

Power and Interest Groups in City Politics

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In years past interest group theory was deeply influenced by research on groups in cities, but more recent scholarship on interest groups has focused on national politics. To what degree do contemporary urban interest group systems fit the models of national policymaking? In trying to answer this question we draw on a set of interviews with city councilors, administrators, and interest group representatives in eight cities in eastern Massachusetts. Three significant problems are addressed. First, what is the rate of participation by different interest group sectors, and how does this constellation of groups at the local level compare with that in Washington? We found an abundance of citizen groups and neighborhood associations, and a much smaller proportion of business organizations in comparison to Washington. Second, what is the relationship between local groups and urban governments? The data revealed a substantial amount of collaboration, especially between nonprofits and the more urban of the cities. The third and final part of the analysis examines development politics in the city of Boston. A clear bias toward facilitating large development project exists, but it is difficult to detect any unified elite dominating city politics. The evidence gathered suggests that the structure of city politics and the needs of bureaucracies necessitate and facilitate a high level of participation by diverse interest group populations.

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Urban politics used to be at the very heart of interest group theory. Pluralism, the most dominant and most controversial theory of interest groups during the Twentieth Century, was firmly rooted in research on groups in cities. Dahl's seminal *Who Governs?* analyzed the interaction of lobbies with city policymakers and elites in a single, middle-sized American city, New Haven, Connecticut. The book was offered as a representation of American democracy, "warts and all" (1961, 311). *Who Governs?* was a stiff rebuke to a competing theory of interest groups in city politics represented by Floyd Hunter's *Community Power Structure* (1953), an elitist view of Atlanta. Although the same debate over pluralism and elitism was carried out in the literature on national politics (Truman, 1951; Mills 1956), the gritty empiricism of *Who Governs?*, *Community Power Structure*, and other community power studies posed, for a generation of political scientists, the question of whether America was truly a democracy.

This imposing question of whether our voices were effectively heard by those who govern, or whether democracy was an illusion, was at its core, a question about interest groups. Did lobbying groups representing the range of interests in a city have real influence, or did a small, interconnected, wealthy elite, control city government? The question was so central and so captivating that vigorous debate among political scientists continued for decades. Though no true resolution was ever achieved, pluralism was increasingly discredited. Both methodological criticism and the political upheaval of the 1960s and '70s undermined the theory among political scientists.

Since that time no new theory of interest groups has emerged to replace pluralism. The scope of pluralist theory—nothing less than a claim that our country is a democracy—is intimidating. Not surprisingly political scientists have gravitated to more tractable problems. But the demise of pluralism has left a gap not only in the study of interest groups but of urban politics as well.

I. Interest Groups in City Politics

This paper attempts to reunite interest group theory with the study of city politics. Utilizing a survey of policymakers and interest group advocates in eight Massachusetts cities, we point the way toward the reintegration of these two increasingly separate realms of political science. Over time interest group research has gravitated more and more toward the study of lobbying and public policymaking in Washington. Urban research has not ignored interest groups, but theorizing about the role of advocacy organizations has hardly been central in recent work in the subfield.

Yet there is ample reason to use cities as a laboratory for testing propositions and developing theory about the role of groups in public policymaking. At the very least cities (and states) offer the variability of contrasting institutions, contexts, and rules (Gray and Lowery 1996). Whatever their variability, though, urban governments are fundamentally different than the national government. No one argues the opposite, but it is easy to ignore just how different policymaking in city government is from that in Washington. These differences can't be fully catalogued here, but from an interest group perspective the most important difference is that of *scale*.

The most obvious contrast in scale is the sheer abundance of interest groups in Washington. As Robert Salisbury (1990) points out, the sharp rise in the numbers of interest groups in Washington has made it increasingly difficult for the typical lobby to gain attention. This "advocacy explosion" continued unabated for decades, increasing pressure on interest groups to contribute more campaign donations and hire the best connected lobbyists (Berry and Wilcox 2006). In contrast, Paul Peterson has called local politics "groupless politics" (1981, 116). Although surely dated at this point, Peterson's

observation suggests a rather stark contrast to the cacophony of voices trying to be heard in Washington. He argues that only those interests with strong financial incentives, such as developers, will become active. But this logic suggests something else too: with more limited interest group activity those who choose to organize do not face the problem of having to compete against large numbers of groups all clamoring to be heard. Surely because the scale of urban interest group politics is modest, the door to city hall is open far wider than those at Congress or at agencies in Washington. This openness appears to be true even in large cities, though the expectation that those in government are friends and neighbors surely increases as the size of the city decreases.

Likewise, the organizational scale of individual interest groups is not just smaller in the more modest venue of city politics, but the basic requirements of organization are considerably different. Many urban groups are largely or entirely run by volunteers. Often they are managed out of someone's home. Being noisy counts a lot in city politics and the requirements for organizational muscle are far more relaxed than in national politics. The easy access to government and the modest requirements for organization make for very low barriers to entry for would-be urban lobbies.

Another important difference with national lobbies is the dependence of urban groups on the participation of rank-and-file members. Interest group politics at the local level is far closer to participatory democracy, while lobbyists for national groups operate as representatives of constituencies. Local advocacy groups offer multiple channels of participation, adding to the level of civic engagement in their communities. On average it is likely that this participation in local groups will be deeper and more demanding than that in national groups, where participation for rank-and-file is typically limited to periodic requests to send an email to one's legislator and, of course, to send more money to the group.

II. Changing Cities, Changing Politics

The contrast between urban and national venues is sharp, but ever more so as cities have undergone so much change in recent years. The implications of the evolution of cities for interest group politics are profound. America's cities are both increasingly robust and increasingly strained, and each trend has strongly influenced interest group politics. "Robust" may seem to be a rather optimistic assessment of cities today, but the popular image of the large, American city overwhelmed with an increasing concentration of the underclass belies the complexity of modern urban life. Cities are still home to large numbers of the poorest among us, and some large cities (Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Baltimore and others) continue to lose population. But of the 100 largest American cities, fully three-quarters gained population in the 2000 Census (Berube 2003, 48-50) even as their suburbs and exurbs grew at a faster pace (Berube *et al*, 2006). And these increases in population are not just the reflection of growth of low income residents. Many cities are thriving and, more broadly, most cities are experiencing a growth in the number of desirable neighborhoods where property values are rising. Looking to the future it seems possible that the continuing high price of energy will push even more people back toward cities and inner suburbs, while smart growth planning will provide further enticements to live closer to centers of employment (Voith and Crawford 2004).

The strain on cities is surely more obvious. Washington has cut back on or eliminated altogether many economic development and social welfare programs. The days when helping the cities survive was believed to be crucial to the national interest are long past us. Yet the responsibilities devolved upon cities have only grown larger. The fiscal pressures on cities have been unrelenting as new sources of revenue are difficult to come

by. Raising taxes is exceptionally difficult even in the most liberal of communities, and the squeeze on cities and states has pushed these governing institutions to shrink their bureaucracies. Policymakers in Washington call on local governments to try to do more with less.

While doing more with less sounds ideal, it's a well-worn cliché and the reality is that cities must sometimes do less, period. But often the real change has been for government to do less and nonprofits to do more. Even as the national and state governments have trimmed services, the welfare state remains substantial. The prevailing model for service provision in the United States has become one in which Washington and the states provide the funding while implementation is left up to the cities. Cities, in turn, contract with a range of local nonprofits. It is enormously beneficial for government to utilize nonprofits to administer programs since the charitable status of these 501(c)(3) organizations facilitates considerable fundraising from individuals and private institutions. Human service nonprofits, for example, receive only 33 percent of their funding from government (Berry and Arons 2003, 9). With substantial private funding, government doesn't have to pay the full price for the provision of social services. These nonprofits engage not only in service delivery, but also participate in program design and advise policymakers in a variety of formal and informal ways. This increasing role for nonprofits has contributed to an explosive growth in their numbers. Roughly half of all 501(c)(3) organizations large enough to file a tax return work in the areas of social services or health care (Berry and Arons 2003; Salamon 2002; Smith 2002).

A striking example of this trend is the conversion of the nation's primary welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), an income maintenance program, to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a program that limits direct financial aid and instead emphasizes training and education to get clients off of welfare. The consequence of this effort, in President Clinton's words, to "end welfare as we know it," has been to increase the demands for programs to equip people with the skills to get off of welfare. This means that cities and states had to set up such programs, but the last thing that governments at any level want to do is to expand their welfare bureaucracies. It's hard to explain to voters why efforts to reduce welfare require more welfare bureaucrats. Thus, nonprofits fill this void as their staffs are not government employees even if much or all of their salaries are derived from government grants and contracts.

TANF is just one, albeit huge, example of the devolution of city and state government onto the nonprofit sector. A wide range of social policy areas have seen a similar evolution. In housing it is hard to conceive of the current array of government programs and policies being implemented without delegation to nonprofits, especially Community Development Corporations (CDCs). There are 3,600 CDCs across the country and while they're not quite little city halls, they do act as a critical gatekeeper and engine for neighborhood development in their catchment areas (Stoutland 1999). New developments, including both housing and economic initiatives, must typically be mediated and facilitated by CDCs.

This description just scratches the surface of a complex web of interrelationships between Washington, the states, the cities, and their neighborhoods. The larger point is simple to express: city governments are increasingly dependent upon collaborative working relationships with other levels of government, private sector actors, and nonprofit organizations. We will have more to say about collaborative government below, but our argument here is that the devolution of government has resulted in an enhanced role for social service nonprofits, neighborhood associations, CDCs, and citizen groups. Far from

being characterized by groupless politics, cities are now *dependent* upon all types of groups to carry out essential functions of government.

III. Interest Group Theory

In recent years the interest group subfield has been a vibrant area of research, with many impressive and large-scale studies adding to our knowledge. Yet Baumgartner and Leech (1998) argue that this is a false prosperity as divergent strands of scholarship have not led to overarching theory or even a satisfactory progression of normal science, where scholars systematically build on each other's findings. Their indictment certainly applies to the intersection of interest group theory and urban politics as the political scientists who study interest groups have largely ignored the changing nature of cities.

For the most part recent theorizing on interest groups has focused largely on national-level organizations. It is easy to understand why scholars might gravitate to the weightier decisions of Washington policymakers rather than on what might seem to be relatively low-level stakes of city hall negotiations with neighborhood associations over modest development projects. Beyond this problem is the one discussed above: integrating national and local level research on groups is extremely difficult because of the vast differences in scale. For example, in Washington access is paramount, prized beyond riches, and efforts to gain access is typically a central strategic focus of advocacy. As documented below, in local politics access is easily obtainable.

The problem in applying existing interest group theory to contemporary urban politics is illustrated by the evolution of politics in Boston, the largest of the cities we report on here. In the late 1950s a small group of business leaders from the top financial institutions in the city formed the Boston Coordinating Committee and began to meet regularly to try to resuscitate the badly deteriorating city. Its meetings in the boardroom of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, adjacent to its safe, led to a label the group was never able to escape, "the Vault" (O'Connor 1993, 147). The Vault advised mayors, in private, about development of the city. It was also responsible for mobilizing and coordinating support from the private sector for proposed projects. Its central goal, reflecting both self interest and noblesse oblige, was building a modern Boston, making it a city appealing to live in while attracting and maintaining business. The Vault was enormously influential and deserves major credit for Boston's emergence as the vibrant and prosperous city it is today. The Vault was also the epitome of private sector privilege and the criticism of its undemocratic nature led it to formally disband in 1997, although its influence had waned long before then as citizen advocacy stopped a number of Vault supported renewal projects (Vennoch 1997). Although other elite business groups, like the Artery Business Committee and Jobs for Massachusetts emerged, the Vault's overarching role has never been duplicated.¹

During the Vault's reign, there was an accurate and easily applied theory that perfectly fit Boston politics: elitism (Boston Urban Study Group 1984). The reality was that a small, secretive group of white, male business leaders exerted extraordinary influence over the city. It's not that the government was impervious to public opinion or that no one else in the city had influence, but the Vault really did constitute a business elite that worked hand-in-hand with several mayors to chart Boston's future.² The soaring skyline of the city today is a symbol of the Vault's success. Sadly, in accomplishing this elite's goals, as well as carrying out their own view of progress, city leaders ran roughshod over neighborhoods, sometimes literally destroying what stood in the way (O'Connor 1993, Gans 1982).

The manner in which contemporary cities are run is a far cry from this earlier period. The days when the wholesale development of neighborhoods, cities, and even whole regions could be conducted from the top down with little role for residents have, fortunately, ended. Top down planning after World War II (Self 2003) led to more contentious times with policymakers and neighborhood advocates fighting each other in the 1960s and 1970s (Greenstone and Peterson 1973). That more conflictual phase, in turn, has evolved into a period where government has learned to work with citizen advocacy and neighborhood groups (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003).

But what is to be made of these changing dynamics in terms of interest group theory? Should it be assumed that if elitist theory is no longer applicable, that pluralism is a likely fit? This question extends far beyond Boston. Globalization, suburbanization, and the boom in mergers and acquisitions have all worked to reduce the presence of large corporations in central cities. In Boston, for example, none of the six banks that were members of the Vault are “players” in Boston today. All have been swallowed up by other banks, none of which are headquartered anywhere in Massachusetts, much less in Boston.³ City economies are dynamic and the exit of banks headquartered in Boston coincided with the rise of the state’s successful high tech sector. Yet the newer high tech companies, which are plentiful in the metropolitan area, have not located in Boston but in Cambridge, the suburbs, and the exurbs.

Even if business today has a much different presence in Boston and many other large cities, it is still quite a leap to assume that pluralism now reigns in urban America. Cities are still dependent on business for economic growth and despite a smaller footprint, corporate influence may remain strong if not as omnipotent as that of the Vault during its heyday. Nor should there be an assumption that other sectors of the cities have become effectively organized and politically skilled.

For all the criticism, over decades, of both of pluralist and elitist theory, would-be successors are few and far between. The most prominent theories to emerge as alternatives are various regime theories. A well-known version is that of the urban governance regime developed by Clarence Stone. In *Regime Politics*, a study of Atlanta, Stone defines a regime as “the *informal arrangements* that surround and complement the formal workings of governmental authority” (1989, 3). Further, a regime is a “relatively stable group *with access to institutional resources* that enable it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions” (1989, 4). Stone’s research led him to conclude that Atlanta’s ruling regime was a working arrangement between the city’s mayors and the downtown business establishment. As applied to Atlanta, at least, this version of regime theory bore an eerie resemblance to elitism. If not organized quite as formally as Boston’s Vault, Atlanta’s private sector leaders found the city’s mayors dependent upon them to move major projects forward. The relationship ran the other way, too, as the mayor had resources and capacities that the business leadership lacked.⁴

Stone’s theory has proven to be far more flexible than elitism. After the publication of his book on Atlanta Stone amplified the theory in a journal article (1993), offering a typology of distinct regime types: maintenance regimes where the primary interest is in keeping the city and its services from deteriorating; development regimes, where the overriding concern of governance is on how to promote economic growth; and middle-class progressive regimes, where leaders of political and other organizations are interested in promoting social justice, environmental sustainability, and quality of life issues.⁵ Each regime type may be characterized by a particular configuration of informal working relationships, where some interests tend to be dominant (as with developers in development regimes) or secondary (as with real estate developers in middle-class

progressive regimes). Stone uses his theory to critique urban pluralism, still an inviting target. Although the idea that there is significant variety in the way cities are governed hardly seems like a breakthrough, it's a reflection of the modest progress that urbanists have made in trying to get beyond the pluralism-elitism debate. As one of the leading texts of urban politics notes, this debate, with its origins a half century ago, "goes on and on" (Ross and Levine 2006, 124).

IV. Bay State Cities

Eight eastern Massachusetts municipalities serve here as a prism through which we can examine some of the larger questions concerning interest groups and democratic policymaking. We make no claim that these cities and their governing processes are representative of the broader country, but their variety and size and the challenges they face give us some confidence that our findings offer important insights into modern-day city politics.

Since the Bay State Cities project relied largely on in-person interviewing the selection of cities was restricted to those located within an hour of the Tufts University campus in Medford, an inner suburb of Boston. Although some geographical diversity is lost by excluding cities to the west of metropolitan Worcester, our eligible area in eastern Massachusetts incorporates close to 90 percent of the state's population. Overall, the entire metropolitan area, which stretches into the southern rim of New Hampshire, is enormous, constituting the sixth largest television market in the United States. To ensure that Boston and Worcester, the state's two largest cities, were included in the study, the eight cities were not drawn at random. Instead a stratified set of cities, selected primarily on the basis of median family income, was chosen. It was assumed that the relative income of municipalities, presumably a reflection of the relative need for economic development, plays a critical role in influencing the population and goals of urban interest groups. Of course, the decision to stratify by family income does not in any way ensure that the strata are comparable in other ways. There are some important differences, as noted below.

The eight municipalities⁶ include three bedroom suburbs of Boston: Arlington, Brookline, and Newton. All have median family incomes above \$75,000 a year, poverty rates of 6.2% or lower, and all are relatively low in ethnic and racial diversity. (Table 1 lists the population, racial/ethnic populations, median family income, and other selected characteristics for all eight cities.) All three suburban municipalities are the type of communities where any large-scale developments would be difficult to site. In contrast Lynn, on the North Shore of Boston, has seen better days. With its manufacturing base gone, Lynn is now a very poor community with a large immigrant population. Worcester, 45 minutes west of Boston, has declined as well, although the east side of the city has seen some recent economic development, and some of its suburbs remain attractive. Somerville, one of the nation's most densely populated cities (18,868 people per square mile) is a city undergoing considerable change. After a long period of decline, its proximity to Boston and Cambridge (both with population densities of over 10,000 people per square mile) and their overheated housing markets has made Somerville's two and three deckers increasingly attractive. Demographic change has made Somerville more upscale overall, but its median income is a misleading indicator as the city is a real stew of subpopulations. Cambridge is surely one of the most unique cities in America, with local politics about as far left as it gets. It is, however, a city with substantial business development in the Kendall Square area adjacent to the campus of MIT, and yet over 12 percent of its families live below the poverty line. Finally, Boston is a rich mix of neighborhoods with a booming downtown. Its long tradition of Democratic machine

politics, dominated by the Irish and Italians, is at the cusp of transformation. With its growing ethnic communities, Boston is on the verge of become a minority majority city. A significant proportion of families in Worcester (24.8 percent), Boston (24.5 percent), and Lynn (21.5 percent) have incomes below the poverty line.

Table 1: Demographic and Related Characteristics

	Arlington	Boston	Brookline	Cambridge	Lynn	Newton	Somerville	Worcester
2000 Population	42,389	584,141	57,107	101,355	89,050	83,829	77,478	172,648
Percent Black	1.7%	25.3%	2.7%	11.9%	10.5%	2.0%	6.5%	6.9%
Percent Hispanic	1.9%	14.4%	3.5%	7.4%	18.4%	2.5%	8.8%	15.1%
Percent Asian	5.0%	7.5%	12.8%	11.9%	6.4%	7.7%	6.4%	4.9%
Median Family Income	\$78,741	\$44,015	\$92,993	\$59,423	\$45,295	\$105,289	\$51,243	\$42,988
Percent of Families Below Poverty Line	3.1%	24.5%	6.2%	12.5%	21.5%	5.3%	16.0%	25.8%
Population Density (Per Square Mile)	8,180	12,165	8,409	15,766	8,234	4,644	18,868	4,596
Per Capita Government Spending	\$2,223	\$3,616	\$2,646	\$2,759	\$2,193	\$2,570	\$1,972	\$2,480
Home Ownership Rate	58.9%	32.2%	45.2%	32.2%	45.6%	69.6%	30.6%	43.3%
Average Percent Democratic Vote, 92-04	70.0%	74.8%	63.6%	71.2%	62.8%	76.7%	71.8%	62.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Census of the Population 2000; U.S. Census of Government, 1997. Voting data are from Massachusetts Election Statistics, PD43, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004, respectively.

Separate lists of city councilors and administrative heads of the top-line agencies were assembled for each of the eight cities. (Excluded among the agencies were the fire, police, and school departments.⁷) Although the organization of executive agencies differs among the eight municipalities, every effort was made to identify administrators in comparable positions. An attempt was then made to interview each person on these lists during the summer and early fall of 2005. Creating a list of advocacy organizations was not as straightforward. No directories of the interest group populations exist and groups in cities can be ephemeral and hard to track down. In light of this, the research relied on a snowball technique, beginning with issue narratives elicited in the interviews with city councilors and administrators. Subjects were asked to identify an issue they were working on and to then tell us about it. This question, follow-up probes, other questions that touched upon issues, and questions about which groups the government officials most often interacted with, generated a good deal of information about the groups active within the cities.⁸ Also, at the end of the interviews with the policymakers, the subjects were asked for names of individuals associated with the groups they had mentioned. Lists of all nongovernmental organizations referred to in any part of these interviews were updated on an ongoing basis, and attempts were subsequently made to set up an interview with a representative of each.

In Washington, interest groups have an address and a phone number and can be located in a matter of seconds. In local politics, corporations and a handful of other organizations (like a Chamber of Commerce) are easy to find. Citizen groups and most neighborhood-

level organizations are another story. Usually they are run out of people's homes and leadership at a particular time may be unclear. Despite these challenges we persevered and sometimes went back to interviewees for help when we had trouble tracking down a representative for a particular group. Unlike the interviews with councilors and administrators, the interviews with advocates were done over the phone. Although not ideal, there were practical reasons for using this alternative. Most of the groups identified by policymakers were either citizen groups or neighborhood-based organizations. Since few had offices, it was logistically simpler to conduct the interview by phone. Also, time limitations were a serious constraint and the phone interviews allowed us to conduct a greater number of interviews than we would have been able to do otherwise. Overall, we completed 116 interviews, and finished with a response rate of 67 percent for city councilors, 71 percent for administrators, and 74 percent for interest group advocates.⁹

Although the interview schedules contained only a limited number of basic questions, probes and follow-ups were used to corral those who veered far off track or failed to respond sufficiently to what had been asked. Relying on probes and follow-ups to collect necessary information does raise reliability issues but allowing subjects to offer a lengthy narrative about an issue they are working on has great benefits. The answers were rich in detail and offered the advantage of taking the interviewer down roads he or she hadn't envisioned. The underlying rationale was for each subject to create a small case study of policymaking for us.¹⁰ This approach allows for greater context in responses and offers greater understanding of the processes, strategies, and events of urban government than more structured questioning.

With these data this paper focuses on three questions central to urban politics. First, who participates in urban government? The population of active groups does not tell us who governs, as all groups are not created equal. But knowing something about that population does tell us a lot. In a political system where there is such a low threshold for involvement with policymakers, the simple act of participating might get a group to the bargaining table. In the immortal words of Woody Allen, "Ninety percent of life is just showing up."

This leads to the second question: what is the relationship between groups and policymakers? Or, more simply, if you show up, what happens? Both elitism and Stone's regime theory are built around a structure of cozy relationships between private sector leaders and those who govern. But looking across a variety of cities, and asking about all groups, what are the patterns of interaction between advocates and policymakers?

Third, attention turns to one critical policy area, economic development, in a single city, Boston. This is a "hard" test of our data as the economic stakes for development in the downtown area are enormous. It's useful to select out Boston to ensure that the overall findings from the eight cities do not obscure a different pattern in a boomtown where considerably larger economic actors with enormous sums at stake, are actively pushing city hall.

V. Who Participates?

The recent upsurge in interest in civic engagement has yielded a considerable amount of data on participation in community life, including participation in groups. Although surveys have measured individuals' participation and membership in such organizations, the level of activity of the groups themselves in city politics and the nature of the organizational population of cities remain unclear. Taking a census of groups within a city is no small task. Identifying advocacy organizations is surprisingly difficult as a considerable amount of aggregate lobbying activity is carried out by organizations that

generally have little to do with public policymaking. A corporation, for example, may occasionally lobby and their effort might be very important to the outcome of a particular issue. But outside the context of that issue, how would one know if that corporation should be considered as an interest group?

Mapping Washington’s interest group universe is not easy either, but there are some key differences. First, there are directories of Washington lobbies and these can be used to create a census of groups (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Schlozman, Burch, and Lampert 2004). Another difference is that groups put offices in Washington for the expressed purposes of advocacy. But in urban politics, there is no easy way to identify the advocacy groups. Outside of state capitals, there are few corporate or trade offices that are dedicated to lobbying. There’s no “K” Street in Dubuque.

Studies of lobbying at the state level have successfully utilized lobbying registrations to analyze lobbying populations but there are no comparable registration requirements in local politics (Gray and Lowery 1996). A more promising methodology is to identify urban advocacy groups by their participation on specific issues. The challenge is that this requires a sizable “n” as the larger the sample of issues, the more likely it is that the groups participating approximate the true population of advocacy organizations. This has been done on a large scale at the national level (Baumgartner et al 2006), but studies of urban interest groups have typically been restricted to a modest number of case studies.

The approach followed did not allow for full-blown case studies in the sense of interviewing administrators and city councilors who were directly involved on the same policies. Rather, interviewees were asked to select their own case histories. As already noted, the identification of advocacy groups was directly tied to the narratives we heard from councilors or administrators.

From the interviews with councilors and administrators we coded a number of variables linked to the three groups receiving the most unprompted discussion from the subject. An aggregate listing of all such groups by type was created from this data and the results are presented in Table 2. The unit of analysis is a mention of a group; if the Arlington Land Trust was cited in two separate interviews, it would be counted twice in the tabulation. The results are cross-tabulated by a dichotomy that compares the upper-income suburban communities (Arlington, Brookline, and Newton) with the more urban cities (Boston, Cambridge, Lynn, Somerville, and Worcester). Although no one would mistake Worcester

Table 2: Interest Group Participation, City-Suburb Comparison

	Suburbs	Cities
Neighborhood Groups	27.8%	20.2%
Citywide Citizen Groups	39.2%	23.5%
Labor		5.9%
Business	13.9%	17.6%
Nonprofit	17.7%	31.1%
Other	1.2%	1.7%
Total	99.8%	100.0%
N = 198		

Suburbs: Arlington, Brookline, Newton

Cities: Boston, Cambridge, Lynn, Somerville, and Worcester

“Business: includes both individual corporations and trade groups.

“Nonprofit” refers primarily to nongovernmental social service agencies, hospitals, and universities.

for Brookline, our distinction between suburb and city is not based on “we know one when we see one.”

The profiles of these two sets of communities are quite distinct as shown in Table 1. The three suburbs’ median family income of \$92,341 is almost twice the five cities’ median of \$48,593. The ethnic and racial makeup is considerably different as well. The suburbs’ population of blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Hispanic Americans (any race), and Asians or Asian Americans averages just 13.3 percent, while the cities’ comparable figure is 32.5 percent. The cities have roughly six times the percentage of blacks, as do the suburbs. Finally, although population densities tend to be higher in the cities than in the suburbs, this is not always the case. Densities are highest in the cities of Somerville, Boston, and Cambridge, which all have more than 12,000 people per mile. But densities are roughly the same in Brookline, Arlington, and Lynn, which all have about 8,200 people per square mile and both Newton and Worcester have densities of about 4,600 per square mile. Moreover, because the suburbs in this study tend to be older “street-car” suburbs, they are substantially denser than the region’s newer, “car-oriented” suburbs where densities are less than 2,000 per square mile and often are less than 1,000 people per square mile.¹¹ Home ownership rates vary considerably as well, with less than a third of housing units in Boston and Cambridge and almost 70 percent of the units in Newton owner-occupied. The suburban municipalities – Newton, Arlington, and Brookline – have the three highest rates of home ownership. It is not clear, however, that overall this characteristic provides any more information about underlying city differences than median family income, which is extremely closely related to home ownership ($r = .80$). Finally, with all the differences noted above, all of these municipalities share the fact that their electorates vote heavily Democratic. All of the cities and towns have averaged more than 60 percent vote for the Democratic candidates for president over the last four presidential elections.

Different as these two types are municipalities are, what stands out in Table 2 is the similarity of their interest group populations. What differences do emerge are in the expected direction: there are more social service agencies mentioned in the city interviews, while the suburbs are populated by more citizen groups. Even more striking is the overall percentage of citizen groups and neighborhood groups. In the suburbs citizen groups and neighborhood groups constitute roughly two-thirds of all advocacy groups, an enormous proportion. These groups are plentiful in the cities, too, comprising 41 percent of the universe. The lower percentage in the cities does not reflect a greater proportion of business groups but, rather, a larger segment of nonprofit agencies and service providers. By themselves the nonprofits form about a third of the advocacy organizations in cities. “Nonprofit” is an ambiguous term since, as a legal distinction, it includes all organizations outside of the private sector and government. In the context of this study we categorize nonprofits as institutions qualifying as public charities under sec. 501(c)(3) of the tax code. In practical terms these are service providers, hospitals and health centers, and universities. Nonprofit advocacy groups and other nonprofit membership organizations were coded as citizen groups or as neighborhood associations.¹²

Although the distinct methodologies don’t allow for a precise comparison, the differences in the contours of these urban populations with the population ecology of organizations in Washington are vast. Schlozman and Tierney’s study found that citizen groups and nonprofits were just 15 percent of all lobbies with an office in Washington and only 8 percent of those that had an office or were represented through a lobbyist for hire. Conversely, corporations, trade groups, and professional associations constituted 68 percent of all advocacy organizations with an office in Washington and fully 80 percent that had some form of representation (1986, 77). Later studies by Walker (1991, 59) and

Leech (2001, 22) show modestly higher proportions of citizen groups and nonprofits in Washington but they, too, found overwhelming dominance by business interests.¹³

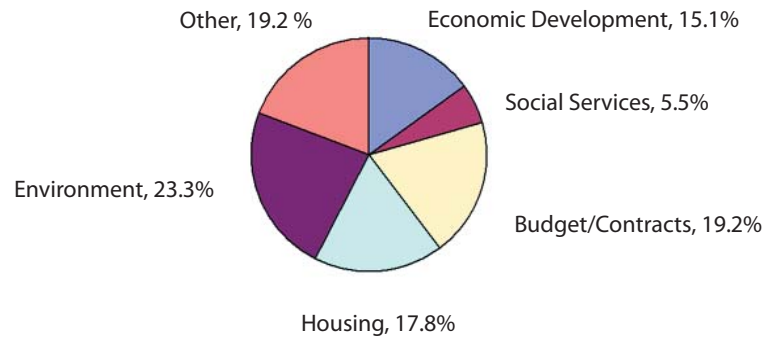
The high proportion of citizen groups and neighborhood groups in urban politics may seem to fly in the face of the collective action problem (Olson 1968). These organizations offer little, if anything, in the way of selective benefits. But there are at least three reasons why general expectations of low levels of citizen and neighborhood advocacy may be misguided. The first is that the initial theory, popularized by Mancur Olson, badly underestimated the propensity of individuals to be, in economists' jargon, "irrational." That is, Americans have proven that they are all too willing to join organizations that command tangible costs, such as volunteer time or financial contributions, but offer ideological rather than material rewards. In both the cities and the suburbs, half of all citizen groups were oriented around environmental issues and in almost all cases there was no selective or material benefit available to these groups' members and supporters. Although a small number advocated what might be called global environmental issues, most were focused on the local environment. Neighborhood groups are a bit different in that advocacy on at least some of their issues could be construed as related to property values, a selective, material good. Overall, however, their work tended to be more ideological than self-interested.

A second possible reason why there is more organization by citizens than might have been expected is that in one important way some of these organizations might fit a major qualification to the theory of collective action. In the case of small groups, Olson says that selective incentives drop in importance and peer pressure to join with one's friends or neighbors becomes more important (1968, 22-36). This would seem applicable to neighborhood associations, where some who are active might observe the absence of other residents. Yet neighborhood associations can encompass significant geographical areas and we're not convinced that peer pressure is a major reason for their successful organization. In the case of citywide citizen groups Olson's qualification appears even weaker. In cities citizen groups tend to be small groups with limited memberships. There may be some peer pressure as leaders and board members ask their friends for support, but this not the foundation of their ability to organize.

Third, there is an incentive for organizations to form and to become active in cities because as a general rule these groups have access to government. In the interviews the policymakers were asked who they hear from the most and the results were similar to the group population statistics, with neighborhood groups and citizen groups scoring the highest. As argued above, in local politics it's not terribly difficult to gain the attention of policymakers and we heard little frustration on the part of advocates about the willingness of those in government to meet with them. Since the snowball technique followed mentions of interest groups by a policymaker, the sample may be biased toward those that have better access. However, many of the mentions were unprompted by any direct question about contact and government officials frequently mentioned an organization in the context of saying they had some differences with them. Access is not influence, but it is a prerequisite. In short, in city politics group leaders can typically demonstrate to supporters and potential supporters that the organization is at least being heard.

What of the relatively small proportion of business organizations in the population of groups active on the issues discussed in the interviews? Numbers of groups do not tell the whole story. Berry (1999) found that the influence of citizen lobbies with the Congress was far out of proportion to their small numbers in the overall population of interest groups in Washington. The Vault was but a single group, albeit one made up of the representatives of many other organizations, but it truly dominated Boston for decades.

Figure 1: Issue Distribution



Response of administrators and city councilors to question asking them what issues they had been spending the most time on during the past month. N = 73.

Yet in none of the eight cities did we come across any evidence that there was a dominant business group or set of individual corporations. At the same time we did find evidence from the narrative accounts and from newspaper coverage that the door is always open for businesses that want to develop property or build something new (Lindblom 1977). A more difficult issue is the contention that conventional research strategies used by interest group scholars are inadequate for truly measuring business influence (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Gaventa 1980). We acknowledge that we have not solved this difficult problem of measuring all aspects of business influence. But what is surprising about the Bay State Cities' findings is not that business has great access to policymakers, but that access is so broadly available across each community to all interest group sectors.

Political influence and the nature of the working relationships between groups and government will be addressed at length below, but we want to first complete the review of data that supports the argument about the breadth of access. The large proportion of citizen groups, neighborhood associations, and other kinds of neighborhood groups active the eight cities reflects the types of issues that cities work on. Figure 1 aggregates the issues discussed in the policymakers' narratives. Since police, fire, and school agencies were not included in the research, issues related to those agencies are underrepresented here. The economic development category (15 percent of all issues) is the most purely business-oriented grouping, while some of the housing and environment issues involved corporations and trade groups. Still, the distribution of issues is a strong reminder that city governments are not consumed with pleasing business interests. Cities do not regulate business to anywhere near the degree that states and the federal government do and this sharply reduces the amount of business advocacy.

Thinking once again about the differences that might exist between cities and suburbs, the issues that emerged from the narratives were coded on the basis of material vs. postmaterial advocacy. Postmaterial interests are those relating to quality of life issues, such as the environment or social justice. They are unrelated to the advocates' own financial self interest. Advocacy on behalf of material interests typically involves wages, profits, regulation, tax policy, retirement benefits, and the like (Inglehart 1977; Berry 1999). The initial expectation was that the suburbs would show a greater propensity toward issues characterized by solely postmaterial advocacy. Given that these suburbs would only be interested in economic development in the modest number of already well developed business areas within their boundaries, one might think the proportion of issues with material sides would be less than what's found in the cities.

Table 3: Material, Postmaterial Advocacy

	Suburbs	Cities
Postmaterial, Quality of Life Advocacy Only	25.9%	23.5%
Material Side Advocacy Only	55.6%	58.8%
Both Material and Postmaterial Sides Represented	14.8%	11.8%
Neither Material Nor Postmaterial Sides Represented	3.7%	5.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
N = 61		

Coding of issues identified in Figure 1. A postmaterial, quality of life side was coded as such if an advocacy group was actively pushing a position which offered its activists, staff, or members no monetary or material reward.

Table 3 shows there is no difference between the suburbs and the cities on the material/postmaterial dimension. Indeed, the respective scores are close to identical. Why didn't the initial assumption pan out? After all, the dominant numbers of citizen groups and neighborhood associations certainly reflect some of the same dynamics that led to the success of citizen groups on the national level. What is it then that leads to such a different mix of issue orientations in local politics? A first step was to disaggregate the issue distribution in Figure 1 for cities and suburbs. Surprisingly, it turns out that there is a strong commonality between cities and suburbs in the array of the basic issues types they face. Although the scale of projects can vary considerably from development to development and town to town, siting still involves much the same dynamic of agency officials, private developers, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations negotiating. Even in the three suburbs with little interest in large-scale economic development, there are still more modest projects proposed for their commercial districts. With the value of land and housing in those suburbs real estate development can be problematic and the incentives to include affordable housing in multi-unit developments are strong.¹⁴ Thus CDCs, citizen groups, and neighborhood associations may all be drawn in, even if it's just a 20-unit, generally upscale development (Simoncelli 2006).

Another reason for the differences between issue advocacy at the national level and what was found in the cities and suburbs of Eastern Massachusetts are the limits on what cities are responsible for. As Peterson argues "local politics is not like national politics. . . [b]y comparison with national politics local politics is most limited. There are crucial kinds of public policies that local governments simply cannot execute" (1981, 3-4). Although one of our cities, Cambridge, is often ridiculed for having its own foreign policy, with its boycotts and policy pronouncements, the reality is that there are issues that are central to national politics that are completely absent from urban and suburban policymaking. For the most part such issues are absent simply because the cities have no jurisdiction over them. Think of abortion, gay marriage, the war in Iraq, nuclear disarmament, business regulation, and international trade. In terms of advocacy the differences are striking. A study of the congressional agenda in 1991 found that there was postmaterial advocacy on 71 percent of the issues (Berry 1999, 45). There was significantly less postmaterial advocacy in both the cities (35.3 percent) and suburbs (40.7 percent).

VI. Collaborative Cities

What does it mean that the doors to city hall agencies and councilors' offices are open to advocates? It could be that administrators and elected officials have become skilled at appearing receptive to advocates. Part of the democratic ethos is that all get their say and in the rhythm of city politics officials can easily accommodate meetings with advocates. Moreover, low threshold politics means that it's easy for a friend or former associate of a policymaker to gain an appointment for a group they're affiliated with. But it could be that "sure, come on in and let's talk" is just a way of being polite.

The literature on urban politics suggests that this is not the case. Rather, recent scholarship emphasizes the growth in collaboration between private and nonprofit partners and city agencies. The underlying reasons for this increasing tendency toward partnerships are evident enough. Since the Nixon administration there has been considerable devolution of responsibilities over domestic programs, especially during Republican administrations. This long-term trend has given states and cities far more control over the programs that are implemented in their communities. This change in federalism continues to play out, partly out of a philosophical commitment to local rule and partly as a way to cut federal spending. Not surprisingly the states and cities complain bitterly that they're given responsibility without sufficient financial resources. Another advantage for the federal government is that devolving programs onto the states and cities keeps the number of bureaucrats in Washington low and allows presidents to claim that they've reduced the overall size of government (Light 1999).

As cities have found their own resources strained while their programmatic responsibilities have grown, they have had but little choice to turn to the private and nonprofit sectors. Managing collaborative arrangements and developing skills as a leader of a network rather than of just a bureaucracy are critical to the success of modern-day administrators. Agranoff and McGuire speak of the challenges: "Managing horizontally means working the highly interdependent local political process, attempting to pool and use differential resource contributions, building bases of support, and determining feasible courses of action" (2003, 80). Local government has become less hierarchical, less structured around command and control, and more oriented around negotiation with constituent groups and providers. And this is no easy task. As Goldsmith and Eggers note, "Managing a portfolio of provider networks is infinitely different than managing a division of employees" (2004, 22). One bureaucrat we interviewed said simply, collaboration is necessary "because it's the only way to get things done."

The interviews with administrators and city councilors yielded considerable data on the relationship of government officials and interest groups. An expansive set of questions was used to code the policymakers' responses and both specific and general responses to individual groups and whole sectors were recorded. The response set is revealing (Table 4). Substantial collaboration is evident in all the cities while very few advocacy groups drew the wrath of administrators or councilors. The high proportion of organizations and sectors that were rated as neutral surely reflects, in part, the episodic nature of lobbying in cities. The one sector that stands out is that composed of nonprofits. Fully 87 percent of nonprofits are described by policymakers as organizations they cooperate with or as partners. This is 30 points higher than the next highest sector.

The distinctive pattern for nonprofits should come as no surprise. Of all the types of interest groups, policymakers are most dependent on nonprofits to carry out the government's programs. As exemplified by TANF, the federal government's move away from income maintenance and toward social services has required an increasing number of nonprofits to administer the programs designed to help people make the

Table 4: Level of Collaboration

Group Type	Negative	Neutral	Cooperative	Partner	Total
Neighborhood Groups (41)	19.5%	43.9%	34.1%	2.5%	100.0%
Citizen Groups (54)	11.1%	40.7%	42.6%	5.6%	100.0%
Business, Professional Groups (34)	8.8%	35.3%	35.3%	20.6%	100.0%
Nonprofits (45)	2.2%	11.1%	64.5%	22.2%	100.0%

Table reflects analysis of multiple responses. The coding incorporated up to three different groups that responders identified and evaluated as to their interactions. Overall, the 72 city councilor and administrator respondents mentioned 174 groups with which they interacted.

CODING: "Negative" reflects comments indicating that an individual group or sector was difficult to work with. "Neutral" indicates that there was contact with a group or sector, but no indication of a relationship, one way or the other. "Cooperative" means that there were positive comments made about a group or sector and their contribution to solving a problem. "Partner" means that there was evidence of a positive relationship that is ongoing.

transition from welfare to work. These nonprofits become an interface between government and constituents and over time social service providers emerge as vital parts of neighborhoods, well connected to government agencies. The role of state and local agencies does not end with the awarding of grants and contracts. Bureaucracies must play an oversight role to ensure that the programs are operating in a manner satisfactory to the government and that funds are being spent appropriately. In short, the relationship is not simply one of overseer and vendor. It's much more complex and intertwined as nonprofits often participate in program design and serve on advisory panels.

Many of those interviewed for this study spoke about the interdependence of agencies and client groups, especially nonprofits. An administrator with a nonprofit social service agency said "Basically we contract with [the city and state] to provide a number of services. . . emergency food, housing, employment assistance referral, summer recreation, those types of things." But it is not only in the area of social services where collaboration emerges. The head of an organization involved in economic development said "I think we have a good collegial relationship [with the agency]. I think it's respectful on both sides. We depend on them for some of the financial and political support that we get and I think on their side [development] is one of the priorities for the city administration." The full range of cooperative activities for all types of groups is detailed in Table 5.

Table 5: Cooperative Activities

Percent of Activities Engaged in by Advocacy Groups Coded as Collaborative or Partners	
Joint Planning with Agency	85.0%
Participate in City Planning	84.2%
Transmit Valued Information	83.3%
Members Sit on Agency Advisory Board	78.9%
Group Carries Out Government Program	63.2%
Government Official(s) Sit(s) on Group's Board	56.2%

Source: Liss, "The Working Nature of Collaborative Relationships in City Government," p. 55.

An effort was made to try to determine the attributes of advocacy groups that lead agencies or councilors to value them. Even among nonprofits, which administer many government programs, there are some that do much better than others. Overall, the interviews tell a clear story: advocacy groups are valued for very practical reasons. City councilors and administrators did not wax eloquently about inclusiveness or their responsibility to be responsive to constituents. Rather, government officials were candid and cited what the groups could do for them. The head of a parks agency lamented that “Ten years ago there was at least 100 more personnel [here but no longer].” She added that, fortunately, the agency’s “Friends’ groups . . . raise money independently of us or even do their own programming. Sometimes they offer to clean [up our sites] and provide free labor. Also the neighborhood associations that use the parks are involved.”

Old-fashioned political support should not be overlooked as interest groups can offer both administrators and city councilors assistance. Various campaign finance laws may limit what different kinds of organizations can donate (if anything), but individuals associated with such organizations can contribute and accomplish the same goal of ingratiating the group with the recipient. For the citizen groups and neighborhood organizations that predominate, campaign contributions are not a significant part of their arsenal. If they are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, they are forbidden to donate or endorse candidates. What community and neighborhood groups can do is to provide indirect support. Neighborhood service providers can easily communicate who their friends are in government to their clients. Government officials can visit the organizations, interact with the boards, while the leaders of service providers go out of their way to appoint board members who are well-connected to individuals in government. Referring to community based organizations (CBOs) Marwell (2004) calls such nonprofits, “machine politics CBOs.” Marwell studied this phenomena in New York City and surely it is more evident in large cities (such as Boston) where the density of social service nonprofits is higher and their collective resources larger.

Interest groups have always been important in urban politics and policymaking, but the evidence collected on these eight Massachusetts cities suggest that their role has grown over time. Although advocacy groups are not created equal, every indication is that access is widespread throughout all sectors of the advocacy universe and in all the cities. Even small groups and neighborhood associations appear to have good access and are treated seriously by administrators and councilors (Hajnal and Clark, 1998). Larger groups enjoyed somewhat more collaborative relationships with agencies, which surely reflects the dependence on nonprofits to administer various programs. As federalism has evolved in recent years, cities have simply become more dependent on the resources of constituency groups. The government officials interviewed made it clear that they operate in a web of many relationships with many different groups. They also made it clear that they needed to work with these groups if they’re to get their jobs done.

VII. Development in Boston

One of the most enduring critiques of interest group democracy contends that ordinary interest group politics is restricted to modest issues that the wealthy elite have little interest in. This school of thought believes that a small ruling class is unconcerned with school boards, parks, social services, and other run-of-the-mill issues. Why would the CEO of a *Fortune* 500 behemoth care if too many liberals get elected to the school board, or if city spending is headed over budget? These issues don’t have any real impact on that person’s life or on the corporation’s bottom line. In elitist theory, the primary influence a top business leader possesses is not even channeled through interest groups. Instead real power is exerted through socialization where citizens are inculcated with values and

frames that exclude various kinds of policy alternatives. This dominant value system is enforced imprecisely but forcefully by an elite that circulates interchangeably back and forth between the private sector and government (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Gaventa 1980; Lukes 1974; Mills 1956).

This is a maddening theory of power as it's impossible to refute. Everything about it is vague. Who, exactly, belongs to this elite? How do these values get transmitted so effectively? Doesn't this elite exert power in conventional ways too? At the same time it's impossible to dismiss the theory because we know that the wealthiest elites are disproportionately influential. And there is no question, for example, that the socialization process exerts a powerful force on American politics through the values that are perpetuated. For example, why is it that school texts define political ideology as a choice between conservative and liberal but ignore socialism, libertarianism, or communitarianism? One must also be cautious about rejecting elitism out of hand because there are many who believe that rising economic inequality is leading to greater political inequality (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005).

We've returned to this question because the findings in the previous two sections would be quickly dismissed by those who believe politics is dominated by an elite. Elitist theory assumes that the truly powerful float above the mundane policymaking at Somerville City Hall or at the Newton Board of Alderman. It would discount the data from the eight Massachusetts cities demonstrating that the policymaking process is remarkably open to participation by a broad range of groups. Although the issues brought up in the interviews were not followed through to their ultimate resolutions, many of the decisions were on their way to a decision that would, not unexpectedly, yield a compromise, melding the views of different and competing sectors. In addition, as noted above, many cooperative relationships exist in each city, typically across all sectors. Yet these findings would not satisfy would-be critics. The stakes of everyday issues would be discounted as being much too modest to prove anything.

This criticism will be addressed here in two ways. The first step will be to examine the nature of the issues that showed up in the eight-city sample. Second, analysis will turn to the high stakes politics of large-scale real estate development projects in Boston.

It is tempting to dismiss the openness and access of the eight city governments because of the nature of issues before them fall rather short of the great dilemmas of modern world politics. How impressed should we be that a citizens' advisory council was at the heart of the process that formulated the terms of the redevelopment of the former Symmes Hospital in Arlington into a mixed use site composed of a medical office building, market-rate housing, and low income housing? Is it really that impressive that all of our cities' parks and recreation issues were characterized by high levels of involvement by local citizen groups and neighborhood associations?

We're unconvinced that the mix of issues and participants on local issues reflects little that bears on the question of real political power. If redeveloping the Symmes Hospital site isn't exactly ending the nuclear arms race, neither is it a trivial matter. In reviewing the data, issue by issue, the most important conclusion reached is that these are matters that affect people's lives. Constructing affordable housing, protecting open space, defending neighborhoods against business encroachment, and settling contracts for city workers are issues of singular importance to communities. Collectively such issues are matters that deeply affect these communities' viability and appeal to prospective residents.

But what of those issues that are of great consequence and directly involve the interests of elites? We begin by rejecting the idea that the elite can prevail simply through the

communication of its interests. In the real world of city politics, the elite's interests are contested. To pretend otherwise turns elitism into little more than conspiracy theory. In city politics, lobbying on the elite's part is required, even if it is behind the scenes and its level of access is greater than that of other sectors.

There can be no better test for gauging the impact of a city elite than an examination of large-scale development. Large office buildings, condominiums, and mixed-use projects typically face difficult and complex zoning, land clearance, permitting, and licensing issues. These projects also offer the largest financial rewards to the private sector of any policies and decisions that city government has control over. In Boston, the Columbus Center project, with a hotel, stores, and condominiums, will rise on top of the Mass Turnpike and cost an estimated \$624 million (Palmer 2005). A proposal now before the city would lead to the construction of two huge office buildings adjacent to the Aquarium near the city's waterfront. Preliminary estimates put the cost at anywhere between \$600 and \$800 million (Bailey and Reidy 2006). The city's financial interests are compelling, too, with increased tax revenues linked to such projects. With the financial stakes so high, large development projects offer an appropriate test for assessing an elite's level of influence as well as its autonomy.

The data gathering on development projects in Boston is not yet complete and the findings presented here are preliminary. In addition to the interviews (which have been completed), we have constructed a database of all economic development projects that have been identified in stories in the city's dominant newspaper, the *Boston Globe*. Once documented, other sources have been used to supplement the *Globe's* coverage. Over the space of about a year 37 large-scale development projects have been identified. These are either proposals still in the planning stage or projects where construction is at the early stages and questions about the final nature of the edifice remain. Plans are to keep this database active for a considerable time to build a larger "n" of cases and to update projects as to the outcome of controversies over any developers' proposals.¹⁵

Since this data is preliminary, only a few tentative findings will be highlighted. First, of the thirty-seven large-scale development projects identified only fourteen of them are being built by for-profit Boston-based companies.¹⁶ These fourteen projects involve thirteen different lead developers. In other words, only one private developer (Joseph Fallon) is responsible for more than a single project. Another nine projects are being built under the auspices of private developers from outside of Boston. Ten of the other projects are being developed by nonprofits (such as Harvard and Northeastern universities) and four have yet to be assigned developers by the government agencies that initiated the project. In summary, at this early stage the database shows that development is dispersed widely among a large variety of corporations and nonprofits. Second, where there has been opposition to a development, neighborhood associations and citizen groups have had some success in forcing projects to be scaled down. Third, projects that have aroused controversy have not been stopped. These findings parallel those of Altshuler and Luberoff (2003), though the scale of the projects they focused on were much larger. In our study, the largest projects with the greatest impact on what is around them are in downtown Boston, in areas where there are no residential neighborhoods. It is the projects that are close to residential areas, such as the community near Northeastern University's proposed new dorms, where negotiation with neighborhood groups has ensued. None of these controversies in our development inventory are pitched battles and the level of conflict appears muted.

The findings here may seem a bit contradictory. There is no question that "Boston is open for business." Large-scale development is welcome and the city bureaucracies and the

Mayor's office stand ready to facilitate the zoning, permitting, and licensing processes. But there is no sign of any unified political elite pushing development. To our knowledge few of the developers connected to these projects are highly involved in city politics. A *Boston Globe* analysis of Mayor Thomas Menino's inner circle listed eighteen close advisors from outside of city government. Of these eighteen only five were from the private sector (three are developers), seven are from nonprofits, three are consultants of various types, and three are from other miscellaneous walks of life (Vennoch 2006).

By itself one shouldn't rely too heavily on this list, as the *Globe's* evidence is impressionistic. Nevertheless, it makes sense given the changing face of Boston's economy. Over time not only have the Boston-based banks been swallowed up by out of state giants, but many of the other leading corporate citizens of Boston have left as well. John Hancock Insurance is now a subsidiary of a Canadian company; Gillette was sold to Procter & Gamble of Cincinnati; and Teradyne, one of the few high tech companies headquartered in Boston, recently moved to a suburb. In his study of business leadership and the Big Dig, Luberoff (2004, 40) found that of the large real estate firms represented on the Artery Business Committee in 1989, two-thirds of them had been acquired or merged with out-of-town firms. Likewise, most of the prestigious old-line Boston law firms that in the past generated so much of Boston's civic leadership have merged themselves into national or international mega-firms.

There are still some very substantial companies left, like Fidelity, State Street, and Liberty Mutual, but many of the large institutions of Boston that are most involved in civic affairs are nonprofits. These mammoth institutions, particularly Harvard University, Partners Health Care, Beth Israel-Deaconess Hospital, University Hospital, Tufts New England Medical Center, Children's Hospital, the Boston Foundation, the Catholic Archdiocese, Boston University, and Northeastern University, are of paramount importance to the city's economy. This "nonprofitization" of the city has produced a much more diversified set of political elites, and these organizations' interests do not directly correspond to those of the private sector. In contrast to private enterprises, a city's leading nonprofit institutions do not move to other cities or countries; they are unlikely to be acquired or merged out of existence. These deep roots give their leaders a standing in the community that may be difficult for some corporate leaders (Hanson et al 2006, 17).

The distinction between the private and nonprofit sectors has also become increasingly blurred in recent years. Businesses and nonprofits have become intertwined in numerous ways as they develop means of finding synergy or complementary resources or benefits. Public-private partnerships are a way that a developer can inoculate a project from neighborhood opposition. Public-private can be a misnomer as a government agency is often a catalyst and overseer of what is realistically a tripartite partnership. Master plans and land use plans bring together business, neighborhood, and citizen groups into negotiations before the next slate of projects can be proposed, typically resulting in a structure that demands ongoing cooperation through a CDC or government agency. For example, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) recently concluded a master plan for the Fort Point Channel section of Boston, an area where limited development in a mixed-use neighborhood is sure to be lucrative. The plan was hammered out in more than 100 public meetings stretching over five years. In the end, only a single citizen group, the Boston Preservation Alliance, objected to the finished plan (Palmer 2006).

The private sector is also diverse and a growing number of companies have become involved in projects that promote postmaterial goods instead of straight development. The sustainable cities and urban ecology movements, which have expanded to all areas of the country, have generated private sector participation in efforts to reduce environmental

degradation. As cities search for ways to ameliorate or prevent environmental problems, businesses have found ways to make money by conducting research, monitoring environmental quality, and developing environmentally friendly projects. Often, this is done in conjunction with nonprofits (Portney, 2003, 2007), and does seem to be related to how wealthy the people of the city are (Bowman, 2006; Kahn, 2006).

Let us be emphatic: business still has clout in Boston and its resources are significant. There are statewide trade groups, notably the Associated Industries of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts High Technology Council, that lobby on issues relating to Boston. As noted earlier, the Artery Business Committee (now called A Better City), has worked to promote the views of business on redevelopment surrounding the new Big Dig tunnel. Boston retains a pro-development bias, but at the same time Boston city government is highly accessible to all and the city has found a way to facilitate development without taking on the neighborhoods. Part of this is that business has learned where it can build and where it would be a political nightmare to try. Developers are cued by the Mayor's office, the BRA, and the city's CDCs, as to where it is possible to build. The city also preserves tracts of land that are eminently developable because of their location, waiting for an appropriate project to be presented to it.

Elites are plentiful in Boston but there is little evidence of a tightly knit regime of business leaders. These elites may have some coincident interests but they represent many different kinds of institutions. The biggest developers are not nearly as powerful as the largest nonprofits, like Partners Health Care or Harvard University. Moving away from the single issue of economic development, the cast of interest group characters is large, dynamic, and diffuse in their objectives. With Boston approaching minority-majority status even more change in the city's political-economic profile is likely.

VIII. Conclusion

Three separate lines of inquiry were undertaken to try to determine how well contemporary city politics fits with interest group theory. The first set of questions asked who participates in city politics. The answer in broad terms is that participation is broadly distributed across a range of interest group sectors. The stark contrast with national interest group politics is surprising as the conventional wisdom holds that interest group politics at the local level is rather modest and that business interests dominate. The data show unequivocally that at the local level citizen organizations constitute a very large proportion of the advocacy population. The only constituency that we did not find well represented was the poor, which, sadly, reflects the conventional wisdom. There was some representation through CDCs, neighborhood associations, and churches, but a close reading of the interviews suggests that the poor remain at a disadvantage in urban interest group politics.

The second line of inquiry pushed beyond the act of participating to an analysis of the interaction between advocates and policymakers. Collaborative relationships were evident in significant percentages in all eight of the cities. These relationships are most evident among groups that are larger and are particularly characteristic of nonprofits. In the wake of the Great Society citizen participation programs were commonly mandated for program planning at the local level. Evaluations of these programs were harsh, and independent observers concluded that many constituted symbolic participation at best (Rosenbaum 1978). In contemporary city politics, however, such requirements tend to be meaningful. They are channels that administrators and city councilors respect, if for no other reason that they create a process that allows projects to "get to yes." Housing and environmental policy are characterized by the most robust set of citizen

participation requirements. In housing, for example, CDCs are formidable because of their independent income stream through Low Income Housing Tax Credits and their role facilitating citizen involvement in project planning. If designed appropriately, citizen participation programs work (Berry, Portney and Thomson 1993; Fung 2004).

Third, research in progress on large-scale development projects in Boston suggests that commercial developers have friends at City Hall, eager to help them navigate the process that leads to completed projects. Such development is largely confined to areas where it is welcome, generally sited away from residential neighborhoods and via the planning process their proponents often agree to provide a host of community amenities designed to mitigate their projects' environmental and community impacts (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). From our own research and other sources, it was hard to identify any unified elite in Boston. The nonprofit sector, with many huge institutions with interests quite different from the commercial sector, is deeply involved in the politics and civic fabric of the city. Boston's elite is far from cohesive and is composed of a very diverse set of leaders and interests.

At the beginning of this paper it was observed that interest group theory moved from a focus on city politics to a preoccupation with national politics. When we began we hoped that the Bay States Cities research could take a small step toward unifying urban and national interest group theory. Aren't there common questions, common approaches, unified frameworks that could provide a more a coherent subfield, one more clearly oriented toward normal science (Baumgartner and Leech 1998)? Our conclusion is that it's a far harder task than we initially thought. The structure of local politics is strikingly different than Washington politics and, as a result, interest groups and lobbying reveal many distinct patterns in the two venues. The most obvious difference is the low barriers to entry for urban interest groups. Policymakers are easily accessible and the organizational requirements for lobbies are minimal. This difference from national politics may, at first glance, seem to be just a matter of scale. But "scaling down" expectations of urban interest groups and lobbying works poorly because city politics is not simply a smaller version of Washington politics.

This distinction is based not on culture, atmospherics, or attitudes. Rather, the very structure of urban politics is fundamentally different and that, in turn, creates distinct opportunities for interest groups. Even though Washington lobbies may engage in planning with an agency or obtain a grant to carry out a project, this not comparable to the role nonprofits play in urban politics. Cities have little choice but to depend on nonprofits to administer federal, state, and local programs. In turn, this generates a pattern of collaborative policymaking. Citizen participation requirements in the cities are, first and foremost, opportunities for interest groups, not individual citizens.

Other differences stand out. The set of issues cities are responsible for is far more circumscribed than Washington's. There are obvious dissimilarities (no foreign policy, no Department of Defense) with federal policymaking, but another key divergence is that cities perform little regulation of business. In addition, cities lack jurisdiction over many of the most contentious ideological issues of the day. City governments are seen as responsible for generating wealth (as is Washington), but unlike the federal government their responsibilities are directly tied to specific project development and not broad fiscal, monetary, or regulatory policy. Typically cities deal with one developer at a time as a project wends its way through the system. One corporation is much weaker than an entire industry, which is usually the lobbying force that confronts an agency in Washington. The good news for developers, though, is this project orientation pushes the cities toward processes that allow economic proposals to get to yes. And getting to yes means creating

processes that allow citizen groups, neighborhood groups, and government officials to negotiate their differences and to keep project proposals out of court.

These differences are of enormous importance and the melding of local and national interest group research requires far more imagination and work than scholars in the subfield have ever acknowledged. But what, then, of just urban interest group theory? Is there anything from pluralist, elitist, or regime theory that can be built upon here?

Little evidence could be found to support elitist theory. We observed lots of elites but found no unified cadres of elites that directed these cities. If our methods did not allow for a realistic assessment of the indirect means of influence by an elite, then others will have to use different tools to assess such complex attributes of power. Stone's regime theory is not so easily rejected. It is grounded in a sound examination of Atlanta's government from the end of the Second World War to the late 1980s. The portrait of a privileged business elite that mayors were dependent upon is convincing (Stone 1989). Yet Boston, the only city comparable to Atlanta in our study, does not fit Stone's theory. It's possible that the poor fit is partly due to the later period of study for Boston. Nevertheless, no comparable "regime" rules Boston today the way business elites dominated Atlanta. Stone's subsequent expanded theory, with its typology of four different regime types among American cities, is promising. Although we didn't find that our cities fit easily into the typology, elements of each certainly describe the Bay State cities. There is little question that the city of Boston more closely resembles a middle-class progressive regime type than does Atlanta. His later iteration of regime theory is brief and not well developed, though further work might make it more widely applicable (Stone 1993).

Despite the avalanche of criticism that has been aimed at pluralism for a half of a century, there are some parallels to the findings here. Certainly the openness of government, the distinct set of elites working on different issues, and the key role of interest groups in policymaking, are reflected in our data just as they were in *Who Governs?* (1961). Still we did not find the pluralist ideal in our eight cities and the heavenly chorus that sings with the upper-class accent does not yet have to head to the unemployment line (Schattschneider 1960, 34-35). Most importantly, the poor and other disadvantaged constituencies remain seriously underrepresented in city politics.

But what we did observe is that there is a high-level of interest group participation in cities incorporating a diverse set of organizations. We term this "stakeholder pluralism" as those interests who mobilize and have a legitimate interest in an issue can get a hearing and, often, a seat at the bargaining table. The structure and processes of city politics facilitate this type of interest group politics. For both bureaucrats and city councilors, policymaking requires building coalitions of stakeholders that can carry proposals forward. Cities have not found a magic formula for ending division and selfish advocacy. But what is clear to policymakers is that working with *all* stakeholders is necessary if their resource-strapped bureaucracies are to overcome obstacles to move programs, policies, and development projects forward.

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Endnotes

¹ The Artery Business Committee (ABC) was formed in 1988 and its goals were to protect downtown from the adverse impact of the Central Artery Tunnel (“Big Dig”), and to promote the project and to enhance that area of the city (Luberoff, 2004).

Later the organization changed its name to A Better City and as the project began to wind down its profile has dropped. Unlike ABC, Jobs for Massachusetts is a secretive organization, in this regard similar to the Vault. But unlike the Vault its focus is not limited to Boston. Also unlike the Vault, it is made up of a mix of representatives from the private sector, labor, universities, hospitals, and government. It has not come close to exerting the influence of the Vault (Bailey 2005).

² The Vault was most influential during the tenures of two mayors: John Collins who served from 1960 to 1967 and Kevin White, who served from 1968 until 1983. Although it continued to meet during the tenures of two subsequent mayors — Ray Flynn (1984-1993) and Thomas Menino (1993-present), its influence and impact had greatly lessened by the end of Flynn’s first term.

³ The six banks that were members of the Vault in 1982, for which we have a complete list of the membership, are Shawmut, Bank of Boston, Boston Safe Deposit and Trust, Bank of New England, the Provident Institution for Savings, and the Boston Five Cents Savings Bank. The Boston Safe Deposit and Trust is now part of the Mellon Bank (Pittsburgh) and the Boston Five Cents Savings was merged into what is now the Citizens Bank, which in turn is a subsidiary of the Royal Bank of Scotland. The others went through various mergers that eventually made them part of the Bank of America, which has been headquartered in North Carolina since its merger with NationsBank. The State Street Bank, which is not a retail bank but an investment bank, was a member of the Vault and remains headquartered in Boston. We will report further on such changes in a future paper.

⁴ An irony of the much-respected study by Stone (1989) is that it lent strong support to the conclusion of the much-maligned study of Atlanta by Floyd Hunter (1953). Hunter was attacked for basing his

conclusions on measurement of elites’ reputation for influence. Decades later, the thick, qualitative analysis by Stone, found a similar elite to the one described by Hunter. In contrast to Hunter, Stone’s work has received high marks from his peers.

⁵ Stone also identifies a fourth regime type, the lower class opportunity expansion regime, which he suggests does not actually exist anywhere in the U.S.

⁶ Among the eight municipalities, Arlington and Brookline are classified by the state as towns rather than cities. The primary difference between cities and towns is related to how the municipality is governed, and is not based on demographics.

⁷ These exclusions do not reflect a belief that these agencies are relatively less important in city politics than the bureaucracies we did investigate. Schools in particular are of paramount importance in city politics, while in suburbs school expenditures often consume the lion’s share of the budget. Our ultimate decisions on research design were pragmatic. After weighing breadth vs. depth, we opted for more cities and less comprehensive investigations of each. School systems, with their own boards, have a separate governing structure and presented a different set of research challenges.

⁸ The interview templates can be found at <http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/web.asp>.

⁹ Calculating the interview completion rate is a bit more complicated than it might seem. Our interviewing ended on a fixed date, but on that date there were still many subjects we had approached but for whom we still not received either a firm acceptance or a rejection. In some cases we were still playing telephone tag with subjects. For the groups, there were many we had listed that we had yet to call and in some of those cases we had yet to obtain the name of a leader of the organization to approach. For the purposes of calculating the completion rate, we initially left out all those subjects we considered “open”—those we were still trying to contact or, for some of the groups, had not yet identified a person to approach. Had we continued (and we were quite persistent in trying to set up interviews) we estimate that of

the “open” councilors and administrators we would have completed another third of them. With the remaining subjects as refusals, the completion rate for both councilors and administrators would have been around 60 percent, still an excellent response rate for political elites. Conjecture about a final response rate for advocacy groups is more difficult. Reflecting how late some organizations came on to our list, there were 52 open advocacy groups at the end of the interviewing period. Some of these open subjects would have turned into rejections but some ad organizations had surely stopped operating.

¹⁰ Some of our questions follow the methodology of the “Advocacy and Public Policymaking” project. For that research interviews with lobbyists began with a question about what they were working on and were then asked to tell us the story of that issue. More information can be found at <http://lobby.la.psu.edu>. See also Baumgartner et al, 2006.

¹¹ Population densities in communities along Route 95/128, such as Burlington or Needham are about 2,000 people per square mile. Densities in more far-flung suburban communities range from about 1,000 in places such as North Andover and Acton to about 500 in places like Hopkinton, Plymouth, and Boxborough.

¹² We did not specifically ask citizen groups and neighborhood associations if they were registered with the IRS but our assumption is that most had not bothered because they were small and did not feel it was necessary, or were informally organized. Nonprofit organizations are not required to register with the IRS unless they have an annual income of at least \$5,000.

¹³ Schlozman, Burch, and Lampert (2004) are in the process of updating the original Schlozman and Tierney data but their research is not yet finalized.

¹⁴ Most notably, under Chapter 40B, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Housing Permit Law, developers of multifamily housing projects where at least 20-to-25 percent of the units have long-term affordability restrictions can ask the local zoning authority to approve a single comprehensive permit for the

project and, in communities where less than 10 percent of the housing units are not in such projects, they can ask the state to overrule local denials of their permit applications. The powerful state override provision applies to more than 80 percent of the state's cities and towns, including Arlington, Brookline, Newton, and Somerville — but not to Boston, Cambridge, Lynn, and Worcester. According to a recent study, the comprehensive permit process was used for more than 80 percent of the new affordable units built in Brookline and Newton in 2005 but only 10 percent of such units in Somerville and none of the units in Boston and Cambridge. They show no additional affordable subsidized units in Lynn and do not provide data on Arlington or Worcester (Bluestone and Heudorfer, 2006).

¹⁵ Since the methodology includes projects that are underway but still controversial, current figures overrepresent projects that are ongoing and still controversial. Over time, as the database is extended, these cases that we've caught in the middle will become a smaller portion of the overall "n."

¹⁶ Some development projects have lead developers from outside of Boston who, in turn, have Boston-based partners. But the pattern is consistent here, too, as these local partners are all different companies and none stand out as a bigger player than the others.

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The Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard University strives to improve the region's governance by attracting young people to serve the region, working with scholars to produce new ideas about important issues, and stimulating informed discussions that bring together scholars, policymakers, and civic leaders. The Rappaport Institute was founded and funded by the Jerome Lyle Rappaport Charitable Foundation, which promotes emerging leaders in Greater Boston.

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