

Big City Lobbyists: Who They Are and What They Do*

Anthony J. Nownes and Jacqueline Giles

Department of Political Science
1001 McClung Tower
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996
Email: anownes@utk.edu
Telephone: (865) 974-7052. Fax: (865) 974-7037

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Long Beach, CA, March 2002.

*Direct all correspondence to Anthony Nownes, Department of Political Science, 1001 McClung Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996.

While national and state lobbyists have received a great deal of scholarly attention, city lobbyists have been more or less ignored. In what follows, we attempt to fill this gap in the literature. Using data from a survey of 167 lobbyists in six of America's largest cities, we examine the activities, backgrounds, and impact of big city lobbyists. We begin with a brief review of the literature. From here, we describe our data and methods. Next, we explicate our findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for theories of city politics.

Background: Lobbyists and Interests in the Literature

Two broad streams of literature inform our work here. First, there is a considerable literature on lobbyists. Second, there is a substantial literature on political power in American cities. In what follows, we will discuss these two strands of literature in turn.

The Lobbyists: Who They Are, Where They Come From, and What They Do

Interest groups of all kinds proliferated after World War II (Berry 1977; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Not surprisingly, this proliferation of groups led to a proliferation of lobbyists. Two of the foremost scholars of lobbyists, Clive Thomas and Ronald Hrebenar (1990), define a lobbyist as "a person designated by an interest group to represent it before government for the purpose of influencing public policy in that group's favor (p. 148)." There are two basic types of lobbyists. An *association lobbyist* works for and is employed by a single organization, while a *contract lobbyist* (or "hired gun") is a "for hire" advocate with multiple clients. Despite disproportionate media attention to high-priced "hired guns," association lobbyists who work for the institutions and causes they support preponderate in state and national lobbying communities (Thomas and Hrebenar 1996; Rosenthal 2001; Salisbury 1986).

Virtually all lobbyist studies confirm Lester Milbrath's (1963) inceptive finding that the typical lobbyist is a well-off, well-paid, well-educated, middle-aged, white male (Hrebenar and Thomas 1992; Rosenthal 2001; Salisbury 1986; Thomas and Hrebenar 1996). Women, racial or ethnic minorities, and the uneducated are vastly underrepresented among lobbyists. One of the most widely circulated hypotheses about lobbyists is that "they moved 'downtown' to the private sector to cash in on the contacts and experience they acquired while in government service (Salisbury, 1986: 152)." Many analysts decry this "revolving door," arguing that it distorts the democratic process by privileging organizations rich enough to employ erstwhile government officials. The literature supports the "revolving door" hypothesis, as it shows that most lobbyists come to the profession from government (Rosenthal 2001; Salisbury 1986).

As for what lobbyists actually do, research shows that the volume of state and national lobbying activity increased substantially in the 1970s and 1980s, and that the end result was more of virtually everything (Heinz et al., 1993; Nownes and Freeman 1998; Schlozman and Tierney 1983). Nonetheless, lobbying *has* changed in recent years. Specifically, electioneering is more prevalent than ever. The FECA (Federal Election Campaign Act) reforms of the 1970s and similar reforms in many states led to a huge increase in the number and variety of groups that contribute money to political campaigns, endorse candidates, conduct “get out the vote” drives, campaign for or against candidates, and contribute “soft money” (Hershey 1986; Magleby 2000; Rozell and Wilcox 1999). In addition, levels of *grassroots lobbying* have increased dramatically. Once seen as the province of “outsider” groups, grassroots lobbying is now conducted by even the most professional and well-heeled organizations (Godwin 1988; Magleby 2000; Nownes and Freeman 1998).

In all, these findings constitute a sort of conventional wisdom about lobbyists and what they do. The conventional wisdom can be summarized as follows: First, lobbyists are a political elite; they are predominantly middle-aged, hyper-educated professionals. Second, lobbying communities are dominated by white men; women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented. Third, most lobbyists come to the profession from government. Fourth, most lobbyists are full-time, in-house (a.k.a. association) lobbyists who work for the institutions and/or causes they support. Finally, lobbyists use a large number and variety of lobbying techniques including both “classic” forms of lobbying and more “nontraditional” techniques. In addition, grassroots lobbying and electioneering are more common than ever. This conventional wisdom rests entirely on studies of national and state lobbyists. Does it apply to big city lobbyists? In what follows, we attempt to answer this question.

Interest Representation in Cities

While studies of urban lobbyists are conspicuously absent from the literature, urban scholars have hardly ignored interest representation altogether. In fact, urbanists have been exploring the process by which private interests and actors get what they want from government for over 50 years. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, scholars asked: Who *really* governs in American cities? Different studies came to different conclusions. On the one hand, pluralists (as they were labeled) concluded that as a result of fragmented authority, popular control over government officials, extensive and unfettered interest group activity, and the power of government officials, power in American cities was dispersed among various groups representing diverse segments of the community (Banfield 1961; Dahl 1961; Sayre and Kaufman 1965). On the other hand,

elitists contended that power in communities was held almost exclusively by local business leaders who controlled various facets of urban life (Lynd and Lynd 1937; Hunter 1953).

Elkins (1995: 584) notes that as approaches to the study of urban politics both elitism and pluralism “withered in the face of substantial challenges” in the 1970s and 1980s. Pluralism was criticized for its faulty methodology and naiveté, while elitism was criticized for its determinism and overly dismissive view of the role of ordinary citizens in urban politics. By the early 1980s, a new theoretical perspective was taking shape. This perspective, which we will loosely label regime theory, built upon earlier community power and “growth machine” research, and focused on how local governing coalitions acted to determine urban political processes and policy outcomes. The theory rests on the insight that American cities, have “...two interdependent sources of authority: one based on popular control (i.e., the various organs of representative government) and the other based on the ownership of private productive assets (i.e., largely on the business community).” (Harding 1994: 359). The existence of these two interdependent sources of authority means that the welfare of city residents is intimately tied to both governmental decisions *and* business decisions. As such, regime theory posits that government officials must be especially attuned to business interests. Regime theory is not simply a modified elitism. Unlike elitism, regime theory does not relegate government officials to the margins of policymaking. Instead, it holds that government officials play an important role in urban decision-making, but generally choose to embrace business interests because they believe that their electoral fortunes are linked to the benefits of economic development (Elkin 1987). Regime theory is also different from elitism in that it does not view business as monolithic. Some businesses are more privileged than others. Specifically, rentiers, and “...developers, financiers, construction interests, and development-dependent professional practices” are likely to be important players in urban regimes (Harding 1994: 358).

In short, regime theorists hold that business interests are almost always key players in governing coalitions because their decisions are perceived to be so important to the economic health of the city and the political fortunes of government officials (Elkin 1985; Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1980; 1989). Regime theorists do not, however, argue that business interests are the only types of interests active in big cities. For example, in some cities, labor unions, the self-employed, and other supporters of growth are parts of the governing coalition. Moreover, as Harding (1994: 358) notes, “[c]hallenges by groups espousing the politics of use values—principally neighborhood organizations—are not impossible.” Some regime theorists even argue that different types of regimes have different mixtures of actors. Elkin (1987) notes, for example, that different

types of regimes show differing degrees of bias towards business, and that some regimes are even “progressive” in the sense that they are not resolutely pro-business (see also Stone 1989). In addition, numerous scholars have concluded that because regimes vary temporally and spatially, it is impossible to reach any definitive conclusions about the role of business in governing coalitions. All of this notwithstanding, it is clear that regime theory “suggests that the growth coalition will be dominated by land-based development elites” (Elkins 1995: 587).

Empirical work on governing coalitions in American cities appears largely to support regime theory. For example, Fleischmann (1997: 154) notes that studies consistently show that organized interests are important players in local politics, and that business organizations are the most active organized interests in cities (see also Abney and Lauth 1986; Elkins 1995; Fraga 1988; Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989). Moreover, case studies of specific regimes show that business interests are supremely important players in city politics (Bernard and Rice 1983; Ferman 1997; Judd 1987; W. Rich 1991; Stone 1989; Swanstron 1986). Of course, a number of other empirical studies show that various non-business interests are also active at the local level (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; DeLeon 1992; Dilger 1992; Elkins 1995; Johnson et al. 1983; O’Brien 1975; Thomas 1986; Zisk 1973). Nonetheless, regime theory clearly suggests that business interests—especially those supportive of land intensification—dominate most urban governing coalitions most of the time.

To summarize, our limited exploration of the extensive literature on urban regimes leads to two general conclusions. First, private interests are integral parts of the governing coalitions in American cities. Second, to the extent that lobbyists are active in big city politics, those representing business interests—especially business interests intent on land intensification—will be dominant.

A Few Words On Governmental Structure

One question of major interest to scholars of urban politics is what difference governmental structure makes. As Renner and DeSantis (1998) point out: “There is considerable controversy among academics, practitioners, and community activists over the consequences of different city government structures.” In their inceptive 1967 article on the subject, Lineberry and Fowler concluded that reformed city governments spent and taxed less than unreformed city governments, and were also less responsive to social cleavages. Subsequent studies, however, reached the opposite conclusion (e.g., Clark 1968). Still other studies have found little if any relationship between city government structure and policy outputs (Leibert 1974; Lyons 1974; Morgan and

Pelissero 1978). At this point, owing to the lack of research, we have no expectations about how governmental structure may affect lobbying and lobbyists in American cities. However, since questions of governmental structure remain open and important, we will do some exploratory analyses of how structure affects lobbying and lobbyists.

Summary: Unanswered Questions

Despite substantial attention to lobbyists and lobbying on the one hand, and power in American cities on the other, a number of important questions remain unanswered. For example, we still know very little about the specific *means* by which powerful organized interests attempt to influence local policy. Do local organized interests use professional lobbyists as do their counterparts at the state and federal levels? Or are governing coalitions more informal? Do local interest representatives use the same sorts of techniques that their Washington and state analogs do? Or do they do different things? We also know little about the kinds of relationships local organized interest representatives have with policymakers. Are these relationships as close as regime theorists suggest? Or is there a clear line between the political and the private? In answering these questions and others, we hope ultimately to provide insight into a question that continues to vex scholars of all stripes: What impact do organized interests and their lobbyists have on urban politics and policy?

Data and Methods: The Big City Lobbyists Survey

The data here come from two surveys: a mail survey of 167 big city lobbyists and a supplementary telephone survey of 11 big city lobbyists. We began our study with a list of America's 20 largest cities. Because we had limited financial means, we could not survey lobbyists in all 20 cities. Here we report the results of surveys of lobbyists in six cities: Chicago, Houston, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose.¹ To identify lobbyists in these cities, we relied on 1999 lobbyist registration lists (most but not all of America's largest cities have registration requirements). These lists allowed us to compile a master population list of 686 lobbyists—134 in Chicago, 59 in Houston, 327 in Phoenix, 82 in San Diego, 56 in San Francisco, and 28 in San Jose.² A total of 167 surveys were returned, which makes for an overall response rate of just under 25%. Response rates for each city were as follows: Chicago 31% (n = 41), Houston 22% (n = 13), Phoenix 17% (n = 55), San Diego 38% (n = 31), San Francisco 25% (n = 14), and San Jose 46% (n = 13).

We modeled our survey instrument after surveys used by Schlozman and Tierney (1983; 1986), and later by (Nownes and Freeman 1998).³ After conducting our mail survey, we conducted intensive follow-up telephone interviews with 11 big city lobbyists. We did this to “flesh-out” the findings of the mail survey. In

our six cities, we randomly chose 22 respondents and contacted them. Of these 22, 11 agreed to talk to us—two in Chicago, two in Phoenix, one in Houston, two in San Diego, two in San Francisco, and two in San Jose. Each telephone interview lasted between 20-40 minutes and proceeded from a questionnaire. We wish to note that in no way do we consider our telephone survey representative. We simply thought that a few issues required a bit of “follow-up.” Copies of both survey instruments are available at the authors’ web site.

We acknowledge that our data are less than perfect. First of all, we cannot be certain that big city lobbyist registration lists accurately mirror the populations they are intended to reflect. Second, our data come from only six of America’s 20 largest cities.⁴ It is certainly possible that these cities are very different from others. In short, we recognize that our data are flawed. We do not, however, see the flaws as fatal. While it is a cliché to resort to the old, “our knowledge on this important topic is so rudimentary that data weaknesses should be discounted” defense, we feel compelled to do so. We believe that our data represent a vast improvement over the status quo. Speaking specifically to the acknowledged weaknesses of our data, we wish to make four points. First, we believe that our sample is reasonably representative of big city lobbyists everywhere. Our sample cities differ considerably in governmental and electoral structure. For example, three of the cities have council/manager governments (Phoenix, San Diego, San Jose) while another three have mayor/council governments (Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco). As for electoral structure, three cities elect their legislators in districts (Chicago, Phoenix, and San Jose), one city utilizes an “at-large” system (San Francisco), and two others have mixed systems (Houston and San Diego). In addition, our cities vary considerably in population demographics, size, and economic and cultural diversity. Second, to insure that our sample would be somewhat representative, we surveyed a large number of lobbyists. Few extant studies have such a large n (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998). We believe that the sheer number of lobbyists allows for some degree of generalization. Third, though our findings may not apply to smaller cities, they are important in their own right given the importance of large cities in American politics. Fourth, we wish to note that our telephone data are not meant to be representative. We use the telephone data only to “flesh out” some of our more robust mail survey data. In the end, we believe that despite their problems, our data can significantly add to our knowledge of both organized interest politics and urban politics.

Results I: The Characteristics, Roles, and Behavior of Big City Lobbyists

Our data shed a great deal of light on the characteristics, roles, and activities of big city lobbyists. In this section, we will attempt to limn a portrait of the universe of big city lobbyists.

The Characteristics and Roles of Big City Lobbyists

Our data provide a great deal of support for the conventional wisdom on lobbyists. First, our data show that big city lobbyists—just like lobbyists elsewhere—are indeed a political elite. The typical big city lobbyist is a 46-year old, well-educated, white, male. Women comprise only 25 percent (41 of 163) of big city lobbyists, and racial/ethnic minorities represent only 9.2 percent (15 of 163). Of these 15 ethnic/racial minorities, six are African-American, eight are Hispanic or Latino, and one is Asian-American. Taking a closer look at education, we find that 97 percent (159 of 164) of sample lobbyists are college graduates, while 70 percent (115 of 164) attended graduate or professional school. As we expected, a sizable number (33.5% or 52 of 155) have law degrees.

As for career paths and the “revolving door,” our data are mixed. On the one hand, the data show that 60 percent (97 of 163) of sample lobbyists came to lobbying from government. Seventy-two percent of this 60 percent came to lobbying from *local* government. The proportion of lobbyists with government experience is even higher if we consider only full-time lobbyists: 81 percent of full-time lobbyists (46 of 57) have government experience. On the other hand, the data suggest that while the “revolving door” may exist, it may not be harmful. The data show that the average lobbyist with government experience is 13 years removed from that service. Overall, these findings suggest that lobbyists do not move “back and forth” between the government and the world of lobbying. The “revolving door” does not swing both ways.

We turn now to the roles of big city lobbyists. The most common lobbyist typology differentiates between *association* and *contract* lobbyists. Another typology differentiates between *part-time* and *full-time* lobbyists. Considering the first typology, our data contradict previous lobbyist studies. Specifically, our data show that 65 percent (106 of 163) of sample lobbyists are part-timers. As for the second typology, the data support previous research. Specifically, the data show that 58 percent (96 of 165) of big city lobbyists are internal lobbyists. This means that most big city lobbyists are indeed “in-house” lobbyists who represent and work for a single organization. We should note, however, that a far higher proportion of big city lobbyists than either national or state lobbyists are external lobbyists. For example, in his study of national lobbyists, Salisbury (1986) finds that only 18.4 percent are external lobbyists.

On the whole, big city lobbyists have many of the same characteristics as their state and national counterparts. They are, however, different in a number of ways. Specifically, more of them are external lobbyists and many more of them are part-timers. Our telephone respondents elaborated on how big city

lobbyists are different. One theme they echoed was that big city lobbyists are more likely than lobbyists elsewhere to lobby “on the side” as part of a different kind of job altogether. Telephone respondents, for example, told us that their experiences led them to believe that part-timers tended to fall into one of three categories: *organizational executives*, *external lawyers*, and *organizational staff*.⁵ One telephone respondent, herself the executive director of a trade association, told us about the role of “organizational executive as lobbyist”: “I lobby occasionally as part of my job. One of the reasons we (the group) exist is that people expect us to ‘go to bat’ for them politically. Our staff is not huge. So sometimes, that means I do some lobbying. It’s not a large part of what I do, but it is a part.” Another respondent, an external lawyer who lobbies occasionally as part of her legal work, told us about the lobbying activities of external lawyers (i.e., lawyers who work for law firms and are hired by organizations):

Our (law) firm specializes in real estate law. I do many different things. But one of the things that you learn very quick in this business is that doing anything in the real estate business means getting permission from the government. I don’t think of myself as a lobbyist at all. But to represent my clients I often have to go before government agencies, ask for permits, or seek zoning permissions. That’s just a fact of life.

Numerous telephone respondents told similar stories about organizational staff. They described to us people who lobbied occasionally in the course of doing their “regular” jobs as consulting engineers, public relations experts, or middle managers.

What Big City Lobbyists Do

To determine which lobbying techniques big city lobbyists use, we included in our mail survey a list of 21 advocacy techniques modeled on that of Nownes and Freeman (1998) and Schlozman and Tierney (1983; 1986). Each respondent was asked to indicate if he/she used each technique never, rarely, occasionally, or often.⁶ Table 1 shows the results of this inquiry. As Table 1 shows, the five most common lobbying techniques used by big city lobbyists are engaging in informal contacts with officials, making monetary contributions to candidates, testifying before the legislature, having influential constituents contact legislators, and alerting representatives to effects of a bill on constituents. The most sparsely used techniques are engaging in protests and demonstrations, running media advertisements, and filing suit or otherwise engaging in litigation. In all, our data support previous research suggesting that lobbyists use a wide range of techniques, and are quite similar to the findings of Nownes and Freeman (1998) and Schlozman and Tierney (1983; 1986). In addition, our data



show that big city lobbyists—just like national and state lobbyists—do a lot. Just how much do they do? To answer this question, we counted the number of techniques used by each sample lobbyist. Our results show that the mean sample lobbyist uses 17.25 of 21 possible techniques, and 79 percent use 15 or more lobbying techniques.

Table 1. Technique Use Among Sample Big City Lobbyists

Technique	A	B
1. Engaging in informal contacts with officials (n = 163)	99%	2.44
2. Making monetary contributions to candidates (n = 162)	91%	2.31
3. Testifying before legislature (n = 163)	96%	2.23
4. Having influential constituents contact legislator's office (n = 161)	96%	2.19
5. Alerting representatives to the effects of a bill on constituents (n = 162)	94%	2.15
6. Attempting to shape implementation of policies (n = 163)	96%	2.12
7. Consulting with government officials to plan legislative strategy (n = 163)	96%	2.04
8. Helping to draft legislation (n = 162)	93%	1.93
9. Helping to draft regulations, rules, or guidelines (n = 162)	93%	1.85
10. Serving on advisory boards or commissions (n = 163)	89%	1.82
11. Mounting grassroots lobbying efforts (n = 161)	87%	1.73
12. Doing favors for officials who need assistance (n = 161)	85%	1.70
13. Shaping government's agenda by raising new issues and calling attention to previously ignored problems (n = 163)	87%	1.68
14. Inspiring letter-writing or telegraph campaigns (n = 162)	81%	1.62
15. Talking to media (n = 162)	89%	1.61
16. Working on election campaigns (n = 162)	78%	1.52
17. Endorsing candidates (n = 161)	68%	1.37
18. Attempting to influence appointment to public office (n = 161)	78%	1.35
19. Filing suit or otherwise engaging in litigation (n = 161)	62%	.94
20. Running advertisements in media about position (n = 162)	49%	.73
21. Engaging in protests or demonstrations (n = 162)	23%	.30

Source: Authors' data.

Column A indicates percent that reported using technique. Column B contains a mean for each technique based on responses to technique questions. Responses for each case were coded as follows: Never = 0, Rarely = 1, Occasionally = 2, Often = 3; maximum score = 3, minimum score = 0.

Turning next to *where* big city lobbyists focus their attention, we find that the legislature is the primary target of big city lobbying activity.⁷ As Table 2 shows, 85 percent of respondents say that the local legislative body is a “very important” target of activity, and only 1 percent say that it is “not important.” As Table 2 shows, however, other parts of city government also attract a great deal of attention. For example, 82 percent of respondents say that the mayor’s office is “very important,” and 74 percent also view bureaucratic agencies as “very important” targets of activity. Finally, in council/manager cities, 66 percent of respondents say that the

city manager is a “very important” target of activity. On the whole, Table 2 shows that most big city lobbyists are active across the various components of government.

Despite the fact that the data show considerable support for the notion that lobbying in big cities is similar to lobbying in Washington and in the states, Table 1 reveals four important differences between big city lobbying and lobbying elsewhere. First, urban lobbyists appear to do more electioneering than their state or national counterparts. All three of the electoral lobbying techniques that we inquire about are more common among our respondents than among state or federal lobbyists. Why is electioneering so prominent among big city lobbyists? We asked this of our telephone respondents, and a common theme ran through their answers: because city elections are low information affairs, both money and grassroots organizing are more important than they are in either state or federal elections. One telephone respondent put it this way: “The way to win elections around here, even now, is to knock on doors and meet people. We do that for candidates. And the candidates know it’s important for them to have [campaign help].” This response supports research suggesting that local electoral success depends heavily upon a candidate’s social acceptability, personal recognition, and community involvement (Lieske 1989).

Table 2. The Importance of Lobbying Targets

<i>Target</i>	<i>Level of Importance</i>		
	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Somewhat important</i>	<i>Very important</i>
Legislature (n = 163)	1%	14%	85%
Mayor’s office (n = 162)	2%	16%	82%
Administrative agencies (n = 163)	< 1%	26%	74%
Courts (n = 155)	72%	24%	4%
City Manager (n = 97)#	4%	30%	66%

Source: Authors’ data.

Council-Manager cities only.

The fact that local elections are such low turnout affairs may also contribute to the high level of electioneering by big city lobbyists. One lobbyist told us:

Frankly, voting [turnout] is low in these [local] elections. In a strange way, this means that every vote, every little [bit of] help, counts for a little more. You see, if we can help [a person] get elected, they remember us. They just don’t have that many people to remember. It helps us to help [candidates].

It’s good strategy. We have a saying around here: If you give \$500, [the candidate] will remember both

your names. If you give \$250 [the candidate] will remember your first name. If you give a little less, [the candidate] may remember your face. But you've got to give something.

In short, to paraphrase one of our respondents, big city candidates ask for and appreciate campaign help more than their counterparts in state capitals and Washington.

A second difference is that urban lobbyists tend to do less grassroots lobbying than national or state lobbyists. Why is this the case? Several of our telephone respondents noted that grassroots lobbying was relatively uncommon in the big city because most citizens are not involved in city politics, and getting them involved is difficult. This response was typical: "Sure, there are NIMBYs ["not in my backyard"] out there. But generally people don't care too much about the politics of this city. They might get involved every now and then but most of the time they're apathetic. Trying to get them involved is a waste of time." As this comment attests, our respondents agreed that for the most part ordinary citizens are not very active in city politics. Even *trying* to involve them, many telephone respondents noted, "is more trouble than it is worth." Interestingly, however, many of our respondents were quick to note that it is neither apathy nor laziness nor ignorance that keeps ordinary citizens out of day to day city politics. Rather, it is the nature of the issues with which city governments deal. One respondent explained it to us this way:

In the city, you have to distinguish between broad legislative advocacy such as rent control legislation, and project-specific advocacy—such as, for example, getting a "conditional use permit" to build an office building. There's a very large difference between these two types of advocacy. In the former, people may get involved. In the latter, people are not apt to be involved.

This respondent went on to note that it would be difficult to imagine why citizens would be involved in many of the project-specific issues with which city governments deal every day.

All of our telephone respondents agreed that lobbying in the big city often involves mundane project-specific issues that the public neither knows nor cares a great deal about. In such cases, lobbyists neither need nor want the public involved. A closely related explanation for the lack of grassroots lobbying in the big city is that often when city lobbyists lobby on project-specific issues they face no opposition from other organized interests or lobbyists. Instead, a lobbyist on such a project must simply convince a city official—often a bureaucrat—that what he/she wants is reasonable and justifiable. One of our telephone respondents explained to us that "getting the public involved" only makes sense when "what the public wants matters." And in many cases, according to this respondent, what the public wants does not matter. "What matters," he noted, "is whether or

not I can convince a city bureaucrat that I've followed the rules, abided by the law, and done what I am supposed to do."

The third obvious difference between urban lobbyists and state and national lobbyists is that a larger proportion of the former appear to target the bureaucracy. This finding makes sense in light of previous research suggesting that city agencies have broad administrative discretion and exercise considerable power over policy outcomes (Lowi 1964; Nivola 1978; Sayre and Kaufman 1960). All of our telephone respondents agreed that city bureaucrats were important lobbying targets because they exercise a great deal of power. This response, from a lobbyist from San Francisco, was typical: "Around here, the administrative agencies are appointed by the mayor. But they are 99 percent autonomous and independent. They've got the power and that's why we target them." Though bureaucrats at the state and national levels have some autonomy and discretion, our telephone respondents (several of whom had worked for and/or lobbied state and/or national government) clearly believed that city bureaucrats have more of both than their counterparts elsewhere. Again, it is their power to make important project-specific decisions that make city bureaucrats so powerful. One respondent told us: "To be honest, I hardly deal with the council members at all. All my clients want...is something from the agencies...the inspectors...they want permits, what have you..." In short, bureaucratic agencies in big cities are important because they have autonomy, power, and discretion—especially over project-specific decisions that are vital to many city businesses.

The fourth important difference between big city lobbyists and lobbyists elsewhere is that the former tend to rely more upon informal contacts with officials. An amazing 99 percent of our respondents reported engaging in informal contacts with officials, and this technique had the highest mean value of all 21 techniques. To paraphrase many of our telephone respondents: Politically, big cities are similar to small towns. The number of people who are politically active is small. Everyone knows everyone. That's how business is done. In this kind of environment, informal lobbying is exceedingly important.

Different Structures, Different Lobbying?

What impact does governmental structure have on lobbyists and lobbying? Unfortunately, we do not have the space here to explore this question fully. We hope to do so elsewhere. For now, we wish to make note of two notable findings. First, lobbyists are remarkably similar across forms of government. For example, *ceteris paribus*, both groups of cities (i.e., council/manager cities and mayor/council cities) have similar numbers of internal and external lobbyists, full-timers and part-timers, lawyers and non-lawyers, whites and non-whites, and

lobbyists with and without government experience. We did, however, discover a statistically significant “gender gap” among sample lobbyists ($p < .05$ for a 2 X 2 table). Specifically, the ratio of male-female lobbyists in council/manager cities is 69-31, while the ratio in mayor/council cities is 83-17. We will discuss this further subsequently. Second, there is some evidence that there are higher levels of lobbying activity in council/manager cities than in mayor/council cities. To determine the level of lobbying activity in each sample city, we computed a score we call an *activity index* for each lobbyist. As we mentioned above, we asked each respondent how often—often, occasionally, seldom, or never—he/she used each of 21 lobbying techniques. To calculate each respondent’s activity index, we assigned a value of 3 to each “often” answer, a value of 2 to each “occasionally,” a value of 1 to each “rarely,” and a value of 0 to each “never.” We then added each respondent’s scores together to form his/her activity index. The data show that lobbyists in council/manager cities are more active than lobbyists in mayor/council cities. Specifically, the average activity index score for council/manager cities is 36.6, while the average activity index for mayor/council cities is 33.7. A difference of means test indicates that the difference is statistically significant at the .10 level. We admit that our analysis here is a preliminary and general one. In fact, we intend to explore intercity differences in greater detail elsewhere.

Results II: Representation and Impact

Our final set of analyses addresses two questions: What types of interests do big city lobbyists represent? What impact do lobbyists have on big city policy outcomes? We will address these questions in turn.

What Interests Do Lobbyists Represent?

To determine what types of interests big city lobbyists represent, we analyzed lobbyist registration lists to find out what specific organizations employed our sample lobbyists. Table 3 contains the results of this inquiry. What is most striking about Table 3 is the dominance of business interests in big city lobbying communities. As Table 3 shows, half of our respondents work for either corporations or business trade associations. Twenty-four percent of our respondents work for law firms, seven percent work for PR firms, and another four percent work for lobbying firms. After perusing the client lists of the lobbying firms, law firms, and public relations firms in our sample, we estimated that another 16 percent of respondents (not including those who are employed by individual corporations or trade groups) represent corporate clients exclusively. Thus, in the end, fully two-thirds of our sample lobbyists represent corporate interests exclusively.

Our data show that an extraordinarily small number of registered lobbyists work for groups that represent the interests of ordinary citizens such as citizen groups, neighborhood groups, or labor unions.

However, it is clear that our data understate the level of citizen group, neighborhood group, and labor union representation in big cities. We say this because a number of the external lobbyists in our sample represent non-business interests in addition to (but rarely instead of) corporate interests. Moreover, big city lobbyist registration statutes (which vary considerably, but generally do *not* exempt neighborhood groups, citizen groups, and labor unions from registering) do not require *some* citizen, community, and labor groups (specifically, those that use volunteer lobbyists or lobby only sporadically) to register.⁶ Thus, it would be overstating things to conclude that labor, neighborhood, community, and citizen groups are virtually unrepresented by big city lobbyists. Nonetheless, given the proliferation of non-business groups at the national and state levels, the relative lack of registered lobbyists working for such organizations is unexpected.

Table 3. What Types of Organizations Do Sample Big City Lobbyists Work For?

<i>Lobbyist Employer</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Corporation	56	35%
Law firm	39	24%
Trade Association	23	14%
PR Firm	11	7%
Lobbying Firm	7	4%
Charity/Non-Profit Service	8	5%
Governmental	7	4%
Labor Union	5	3%
Independent Attorney	3	2%
Independent Lobbyist	1	1%
Total	160	99%

Source: Authors' data.

Thus far, our data are very supportive of previous research suggesting that business interests dominate urban lobbying communities. As for what types of business interests predominate, our data are again supportive of previous research. Table 4 contains a breakdown of the specific industries lobbyists employed by corporations and trade groups work in. As you can see, just as "growth machine" theorists and many regime theorists suggest, land intensification interests predominate in big city lobbying communities. For example, our data show that of the 79 lobbyists who work for corporations or trade associations, approximately half work for companies directly involved in financing, buying, or selling land, or designing or building commercial or residential structures/developments.

Table 4. What Types of Businesses Do Sample Corporate and Trade Lobbyists Represent?

Corporations		Trade	
Architect	1	General Business	4
Banking/Brokerage	5	Hotels	1
Civil/Consulting Engineer/Land Use Planng.	6	Liquor	1
Energy/Oil	1	Real Estate Dev., Services, Sales	10*
Payment Services	2	Rental Housing	3
Real Estate Development, Services, Sales	13*	Restaurants	1
Rock Products	1	Retail Stores	1
Telecommunications/Telephone	9	Rock Products	1
Unknown	1	Sports	1
Utility	14		
Waste Management/Disposal	2		

Source: Authors' data.

*Includes builders

The Influence Question

The question of interest group influence is a notoriously thorny one. Given that each policy outcome has myriad causes, how can we discern the precise impact of lobbying activity? The short answer is *we can't*. Unfortunately, our data (like most cross-sectional data) do not speak directly to the question of lobbyist/interest group influence. They do, however, give us some hints as to the impact of lobbyists on local public policy. We will begin with Table 5, which presents respondents' answers to the following survey item: "When you interact with your local legislative body (i.e., City Council, Board of Supervisors, or City Commission) and administrative agencies/departments, how would you characterize these relationships? Are they normally cooperative, occasionally cooperative, seldom cooperative, or almost never cooperative?" As you can see, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported that their relationships with both the legislature and the bureaucracy are normally cooperative. This does not, of course, prove that lobbyists have a large impact on public policy. It does, however, suggest that lobbyists have cordial and close relationships with city officials. Another measure of the closeness of relationships between lobbyists and local policymakers is the frequency with which policymakers approach lobbyists for advice on policy matters. When asked how frequently policymakers approach them for advice, 21% (34 of 162) of our respondents said this happens frequently, and 44% (71 of 162) said it happens occasionally, while only 28 percent (46 of 167) said it happens rarely, and only 7% (11 of 167) said it never happens.⁹ On the whole, lobbyists report high levels of interaction and cooperation with public officials. This certainly suggests that private interests are integral parts of governing coalitions in our seven sample cities.

Table 5. Sample Lobbyists' Relationships with Legislative Body and Administrative Agencies

<i>Relationship with</i>	<i>Almost Never Cooperative</i>	<i>Seldom Cooperative</i>	<i>Occasionally Cooperative</i>	<i>Normally Cooperative</i>
Legislative body is: (n =167)	.6% (1)	1.2% (2)	26.1% (42)	72% (116)
City agencies is: (n = 167)	0% (0)	7.4% (12)	27.2% (44)	65.4% (106)

Source. Authors' data.

As for the influence of business interests specifically, we asked our respondents about business impact on local policy. Specifically, we presented our respondents with the following statement, and asked them to strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree: "Business organizations in this city enjoy a special relationship with local officials that other types of organizations do not enjoy." The distribution of responses is as follows: 10% (16 of 159) strongly agreed, 40% (64 of 159) agreed, 44% (70 of 159) disagreed, and 6% (9 of 159) strongly disagreed. We also asked respondents if the following statement was a good description, a poor description, or in between: "Business interest groups generally get what they want from city government." Twenty-four percent (39 of 162) said that this statement was a good description, 11% (18 of 162) said it was a poor description, and 65% (105 of 162) said it was in between. In all, we believe these results support the notion that businesses get much of what they want from city governments. We are especially struck by the fact that half of sample lobbyists (almost all of whom are business lobbyists) agree that business interests have a special relationship with city officials. In addition, a startlingly low proportion of respondents disagree with the notion that business groups generally get what they want from city government.

To further explore the question of business influence, we asked our telephone respondents if they believed that business interests dominate local politics. Respondents were frank about the power of business in local affairs. For example, one respondent told us: "Sure, there are some issues that business controls... no question. But there are others that business does not control." This begs the question: Which issues are business-dominated? Again, the respondents alluded to the two types of advocacy we mention above—broad legislative advocacy, and project-specific advocacy. On the latter, businesses often win because no one else cares. One respondent put it like this: "By the time I get involved, the big issues—about what the city will do—are already decided. All that's left is deciding *how* the city is going to do it—who gets contracts, etc." As an example, one respondent told us that he had spent several weeks working to get a company he represented on

a list of city-approved building supply contractors. This he said, was exceptionally important to his client. It was not, however, important to anybody else. This is a case, he acknowledged, in which a business interest—his client—got exactly what it wanted from city government. It hardly, however, signals business dominance.

What then, can we conclude about the influence of lobbyists in general and business lobbyists in particular on big city politics? There are three obvious answers. First, private interests are active and engaged participants in many city policy battles. Second, business interests—especially those intent on land intensification—are permanent players in urban governing coalitions. Third, businesses and their lobbyists often “win.” We will return to this question in our conclusion.

Conclusions

In many respects, big city lobbyists are a lot like lobbyists elsewhere. They are, however, somewhat different. How? Robert Salisbury (1986) concludes that in Washington “interest representation is increasingly a specialized responsibility located within organizations with public policy concerns (p. 154).” The same can be said of interest representation in states. This conclusion does not apply to big city lobbyists. The typical big city lobbyist is a part-timer who spends only 27 percent of his/her time lobbying. Moreover, nearly half of all big city lobbyists are external lobbyists who work on a retainer or fee for service basis. Overall, our results suggest that a great deal of lobbying in big cities is done by people for whom lobbying is only one small part of a multi-faceted job. Lobbying is only part of what most of our sample lobbyists do, and lobbying has not become a highly specialized and professional occupation in big cities. This is due partly to the very nature of city policymaking. As numerous scholars have noted, city politics are dominated by development and distributive policies rather than redistributive policies. Almost by definition, businesses are intimately involved in these types of policies. It is no wonder then that big city lobbying communities are dominated by business elites who lobby as part of their other responsibilities. We will have more to say about this later.

Our data do not augur well for the interests of traditionally underrepresented groups in city politics. We find that an extraordinarily low number of big city lobbyists are ethnic or racial minorities. This is not surprising given past research on lobbyists. It is surprising, however, in light of the demographics of our sample cities. Consider, for example, that African-Americans comprise 37 percent of the population in Chicago, and 25 percent in Houston (according to census figures), while they comprise only 10 percent (4 of 39) and 0 percent respectively, of sample lobbyists in these two cities. Consider also, the following: Hispanics or Latinos comprise 30 percent of the population in San Jose, 26 percent in Chicago, 34 percent in Phoenix, 14 percent in San

Francisco, 25 percent in San Diego, and 37 percent in Houston; but are completely absent from three sample cities—Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco, and comprise only 6 percent of sample lobbyists in Phoenix, 8 percent in San Jose, and 13 percent in San Diego. Finally, while Asians comprise a substantial proportion of the population in four of our cities (27 percent in San Jose, 31 percent in San Francisco, and 14 percent in San Diego) they are virtually absent from lobbying communities. Only one of our sample lobbyists is Asian-American.

Does this lack of diversity matter? We believe the answer is yes. As Kantor (1995) notes, despite the lack of overt redistributive policies in many cities “many decisions made by local governments have at least some redistributive consequences” (p. 213). In other words, distributive and developmental policies—the kinds in which most of our respondents are interested—have important implications for traditionally disadvantaged groups. “City money and programs,” Kantor goes on to say, “can be used in ways that at least provide the poor with their fair share...” (p. 213). Numerous studies support this view, finding that the inclusion of ethnic or racial minorities in local governing coalitions can lead to substantial progressive changes in social policy (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Button 1989). Of course, these studies ostensibly examine the inclusion of ethnic or racial minorities who claim to speak for specific ethnic or racial interests. It is not unreasonable to assume, however, that the decided lack of minority representation in lobbying communities—even if the lobbying communities are dominated by lobbyists who work for business organizations—may have implications for the adoption of policies friendly to non-whites and poor people. At the very least, our data show that in one important arena of urban political life, ethnic or racial minorities are underrepresented and as a result their views may get short shrift. Certainly none of this means that the interests of ethnic and racial minorities are ignored in city politics. It does indicate, however, that among the permanent players in developmental and distributive politics ethnic and racial minorities are still woefully underrepresented.

Finally, the “gender gap” we discover deserves mention. At this point, we have no explanation for our finding that female lobbyists are much more prominent in council/manager cities than in mayor/council cities. However, given research suggesting that women tend to have different issue priorities than men (specifically, they are much more likely to prioritize women’s children, and family interests; see Gilligan (1982)), and that women have different leadership styles than men (i.e., they engage in more “interactive” leadership than men; see Rosener 1990), it is reasonable to conclude that lobbying differs somewhat between types of cities in ways that our data do not address. Certainly, this deserves further attention.

Activities

Lobbying in big cities is a lot like lobbying elsewhere. Our data show that lobbyists are exceedingly active in city politics, they use a large variety of lobbying tactics, and they are active across the various components of city government. Nonetheless, lobbying in big cities is different than lobbying elsewhere. Specifically, electioneering, bureaucratic lobbying, and informal lobbying are more important, and grassroots lobbying is less important.

Overall, our findings on what big city lobbyists do suggest two things about urban politics. First, lobbying in big cities is more professional than ever. Though regime theorists sometimes talk of informal governing coalitions, our data suggest that governing coalitions are in many respects formal—they comprise lobbyists who have repeated interactions with policymakers, often in formal governmental settings. The professionalism of city lobbying may be a positive development. In theory, it makes government more accountable and transparent, as citizens can easily keep tabs of what government officials are doing. It also makes lobbying in big cities easier to study. Much of the “wheeling and dealing” in urban politics takes place in formal governmental settings and are open to scrutiny. This bodes well for our ability to understand it.

Second, our data suggest that lobbying in big cities is in many ways less public and professional than lobbying in states and in Washington. Despite lobbying registration and disclosure laws (the very existence of which suggest that lobbying and lobbyists are open to some public scrutiny) and the formal nature of much big city lobbying, our data clearly show that big city lobbyists more than lobbyists elsewhere do not engage ordinary citizens very much or very often. Less grassroots lobbying and more bureaucratic lobbying suggest a system where lobbyists often operate out of the limelight without public involvement or input. Of course, this may be due to the propensity of cities to focus on distributive and developmental policies. But our telephone respondents’ consistent allusions to disinterested and disengaged citizens supports the view that lobbying in big cities is (ironically given the “closeness” of city government to citizens) an insider’s game. Furthermore, because grassroots lobbying is generally considered a tactic that broadens the scope of conflict, the relative lack of such lobbying suggests relatively cozy relationships between lobbyists and public officials.

Finally, our finding that council/manager cities witness more lobbying activity than mayor/council cities suggests to us that just as reformers suggest, the former system may diffuse the power of organized interests. We say this because we believe that higher levels of lobbying activity among our respondents—most of whom are business lobbyists—indicates a more pronounced need to explain and justify their claims. In other

words, higher levels of activity signal higher levels of conflict between organized interests, which signals a more balanced approach to policymaking. This conclusion is buttressed by our finding that respondents in council/manager cities report statistically significantly higher levels of conflict among groups, and between groups and public officials, than respondents in mayor/council cities (we intend to elaborate on this finding elsewhere). In short, we believe that our data support the notion that council/manager cities may diffuse the power of business interests.

Representation, the Nature of Urban Governing Coalitions, and the Impact of Lobbyists

Our data overwhelmingly support the notion that business interests—especially land intensification interests—dominate urban lobbying communities. Since lobbying registration statutes generally have a “threshold requirement”—that is, people who do a lot of lobbying must register while people who do a little or none do not—it is fair to conclude that the permanent players in urban regimes are just the sorts of business interests Stone (1980) and other regime and “growth machine” theorists suggest. As numerous treatments suggest, citizen, neighborhood, and labor groups may be active in big city politics. But the permanent players in urban politics—the interests that employ lobbyists regularly and that rely upon high-priced and experienced lobbyists with the characteristics (such as government experience and lots of time on the job) that make lobbyists most successful—are business interests, especially development interests. Our findings support those of Dilger (1992) who concludes that neighborhood groups (which are, after all, groups of citizens) tend to be more reactive than proactive, and participate in policy battles only sporadically. Business interests—especially development interests—participate in politics constantly.

Does this mean that business groups dominate big city politics? In the end, we cannot speak directly to this question. But before leaving this topic, we wish to make two more points. First, as our telephone respondents noted, a great deal of lobbying in the big city is qualitatively different than lobbying elsewhere. Specifically, much of what big city lobbyists do is “project specific advocacy” that has little in common with the broad programmatic lobbying that preoccupies so many lobbyists in the states and in Washington. In addition, a great deal of big city lobbying concerns developmental issues. Our data suggest that developmental policies promote substantial lobbying activity, and are often virtual “feeding frenzies” for organized interests that want to get “a piece of the action” in the form of government contracts, tax breaks, zoning variances, etc. Second, the fact that a great deal of big city lobbying occurs on developmental issues that almost by definition do not engender conflict between business groups and citizen-based organizations, should not lead us to dismiss the

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power of business. Since business lobbyists are the permanent players in urban politics, it is likely that their influence spills over into other areas of urban decision-making. Just how it does so is a subject ripe for research.

In the end, it is impossible for us to reach any grand conclusions about the influence of lobbyists and lobbying on big city policy outcomes. It is tempting, however, to conclude that because organized interests in big cities spend a great deal of their time and money on program-specific lobbying they have little influence over the larger direction of city policy. This may be true as far as it goes. However, in one sense it is irrelevant. For it is clearly the case that the large number of low-profile, program-specific decisions with which big city lobbyists deal every day cumulate to determine a city's quality of life, the contours of its growth, and indeed, its very essence. On these issues, white, upper middle-class, savvy and highly professional representatives of business interests are almost always at the table, and they report high levels of interaction and cooperation with public officials.

Of course, our portrait of lobbyists and lobbying in the metropolis begs a number of questions. For example, when and how do non-business interests lobby? How do public officials—local legislators and administrators, for example—view (the mostly business) lobbyists they see on a regular basis? How much business lobbying amounts to simple monitoring of the activities of local government? Are business lobbyists significantly advantaged by their mere presence in so many governmental contexts? These are questions we hope to address in the future.

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¹ In an earlier version of this paper, we reported the results of a survey of lobbyists in Los Angeles as well. However, this version was repeatedly criticized for its overrepresentation of California lobbyists. Thus, here we eliminate Los Angeles from the analysis to make the results more representative.

² The initial list was much larger. However, the master list of lobbyists was pared down to account for registrants who do not lobby and inaccurate contact information.

³ We would like to thank Dr. Schlozman for granting us permission to reuse her survey questions.

⁴ Again, our original study had seven cities.

⁵ In an earlier version of this paper, we classified lobbyists according to this typology developed by Salisbury (1986): external lawyers, external consultants, government affairs staff, organizational officers, internal lawyers, and other organizational staff. We learned, however, that many respondents placed themselves in more than one category. This made it difficult to generalize about categories. Thus, we concentrate here on the three categories mentioned by telephone respondents.

⁶ The precise question was as follows: "As you know, lobbyists use many different techniques to either directly or indirectly influence what goes on in city government. Below is a list of advocacy techniques. Please indicate how often you use each technique—often, occasionally, rarely, or never."

⁷ The precise question was as follows: "As you know, there are many points of contact for city political activity. Please indicate how important each of the following access points is—very important, somewhat important, or not important."

⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have the space to discuss these statutes in any detail. We plan to do so, however, in the future.

⁹ The precise question was: "How often does each of the following occur—frequently, occasionally, rarely, or never? Local government officials or staff come to you seeking advice on a policy matter."

