Challenges of Integrating Levels of Analysis in Interest Group Research

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Abstract

One of the most significant innovations of Gray and Lowery's population ecology approach to studying interest groups may also be its limitation. Simply put, their theory is at a higher level of analysis than most of the other theories of interest groups and lobbying, which are usually at the individual organization level or the lobbyist – lawmaker dyadic level. This makes it difficult to apply what population ecology teaches us in conjunction with other theories and empirical findings at lower levels of analysis. Yet the problem is not that population ecology theory is incompatible with other interest group theories, but that scholars have not really tried. In this chapter I attempt to take a step towards better integration by blending elements of population ecology findings with research on interest group competition and cooperation. At first glance these different approaches appear to produce empirical results that have little relationship with each other. Is this because research results at one level are fundamentally at odds with research results at another level of analysis? Or are scholars just talking past each other, failing to take the possibly difficult steps of integrating this research? I argue that the latter is true and attempt to show how and why in this chapter by trying to link population ecology with lower level research on interest group competition and cooperation that might serve as a template for broader linkages between these theoretical approaches.

In the early 1990s, Virginia Gray and David Lowery embarked on a major research agenda that, after twenty years, has led to a new way of studying interest group politics. Rather than just study the choices individual groups and their lobbyists make in multivariate models using independent variables unique to that group or its lobbying target without regard to context, they argued that the structure of the population of interest groups each organization is embedded in significantly shapes its choices. Important systematic variation from population to population, even from one sub-population to another, influences the births and deaths of groups and the choices their lobbyists make. In other words, the density and structure of group populations matter, and they may matter quite a bit. To study the effects population structures have on group maintenance and advocacy, Gray and Lowery drew on the theory of population ecology from biology and from it deduced and tested a model of dynamic change in group populations. Then they applied this model to the study of lobbying by individual groups.

Twenty-plus years later, Gray and Lowery's success has created something of a problem for interest group scholarship. Most of the other major areas of research in interest group politics remain at the individual group or lobbyist level, and it is not clear how to integrate it all with Gray and Lowery's population approach, which is at a higher level of analysis. Yet if scientific research into how interest groups represent diverse constituencies in the political system, and how their lobbyists influence lawmakers, is to advance, integration of different levels of analysis must be done. In this paper I lay out this problem, discuss the theoretical, empirical, and statistical challenges to integration, and then suggest how the problem might be overcome. Specifically, I discuss how Gray and Lowery's population-level work might integrate with, and therefore better inform, my own

research on group competition and multi-venue lobbying. Hopefully this will stimulate other ideas regarding theoretical and empirical integration that will lead to a much richer understanding of interest group politics in the United States and in other nations.

The Population-Level View of Interest Group Politics

Rather than attempt to draw conclusions about interest groups and lobbying by studying individual organizations, Gray and Lowery approached the subject from a higher perch, looking down on whole communities of groups in the fifty states. What, they asked, causes a state's population of groups to look the way it does, both in sheer numbers and in the variety of organizations representing people with varying political interests? Moreover, what effects do these population structures have on the advocacy strategies of the lobbyists these groups employ? Essentially Gray and Lowery pursue two goals. I will discuss the second later, but their first and arguably primary goal was to apply the theory of population ecology from biology to model the process by which interest group communities and sub-communities form, an effort culminating in their book *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation* (1996a). In their version of population ecology, itself derived from the theory's application in sociology (see Hannan and Freeman 1977; 1989), the likelihood that a new interest group forms is a function of the structure of the existing community of organized interests, and the resources supporting all of them, as much as it is the desires of some people to mobilize in defense of their political interests (Truman 1951), how attractive they find various material and purposive incentives (Clark and Wilson 1961; Olson 1965), and the charisma of group leaders (Salisbury 1969; Walker 1983).

Gray and Lowery's basic assumption is that existing group community structures

feedback on future structures as the resources available to support those populations of interest groups shift and change over time. Thus the key variables of their Energy-Stability-Area (ESA) Model derived from population ecology theory are the density of the current population, essentially the number of groups existing at any given time, and the resources available to support it. They define resources as the number of people seeking political representation through an interest group and the material resources available to fund the group. Group formation is also driven by the "energy" of the political system the group is embedded in, meaning the attention lawmakers are giving to issues perceived to be affecting potential group members' interests and the likelihood of a change in political party control. There are only so many people wanting to be represented by a particular group, so unless this number expands, which happens when their issues suddenly emerge on the government's agenda, few new groups are likely to form (Gray and Lowery 1996b).

One of Gray and Lowery's most interesting findings is that whether the group community remains in a stable equilibrium depends upon a state's economy. More people willing to spend money to join interest groups does not consistently lead to equivalent increases in the number of groups in a community. They find instead that, in the fifty states, the rate of increase in group numbers levels off at higher aggregate resource levels (measured as state GDP) (Gray and Lowery 2007). This is the density-dependence curve derived from ESA theory. The finding is interesting enough to warrant replication since their data is from 1997, which I do with 2011 data on state interest group populations from the Institute for Money in State Politics, and GDP and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau. In Figure 1 I graph the number of groups in each state and state GDP, which reveals the same leveling-off pattern. Indeed, as Figure 2 shows, this leveling-off effect

even emerges when just considering raw population data irrespective of their financial resources. Apparently group populations can only be so big. Numbers increase up to the state political system's "carrying capacity," at which point fewer newer organizations form and group deaths set in, causing the overall growth rate to level off.

---- Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here ----

Gray and Lowery went on to link their ESA model to other scholars' work by studying the structures of more narrowly construed sub-populations of groups, which, they argued, might be even more important to understanding interest group politics in each state than overall population size (Gray and Lowery 1993; Gray, Lowery, and Fellowes 2005). Interest groups need dues-paying members to represent, but they cannot recruit just anybody. To mobilize and survive, each group or potential group markets itself only to a sub-population of people with similar interests, what is sometimes called an *interest-niche*. The result, though, is several similar interest groups competing with each other to recruit members from the same limited pool of people with similar interests, though competition lessens when potential members are wealthy and can join several groups at once. This connects Gray and Lowery's ESA model to the work of William Browne (1990) and James Q. Wilson (1973) by refining and testing their arguments that a group thrives and survives by becoming the dominant, legitimate spokes-organization for an interest.

Interest-niches, however, are only one way to define a sub-population. We know that government officials can only focus on a few issues at a time (Kingdon 1984), so any burst of interest mobilization resulting from increased government attention to an issue, Gray and Lowery's energy term, will only affect those groups whose members are concerned with the issue. But the issue probably concerns people, and therefore groups, in

several interest-niches. Transportation-oriented business associations and environmental groups, two distinctly different interest-niches, are both concerned with any proposed changes in the regulation of car and truck emissions. Greater government attention to an issue, and the policies addressing that issue, injects greater energy into all concerned interest-niches, causing greater mobilization and, consequently, the number of lobbyists lobbying those issues. Thus their work contributes to the study of *issue-niches* (or policy domains), sets of similar issues affecting multiple interest-niches, and links their work to research on cycles in issue attention (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), subgovernments (McConnell 1966; McCool 1990), and issue networks (Heclo 1978; Heinz et al. 1993).

After developing their ESA Model over a period of years, Gray and Lowery started on a second goal, using it to study other questions in the field of interest group politics to see if their population-level approach yielded new insights into how interest groups lobby. One extension was studying the effect of population-level variables on the strategies individual group executives use to grow their organizations in resource-scarce environments (Gray and Lowery 1997). They find that leaders are less aggressive about redefining their organization's mission to ensure survival when they already dominate their interest-niche, having successfully recruited most of the potential members and pushed out competitor organizations, though they also sometimes shrink the size of their niche to achieve dominance. Another application is to whether lobbyists join coalitions of groups or work alone in their pursuit of policy goals, finding that lobbyists tend to join when potential resources in their interest-niche are scarce (Gray and Lowery 1998).

Challenges to Integration

The idea of studying interest groups at the population level, or at the issue-niche or interest-niche levels, is innovative, but it also creates a problem when it comes to building a more unified theory of interest group politics, though it is not specific to Gray and Lowery. The problem is one of levels of analysis. While Gray and Lowery are studying group populations, most of the other research on interest groups and lobbying is at the individual group or lobbyist level, such as the work by Baumgartner et al. (2009), Hojnacki (1997), Heaney (2006), and Yackee (2006). Or it is at the dyadic level, such as lobbyist contact with individual members of Congress (e.g., Hojnacki and Kimball 1998) or interest group PAC contributions to individual candidates (e.g., Wright 1985; 1989). Research at multiple levels would lead to a richer set of findings, and allow us to know far more about interest groups and lobbying than we would otherwise, but it is dangerous to carelessly conflate findings from macro-level population studies with those from micro-level individual and dyadic studies in an effort to produce broad theories and conclusions. Specifically, there appear to be three types of challenges when it comes to combining Gray and Lowery's ESA Model with micro-level interest group research - theoretical, empirical, and statistical.

Theoretical

The purpose of theory is to create logical systems that explain and predict behavior observed in the world. Gray and Lowery's version of population ecology theory is internally consistent and its hypotheses are, more often than naught, supported by data analysis. Yet it is not clear how their ESA Model combines with micro-level theories and models, even though it ultimately must. Gray and Lowery themselves *have* integrated it

with micro-level theories of interest group mobilization, which previously focused on the choices of potential members to join or individual entrepreneurs' efforts to form new groups. Although other scholars have used variations on the ESA model to study interest groups in Washington, DC (e.g., Bosso 2005; Nownes and Lipinski 2005; Dusso 2010), or in other countries (e.g., Halpin and Thomas 2012; Fisker 2013), it has not been widely used by scholars in micro-level research on lobbying and other forms of advocacy, though the fault may lie with those scholars (like myself) who cannot see the forest for the trees.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to think about the challenges population ecology may have integrating with the well-developed theory of how lobbyists gain access to, and become influential with, lawmakers. First laid out by Lester Milbrath (1963), and developed by John Mark Hansen (1991), David Austen-Smith (1993; and with Wright 1994), and especially John Wright (1996), this theory holds that lobbyists gain access to elected officials by reliably providing information lawmakers need but cannot obtain for themselves without great cost. It may be information on the demands of constituencies crucial to legislators' re-election coalitions, constituents who also happen to be members of powerful interest groups like the AARP and the National Rifle Association. It may be highly specialized information regarding the technical aspects of policies that lawmakers will be voting on but do not really understand. It may even be intelligence regarding the positions of other lawmakers and lobbyists that legislators must be cognizant of as they try to enact new policy threatening an old status quo. Probably it is all of the above. Lobbyists happily provide this information because it allows them to build relationships with lawmakers, giving them access to governing institutions. Reciprocity generates trust (and mutual sense of obligation) and strengthens bonds between lobbyist and lawmaker (Susman 2006).

The difficulty of integrating this theory with population ecology is suggested by a few questions. Do more interest groups in an issue-niche (the sub-population probably most relevant to legislators) make it harder or easier for those groups' lobbyists to form mutually-beneficial exchange relationships with lawmakers? Harder perhaps because there are more advocates struggling to be influential, but then again perhaps easier because with such a cacophony from advocates, legislators need these relationships even more in order to manage the noise and uncertainty in their environment. And how does the theory of access and influence contribute to population ecology theory? Is the need of lawmakers for information from lobbyists actually a kind of energy that stimulates group formation in issue-niches, or does the fact that lawmakers can only maintain a few relationships at any given time instead limit group formation in an issue-niche? Does lawmaker reliance on just a few relationships, shutting out many other interests, stimulate the formation of new groups who see the privilege some interests enjoy as threatening to their own? Integrating these two theories from different levels of analysis generates a lot of questions, questions that suggest contradictory but testable hypotheses. Testing them, should anyone undertake the enormous research effort required, would certainly lead to significant advances in building a coherent theory of group advocacy and the role interest groups play in the policy-making process.

Empirical

The empirical challenge to integrating population and individual level theories is simply getting enough micro-level data to compliment the population data. Gathering interest group data has always been difficult, but it is easier to get population-level data

than the equivalent amount on individual group choices. Lists of all the interest groups lobbying in Washington, DC can be obtained, along with data on which issues they lobby, from Congress under the Lobbying Disclosure Act, though arguably more complete data sets on national groups are available from databases like Lobbyists.info.[1] It is also becoming possible to get lists of state interest groups and the issues they lobby.[2] Getting data on the strategic choices these groups and their lobbyists make in pursuit of political influence, though, is nearly impossible without complicated surveys or costly in-person interviews. But if we believe lobbying choices are shaped by group populations at interest-niche or issue-niche levels, meaning the strategic choice of each group in the population influences every other group's decision, then to fully integrate these theories we really need data on every group in a sub-population, or at least a representative sample.

It is the old trade-off between breadth and depth. Certainly random samples can be taken of interest group populations and the sampled groups surveyed, but surveys tend to be fairly restrictive in how nuanced the data gathered can be. The most revealing studies of interest group lobbying are arguably done with interviews, or at least direct observations of lobbyists. The gold-standard of interest group research arguably remains the work of John Heinz, Edward Laumann, Robert Nelson, and Robert Salisbury (1993) where a rolling sample of 776 lobbyists and officials were interviewed with astonishingly detailed questionnaires. Yet even after a decade of field work they only covered four issue-niches, so for all of their impressive work their results are not really generalizable to the entire Washington, DC group population. The recent multi-year study of national interest groups by Frank Baumgartner and colleagues (see Baumgartner et al. 2009) is even larger, interviewing 2,117 lobbyists and officials sampled from groups lobbying ninety-eight

issues, but their reliance on simpler, open-ended questions supplementing internet-based research means their data is not quite as nuanced as that of Heinz et al., though still an enormous contribution.

An example of going in the direction of depth is Michael Heaney (2006), who used interviews with highly detailed questionnaires over three years to map a sample of interest groups in the health care issue-niche to get a good sense of how groups' choices in a sub-population are interdependent. Could this have realistically been done for other niches, enough to make real comparative analysis possible? Comparison is essential for real hypothesis testing, but the time and cost of replicating Heaney's work in other issue-niches would be enormous. That is the empirical challenge to integration. Gathering data on even just sub-populations is a vast undertaking, and typically not appealing to eager-to-publish scholars. Nor easy to do when financial support for political science research is shrinking. Unfortunately, more research involving months interviewing samples of group lobbyists, probably involving teams of researchers like Heinz et al. and Baumgartner et al., is what we need to integrate macro- and micro-level research on interest groups and lobbying.

Statistical

There are also challenges regarding the use of population level variables in statistical equations where the dependent variable is an observation of individual group or lobbyist choice, or a dyadic connection between a lobbyist and lawmaker, especially when many independent variables are also micro-level. Certainly the estimation of interest group population effects on individual group decisions or dyadic pairs is the next logical step to take in blending population ecology studies with individual-level research, but just

throwing independent variables counting the size of the lobbying community into an equation estimating individual lobbying strategies is the wrong approach. The result would be a badly mis-specified model with biased standard errors.

Arguably the better approach to statistical models of interest group politics using data from multiple levels of analysis is to employ the class of models known as hierarchical, also called multi-level or nested models. These are models where the effects of different levels of analysis are explicitly taken into account. Data on the actions of individual groups or lobbyists is nested within observations of some population of interest groups, like an interest-niche or issue-niche. The researcher must decide what independent variables vary from interest group to interest group and which are constant within interest-niches or issue-niches, but vary from one niche to another. Others may only vary from state to state or nation to nation. This involves a combination of random effects (varying within or between nested data at some level of analysis) and fixed effects (held constant within a data grouping) in the statistical equations, which is why these are sometimes called "mixed-effects" models.

Analysis of interest groups in the fifty states, for instance, would require data on each individual group to have a code representing the state they are in, and another indicating which issue-niche and/or interest-niche they are in. A multi-level mixed-effects model would estimate the effects of independent variables designated at the state-level, such as state budget surpluses and party dominance which vary from state to state but are constant within each state on individual group lobbyist choices. It would also estimate the effects of variables at the issue- or interest-niche level, such as a niche's group density and the number of potential group members in that niche, which vary from niche to niche but

are constant within each niche. Then finally the model would estimate the effects of unique group characteristics, like an organization's budget and the number and quality of relationships it has with lawmakers, which vary across all groups, niches, and states.

Another challenge with multi-level analysis of interest group data is identified by Scott Ainsworth (2000) - the ecological inference problem. Also called the ecological fallacy, the problem arises when we use aggregate data on interest groups to test hypotheses on, and draw conclusions about, individual-level behavior. This may include using aggregate information about a group's membership to draw conclusions about the choices of individuals to join or not join a group. It may also include using population-level, and even sub-population-level, data to draw conclusions about the strategic choices of individual group leaders and lobbyists. The problem is that individual group members or lobbyist decisions cannot be assumed to add up to the observed population-level data we may have; crucial information is often lost (King et al. 2004). The problem may also arise when aggregated data comes from two separate sources where there is no clear linkage between the individuals or groups whose information is being aggregated.

This is not a criticism of Gray and Lowery, nor of anybody else's research, but simply another pitfall we must all be careful about when using population-level data to draw inferences about individual level decisions, or using individual decisions to make claims about population or sub-population level data. This is especially true in regression models using aggregated population-level data to explain individual-level phenomena (or vice versa), such as using an independent variable on the proportions of citizen groups versus business associations as a measure of competition to estimate a dependent variable capturing the strategic choices of individual lobbyists. Statistical corrections for these

problems exist (see King 1997) and need to be used since the way forward in interest group research requires reliance on models combining different levels of analysis.

Examples of Integrating Research

To help highlight some of the challenges of combining population-level and individual-level interest group research, and hopefully reveals the benefits integration might yield, I will pick on my own work on group competition and multi-venue lobbying.

Interest Group Competition

I define interest group competition as the degree to which one organization's policy goal fulfilling its members' collective interest is perceived as coming at the expense of the collective interests of other groups' members (Holyoke 2011). In practice, the level of competition is this degree of interest conflict weighted by the amount of advocacy resources each organized interest brings to a fight (Holyoke 2009). For Gray and Lowery, however, competition primarily occurs between groups with similar interests. They see group competition as not so much about influencing policy as organizational survival, acquiring more resources necessary to survive than other groups. This means competition between interest groups is in the same interest-niche. These conflicting definitions only arise, though, because we consider group competition and how lobbyists make strategic decisions vis a` vis each other at different levels of analysis, embedded in different populations. I explore competition in the issue-niche, while Gray and Lowery largely focus on the interest-niche.

More precisely, Gray and Lowery argue that competition is a consequence of group

executives trying to maintain and grow their organizations. Interest groups compete with each other to define who they represent and thereby attract members. Ultimately their goal is to eliminate the competition by attracting to their membership rolls nearly all of the people who could possibly be represented by their organization. Once it dominates the interest-niche, the group's lobbyist finds his or her credibility and legitimacy in the political arena greatly enhanced because he or she speaks on behalf of an entire segment of the population. But competing with other groups in the same niche is time-consuming and expensive, so, drawing on Browne's (1990) work, Gray and Lowery find that in order to realize the political benefits of niche domination, group leaders will often narrow the niches they are trying to dominate to reduce competition. At the same time this reduces the number of people they can potentially represent and the resources they can amass. Group leaders must therefore be careful, a viable interest-niche can only be so small if it is to sustain the group, but too large means too much competition with other organizations.

I approach competition as a state of conflicting interests; greater differences in interests leading to a greater likelihood that two or more interest groups will fight each other as they lobby for or against proposed policy on the government's agenda. Since I focus on conflict or cooperation between groups with differing interests instead of the need to gain and secure resources, the group population in my work is at the issue-niche level, not the interest-niche level. In my work, lawmakers are not so much an audience to be impressed by whichever group dominates a niche as they are a pressure on lobbyists to overcome differences in interests to form coalitions (or alternatively pressure lobbyists to fight other interest groups). How to integrate my approach to competition at the issue-niche level with Gray and Lowery's at the interest-niche level perhaps begins with this

thought: interest groups jockey for preeminence in their interest-niche, but those same groups may come together to stand against their common enemies (groups with much different interests) in the issue-niche.

Think about interest groups representing the banking industry. The American Bankers Association (ABA) represents all banks big and small, Financial Services Roundtable represents the biggest of the big, Independent Community Bankers Association (ICBA) represents small banks, and Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) only represents banks specializing in home loans. To a large extent the common bonds defining their members' interests, and therefore defining their potential memberships, overlap. They are an interest-niche. And they compete to dominate all of it, or parse it into smaller sub-interest niches. ICBA makes it an almost daily goal to point out how ABA is controlled by the likes of Citibank and Bank of America with no regard for community banks. MBA argues that banks specializing in mortgage lending also have little in common with the great banks, even though institutions like Citibank do considerable home lending. The Roundtable argues that by making small banks feel included, fighting off encroachments from ICBA and MBA, ABA cannot represent the interests of multi-national banks. ABA just wishes these others would go away, claiming it is perfectly capable of representing everyone and that banks big and small have mostly common interests anyway when it comes to public policy.

These groups compete to dominate the banking interest-niche, just as Gray and Lowery predict, differentiating themselves from each other as they lobby. ICBA seeks exemptions for banks with assets of less than $250 billion from capitalization requirements, thus reducing their regulatory burden and freeing more capital for home

and business lending. It also pursues its decades-old effort to strip the credit union industry of its tax-exemptions.[3] These are not big concerns for larger banks so ABA's apparent reticence to lobby on them becomes ammunition for ICBA in its efforts to steal away small banks. This fighting to dominate a large, powerful banking interest-niche, or parse it into a series of smaller interest-niches is low-level competition. When it comes to actually lobbying issues on the government's agenda pushed by interest groups from other interest-niches, such as efforts by consumer protection interest groups to enact and implement the Dodd-Frank Act regulating all kinds of banking activities, banking interest groups big and small are mostly on the same page. How could they not be?

This is one way Gray and Lowery's work informs and, hopefully, improves my own. Although the dependent variable in my original paper on competition is a dyad capturing how lobbyists for two groups react to each other, it is in the issue-niche context (Holyoke 2009). Issue problems emerging on the government's agenda, and policies proposed to address them, tend to embrace several interest-niches. The issue-niche is therefore at a higher level than, and encapsulates, the interest-niches. The degree of difference between the interests of any pair of groups can be larger at the issue-niche level than at the interest-niche level because groups from different interest-niches get paired together. If the likelihood that competition between groups will erupt into conflict rather than cooperation in the issue-niche is at least partially a function of differences in interests, then conflict is more likely to occur and to be more intense between groups from two different interest-niches than two from the same interest-niche.

This integration suggests that interest groups are less likely to fight (and more likely to cooperate) with other groups in their own interest-niche when there is an issue at the

issue-niche level threatening most of them. Interest-niche rivals will stand shoulder to shoulder against common foes from other issue-niches, fighting each other at the issue-niche level. Without a threat from outside the interest-niche, these groups are more likely to fight with each other. My original analysis could be re-done with a new, nominal three-category dependent variable capturing whether two observed group lobbyists chose to cooperate, fight, or ignore each other. One crucial independent variable would be a continuous or ordinal measure of the degree of difference between the two groups' interests, with some cut-point indicating whether or not the two groups are too different to be in the same interest-niche. Another crucial variable would be a binary indicator of whether or not there is a policy at the issue-niche level potentially affecting both lobbyists' members. This threat / no-threat condition would affect expectations of whether the two lobbyists would fight, cooperate, or ignore each other given the degree of differences in interests between them, yielding the hypotheses summarized in Table 1. If the issue-niche threat is present, then the analysis uses variables regarding the issue-niche, the interest-niche(s), and characteristics unique to each group in the observed pair in a hierarchical statistical model. If the condition is not present, then only interest-niche and individual group variables are used.

---- Insert Table 1 about here ----

Finally, assuming, as Gray and Lowery do, that a sub-population, like an issue-niche or an interest-niche, is greater than the sum of its parts, then at least some variables from these niches must capture the density of group populations at these levels. Presumably these variables would be counts of the number of interest groups in the interest-niche containing one or both of the lobbyists in the observed pair, and then a count of the groups

in the issue-niche population *if* there is an issue on the government agenda affecting the lobbyists in the relevant interest-niches. Employing aggregated data at the sub-population level to estimate a two-lobbyist dyad also means we must be very careful of running afoul of the ecological inference problem.

Multi-Venue Lobbying

Another interesting area of micro-level interest group research which would benefit from integration with Gray and Lowery's ESA model is multi-venue lobbying. Interest groups hardly spend all of their time lobbying just Congress, or just quietly working with executive agency bureaucrats to shape the implementation of policy, or just specialize in lawsuits to kill policy in the judicial branch. Often they do all of these things to some degree because all of these lawmaking venues are opportunities to shape or kill a policy. I studied the strategic choices of lobbyists to target to varying degrees congressional committees, the full House and Senate, regulators, and the courts as they sought to pass or kill financial modernization legislation in 1999 (Holyoke 2003). Other scholars have studied the circumstances under which interest groups focus their efforts on bureaucracies rather than legislatures (Constantelos 2010; McKay 2011), or go to court rather than lobby the other branches (S. Olson 1990; Solberg and Waltenburg 2006), seeking the venue where they have maximum leverage over a policy given the political context surrounding each venue.

But multi-venue lobbying encompasses much more than the three branches of the national government. After all, the United States separates power vertically as well as horizontally, with lower levels of government having a variety of responsibility in the

federal system. Organized political interests unable to achieve their goals at the national level may try to achieve them in some of the states, or even in some localities. Consequently, there is perhaps no research question that is more in need of a multi-level approach as strategically choosing which levels of the federal system, and which venues in these levels, to lobby. Not only a multi-level approach with data on advocacy efforts at the state level as well as local levels, but also with interest / issue-niche and individual group-level data nested in both the state and local levels.

I and a couple of colleagues explored lobbying in a multi-venue context for school choice policy where advocates could target one or more state and/or local government venues (Holyoke, Brown, and Henig 2012). Estimating our data with a hierarchical mixed-effects model, we found that anticipated support from ideologically friendly lawmakers in a venue made charter school advocates more likely to lobby there. But would they have been *less* likely to lobby that venue if many other interest groups had already established themselves there in the education interest-niche and are already better connected to key lawmakers (and this line of thinking may run into the ecological inference problem)? Or, as Gray and Lowery might ask, does the interest or issue-niche density at one level of government influence a lobbyist's choice to lobby a venue there? Or would the observed lobbyist instead target venues at another level, even if lawmakers there are less friendly?

Does the diversity of groups in the education issue-niche affect choices of which venue and level to lobby, diversity suggesting that charter school proponents may have some friends there as well as enemies (though this may also run into the ecological inference problem)? We also found that the more financial resources an interest group has, the more likely it is to lobby more venues at the state and/or local levels, but might we also

find that groups with relatively few resources are more likely to lobby at the arguably more expensive state-level if there are already many organizations with similar interests working there (greater density)? Greater exposure to a wider audience might enable a small pro-charter school group to attract more members, and thus expand their resource base, so that the the need to grow pushes the organization to make a perhaps surprising lobbying decision. Many other hypotheses derived from variations of Gray and Lowery's ESA model could also be deduced, but the point is that they need to be developed and tested if we are ever to really understand multi-venue lobbying.

Final Thoughts

Gray and Lowery have done the interest groups and advocacy sub-discipline a great service by developing population ecology for the study of organized interests, applying it with their ESA model to better study group mobilization, and then extending the application of their model to other important questions in the field of interest group politics. Now the next, possibly harder, step is upon both them and all of the rest of us who work in this sub-field – integration. Integration of different theoretical and empirical perspectives on a subject is essential, absolutely essential, if theory and the whole scientific enterprise is to advance in any meaningful way.

I tried to present what I believe are the challenges to integration in this chapter, and some of them may be formidable, especially data gathering. It is a problem that has long plagued scholarship on organized interest groups because we do not have access to same kind of quality data that students of the Congress and even voting and elections have. A variety of databases have information on the sheer number of organizations lobbying in

Washington, DC and the states, and perhaps a little more information such as the number of members they have (when they have members at all), the size of their lobbying staff, a group's age, and perhaps even the size of their annual budget. But some of the most important information, information forming dependent variables, such as who they lobby, how they lobby, how they reach out to members, how their members interact with these organizations, is not in these databases. Such information can only be obtained for samples of groups from populations, and even then enormously time consuming and expensive field work is required to gather it.

So in the end I draw a somewhat pessimistic conclusion. It is exciting to think about the integration of macro- and micro-level theories and models, but actually testing the hypotheses such integration would generate will be extremely difficult. That is unfortunate because theoretical integration would probably yield contradictory hypotheses, and testing these hypotheses would allow us to rule out some theoretical ideas, explore new theoretical ideas, and perhaps the new theorizing that results would lead us to realize that perhaps these hypotheses are not actually contradictory at all. Hopefully in the future we will see new teams of researchers with large grants, in the vein of the Heinz et al. group and the Baumgartner et al. group, who can dedicate the time and resources to such data collection, theoretical integration, and rigorous data analysis.

Figure 1: Number of Interest Groups and State Gross Domestic Product in 2011
Source: Institute for Money in State Politics and U.S. Census Bureau

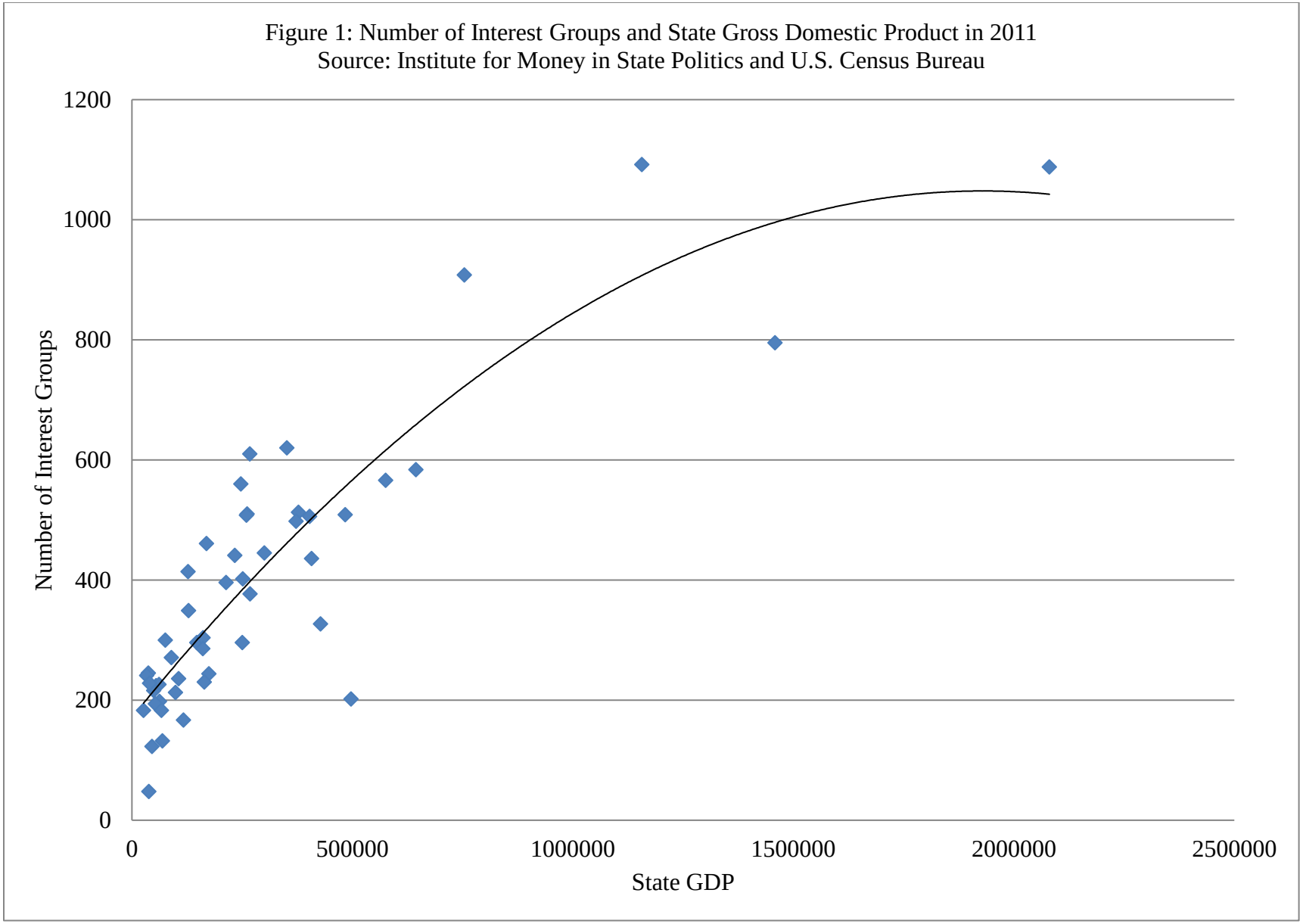

Figure 2: Size of State Populations and Interest Group Communities in 2011
Source: Institute for Money in State Politics and U.S. Census Bureau

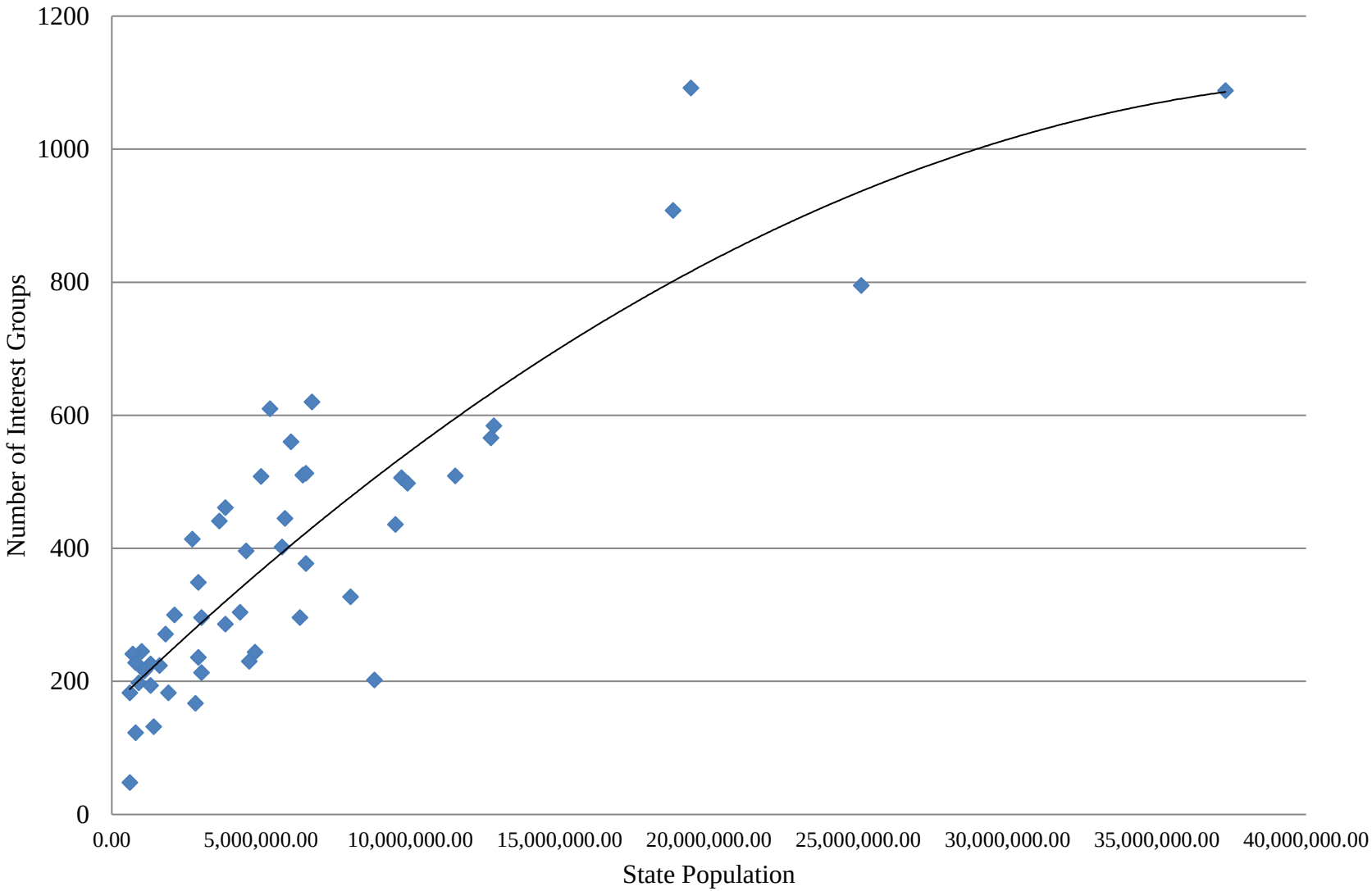

Table 1
Lobbyist Predicted Responses Given Variation in
Interests and Issue Affecting these Interests

Degree of interest difference between two observed groups	**There is no issue affecting many groups**	**There is an issue affecting many groups**
Interest difference is small (groups are probably in the same interest-niche)	Prob. of fighting is high Prob. of cooperating is low Prob. of ignoring is high	Prob. of fighting is low Prob. of cooperating is high Prob. of ignoring is low
Interest difference is high (groups are probably in different interest-niches)	Prob. of fighting is low Prob. of cooperating is low Prob. of ignoring is high	Prob. of fighting is high Prob. of cooperating is low Prob. of ignoring is low

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[1] Although widely used, data from groups and lobbyists filed under the Legislative Disclosure Act is limited because many groups and lobbyists that only lobby occasionally often do not feel the need to register, nor are groups that primarily lobby the executive branch or judicial branch, or primarily use grassroots advocacy to pressure lawmakers required to register. For more on the disclosure limitations of the LDA, see Luneburg 2009.

[2] For instance, the Institute for Money in State Politics at www.followthemoney.org.

[3] See http://www.icba.org/files/ICBASites/PDFs/legregsuccesses.pdf (last viewed on September 16, 2013).