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Louder Chorus -- Same Accent: The Representation of Interests in Pressure Politics, 1991-2011

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INTRODUCTION

Citizens in American democracy have multiple channels for the expression of political voice, among them, organized interest politics in Washington. But the advocacy on behalf of citizen preferences and needs in national politics is neither universal nor representative. That is, not all voices speak equally loudly in organized interest politics and systematic processes operate to influence which voices are amplified by a megaphone and which ones speak in a whisper. The result is pronounced inequalities of political voice.

Drawing upon the Washington Representatives Study, an extensive data base covering the period from 1991 to 2011, we ascertain how the Washington pressure system has grown and assess any changes in the balance among the kinds of interests represented and the resources they devote to influencing policy.¹ We find more of the same: more organizations and more dollars invested in lobbying but little change in the kinds of interests represented. For all the diversity among the thousands of organizations active in Washington, policymakers hear much more from advocates for narrow interests than from supporters of broad public interests and much more from those with deep pockets than from the less affluent. A half century ago, E.E. Schattschneider observed famously that "the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with an upper-class accent."² The chorus now has more members, and they sing more loudly, but the accent is unchanged.

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The Washington Representatives Study

To investigate the question of who has political voice through organizations, we built an extensive data archive. It contains information about all the organizations listed in any of the *Washington Representatives* directories published in 1991, 2001, 2006, and 2011 as having a presence in national politics -- either by maintaining an office in the capital or by hiring Washington-based consultants or counsel to manage their government relations activities.³ The file, which includes profiles of more than 33,000 organizations, covers a period that has witnessed critical political and economic changes in America and the world.

Given our concern with political voice, a crucial part of this data collection was to place each organization into one or more of 96 organizational categories based on its organizational structure and the nature of the interest being represented.⁴ In contrast to most studies of organized interests that rely on highly aggregated categories, we deliberately proliferated the number of categories in order to capture fine distinctions.

The most obvious development, shown in Figure 1, is that the Washington pressure community has enlarged. Between 1991 and 2011, the number of organizations active in Washington politics has more than doubled -- surpassing the increase in the U.S. population and inflation-adjusted GDP or federal spending over the period. Comparison across the four data points suggests that the rate of growth has varied over the period. Based on the listings in the *Washington Representatives* directory, the number of organizations active in Washington grew steadily in the 1990s and early 2000s before slowing down notably between 2006 and 2011, a trend consistent with other data on the changing size of the pressure system.⁵

Who Has Political Voice in Washington?: The Changing Distribution of Organized Interests

Table 1 shows that the organizations in the pressure system are both numerous and diverse. Still, the distribution of interests across categories suggests that not all voices are equally likely to be heard, a pattern of uneven representation that has persisted across the two-decade period.

Of course, there are trends worth noting. One is a steady increase in the share of organizations from the health and education sectors. Another is the progressive expansion in the space in the Washington pressure system occupied by state and

local governments. In contrast, several categories of membership associations that have traditionally figured importantly in pressure politics -- trade and other business associations, occupational associations, and unions -- constitute a diminishing share of the organizations active in Washington.

Nevertheless, the continuities trump the changes. The set of organized political interests is organized principally around economic matters and, in this arena, the representation of business is dominant. By a factor of almost three, the most numerous organizations in the economic domain are corporations. Consistent with Schattschneider's observations, very few organizations represent the economic interests of those with ordinary jobs and middle-class incomes, and even fewer represent the economically disadvantaged. Organizations that advocate on behalf of the poor are relatively scarce, and organizations of the poor themselves are even harder to find.

Even the occupational associations and labor unions that bring together people on the basis of what they do for a living skew heavily in the direction of representing occupations requiring high levels of education and training. A majority of the occupational associations are professional associations that unite members on the basis of a shared occupation requiring a prescribed course of educational training and at least a college degree.⁶ Much rarer, less than 1 percent of all organizations in the Washington pressure community, are organizations that bring together those in non-professional and non-managerial occupations. However, the occupations represented by this handful of organizations -- among them, realtors, master printers, meeting planners, travel agents, and medical sonographers -- require skill and command fairly high compensation. With the exception of unions -- which constitute less than 1 percent of the 2011 organizations and which increasingly organize public sector workers, many of them well educated -- there are no organizations that join together whose jobs are unskilled.

Furthermore, outside the economic domain, the identity groups and public interest groups sometimes collected together under the rubric of citizen groups figure much less importantly. Across all of the data sets, the number of public interest groups that advocate on behalf of public goods -- for example, liberal objectives like reproductive choice or the end of capital punishment, conservative objectives like gun rights or low taxes, or objectives like divorce reform with no particular ideological coloration -- is relatively small, accounting for less than 5 percent of the organizations active in Washington. The identity organizations representing racial, ethnic, religious, and LGBT groups, the elderly, and women constitute an even smaller share.

By aggregating the categories even further into organizations representing the interests of business, the less privileged, identity groups, or broad publics, Figure 2 makes the point even more clearly. Aside from the consistent increase in the proportion of state and local governments, the dominant theme is continuity. In each year across the time series, business interests represent a majority of organizations active in Washington. In contrast, the voices of the less privileged never make up more than 3 percent of the chorus, and the public interest and identity groups that capture so much attention in discussions of interest politics taken together never make up as much as a tenth. In short, while Figure 1 shows the dramatic growth in the size of the choir, Figure 2 reveals that its accent remains unchanged.

Changing Organizational Capacity

Comparing numbers of organizations allows us to get some purchase on who is likely to have a voice in Washington politics and who is likely to remain silent. However, not all organizations speak equally loudly. We can gain further perspective on the amplitude of political voice by considering the investments that various kinds of organizations are willing to or able to make in political advocacy.

In our attention to the staggering sums donated to campaigns by those with deep pockets, we sometimes forget that government relations is also a big and, until recently, growing business. Table 2 presents information about the distribution of lobbying expenditures for the two-year periods, 2000-2001 and 2010-2011.⁷ In 2011 dollars, total lobbying expenditures for the organizations listed in the *Washington Representatives* directory rose from \$2.07 billion in 2000-2001 to \$3.33 billion ten years later -- remarkable growth for a decade that included the Great Recession.

What is notable about Table 2, which shows the distribution of lobbying expenditures, is not the change over the first decade of the twenty-first century but the extent to which business organizations, especially corporations, dominate. Together corporations and trade and other business associations account for 74 percent of all dollars spent on lobbying. Adding other business-related organizations such as foreign corporations and business associations and business-related research organizations brings the share up to 77 percent -- up slightly from 74 percent in 2000-2001. Under the circumstances, what seems notable is not so much that the share of lobbying dollars arising from such underrepresented constituencies as public interest groups, identity groups, and organizations supporting social welfare and the poor has diminished as that they constituted such a small portion of the lobbying spending in 2000-2001.

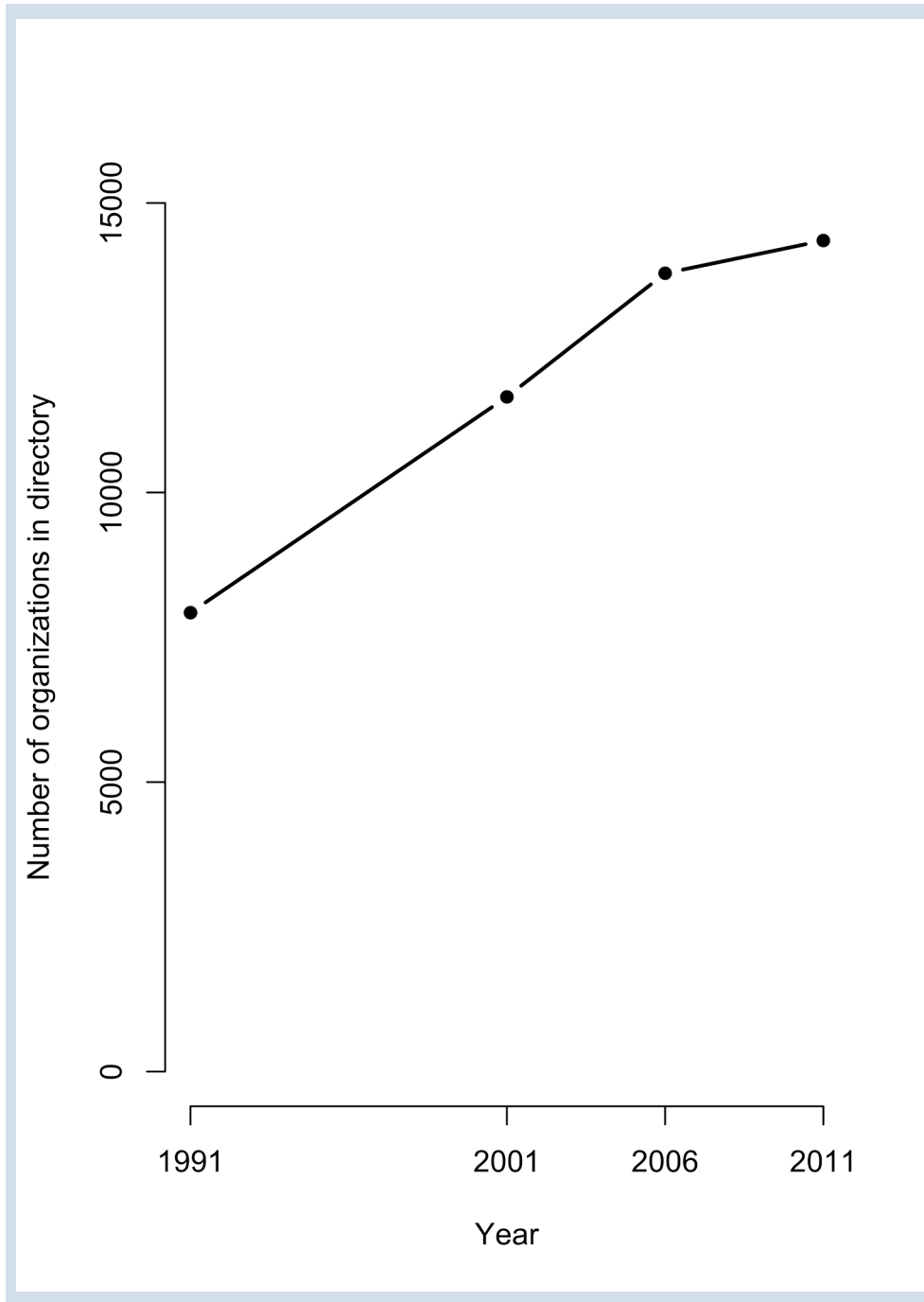
These patterns are underscored in Table 3, which presents the same data in terms of actual dollars expended on lobbying. Organizations associated with business pumped a phenomenal sum, more than \$5 billion, into lobbying during the two-year period. Among membership associations representing people on the basis of how they make a living, organizations representing the 37 percent of workers in professional and managerial occupations spent \$249,424,000 on lobbying. That figure is nearly twice the sum spent on lobbying by the unions and occupational associations that represent the 63 percent of the work force employed in nonprofessional, nonmanagerial occupations: \$125,976,000. Because many white-collar unions represent professionals, even this figure overstates the amount of lobbying spending by advocates for those in nonprofessional, nonmanagerial occupations. In fact, in 2010-2011, the two major teachers unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, accounted for a not insignificant share of the lobbying expenditures by labor unions, \$13,592,000. At the other end of the economic ladder, organizations advocating on behalf of the poor spent \$3,268,000, less than a thousandth of the lobbying expenditures of business organizations.

Lobbying expenditures by identity groups and public interest groups are also quite paltry. Among identity groups, it is striking that nearly three-quarters of the lobbying expenditures, 74 percent, are accounted for by organizations representing Native Americans (\$44,131,000) and the elderly (\$43,217,000). Among the public interest groups that advocate for public goods the largest spenders are environmental and wildlife organizations (\$30,643,000). As they did in 2000-2001, conservative public interest groups (\$23,224,000) that support such public goods as national security, economic growth, and safe streets continued to outspend liberal public interest groups (\$17,595,000) by a ratio of roughly four to three. However, this ratio is much nearer to parity than ten years earlier when it was more than four to one.

Conclusion

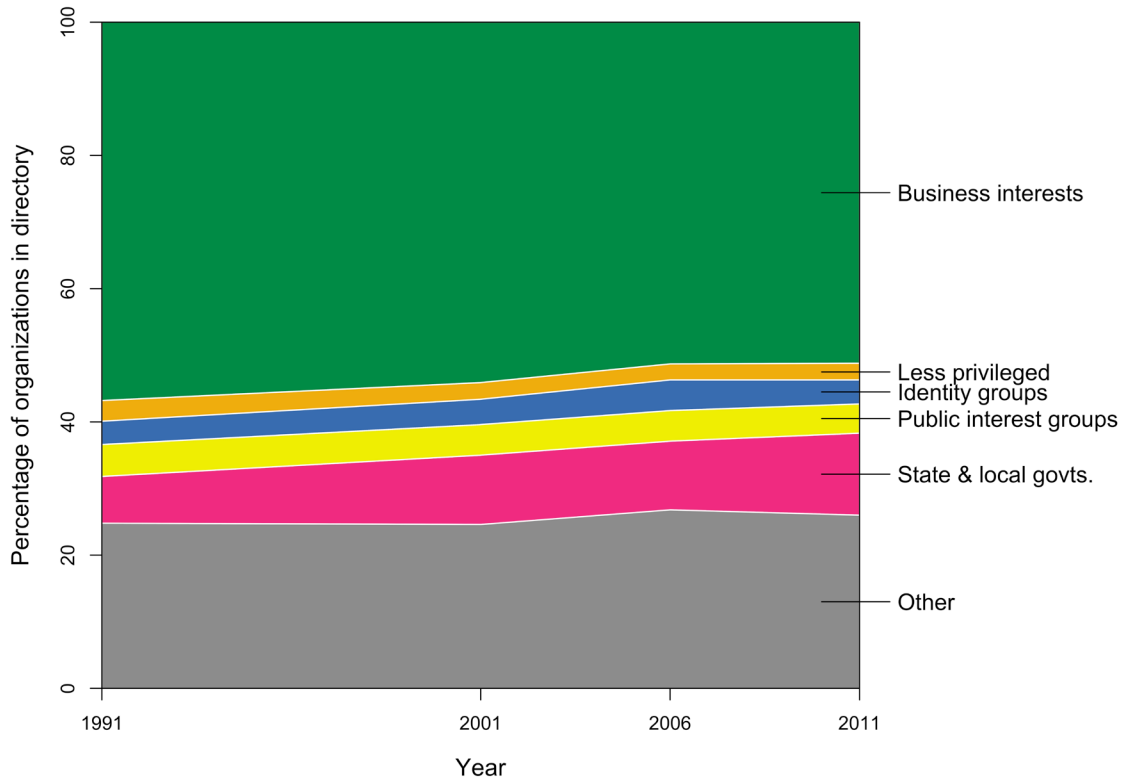
Contained in the detail about changes in the pressure community between 1991 and 2011 is a clear message: more of the same. There are more organizations and they spend more on lobbying. But this growth has not been accompanied by any amelioration of inequalities of political voice. The number of physicians in the workforce is roughly equivalent to the number of hair stylists and cosmetologists but the former are represented by organizations and the latter are not. Moreover, considering lobbying expenditures shows that, even when there is organized representation, constituencies with deep pockets are able to multiply their lobbying presence in way that impecunious ones cannot. In brief, organized interest politics is an arena that facilitates the conversion of market resources into political voice.

FIGURE 1: GROWTH IN THE WASHINGTON PRESSURE COMMUNITY



Source: Washington Representatives Study

FIGURE 2: ORGANIZED INTERESTS IN WASHINGTON POLITICS



Source: Washington Representatives Study

“Business interests” includes U.S. and foreign corporations, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations, for-profit firms of professionals such as law and consulting firms, U.S. and foreign trade and business associations, and business-affiliated think tanks.

“Less privileged” includes all unions (whether blue- or white-collar) and organizations representing the poor, benefits recipients, and social welfare service providers.

“Identity groups” includes organizations representing racial, ethnic, religious, or LGBT groups, elderly, or women

TABLE 1 - ORGANIZED INTERESTS IN WASHINGTON POLITICS

	<u>Share of D.C. Organizations</u>				<u>Change in Share</u>
	1991	2001	2006	2011	1991-2011
Corporations ^a	33.8%	34.9%	36.1%	36.6%	+2.8%
Trade and Other Business Associations	14.8	13.2	10.7	10.2	-4.6%
Occupational Associations	8.6	6.8	5.2	5.4	-3.2%
Unions	1.5	1.0	.8	.7	-.8%
Education	3.0	4.2	5.4	5.7	+2.7%
Health	2.4	3.5	4.4	5.2	+2.8%
Public Interest	4.8	4.6	4.1	4.4	-.4%
Identity Groups ^b	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.6	+.1%
Social Welfare or Poor	.7	.8	.9	1.1	+.4%
State and Local Governments	7.0	10.4	11.8	12.3	+5.3%
Foreign	10.2	7.8	6.5	6.2	-4.0%
Other	7.0	7.7	8.6	7.9	+.9%
Don't Know	2.7	1.4	1.7	.7	-2.0%
Total	100.0%	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%	
N	7925	11651	13777	14351	

^aIncludes U.S. corporations, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations, and for-profit firms of professionals such as law and consulting firms.

^bIncludes organizations representing racial, ethnic, religious, or LGBT groups, elderly, or women.

Source: Washington Representatives Study

TABLE 2 - DISTRIBUTION OF LOBBYING EXPENDITURES

	2000-2001	2010-2011
Corporations ^a	46%	55%
Trade and Other Business Associations	22	19
Occupational Associations	8	5
Unions	1	1
Education	3	2
Health	4	4
Social Welfare or Poor	< 1	< 1
Identity Groups ^b	3	2
Public Interest	3	2
State and Local Governments	5	4
Foreign	3	3
Other	3	3
Don't Know	< 1	< 1
Total	101%	100%
N	\$2,806,585,000 ^c	\$6,742,051,000

^aIncludes U.S. corporations, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations, and for-profit firms of professionals such as law and consulting firms.

^bIncludes organizations representing racial, ethnic, religious, or LGBT groups, elderly, or women.

^cThis figure has not been adjusted for inflation. In 2011 dollars it would be \$3,564,712,000.

Source: Washington Representatives Study

TABLE 3 - LOBBYING EXPENDITURES: 2010-2011

	Lobbying Spending
Corporations ^a	\$3,715,973,000
Trade and Other Business Associations	\$1,291,269,000
Occupational Associations	\$311,743,000
Unions	\$70,442,000
Education	\$165,659,000
Health	\$246,969,000
Social Welfare or Poor	\$17,220,000
Identity Groups ^b	\$118,463,000
Public Interest	\$111,032,000
State and Local Governments	\$265,172,000
Foreign	\$198,776,000
Other	\$221,282,000
Don't Know	\$8,050,000
Total	\$6,742,051,000

^aIncludes U.S. corporations, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations, and for-profit firms of professionals such as law and consulting firms.

^bIncludes organizations representing racial, ethnic, religious, or LGBT groups, elderly, or women

Source: Washington Representatives Study

ENDNOTES

1. This posting is a radical condensation of arguments and data in Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) chaps. 10-14; and Kay Lehman Schlozman, Philip Edward Jones, Hye Young You, Traci Burch, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Louder Chorus - Same Accent: The Representation of Interests in Pressure Politics, 1981-2011," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 1, 2013. Full technical details and a greater elaboration of these themes can be found in both sources, along with any data cited in the text but not the tables and acknowledgement of the many research assistants to whom we are indebted.

2. E.E. Schattschneider, *Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, 1960), p. 35.

3. The directory, *Washington Representatives* (Washington, DC: Columbia Books), is published annually. For detailed information about the directory and the data base constructed from it, see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *Unheavenly Chorus*, Appendix C. We are grateful to Valerie Sheridan and Duncan Bell of Columbia Books for explanations about how the information in the directories is gathered and updated.

Our database also includes information for 1981, but a methodological change in the way the directories were compiled makes the 1981 data not fully analogous to those presented here. For detailed explanation, see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *Unheavenly Chorus*, p. 350. For ease of explanation here, we have excluded the data for 1981, which are presented in our earlier work. Nonetheless, we emphasize that the inclusion of 1981 does not change our conclusions in any way.

4. For detailed information about how these categories were constructed, see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *Unheavenly Chorus*, Appendix E.

5. Figures from the Center for Responsive Politics indicate that, after steady yearly increases beginning in 1998 (the first year for which data are available), the number of lobbyists peaked in 2007 and fell 14 percent by 2011 -- although to a level still higher than in 2001; in inflation-adjusted terms, aggregate amounts spent on lobbying rose rapidly and reached their high point in 2009 before dropping slightly thereafter. There are several plausible explanations for this pattern: that it reflects the Great Recession; that the policy stasis accompanying partisan gridlock makes organizational involvement in Washington politics less necessary; that the end of earmarks has

reduced the incentive for smaller organizations to lobby; that, in the post-*Citizens United* era, organizations are focusing on campaign giving; and that the seeming diminution is deceptive, the consequence of more stringent regulation of lobbying under the 2007 Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which has led lobbyists to calibrate their activities to stay just under the threshold for registration -- with the result that the amount of unreported activity has increased.

6. In categorizing occupational associations as professional associations, we followed the Census definition of professional occupation.

7. Information about lobbying expenses, which is not available for 1991, was taken from reports filed under the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 as summarized on opensecrets.org, the website of the Center for Responsive Politics. If opensecrets.org did not have information about lobbying spending for an organization, we consulted politicalmoneyline.com.

This discussion ignores the small share of organizations about which we could find no information at all, classified as "Don't Know."

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