

Business as Usual:  
Interest Group Access and Representation Across  
Policy-Making Venues<sup>1</sup>

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# Business as Usual: Interest Group Access and Representation Across Policy-Making Venues

## ABSTRACT

We provide the first comprehensive study of lobbying across venues by studying interest group registrations in both the legislative and administrative branches. We present four major findings based on Federal and state data. First, groups engage in substantial administrative lobbying relative to legislative lobbying. Second, the vast majority of groups lobby the legislature, but a large proportion of groups also lobby the bureaucracy. Third, representational biases in legislative lobbying are replicated across venues: business groups dominate administrative lobbying at least as much as they do legislative lobbying. Finally, the level of interest group activity in one venue for a given policy area is strongly related to its level in the other venue.

The question of representation in the political process has long been of interest to citizens and scholars. For decades, political scientists have explored the question of whose voices are amplified by organized interests in the policy-making process, with particular attention to the legislative process and the ecology of interest groups in general. By now the dominance of business interests is a often-rehearsed dictum.<sup>1</sup>

Champions of administrative policymaking have argued that it has the potential to mitigate some of the biases of interest representation in other policymaking venues. Since administrative procedures are subject to conscious control in statute and judicial doctrine, it is possible that guaranteed access for and equal treatment of underrepresented interests in the administrative policy process can be enshrined in law.<sup>2</sup> This hope is crystallized by but not unique to the optimistic take of Francis Rourke: “One of the historic functions of bureaucracy in America has been to provide a means of effective expression in policy deliberations for community groups that are inarticulate, poorly organized, or for some other reason unable to speak for themselves. With administrative help, these stepchildren of the political system may acquire a political equality with other groups that they could never hope to attain through the ordinary processes of politics alone” ( 1976); see also, *e.g.*, Ricucci ( 1995, pp. 6-8) and Mosher ( 1982). But legal codification of equal access and treatment in the administrative venue is one thing; actual equality of representation across interests is another. The law cannot require different types of interests to have the same degree of political acumen, wherewithal, and resources to use in administrative lobbying.

To explore whether the administrative policy process lives up to its potential to mitigate biases in legislative lobbying, it is necessary to compare interest representation across policymaking venues. Previous research has shown that administrative lobbying is important to interest groups,<sup>3</sup> and that business interests are the predominant voices heard in administrative policymaking.<sup>4</sup> But without a comparison of interest representation across venues, it is impossible to determine whether, at the least, the administrative or bureaucratic policymaking venue at least lessens some of the biases of interest representation in the policy process.

Even if business interests predominate in administrative lobbying, they might predominate less than they do in legislative lobbying.

Very little research has compared interest representation across legislative and administrative venues.<sup>5</sup> We know of only three such published studies. Two of these — Greene and Heberlig (2002) and Holyoke (2003) — focus on samples of membership groups only and do not examine patterns of representation within or across venues or policy areas. Thus, while informative, these studies do not resolve the question laid out above. More closely related is Heinz, Laumann, Nelson and Salisbury’s study (1993), which uses survey data from organizational representatives on lobbying in four issues areas. Their results (particularly, Table 4.3) are highly suggestive: of the groups that contact at least one of the legislative or executive branches, 60% report lobbying both venues. This foreshadows results we obtain in a more comprehensive survey of over seventy different issue areas.

Given the importance of the issue and the lack of existing empirical research addressing it, in this paper we attempt to give a more comprehensive comparison of interest representation in the legislative and administrative policymaking venues. Our analysis utilizes information on all groups reporting lobbying activities in a given time period for two different levels of government. This allows us to draw comparisons that cross boundaries of group networks, policy areas, and state and federal governments. In order to address these issues, we rely on two different sources of data. First, we use Baumgartner and Leech’s (2001) data compiled from reports filed by groups active in Washington, D.C. under the 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA). Second, we use new data constructed from lobbying reports filed in the state of Minnesota. Both data sets include information on lobbying activities in both the legislative and administrative branches. In addition, they both include information that allows us to (coarsely) compare the amount of activity across venues in different policy areas.

These data allow us to answer four specific questions crucial for assessing interest and issue representation in the policy system as a whole. First, what is the extent of bureaucratic lobbying? At this point, while there exist a few studies that examine interest group activity

in the administrative branch, they are all based on relatively small samples of groups. Thus our data provide a first indication of how pervasive administrative lobbying is. Second, we study the pattern of venue choice across groups, both at the group level and at the group-policy level. This allows us to understand the pattern of representation across venues. For example, do groups tend to specialize in a single venue or do they target both equally? Third, we also examine whether there is venue specialization across policy areas. If this is the case, then groups with an advantage in the dominant venue may ultimately be better positioned to achieve their goals. Finally, we aggregate these data to study the distribution of representation of types of interests across venues: do business interests dominate in all venues or do rules promoting equal access in the bureaucracy help alleviate this bias?

Our findings have a number of important implications. The most important is a theoretical one about the functions of administrative policymaking institutions, and whether they balance out representational biases arising in the legislature. Our federal-level data indicate that the distributions of groups across venues are quite similar. Business dominates in and across venues, and to at least the same degree in administrative as legislative lobbying. If anything, there may be greater business dominance among groups that lobby the administrative branch relative to those that just lobby the legislature. This suggests that participation in the administrative arena does not alleviate any biases in the pressure group system in the legislature; rather, it primarily allows the “rich to get richer.” In addition, we provide a first look at the ecology of representation in the administrative branch inclusive of all groups, issues, and agencies. Our data suggest that administrative lobbying has been overlooked as a means of interest representation, with almost two-thirds of all groups indicating an interest in this venue. By extension, our study provides an important context for the growing literature on administrative lobbying (see, e.g., Golden 1998 and Yackee and Yackee 2006) that has found it difficult, in the absence of a baseline for comparison, to reconcile its finding that business interests are well represented with the existence of formal requirements for equal footing of participants.

## Theoretical Expectations about Lobbying Activity

Before presenting our data and arguments, it is useful to consider what existing theories lead us to expect about lobbying activity within a separation of powers system with multiple points of access. For reasons of clarity and parsimony, most extant theories of the legislative-bureaucratic relationship portray the distinction between the two branches as clear-cut, a necessary and useful simplification. This simplification enables a representation of the legislative-bureaucratic relationship as one of a principal-agent problem, as utilized by Epstein and O'Halloran (1990), Sloof (1998, 2000), Bendor and Meirowitz (2004), Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty (2006), and Bennedsen and Feldmann (2006).<sup>6</sup> All of these theories share a common theme: under what types of conditions will discretionary authority be granted to an agency whose policy preferences differ from that of the median legislator?<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, even to the degree that this literature accounts for the possibility that interest groups might seek to influence bureaucratic decision-making, its hypotheses speak to the legislative choice about agency design and discretionary authority rather than to individual group choices about which venue to lobby, and less to the representational consequences of those choices. In short they do not deliver implications that this paper addresses.<sup>8</sup>

The existing literature offers little in the way of predictions about legislative versus bureaucratic lobbying *per se*. Within the rational choice framework, Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty (2006, p. 146) summarize their theory's prediction about where representation should be sought unexceptionably: "the group should lobby the [venue] whose policy gives it the highest utility." Further, this is the only theory we are aware of that incorporates both options into a group's decision calculus. Despite the fact that there are no specific hypotheses to test in the literature, we do not believe that the analysis presented below in this paper is atheoretical. Rather, we believe that the existing theoretical work offers a clear motivation for our analysis, as it suggests that bureaucratic lobbying is important. Further, it provides justification for examining exactly the types of measures that we report later in this paper

(proportion of lobbying effort devoted to administrative lobbying and the variation of this proportion across different policy areas). Space constrains us from belaboring this point further, but the simple fact is that the existing theoretical literature represents this paper's starting point. In addition, it should be noted that the measures and regularities reported in this paper will be of interest to scholars who have no interest or stake in the literature cited above, and are of independent interest in their own right.<sup>9</sup>

## **Data on Lobbying, Venues, and Policies**

In order to study interest group representation across venues, we require detailed information that links organizations' lobbying efforts to specific issues and venues. Because studies of lobbying behavior as well as government laws governing lobbying have traditionally focused on lobbying in the legislature, there are few currently utilized data sources that are appropriate. As government reporting requirements for lobbying organizations have become more expansive over the years, however, information suitable to our task can now be gathered in some cases. Here, we rely on information filed by groups at both the Federal level and in the state of Minnesota.

The Federal data come from reports filed under the 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA), which requires groups to file reports in specific policy areas and also to include information about the various components of government that they contacted, including the legislature and the administrative branch. We use Baumgartner and Leech's (2001) data compiled from reports filed in 1996. Our second source of data arises from reports filed by groups in Minnesota; we compiled these data from the state's Campaign Finance Regulation web site. These reports include comparable information on lobbying across policy areas and venues.

Relying on two different data sets provides a number of strengths for our study. First, we are able to provide a more robust understanding of the prevalence of administrative lobbying by studying it at multiple levels of government. Second, the data were gathered by

independent research teams under different guises, reducing the chances that any similarities between the two are due to decisions made by the researchers. Third, the reporting schemes for policy areas are different: groups are required to report in seventy-seven specific policy areas at the Federal level; in Minnesota, groups choose their own areas, which we relied on in developing our own coding of policy areas. Because the Federal data have been discussed in previous studies (i.e., Baumgartner and Leech 2001), we focus our discussion here on the new data from Minnesota.

### *Lobbying Data in Minnesota*

Minnesota requires both groups and lobbyists to register with the state if they exceed a minimum amount of lobbying activity. Lobbying is defined in the *Handbook for Lobbyists and Lobbyist Principals* for each of three venues.<sup>10</sup> Legislative lobbying constitutes efforts to influence action of either legislative house on a variety of actions, including bills, resolutions, nominations, or reports. Administrative lobbying includes attempts to influence rulemaking procedures or rule application for rate setting and power-related issues.<sup>11</sup> Metropolitan lobbying involves attempts to influence the official actions of a Metropolitan governmental unit.

The definition of a lobbyist consists of three components. First, it includes individuals who receive compensation of at least \$3,000 from all sources in a given year for engaging in the lobbying activities just described. Second, it includes individuals who spend at least \$250 of their money engaging in lobbying activities (travel costs are exempt). Finally, any local official or government employee who spend at least 50 hours in a month lobbying the government (excluding that individual's political subdivision) is a lobbyist. Groups that lobby are required to register if they spend more than \$500 on a lobbyist in a calendar year or if they spend in excess of \$50,000 on their own lobbying activities. Registration of lobbyists and principals must occur within three days any lobbying activities.

Lobbying data are compiled from a summary file of lobbyist reports available from the



state web site.<sup>12</sup> For each of the groups that a lobbyist represents, the report lists the general issues to be lobbied on and, for each issue, a list of the venues to be lobbied. Including 321 cases of lobbyists that failed to report an issue for a given organization, we have a total of 5935 lobbyist-issue-organization and 3975 issue-organization observations from 1092 organizations. For the purposes of this paper, we focus only on groups that lobby the legislature or the administrative branch, excluding the 24% of all groups that report only metropolitan lobbying. We leave the analysis of additional venues for future research.

Overall, lobbyists report activity on a total of 669 alphanumerically unique issues in these data. In order to study lobbying activity across policy areas, we code these issues into ninety-six different policy areas based on a list of suggested reporting categories from the state's web site.<sup>13</sup> Most groups use these categories for reporting; many of the exceptions are merely minor variations or misspellings of the ninety-six policy areas.<sup>14</sup> We refer to these categories as "policies" or "policy areas," rather than as "issues," in order to distinguish between Baumgartner and Leech's usage of the word issue, which may refer to specific proposals or bills; we consider policy areas to be, in general, at a higher level of aggregation.

### *Lobbying Data at the Federal Level*

To study lobbying across venues and policy areas at the Federal level, we utilize data filed under the 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act. The LDA requires groups to file semi-annual reports listing their total lobbying expenditures if they exceed a minimum threshold of lobbying activity (spending at least \$20,500 in 1996 or employing an individual who devotes at least 20% of her time to lobbying activities during a six-month period), though the definition of lobbying excludes most forms of grassroots lobbying as well as notice and comment participation. In particular, we rely on Baumgartner and Leech's (2001) data on 1996 filings, which they have made available online.<sup>15</sup> While the level of detail varies, each report contains information on lobbyists, lobbying targets, and lobbying expenditures.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Baumgartner and Leech (2001) were interested in the number of groups involved

in a sample of 137 issues (out of 49,518 total issues mentioned in the reports), we focus on group activity in and across policy areas in order to maintain comparability to the Minnesota data. Because the LDA requires groups to file separate reports for seventy-six different policy areas (now seventy-seven with the addition of Homeland Security), it is relatively straightforward to calculate lobbying activity at the group-policy level. Further, we can study lobbying across venues using the information in these reports: groups are asked to list which branch of government they contacted for each policy area, including the House, Senate, White House and the number of agencies. To compare lobbying activity across the legislative and administrative venues, we determine whether a group mentions either the House or Senate and whether they mention an agency. Unfortunately, information about lobbyists and expenditures is not reported separately by policy area or venue. Finally, we rely on Baumgartner and Leech's coding of these 5838 groups into eleven categories based on the organization's type or the substantive interest they represent.<sup>17</sup> This information allows us to study the distribution of organizations across venues.

### *Levels of Analysis*

Using the two data sources described above, we construct three measures of lobbying across venues. First, we use the Minnesota data to construct measures of venue choice at the group-policy-lobbyist level by creating dichotomous variables indicating whether each lobbyist reported lobbying the legislature or the administrative branch. In Washington, D.C., we create similar variables at the group-policy-report level based on whether each report listed a branch of Congress or at least one agency. Second, we aggregate to the group-policy level and create variables indicating whether a group had at least one lobbyist reporting the legislative or administrative venues for each policy area. Finally, we make the same calculation at the group level by determining whether each group had at least one lobbyist on any policy for each venue. While we would prefer to have a more detailed measure of group activity across venues, such as lobbying effort or expenditures, we follow Baumgartner and

Leech's (2001) approach by counting reports (or lobbyists employed) by venue and policy area in order to obtain more information on whether groups devote any attention to different venues. We do this because we are interested in representation not just by specific groups, but by the representation of groups in specific policy areas; venue choice is made in the context of different policies, so studying it at that level is crucial.

As an example, consider the reports filed by the Automotive Service Industry Association, which indicated a six-month expenditure of \$80,000. It filed eight different reports in seven subject areas. For the two reports in the Clean Air and Water policy area, one indicates only administrative lobbying while the other lists both administrative and legislative lobbying. Of the other six reports, four are in policy areas with just legislative lobbying, one has only administrative lobbying and one lists both venues. In our group-policy-report level data set, then, we have eight observations for this group: five of them mention Congress, two mention both Congress and the administrative branch, and one lists just the administrative branch. When we aggregate to the group-policy level, there are seven observations: five policy areas mentioning just Congress and two mentioning both venues. Finally, at the group level this association is recorded as lobbying both venues.

## **The Incidence of Lobbying Across Venues**

Table 1 offers our first look at the total amount of interest group lobbying across venues. The main result from this table is that a substantial amount of interest group lobbying occurs in the administrative venue, ranging from 33% to 41% at different levels of aggregation. In different terms, the average group lobbies in 1.6 of the two venues we examine; the average report or lobbyist lists 1.4 venues.

[Table 1 Here.]

A number of other notable features emerge. First, the percentages of groups lobbying in the administrative branch at the Federal level and in Minnesota are almost identical

at comparable levels of aggregation; second, they both indicate less venue specialization at higher levels of aggregation. Starting with the group-policy-lobbyist and group-policy-report level, the percentages mentioning the administrative branch are 34% in Minnesota and 33% in Washington, D.C.; these both increase to 35% at the group-policy level. At the group level, 37% of groups in Minnesota and 41% of groups in Washington, D.C. mention the administrative branch. These numbers indicate that there is more specialization in venues at the policy level than at the group level, suggesting that groups make different venue choice decisions for different policies. The fact that groups' venue choices are policy-specific is consistent with the notion that political representation within a policy area depends on the details of the policy area, the legislative and executive design of policymaking processes, or both.

As an aside, aggregate expenditure figures by venue for the state of Minnesota show a much greater tilt of lobbying activity toward the legislative venue than reports do.<sup>18</sup> Almost 90% of lobbying disbursements are targeted to that branch, suggesting that legislative lobbying requires more expenditure-intensive activities than administrative lobbying does. On the other hand, the disbursements data exclude lobbyist salaries, which constitute about 75% of total lobbying expenditures. To the extent that administrative lobbying relies more heavily on lobbyists' time, then the disbursements figures will overstate attention to the legislature. We hope to return to this issue in future work.

## **Venue Choice at the Group Level**

In this section we compare the attention and resources devoted across venues by individual groups. Groups' choices of venue or venues in which to lobby is of interest for several reasons. For example, if many groups focus only on one venue, it would increase the chance that representation varies across venues. Additionally, it seems reasonable to presume that a group will allocate its resources to the venue or venues that are most productive in achieving

the group's goals (see, e.g., Boehmke, Gailmard and Patty 2006). Thus, there are several reasons that one might want to know whether the same groups are represented in both the legislative and administrative venues.

We use our data on group lobbying registrations to tackle these questions in two ways. First, we examine the pattern of venue choice for individual groups by tabulating lobbying by venue, allowing us to determine how many groups focus on a single venue and how many lobby in both venues. We also report correlations of venue choice at the group-policy level. Second, we compare the amounts of attention devoted to legislative and administrative lobbying by comparing the number of lobbyists or reports for each venue. Admittedly, this is a very coarse measure of the amount of attention, but it still provides a more detailed analysis of groups' allocation of attention across venues and the degree of specialization for groups lobbying both venues.

Table 2 reports the tabulations of venues at the group level and at the group-policy level. There are a number of interesting results in this table. First, almost no groups specialize solely in administrative lobbying: over 94% of the groups at both levels of government and at both levels of analysis lobby the legislature. Nonetheless, a majority of groups do indicate an interest in the administrative branch, with about 59% of groups registering in both venues. At the same time, about 49% of registrations at the group-policy level are in both venues, suggesting that groups often specialize in specific venues when appropriate for a given policy area. This tendency is further suggested by the fact that groups that are involved with both branches are involved with more policies: groups interested in just the legislative venue indicate activity on 2.7 policies in Minnesota and 1.8 policies in Washington, whereas those interested in both venues indicate interest in 3.9 and 2.9 policies, respectively. Again, note the similarity between the results at both levels of government.

**[Table 2 Here.]**

Because so few groups lobby just the administrative branch and nearly half of those that lobby the legislature also lobby the administrative branch, there is mixed evidence regarding

venue specialization. While some groups specialize in legislative lobbying, very few specialize in only administrative lobbying. By and large, however, the majority of groups tend to lobby both venues. Since groups that pursue administrative lobbying are largely a subset of groups that pursue legislative lobbying, it seems unlikely that the administrative venue opens the policy process to interests unheard elsewhere in it.

Moving from whether groups express any interest in either venue to the amount of attention they devote, which we again measure with the number of lobbyists or reports indicating each venue, further supports this contention. The correlation between the number of lobbyists or reports mentioning the legislature and the number mentioning the administrative branch is 0.69 at the group-policy level in Minnesota and 0.42 in Washington, D.C. At the group level, the correlations between the number of administrative and legislative mentions are even stronger, with values of 0.90 in Minnesota and 0.76 in Washington, D.C. Again, these results are driven by the fact that groups that lobby extensively in one venue also lobby extensively in the other venue.

In order to provide a more detailed perspective on lobbying activities across venues, we compare levels of legislative and administrative lobbying at the group-policy-lobbyist level in Minnesota and the group-policy-report level in Washington, D.C. In order to present the data more clearly, we calculate the conditional distribution of legislative lobbying for each level of administrative lobbying and graph the results in Figure 1. The circles marking each combination of administrative and legislative lobbying are proportional to the number of legislative lobbyists given a specific number of administrative lobbyists. (Results at the upper ends of the ranges are combined both for presentation purposes and to have a reasonable number of observations for each level of administrative lobbying.)

**[Figure 1 Here.]**

It is clear from Figure 1 that the greatest proportion of groups devote the same amount of attention to each venue, as the largest circles are on the diagonal line for equal lobbying. For instance, at the Federal level 80% of groups with one administrative report have

one legislative report; 74% of those with two administrative have two legislative; etc. In Minnesota, the percentages are over 75% for all cases involving one to five administrative lobbyists. The exception, of course, is for groups that have no administrative lobbyists: the majority of these groups has one legislative lobbyist and a sizable proportion has two. It is also apparent that most groups have more legislative than administrative lobbyists. Finally, as evidenced by the largely empty space below the 45 degree line, one characteristic of the Minnesota lobbying system is that almost no lobbyist lists only the administrative branch.

## **Activity Across Venues by Policy Area**

In this section we examine the aggregate level of attention to the two venues within each policy area. Substantively, this analysis provides a picture of which of the two venues is seen by the participants in the process to be more important in each policy area. For example, the administrative venue might receive significantly more attention than the legislative venue in certain policy areas because of administrative specialization, delegated discretionary powers, and/or legislative abdication in those policy realms.

This analysis is also important from the standpoint of representation. Specifically, the presence of a dominant venue within a policy area may produce an advantage for organizations that have a comparative advantage in lobbying that venue. Thus, any variation in the relative levels of aggregate attention paid to the two venues across policy areas necessarily raises questions about the uniformity of representation of different interests within different realms of public policy.

To address this issue, we count the number of groups mentioning each venue for each policy area, which allows us to compare the Minnesota and Federal data. This variable reflects the number of groups paying at least some attention to each venue. Scatter plots based on these calculations are presented in Figure 2. Because there are a different number of policy areas in the two data sets and because the scale of activity is much greater at the

Federal level, we use two different sets of axes. Further, the data are presented on a log-log scale in order to better separate the large number of policy areas with relatively low levels of lobbying from the few policy areas that attract the bulk of lobbying.

**[Figure 2 Here.]**

The results in this figure are unequivocal: activity levels in one venue are strongly associated with activity levels in the other venue, with correlations of 0.95 in Minnesota and 0.98 in Washington, D.C. Put differently, the administrative policy process is not directed by lobbyists to pick up policy issues neglected in the legislative process. As alluded to above, there is a great degree of variation in lobbying activity across the different policy areas, with the number of groups mentioning Congress varying from six for Unemployment to 1147 for Budget/Appropriations; the number of groups mentioning the administrative branch varies from two for District of Columbia to 560 for Budget. The average number of groups for the legislature is 183; for the administrative branch it is ninety-eight. In Minnesota the averages are twenty-four and thirteen, respectively. Clearly, these data indicate little substitution among venues in terms of the locus of (unconditional) interest group attention.

Consistent with our earlier findings, more groups mention the legislative venue than the administrative venue in every policy, and at both levels of government. In Minnesota, the average ratio of legislative to administrative groups is 1.90; at the Federal level it is 2.27. Interestingly, this ratio shrinks as the number of groups in a given policy increases, though more so at the Federal level.

## **Representation Across Venues**

The analysis so far give some sense that representation in the bureaucracy tracks representation in the legislative branch — at least when measured by lobbyists or reports. The groups active and pressing their issues in the legislature are also active and pressing their issues in the bureaucracy. Put differently, whoever the bureaucracy is hearing from and on whatever



issues, they are not hearing from interests wanting for representation elsewhere in the policy process.

Yet the analysis so far tells us little about the identity of those groups, and therefore about the composition of the interests heard. Because around 50% of groups lobby both venues for a given policy, it could be the case that the overall pattern of representation is quite different across venues. To address this issue, we rely exclusively on the Federal data, which partition groups into ten categories. Following Baumgartner and Leech's (2001) approach with these same data, we combine the professional lobbying firms category with the business and corporation category and create an "institutions" category by combining universities, hospitals, and other institutions, resulting in seven final categories. Because groups can report lobbying in either or both venues, we examine the distribution of organizations based on three categories: (1) those that lobby the administrative venue, (2) those that lobby the legislative venue, and (3) those that lobby both venues. To compare representation across venues, we calculate the distribution of organizational types for each of these categories, both at the group-policy level and at the group level. Because the proportions in each column depend on the venue choice decisions of all types of groups, they make it harder to understand the pattern of venue choice for each category of group. In order to illuminate this issue we also report the distribution of venue choice by organization type.

**[Table 3 Here.]**

The results are presented in Table 3. Overall, the distribution of organizations within one venue is fairly similar to the distribution in the other, suggesting that any representational bias indicated by activity in the legislature venue extends to the administrative venue as well. Some interesting patterns emerge beyond this. In particular, business dominance is greater among groups that lobby a single venue than among those that lobby both, with its percentage increasing from 40% of observations in both venues to about 45% of observations in just the legislature at both the group and group-policy levels to 48% of observations in just the administrative branch at the group-policy level and 60% at the group level. Citizen

groups, on the other hand, comprise a lower percentage of groups in the administrative branch at both levels of analysis. After business groups, only trade associations and government organizations are better represented in the administrative branch-only column. Our findings for the administrative venue are consistent with previous work that examines representation only in the notice and comment process (Golden 1998).

The comparison across venues demonstrates a somewhat surprising similarity between citizen and business groups: along with institutions, citizen and business groups are the only categories of groups at the group-policy level for which a majority lobby just the legislature rather than both venues. At the group level, these three categories are still the most likely to lobby only the legislature, but the proportion has dropped nearer to a third rather than a half. At both levels of analysis, business groups are the most likely to lobby only the administrative branch, with 5.1% of observations at the group-policy level and 5.3% at the group level. Citizen groups are the least likely to lobby just this venue at the group level (1.5%) and the second least likely at the group-policy level (3.4%). Because of their greater numerosity, of course, these small differences lead to a much greater edge for businesses in the administrative venue. Another interesting finding comes from comparing the pattern of venue choice across the group and group policy levels of analysis. Specifically, professional associations, government organizations and citizen groups are much more likely to lobby in just the administrative venue at the group-policy level, which helps explain why they constitute twice as high a proportion of groups in this venue at the same level of observation.

While these results advance our understanding of representation of types of interests across venues, they must be read in light of four tempering facts. First, the number of groups lobbying in just the administrative branch is small (less than 5% for both levels of analysis). Accordingly (and somewhat unsurprisingly), the portrait of representation is sparser in this venue than in the legislative branch. Second, the differences are still relatively small, particularly at the group-policy level: the overall pattern of representation is fairly consistent across the three venues and exhibits the well-known, pro-business bias

in representation. Third, making inferences about how the existence of multiple venues changes representation involves a counterfactual about how groups' lobbying would change if the available venues were different. Groups registered in just one venue might, if that option were closed off, move their efforts to the other. Fourth, our data do not indicate the “substance” of lobbying activities in each venue. For example, it is possible that groups exclusively lobbying the administrative branch offer policy-specific information about the technical details of implementation, while they communicate political preferences to the legislative branch. The next section partially addresses this question by considering the relative representation of citizen and business groups in different policy areas, but future work should consider the differences in form and substance (if any) that distinguish administrative and legislative lobbying.

## **Representation Across Venues & Policies**

In this section we continue to focus on the issue of representation of group types across venues, but add a comparison across policy areas, in order to obtain a better understanding of the locus of business dominance vis-à-vis citizen groups. To make this comparison we implement a number of simplifications, since it would very difficult to fully investigate the distribution of nine types of groups across three venue choice outcomes and seventy-six policy areas. First, we focus only on the representation of business groups vis-à-vis citizen groups. This is not to suggest that representation by other types of groups is not important. Rather, much scholarly attention is focused on the divide between these two categories. Second, we compare groups that lobby only the legislature with those that lobby the administrative branch — either on its own or in addition to the legislative branch. We do this in recognition of the fact that very few groups lobby just the administrative branch: the major decision appears to be whether to lobby the administrative branch in addition to the legislature. Finally, we use the ratio of the number of citizen groups to the number of businesses as our

measure of representational disparity. Low values correspond to business dominance. This leaves us with two numbers for each policy area: the citizen to business ratio for groups that only lobby the legislature and the same ratio for groups that lobby the administrative branch, either alone or in addition to the legislature (hereafter, we refer to the latter category as the combined administrative category).<sup>19</sup>

**[Figure 3 Here.]**

For the legislative venue the mean value across policy areas is .78 while the median is .15. For the combined administrative category the mean is .73 and the median is .17. The two categories reveal a substantively similar degree of business dominance. It certainly does not seem that access to administrative policy channels counterbalances the business dominance in legislative lobbying.

Because the distributions of these ratios are highly skewed and clustered toward smaller values, we convert them to a log scale.<sup>20</sup> Figure 3 plots these two ratios for each policy area, along with an equal bias line. Policy areas above this line have a smaller pro-business representational disparity in the combined administrative category compared to the legislative-only category. The dashed lines are located at the mean ratio for each venue; the solid vertical and horizontal lines at one demarcate cases where citizen groups have an actual representational advantage — observations beyond these lines represent cases where there are more citizen groups than business groups. Finally, the three-letter symbols correspond to the government codes for each policy area.

On average, policy areas with greater ratios in one category also have greater ratios in the other category, as evidenced by the correlation of .60 between the two measures. Yet the results in the figure indicate a great deal of variation across policy areas in terms of the relative representational disparity across venues, especially considering the conversion to the log scale (which spreads the data out, but also reduces relative distances to the equal disparity line). Thirty of the fifty-seven policy areas lie above the equal disparities line, indicating better relative representation of citizen groups in the combined administrative

category. Put differently, only 36% of the variation in representational disparity in the combined administrative category is explained by the legislative-only category. This leaves a lot of variation to differences between the venues within policy areas. Notably, there are only nine policy areas where citizen groups have an absolute advantage in the legislative-only venue and ten where they have this advantage in the combined administrative venue; six cases meet the threshold in both venues.<sup>21</sup>

Focusing on the policy areas with the biggest representation differences, a few unusual findings surface amidst mostly unsurprising results. Policy areas where the value for the combined administrative category is less than one-half the value for the legislative-only category — indicating much greater business representation in the administrative branch relative to the legislative branch — are: Urban Development/Municipalities, Apparel/Clothing Industries/Textiles, Small Business, Railroads, Government Issues, Indian/Native American, Family Issues/Abortion/Adoption, Telecommunications, Arts/Entertainment, and Defense. These are industries generally dominated by business interests, though with a couple of exceptions. Note that for one of these exceptions — namely, Family Issues/Abortion/Adoption — greater relative business representation in the administrative branch does not change the fact that citizen groups dominate in both branches. Those with a ratio of four or greater — indicating much reduced relative business dominance in the administrative branch — are: Trucking, Insurance, Tobacco, Housing, Food Industry (Safety/Labeling), Civil Rights/Civil Liberties, Pharmacy, and Animals. Given that most of these are areas one would expect to be dominated by businesses, it is interesting that citizen groups do better in the combined administrative category.

An interesting feature of this figure is that there are few policy areas in which one type of group dominates in one venue while the other type of group dominates in the other. Of course, this may be a consequence of the fact that our combined administrative category includes groups that lobby both venues, which inevitably reduces the clarity of our findings, though we note that the figure is not terribly different if we use groups that only lobby

one venue. The two exceptions would be Animals, for which business has a fifteen to one advantage in the legislature while citizen groups have an eleven to two advantage in the administrative branch, and, to a lesser extent, Urban Development/Municipalities, for which business groups' two to one advantage is reversed in the combined administrative category. Note that these are the actual number of groups, so the latter is based on only three groups of each type.

## **Discussion: Participation in Administrative Policymaking**

A consistent pattern in the evidence above is of an interest group ecology that, collectively, attempts to direct administrative agencies to much the same set of groups and issues as the legislature.<sup>22</sup> This has several important implications for the role of the bureaucracy in the policy process. First, the strategic calculus behind these venue choice decisions suggests that groups do not feel content to lobby the legislature and let it direct the bureaucracy in turn. Rather, our data suggest that many groups who lobby at all spread their lobbying efforts throughout the policymaking process. They consistently use more resources, at least when measured by lobbyists or reports, on legislative than administrative lobbying, but in general, the more they use on one, the more they use on the other. This is difficult to rationalize unless the groups believe that bureaucratic agencies do possess discretionary authority over some or all policies that the groups care about. If agencies were mere ciphers or subordinate actors for the legislature, the legislature would see most or all lobbying action. Lobbying the bureaucracy would only support policy choices that could be overturned at will by the legislature if the latter were the source of all policy direction, rendering bureaucratic lobbying largely useless.

Furthermore, to the extent that the lobbying activities as measured here are consequential in the determination of public policy outcomes, our findings indicate that administrative policy processes may simply reinforce the advantages possessed by particular groups and

policies in the legislature. Administrative lobbying does not broaden the representation of interests beyond those that pursue representation within the legislative venue. That would require interests and issues relatively inactive in the legislature to be more active in the administrative venue, which would yield different distribution of organization types in the two venues. Across several measures, that is not the case.

A natural explanation for this pattern of activity is the basic logic of collective action (Olson 1965). Administrative lobbying may be subject to essentially the same collective action problems as legislative lobbying. To that extent, it makes sense that groups very active in the legislature would also be relatively active in the bureaucracy.

In any case, this pattern sheds light on the effect of participation opportunities in bureaucratic policy-making.<sup>23</sup> The bureaucratic venue presents another opportunity for the active, high-spending interests that predominate in legislative lobbying to be heard. The lobbying patterns it is exposed to do not direct it to broaden the set of groups or policies privileged in other parts of the policy process. Our data suggest that – at least as measured by lobbying activities – any representational biases that exist in the legislature carry over to the administrative branch as well.

## **Conclusion**

This study constitutes the first broad examination of interest group representation across multiple venues. Using existing data from the Federal government and a new data set from the state of Minnesota, we are able to answer a number of important questions about administrative lobbying vis-à-vis legislative lobbying. First and foremost, administrative lobbying is a widespread phenomenon: about two-thirds of all registered lobbying organizations indicate at least some interest in this venue. Second, for most groups, larger levels of activity in one venue are matched by larger levels of activity in the other venue. Finally, within many policy areas, the well-documented pro-business bias in lobbying activity exists in both

venues.

In terms of representation, the findings are simultaneously revealing and potentially troubling. Of course, we are cognizant that registered lobbying is only one form of participation in the policy process; our data do not include groups that engage solely in “outside” lobbying, groups that fall below the reporting thresholds, or additional forms of participation in the bureaucracy, whether through the process of notice and comment or through service on advisory committees. These alternate forms of participation may open up the door to groups not represented in our data; studies that analyze the distribution of groups in notice and comment, however, also find a significant pro-business bias, whether measured by participation (Golden 1998, Furlong and Kerwin 2005) or influence (Yackee and Yackee 2006). Further, it is worth repeating the caveat that our data on lobbying are quite coarse, extending no further than the number of lobbyists or reports that groups devote to or file in each venue for a given policy area. While presence is an important measure of representation, finer measure of lobbying activity may help illuminate the issue in more detail and help us understand the conditions under which representation can lead to access and, ultimately, influence (see, e.g., Hansen 1991; Kollman 1997).

In general, the study of interest group activity across multiple venues allows analysis of many new questions and ways of assessing the policy process as a whole. Datasets containing detailed information on activities and expenditures and that link lobbying behavior across venues are only now becoming available. As they do, we believe that exploring how an interest group’s strategic problem of venue choice is related to the characteristics of each issue, the relevant venues, and the behavior of other interests active on that issue will provide important insights into the consequences of government structure for representation.

This argument is consistent with recent work that argues that research on interest group lobbying should pay greater attention to the role that issues play in determining interest group lobbying decisions (see, e.g., Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, and Kimball 2009) and the characteristics of interest group lobbying communities. For example, recent studies



(e.g., Leech, Baumgartner, La Pira, and Semanko 2005; and Lowery, Gray, Fellowes, and Anderson 2004) show that aggregate interest group activity across policy areas responds to government activity in those areas. We believe that adding information on groups' menu of venues in which to seek representation to these approaches is a logical step that will simultaneously add to our understandings of policymaking and interest group behavior.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Most major studies of representation in the interest group universe put the proportion of business interests anywhere from 50% to 80%, depending on how broadly those interests are construed (see, e.g., Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman 1984; Walker 1991; Gray and Lowery 1996; or Baumgartner and Leech 2001)

<sup>2</sup>For a review of the legal guidelines governing the participation opportunities that organized interests have in administrative policymaking, see Piotrowski and Rosenbloom (2005).

<sup>3</sup>80% of groups in Walker's (1991) 1980 survey of membership organizations indicated that administrative lobbying was very important, giving it a higher score than any other lobbying tactic, including legislative lobbying (78%). Three-quarters of the groups surveyed in 2002 by Furlong and Kerwin (2005) indicated that participating in rulemaking is more important than lobbying Congress; up from two-thirds in a similar survey from 1992 (Kerwin 2003).

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Golden 1998; Furlong 1997; Furlong and Kerwin 2005; and Yackee and Yackee 2006) find that, as in the legislature, business groups comprise the largest category of interests heard in official proceedings such as notice and comment rulemaking.

<sup>5</sup>While the nexus of organized interest, congressional committees and administrative agencies once figured prominently in the interest groups literature in the form of the subgovernment, or iron triangles, approach (see, e.g., Griffith 1939 or Lowi 1969), attention to interest group influence outside the legislative branch waned with the rise of the more amorphous issues network approach (see, e.g., Heclo 1978). Walker 1991) successfully argued that iron triangles were, in most cases, a thing of the past due to the rise of citizen groups and the opening up of the government process to citizens and the press. Further, the release of campaign finance data likely also prompted scholars to focus attention on the legislative branch. See Baumgartner and Leech (1998) for a summary of the representation, legislative lobbying, and campaign contributions literatures.

<sup>6</sup>Other, earlier studies, considered the possibility of bureaucratic lobbying (*e.g.*, Spiller 1990;

Laffont and Tirole 1993), but it must be acknowledged that the form that bureaucratic lobbying is generally assumed to take – direct transfers – is in direct opposition to both *de facto* and *de jure* structure of modern administrative policymaking in the United States.

<sup>7</sup>The answers to this question differ between the papers, based largely on the type of problem the agency is presumed to solve on behalf of the legislature. For example, Epstein and O’Halloran (1990), Sloof (2000), and Bendor and Meirowitz (2004) generally agree that discretionary authority will be decreasing in the divergence between the preferences of the median legislator and those of the agency head (*e.g.*, the President). Bennesen and Feldmann (2006) also tap into this logic and extend it to cover the effect of lobbying, in addition to preference divergence, on bureaucratic discretion. Boehmke, Gailmard, and Patty (2006) point to a different logic, under which preference divergence is necessary to increase informational lobbying in the bureaucracy, which is desirable to the legislature for policy purposes.

<sup>8</sup>In addition, the hypotheses generated by the works cited require measures of agency and legislators’ preferences, discretionary authority, and/or levels of policy uncertainty that prevail in different issue areas. While these may be available in the future, we most certainly are not aware of existing and appropriate measures.

<sup>9</sup>Indeed, as our language throughout the paper suggests, we believe that the regularities we do (and don’t) discover in the empirical analysis speak directly to the broad body of work on representation within and through the bureaucracy.

<sup>10</sup>Downloaded from [http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/handbook/hb\\_lobbyist.pdf](http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/handbook/hb_lobbyist.pdf).

<sup>11</sup>These activities must be directed at individuals designated as public officials, which generally includes members of state boards and commissions and assistant and deputy commissioners. See <http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/eis/agatoz.html> for a complete listing.

<sup>12</sup>Downloaded from <http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/lobbysub.html> on September 10, 2004. Versions of this list are not available on an annual basis, just the current up-to-date listing.



<sup>13</sup>See <http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/LBSUBJECTDESCRIPTIONS.htm>. We created one additional policy area for Waste/Recycling.

<sup>14</sup>The issues were initially coded separately by two different individuals, with up to three categories ordered by priority. Agreement was fairly high given the large number of categories: 69.7% of first-priority issues were coded identically; this increased to 81% when first choices are compared to second and third choices. When weighted by the frequency of each issue in the data, these numbers increase to 81% and 93.5%. The issue areas that did not receive the same first-priority issue code were then reviewed by all three authors whereupon a final coding decision was agreed upon for each.

<sup>15</sup>Available at <http://lobby.la.psu.edu/related.html>.

<sup>16</sup>See Baumgartner and Leech (1999) and Furlong (1999) for more information on the strengths and weaknesses of the LDA data.

<sup>17</sup>These codings were added by Baumgartner and Leech (2001), using information from *Washington Representatives* and through Web searches.

<sup>18</sup>See <http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/LobDisburseSummary/LBSMCMV04.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup>Including or omitting labor groups only modestly changes the results since there are relatively few labor groups in the data; the ratio measures with and without labor groups within each venue have correlations over 0.997.

<sup>20</sup>Along the way, we lose information for seventeen policy areas. Five have no business groups in at least one venue category (Constitution, District of Columbia, Religion, Sports/Athletics, and Unemployment) and the rest have no citizen groups (Advertising, Aerospace, Automotive Industry, Beverage Industry, Bankruptcy, Commodities (Big Ticket), Fuel/Gas/Oil, Gaming/Gambling/Casino, Manufacturing, Media (Information/Publishing), Roads/Highway, and Travel/Tourism). Additionally, there were no reports in the file we downloaded from Baumgartner's web site for the Accounting policy area (ACC).

<sup>21</sup>One of these policy areas (Constitution) is not displayed in the graph since the value for the other venue is undefined.

<sup>22</sup>We say “attempts” because, like much lobbying data, this evidence cannot address the effects of these lobbying efforts on policy. It is not an attempt to treat the population of groups as a unitary actor.

<sup>23</sup>This assessment requires that the observed patterns of legislative lobbying are not a result of participation opportunities in the bureaucracy (otherwise the legislative baseline cannot be taken as exogenous). We are not aware of any evidence or argument for why this requirement would not be met.

Table 1: Distribution of Lobbying Activity Across Venues

	<b>Minnesota</b>					
	<i>Legislative</i>		<i>Administrative</i>		Total	Unique
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Groups	824	63.5%	473	36.5%	1,297	830
Group-Policies	2630	65.1%	1409	34.9%	4,039	2,694
Group-Policy-Lobbyists	3976	66.1%	2043	33.9%	6,019	4,120
Expenditures	\$10,368,992	89.9%	\$1,164,133	10.1%	\$11,533,126	
	<b>Federal</b>					
	<i>Legislative</i>		<i>Administrative</i>		Total	Unique
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Groups	5570	59.3%	3817	40.7%	9,388	5,838
Group-Policies	13,599	65.2%	7,258	34.8%	20,858	14,419
Group-Policy-Reports	18,023	66.8%	8970	33.2%	26,994	19,309

*Note.* Source: Federal lobbying reports filed under the LDA (Baumgartner and Leech 2001); authors' data compiled from Minnesota lobbying report. Minnesota data exclude 262 groups that only engaged in metropolitan lobbying. Entries, with the exception of spending data, are the number of observations mentioning each venue at least once at the listed levels of observation. See text for additional details.

Table 2: Tabulations of Venue Declarations

	<b>At the Group Level</b>					
	<u>Minnesota</u>			<u>Federal</u>		
	No Adm.	Adm.	Total	No Adm.	Adm.	Total
No Legislative	0	6	6	52	216	268
Legislative	357	467	824	1,969	3,601	5,570
Total	357	473	830	2,021	3,817	5,838
	<b>At the Group-Policy Level</b>					
	<u>Minnesota</u>			<u>Federal</u>		
	No Adm.	Adm.	Total	No Adm.	Adm.	Total
No Legislative	39	25	64	166	654	820
Legislative	1,246	1,384	2,630	6,995	6,604	13,599
Total	1,285	1,409	2,694	7,161	7,258	14,419

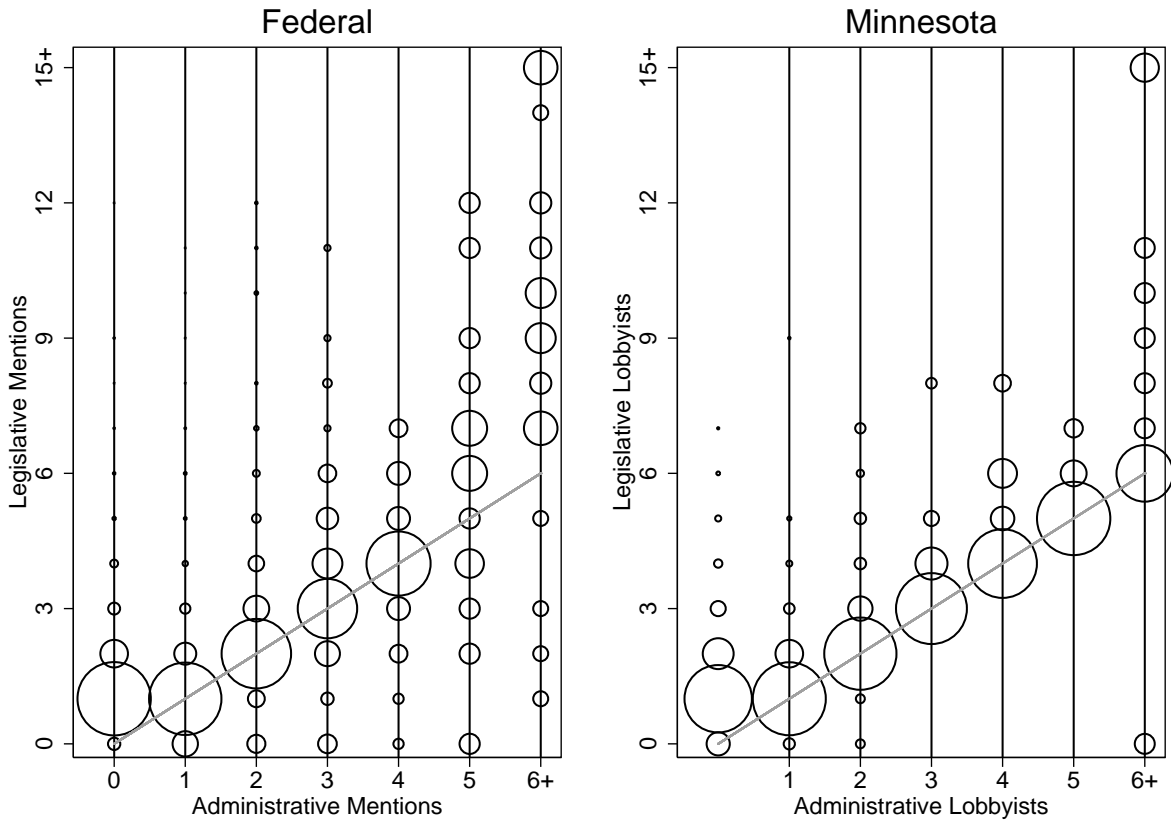
*Note.* Entries correspond to the number of groups that mention each venue choice combination for the listed level of observation. Minnesota data exclude 262 groups that only engaged in metropolitan lobbying. Some reports at both levels listed no venues.

Table 3: Representation and Patterns of Venue Choice by Organizations at the Federal Level

<b>At the Group-Policy Level</b>								
	<i>Representation Within Venue</i>				<i>Venue Choice</i>			Obs.
	Admin. Only	Legis. Only	Both	Overall	Admin. Only	Legis. Only	Both	
Businesses	47.9%	44.9%	40.4%	43.0%	5.1%	51.3%	43.6%	6,114
Trade associations	19.0%	15.3%	18.7%	17.0%	5.1%	44.1%	50.8%	2,420
Professional associations	4.9%	5.9%	7.3%	6.5%	3.5%	44.3%	52.3%	924
Labor Unions	1.5%	1.8%	2.3%	2.0%	3.5%	44.4%	52.1%	288
Citizen Groups and Nonprofits	7.0%	9.8%	9.3%	9.4%	3.4%	50.9%	45.7%	1,341
Government Organizations	12.3%	10.0%	12.3%	11.2%	5.0%	43.9%	51.0%	1,589
Institutions	4.6%	9.7%	6.4%	7.9%	2.7%	59.9%	37.5%	638
Unknown	2.8%	2.7%	3.3%	3.0%	4.2%	44.9%	50.8%	425
Observations	653	6990	6589					14,232
<b>At the Group Level</b>								
	<i>Representation Within Venue</i>				<i>Venue Choice</i>			Obs.
	Admin. Only	Legis. Only	Both	Overall	Admin. Only	Legis. Only	Both	
Businesses	59.7%	46.2%	39.6%	42.6%	5.3%	36.9%	57.8%	2,457
Trade associations	17.1%	12.8%	17.9%	16.2%	4.0%	27.0%	69.0%	933
Professional associations	2.3%	4.6%	6.7%	5.8%	1.5%	26.9%	71.6%	334
Labor Unions	0.9%	1.0%	1.4%	1.2%	2.8%	26.8%	70.4%	71
Citizen Groups and Nonprofits	3.7%	9.4%	9.7%	9.4%	1.5%	34.2%	64.3%	541
Government Organizations	6.0%	11.0%	12.9%	12.0%	1.9%	31.3%	66.8%	693
Institutions	4.2%	8.9%	7.5%	7.8%	2.0%	38.6%	59.4%	451
Unknown	6.0%	6.2%	4.4%	5.1%	4.5%	41.4%	54.1%	292
Observations	216	1965	3591					5772

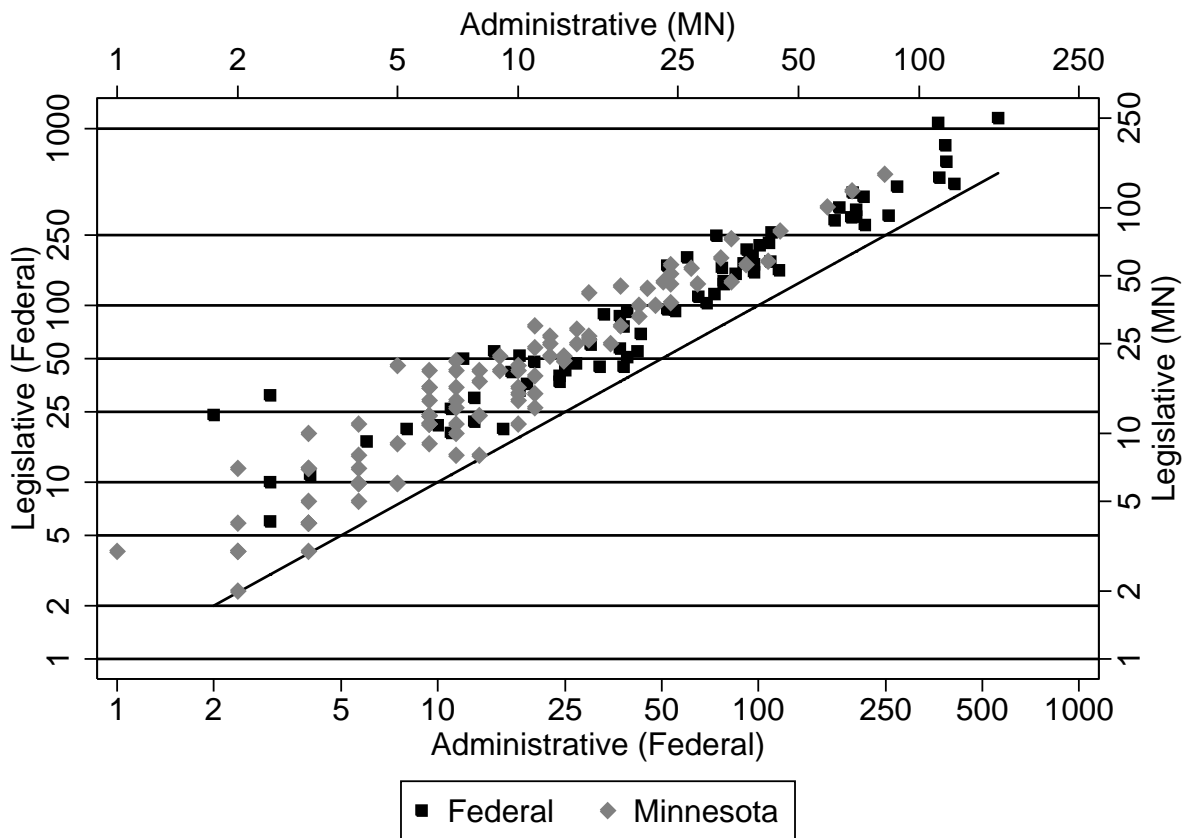
*Note.* Groups that listed no venues are excluded from these tabulation. See text for details on the construction of group categories.

Figure 1: Distribution of Groups' Legislative Lobbyists/Reports Conditioned on their Administrative Lobbyists/Reports, by Group-Policy Area



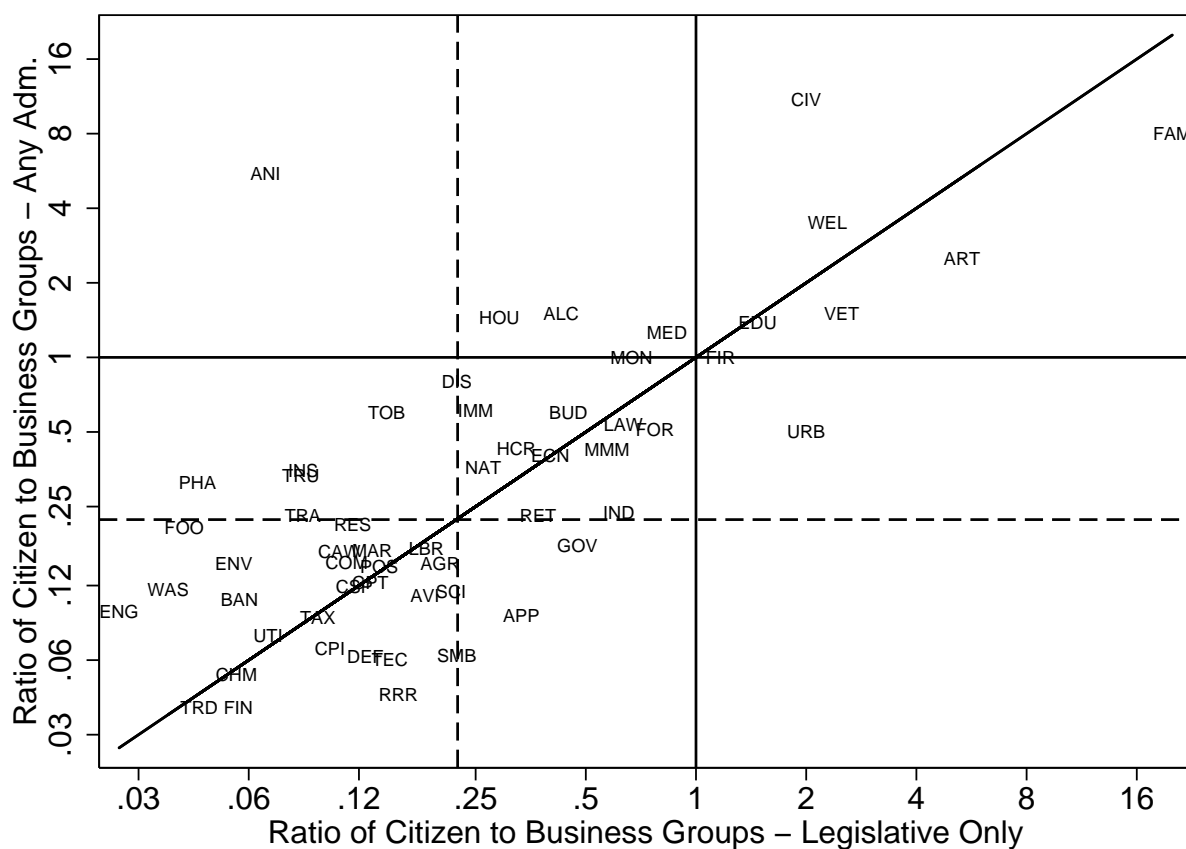
*Note.* The diagonal line corresponds to equal levels of lobbying in the two venues. Cases with six or more administrative or fifteen or more legislative lobbyists or reports were collapsed into one category for presentation (twenty and three cases, respectively, at the federal level and eight and two cases in Minnesota). Minnesota data exclude all groups that only engaged in metropolitan lobbying.

Figure 2: Total Groups per Venue by Policy Area (Axes on log scale)



*Note.* Data are counts of the number of groups that list each venue at least once for each of the seventy-six federal and ninety-six Minnesota policy areas. Diagonal line indicates equal number of mentions of both venues. In Minnesota, one policy area (Public Safety - Policy) is excluded due to no groups in the administrative venue. In Washington, D.C. one policy area had no observations (Accounting).

Figure 3: Representational Disparities by Venues: Ratio of Citizen Groups to Business Groups Across Policy Areas in Washington, D.C. (Axes on log scale)



*Note.* Legislative-only category includes all cases for which a group mentions only the legislature; the any administrative category includes all cases for which groups mention only the administrative branch or both the administrative and legislative venues. The diagonal line indicates equal ratios in both venues, while the dashed lines correspond to the average ratio in each venue in the full group-policy data set. A few policy areas are lost due to the presence of no businesses or citizen groups. See the text for more information. The three letter codes are used by the Federal government for each policy area (see <http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/ld-198.pdf> or Baumgartner and Leech's codebook for the LDA data.)