Controlling the Levers of Power: How Advocacy Organizations Affect the Regulation Writing Process

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The Federal regulation-writing process is vital to understanding how laws are translated into policy. This paper re-examines data on human services interest groups active in lobbying the executive branch to determine what factors influence their effectiveness. Building on findings from Hoefer (2000), structural equation modeling is used to re-analyze the original regression model of interest group effectiveness (IGE) on a sample of 127 Washington D.C.-based interest groups. Results indicate that some of the previous findings are not supported and an alternative model is proposed. A group's position, context and access to information and policymakers emerge as significant determinants of IGE. Access also mediates the impact of a group's strategy and position on IGE. Implications for practice and future research are provided.

Keywords: *human services, interest groups, regulations, policy, advocacy, structural equation modeling, policymaking*

Regulatory politics—the struggle for control over the
administrative levers of power and policy shaped
within government agencies—is central to government
activity in the United States (Harris and Milkus, 1989,
p. viii).

Regulations control implementation of laws. This vital
fact concerning the policy process can often be overlooked in
the euphoria of winning a legislative battle or in the dispirit-
ing crush of losing a vote. Either way, significant opportuni-
ties exist in the post-legislative process to affect policy, a fact
noted in the scant social work literature on the subject (Albert
1983; Bell & Bell 1982; Haynes & Mickelson 1997; Hoefer 2000;
Jansson 1999). Most of this social work literature, however, is
concerned with explaining what the regulatory process is and
how it fits into the policy process rather than with research-
ing how best to affect the process, particularly for the interest
groups that try on a daily basis to affect policy.
      Moving the administrative levers of policy requires in-
fluence and power. Interest groups that understand the im-
portance of regulatory policymaking want to be as effective
as possible in their pursuit of this task. The study of interest
group effectiveness (IGE) (a type of political power) is a subject
of great interest and importance, yet one that is controversial
because skeptics doubt that the concept can ever be measured.
The search for interest group influence has been equated with
"a blind man searching for a black cat in the coal bin at mid-
night" (Loomis 1983, p. 194). Less lyrically, Sloof (1998, p. 247)
states: "...the prospects for a comprehensive model of the po-
litical influence of competing interest groups on government
policy look rather dim."
      The major problem with demonstrating interest group in-
fluence is connected with the "second face of power" argument
(Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). This posits that truly influential
groups are at work behind the scenes so that proposals con-
trary to their interests are never put on the decision agenda.
If this were true, we would not need to study interest group

effectiveness, for it would be clear that interest groups visible in the process were not key actors in the agenda-setting or decision-making processes of government. Their actions would be mere window-dressing to confuse the masses into believing that their voices and actions (as reflected in interest group activity) were meaningful.

While the power to control the agenda is clearly important, the second face of power argument is not the end of the story. Important issues of concern to various interests *are* publicly debated and acted on by elected officials. The literature on agenda setting notes that issues are put onto the decision agenda in various ways, including crises or prominent events, changes in widely respected indicators, a gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among specialists, and the development of new technology (Kingdon, 1995, pp. 16-17). Baumgartner and Jones (1993) describe how shifts in the way an issue is viewed are instrumental in changing the political agenda. Thus, exceptions to a powerful actor's ability to control the agenda exist. Once a topic is on the agenda (whether by interest group activity or other means), interest groups then act to try to influence the outcome of the political battle. While interest groups may not control the agenda, Kingdon (1995, p. 50) argues that they "affect the alternatives considered", surely a significant type of power and one that might profitably be investigated.

For researchers not dissuaded from approaching this difficult subject, different approaches have been tried in an effort to measure interest group effectiveness. Similarly, review of the extant literature reveals a variety of different statistical methods used to identify the predictors of effectiveness and to understand the interrelationships among them. This paper presents research that adopts a different statistical technique to re-test Hoefer's (2000) ordinary least squares (OLS) model of interest group effectiveness in the Federal regulation-writing process using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Although a number of other types of analysis have been used in studying interest group power (notably, probit [Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998; Wiggins, Hamm & Bell, 1992], logit [Evans, 1996], and regression analysis [Grenzke, 1989; Haider-Markel, 1999], as well as modeling based on game theory [Sloof, 1998]),

SEM has rarely, if ever, been used despite its potential advantages. SEM is better in handling a dependent variable that is continuous (not possible with probit and logit techniques) and is better able to handle the multiple, overlapping variables and indirect pathways involved in this analysis than is regression analysis. It also allows for confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the measured variables are truly aspects of their respective theoretical constructs.

It is incumbent upon social work researchers to use the best theory and the most powerful tools available to test our understanding of phenomena of interest. Ordinary least squares regression techniques are powerful, but SEM is able to handle vexing issues that cannot be dealt with successfully using OLS. While Hoefer (2000) is a good example of the use of OLS, we believe the re-analysis of the data using structural equation modeling is justified because SEM is a more powerful technique for taking into account "the modeling of interactions, correlated independent variables, measurement error, correlated error terms, [and] multiple latent independent variables, each measured by multiple indicators..." (Garson, 2002, p. 1). SEM thus appears useful both to determine how robust Hoefer's original results are and to facilitate a more precise measurement of determinants using latent structures and multiple indicators that theory posits are important.

After describing past research to understand current thinking about measuring the concept of IGE and identifying the oft-cited determinants, this paper describes the results of testing the original model with SEM. Drawing from the interest group literature over the past decade, an alternative model with increased fit is proposed, which introduces new predictors absent in the original model. Findings are then discussed in the context of the existing literature and suggestions for future directions of research are presented.

Measuring Interest Group Effectiveness (IGE)

Two major approaches to measuring IGE are well documented. The first is measuring a group's reputation and the second is looking at "objective" indicators of influence, such as votes or bureaucratic decisions. A third approach, asking the

group itself how effective it is, is less common. Each strategy has advantages and disadvantages.

Reputational studies ask respondents how much influence particular other groups have. The logic behind this approach is that other interest group leaders, legislators or other policy actors have a sense of which groups are effective in achieving their goals and which groups are not effective. In this way, an interest group such as the National Rifle Association or the American Association of Retired Persons can be rated among the most powerful in their policy arena. The main advantages of this approach are that it is relatively easy to obtain, and is at least somewhat plausible. Unfortunately, it may be that other groups or actors see only a portion of a group's whole effort and may thus underestimate the group's impact. This approach may also overestimate group power if the group is caught in the currents of a legislative movement, riding the wave, rather than having stirred the waters itself.

Objective indicators, such as counting how often legislators vote in accordance with an interest group's wishes, are another way to measure IGE. The myriad studies of the effect of Political Action Committees on votes in Congress or in committees provide examples of this approach. This approach has a strong advantage in that the dependent variable is observable and countable. This greatly aids statistical analysis of the data collected. The downside of this approach is that it severely limits what is meant by interest group influence, thereby reducing the types of decisions that can be studied.

A third approach, not often used, though employed in this study (as in Hoefer, 2000 and Hoefer, 2005), is to ask group leaders how effective their own groups are. This straightforward approach allows for group leaders to weigh all of their efforts, both public and behind-the-scenes. It also allows for a continuous dependent variable, thus aiding statistical analysis. The major disadvantage to this approach is in not knowing how accurate it is.

Several arguments can be used to support its use, however. First, as controversy exists on how to measure the concept of IGE, it seems reasonable to use a measure with considerable face validity. Second, self-reported effectiveness is useful because it moves us away from a simple "win-lose"

perspective on government decision-making. Groups may know a defeat is coming, but be able to soften the blow. This should be considered as constituting an example of influence, even if the overall result is not what the group desires (Evans, 1996; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998). Finally, in the only empirical study where all three types of IGE measures (reputational, objective and self-report) were collected on the same groups (Hoefer, 1994a), the measures of objective and self-reported effectiveness were highly correlated ($r = .758$, $p < .01$). In the present study, as in the original Hoefer (2000) OLS model, interest group effectiveness consists of a single-item indicator, which is operationalized as the interest group member's perception of the percentage of time that the organization is considered to be successful in achieving its policy goals through affecting regulations.

Determinants of IGE

According to Sloof (1998, p. 18), when discussing legislative policymaking, "most studies...report a significant influence of lobbying on policy." While some studies use a "black box" approach to understanding what leads to this influence, much of the literature on legislative policymaking describes various factors that impede or increase an interest group's influence. Hoefer (2000) is one of the few to turn to a quantitative analysis of these factors in the Federal regulation-writing process. (For more details on the Federal regulation-writing process, see Albert [1983], Hoefer [2000] or Kerwin [2003].)

Using ordinary least squares regression, Hoefer (2000) determines that four factors influence interest group effectiveness. These factors are both internal and external to the group and can be categorized as: 1) group access to policymakers; 2) group policy positions; 3) group strategy; and 4) group resources. While the original OLS model utilized single-item indicators as predictors of interest group effectiveness, the alternative SEM aims to more fully define these complex constructs by incorporating both latent factors and observed variables. A short description of the literature in each of these areas follows. In the interest of parsimony, the authors limit their discussion to the extant literature around the effectiveness indicators

proposed for the alternative structural equation model. Although significant in the original OLS model, *Group Resources* was not a significant determinant of IGE and was thus eliminated from the final structural equation model. (For a complete review of the original OLS model and findings, see Hoefer [2000]).

Group Strategy

Two basic strategies for interest groups have been discussed in the literature. These are the inside strategy and the outside strategy (Walker, 1991). According to Walker (1991), neither strategy is inherently better than the other; both are ways to retain organizational viability, depending on the group's environment, membership and financing mechanisms. Hoefer (1994b), however, found that the use of inside tactics leads to greater levels of self-reported effectiveness in trying to affect the executive branch. Recasting the concept of strategy into when it is used in the regulation-writing process, Hoefer (2000) finds that interest groups using a "pre-publication" strategy of proactively bringing ideas regarding proposed regulations to policymakers are more successful than are groups not using that strategy. Using a pre-publication strategy is a conscious choice by a group, as it takes an allocation of resources "up-front" to research and prepare ideas for presentation to decision-makers. Even if the ideas are not immediately used in the proposed regulation, the group is able to access the policy actors involved and gain additional information regarding what ideas are being considered. This allows the group to modify its proposals to fit better into the agency's thinking. Hoefer's findings in the two manuscripts are consistent because a pre-publication strategy is an inside strategy, as the term is used by Walker (1991). (For more details on the regulation-writing process and the various strategies that may be used, see Hoefer, 2000).

On the basis of these findings, Hypothesis 1 is that greater use of a "pre-publication" strategy will lead to greater effectiveness. Related, Hypothesis 2 is that the more a group uses a pre-publication strategy, the more access it will have to information and policy actors.

Group Position

   One of the key aspects of interest groups is what they per-
ceive as their interests and thus what policy positions they
take. This has an impact on how effective they are, as groups
with positions outside of the mainstream or not in tune with
Congressional or Administration priorities are likely to have
less influence (Greenwald, 1977; Ziegler, 1964). Hoefer (2000)
found that the group's policy position was important in un-
derstanding a group's level of effectiveness. While the Clinton
administration is widely viewed as more "centrist" or "mod-
erate" than liberal (Stoesz, 1996), Clinton's government was
more apt to see increases in government programs and author-
ity in a favorable light than were the governments of Ronald
Reagan and George H. W. Bush, his immediate predecessors.

   Because the data were collected at a time when President
Clinton was in office, Hypothesis 3 is that more liberal posi-
tions will lead to greater group effectiveness and Hypothesis
4 is that the more liberal a group's position, the more access it
will have to information and policy actors in the Clinton ex-
ecutive branch.

Group Context

   Several authors suggest that the context within which the
interest group operates (particularly the level of conflict) is
an additional aspect of a group's situation that influences its
level of effectiveness (Walker, 1991). The more conflict in an
issue area, the less likely any group is to be effective (Evans,
1996). The existence of interest groups with opposing posi-
tions decreases interest group influence (Sloof, 1998). Wiggins,
Hamm and Bell (1992) show that elected officials can limit in-
terest group influence as well. Policymakers want compet-
ing interests to bring forth proposals that are acceptable to all
concerned. When no such acceptable compromise exists, deci-
sion-makers may try to delay a vote (Evans, 1996; Kingdon,
1989). Groups prefer to specialize in a narrow niche and to
avoid direct competition with other groups (Browne, 1990;
Walker, 1991). Given that the policy arena for the groups in
this study is human services, oftentimes seen as a redistribu-
tive type of policy, we may expect a fairly high level of conflict
to exist. Based on prior work, Hypothesis 5 is that the greater

the level of conflict in the group's environment, the less effective it will be.

Group Access to Information and Policy Actors

One of the key elements of lobbying is gaining access to and cooperation from policymakers (Rosenthal, 1993). Without access, little effective lobbying can occur (Greenwald, 1977; Culhane & Hacker, 1988). Hoefer (2000) shows that when agency personnel contact interest groups to provide information, interest group self-reported levels of effectiveness increase. Access to policy actors is also potential access to greater levels of information, as noted above. Thus, what might be considered two separate variables are combined here into one latent construct. On the basis of these findings, Hypothesis 6 proposes that higher levels of access to information and policymakers will lead to greater effectiveness.

In addition to this expected direct path between access and IGE, it seems logical to believe that the degree of access that a group has to information and policy actors is influenced both by the strategy it uses and the positions it takes. As one leader of a group interested in equal rights for gays, lesbians and transgendered people said regarding the administration of the first President George Bush: "We didn't even get in the door of their offices." As such, Hypothesis 7 is that access to information and policy actors will mediate the effect of strategy on effectiveness. Related, Hypothesis 8 is that access to information and policy actors will mediate the effect of position on effectiveness. In other words, we believe that strategy and policy position have both direct effects on IGE (Hypotheses 2 and 4) as well as indirect effects through access to information and policy actors.

Hypothesized Model

Coalescing the correlates of IGE, Figure 1 displays the hypothesized structural equation model of interest group effectiveness. The causal ordering and specific hypotheses are drawn from interest group theory and empirical precedents of IGE.

Methods

Data and Sample
    The data originally used by Hoefer (2000) were collected in 1995 from Washington, D.C.-based interest group staff using a mailed survey. In order to be included in the research, a group needed to be active in social policy and attempt to influence

Figure 1. Hypothesized structural model of interest group effectiveness.
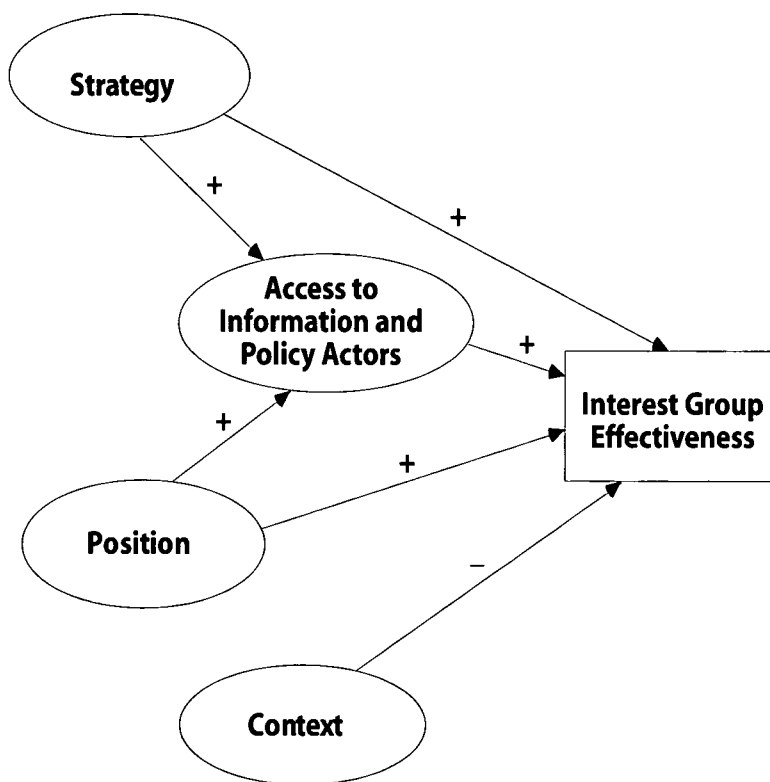
both the legislative and executive branches. Groups were initially identified through the 1993 *Washington Information Directory*, published by Congressional Quarterly. A phone contact was made to determine if the interest group met the

criteria for inclusion in the study. At that time, the person who was most responsible for trying to influence the executive branch was determined. The survey was pre-tested on a small number of organizations and 10 personal interviews were conducted using the draft survey in order to improve and finalize the instrument.

A typical mail survey process was used, with initial mailing, post-card follow-up and a second full mailing to all non-respondents after 3 weeks. A new survey was sent to remaining non-respondents after an additional 6 weeks. Of the 295 groups initially determined to fit the study criteria, usable responses were received from 127 groups, for a response rate of 43%, a very respectable return rate for surveys such as this.

Measures

In the present study, *group strategy* refers to an overall approach to influencing policy. This latent construct is comprised of two of the three items from the original survey that were designed to measure the "pre-publication" strategy. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to select the following two indicators: 1) work to bring shortcomings of current regulations to the attention of executive branch agencies, and 2) offer drafts of regulations prior to agency publication of proposed regulations. Factor loadings were 0.90 and 0.58 respectively. Each indicator is operationalized by responses on a 6-point, Likert-type scale to questions regarding the importance of these organizational activities in achieving policy goals. Higher scores reflect increased importance of the respective activities.

Group position is defined as the extent to which the group advocates for a larger role for the federal government in solving social problems, which we label as being a more "liberal" point of view. Position consists of a latent factor with four indicators, which were selected on the basis of construct validity from among six items on the original survey. CFA produced high factor loadings that ranged from 0.70 to 0.82. Each item is operationally defined as the interest group leader's perception of the organization's policy regarding the desired level of expenditure by the federal government for health, social, housing and civil rights services. Higher numbers correspond with an organizational policy that supports an increased amount of

Table 1
Definitions of Measures and Descriptives of Model's Variables

FACTOR/ VARIABLE	LABEL	SURVEY ITEM	RANGE	MEAN	SD
STRATEGY		*In regard to influencing the executive branch and the writing of regulations, organizations may engage in a variety of activities in order to achieve their public policy goals. Please indicate your best estimate of the importance of each activity to your organization. (1 = not important; 6=s one of most important.)*			
	Executive branch	Work to bring shortcomings of current regulations to the attention of executive branch agencies.	1-6	4.46	1.58
	Public	Offer drafts of regulations prior to agency publication of proposed regulations.	1-6	3.28	1.81
POSITION		*For each of the following policy areas, please indicate which statement reflects most accurately the policy of this organization concerning the level of expenditures or provision of services by the federal government: (0 = no position; 5 = much more.)*			
	Health	Health	0-5	3.32	2.11
	Non-health	Non-health human services	0-5	3.34	1.97
	Housing	Housing and urban policy	0-5	3.08	2.17
	Civil rights	Civil rights and civil liberties	0-5	2.90	2.01
CONTEXT		*Listed below are a number of statements that might describe your organization. Some of these statements may be a good description of the organizations, while others may be a poor description. For each statement, please indicate your best estimate of whether it is a good or poor description of this organization, or something in between. (1 = poor description; 5 = good description.)*			
	Intense conflict	This organization works in a policy arena marked by intense conflict or disagreement over fundamental policy goals.	1-5	3.04	1.52
	Conflict erupts	This organization works in a policy arena where conflict erupts very often.	1-5	3.08	1.29
	Elected oppose	Some important elected officials oppose the policy aims of this organization.	1-5	3.53	1.33
	Org groups oppose	Some organized groups oppose the policy aims of this organization.	1-5	3.51	1.38

FACTOR/ VARIABLE	LABEL	SURVEY ITEM	RANGE	MEAN	SD
ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND POLICY ACTORS		*Organizations may use several different ways to keep abreast of pending changes in regula-tions. How important are the following methods to you? (1 = not engaged in; 6 = one of most important.)*			
	Federal register	Reading the Federal Register	1-6	3.67	1.86
	# agencies interacted	How many different cabinet departments and independent agencies of the federal government did this organization communicate, consult or interact with during the past year? (1 = none; 5 = more than 5)	1-5	3.66	1.05
	Frequency of interaction	For the federal agency with which this organization communicates, consults, or inter-acts the most, how often does this organization interact with it? (1 = almost never; 4 = frequently interacts)	1-4	3.52	0.72

federal expenditures (i.e., a more liberal position).

Group context refers to the milieu in which the group is operating, one which can be more or less conflictual. This construct is a latent factor comprised of four observed indicators, which were selected from among eight items on the original survey using CFA. Factor loadings were moderate to high, ranging from 0.56 to 0.86. The indicators were operationalized by responses on a 5-point, Likert-type scale to questions concerning the accuracy of proposed descriptive characteristics to each respective organization. Higher scores indicate increased accuracy of the respective organizational descriptions.

Group access to information and policy actors denotes the extent to which a group has a variety of information sources upon which to draw and have the ability to provide information to agency decision-makers. Access is a latent construct operationalized by four indicators, which were selected from the original survey as the most theoretically relevant indicators of an interest group's access to information and policy actors. CFA produced factor loadings for these items that ranged from 0.53 to 0.87. Two of the four indicators were measured on 6-point, Likert-type scales in which higher scores indicate that accessing government agencies and reading the *Federal Register* have increased importance. One variable was measured on a 5-point scale in which higher numbers connote an increased number of attempts to communicate, consult or interact with different cabinet departments and independent agencies. The remaining variable was measured on a 4-point scale in which higher values reflect an increased frequency of interactions with federal agencies.

Interest group effectiveness (IGE) refers to the organization's perceived success in achieving policy goals through influencing regulations. This single-item indicator is defined by respondents' answers to the survey question: "Thinking about all of the times your organization tries to achieve its policy goals through affecting regulations, what percentage of the time do you think it is successful?" Higher scores indicate a greater percentage of perceived success. The operational definitions, means and standard deviations for all variables in the SEM are detailed in Table 1.

Results

Analysis of Hoefer's Original OLS Model Using SEM

Hoefer's (2000) original OLS model was re-analyzed using SEM. Given that the original model was not designed as a structural model, it violates several of the assumptions of SEM and clearly does not maximize this technique's unique strengths. Nevertheless, the re-analysis is justified given the aims of our paper. Slight differences in findings between the OLS and the SEM models resulted from the analysis. While two variables—degree of access and strategy—were stronger determinants of interest group effectiveness in the SEM model, the remaining predictors—policy position and resources—displayed weaker loadings than in the OLS model. Policy position, which was a statistically significant predictor in the OLS model, had a non-significant factor loading in relation to effectiveness in the SEM model. Both models explained relatively the same amount of variance in effectiveness (27% via OLS and 26% via SEM).

Overall, goodness-of-fit indicators for the structural model indicate that the SEM is not a solid-fitting model. Due to the influence of sample size on the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic, Byrne (2001) suggests the ratio of the chi-square statistic to the degrees of freedom (CMINDF) of less than 2.0 as an alternative indicator of a good-fitting model. The CMINDF value for the SEM model was 7.9. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .958 (desired value above .90 or .95 by more conservative estimates), while the RMSEA was far outside the desired range at 0.234 (desired value < 0.05).

In light of these findings, we proceeded to develop an alternative model that would take advantage of SEM's strengths by creating latent factors for the original variables in the OLS model from the literature on interest group effectiveness. Additionally, the alternative structural equation model introduces a new factor, policy context, which was absent from the OLS model.

Analysis of Alternative Structural Equation Model for Interest Group Effectiveness

Given that structural equation modeling is a multi-stage

process, confirmatory factor analysis was first used to determine whether the measured variables were considered to be valid indicators of their underlying constructs (Bollen, 1989). Factor loadings for all indicators in the three overidentified measurement models—position, context and access—were moderate to high and all loadings were statistically significant, lending credence to the convergent validity of the indicators (Hatcher, 1994). One measurement model—strategy—was underidentified due to insufficient number of known data points, yet was included in the full structural model on the basis of content validity.

Figure 2. Hypothesized full model of interest group effectiveness. (Note: All paths statistically significant at p<.05.)
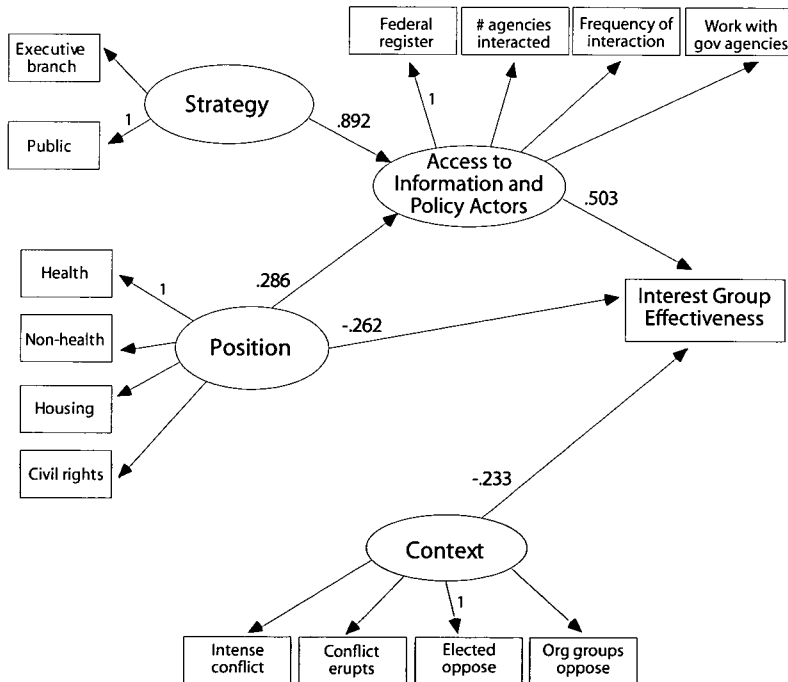
The measurement models were combined into a full latent variable model and a structural equation analysis was conducted using the AMOS 5.0 program and the maximum

Likelihood estimation method. The Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) method of estimation was used to handle all missing data (Arbuckle, 1996). Missing data for this sample were relatively low, ranging from 0 to 20% of the total number of valid responses across all predictor variables. The full latent model displayed in Figure 2 produced a testable, overidentified model with 83 degrees of freedom.

Table 2 presents the goodness-of-fit estimates for the full model. Based on the measures of overall fit, there is evidence that the hypothesized alternative model of interest group effectiveness is a sound-fitting model, considering the small sample size used here. The CMINDF value of 1.3 is indicative of a good-fitting model, demonstrating a considerable improvement in fit from the 7.9 value displayed in the first SEM model of Hoefer's OLS re-analysis. The CFI and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) were also both well above the acceptable cut-off value, displaying values of .961 and .963, respectively. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) constitutes a widely used criterion within the literature, yet because this index tends to underestimate fit when sample sizes are small, the IFI was preferred on the basis of the sample size used in this study. The RMSEA of .050 reflects a good-fitting model and represents a substantial improvement from the RMSEA value of .234 from the first SEM model. The relatively narrow confidence interval ranging from .017 to .074 indicates a high degree of precision (Byrne, 2001). As such, one can be 90% confident that the true RMSEA value in the population is located within the range of .017 and .074. Finally, the overall R-Square for IGE in the revised model was 0.301. Thus, the four hypothesized latent constructs account for 30% of the variance in interest group effectiveness. Based on existing R^2 values cited in the literature, strategy, resources, position and access collectively account for a total of 27% of the variation in interest group effectiveness (Hoefer, 2000). One advantage of SEM over OLS here is that given the use of latent constructs in SEM, the variance modeled constitutes true latent variance since the measurement error is excluded and modeled separately (Byrne, 2001).

Table 2
Overall Goodness-of-Fit Estimates for Modeling Interest Group
Effectiveness

FIT INDEX	ESTIMATE
Overall Chi Square (CMIN)	109.03
Degrees of Freedom (DF)	83
Significance (P)	0.029
Number of Parameters (NPAR)	52
Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom (CMINDF)	1.31
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.961
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	.963
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	.944
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	.863

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)
     RMSEA lower bound
     RMSEA upper bound
	.050
	.017
	.074

Overall R-Square (for Interest Group Effectiveness)	.301

With respect to the individually hypothesized relation-
ships among the variables in the revised model, the initial
speculations were fairly accurate. Standardized regression co-
efficients are listed in Table 3 and explained more fully below
by predictor variables.

The data failed to support our first hypothesis: *greater
use of a "pre-publication" strategy will lead to greater effective-
ness.* Group strategy was not found to positively impact ef-
fectiveness. However, the data did support our second spec-
ulation that *the more a group uses a pre-publication strategy, the
more access it will have to information and policy actors.* Results
showed that group strategy had a significant, positive effect
on access to information and policy actors, with a standard-
ized weight of 0.89 (p<.001). As the strongest coefficient in the

model, the relationship between group strategy and access to information and policy actors constitutes a unique contribution to the existing interest group literature, given that previous studies have solely assessed the direct effects of group strategy on interest group effectiveness, rather than possible indirect effects through another mediating variable (Hoefer, 2000).

Table 3

Standardized and (Unstandardized) Parameter Estimates for the Structural Model for Interest Group Effectiveness

	Dependent Variables	
Predictor Variables	Access to Information and Policy Actors	Interest Group Effectiveness
Strategy	.892 (.902)***	
Position	.286 (.196)**	-.262 (-4.167)*
Context		-.233 (-4.827)*
Access to Information and Policy Actors		.503 (11.677)***
Strategy x Access (Indirect Effect)		.449
Position x Access (Indirect Effect)		.144
R^2	.877	.301

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

Regarding the third hypothesis, *more liberal positions will lead to greater group effectiveness*, contrary to what we expected, position had a significant, *negative* impact on effectiveness. The standardized effect of position on IGE was -0.26 ($p < .05$). However, we did find support for our fourth hypothesis: *the more liberal a group's position, the more access it will have to information and policy actors*. Position was found to have a significant, positive effect on access to information and policy actors, with a standardized path of 0.29 ($p < .01$).

The fifth hypothesis, *the greater the level of conflict in the group's environment, the less effective it will be,* was also support-ed by the data. Policy context was found to have a significant, negative impact on overall levels of interest group effective-ness, with a standardized weight of -0.23 (p<.05). This finding also confirms earlier results found in the literature indicating that conflict and opposition in the policy arena have a negative effect on interest groups' perceived success levels in achieving their policy goals through affecting regulations (Evans, 1996; Sloof, 1998).

Likewise, we found support for our sixth hypothesis: *higher levels of access to information and policymakers will lead to greater effectiveness.* Indeed, access had a significant, positive effect on IGE. The standardized structural path coefficient was 0.50 (p<.001). This, too, is in line with prior research (Hoefer, 2000; Rosenthal, 1993).

Finally, the data also support our final two hypotheses on the indirect effects of strategy and position on effectiveness: *access will mediate the effects of strategy* (Hypothesis 7) *and posi-tion* (Hypothesis 8) *on effectiveness.* As speculated, access sig-nificantly and positively mediated the effects of strategy (0.45, p<.001) and position (0.14, p<.05) on effectiveness. The indirect effects of both constructs on IGE—mediated through access—are novel findings within the interest group literature.

Discussion and Implications

The use of SEM to re-evaluate the same data analyzed with OLS by Hoefer (2000) has led to some different results, high-lighting the importance of continually testing our knowledge base with the best analysis techniques possible. Of our eight hypotheses, six are confirmed, one is found to be non-signifi-cant and one is found to be the reverse of what we expected.

Hypothesis 2 (Prepublication strategy leads to greater access), Hypothesis 4 (Liberal position leads to greater access), Hypothesis 5 (Conflict leads to less effectiveness) and Hypothesis 6 (Greater access leads to higher effectiveness) are all confirmed. As these are all well-grounded in the literature, this is welcome news. In some ways, these results seem like "common sense" but they have important implications for social work advocates.

First, related to Hypothesis 5, we must strive to eliminate conflict if we want to achieve our goals. Working within coalitions and moving across old boundaries of conflictual relationships are important tools for our advocacy. At the same time, when other groups are active, pushing proposals that are inimical to client interests, we can see that it pays to be a very squeaky wheel, as conflict can bring a halt to further regulatory action, making the other group less effective.

Another implication is that what social work interest groups choose to do in terms of the strategy they use and the positions they take has a significant impact on whether they can get in the door of policymakers' offices and gain access to the information there (Hypotheses 2 and 4). Thus, in the regulation-writing process, becoming involved *before* the regulations are published in the Federal Register is vital. Efforts must be made to understand the importance of this part of the policy process, to influence or at least find out to which agency the regulation is being assigned for writing and whom the lead author will be. A relationship should then be created quickly so that the group's ideas are able to be put into the process. Of course, all this advice presupposes that the organization has ideas developed and ready to promote. All of these actions are under the control of the organization's leadership.

In addition, the results clearly show that having access to information and policy actors makes an important difference in how effective a group perceives itself to be. While social work groups clearly do not want to compromise their values, it pays to understand how important the positions taken and the strategy used are for getting results.

Hypothesis 1 (Strategy choice affects effectiveness directly) was not supported by the data. In combination with support for Hypotheses 2 and 7, however, we find that choice of strategy *is* important, but not directly. While a bit surprising, this result shows the importance of using the best analytical methods available. Previous research did not tease out the important mediating effect of access to information and policy actors. Structural Equation Modeling has shown its usefulness in providing a clearer picture of the relationships between the concepts explored here and in previous research. As noted earlier, access is vital to achieving success within an "inside" or

"pre-publication" strategy. Without access, there is no chance of presenting ideas or having them inserted into policy. The results thus reinforce the idea that access is vital if an inside strategy, such as the pre-publication strategy, is to be effective.

The most surprising finding is that a group's more liberal position directly leads to less, rather than more perceived effectiveness, which was what we predicted in Hypothesis 3. Again, SEM has provided us a valuable insight not seen before in the literature. More liberal positions are associated with working with more agencies, seeing them more frequently and believing these connections are more important; but these liberal positions, in and of themselves, lead to less effectiveness in affecting regulations.

A possible explanation for these apparently contradictory findings is that there is a bit of a gap in the executive branch between the civil servants working on the regulations and the political appointees who make the final decisions. The civil servants who interact with interest group representatives may themselves be more liberal than those above them in the hierarchy who are beholden to the President for their jobs. Because President Clinton was a centrist, trying to balance liberal and conservative views in order to maintain his influence over social policy issues, groups that were "too liberal" may have found themselves coming up short when the overall policy decisions were made by political appointees (not the civil servants with whom the interest groups would have worked). One example of President Clinton's balancing-act proclivities can be seen in his signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This law dismantled the entitlement program Aid to Families with Dependent Children and created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, a policy decision which many liberals decried. It should be remembered that President Clinton faced Republican majorities in the House and Senate from 1994 to 2000, which was during most of his two terms in office. This finding and possible explanation indicate how important it is to social workers to have people in the White House and in Congress who have a strong mandate to work on progressive social issues. It makes an important difference for us and our clients *who* is in office.

Finding that a group's more liberal policy positions are related to its effectiveness only when mediated by access is an important contribution to the literature. Practically speaking, it implies that groups with access may be creating "internal lobbyists," that is, civil servants who can argue for more liberal regulations on a constant basis from within the agency. Providing these civil servants with convincing data and arguments to counteract their politically motivated bosses (of whatever party) may be one of the most important roles that human service advocates can play in trying to influence the executive branch.

Every study has its limitations, however, and these must be acknowledged. First, from a methodological perspective, the use of several skewed variables and a small sample size inhibits our ability to generalize the model to the larger population. The results would also be more generalizable if the response rate were higher. Another methodological limitation is the nature of the data themselves. The variables are all self-reported measures and are open to the biases any self-reported data may have. Finally, changes in the political environment happening since these data were collected may lead to different results. Thus, until further data collection is done, these results should be considered somewhat tentative.

Conclusion

Despite the study limitations, this paper has important implications, both for social work practitioners and for social work researchers. Substantively, it presents information that largely confirms the previous literature and adds additional nuances to other parts. As budget deficits created by tax cuts and foreign wars wreak havoc on social spending at the federal level, leaving millions of program recipients with fewer resources, the study of how interest groups and social workers in general can impact the policy process becomes ever more important. Using limited resources as effectively as possible becomes not just important, but the "right thing to do." Research such as this, using the best data and analytical tools available, should lead current practitioners to perform their

jobs better.

   This paper also challenges social work researchers. It illustrates that the choice of analytical technique is important and we should always be willing to test our past understanding by subjecting our data-derived conclusions to further scrutiny using more advanced analytical methods. Understanding what techniques are appropriate and translating results into best practices for practitioners becomes more important as analytical techniques become more complex. As always, the most important message to researchers is to keep skills sharp and models flexible. Moving forward with theory-based research and the most powerful appropriate tools available, we can then have findings that can be translated into evidence-based practice guidelines. This process is vital for all of us affected by the social work profession, whether we are researchers, practitioners, clients or policymakers.

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