

Voice-In, Voice-Out: Constituent Participation and Nonprofit Advocacy*

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ABSTRACT

How do participatory constituent practices affect the scope, intensity, and efficacy of nonprofit advocacy? In this paper, we empirically examine this question through the use of survey data from a random sample of 1,347 charitable nonprofit organizations in Arizona in 2007. Our findings show that the scope of nonprofit advocacy activities increases with constituent board membership, communication with constituents, and level of constituent involvement in strategic decision making. In contrast, the scope of advocacy activities diminishes with the growth in government funding and private contributions.

Nonprofit organizations contribute to democratic governance by representing the interests of citizens to the state via lobbying and advocacy activities (Warren, 2001). In order to provide an accurate voice for their constituents, nonprofit organizations must first establish governance mechanisms that allow their constituents to participate in the shaping of the organization—in the development of the organization’s mission, vision, and strategies (Guo & Musso, 2007; McCambridge, 2004). Though this idea of a connection between constituent voice and advocacy output dovetails with citizen participation research – which suggests participation in organizational decision-making shapes political behavior and attitudes (Almond & Verba, 1963), develops civic skills and democratic values (Brady et al., 1995), and generates social capital (Putnam, 1993, 1995) – no empirical research to date has been done on the relationship between constituent participation (i.e., voice-in) and nonprofit advocacy (i.e., voice-out).

This insight led us to the following research question: how do participatory constituent practices affect the scope, intensity, and efficacy of nonprofit organizations’ advocacy activities? In this paper, we empirically examine this question through the use of survey data from a random sample of 1,347 charitable nonprofit organizations in Arizona in 2007. Our results show that the scope of nonprofit advocacy activities increases with constituent board membership, communication with constituents, and level of constituent involvement in strategic decision making. By contrast, as the percentages of government funding and private contributions increase, the scope of advocacy activities diminishes. In addition, measures of organizational size (staff size and revenue size) are positively associated with the scope of advocacy activities, whereas arts, education, and human services organizations are negatively associated with the scope of advocacy activities.

The paper is organized into four sections. We begin with a review of relevant literature that leads to our main hypothesis on constituent inputs and nonprofit advocacy. The second and third sections describe the methodology and present findings respectively. We conclude the paper with a discussion about the contributions and limitations of the study.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Berry (1994) argues that “[g]overnance questions are questions about representation. More specifically, they are questions about how well people’s views are represented within an organization, and how members’ views correspond to what their lobbying organization communicates to government” (p. 23). In accordance with this view, our general theoretical framework in this paper is built on the notion of “representation” in nonprofit organizations.

In particular, we generate our hypotheses using a recent theoretical synthesis developed by Guo and Musso (2007). The literature has long noted the multi-dimensional nature of constituent representation (e.g., Pitkin, 1967) – with truly “representative” organizations utilizing a mix of constituent-focused practices – and Guo and Musso (2007) synthesize these practices into a five-dimensional representational framework. Their framework implicitly posits a system of representational “inputs,” covering formal, descriptive, and participatory representation, and representational “outputs” in the form of substantive and symbolic representation. Our study makes this relationship explicit and examines the connection between constituent-focused inputs and outputs. Our guiding proposition is that the quality of representational outputs, or “voice out,” should be determined by the quality of representational “inputs.”

“Voice Out” – Nonprofit Advocacy

The representational “output” we are concerned with here is public policy-related *advocacy*, or efforts to influence or change governmental policies at the local, state, or federal levels. Though to many in the public the word “advocacy” brings up images of direct lobbying of politicians, an organization planning to conduct public policy advocacy can in fact choose from a broad array of potential advocacy strategies, including, among others, litigation, public education, judicial advocacy, administrative lobbying, the mobilization of grassroots support and, yes, the direct lobbying of politicians.

In terms of the Guo and Musso (2007) representational framework, there are compelling arguments that advocacy is an essential indicator of *substantive representation* and *symbolic representation* – or how well an organization’s representatives “*act for*” and “*stand for*” the interests of their constituents (Pitkin, 1967),¹ Our central argument is that those organizations that receive more constituent inputs – particularly in terms of formal, descriptive, and participatory representation – will have more substantive and symbolic representation on the “output” side in the form of meaningful advocacy efforts.

Given the lack of prior research on this connection, we provide below our logic on nonprofit advocacy and how the various dimensions of constituent inputs might be expected to affect an organization’s advocacy efforts. To start, there is a growing body of literature on nonprofit advocacy (e.g., Berry & Arons, 2003; Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009; Saidel, 2002) and its “democratic” functions.

¹ *Symbolic representation* generally occurs when an organization is trusted by its constituents as their legitimate representative, and provides intangible benefits in terms of trust and legitimacy of an organization as perceived by its constituents. *Substantive representation*, in turn, refers to the extent that an organization’s representatives “act for” the interests of their constituents, or acts in a manner responsive to them. Substantive representation is often measured by the congruence between leaders and constituents on issues of most importance. Guo and Musso (2007) argue that substantive representation and symbolic representation are the most direct measures of the democratic capacities of nonprofit organizations.

O'Connell (1994) categorized the roles of nonprofit organizations into service, advocacy, and empowerment. In a subsequent study, O'Connell went on to argue that service is secondary to the functions of advocacy and empowerment (O'Connell, 1996). In a similar vein, Frumkin (2002) focuses on four important functions that have come to define nonprofit organizations: delivering needed services, promoting civic engagement, express values and faith, and channeling entrepreneurial impulses. Advocacy is not only important for those nonprofit organizations whose primary goals are to engage in external representational activities (e.g., advocacy groups), but it is also relevant to charitable organizations (e.g., hospitals, universities, museums, churches, and human service organizations). Even though advocacy remains outside their core mission, charitable organizations have enormous potential to improve the lives of their constituents by influencing public policy and empowering their constituents to represent themselves effectively (O'Connell 1994; Guo, 2007). In short, nonprofit advocacy is often seen as not just another "service," but as a critical component of a nonprofit organization's responsibility to its constituents as well as civil society as a whole.

Elizabeth Reid (1999) defines nonprofit advocacy as "attempts by nonprofits to influence government decisions" (p.291). Beyond this point, however, relatively few studies disaggregate the umbrella term "nonprofit advocacy" into discrete activities (Saidel, 2002). An important exception is Reid (1999), who proposes a useful typology of nonprofit advocacy that includes ten categories: legislative advocacy, grassroots advocacy, public education and public opinion shaping, electoral advocacy, among others. Avner (2002) similarly identifies ten basic advocacy strategies: direct lobbying, grassroots lobbying, research, media advocacy, administrative advocacy, public education, coalition building, voter registration, public events/direct action, and lawsuits and courts. For the purpose of this study, we follow the above typologies of advocacy

activities in our discussion of the scope and intensity of nonprofit advocacy. Appendix I includes a complete list of relevant strategies with definitions.

“Voice In” – Constituent Inputs

Our examination of “voice in” centers on two constituent input mechanisms in the Guo and Musso (2007) framework—namely, “descriptive,” and “participatory” representation. Empirical evidence has shown that levels of such representation vary and are often low among nonprofit organizations. Nearly a century ago, German sociologist Robert Michels (1962) observed the inherent tendency of political parties (a subset of nonprofit organizations) to develop a small, self-serving group of leaders with interests in the organization itself rather than in its constituency. Later studies on Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” have produced mixed findings. Notably, Knoke’s (1990) national association study found that, on a four-point scale ranging from “never” to “regularly,” average internal participation was closest to “rarely;” most association members were not active on the set of internal issues nominated by their leaders.

How might it affect the ability of nonprofit organizations to represent constituent interests if these organizations coopt their constituencies rather than represent their true needs (Cooper & Musso, 1999, pp. 206-207), or if they are “coopted by the government” (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977, p.40) and become “agents of government” (Smith & Lipsky, 1993, p.72)? Although it is widely held that a nonprofit organization should act in the best interests of its constituency and that the board should “function as guardian or steward to safeguard the public interest” (Axlrod, 1994, p.120), it is not at all clear how this would be happening. Indeed, what are the possible mechanisms through which nonprofit organizations can be held more responsible, representative, and responsive to the demands of those whom they claim to be representing? And, more central

to the task at hand, how might different forms and levels of constituent inputs affect an organization's advocacy efforts?

Constituent Input I: Descriptive Representation. Descriptive representation appears to offer one possible, albeit indirect, mechanism for receiving constituent input. This form of voice occurs when leaders of an organization are in some respects "typical" of the organizational constituents (Guo and Musso 2007). Austin and Woolever (1992) argued that, if nonprofit organizations perform mediating function between citizens and the larger social institutions, then "the extent to which voluntary organizations represent the actual populations of their constituent geographic domains . . . in governance" should be of concern (p. 181). They further argued that "[if] participation in the organization is completely random, we would expect the composition of membership and boards to reflect community population characteristics" (p. 183). As such, descriptive representation in board governance might provide effective mechanisms by which the needs and concerns of multiple constituents are relayed to organizational leadership. As a nonprofit leader nicely illustrated:

"True diversity means bringing unlikely perspective to the board table so that they inform and enrich debate about the mission and action of the organization. . . . [Through building boards of trustees that reflect the diversity in the community,] board dialogue becomes a conversation across communities and among stakeholders that illuminates the organization's mission and life in new ways." (Dodson, 1992; as quoted in Widmer & Houchin, 2000: 130)

To a lesser extent, scholars have also related board of directors to the organizational-level analysis of the developmental effects of nonprofit organizations on citizens. Zimmermann, for instance, suggested that nonprofit organizations "might serve better as training grounds for democracy" if their boards are "more truly representative" of the community (Zimmermann, 1994, p. 401). Smith and Lipsky (1993) argued that nonprofit organizations are "tangible, significant manifestations of community" and pathways to citizen participation (p. 22), and that

“[boards] of directors, more than any other aspect of nonprofit organizations, embody and represent community interests” (p. 74). Implicitly, at least, these arguments provide a link between descriptive representation and advocacy.

Constituent Input II: Participatory Representation. Existing literature also alludes to the connection between participatory representation and advocacy outcomes. In Guo and Musso’s (2007) framework, the notion of participatory representation entails the extent of direct participatory relationships between organizational leaders and their constituents. This form of representation highlights the importance of maintaining a variety of channels of communication with constituents. The prevalence of this dimension can be indicated by the existence of certain inclusive organizational and governance practices in an organization. Participatory representation has become more salient as computer networks continue to open up unprecedented opportunities for new systems of participatory representation based upon direct, unmediated communication and interaction between citizens and legislative assemblies (Zittel 2002).

In the context of charitable organizations, where *formal representation* – the selection of leaders through the medium of frequent, free elections² – is virtually absent, constituent participation in the decision-making process offers stronger control over the directions of these organizations. Constituent participation engages constituents in an on-going public dialogue within an organization through which matters of public concern can be communicated and deliberated, and thus improves the control of the organization by its constituents. Evidence suggests that participatory mechanisms, in the forms of inclusive organizational and board practices, facilitate the organizations’ representation of and sensitivity to constituents (Brown,

² According to Guo and Musso (2007), *formal representation* refers to the formal organizational arrangements that establish the ways in which its leaders are selected by constituents.

1999). Strategies to understand constituents can differ depending on organizational need, but some general practices include communicating decisions to the people they affect and obtaining statistical information about constituents and the larger community. Moreover, constituent participation also performs an educational function, allowing those involved to develop a keener understanding of the system, and facilitating the development of political and civic skills of ordinary constituents.

Summary of Theoretical Propositions

In sum, our central proposition is that representational outputs are impacted by the nature of representational inputs; that is, “voice in” affects “voice out.” Our concern in this paper is with the effects of two key forms of constituent-related inputs – descriptive representation and participatory representation – on advocacy, which we argue to be a key indicator of representational output. Accordingly, we have our main hypothesis:

H1: The scope, intensity, and efficacy of a nonprofit organization’s advocacy efforts (Voice-Out) is positively related to the extent of constituent inputs (Voice-In).

METHOD AND DATA

In January 2007, 1,600 charitable nonprofit organizations in the State of Arizona were mailed a letter inviting them to participate in a nonprofit organizational and governance practices survey. The survey covered advocacy activities in ten broad categories: research, media advocacy, direct lobbying, grassroots lobbying, public events and direct action, judicial advocacy, public education, administrative lobbying, voter registration and education, and expert testimony. The survey also contained numerous questions about organizational and governance practices. A modified Dillman method was used for the survey. The mailing list was derived from the pool of 13,451 charitable organizations in the State of Arizona included in the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) core data file for 2006. The NCCS is a national

repository of data on the nonprofit sector in the United States; its core data file is comprised of 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations and contains information obtained from form 990, the annual financial disclosure to the IRS. By the end of July 2007, 253 invitation letters were later returned as incorrect addresses, thus reducing the total number of eligible organizations to 1,347. A total of 174 highest-level staff members (e.g., executive directors) provided valid and complete survey responses (response rate: 12.7%; 174 of 1,347).

Since such a low response rate can often produce biased samples, it is important to check if our sample differs from the state and national data in potentially nontrivial ways. Of the 174 participating organizations in the present sample, 57 (33%) were human service organizations, 19 were education and research organizations (11%), 14 were health organizations (8%), and 12 were arts organizations (7%), among others. By comparison, the NCCS core data file for 2004 reports the following breakdowns of registered public charities in Arizona: human service organizations, 25%; education and research organizations, 13%; health organizations, 7%; and arts organizations, 9%. According to an analysis of the national data during the same time period, the most common categories of reporting public charities are human services (35%); education and research (16%); health (15%); and arts organizations (11%; see Weitzman & Jalandoni, 2002). While the overall distribution pattern of the current sample appears to be consistent with those of the state data, it should be noted that human service organizations are over-represented, while educational organizations are slightly under-represented, in our sample.

Organizational Background Information

This section reports on findings related to the organization-related information, including organizational age, staff size, use of volunteers, revenues and expenses, programs/services, among others. An average organization is 24.5 years old (min.:1; max.: 99), has 16 full-time

equivalent paid staff members (min.:0; max.: 400), had \$1.42 million of total revenues (min.: 0; max.: \$30 million) and \$1.34 million of total expenses (min.: 0; max.: \$30 million) in the most recently completed fiscal year. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the percentage of the organization’s revenues from various sources:

Insert Table 1 about here

Respondents were also asked about the presence of a variety of components in their organizations (see Table 2). The responses indicated that the majority of nonprofits today seem to be “wired”: 80 percent of them had an organizational website, 85 percent had an email address, 81 percent had computers available for key staff/volunteers, and nearly 78 percent provided direct Internet access for key staff/volunteers. On the other hand, the responses also revealed that most organizations did not have reserves for maintenance/equipment or capital improvement, nor did they have formal volunteer recruitment and training programs.

Insert Table 2 about here

As a final piece of background information, we believe it would be useful to report basic findings related to the members and constituents of the organizations surveyed. Respondents were asked whether their organizations currently have members (other than board members). Not surprisingly, the majority of the responding nonprofits did not have members (Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

MAIN FINDINGS—DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES

In this section we report the initial descriptive findings of the organizations’ scope and intensity of advocacy activities as well as the prevalence of constituent input mechanisms.

Scope and Intensity of Advocacy Activities. We included an item tapping the frequency of the political- and advocacy-related activities of the reporting organizations. Table 4 below summarizes the frequency with which organizations reported engaging in various advocacy-related activities. Respondents evaluated a number of different strategies nonprofits can employ in their efforts to work for policy change. Except for “public education,” none of the advocacy strategies was extensively used by more than half of the respondents. The most commonly used strategy included public education, coalition building, media advocacy, and grassroots lobbying.

Insert Table 4 about here

Constituent Inputs. We were interested in two constituent input mechanisms: 1) descriptive representation in board governance; and 2) participatory representation. In terms of the former, we asked the survey respondents to break down the composition of their boards of directors. In particular, we asked them to provide the number of primary constituents serving their boards. Among the 165 organizations that had their own boards of directors, 90 of them (nearly 55%) had at least one constituent representative serving as a board member.

In terms of the latter, we focus on three participatory practices: organizational communication with constituents; scope of constituent involvement in making strategic decisions; and level of constituent involvement in making strategic decisions. First, as shown in Table 5, respondents were also asked to rate their organizations' communication with their constituents.

Insert Table 5 about here

Next, we included a series of questions related to different facets of constituent participation in organizational decision-making. First, as shown in Table 6, we asked respondents to indicate how extensively various constituent groups were involved in making "major strategic decisions."

Insert Table 6 about here

In an important extension to this "involvement" component of decision-making, we then asked what level of involvement the same set of constituents had in making the ultimate decision. Table 7 below reports these results.

Insert Table 7 about here

MAIN FINDINGS—MUTIVARIATE ANALYSES

We now turn to hypothesis testing. First, we describe our measurement procedures for the main dependent and independent variables as well as the various control variables included in the analyses. We then present the results of the Poisson regression analyses.

Dependent Variables

We include three key dependent variables in our analyses. All are derived from the survey instrument described earlier. The first, *Resources Spent on Advocacy*, taps the rough proportion (0 – 100%) of the organization’s resources that are devoted to advocacy work.³ Second, *Advocacy Effectiveness* taps executives’ assessment of the general level of effectiveness of their organizations’ advocacy efforts on a 1 – 5 scale, with 1 representing “Not at all effective” and 5 “Completely effective.”

Our third dependent variable is a composite measure of the scope of advocacy strategies employed by an organization (ADVOCACY). We base this index on the eleven advocacy strategies (research, lobbying, public education, etc.) shown in Table 4 above. To create the composite index, we recoded each item such that an organization received a score of 1 if it utilized a particular strategy (values 1, 2, or 3 for each item), and 0 if it never utilized the strategy. Believing these eleven items formed a coherent summative index, we then conducted a confirmatory factor analysis; a principal factors analysis (PFA) showed a single factor (eigenvalue = 5.26) on which all eleven items load at .47 or greater.⁴ Moreover, a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.907 suggested a high degree of internal consistency.⁵ We thus define our advocacy strategy index, *ADVOCACY*, as the total number of these eleven advocacy strategies

³ The survey question on which this variable is based asks, “...what proportion of your organization’s resources (time, money, etc.) are spent on [advocacy work]?”

⁴ Using the Kaiser (1960) criterion, we should retain only those factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1; all other factors here had values less than 0.332. A Scree plot similarly confirmed the existence of a single factor.

⁵ Nunnally’s (1978) rule of thumb is that alpha should generally be a minimum of 0.70.

employed by each organization. Specifically, letting $Item_i = 1$ if the organization employs the i^{th} strategy, and $Item_i = 0$ otherwise, then

$$ADVOCACY = \sum_{i=1}^{11} Item_i, \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, 11.$$

Independent Variables

Our tests include four independent variables designed to tap four distinct dimensions of constituent participation. The first, *Scope of Constituent Involvement*, is derived from (the “Primary Constituents” row of) Table 6 above. In particular, this variable measures on a 1 – 5 scale (1 = “Not at all involved” and 5 = “Completely involved”) the extent of involvement of the organization’s primary constituents in “making major strategic decisions” for the organization.⁶

Whereas the above measure taps the amount of effort constituents expend in the decision-making process, our next variable, *Level of Constituent Involvement*, directly measures the level of decision-making authority that the organization’s constituents have in making strategic decisions. Namely, based on the information from the “Primary Constituents” row of Table 7 above, this variable measures on a 1 – 6 scale primary constituents’ decision-making authority, where 1 indicating primary constituents are “not consulted” and 6 indicating they are “empowered to directly select, implement, vote on, and change alternatives.”

Our third independent variable is *Constituent Board Membership*. This variable was derived from a survey item that asked executives to break down the composition of the board of directors into several categories, including “primary constituents” of the organization, “rank-and-file employees,” “government officials,” etc. *Constituent Board Membership* is a raw count of the number of primary constituents serving on the board.

⁶ The survey item asked, “...how extensively [are primary constituents] involved in your organization’s strategic decision-making?”

Lastly, we include a measure of *Organizational Communication*. As shown in Table 5 above, our survey included seven items that we believed would tap “constituent communications,” or the quality and extent of communication between the nonprofit and key organizational constituents. Our organizational communication index, *OrgComm*, is defined as the sum of the organization’s scores on these seven items. Specifically, letting $Item_i$ represent the organization’s score on the 1 – 5 scale for the i^{th} item, then

$$OrgComm = \sum_{i=1}^7 Item_i, \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, 7$$

As expected, a confirmatory factor analysis verified a single factor with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.82, which suggests a solid degree of internal consistency for this index.⁷

Controls

Organizational Age. This variable is measured by the difference between the year of 2007 and the year when a given nonprofit organization was founded. *Staff Size*. This variable examines the size of an organization and is measured by the number of full-time equivalent paid staff members in a given organization. *Revenue*. This variable also examines the size of an organization and is measured by the average total revenue of an organization in the year prior to the survey. *Human Services*. This variable examines the effect of operating in the social and legal services industry. It is defined as a binary variable and takes on two values: 1, indicating that an organization operates in the social and legal services industry; otherwise 0. *Health Services*. This variable examines the effect of operating in the health services industry. It is defined as a binary variable and takes on two values: 1, indicating that an organization operates in the health services industry; otherwise 0. *Education and Research*. This variable examines

⁷ Specifically, a principal factors analysis (PFA) showed a single factor (eigenvalue = 2.79) on which all 7 items load at .51 or greater. All other factors had eigenvalues less than 0.34. A Scree plot similarly confirmed the existence of a single factor.

the effect of operating in the education and research industry. It is defined as a binary variable and takes on two values: 1, indicating that an organization operates in the education and research industry; otherwise 0. *Arts and Culture*. This variable examines the effect of operating in the arts and culture industry. It is defined as a binary variable and takes on two values: 1, indicating that an organization operates in the arts and culture industry; otherwise 0. *Government Funding*. The percentage of an organization's revenues from government or public agencies (e.g., grants, fees, sales, appropriations). *Private Contributions*. The percentage of an organization's revenues from donations and gifts (e.g., United Way, foundations, individuals, corporations).

Poisson Regress Analyses

The dependent variable in this study -- the scope of advocacy strategies employed by an organization (ADVOCACY) -- was a composite measure based on the eleven advocacy strategies (research, lobbying, public education, etc.) shown in Table 4. In this case, the ordinary least squares (OLS) method tends to result in biased, inefficient, and inconsistent estimates (Long 1997). To deal with this problem, researchers have developed various nonlinear models that are based on the Poisson distribution and negative binomial distribution. For the purpose of this study, we present the results (see Table 8) from the Poisson regression analysis.

Before the Poisson regression analysis, a correlation analysis has been conducted to examine the possible correlations between independent variables (multicollinearity). No unusually high correlations have been discovered (please see Appendix for results of the correlation analysis).

Insert Table 8 about here

The three models shown in the table are nested. That is, we have added additional variables in each new model. The most common method to contrast the fit of nested logistic regressions is the log likelihood ratio test (Knoke and Bohrnstedt, 1994). The test statistic (G^2), which compares the ratio of the likelihoods of two nested models, is distributed as a chi-square with degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of predictors between the models, which is also equal to the difference in the degree of freedoms of the models. The formula for the test statistic is:

$$G^2 = -2\ln(L0/L1) = (-2\ln L0) - (-2\ln L1) = 2(\ln L1 - \ln L0)$$

Model 1 includes three control variables, organizational age, staff size, and revenue size. As compared to Model 1, Model 2 adds six additional control variables related to funding sources and industries of operation. The addition of these variables significantly improves the model over Model 1 ($G^2 = 35.12$ with degrees of freedom equal to 6). As compared to Model 2, Model 3 adds the major independent variables of interest, namely constituent board membership, communication with constituents, scope of constituent involvement, and level of constituent involvement, which again significantly improves the model fit over Model 2 ($G^2 = 41.20$ with degrees of freedom equal to 4). Since Model 3 has the highest overall fit, we focus on Model 3 to discuss the results of hypothesis testing and relevant findings.

Our main hypothesis maintains that the scope, intensity, and efficacy of a nonprofit organization's advocacy activities are positively related to the extent of constituent inputs. Consistent with our prediction, three of the four variables measuring various aspects of

constituent inputs have positive significant coefficients in Model 3, indicating that the scope of nonprofit advocacy activities increases with constituent board membership, communication with constituents, and level of constituent involvement in strategic decision making.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study provides an empirical assessment of the relationship between constituent participation and nonprofit advocacy. Our major finding is that the scope of nonprofit advocacy activities increases with constituent board membership, communication with constituents, and level of constituent involvement in strategic decision making. By contrast, as the percentages of government funding and private contributions increase, the scope of advocacy activities decreases. In addition, organizational size (staff size and revenue size) is positively associated with the scope of advocacy activities, whereas arts, education, and human services organizations are negatively associated with the scope of advocacy activities.

The finding that the percentage of government funding is negatively related to an organization's scope of advocacy requires further attention. Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz (2004) found no relationship between government funding and political activity by charities and congregations. Based on data from a large survey of Indiana nonprofit organizations, Child and Gronbjerg (2007) found no relationship between government funding and participation in advocacy in their logistic regression analyses. In their multinomial regression analyses, however, they found that the odds of doing core advocacy compared to peripheral advocacy decreased with substantial reliance on government funding (i.e., 50% or more of total revenue from government). Similarly, in a survey of Israeli nonprofits, Schmid, Bar, and Nirel (2008) found that reliance on funding from local authorities decreased the scope and intensity of advocacy and

political activity. So far, it appears that the jury is still out on the exact effect of government funding on nonprofit advocacy.

Among the other control variables, organizational size (in terms of both staff size and revenue size) is found to be positively associated with the scope of advocacy, whereas organization age does not have a significant effect. This finding is consistent with those of previous research (e.g., Child & Gronbjerg, 2007). Moreover, an organization reduces its scope of advocacy if it operates in the arts, education, and human services industries.

The study makes several significant contributions to the existing literature. Most notably, it represents one of the first empirical investigations into the relationship between constituent inputs and nonprofit organizations' advocacy activities, filling a critical void in the existing studies of the representational and democratic role of nonprofit organizations. Moreover, this study yields valuable baseline data that can be used not only to inform the making of laws and regulations in terms of nonprofit advocacy, but also to enhance managerial understanding of the advocacy activities of their organizations and the various influencing factors.

The limitations of the study suggest several avenues for future research. First, although our results suggest the association between various measures of constituent voice and the scope of advocacy strategies, the cross-sectional nature of the survey data precludes a causal inference. Future research should collect longitudinal data so as to examine lagged effects of constituent input as well as other organizational and contextual factors. Another limitation lies with the database used for sampling and data collection. Since the database is a collection of charitable organizations that file a 990 return with financial information to the IRS, the organizations included in this database tend to be relatively medium- or large-sized organizations, as many small-sized organizations with annual revenue of less than \$25,000 are not required to file a 990

return. Thus, the findings of this study might not reflect the true picture for the advocacy practice of very small nonprofit organizations. Finally, due to the scope of the paper, we have not examined the possible relationship between constituent inputs and the intensity and efficacy of nonprofit advocacy. Prescriptive studies have suggested a positive relationship between the two, yet the empirical test is lacking. This area might also be ripe for future research.

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Table 1: Types of revenues

Type of revenues	% of revenues
Government or public agencies (e.g., grants, fees, sales, appropriations)	17.83%
Donations and gifts (e.g., United Way, foundations, individuals, corporations)	39.17%
Special events (net of expenses)	17.02%
Dues/membership fees	11.33%
Private sale of goods and services (non-government)	8.16%
Other sources (including endowment, interest)	6.39%
TOTAL (should add to 100%)	100

Table 2: Organizational components

	Percent of respondents
A web site for your organization	80.11%
An email address for your organization	85.06%
Computers available for key staff/volunteers	80.57%
Direct Internet access for key staff/volunteers	77.71%
Computerized financial records	81.81%
Computerized client/member/program records	70.86%
Written governance policies or by-laws	95.45%
Written conflict-of-interest policy	56.98%
Written personnel policies	58.72%
Written job descriptions	68.18%
Formal volunteer recruitment program	35.26%
Formal volunteer training program	33.53%
Reserves dedicated to capital improvement	31.58%
Reserves dedicated to maintenance/equipment	34.68%
A recent audited financial statement	64.12%
An annual report produced within the last year	69.36%
Evaluation/assessment of program outcomes/impact within past 2 yrs.	43.60%

Table 3: Does your organization have members?

	Percent of respondents
Yes, you have members and some pay dues or membership fees	31.61%
Yes, you have members, but none pay dues or membership fees	14.37%
No, your only members are your board members	54.02%

Table 4: Advocacy strategies

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
	Mean	0	1	2	3
A. Research	1.00	43.8%	20.9%	26.2%	9.2%
B. Media advocacy	0.96	43.8%	23.5%	25.5%	7.2%
C. Direct lobbying	0.68	62.8%	12.4%	18.9%	5.9%
D. Grassroots lobbying	0.88	51.0%	16.3%	26.8%	5.9%
E. Public events & direct action	0.27	83.7%	8.5%	4.6%	3.3%
F. Judicial advocacy	0.26	80.4%	14.4%	3.9%	1.3%
G. Public education	1.41	30.1%	17.0%	35.3%	17.7%
H. Coalition building	1.02	47.7%	16.3%	22.2%	13.7%
I. Administrative lobbying	0.75	58.8%	16.3%	15.7%	9.2%
J. Voter registration & education	0.42	75.2%	9.2%	13.7%	2.0%
K. Expert testimony	0.47	70.6%	13.7%	13.7%	2.0%
L. Electioneering	0.13	90.9%	5.90%	2.6%	0.70%
M. Other	0.06	96.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%

Table 5. Communication with Constituents

		1	2	3	4	5
	Mean	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
We communicate adequately with our constituents.	3.78	1.8%	8.3%	23.8%	42.3%	23.8%
We report to our constituents on our progress.	3.65	2.4%	10.8%	26.6%	40.1%	20.4%
Through research and feedback, including suggestions from community groups, service agencies, advocacy groups and users, we know the needs of our constituents.	3.66	1.9%	11.7%	28.4%	34.6%	23.5%
We use constituent feedback in designing and modifying our program and services.	3.72	3.6%	9.6%	20.5%	44.0%	22.3%
We communicate our decisions to all those affected by them.	3.89	0.6%	6.6%	22.16%	44.3%	26.4%
Before reaching decisions on important issues, we request input from those likely to be affected by the decision.	3.77	1.8%	9.0%	23.2%	41.9%	24.0%
If the organization thinks a constituent group is likely to disagree with an action we are considering, we make sure we learn how they feel before we make the decision.	3.68	3.1%	7.9%	31.1%	34.2%	23.8%

Table 6. Involvement in Strategic Decision-Making, by Constituent Group

		Not at all involved		Somewhat involved		Completely involved
	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
Board of directors	4.28	4.8%	1.2%	13.3%	22.3%	58.4%
Executive director	4.54	5.1%	1.5%	6.5%	8.7%	78.3%
Rank-and-file employees	3.22	15.7%	6.1%	32.2%	33.0%	13.0%
Volunteers of the organization	3.06	14.0%	13.3%	40.6%	17.5%	14.7%
Primary constituents of the organization	2.87	15.6%	20.1%	37.0%	16.2%	11.0%
Secondary constituents of the organization	2.39	30.7%	24.3%	25.0%	15.7%	4.3%
Other	2.00	60.0%	0.00%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%

Table 7. Level of Involvement in Setting Strategic Decisions, by Constituent Group

		Group is <i>not consulted</i>	Group is <i>informed</i> during the process	Group is <i>consulted</i> for its opinions, needs, & wishes	Group can <i>vote</i> on alternatives created by others	Group has active <i>input</i> and <i>collaboration</i> in developing alternatives and setting priorities	Group is <i>empowered</i> to directly <i>select, implement, vote on, and change</i> alternatives
	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	6
Board of Directors	5.4	1.9%	1.9%	4.4%	5.0%	23.0%	64.0%
Executive Director	5.0	3.0%	3.0%	7.4%	3.0%	37.8%	45.2%
Rank-and-file employees	3.1	15.5%	12.1%	43.1%	6.0%	18.1%	4.3%
Volunteers	3.1	16.2%	14.0%	37.5%	11.8%	14.0%	6.7%
Primary Constituents	2.8	21.3%	18.1%	40.0%	7.1%	10.3%	3.2%
Secondary Constituents	2.5	27.7%	22.0%	36.9%	4.3%	6.4%	2.9%
Other	2.8	44.4%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%	22.2%	11.1%

Table 8. Constituent Voice and Nonprofit Advocacy: Poisson Regression Analyses

Variable	Model 1 (baseline model)	Model 2	Model 3
Age	0.006*** (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Staff size	0.158*** (0.025)	0.182*** (0.030)	0.181*** (0.031)
Revenue size	0.023*** (0.007)	0.027*** (0.007)	0.028*** (0.008)
Percentage of government funding		-0.002 (0.001)	-0.003** (0.002)
Percentage of private contributions		-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)
Arts		-0.595*** (0.196)	-0.743*** (0.202)
Education		-0.437*** (0.144)	-0.465*** (0.146)
Health services		-0.358** (0.151)	-0.204 (0.156)
Human services		-0.224** (0.099)	-0.257** (0.102)
Constituent board membership			0.016*** (0.006)
Communication with Constituents			0.035*** (0.007)
Scope of constituent involvement			-0.081 (0.102)
Level of constituent involvement			0.209** (0.097)
N	165	165	165
Log likelihood	-487.44	-469.88	-449.28
χ^2	105.54***	140.66***	181.86***

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01, standard errors are shown in parentheses.

Appendix

Definitions of Advocacy Strategies

The following definitions are provided as a reference for you to answer Q. 40 on the survey questionnaire.

Research: original analysis or research on specific legislation or broad social or political problems.

Media advocacy: working for policy change via press releases, media events, letters to editor, op/ed pieces, and relationship-building with editors and journalists.

Direct lobbying: efforts to influence legislation by persuading politicians to support a particular position, normally through direct communication with elected officials or their staff.

Grassroots lobbying: mobilizing the public to support or oppose specific legislation (aka “indirect lobbying”).

Public Events and Direct Action: strikes, protests, demonstrations, “sit-ins,” and other public actions.

Judicial Advocacy: working for change through the legal system (e.g., class-action and amicus curiae litigation).

Public Education: efforts to inform and educate the public about public policy issues.

Coalition Building: working for policy change through coalitions with other advocacy & lobbying groups.

Administrative lobbying: influencing the administration through meetings with government officials, commenting on administrative rulemaking, etc. (aka “regulatory advocacy”).

Voter registration and education: efforts to register voters or encourage citizens to vote.

Expert Testimony: providing testimony / advice at committee hearings, etc. upon request from a legislative body.

Electioneering: efforts to influence the outcome of an election by endorsing or supporting a candidate or political party, or mobilizing your supporters to vote a certain way.