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Civil Society and Sustainable Cities

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Abstract

In the modern American city, who determines environmental policy? Cities have undergone fundamental change in both their economies and populations. In terms of political forces, our expectation is that across a range of cities, where nonprofit environmental groups have been included or incorporated into the local policymaking process, there is greater commitment to environmental protection, and more extensive adoption and implementation of local policies and programs designed to protect the environment. To test this idea, we draw on our own research that combines two original data sets. First, we have collected information on what programs and policies are in place in America's large cities. Second, for 50 large American cities, we have also surveyed top city administrators. We find that inclusion of environmental groups in city policymaking is strongly linked to city administrators' perceptions of city commitment to environmental protection. The number of local environmental protection policies and programs also demonstrates a strong relationship to inclusion of environmental groups in city policymaking.

Keywords

sustainability, sustainable cities, environmental politics, urban politics, cities and the environment

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The concept of sustainable development achieved elevated recognition and legitimacy in 1987 when the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) issued its report *Our Common Future*. More commonly known as the Brundtland Commission report after its Chair, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, it was designed to create an international agenda focusing on how to protect the global environment by sustaining and expanding the environmental resource base of the world. In the process, it put forth the very general and now widely cited notion that sustainable development consists of economic development activity that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 8). Beyond this, the report is rather short on details and specifics. Its definitional contribution clearly comes out of its focus on what might be called cross-generation concerns as well as its emphasis on the idea that economic development needs to be viewed over a longer period of time than is usually practiced in the political world.

The Brundtland Commission report served as the foundation for the discussions and negotiations on sustainable development that took place among nations in the "Earth Summit," held in Rio de Janeiro in June of 1992. One of the results of the Earth Summit was the passage of a resolution often referred to as "Agenda 21," a statement of the basic principles aimed at guiding nations in their quest of economic development in the 21st century. Embedded in this report is the less-oft referenced view that cities both represent the source of unsustainability and provide the potential locus of efforts to become more sustainable. The report's conclusion that "… cities [in industrialized nations] account for a high share of the world's resource use, energy consumption, and environmental pollution" was both a criticism of cities and a call to action (WCED, 1987, pp. 241-243).

Cities and Sustainable Development

Despite the constraints placed on cities by state and national governments, the Agenda 21 resolution argued that cities nevertheless possess a great deal of independent authority. In Chapter 28, "Local Authorities' Initiatives in Support of Agenda 21," the responsibility of cities is made clearer:

> Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social, and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations,

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> and assist in implementing national and subnational environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing, and responding to the public to promote sustainable development. (United Nations Environmental Programme, 2000)

Thus, the idea of sustainable cities is born out of an understanding of the importance of individual human behavior, and the *local* governance context in which that behavior takes place. As the Brundtland report states, "local authorities usually have the political power and credibility to take initiatives and to assess and deploy resources in innovative ways reflecting unique local conditions. This gives them the capacity to manage, control, experiment, and lead urban development" for the good of the environment (WCED, 1987, p. 242). Implicit in this statement is the notion that government efficacy will be aided when there is some degree of congruence between the geographic area in which sustainability is to be achieved and the political jurisdiction trying to achieve it. Cities share this important trait. Indeed, despite enormous differences, cities share many more characteristics, including a wide array of governmental and policymaking processes, than are typically acknowledged (Waste, 1989). This represents a dominant assumption underlying efforts to localize the implementation of Agenda 21 (Agyeman & Evans, 1995).

With the biophysical environment, such an apparent and integral part of almost any definition of sustainability, local governmental efforts to manage climate change loom large. Over the last decade, local officials have started to express concerns with climate change issues, with large numbers signing on to one or more of the national and international initiatives to work toward reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Prominent among these initiatives is the Climate Protection Programme of ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability (an outgrowth of the Agenda 21 process), the Climate Protection Agreement of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the Climate Initiative of the Clinton Foundation. Each of these initiatives asks cities and their leaders to make voluntary commitments to take "climate action"—commitments to reducing their carbon and GHG emissions. Each also provides some level of technical assistance to cities that make such commitments. Although such efforts are largely confined to an immediate focus on air quality, especially carbon emissions, there is little question that actions to improve air quality can be said to represent steps toward trying to make cities more sustainable.

In terms of sustainability, ecosystems or species habitats are the appropriate levels at which the environment should be considered; in practice, there is little correspondence between the geographic area of an ecosystem and the boundaries of governmental jurisdictions (Newman & Jennings, 2008).

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Ecosystems rarely conform to the boundaries of cities or towns, counties, states, election districts, or even nations. This means that no single governmental jurisdiction may possess the authority to deal completely with a particular environmental problem or to achieve sustainability results. Clearly, larger, more encompassing jurisdictions have advantages in terms of fewer externalities, but there may not be the political will to address sustainability at such higher levels. In the United States, there are many ways in which the national government could act to work toward greater sustainability, but the contemporary ideological mood, the distribution of power and influence among competing interests, the structure of federalism, and the historical culture of the nation present significant impediments. Even if it cannot be done at the state or national level, is it, in fact, possible for cities to develop the political will to effectively address issues of sustainability?

The pursuit of sustainability by cities is fueled by two related economic dynamics. First, cities where manufacturing companies once served as the foundation of the local economy now must rely on the service sector to generate needed jobs and economic growth. As we discuss later in this article, corporations that once dominated local politics and stood in the way of progressive policy have left the city or have been transformed. Businesses with long-term local roots are frequently no longer locally owned, often now divisions of larger multinational corporations with little or no interest in local politics and policies. To the extent that sustainability can be thought of as progressive (Milbrath, 1984), the changing ecology of business has profound implications for the political feasibility of sustainability in cities (Portney, 2007).

Second, the decline of manufacturing within cities has led local leaders to recognize that old models or strategies of local economic development no longer work. The old adage that cities should "attract and retain" large, externally owned businesses as anchors of the local economy, no longer seems to provide as much employment potential as it once did. The idea behind attract and retain prescriptions is that local government should engage in the competition to bring new business and industry into the city. Cities do this by offering prospective businesses substantial incentives and assistance, including major tax and fee reductions, zoning variances, streamlining approval processes, and many other advantages. Of course, any particular city wishing to attract a new, large employer would compete with other cities. Perhaps because there are few takers, and certainly because of a recognition that the longer term costs and benefits to the city may not be as favorable as once assumed, this model has fallen on hard times. To be sure, there are plenty of cities that still cling to the hope that the old model will work and some continue to try to tweak it by going after big box retailers or trying to lure large suburban employers through tax incentives for a new building. Yet, only one clear-cut

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alternative strategy has started to gain broad acceptance: sustainable development and smart growth through the development of "green jobs" (Fitzgerald, 2010; Greenwood & Holt, 2010; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008).

Advocacy and Marketing

How, then, have these new realities of urban economics manifested themselves politically? Fundamental changes can be seen in the advocacy brought to bear on city policymakers as well as in the way in which cities envision quality of life attributes designed to attract future residents.

Low Barriers to Entry

Any conventional view of public policy change assumes that interest group advocacy plays a significant role. The manner in which political scientists understand governmental policymaking places interest groups firmly in the center of a process where advocacy is linked to decision making. Regardless of whether that interest group constellation reflects the diversity of community interests or a dominant voice of a particular sector, government is still assumed to be responsive to the advocacy of its organized interests.

The advocacy explosion of interest group lobbying in the United States has been well documented (Berry & Wilcox, 2009, pp. 15-33). This sharp growth in advocacy is reflected at every level and in cities interest group lobbying is aided by the low barrier to entry to city hall (Berry, 2010). The low barrier is illustrated by the proliferation of neighborhood associations across urban America. Although the collective action problem makes it difficult to enlist a large number of neighborhood residents in an ongoing advocacy effort, broad participation is not required for a neighborhood association to gain entrée to city hall. To build a neighborhood association, it only takes a few dedicated souls to call themselves a neighborhood association. What is *not* necessary to organize a neighborhood association is money, an office, a paid staff, or even a dedicated telephone number. An email mailing list is sufficient for a claim of a "membership" and, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, city councilors and agency leaders are highly sensitive to issues that might cause neighborhood residents to become agitated and critical of the city (Berry & Portney, in press).

The density of urban advocacy organizations has also grown because of the skyrocketing number of nonprofits. There are 1.6 million nonprofits in the United States today, 1 million of which are 501(c)(3)s and thus qualify for tax deductibility for donors (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2012). This number underestimates the true number of nonprofits as those below

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$5,000 in annual income (which would include most neighborhood associations) are not required to register with the federal government. The vast majority of these (smaller) nonprofits are community based. Particularly notable are social service nonprofits which have come to play an increasingly important role in cities as many possess significant resources derived from grants, contracts, and fees for service. The leadership cadre of nonprofit professionals holds a central position within cities and the respect for the most significant nonprofits in the community enhances these leaders' role as spokespeople for various interests.

From the perspective of city councilors and city administrators, good relations with neighborhood-based nonprofits are critical to the performance of their jobs. If a city official needs to build a coalition to succeed with an initiative of their own or of a larger government entity, their likeliest partners at a neighborhood level are the neighborhood associations, the social service agencies, large nonprofits like universities and hospitals, and large employers. To ignore nonprofits is to court conflict. On a broad city-level initiative, the calculus is a bit different, but in this day and age, citywide civic associations include a heavy concentration of nonprofit leaders on their boards. The bottom line for city officials is always this: "How do we get to yes?" When that question is asked, negotiating with neighborhood associations and civic associations is usually part of the answer.

On top of the incentives to reach out to nonprofits are city, state, and federal citizen participation requirements that mandate processes that create opportunities for local advocacy organizations. It is naïve to believe that such requirements force government to treat all advocacy groups with equal seriousness, but at the same time many of the citizen groups and nonprofit agencies that participate in such processes are important to city officials' own prospects for advancement.

Promoting Environmentalism

Environmental advocacy plays a particularly distinctive role in urban politics as cities are increasingly pursuing sustainability. It is common for cities to define their aspirations in the context of coupling environmentally responsible economic development with high quality of life for its residents. Planners and policymakers recognize that people may move to central cities because they seek jobs there but as individuals choose between a city and its suburbs, there seems to be more at work than a strict calculation as to job prospects. Urban governments increasingly sell lifestyles to attract young, highly educated professionals who may one day build a business or otherwise further the city. They are especially interested in attracting and nurturing a large cohort of the "creative class" who will then draw others like them to the city

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(Florida, 2004). Cities with higher educated residents are more successful at attracting similar residents with higher level educations. Not surprisingly, those cities with higher levels of education have populations with higher per capita incomes. This is the virtuous circle of contemporary city life.

Cities use a variety of strategies that make them appear to be vibrant, exciting places to live. These strategies go far beyond the cultural amenities that have always distinguished cities from the other communities in their metropolitan areas. One popular strategy is to enhance and brand village life within the city, perhaps featuring an attractive school as a magnet. Inner city light rail systems have proliferated, offering an attractive alternative to the increasingly expensive hassle of commuting by car from suburb to city. Some urban strategies tie business development to amenities or lifestyles. Smart growth has yet to emerge as a dominant city growth strategy, but it is gradually becoming a standard planning approach.

Environmentalism can be fundamental to a city's appeal. Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco are all known for their strong commitment to sustainable lifestyles (AtKisson, 1999; Golub & Henderson, 2011; Iglitzin, 1995; Leo, 1998; Portney, 2013; Slavin & Snyder, 2011). But the marketing of environmentalism extends far beyond these liberal enclaves. In Louisville, for example, the expansion of the park system is an impressive amenity the city uses to define itself as an attractive place to live. Houston, despite its close identification with the oil business, is awash in environmental initiatives. For example, new residential development must be accompanied by new park space. The "Million Trees + Houston" public–private partnership began in 2008 and the millionth new tree is expected to be planted in 2012.

As environmentalism is built into the structure of city bureaucracies, a regulatory framework expands and creates a de facto continuous quality improvement (CQI) approach to institutionalizing environmental protection. Houston continues to roll out environmental initiatives because its Environmental Coordinating Council has tentacles that reach across the city's agencies (Siemens Corporation, 2011, pp. 68-71). This does not mean that environmentalism dominates city politics but what it does indicate is that making Houston greener is always part of the discussion. Can this enormous sprawling city, characterized by a lack of zoning restrictions and a population of low income minorities, become a green city? The very fact that a city like Houston to is trying is testament to the power of appearing to be green. Tiebout's (1956) theory, which holds that consumers select a city, suburb, or town based on a judgment of how much they want to spend on a selected level of services, remains a strong foundation for thinking about how cities want to market themselves. As a consumer prices a residential location, however, he or she not only weighs taxes against services but includes in that calculation the values embodied by that city.

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Our research builds upon both political scientists' assumption that interest advocacy lies at the center of policymaking and our argument that there has been a movement by cities toward the pursuit of sustainability. We also know that cities vary in the degree to which they have made environmental protection a priority. This variability offers us an opportunity to test these ideas; thus, the central hypothesis of this paper is as follows:

> *Hypothesis 1*: U.S. cities with active nongovernmental organizations working on behalf of the environment will be more likely to have greater commitment to protecting and improving the quality of their respective biophysical environments, and will enact and implement more specific environmental protection policies and programs.

We expect to find, across a range of cities, that where nonprofit environmental groups have been included or incorporated into the local policymaking process, there will be greater commitment to environmental protection, and more extensive adoption and implementation of local policies and programs designed to protect the environment. Previous research has suggested a correlation—cities with at least one active, identifiable environmental group seem to do more to pursue climate protection policies (Brody, Zahran, Grover, & Vedlitz, 2008; Lubell, Feiock, & Handy, 2006; O'Connell, 2009; Zahran, Brody, Vedlitz, Grover, & Miller, 2008). Our analysis goes a step further to look into the character of policymaking by city policymakers—city councilors or commissioners, and high-level city administrators—and inquiring about specific aspects of city policy and program decisions, especially with respect to the environment and to sustainability. This analysis is motivated by an expectation that active local environmental groups play a role in creating the commitment to sustainability and to the environment among policymakers, eventually translating into stronger sustainability and environmental policy decisions. Moreover, we expect this role to persist even when the political (liberal versus conservative) ideology of the councilors, the strength of local business groups, and other plausible alternative explanations are controlled.

Neither theory nor existing data provide much guidance in the formation of more precise expectations or hypotheses related to local policymaking. As discussed later, we examine two separate dependent variables, one measuring the perceived level of commitment of policymakers to achieving greater environmental protection, and the second measuring policy outputs—the extent to which cities have actually enacted and implemented programs to protect and improve the environment. These two variables are not independent of each other ($r = .595$, $p > .00$), and indeed are likely to be part of a

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larger constellation of variables defining the character local environmentalism or the lack thereof. Our analysis here is focused simply on adding to an understanding of how local interest groups seem to factor into the policy processes associated with the development of commitment to environmental protection and local policy decisions to protect the environment.

At the same time, such policymaking does not take place in a cocoon where only environmental groups interact with city officials. Cities continue to be concerned with growing their economies and at least some environmental policies may not be seen by city officials as business friendly. Even in this postindustrial era, with most heavy manufacturing having departed cities, urban policymakers believe that it is critical to foster a climate that at the very least is not seen as hostile to business.

Likewise, there is business advocacy to compete with lobbying by environmental groups. Business leadership is vital to the overall civic fabric of cities and these individuals clearly have access to those in power (Berry & Portney, 2012). At the same time, business leadership in the central city has been depleted by not only the decline of manufacturing but by globalization of business and migration of business to suburbs and exurbs (Hanson, Wolman, Connolly, Pearson, & McMannon, 2010). Cities all say they balance the needs of business with the quality of life within their borders. But this is convenient rhetoric and empirical tests are necessary to determine just how cities handle the competing demands for both its business community and environmental advocates.

Research Design and Findings

Here, we present a relatively simple model. Our dependent variables represent measures of city commitment to environmental protection. Our key independent variable is a measure of the incorporation of environmental nonprofit organizations into the local policymaking process. We assess this relationship controlling for several possible powerful alternative, or spurious, explanations. These explanations focus on the political ideology of city officials, the propensity of the city electorate to vote for Democrats in presidential elections, and the level of personal income of the residents of the city. Each of these variables and their measures will be described below.

The data on which this analysis is based come from a 2009 survey of local officials and advocates in 50 of the largest 54 cities in the United States. The four largest cities, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston, were excluded from the survey because the challenges presented by their scale. The 50 surveyed cities have 2007 population sizes ranging from 1.5 million in Phoenix to 336,000 in Tampa. In other words, these cities represent the entire universe of

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U.S. cities in this population range. Between June and August of 2009, questionnaires were mailed to all city councilors or commissioners, a relatively large subset of city agency administrators, and to a selected set of representatives of advocacy organizations in each of these cities.[1] We used a multimodal approach, offering subjects the choice of filling out a paper questionnaire they received in the mail or going to a website and answering the same questions online. Follow-up prompts to initial nonrespondents took the form of personalized emails and specified the hot-linked URL for the website.

The project also involved identifying and surveying an average of about 18 city administrators in each city, and the responses from these administrators are used in this article. The administrators we targeted were all leading officials at the heads of departments or bureaus with some relevance to environmental affairs or economic development. Titles of such offices and the organization of responsibilities differed from city to city. Generally, though, we identified those working in areas such as environmental protection, sustainability, public works, parks and recreation, public utilities, water and wastewater management, office of the city manager, economic development, and planning. Questionnaires were mailed to this entire population of 885 city administrators, and 413 responded. Thirty-seven of these questionnaires were returned as "undeliverable," and we were not able to locate appropriate replacement administrators. The adjusted response rate was thus 48.7%.[2] The average number of administrator responses across all included cities is 8.5.

Dependent Variables

The primary dependent variable in this analysis is an attitudinal measure of how committed the city is to the environment, and is derived from a survey question asked of city administrators. The question asked administrators to reveal how committed they perceived the city to be to environmental protection using a 5-point scale. The specific question wording was:

> Cities also vary considerably in their commitment to environmental protection. In your own estimation, how would you evaluate your local government's commitment to improving the natural environment of the city?

Level of commitment to environmental protection				
None	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
1	2	3	4	5

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Table 1. Frequency Distribution of City Administrators' Reports of City Commitment to Environmental Protection.

Response category	Number of administrator responses	Percentage of responses
1. No commitment	0	0.0
2. Low commitment	23	5.6
3. Moderate commitment	101	24.6
4. High commitment	168	40.9
5. Very high commitment	119	29.0
Total	411	100.0
Summary statistics	Mean response = 3.93; *SD* = 0.87	

Table 1 provides the frequency distribution of the answers to this question for all respondents. Nearly 70% of all administrators reported that their cities have "high" or "very high" commitment to environmental protection. The question here, of course, is whether lower levels of commitment are found in cities without much in the way of nonprofit environmental groups.

In addition to this attitudinal measure of commitment to environmental protection, we also include a measure of how aggressive the city has been in enacting and implementing specific environmental policies and programs. Presumably, a city that has enacted a relatively large number of environmental programs has made a stronger and more significant commitment to environmental protection than a city that has enacted fewer. Here, the focus is on how many of some 23 different environmental programs and policies each city has enacted and implemented. This includes programs on public transit, high occupancy vehicles, limits on downtown parking spaces, alternatively fueled city vehicles, bicycle ridership, household solid and hazardous waste recycling, industrial hazardous waste recycling, eco-industrial park development, air emissions control (including climate action programs), purchasing recycled products, superfund or brownfield site redevelopment, lead and asbestos abatement, community gardens (sustainable agriculture), pesticide reduction, green building, green affordable housing, city purchase of renewable energy, city energy conservation (including use of federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funds for city building retro-fits), alternative energy for residential customers, and water conservation. The inclusion of a dependent variable measuring this aspect of local environmental policies is meant to capture actions, not just attitudes. As discussed later, the two variables—attitudes of local officials and actual environmental policies—are closely correlated.

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Independent Variable

The key independent variable in this analysis focuses on the role of nonprofit environmental groups in policymaking. Our broader analysis sought to help establish the role of a variety of different types of groups and organizations, including business associations and businesses, labor unions, neighborhood associations, and others. The question posed to city administrators to get a sense of the role of these groups was as follows:

> Which of these sectors are most likely to be included in informal bargaining and negotiation with city officials? On issues involving both economic development and environmental concerns, what is the likelihood that you and your colleagues would include these sectors in your policymaking deliberations?

	Very likely to include	Maybe/maybe not	Not very likely to include	Don't know
Business associations	___	___	___	___
Environmental groups	___	___	___	___
Nonprofit other than environmental	___	___	___	___
Church or faith-based	___	___	___	___
Specific corporations/businesses	___	___	___	___
Labor unions	___	___	___	___
Neighborhood associations	___	___	___	___
Other city governments	___	___	___	___
Council of governments or metropolitan planning organization	___	___	___	___
Regional development organization	___	___	___	___

Our analysis focuses on the second type of group in the list—environmental groups. Among all of the types of groups listed, environmental groups would seem to be most likely to be strong advocates of environmental protection. Thus, we would expect when policy decisions are "very likely to include" environmental groups, city governments are likely to exhibit high levels of commitment to the environment, and to enact policies and programs designed to protect and improve the environment. Empirically, the issue is whether there is a relationship, and if so, how strong is it.

Control Variables

Even if there is a reasonably strong correlation between attitudinal commitment and the incorporation of environment interest groups, this relationship

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could very well have alternative explanations. Here, we focus on three such alternatives. First, the political ideology of local officials could independently explain why some cities are willing to incorporate environmental groups into policy deliberations, and why local officials would be willing to adopt environmental protection policies. To control for this possibility, and the possibility that it is only ideologically liberal cities that pave the way for inclusion of environmental groups, we rely on another question from the surveys of city administrators, this one asking respondents to act as informants to provide their assessments of how politically "liberal" or "conservative" local officials are.[3] The specific question was as follows:

> How would you describe the political views of those who work for city government? Are they predominantly liberal? Conservative? Moderate? On a scale where 1 indicates very liberal political views, 4 represents a moderate position, and 7 represents very conservative political views, where would you place the following:

	Please circle						
	Very liberal			Moderate		Very conservative	
Most administrators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Most city councilors/commissioners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The Mayor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The analysis here focuses on administrators reports of the political ideology of city councilors or commissioners, the chief legislative policymakers of the city. Administrators were asked to provide this assessment using a 7-point scale. The expectation here is that cities with larger numbers of politically conservative councilors or commissioners will be less likely to be committed to sustainability since environmental protection is often seen by conservative policymakers as impeding economic growth and development. The intent here, however, is to examine whether and to what extent the activity of local environmental interest groups seems to be related to environmental commitment and policies independent of the ideology of the policymakers. If environmental interest groups matter, per se, the relationship with environmental commitment and policy should persist even when the ideology of local policymakers is controlled. In other words, our expectation is that interaction between environmental groups and policymakers is capable of influencing commitment to environmental protection even in relatively moderate and conservative cities.

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The second potential alternative explanation focuses on the character of the local electorate. Using information about the average level of support of the voters in each city for the Democrat candidate for President across the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections provides a sense of how "Democrat" the electorate is. Presumably, cities that have larger Democrat proportions of the electorate would be able to be more committed to environmental protection than cities with smaller proportion Democrats. We use presidential elections because doing so allows us to know the party of the vote (which is not usually possible if local elections happen to be nonpartisan), and ensures that the measurement is done at the same points in time, which would be problematic with local elections that may be held at various times of any given year.

The third alternative explanation focuses on the resource base of the city, particularly the level of personal income of the residents. Although previous studies have not universally found a correlation between environmental protection policies and the level of personal income, the idea that those with higher incomes are more likely to be environmentally conscientious persists. Moreover, theoretically at least, there is an expectation that income (as a measure of the level of economic development) presents a nonlinear "environmental Kuznets curve" relationship with the pursuit of environmental policies and programs (Kahn, 2006). Since we are not interested specifically in the exact shape of the relationship here, but rather simply wish to use income as a control variable, the measure employed here is the log of median family income as reported in the 2000 U.S. Census.

Unit of Analysis

The survey data are measured for individual respondents. Yet, the appropriate unit of analysis for the central hypothesis is not the individual person, but rather the city. For this analysis, we use the survey questions to measure the variables as aggregate summary responses at the city level.[4] The administrators' responses to the question about commitment of the city to environmental protection are used to characterize the city as a whole. Here, we use the survey data to compute the percentage of administrators reporting that the commitment is "high" or "very high." The key independent variable, based on responses to the question about incorporation of environmental groups, measures the percentage of administrators who reported inclusion of environmental groups as "very likely." And the political ideology control variable represents the percentage of administrators reporting that most city councilors or commissioners are liberal or very liberal (Categories 1 and 2 combined).

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Findings

Is the level of commitment to environmental protection related to incorporation of environmental groups in policy deliberations? Figures 1 and 2 show the bivariate scatterplots of the relationship between inclusion of environmental groups and the two dependent variables. These graphs demonstrate that there is a fairly strong positive relationship where greater inclusion of environmental groups in policy deliberations is associated with greater commitment to environmental protection, both in terms of the reported commitment and the number of environmental protection programs enacted and implemented. But how well do these relationships seem to hold up when the partisan, economic, and political ideological context of the city is considered?

Table 2 provides an OLS regression analysis[5] in an effort to isolate the effects of environmental group inclusion. The patterns are very similar for both dependent variables. Even controlling for family income, the political ideology of public officials, and the tendency for the local electorate to vote for Democrats in presidential elections, inclusion of environmental groups is still significantly related to commitment to environmental protection. Clearly, the ideology of city council exerts some significant influence on how committed the city is to environmental protection, even if Democrat voting and family income do not. What is more striking is that the influence of inclusion of environmental groups, at least as reported by city administrators, persists even controlling for these potential spurious factors. The implication of these findings is that it is not just cities with very liberal city policymakers where there is high commitment to environmental protection and aggressive local environmental protection policies. Cities where environmental groups are included in policy deliberations seem to have a stronger commitment to environmental protection even controlling for how liberal or conservative their respective policymakers are. Stated another way, it does not seem to be the case that environmental groups affect commitment to environmental protection and policies only when city policymakers are liberal.

Our data show that environmental groups have ample access to city policymakers. Even in cities where politics tilts toward the right on national issues, environmental organizations demonstrate significant interaction with city officials. This contact is ongoing and the relationship between inclusion and the robustness of policies and programs aimed at protecting the environment seems to be a strong one.

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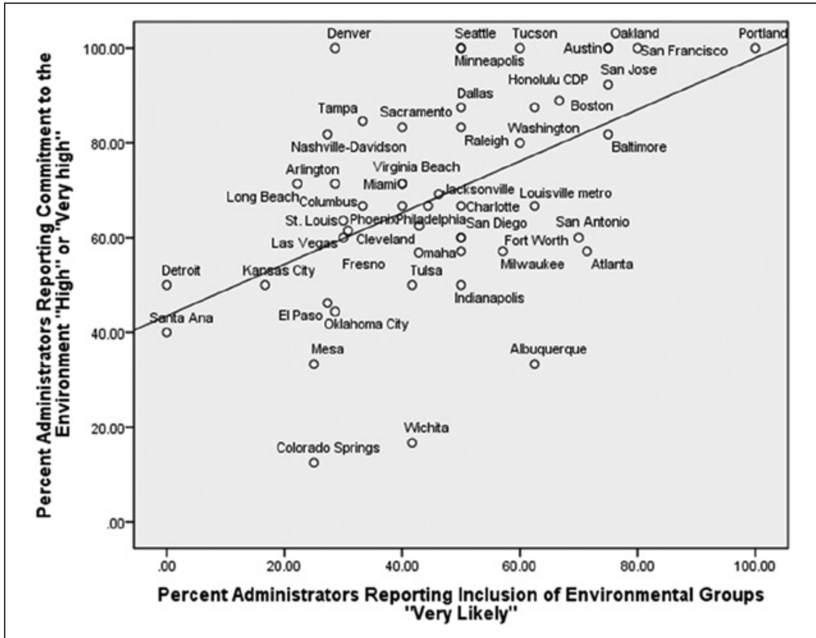

Figure 1. Scatterplot of the relationship between "very likely" inclusion of environmental groups and level of commitment to environmental protection, as reported by city administrators.

Percent commitment to environmental protection = 43.5 + 0.544 (% inclusion of environmental groups "very likely"). R^2 = .255, significance = .000.

Business Influence

The apparent strength of environmental advocacy raises an obvious question: What of business influence? A traditional view of business and environmentalists in city politics is that their respective interests can be antagonistic. Business may want to expand wherever it wants in the city and utilize manufacturing processes that create externalities harmful to the environment. Environmental groups may be opposed to such objectives, placing quality of life concerns ahead of the city's economic prosperity. In areas where such interests clash, scholars have long held that business has an overwhelming advantage. Cities need jobs to grow while business has a choice of where to locate. If a city seems inhospitable, a business can move across that city's boundaries to a more accommodating suburb (Peterson, 1981).

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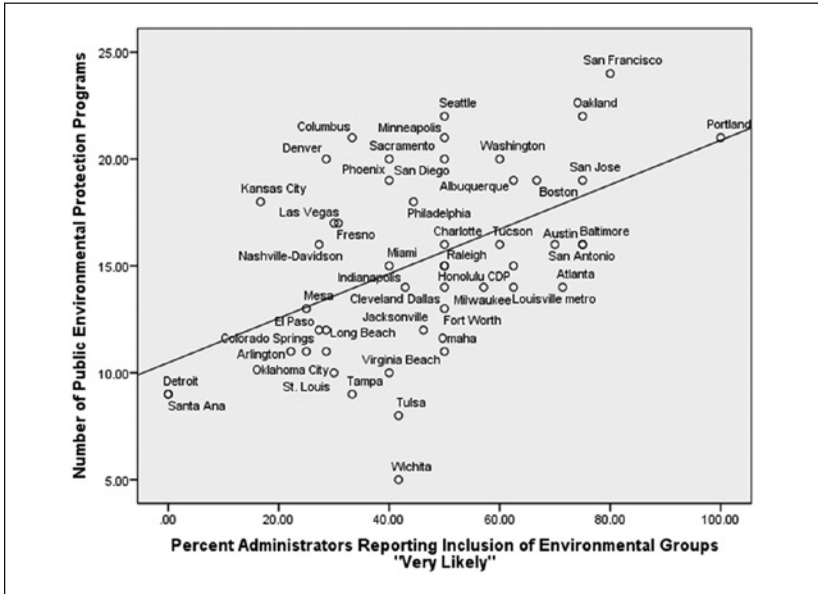

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the relationship between "very likely" inclusion of environmental groups and number of city environmental protection policies and programs.

Number of environmental programs and policies = 10.5 + 0.104 (% inclusion of environmental groups "very likely"). R^2 = .243, significance = .000.

Table 2. OLS Regression Analysis of Commitment to Environmental Protection.

	Dependent variables					
	Percent of administrators reporting commitment to environmental protection "High" or "Very High"			Number of local environmental protection policies and programs		
Variable	β	*SE*	Significance	β	*SE*	Significance
Inclusion of environmental groups "Very Likely"	.313	.134	.024	.052	.025	.046
Percent of city council/commission that is "Liberal" or "Very Liberal"	.237	.105	.029	.054	.020	.010
Average percent democrat vote, 1996, 2000, 2004	.258	.233	.274	.043	.044	.331
Median family income, 2000 (log)	.000	.000	.217	.0000092	.000	.096
Constant	11.64	19.76	.559	3.59	3.75	.343
R^2		.466			.499	
Significance		.000			.000	

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Table 3. Regression Results Showing the Relative Importance of Business Advocacy and Environmental Advocacy in Adoption and Implementation of Local Environmental Policies.

Independent variables	β	beta	*SE*	Significance
Inclusion of business in deliberations[a]	.153	.015	1.35	.911
Inclusion of environmental groups in deliberations[b]	.100	.455	.029	.002
Constant	10.60	—	1.67	.000
R^2			.210	
Significance			.005	

Dependent variable = Number of local environmental programs; *n* = 49 cities.
a. A dummy variable coded "1" if 100% of administrator respondents reported that business is "very likely" to be included in deliberations, and "0" if less than 100% of respondents reported business is "very likely" to be included.
b. Percent of administrator respondents who reported that environmental groups would be "very likely" included in deliberations.

Skepticism about the strength of environmentalism also arises from a more fundamental argument about the role of business in the city. Simply put, business is commonly viewed as an intrinsic part of the ruling coalition of the city. In this sense, the influence of business derives not simply from corporations lobbying for this policy or that development project, but from ongoing relationships with city policymakers. For business leaders, the door to city hall is always open (Lindblom, 1977). What we might call the business dominant model of interest group politics is illustrated by Clarence Stone's well known study of Atlanta. Stone documents how different mayors of Atlanta all depended on business as an integral part of their governing coalition. The mayors needed business leaders to get things done; city government was not powerful enough by itself to move the city forward (Stone, 1989).

Our data sets allow us to test the supposition that business may be the underlying force in city politics (Berry & Portney, 2012). By taking business into account, the positive relationship between inclusion of environmental groups and the number of environmental programs might be considerably weaker than we have shown here or could even be spurious altogether. To test this possibility, we employ a regression analysis and utilize variables for both inclusion of environmental groups and inclusion of business groups by administrators, as shown in Table 3.[6] When we control for the percent of administrators who report business inclusion, we find that inclusion of environmental groups is significantly related to the number of sustainability

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programs. However, when we control for the inclusion of environmental groups, inclusion of business is unrelated to cities' pursuit of sustainability and environmental protection. What is perhaps most notable about these results is that the coefficient for business inclusion is not negative. This implies that business advocacy and inclusion does not take the form of opposition to environmental protection policies and programs. Business groups may not enthusiastically advocate for environmental protection, but neither do they impede the adoption of such policies. In short, these results suggest that environmental advocacy is a powerful force in city politics.

Why is this so? A beginning point is that interest group scholarship has not caught up with the profound economic and demographic changes in cities. The business dominant model is built around the notion of a set of large-scale businesses headquartered in the central city. The leaders of these firms use their access to city hall to not only lobby for what their firms need but they also provide civic leadership aimed at keeping the city attractive for both residents and prospective businesses. For many cities, however, business's footprint within their borders has shrunk markedly. Today there is only a single *Fortune* 100 firm (Liberty Mutual) based in the city of Boston (Wallack, 2012). Yet, this does not reflect a decline in the city's economic condition as Boston is actually doing quite well. Rather, a combination of mergers, acquisitions, and globalization has depopulated the city of most of the large firms (i.e., Bank of Boston, Shawmut) that used to make the city its corporate home. The large businesses that have newly emerged in recent years have generally located in the suburbs or exurbs of the economically vibrant metropolitan area.

Another aspect of the changing business population in cities is that with the decline of manufacturing many of the classic tradeoffs between business prosperity and environmental protection vanish. Cities regulate business only in certain policy areas with most regulatory responsibility overall residing with the states and the federal government. What city governments do regulate is land use and here there are still conflicts between business development projects and environmental quality of life concerns. Typically, they are not intractable and a common avenue of compromise is for developers of apartments, condominiums, office buildings, retail complexes, and the like to adopt various mitigating project characteristics to make new construction environmentally sensible.

What has not changed in city politics is the desire of government to attract new business. Cities are always interested in adding jobs and tax revenue and when economic downturns hit, such needs take on real urgency. Not all businesses, however, are equally appealing. Most desirable are firms in dynamic business sectors that will bring highly educated people into the city. As noted

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earlier, cities want to draw highly educated professionals who will be interested in the amenities of a vibrant, tolerant, and diverse city (Florida, 2004, 2012). In the modern city, creating programs that promote sustainability may not be seen as hostile to business expansion. Local firms may strongly endorse such initiatives, either because it adds to the appeal of the city to its employees or there are direct business benefits through the economic activity generated by new programs or projects. Looking to the future, economists Glaeser, Kolko, and Saiz (2001) advise city leaders that "the quality of life is paramount" to a city's prospects (p. 27).

None of this is to argue that business has become a minor part of the political fabric of cities. The door to city hall is still open and mayors value business leaders as part of their political coalitions, as donors to their campaigns, and as members of various advisory bodies. Public–private partnerships remain as a strategic route to achieving certain policy goals. And city hall is still interested in helping both firms within its boundaries and firms from outside the city gain access to land, tax relief, or zoning variances, if that facilitates business expansion. But such assistance is a far cry from the business dominant model. City hall is also interested in helping other constituencies and access to city councils and city administrative agencies is very high for *all* interest group sectors. Even small neighborhood associations have very easy access to city hall (Berry & Portney, in press).

The strength of environmental groups is no illusion or statistical miscalculation. In the contemporary city, quality of life is important just as is attracting new businesses. As the American economy has continued to evolve, the antagonism in cities between business and environmental groups has softened. For their part, mayors have complicated challenges and their regimes are now far more diverse than a partnership with downtown business interests.

Conclusion

Our goal here was to build on what we know about interest groups in city politics and, more specifically, to expand our understanding of the relationship between environmental advocacy and the adoption of environmental protection policies. These are interesting questions in and of themselves but they take on added significance in the context of the federal government's inaction with respect to new policies designed to fight global climate change. The foundation of our argument is that cities have low barriers to entry and, thus, it is considerably easier for environmental groups to have their voices heard. However, being heard and being effective are not the same things. Local officials can hew close to procedural openness, making sure they meet

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with all stakeholders as policymaking moves forward, without moving in the direction preferred by environmental advocates.

We have found a robust relationship between incorporation of environmental groups into policymaking and policies aimed at moving cities forward toward sustainability. This link holds against conventional statistical controls for obvious counter-explanations. We do not wish to carry the causal inference too far, for the data we analyze are insufficient to support a firm conclusion that it is environmental interest groups, per se, that differentiate cities that are strongly committed to environmental protection from cities that are not. Plausibly this relationship could simply reflect a greater propensity of cities with ideologically progressive populations, voters, and elected officials to be more oriented toward environmental protection. However, we show that the liberalism of the city council as a predictor does not vitiate the relationship between the inclusion of environmental groups and administrators' reports of city commitment to the environment, or the relationship between inclusion and the number of environmental protection programs. It is also plausible that the relationships we have emphasized actually reflect nothing more than cities' economic standing. Wealthier cities would seem more likely to fund programs that are, ultimately, discretionary, and must compete against all the other claims made on tight urban budgets. This logic, however, does not survive our multivariate tests. A third control, cities' liberalism among its population in general, based on past patterns of voting in national elections, fails to reach statistical significance as well. Finally, business advocacy does not appear to impede environmental advocacy. In the modern city, governments recognize that they must continue to promote economic development while intensifying their efforts aimed at environmental sustainability. From these results, we cannot say definitively that city policymakers enact and implement sustainability and environmental policies that they would not otherwise enact because of pressure from environmental groups. But the evidence provided here does lend support to the conclusion that commitment of local policymakers to the environment, and decisions to pursue environmental protection policies, seems to have much to do with the extent to which local environmental interest groups are included in the policymaking process.

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Notes

1. The city administrator questionnaire can be found at http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/berry/question-admin.pdf.
2. Two or more city administrators responded in every city except Memphis, where only one administrator responded. As a result, Memphis is not included in the analysis comparing cities.
3. The distinction between ideologically liberal and ideologically conservative cities is made on the basis of consistent public opinion division on the environment. To cite just one poll question, Gallup asked a sample of Americans whether they believed news about global warming was generally exaggerated, generally correct, or generally underestimated. Fully 67% of self-described Republicans answered that such news is generally exaggerated. In contrast, only 20% of Democrats believed that. Although surveys of elites rather than rank-and-file are used here, these judgments and the inferences about ideological divisions are supported in the literature. See Lydia Saad (2012).
4. The primary disadvantage of this approach to the analysis is that it disregards variations in survey responses within cities. Yet, because the unit of analysis is the city, a method of aggregation is appropriate here.
5. Logit analysis produced identical result with respect the relative significance if each independent variable. Analysis of intercorrelations among the independent and control variables, as well as tolerance (not presented here), suggests that these models do not present a problem of multicollinearity. See Note 6 for discussion of multicollinearity when a business inclusion variable is analyzed.
6. The preferred method of analyzing these relationships might be to measure business inclusion as the percentage of administrators who report inclusion of business organizations or specific businesses as “very likely,” and then conduct a regression analysis with all of the independent and control variables included in the equation. However, there is much less variation in this variable than the comparable variable for environmental groups, and problems of multicollinearity preclude this type of analysis. The alternative used here is to define a new business inclusion variable as a dummy variable if 100% of surveyed administrators reported that inclusion of business organizations or specific businesses where “very likely” to be included in deliberations.

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