

**Shopping in the Political Arena:  
Strategic Venue Selection by Private Organized Interests**

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## **Abstract**

Why do private interest organizations target certain types of venues in the institutions of government for advocacy over others? Often referred to as “venue shopping”, we answer this question by developing a theoretically grounded typology of venues and connect it with prevailing theories of interest group influence to predict which venues will be targeted by organizations drawing on certain kinds of political resources. We test hypotheses deduced from this framework with data on the lobbying activities of charter schools in the four states. We find that both the institutional structure and the prevailing ideology of an institutional venue serve to attract certain types of charter schools, facilitating their ability to gain access to lawmakers and ultimately begin to have influence over the policymaking process.

If, as Schattschneider (1960) argued, where an issue is decided often determines who wins and who loses, then where an interest group targets its resources in its quest for influence is one of the most important strategic decisions it can make. Proponents of school choice in the District of Columbia, for example, in 1995 successfully used their close connections with members of Congress to push charter school legislation on a reluctant city government. Indeed, Mintrom (2000) has shown that similar venue shopping has driven much of the spread of charter school legislation, but this type of strategic decision making is hardly confined to school choice policy. During the Clinton Administration the environmental lobby used their ties with the White House to block congressional efforts to weaken environmental standards (Bosso 1995), and for years bankers have used their close ties with regulators to expand their business powers at the expense of the insurance industry (Holyoke 2002). In other words, successfully gaining access by tailoring their resources to fit the needs of decision makers in particular institutional venues in the federal system allows organizations to maximize their advantages and confound their competitors. Although research has shown that the locus of decision making for an issue often shifts venues over time, and that many interests benefit from these shifts (Gais, et al. 1984; Baumgartner and Jones 1993), how organizations select the venues from which they hope to wield influence over the policymaking process remains something of a mystery. But if who gets ahead and who is disadvantaged depends on where issues are developed and who is influential, then asking how organizations target one venue over another remains perhaps the most critical question in advocacy research.

We suggest that part of the reason venue shopping has not been as thoroughly explored as its importance warrants is that while theories of interest group access to lawmakers in many venues are fairly advanced, there is as yet no means of distinguishing one venue for another that can be linked to these theories. Nor have scholars thoroughly explored “vertical shopping”

by embracing the possibilities of federalism. We offer a theoretical grounded typology of venues and couple it with prevailing theories of interest group access. By linking the resources interests have to offer with the needs imposed on lawmakers by venue structure and ideology, we are able to deduce a set of hypotheses regarding which venues, both horizontally in national or state systems or vertically between these systems, certain types of interests should target for advocacy. We then test these hypotheses using data on the advocacy behavior of a particular type of organization, charter schools, in four states. With a multitude of incentives to engage in politics, and a wide range of venues from which to choose, charter schools prove to be savvy political operators and excellent subjects for the study of advocacy and venue shopping.

### **Venue Shopping as a Strategic Choice**

“Venue shopping” refers to the strategic choices organized interest lobbyists make regarding the decision making subdivisions of political institutions, such as an administrative agency or a congressional committee, in which they will attempt to build a power base and facilitate a mobilization of bias in favor of the issues important to their membership. That advocates make such choices was first argued by Schattschneider (1960), who claimed that private interests attempt to steer issues from venues where they are disadvantaged to those where they have influence and are favored by the prevailing norms and rules of the game. Although scholars have documented case-studies of venue shifting, such as the ACLU challenging legislative enactments in the courts, models of venue shopping as a strategic decision have received short shrift in the advocacy literature since Schattschneider. Despite empirical evidence that many organizations, particularly those emerging over the last couple of decades, have successfully used new venues to redefine old policies (Baumgartner and Jones

1993; Berry 1999), research has focused more on how they gain influence within each venue rather than why that venue is chosen over others in the first place.

Part of the reason for this, we suspect, is that for years organization and policy scholars saw lawmaking in terms of tightly knit subgovernments and iron triangles centered on single decision making venues, effectively ruling out the viability of alternative arenas (Cater 1964; Lowi 1969). Only as Congress decentralized its decision making structures has the opportunity for venue shopping emerged (Davidson 1981; Deering and Smith 1995). Coupled with the dramatic expansion of the executive branch (Heclo 1978) and broader standing rights before the courts (Orren 1976), decentralization has created a multiplicity of decision making arenas in the institutions of American government where private interests may attempt to establish influence (Gais et al. 1984; Peterson 1990; Salisbury et al. 1992). Finally, new federalism has, at times, further shifted major policy responsibilities to state and local officials.

While legislative committee may remain the most desired pressure points for interest groups because it is where policy tends to be initiated (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998), all of these other venues can act as opportunities to amend those policies, or simply serve as veto points. Olson (1990) and Solberg and Waltenburg (2006) have explored lobbying the courts as an alternative to Congress given certain conditions and the need for policy success, while Howard (2007) has looked at choices with the judicial structure. Holyoke (2003) explored venue shopping as a tactical choice for an advocate given expected resistance from lawmakers and competing groups as bills move their way through the political system, but largely ignored crucial features of the institutional structure or the influence some lobbyists may be able to build with lawmakers that might dispose them to certain *types* of venues. Yet there is still no general model of venue shopping either horizontally (across federal or state governments) or one embracing the possibility of movement up and down the federal structure.

The literature on lobbying legislative committees, coupled with fairly well developed theories of how lobbyists gain access and influence to lawmakers, also suggest that all of the main pressure points in the government superstructure are not equal. Some venues are more permeable to lobbying, while others are less so. Such theories utilizing the incentives and constraints on lobbyists and lawmakers must also have a place in any general venue shopping model. Accordingly, we take a first step towards a sharper understanding of how interests select venues to pursue their policy goals by developing a typology of venues.

### **Modeling Venue Shopping**

Building on Baumgartner and Jones (1993: Chapter 11) we begin by drawing a distinction between horizontal and vertical arrays of venues. Vertical means viewing venues as levels up and down the federal system. Private interests unable to gain access to Congress, for example, may choose to appeal to state legislatures instead. By contrast, the horizontal array looks across branches of government within a given level (for example, groups failing to convince state legislators may turn instead to state regulators), or across sub units within a given branch of government (as when a lobbyist attempts to steer oversight responsibility to one congressional committee instead of another).

Second, we differentiate venues according to whether they have general vs. specialized responsibilities and whether decision makers in them are elected or appointed. Bureaucracies allocate most responsibilities to policy-specific agencies and bureaus, with local level transportation authorities, school districts, economic development commissions, pollution control boards, and the like constituting more than half of all governmental units.<sup>1</sup> Unlike

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the national government and fifty states, the 1997 Census of Governments identified 87,453 local governmental units, including 13, 725 school districts and 34,683 special districts (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Table No. 490).

general purpose governing bodies, such as city councils, mayors, governors, or Congress, such special district institutions are designed to concentrate attention and expertise on a very narrow set of related policies and typically are structured to maximize responsiveness to technical issues, scientific evidence, and narrow but highly motivated constituencies. Institutions responsible for making decisions across multiple issue areas, like legislatures, are forced to set priorities and make trade-offs in contexts where conflicting interests are more accepted and are more generally permeable to advocacy.<sup>2</sup>

---- Insert Figure 1 about here ----

Finally, in each level of government, institutional venues also differ according to the extent to which their memberships are constituted through elections. Elected officials presumably are more sensitive to majoritarian principles and pressures, while appointed officials may be freer to base decisions on professional criteria, the broad public interest, or even their own personal desires. In practice, all of these dimensions exist as continua, but for heuristic purposes Figure 1 presents a simplified typology assuming pure forms anchored at the extremes. Yet even this pared down presentation reveals a multiplicity of potential pressure points, each differing in its responsiveness to different types of appeals.

Taken by itself this typology is insufficient for predicting which venues advocates will try to establish themselves in for it says nothing about the organizations themselves or, since access is not a one way street (Ainsworth 1993), the incentives and constraints on the public officials being targeted. Yet it is the variation in the way different institutional structures

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<sup>2</sup> One of the hottest contemporary school reform notions draws its basic sustenance from this belief that general-purpose governmental institutions consider different kinds of inputs and apply different decision-making criteria. What some have labeled “the Chicago Model” involves shifting formal authority for many education policy decisions away from the issue-specific venue of school boards to the general-purpose portfolio of big-city mayors (Kirst and Bulkley 2000; Meier 2001).

aggregate preferences and impose constraints our typology highlights that holds the key to predicting venue shopping strategy when coupled with theories of interest group influence. These are grounded in the supply and demand relationship theories of influence (Austen-Smith 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Wright 1996), which holds that policymakers require information and other resources to make technically accurate and politically expedient decisions. Private interests supply these resources in exchange for access and influence.

Some of the variation in the demands of legislators and bureaucrats stems from personal ideologies and ambitions (Fenno 1973; Downs 1967), making them attractive to like-minded organizations. But beyond personal motivations, positive organization theories argue that behavior may also be explained by the incentives and constraints imposed on individuals by institutional structure (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast 1995). For example, legislators are driven by the requirement of re-election (Mayhew 1974), the necessity to raise campaign funds to ensure re-election (Jacobson 1992), and the need to make quick decisions on a multitude of bills with uncertain outcomes (Kingdon 1973; Krehbiel 1991). Agency officials must likewise respond to political principals (McCubbins et al. 1987), other key stakeholders (Hecklo 1977), and the technical challenges of policy implementation.

As institutional structures and ideological compositions vary from venue to venue, the capacity of lobbyists to meet the needs of, and develop lasting exchange relationships with, officials in these venues also varies. Organizations, like public officials, also differ by ideology, constituency size and composition, ability to raise campaign contributions, and technical policy knowledge, making it difficult to fit the resources they have to offer with the needs of policymakers in each venue. Nor are policymakers looking for one time exchanges. As boundedly rational actors lacking perfect information, they require a means of structuring a continuous flow of information and resources on which they may depend. Organizations able to

consistently and reliably provide resources valuable to lawmakers develop reciprocal exchange relationships giving them long term access (Hansen 1991). Figure 2 provides a diagram of this flow of information and influence as shaped by the ideological disposition of both parties exogenous to the model as well as the needs of lawmakers imposed by institutional structures. Feedback from repeated exchanges allows both parties to evaluate the benefits of the exchange relationship. By distinguishing different types of resources private interests have to offer, and connecting these to the needs of policymakers in different venues, we can predict where organizations are likely to focus their long term advocacy efforts in a multidimensional system of venues.

-- Insert Figure 2 about here --

For instance, membership in legislative bodies and many executive offices is determined by election, and to retain their positions in the institution members must periodically stand for re-election. Congressional scholars have often placed the fundamental desire for re-election at the heart of legislative behavior models (e.g., Mayhew 1974; Arnold 1990), and the logic extends to elected executives. Sensitive to constituent pressures, elected officials have an incentive to pay particular attention to groups able to mobilize large numbers of voters. This yields the following hypothesis:

H1: Organizations boasting large numbers of constituents are more likely to target institutional venues where membership is determined by popular election rather than civil service systems.

In addition, decision making venues differ in geographic scope and therefore the number of constituents to which elected officials need to be responsive. United States Senators, after all, represent considerably larger geographical regions than city council members. As a result, spatially concentrated interests that are distinct minorities at the national or state level can be majorities at the county, city, or district levels where these concentrated

constituencies may translate into effective grassroots pressure. Interests that are dispersed across many legislative districts, on the other hand, may have greater influence at higher levels of government. From this we deduce a second hypothesis:

H2: Organizations with large, geographically dispersed constituencies are more likely to target elected venues and less likely to target those with more concentrated constituencies.

Institutionally imposed re-election motivations also require lawmakers to prioritize the constituencies they serve, directing policy benefits towards those more likely to generate returns at the polling booth (Fenno 1978). Organizations with deep roots in the same community as an elected official may provide access to the types of local networks politicians need to expand re-election coalitions, and in return receive benefits such as public financing and grants that are the lifeblood of many organizations (Walker 1983; Salamon 1995). As elected officials at higher levels have fewer opportunities to develop close ties to any one organization, and may be reluctant to elevate one over another through pork barrel financing, this effect becomes diluted at venues higher in the federal system. Venues with specialized policy responsibilities are also unattractive targets to more parochial organizations as officials there without the election motivation have few incentives to be responsive. Although this may not be the case where the specialized venue administers programs important to the organization, we expect that these venues will normally be avoided for more general jurisdictional venues. Thus:

H3: Private interests with more parochial orientations are more likely to target local elected venues, and prefer venues with general jurisdictions over specialized.

By design most executive branch venues specialize in particular policy areas such as education or transportation. Kingdon (1989) found that private interests who possess expert knowledge in a policy area administered by an agency often find greater receptivity by officials at those agencies because the former's technical expertise may help the latter anticipate

difficulties in policy implementation, identify new problems, and further agency missions. Farming organizations frequently work closely with USDA developing new crop growing techniques, and transportation organizations often work with state and federal departments of transportation developing global positioning and smart driver technologies. Often times this takes the form of serving on advisory committees run by the agency to funnel the professional advice of “legitimate” interest groups (Balls and Wright 2001). Although this may really amount to regulatory “capture,” their congruent interests and ability to speak the same technical language creates the understanding and trust necessary for developing information exchange relationships. By the same token, these specialist organizations may be less inclined to target elected, or at least non-specialized, venues where different languages are spoken and politics rather than science and technical expertise determine outcomes. So:

H4: Organizations able to provide technical and scientific information in a field will target venues specializing in that policy over venues with more general jurisdictions.

Apart from aspects of institutional structures, we also believe that a venue’s dominant ideology may act as a natural facilitator between private interests and government officials. Whether holding a particular ideological belief prior to entering an institutional venue, or being indoctrinated afterwards, most actors within a venue hold a shared system of values and beliefs. Indeed, they often must in order to function together. Historically the House Appropriations Committee functioned on a shared belief in the seniority system and reciprocity while other congressional committees were decidedly partisan (Fenno 1973). Many executive branch agencies have common ideological missions shaping their behavior (Downs 1967), often to the detriment of politically appointed superiors (Hecklo 1977). Research into cognitive processes suggests that individuals prefer acquiring information from those they want to learn from, i.e., those with similar ideological beliefs (Lupia and McCubbins 2000). By extending this logic it follows that those suppliers of information most likely to be trusted are those with

similar ideological dispositions desiring to help engrain these core values in the structure of the institution. In other words, organizations will target venues driven by similar ideologies and values. We draw two distinct hypotheses out of this. Unlike our first four hypotheses, these do not depend on the fixed structure of a venue, but the ideological orientation of those in control.

The first is partisan:

H5: Organizations driven by a business or profit making orientation are more likely to target generalist elected officials versus non-elected issue specialists.

The second hypothesis centers on ethnicity. Apart from affiliation, core values can be influenced by shared experiences rooted in race and ethnicity. Although this may end up being more true of elected officials representing smaller, more concentrated districts like state legislators, we state our hypothesis as:

H6: Organizations with large minority constituencies will target venues where lawmakers of a similar ethnic identification predominate.

Finally, organizations have a couple of incentives to work through coalitions rather than purely on their own. First, it is not always easy for private interests to identify institutional venues where they might find sympathetic lawmakers, nor is it always easy for lawmakers to identify the most helpful organizations out of the multitude clamoring for their attention. This opens the door for the emergence of an entrepreneur, such as a coalition leader, able to bring parties together (Hula 1999; Mintrom 2000). Second, coalitions also provide organizations with representation through the efforts of *other* members (Hojnacki 1997; Hula 1999). Instead of individual organizations attempting to advocate in venues where they do not have connections, they may use the access enjoyed by other coalition members to gain access. Coalitions are an important part of the business of advocacy, but they may mask our ability to identify the direct connection between organizations and policymaking venues so we treat their use as a control variable. We summarize our hypotheses in Table 1.

---- Insert Table 1 about here ----

## Research Design

To test our hypotheses we use political contact data for a particular kind of private organization engaged in lobbying - charter schools in the Arizona, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and the District of Columbia. For several reasons we believe analyzing the advocacy of charter schools is an effective means of testing our hypotheses. First, although typically cast as private market actors (Chubb and Moe 1990), their reliance on public funding for survival and subjection to government oversight actually gives charter schools a powerful incentive to engage in political advocacy (Henig et al. 2003). This follows the economic theory of regulation where firms are expected to use politics to shape the parameters of their markets (Stigler 1971; Peltzman 1976).<sup>3</sup> Second, Salisbury's (1984) finding that the Washington interest group community is disproportionately populated by private firms rather than traditional associations leads us to believe that we are not biasing our results for or against our theory by focusing on charter schools as opposed to any other type of organization. Third, rather than being uniformly profit driven, charter schools actually vary considerably in mission, history, available resources, and constituencies (i.e., parents) represented (Lacireno-Paquet et al. 2002). This provides us with the variation necessary for our analysis.

Our data comes from a 2002 survey sent to charter schools in four states: Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. A full description of the survey methods and data collection can be found in (Brown et al. 2004). Briefly, we selected states that had charter schools in operation for several years in order to have a large enough sample and for

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, with the growing reliance of government on private firms to provide public service through contracts, franchises, and similar arrangements (Kettl 1993; Savas 2000), many firms now compete nearly as intensely with each other for public goods from government as they do for customers (Becker 1983; 1985).

the norms and behaviors of the schools to be established; each had its charter school law in place by 1997, and each had charter schools operating by 1999. We sought to maximize the variety of types of schools by selecting states in which they operated at least one large for-profit educational management organization (EMO). We also chose states that were varied in their political ideology (Erickson, 1993) and demographics (Hero, 1998). This purposeful selection means that these states cannot be assumed to be representative of all states with charter schools.

The survey was sent to the principal or director of every charter school in each state in January 2002. We included only those schools open in the 1999-2000 school year and still in operation by 2002. Basic descriptive information about each school was collected along with responses to closed-ended questions regarding the school's founding, operations and administrative strategies, including the frequency with which they pro-actively contacted government officials in a number of policy making venues. We received a total of 270 surveys for a response rate of 35 percent. This response rate is relatively good when measured against the track record of other efforts to get information on charter schools, which are often quite small, often quite overwhelmed, and sometimes quite suspicious of outsiders.<sup>4</sup>

We created four dependent variables related to advocacy and venue shopping. While they are not an exhaustive list of organization's political activities, they do capture important elements of these activities, particularly as they relate to direct contact with political officials. In the survey we asked each respondent how frequently they initiated contact with officials in the state legislature, the governor's office, state education departments, as well as their local city

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<sup>4</sup> By comparison, the Center for Education Reform, a highly visible organization that takes a pro-charter school position, reports a response rate of just over 20% in its 2002 Annual Survey of Charter Schools (CER, 2002) Comparison on comparable dimensions to charter schools in the 1999-2000 Schools And Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, provides some reassurance that our sample is representative.

councils, mayors, and school district officials. To capture more of the theoretical aspects of venues we discussed earlier in the paper, we group these contact points into state venues versus local venues, and then general policy jurisdictions versus specific.<sup>5</sup> First, we measured the *contacting of lobbying local venues, state venues, specialists, and generalists*. Respondents indicated whether they contacted various government agencies “once a week”, “once a month”, “once a year”, or “never”. We grouped local venues versus state venues and issue specialists versus issue generalists and took an average of their responses for each.<sup>6</sup> We then averaged contact scores for all state venues and all local venues for those dependent variables, and then averaged contacts with legislatures or council and governors or mayors for general venues. Specialist venues were the average of contact with regulators at the state and local levels. Thus our measures capture how intensely each charter school leaders lobbied each type of venues, a higher score indicating a greater intensity. Clearly this does not full address the issue of venue shopping, or the strategic choice to lobby one venue versus another, but does capture an important dimension of this political activity.

---- Insert Table 2 about here ----

Our independent variables correspond to each of our six hypotheses. To represent constituency size we use the total enrollment of each school for the 1999 – 2000 academic year. More students translate into more parents who may be registered voters, and although

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<sup>5</sup> This also makes it a little easier for us to incorporate the District of Columbia. DC charter schools were able to, and often did, lobby Congress, so we made Congress the higher venue while the District City Council was the local venue.

<sup>6</sup> We included a question in the survey phrased: Please indicate how frequently (never, once a year, once a month, once a year) someone from your school actively initiates contact with the following people and institutions in order to inform them of interests and concerns regarding government policies or their implementation.” We then included a list: state legislator, governor, mayor, city council members, chartering authority, state education office, and school district officials. We coded never as a zero, once a year as a 1, once a month as a 2, and once a year as a 3.

the maximum value of this variable, 1450, may not be large when compared to enrollment in AARP, on the scale of state and local politics 1450 parents beating down a councilman's door is likely to be significant indeed. Geographic dispersion is measured by coding a survey question that asked whether the school recruited only from the local neighborhood, 1, or whether they recruited from across their district or across multiple districts, 0. A binary variable indicating whether the school evolved out of a local social service organization, coded as 1, was taken from the survey questions. To test whether for-profit charter schools are attracted lobby different venues we coded schools partnered with for-profit companies, such as Edison or Advantage, as 1. Policy specialty is a binary variable indicating whether the school's founder had a history in education, public or private, prior to opening the school. A school's ethnic ideology is measured by the percent non-white students enrolled in each school.

For our coalition control variable we used the frequency each school contacted a formal advocacy alliance from 1999 to 2000. Recognizing that political activity need not always occur individually, this control captures the extent to which the organization is participating in collective political action. Schools that pursue political activities primarily through an advocacy organization might simply eschew direct contact with political actors in factor of venue shopping by proxy through an interest group. This strategy could be an ideological preference or one driven by simple economics.

Additionally, studies of schools and school decision making always highlight the importance of the composition of the student body. Demographic diversity is often correlated with everything from differences in achievement, graduation rates, and expenditures. Schools with a high level of diversity may have to expend more money on certain types of programs for at-risk students like English as a Second Language, school lunches, and even crime prevention. Given that lobbying is best viewed as a non-essential activity for most schools, money spent on

programs for at-risk students are likely to take away from political activities. We used the percentage of the student body that was non-white as a proxy for the percentage of at-risk students. (Shober et al., 2006)

### **Analysis and Discussion**

In terms of the predicted direction of the coefficients our hypotheses are only sometimes supported, as seen in Table 3. For instance, we find somewhat mixed support for our constituency size and geographic dispersion hypotheses, as measured by school enrollments and connection with charter systems outside of their immediate neighborhood. We predicted that schools with larger enrollments, and therefore more parents, would prefer to lobby elected generalist venues over non-elected. The coefficients in fact are statistically significant and positive for these all four venues. This suggests that rather than venue shopping, larger schools are simply more active politically, engaging in political contact more often as the size of the student body grows. This may be the case because with increasing numbers of students comes additional revenue and in turn the ability to commit resources to political advocacy.

---- Insert Table 3 about here ----

The constituency dispersion hypothesis performs partially along the lines of our predictions. As expected, we find evidence that schools with geographically dispersed constituencies are more likely to be involved in advocacy at the state level. The positive coefficient (0.15) shows that, compared to schools with a narrow, neighborhood constituency, schools that appeal to a wider geographic audience may see advocacy at the state level as more fruitful. At the same time, these schools are also significantly more likely to target local venues which contrasts with our hypothesis that suggested the opposite. Although we had not

predicted the positive influence on contacting general purpose venues that turned up, we suspect that because these venues also tend to be elected, that schools connected to outside networks may have extensive political networks as well.

The deep roots a school has in its community as a result of its background as a social service nonprofit, hypothesis three, performs somewhat as anticipated. Schools with such community ties have a positive inclination towards contacting local officials and state officials, though significantly. Social service oriented charter schools are, however, significantly more likely to contact elected generalists.

Hypothesis four, that charter schools established by founders with strong backgrounds in education should be more attracted to venues with a similar professional orientation and less of a political bent (non-elected and special jurisdiction) is partially born out. As predicted, the coefficient for contacting specialized venues is positive, the effect however is not statistically significant. We suspect the reason is that more education oriented founders are less likely to want to engage in politics, it simply has not been a large part of their history and social culture. To our surprise we found that charter schools with a greater education background are also more likely to lobby in generalists venues, the strongest performance we witness for this variable. Although in general the effect was predicted to be negative, we interpret this as support for our hypothesis. Normally the shared interest in a policy area should draw organization and agency professionals together, but in many states charter advocates have come to see traditional public education systems as structurally broken and hostile to choice-in-education policies. This belief is likely strongest among educators who have chosen to abandon it and establish charter schools, and may explain their strong focus on non-education officials.

Of our two venue ideology hypotheses, for-profit and ethnic orientations, the evidence supports the latter strongly but casts doubt on the former. Contrary to expectations, the more

of a for-profit orientation a charter school has, the less likely it turns out to be interested in working with state officials. Not that they were clearly more inclined to contact any of the local venues, for these coefficients are all statistically insignificant. On the other hand, ethnicity, and the shared values that stem from it, performs somewhat as we predicted. Charter schools with large non-white enrollments are less likely to lobby in any of the venues, though not statistically different in any case. This may be the case because in many districts, the increasing racial diversity of the student body is associated with additional costs for educational expenses such as bilingual education and programs to address academic achievement gaps. Dedicating resources to political activity in such schools may simply be an unavailable option.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the performance of our control variable for participation in a coalition of charter schools. Indeed the coefficients are large in the all four venues where they are statistically significant. Intuitively this is what we might expect. The positive coefficients suggest that many of the schools are willing to dedicate time to contacting policymakers directly while at the same time pursuing collective action through coalition leaders.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of this research, we feel, reverberate in a number of different literatures to varying degrees. Directly the findings reported here contribute to the growing literature on how interest groups make strategic decisions. A great deal of research has peered into the ways organized interests gain and retain access with policymakers, thereby gaining influence over the formation of public policy (Milbrath 1963; Hansen 1991; Austen-Smith 1993; Balla and Wright 2001) and how lobbyists target legislators in Congress (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Baumgartner and Leech 1996; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998). But why they target these venues

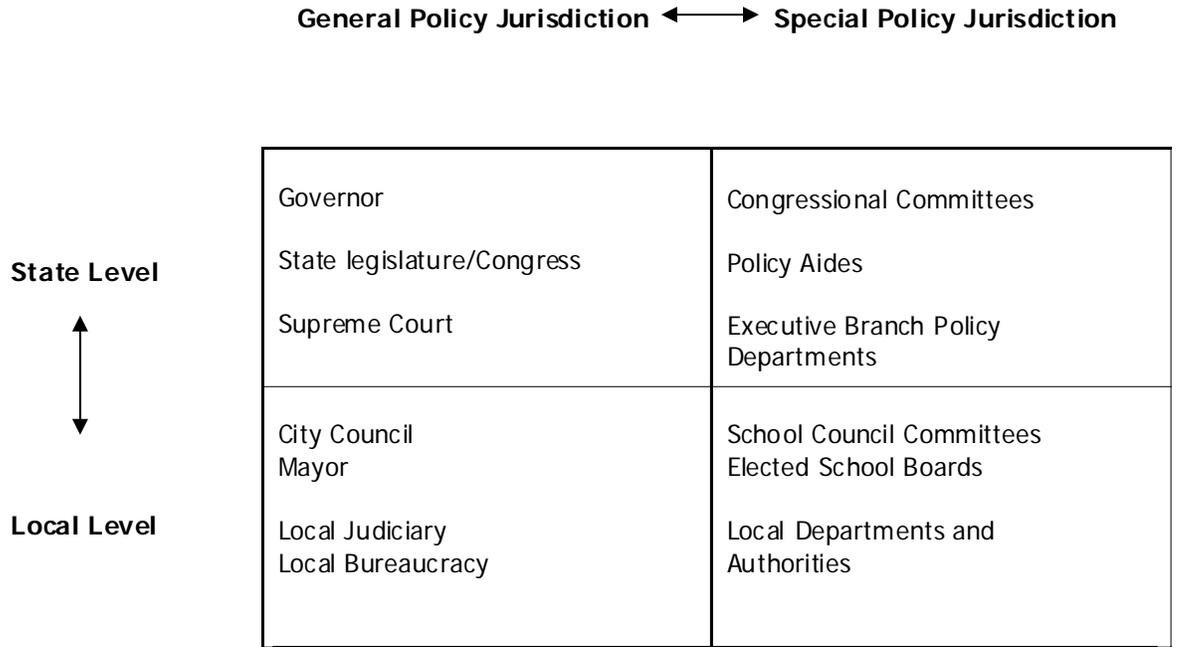
for their advocacy efforts in the first place has not been explored. By bringing together the often cited, but little applied, insights of Schattschneider (1960) with current theories of interest group access and a theoretically grounded typology of venues we build an organization - venue fit model that provides a good deal of leverage over this question.

Tests of our organization - venue fit model with data on charter school advocacy providing empirical support for some of our venue shopping predictions, we have learned that much of the venue selection decision is driven by finding the best "fit" between the resources and information private organizations have to offer and the needs of lawmakers imposed on them by the structures of their institution and facilitated by a congruence in some types shared ideological values. Where interests hope to receive the biggest return in terms of access and influence for the resources they have to offer and where common beliefs will help build lasting relationships is where they will target their long term, and most likely short term, advocacy efforts. If the venue an issue is considered in truly is influential in determining who wins and who loses, as Schattschneider believed, then how private interests decide where to establish themselves is crucial to understanding the mobilization of bias in the political system and for predicting the shape and perhaps not so obvious results of policy. Policy scholars would therefore do well to consider our results in their research as well.

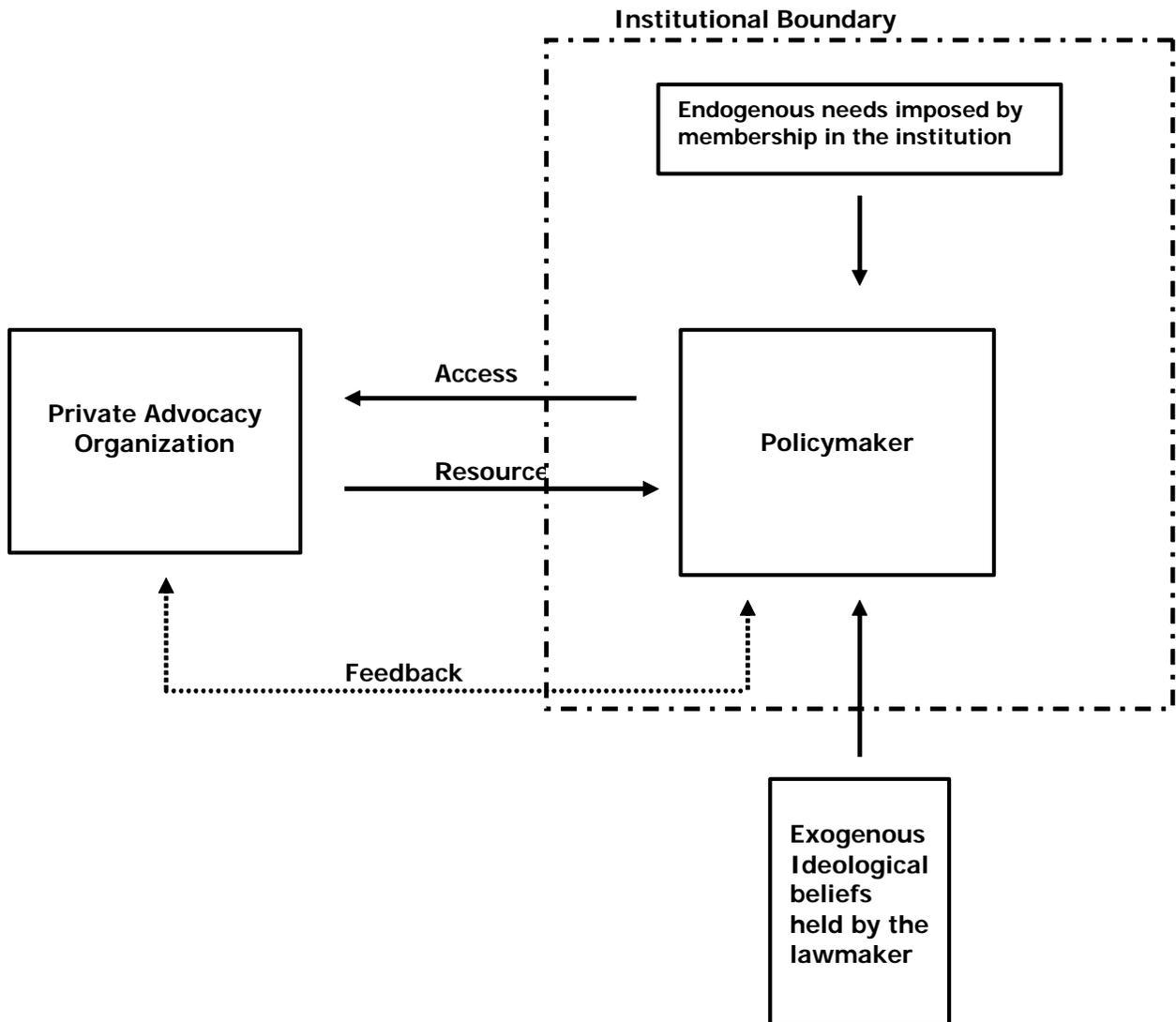
Finally, although it was not the question that drove this research, we are mindful that by using data on the political advocacy of charter schools we are casting them in a role very different from the one they are traditionally considered to act in. Rather than respond to market signals and change their product in order to attract customers, the charter school advocacy experience, and that in other jurisdictions around the nation, shows that charter schools are just as likely to use political advocacy to change the structure of the system instead. It is therefore most appropriate to think of charter schools as much as organized interests as it

is to think of them as schools. This suggests that not only is the diversity in the types of groups entering politics expanding (Walker 1983; Schlozman and Tierney 1986), but our conception of just what constitutes an “interest group” must also be growing. Citizen and public interest groups have emerged to challenge the once dominant positions corporate and trade associations had in national policymaking (McFarland 1984; Vogel 1989). Even new types of nonprofit organizations, including the officially lobby-banned 501(c)(3)s, are becoming players in politics (Reid 1999). As we expand our definition of what constitutes an interest group to include many new entrants, such as charitable nonprofits, previously thought to be “political actors”, it should come as little surprise that schools can be interest group as well.

**Figure 1**  
**Dimensions of Venue Shopping**  
 Elected versus Non-Elected Dimension Included in Each Cell



**Figure 2**  
**Exchange Relationship Diagram**



**Table 1**  
**Hypotheses and Expected Direction of**  
**Independent Variable Effect**

Hypotheses	State Venues	Local Venues	General – Elected Jurisdiction Venues	Specialized - Non-Elected Jurisdiction Venues
<u>Hypothesis 1</u> : Schools with larger enrollments are more likely to lobby elected venues and less likely to target non-elected venues	None	None	+	-
<u>Hypothesis 2</u> : Schools with geographically dispersed networks are more likely to lobby state venues than local venues	+	-	None	None
<u>Hypothesis 3</u> : Schools with a social service background are more likely to lobby local and general jurisdiction venues over specialized venues		+	+	-
<u>Hypothesis 4</u> : Charter schools with an educator(s) as a founder are more likely to lobby specialized venues over more politically charged elected member venues		None	-	+
<u>Hypothesis 5</u> : For-profit oriented charter schools are more likely to lobby elected general venues		None	+	None
<u>Hypothesis 6</u> : Schools with greater non-white enrollments are more likely to lobby general venues over specialized venues		None	+	-

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics for**  
**Dependent and Independent Variables**

Variable Name	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
<u>Dependent Variables</u>				
Local Venues	1.97	.57	1	3.7
State Venues	1.72	.50	1	3.5
General Jurisdiction Venues	1.52	.69	1	3.75
Specialized Jurisdiction Venues	2.27	.44	1	3.2
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
<i>Hypothesis One</i>				
School Enrollment	275	235	12	1450
<i>Hypothesis Two</i>				
District Outsider			0	1
<i>Hypothesis Three</i>				
History as a Social Service Organization			0	1
<i>Hypotheses Four</i>				
School had a For Profit Founder			0	1
<i>Hypothesis Five</i>				
Charter School's Founder has a Background In Education			0	1
<i>Hypothesis Six</i>				
Percentage of African-American Students	62	31	2.5	100
<u>Control Variables</u>				
Frequency of political contact with advocacy organization	1.8	1.2	0	4

**Table 3**  
**Estimates of Venue Contact by Charter Schools**  
 Coefficient (Standard Error)

Explanatory Variable	State	Local Venues	General Purpose Venues	Special Purpose Venues
<i>Hypothesis One</i>				
Charter School Enrollment (log)	.10*** (.04)	.12** (.04)	.09*** (.03)	.14** (.05)
<i>Hypothesis Two</i>				
Schools with Geographically Dispersed Networks	.15* (.09)	.20* (.10)	-.15* (.07)	.18 (.13)
<i>Hypothesis Three</i>				
Charter School has Roots as a Social Service Organization	.10 (.10)	.10 (.10)	.16** (.07)	.03 (.12)
<i>Hypotheses Four</i>				
Charter school's founder has a background in education	.11* (.07)	.04 (.07)	.09* (.06)	.05 (.09)
<i>Hypothesis Five</i>				
Charter School has a For Profit Orientation	-.13 (.09)	.02 (.11)	-.05 (.08)	-.02 (.19)
<i>Hypothesis Six</i>				
Percentage of Charter School Enrollment Is Non-White	-.00* (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00** (.00)
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Frequency of political contact with advocacy organization	.05** (.03)	.12*** (.03)	.06*** (.02)	.12*** (.04)
<i>Constant</i>	.98	1.05	.73	1.28
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	.07	.11	.10	.09
<i>N</i>	235	235	235	235

\* p < 0.10  
 \*\* p < 0.05  
 \*\*\* p < 0.01

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