

Article

Sustainability and Interest Group Participation in City Politics

Jeffrey M. Berry * and Kent E. Portney

Department of Political Science, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155, USA

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: jeffrey.berry@tufts.edu;
Tel.: +01-617-627-3465.

Received: 1 February 2013; in revised form: 28 April 2013 / Accepted: 30 April 2013 /

Published: 7 May 2013

Abstract: Many cities across the United States have embraced programs aimed at achieving greater sustainability. This may seem surprising, particularly since adopting aggressive environmental protection programs is regarded by some as inimical to economic development. An alternative perspective is that in the modern city sustainability can be part of an economic development strategy. What is largely missing from the literature on sustainable cities' policies and programs is systematic analysis of the political dynamics that seem to affect support for, and adoption and implementation of, local sustainability policies. To explore the actual behavior of cities with respect to sustainability and economic development policies, two original databases on 50 large U.S. cities are used. One source of data is composed of survey responses from city councilors, agency administrators, and leaders of local advocacy groups in each of these cities. The second database contains information as to what these 50 cities actually do in terms of sustainable programs and policies. In testing a series of hypotheses, findings suggest that: a high number of programs aimed at achieving sustainability is linked to the inclusion of environmental advocacy groups; that this relationship is not compromised by business advocacy; and that inclusion of environmental groups in policymaking seems to be supported, rather than impeded, by high rates of economic growth by the cities.

Keywords: sustainable cities; urban sustainability; interest groups; citizen groups; business groups

1. Introduction

The demographic and economic changes in America are far-reaching and are fundamentally altering urban life. The decline of manufacturing, migration of businesses to suburbs, and the globalization of economies have all had profound effects on cities. Some cities are thriving with the emergence of high tech and service sector businesses within their borders; other cities have struggled to find new businesses. A few decades ago the population of large cities was typically viewed in literal terms of black and white; diversity today is better conceived of as a rainbow of different ethnicities. Most cities today are growing in population and, by and large, are no longer seen as declining under the weight of a growing proportion of residents who are poor and marginalized. Many cities have ventured into policy arenas never imagined thirty years ago, including a wide array of policies designed to address environmental protection, sustainability, smart growth, climate protection, resiliency, and others. There is great optimism as to the future of U.S. cities [1].

Social scientists analyzing these changes have enhanced an understanding of the underlying dynamics of urban life [2,3]. Yet in one area research has not kept up with the evolution of U.S. cities. Recent scholarship has not focused heavily on the question posed by Robert Dahl [4] more than a half century ago: who governs? The animated debate sparked by this controversial book lasted for well over a quarter of a century. Issues of who governs are more likely today to be embedded in discussions of adaptive governance [5] and the role of agency in governance of earth systems [6], but interest in understanding the connection between governance and the ability of public policies to tackle environmental challenges persists. This paper hopes to shed some light on the broad question concerning the nature of power and governance in urban politics as it relates to city sustainability policies. The issue of “who governs?” in cities is germane to sustainability policies in that, despite the myriad empirical efforts to explain why some cities are more likely to pursue sustainability than others, there is yet little understanding of what gives local policymakers the political willingness to tackle long-term environmental problems by adopting and implementing sustainability programs. This paper’s means of shedding light on this issue is to analyze interest group influence across 50 large U.S. cities [7]. More specifically policymaking in the areas of both sustainability and economic development are examined. Although these are far from the only issues that come before city governments, they are broad policy fields central to the ongoing development of the nation’s urban centers.

This paper proceeds in the following manner. First, a foundation for the empirical investigation by placing city policymaking is built within the context of interest group politics. This will link the 50 city analysis to a central literature in political science. Second, this broad overview is used to develop specific research questions to be explored. The paper then turns to describing the two databases utilized to test the questions. Finally, the results of the statistical tests are interpreted with some suggestions for lines of further research.

2. Interest Group Arenas

At the center of the earlier debate over democracy in the city were judgments about interest groups in urban politics. To answer the question “who governs?” one must first identify the organizations and

sectors that wield power. But power is not an abstraction and city officials do not simply operate on the basis of knowing what's in the best interest of elites and then following those imputed preferences. Typically scholars look to either public opinion or interest group advocacy, or both, to try to measure and understand who governs. Recent analyses have documented the role of different kinds of groups in sustainable development in the international sphere [8], but analogous systematic efforts to understand the interest group basis of local decisions are not as prevalent.

2.1. Business Groups

The evidence of business dominance in national politics is overwhelming [9,10]. Roughly half of all Washington lobbies are corporations or business trade groups [11] (p. 321). The availability of resources is even more lopsided in favor of business. It seems logical to assume that the advantages of business so evident in national politics carry over to city politics. Clarence Stone [12], for example, makes the case that city hall must depend on local business leaders as it is otherwise difficult for mayors to amass and mobilize the resources necessary to accomplish their goals. Comparing business to other interest group sectors also points toward great advantages for business. It is conceivable that the collective action problem is an even greater hurdle in urban politics for citizen groups than it is on the national stage. The underlying scale of most cities may not be sufficiently large enough for local citizen constituencies to aggregate the resources required to open an office and hire professional staffers. If so, citizen constituencies that might oppose various business development plans may not have their views adequately expressed at city hall.

Yet there is reason to question whether this judgment based on structural advantages of the business sector accurately describes urban politics today. The business dominant model in local politics was built around a mobilized set of large corporations headquartered in the central city. Yet "downtown" isn't quite what it used to be in terms of the location of large-scale businesses. Boston provides a vivid example. Between the 1950s and the 1980s a semi-secret business group, "the Vault," worked closely with the city's mayors to envision the future and plan major initiatives. It certainly fits the notion of a behind-the-scenes power elite [13]. At the center of the Vault were the CEOs of six large money-center banks headquartered in the city. None of those banks still exist as all were swallowed up by mergers or acquisitions; today none of those larger swallowing entities are headquartered in Boston [14]. At the same time, the new large corporations that have since emerged in the metropolitan area are largely headquartered outside the city and have little reason to be involved in Boston politics. Although one can identify a few political movers-and-shakers in the Boston business community, it is abundantly clear that the mayor is not dependent upon a business elite to effectively govern the city.

Of the large corporations still headquartered in Boston, few appear to have a significant stake in city politics. To take just one case, it is hard to think of recent decisions by the city's government that have deeply affected Fidelity Investments, one of the largest and best known Boston-based corporations. In contrast, the same is not true for the large nonprofits in the city (particularly the hospitals and universities) which have a great deal at stake in real estate development. Indeed, nonprofits have become major employers in the city and large nonprofits like Partners Health Care, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston University, Harvard University, Northeastern University, and the Boston Foundation are major players in the city [15,16]. Even though there are cities where, surely,

city hall has more reason to reach out to business than in Boston, the larger point remains: in most cities, large-scale downtown businesses do not have the same footprint that they did at the time of the scholarly debate over pluralism vs. a power elite.

It is also important to recognize that the scale of city politics also works against the organization of business. While business trade associations abound in Washington, they are scarcer in cities or even metropolitan areas. Without a large number of individual businesses in the same industry, the costs to open an office that, among other things, lobbies city government, are going to be substantial for each individual business member. As a result business representation is most likely to come from business peak associations like the local chamber of commerce and a handful of large corporations with significant issues before the city.

The modest mobilization of business through trade groups is also a function of the regulatory context as cities possess limited regulatory powers over most business markets. Product standards, pollution limits, trade rules and the like are largely regulated at the state, national, and even international level. Where cities do hold considerable regulatory powers is in the area of land use. Not surprisingly, real estate developers and construction companies tend to be better organized than other city business sectors and are active in pressing their interests forward.

The scarcity of political science research on business advocacy in the city should come as no surprise. As Mark Smith points out, “the study of business remains a niche area in political science” [17] (p. 452). The paucity of research on business in urban politics makes this field of scholarship a niche within a niche. What is known about cities suggests that business is not dominant but, at the same time, there is no reason to believe that it is weak or passive when city-level issues that affect it arise. The contours of business’ influence between these two poles remains unclear.

2.2. Citizen Groups

The prevailing view of citizen group advocacy in urban politics has evolved considerably over time. Stone’s 1989 study of Atlanta [12] found neighborhoods to be poorly organized and weak on issues of direct importance to them. As noted above, there are powerful reasons to believe that citizen advocacy will be modest on the city level. At the heart of such thinking is a belief the collective action problem is a formidable obstacle. Whereas a small percentage of citizens across the country can adequately fund national citizen groups, the same small percentage of a city may not seem adequate to provide the financial support necessary to create viable advocacy organizations.

Nevertheless, there is research which suggests that citizen advocacy may be more substantial than the logic of collective action predicts. The first step in assessing how the scale of city-level politics affects interest group advocacy is to step away from the seemingly logical assumption that urban lobbying is generally a smaller version of Washington lobbying. The critical difference is that city politics is characterized by low barriers to entry [18,19]. Unlike Washington politics, where getting a foot in the door just to plead one’s case can be a challenge [20,21], city councilors and local agency administrators are not inundated with requests for face time and allocating time to meet with neighborhood and citywide organizations is a manageable part of their job.

Local governments are also lean, ever more so with today’s shrinking revenues and layoffs. In a comparative context, using the percentage of the workforce employed in government, local

governments in the United States have a smaller workforce than those in most other western democracies. On the state and local level, ongoing budget pressures have had a downward impact on the number of government employees [22]. Consequently, agencies may not be in the position of being information rich—again, a stark contrast to Washington—and may find that studies and reports from an advocacy group fills in gaps in their knowledge. Lean or starved city agencies also depend heavily on nonprofits to implement social service programs and need to work with them in a collaborative framework. Although these may not technically be interest groups, they are community-based organizations and their leaders work with their professional staffs to act as advocates before government [23,24]. Nonprofits often represent broad citizen interests and are able to support staff professionals who are able to support themselves through a variety of income streams such as grants, contracts, fees for service, and philanthropic donations.

As Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom [25], as well as Beatley and Manning [26], suggest, local politics is the politics of place. Many of the issues that arise on a city's agenda have highly specific impacts on selected neighborhoods. Economic development proposals, deteriorating housing and vacant business properties, parks and recreation, siting of facilities, schools, and crime are all linked to neighborhoods and, often, to one single neighborhood. Neighborhood associations and other neighborhood groups are not expected to be large, sophisticated lobbies and their access to government is enhanced by city hall's sensitivity to neighborhood opinion. Previous evidence suggests that more than 80 percent of leaders of neighborhood groups have their phone calls to city hall "almost always" or "usually" returned [19]. In the end the collective action problem is not the obstacle it may seem as lobbying in city politics does not require a smaller version of an office along "K" Street in Washington. Rather, volunteers operating out of people's homes are perceived to be credible representatives of their neighborhoods. Government officials may not necessarily agree with the views that are put forward, but these advocacy groups are seen as authentic voices of the citizenry.

One constraint on local policymakers that is similar to Washington is the need to "get to yes." Finding ways of bringing opposing groups to a compromise solution is challenging but can be particularly urgent in cities when the issue at hand pits economic development against neighborhood opposition. With jobs and future tax revenues at stake, city officials are predisposed to push for resolutions that will enable a project to move forward quickly. Neighborhood groups may be emboldened by a city councilor representing their district and gain leverage in negotiations by the ever-present threat of a law suit that could delay a project for years. The structures for such negotiations are likely to be in place. Citizen participation procedures, advisory bodies, and more informal means of negotiating may bring citizen groups into the policymaking process and over time create a norm of inclusiveness. An ideal outcome for city hall is for development of some scale to go forward without leaving behind an angry neighborhood in the wake of the ultimate decision. The search in cities is always for a "win-win" solution.

3. Tradeoff?

Are there "win-win" solutions that allow cities to aggressively pursue commercial development while at the same time protecting neighborhood environments and quality of life? To use the vernacular, can cities have it all? The literature on urban politics might lead one to be skeptical.

In Harvey Molotch's evocative phrase [27], cities are widely understood to be "growth machines." In short, the job of city government is to produce jobs. Many argue that cities can only do this by creating business-friendly environments where commerce is king.

Cities can be highly vulnerable to the loss of commerce because they compete with each other and with their suburbs for business development [28,29]. As a business plans to expand or relocate, it may have little inherent preference as to which side of a city-suburb border it chooses. A company's primary concern in this decision may be "what can government do for me?" Property tax concessions, quick action enabling land acquisition, waiving of zoning guidelines, and infrastructure improvements can be crucial. Such governmental assistance can also be expensive, both in terms of outlays and lost revenue from tax considerations. In turn, lost revenue has a direct impact on the city's ability to meet other needs and demands.

The ongoing need of cities to attract and maintain business has implications beyond government assistance for those companies that request it. As Charles Lindblom argued in *Politics and Markets*, business has a "privileged position" at all levels of government [9] (pp. 170–188). Lindblom says the door must always be open to business leaders and, as such, business is firmly incorporated into the larger policymaking process. If this logic holds, its influence is going to be felt across a range of issue areas. As environmental discussions and initiatives emerge, corporate leaders may act as a constraint on the development of programs and policies aimed at promoting greater sustainability.

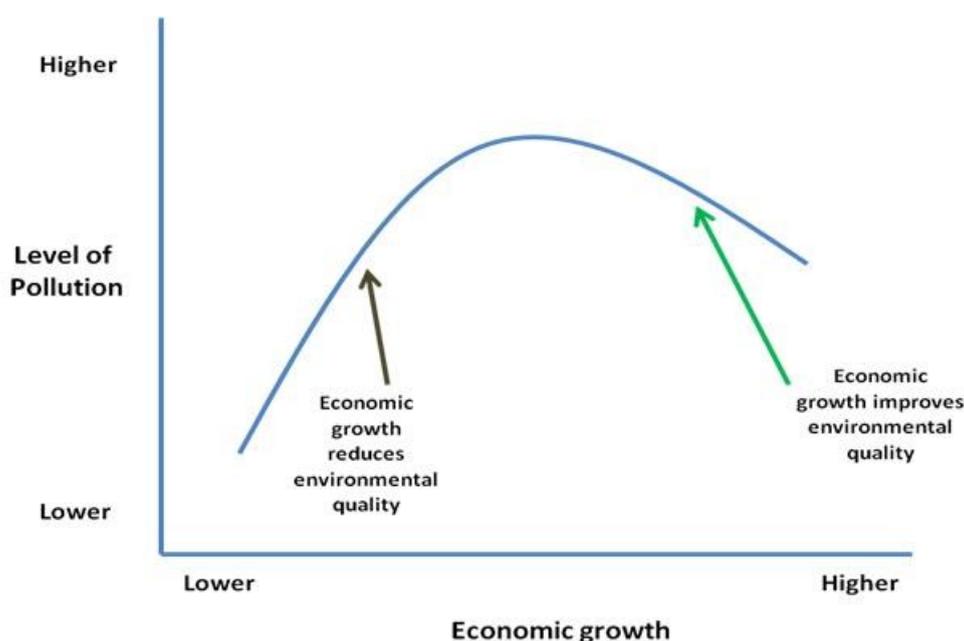
Lindblom's crude determinism may not seem appropriate to contemporary U.S. cities with their shrunken manufacturing base and more complex economic challenges. Yet the need to generate jobs and economic opportunity still remain. A more recent perspective is that cities are now driven by the globalization of the economy. In this view they have no choice but to compete in the world economy and city policymakers must do what they can to create conditions that accommodate and encourage international commerce [30–32]. Cities must focus intently on attracting human capital, the engine of postindustrial economies. They must also become more entrepreneurial and "local policy initiatives [should] center on linking localities to global webs" [30] (p. 9).

The critical importance of focusing on human capital certainly seems validated by the prosperity of U.S. cities that score high on that scale. Cities such as San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Austin, Boston, Charlotte, and New York are thriving as they are centers of new business formation and are magnets for entrepreneurs and start-ups. Whether this economic vitality reflects returns on investments in human capital or the effects of other influences is the subject of much debate [33–37]. It certainly seems plausible that the economies in these and other cities are driven forward, at least in part, by highly educated, high income professionals who have the skill sets to thrive in today's business world.

Cities strategize as to how to nurture entrepreneurship and attract young professionals. Thus, local governments face complex demands as they want to encourage business development while attracting professionals who look for communities that provide high performing schools, rich cultural amenities, and a strong city commitment to environmental protection. Unlike schools and cultural amenities, sustainability seemingly involves tradeoffs with economic development. Even in modern city economies characterized by less manufacturing, expanded business development will likely mean more cars commuting, more trucks making deliveries, more congestion, more energy use, and more pollution.

The Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) in cities offers a provocative theoretical insight into this tradeoff [3]. In this theory, economic growth and development is coupled with environmental degradation but only up to a point. The central argument is that as economic development makes a city more prosperous and as its population of professionals grows, political demands from these influentials push policymakers to make environmental protection more of a priority. It is this cohort that not only understands the dangers of environmental degradation and untenable natural resource consumption but embraces as a fundamental value the virtue of sustainability. It is a view of stewardship—the belief that humans take care of the earth and that any damage done can be balanced by some form of remediation that improves the environment. The essence of sustainability is that the needs of today are met “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [38] (p. 8). When the population holding this principle reaches some critical mass, the city tips toward more environmental protection efforts. Expressing the EKC theory graphically, Figure 1 shows that the relationship between economic development and the level of pollution is posited to be curvilinear.

Figure 1. The Environmental Kuznets Curve. Adapted from Kahn [3] (p. 31).



Cities such as Seattle and Portland are certainly aided in attracting young professionals because of their robust array of sustainability and related programs [39]. Yet it is not just environmental protection that is at the heart of such cities’ strategies as increasingly young professionals demonstrate a preference for close-in jobs that allow them to live in the central city [40]. These cities are also focused on economic development strategies that will yield jobs and prosperity but, critically, they are interested in new businesses that will have a minimal adverse impact on the environment, if not a positive one. This is a rather different economic development strategy than the traditional “attract, retain, and expand” [41–43]. This business first approach is built around large anchor employers (think Wichita and Boeing) and depends on tax and fee incentives to keep these key companies loyal to the city [44]. Indeed, in some cities business has led the fight for a sustainability initiative as corporate leaders saw sustainability as a means of promoting economic development after deindustrialization had shrunk

the city's economic base. Chattanooga's Chamber of Commerce is such an example [45] (pp. 115–136). Smart growth strategies, as an element of sustainability, offer a striking contrast. They focus heavily on mixed land uses and mixed-use zoning with plans to concentrate high density housing near mass transit and places of employment, while emphasizing the need to locate new businesses near such housing and mass transit [1,46].

As city governments have moved toward more programs and policies aimed at promoting sustainability, they typically have established bureaucracies within their broader structure that become internal government advocates for environmentalism. The city of Houston, despite its location in the heart of big oil country, continues to produce a steady stream of environmental initiatives because its Environmental Coordinating Council develops proposals and has built relationships that reach across the city's agencies [47] (pp. 68–71) [48] (pp. 243–244). This does not mean that environmentalism dominates city politics, but making Houston greener seems to be part of the discussion today. This enormous sprawling city, characterized by a lack of zoning restrictions and a substantial population of low income minorities, is hardly the image of a green city whose politics is dominated by liberal, high income professionals. Nevertheless, its policymaking process has moved toward inclusiveness and Houston city hall is clearly open to a variety of interests.

4. Lines of Inquiry

This paper has offered many different crosscurrents in theorizing about urban life, economic development, sustainability, and city policymaking. Cities vary considerably in all respects and it is surely possible to find selected cities to fit any of the propositions put forward. The real challenge is to determine which line of thinking has the most explanatory power. The data on 50 U.S. cities (described in detail below) offers the opportunity to compare cities along several relevant dimensions. Most centrally, what types of cities pursue what kinds of economic development and environmental protection strategies?

The broad relationship between the 50 cities' sustainability efforts and their economic well-being was explored by Portney [49]. He finds a strong and positive relationship between growth in a city's per capita income over time and its sustainability score. The more programs and policies aimed toward promoting sustainability, the greater the city's growth in per capita income. After applying appropriate controls this relationship holds. This does not imply that there is a relationship between the number of sustainability programs and sustainability outcomes, or that cities that adopt and implement more programs necessarily would be expected to produce the highest number of sustainability outcomes.

The goal here is to understand the relationship between sustainability policies and programs and more explicit political variables. As noted at the outset, policymakers cannot be assumed to impute preferences; there's too much room for error in interpreting what those outside of government want. Moreover, those in government have strong views of their own and can easily convince themselves that they understand what citizens prefer. With a data set rich with information about the interest groups active in the cities, this paper is able to examine the degree to which advocacy is linked to the pursuit of sustainability. Does advocacy matter and, if so, advocacy by whom?

The first line of inquiry is to explore environmental advocacy. Presumably the greatest push for sustainability would come from those who have organized to advocate on behalf of environmental

protection. While this connection seems obvious, there are certainly other variables that could prove to be more important. It is also the case that cities are complicated entities; with so many political, cultural, economic, and regional factors at work, that there may be no distinct relationship between local environmentalism and the adoption of programs promoting sustainability. Still, given the impact of environmental groups on national policymaking, there is strong reason to hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship. An understanding of interest groups in national politics clearly leads to an expectation that if there is large scale mobilization coupled with sufficient resources, some degree of responsiveness by government is a likely result. Evidence suggests that there is environmental group activity in these cities but the question addressed here is whether this activity is sufficient enough to warrant inclusion of such groups in policymaking? Moreover, is such mobilization and inclusion strong enough to influence policymaking? Emerging literature in city environmental policymaking suggests that it is [50,51]. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

Cities with greater the inclusion of environmental groups in their policymaking processes will be more likely to aggressively pursue sustainability policies and programs than cities where there is lesser inclusion of environmental groups.

The next step is to consider the impact of business on sustainability. If the inclusion of environmental groups demonstrates an overall positive relationship with sustainability, is that relationship compromised in some way by the inclusion of business groups? This analysis is made a bit more difficult by the finding that there is high, uniform, access of business to local government. This comes as no surprise as the literature on business and politics predicts such open access for business. Because there is a lack of sufficient variation along this dimension, the influence of business is approached from a slightly different perspective: what happens in those cities where access is very high for both business and environmental groups? Using the full scale of measures of such access for both sets of groups provided by the surveys, the degree to which business lobbying might lessen the impact of environmental access can be calculated.

It is easy to articulate a chain of reasoning that predicts a dilution of environmentalists' effectiveness when both business and environmental groups are included in city policymaking. Pushed to make a choice, won't city officials regard job creation and job maintenance as their priority? If so, they will surely side with business. But is there a contrary logic that suggests high access for both sectors predicts high sustainability scores? Such a contrasting logic can be built around the shrinking business presence in the central city. Moreover, stopping sustainability programs from being enacted seems unlikely to be a priority of service sector firms. Rather, large downtown firms are going to focus on those few issues that might provide them with more business, especially real estate development. Moreover, as already noted, the prevailing economic model in the heads of city policymakers may no longer be "attract, retain, and expand." If so, a new economic model may be focused around the "livable city" with smart growth and green industry. Case study evidence suggests that as businesses increasingly seek to reduce their own environmental impact (particularly around climate impacts), opportunities for businesses to collaborate with local governments has expanded [52]; such a city must need sustainable initiatives to make this vision credible. This logic can be tested with the data here and stated in a second hypothesis:

Cities with greater inclusion of both business groups and environmental groups in their policymaking processes will be more likely to aggressively pursue sustainability policies and programs than cities where there is lesser inclusion of business and environmental groups.

The final research question examined here focuses on the relationship of environmental advocacy to the economic prosperity of the city. A traditional and familiar argument made by business is that environmental protection works against economic development. Building on Portney's finding [49] that growth in per capita income is positively correlated with the level of cities' sustainability effort, this paper asks about the political implications of this relationship. It is possible that underlying this relationship is a dynamic where sustainability policies are the most prevalent in cities that are both politically liberal (progressive) and wealthy. In other words, it could be that affluent progressive voters elect liberal city councilors and mayors who, in turn, enact the policies those voters prefer. Cities like San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Denver immediately come to mind as they are leaders in urban sustainability and appear to validate such a relationship. However, a contrary conjecture is that it is environmental organizing that is critical and not the underlying aggregate ideology of the citizenry. Given all the competing demands upon city policymakers, the complexity of public policy, and the common nonpartisan nature of city elections and politics, such a direct relationship between political demographics and policy outputs seems problematic. Rather, it may be the inclusion of environmental groups that is key. Thus, this suggests a third hypothesis:

Cities with greater growth in per capita income will be more likely to exhibit greater inclusion of environmental groups in policy deliberations than cities with lesser growth in per capita income.

5. Research Methods

Before testing these three hypotheses, a few words describing the data are in order. The statistical analysis below draws upon two original, large-scale databases. The first is a 2009–2010 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 of the challenges presented by their scale [53]. The 50 surveyed cities had 2008 population sizes ranging from 1.5 million in Phoenix to 336,000 in Tampa. Between June 2009 and January 2010, questionnaires were mailed to all city councilors or commissioners, a specific subset of city administrators, and to a selected set of representatives of advocacy organizations in each of these cities. A multi-modal approach was used, offering subjects the choice of filling out a paper questionnaire they received in the mail or going to a web site and answering the same questions online. Follow-up prompts to initial non-respondents took the form of personalized emails and specified the hot-linked URL for the web site [54].

Overall, questionnaires were mailed to the entire population of 541 councilors [55] and yielded a response rate of 35.9 percent. The project also involved identifying and surveying an average of about 18 city administrators in each city. The administrators targeted were all leading officials serving as 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, 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 were identified. Questionnaires were mailed to this entire population of 885 city administrators and the response rate was 48.7%. Overall, these response rates compare very favorably to similar survey work in cities. For example, in the 2010 ICMA large scale survey of sustainability policies in all U.S. cities and towns of 2,500 population or larger only 16 of the largest 55 cities responded, producing a response rate of 29.1% for this group of cities. The overall response rate across all cities and towns was an even lower 25.4% [56].

The second data set is composed of information about what the same 50 cities actually do in terms of programs and policies related to sustainability [48,49]. Such data make it possible to link the attitudinal and policymaking variables from the survey to each city's commitment to environmental protection. The data gathering was quite comprehensive and information has been collected across 38 separate variables in all of the cities. These 38 programs and policies include industrial recycling, brownfields redevelopment, tax incentives for environmentally friendly development, alternatively fueled city vehicles, car pool lanes, eco-industrial projects, a citywide comprehensive plan, and a sustainability indicators program. Summary (additive) scores (one point for each program) for each city allowed the creation of a measure of each city's apparent commitment to sustainability. Cities with higher scores would seem to have stronger commitment to sustainability than cities with lower scores by virtue of having enacted and implemented more programs. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that cities with higher scores have produced more sustainable outcomes; it simply suggests these cities are trying harder. While this approach takes a relatively large number of specific policies and programs into consideration, it has the drawback that it does not attempt to weight any one program or policy as being more important than another. Weighting might seem intuitively appropriate, but must be deferred until the operation of specific programs can be systematically linked to the production of sustainability outcomes (such as cleaner air, lower levels of human exposure to toxics, *etc.*). External validation for this scoring of individual cities comes from comparison with the sustainability assessments produced by other researchers [47,57]. A simple comparison between the scores used here and the SustainLane sustainable city rankings shows substantial similarity. Both the scores used here and the SustainLane assessments reveal that Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco are at the top; Virginia Beach, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City are near the bottom. As another indication of the internal validity of the index developed here, the correlation between these scores and the Siemens environmental performance index [47] for the 21 U.S. cities included in the Siemens' analysis is .772 (significant at the 0.000 level), suggesting that both indexes are likely measuring the same underlying policy commitment to sustainability and the environment.

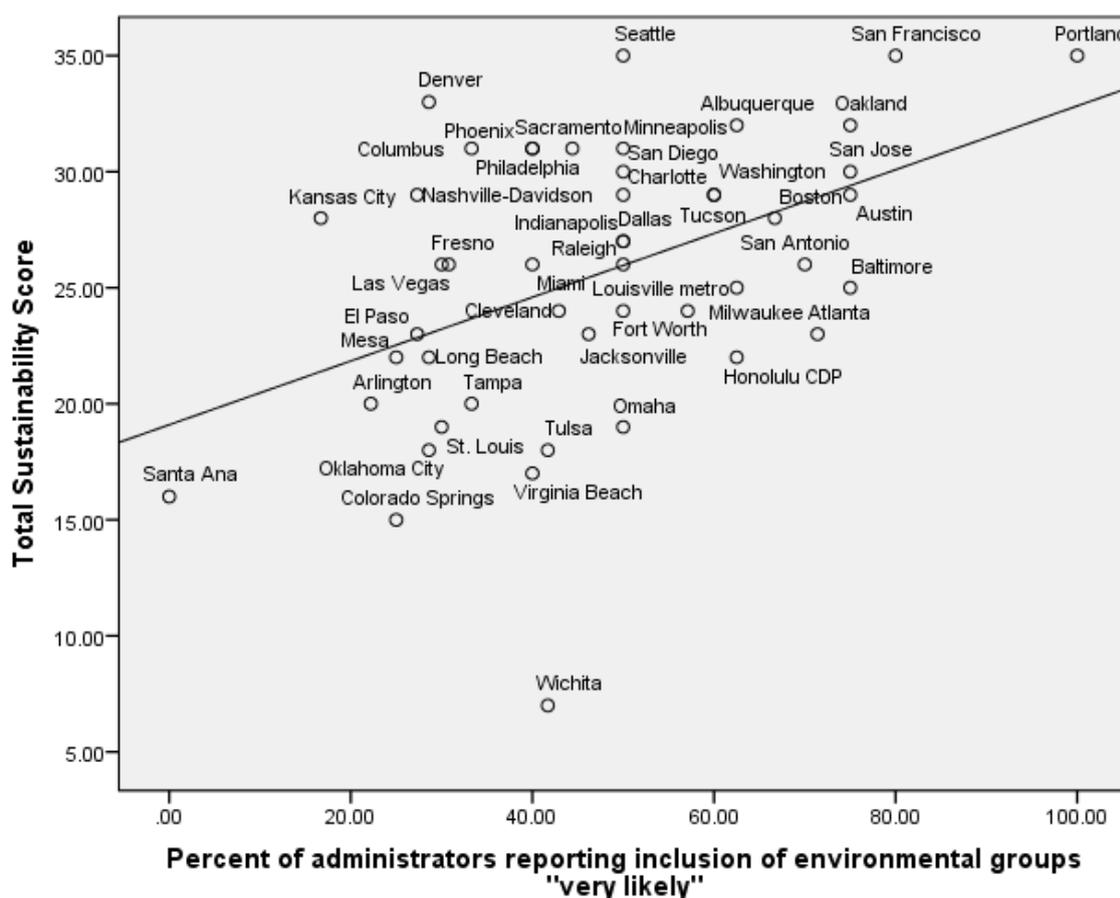
6. Advocacy Group Inclusion

All three of the hypotheses utilize a measure of interest group inclusion in the policymaking process. To assemble this data each administrator surveyed was asked this question, "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?" Respondents scored ten different interest group sectors or organizations of city governments. For each

sector administrators chose from the categories “very likely to include”, “maybe/maybe not”, “not very likely to include” or “don’t know”.

The first hypothesis ties this measure of inclusion to the level of sustainability in each city. Again, the sustainability index is an aggregate of the number of programs and policies operative in each city across the 38 categories utilized in this research. More specifically, the percentage of administrators within each city reporting inclusion was correlated with the city’s total sustainability index. Detroit and Memphis were dropped from the data analysis as the total responses from administrators in those cities were fewer than four, the minimum threshold established. The resulting correlation for the 48 cities is high ($r = 0.455$, significant at 0.001). Figure 2 offers a scatterplot of these data. The positive relationship is apparent, and the cities pursuing the most sustainability programs and policies (Portland, San Francisco, Seattle and Denver, in particular) have administrators reporting even higher levels of inclusion of environmental groups than might be expected. Cities below the regression line (Wichita, Virginia Beach, Colorado Springs, and Santa Ana, among others) demonstrate lower commitment to sustainability policies and programs than would be expected given the level of inclusion of environmental groups reported by their respective administrators.

Figure 2. Inclusion of Environmentalists and Sustainability Scores ($R^2 = .207$).



The next step was to try to determine how this relationship might be affected by a high level of business inclusion. Is the link between environmental advocacy and sustainability tempered by business lobbies that might be working at cross-purposes from green lobbies? The test above is

replicated, substituting a high degree of inclusion for *both* business and environmental groups. The results are little changed, with only a slightly weaker relationship between this combined advocacy variable and the sustainability index ($r = 0.400$, significant at 0.005).

There are different approaches that could be taken to try to assess the relative importance of these two types of groups, but the most obvious is through a simple multivariate regression analysis. Here the percent of administrators reporting inclusion of businesses and the percent of administrators reporting inclusion of environmental groups are used as independent variables and the sustainability scores are used as the dependent variable (see Table 1). Controlling for the percent of administrators who report business inclusion, inclusion of environmental groups is significantly related to the pursuit of sustainability. Controlling for inclusion of environmental groups, inclusion of business has no effect on the pursuit of sustainability. From these regressions and further statistical analyses, the bottom line seems clear: environmental groups do seem to matter [58].

Table 1. Regression Results Showing the Relative Importance of Business Advocacy and Environmental Advocacy on Local Sustainability Policies (Dependent variable = Total Sustainability Score; $n = 48$ cities).

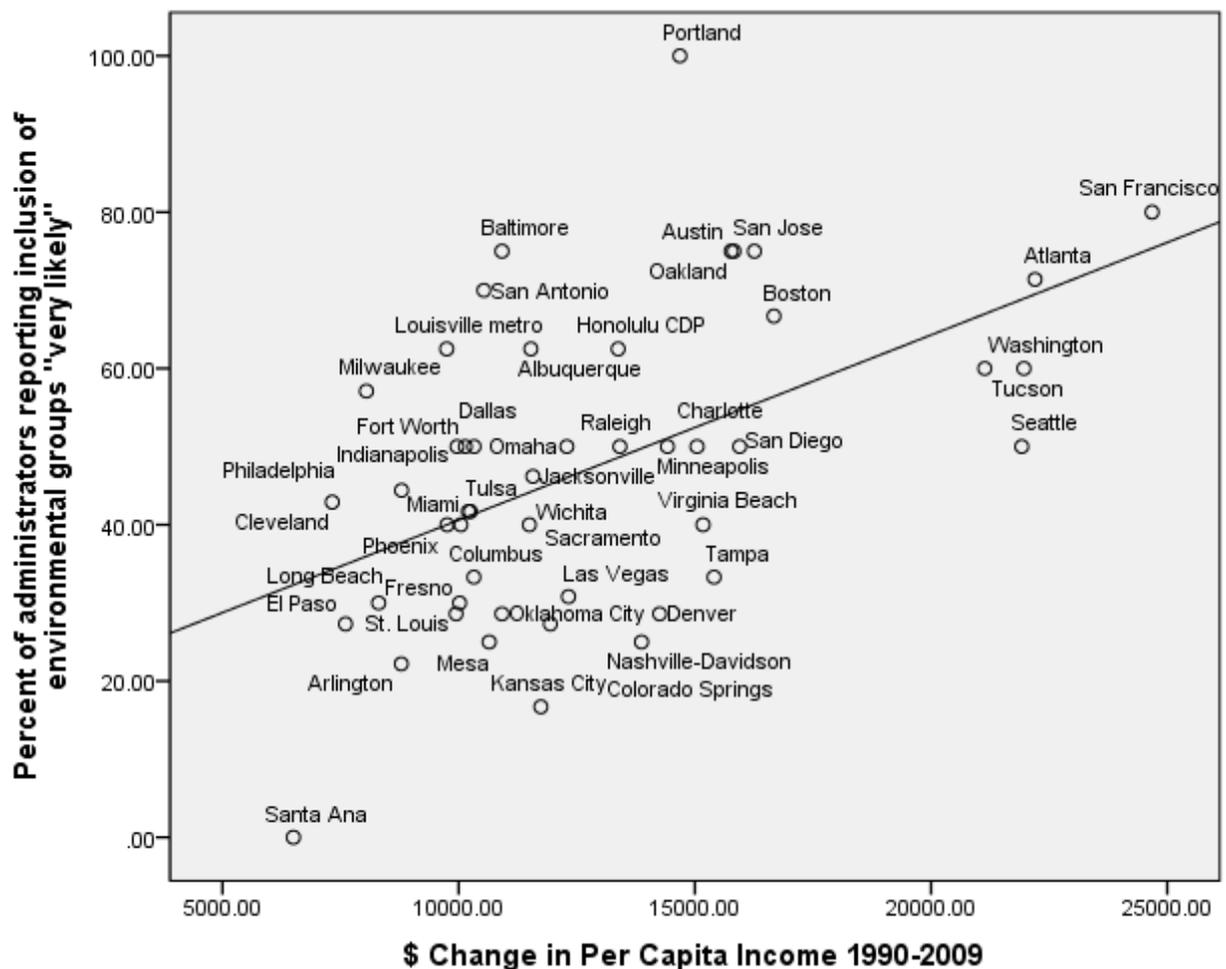
Independent Variables	B	beta	S.E.	Significance
Inclusion of business in deliberations	0.017	0.024	0.093	0.856
Inclusion of environmental groups in deliberations	0.136	0.452	0.040	0.001
Constant	17.5	-----	8.93	0.056
R ²			0.208	
Significance			0.005	

The final set of tests involves the relationship between environmental advocacy and a city's prosperity. Change in per capita income is utilized as a measure of a city's overall economic direction. The presumption is that any adverse economic effect of enacting programs designed to protect the environment would manifest itself in this macro-level indicator. As graphically illustrated in Figure 3, however, inclusion of environmental advocates in city policymaking processes is strongly related to *growth* in per capita income ($r = 0.511$, significant at 0.000). Two cities, Portland and Santa Ana seem to stray farthest from the regression line, where 100 percent of Portland's administrators report inclusion of environmental interest groups, and Santa Ana shows much lower levels of environmental interest group inclusion (none) than would be expected even given its very modest levels of income growth.

This association could be a reflection of a number of different processes. First, the positive correlation could constitute evidence of the mechanisms underlying a possible environmental Kuznets curve, or at least the right-most portion of the curve. As personal income goes up and reaches a threshold, leaders see an increased demand for environmental policies and start to feel compelled to include environmental groups as they contemplate new policies and programs. Second, it could reflect a belief by city officials that economic development is aided by environmental protection and the

pursuit of sustainability. As city policymakers consider the best ways to pursue economic development, they may come to believe that they need to include environmental groups if they want to develop effective growth strategies. Inclusion of business groups is not correlated with change in personal income, suggesting that business groups probably can't deliver the goods any more, at least not the way they once could. As such economic development requires inclusion of environmental groups along with business groups. Third, the relationship could, of course, be spurious. The true underlying relationship may reflect a city's underlying political ideology, or at least a preference by policymakers for a balanced approach.

Figure 3. Per capita Income Growth and Environmental Advocacy ($R^2 = .261$).



To test these alternative perspectives, regression analyses assess the impact of some additional explanatory variables. Spuriousness of the relationship depicted in Figure 3 is examined by conducting a regression analysis with the percent inclusion of environmental groups as the dependent variable and three independent variables: change in per capita personal income 1990-2009, the percent of administrators who report that most city councilors are “liberal/very liberal,” and the percent of administrators who reported that the city balances economic development and the environment (see Table 2) [59].

Table 2. Regression Results Showing Relationships with Inclusion of Environmental Groups in Policy Deliberations (Dependent variable = Percent of administrators reporting inclusion of environmental groups “very likely;” n = 48 cities).

Independent Variables	B	beta	S.E.	Significance
\$ change in per capita income, 1990–2009	0.002	0.407	0.001	0.007
Percent of administrators reporting that most city councilors are “liberal” or “very liberal”	0.128	0.220	0.084	0.135
Percent of administrators reporting an equal balance between economic development and the environment in city policies	0.113	0.113	0.126	0.377
Constant	13.2	-----	9.11	0.156
R ²			0.319	
Significance			0.001	

The overall R² is .319 and is highly significant. These results suggest that income is still a strong correlate of the inclusion of environmental groups in policymaking even controlling for political ideology and for the propensity of administrators to seek a balance between economic development and the environment. It is certainly not just liberal cities where environmental groups are being included. Another regression substitutes a different measure of the cities’ commitment to sustainability for the “balance” variable, this one representing an average percent of the city councilors and administrators who said the city has a “very high” or “high” commitment to sustainability. Table 3 reveals that the R² is even higher (.339). These findings are consistent with the previous regression in that the income variable continues to be highly significantly related to inclusion of environment groups. The commitment to sustainability variable is also significantly related to inclusion of environmental groups, suggesting that cities that are committed to sustainability do tend to be those that are more inclusive of environmental groups.

Table 3. Regression Results Showing Relationships with Inclusion of Environmental Groups in Policy Deliberations (Dependent variable = Percent of administrators reporting inclusion of environmental groups “very likely;” n = 48 cities).

Independent Variables	B	beta	S.E.	Significance
\$ change in per capita income, 1990-2009	0.001	0.320	0.001	0.033
Percent of administrators reporting that most city councilors are “liberal” or “very liberal”	0.092	0.168	0.094	0.333
Percent of administrators and city councilors reporting a “high” or “very high” commitment to sustainability in city policies	0.202	0.251	0.124	0.110
Constant	11.7	-----	10.10	0.256
R ²			0.339	
Significance			0.001	

6. Conclusions

These results suggest a pattern of relationships involving environmental and business interest groups that is somewhat different than that which the existing literature on urban policy making would predict. A central finding is that the degree to which large U.S. cities decide to adopt and implement sustainability policies seems to be strongly related to whether environmental groups are included in city policy making processes, even controlling for inclusion of business groups and businesses and the ideology of policymakers. Business groups are included in policy deliberations in nearly every city, but when environmental groups are also included, cities are considerably more likely to be willing to embrace policies in pursuit of sustainability. This seems to be true even in cities with relatively conservative policymakers. In other words, the pursuit of sustainability policies does not appear to be driven by progressive officials alone.

This analysis also finds that the inclusion of environmental groups appears very strongly related to the robustness of the local economy, notably how much economic growth the city has experienced. Cities that have experienced the greatest increases in per capita income tend to be the cities where environmental groups are more likely to be included in policy deliberations. This holds even controlling for how progressive the city policy makers are and how committed the city is to pursuing sustainability. Income growth seems to influence policy makers to be open to environmental groups, and openness to environmental groups seems to influence the adoption of sustainability policies. If the Environmental Kuznets Curve represents an accurate depiction of the relationship between economic growth and environmental degradation, the effects of income growth on environmental interest groups may well represent the mechanism through which income growth actually improves the quality of the environment. Specifically, as personal incomes grow, environmental interest groups seem to be able to

increasingly gain access to local policymaking processes. As environmental interest groups gain this access, city policymakers seem increasingly willing to enact and implement policies and programs designed to achieve greater local sustainability. There are certainly exceptions to this pattern—cities that don't fit the pattern as neatly as others. Inclusion of interest groups in local policymaking appears to be an extremely important element in cities' efforts to try to become more sustainable as a matter of public policy.

Do the statistical findings here resonate with our understanding of real-world practices? That is, do they seemingly reflect how the governments of modern U.S. cities operate? Furthermore, can we be confident that environmentalism is as strong as these numbers suggest? As we have argued, a beginning point is to understand that many cities have moved away from the long enduring economic development model of “attract, retain, and expand.” This traditional model does not fit what cities can realistically expect from newly established businesses within their boundaries. Although large, existing employers are still cherished, the fundamental changes in the nature of the U.S. economy yield fewer and fewer such enterprises whose business model runs against the grain of modern smart growth paradigms.

Beyond changes in the structure of the economy is the structure of contemporary city governments. Embedded within a city's bureaucracy are agencies whose responsibility is to promote environmental protection and sustainable practices. Thus, there are city employees whose job it is to make sure that environmental advocates have access to government. Those bureaucrats want these groups at the bargaining table because they validate the importance of those bureaucrats' duties. The broader politics that mayors and city councilors operate within also work to the advantage of environmental advocates. Urban politicians must be known as being responsive to their cities' neighborhoods. To be known otherwise is to invite defeat at the next election. And what do neighborhoods want? Obviously, not any one thing, but quality of life issues are important. In short, the statistical results provided here confirm the expectations about the environmental politics of the modern city: local officials seem to respond to demands for sustainability policies and programs. This is not to say that the city is the only, or even the most appropriate, level of government where the pursuit of sustainability is most effective. Indeed, some state governments and sub-state regional agencies also promote sustainability [60]. But largely because regional agencies in the U.S. rarely have explicit policymaking authority and responsibility, cities promise to be a very important locus of sustainability activity.

Despite the convincing logic provided by bureaucratic and electoral politics, the data here cannot provide definitive evidence that these political dynamics are at work. Additional future research will need to generate data capable of clearly establishing the direction of these relationships, and of ruling out alternative explanations. Moreover, this also raises the question of whether smaller cities share in a similar experience. Do these patterns hold for smaller cities? Yet this current analysis provides *prima facie* evidence that, at least for the fifty studied cities, the inclusion of environmental groups matters, and there is a strong possibility that the strength and activity of such environmental groups may well be the product of economic development, very much in line with what might be predicted by the Environmental Kuznets Curve.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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54. To incentivize respondents to fill out the questionnaire, recipients of the questionnaire were offered the opportunity to win one of three \$100 gift cards from Amazon.com. The mailings included a pre-paid (stamped) postcard allowing the respondent to provide his/her name and to be entered into the gift card raffle. This mailing also included a new \$1 bill, which exerts significant influence on the response rate; See: Dillman, D.; Smyth, J.; Christian, L.M. *Internet, Mail, and Mixed Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, 3rd ed.*; Wiley: New York, NY, USA, 2009; pp. 238–242.

55. The generic term “councilor” is used here, although some cities may refer to their representatives as Aldermen (as in Milwaukee), Supervisors (as in San Francisco), or Commissioners (as in Portland).
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59. The scoring for liberal/very liberal is derived from a 7 point scale (1=very liberal, 4=moderate, and 7 = very conservative). The “balance” data comes from a question that is worded: “It’s sometimes the case that economic development and environmental protection come into conflict. Although each issue is unique in its own way, if you were to make a generalization about how city officials choose between competing visions of what is best for the city, how would you rate your local government?” Respondents were given the choice of statements and asked to check the one that “comes closest to describing your city.” Those statements were: (a) Strongly favors economic development; (b) Economic development somewhat more a priority; (c) Equal balance between economic development and environmental protection; (d) Environmental protection somewhat more a priority; and e) Strongly favors environmental protection.
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