TESTING THEORIES ABOUT ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY

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This paper focuses on tests of theories that attempt to explain why and how non-party organizations and activities—interest groups and social movement organizations (SMOs), lobbying and protest, etc.—affect policy. It analyzes all articles testing such theories published in 25 major journals in political science and sociology between 2000 and 2018.

There are 19 such theories. For the most part, there are different theories for each type of organization—interest groups, SMOs, non-governmental organizations, and the like. All the theories usually predict that organizations and activities will directly influence policies, but sometimes the theories hypothesize that the influence will be conditional, occurring under some circumstances but not others, and sometimes that there will be no influence at all. Theories are tested against one another very rarely.

Predictions made by the theories are consistent with the data just over half the time. Authors seldom attempt to generalize, but the articles do make a number of suggestions for future work that could help the study of policy change move forward.

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