Group Involvements in City Politics and Pluralist Theory

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Abstract

The assessments of 75 councilors and mayors in eight cities in the Kansas City metropolitan area provide global measures of group organization, activity, and influence in community politics and measures of their specific involvements in 73 issues that arose in these communities. While variations in group involvement and influence—both in exercising social control and contributing to social production—are reported, the most general findings are that groups are less involved in city politics and their limited involvements are less conflictive than suggested by orthodox understandings of pluralist theory. I argue that these results point to the need to reformulate pluralist theory, not abandon it.

Keywords

group organization, activity and influence, group conflict and collaboration, "power over" and "power to," orthodox and reconstructed pluralism

In the twenty-first century, all but the smallest and most isolated local communities are characterized by social and moral pluralism. American cities have increasing racial, ethnic, class, and religious diversity. Their citizens have various interests and hold diverse principles of morality and justice. Despite declines in organizational involvements (Putnam 2000), citizens also

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belong to a wide variety of voluntary associations that serve as vehicles for expressing their social identities, pursuing their interests, and developing their principles.

It thus seems ironic that pluralism, as a theory of city politics, has receded from being a primary to a tertiary approach used by political scientists in the study of city politics (Sapotichne, Jones, and Wolfe 2007). Pluralism held a more elevated status a half century ago, when Robert Dahl (1961) and many others developed a pluralist paradigm to describe, explain, and vindicate the democratic performance of local communities. Dahl's orthodox pluralism was never as simple as the group theory of politics that held that political outcomes could be explained by focusing entirely on group activity (Bentley 1908). While groups were seen as organizing different identities and interests, and while group influence was thought to be extensive yet dispersed among many groups, Dahl also stressed that pluralist politics involved such things as the key roles of political leaders, significant "indirect influence" by the unorganized public, and a "democratic creed" comprising basic normative principles that both influenced political outcomes and constrained group struggle. Yet, most disciplinary understandings of orthodox pluralism emphasize the importance of group activity, conflict, and influence.[1]

Subsequently, orthodox pluralism was modified and then pretty much abandoned. Even Dahl (1982) stressed problems with this paradigm for understanding community politics. It failed to assess adequately the inequalities in participation, representation, and influence in pluralist politics (Stone 1980). It failed to account for how certain groups set the agenda of "key issues," while issues of importance to other groups were neglected and suppressed (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). It failed to account for how individual and group interests came to be (mis)understood and (under)expressed (Gavanta 1980). By removing accountable and public-minded public officials from center stage and accepting the influence of unaccountable and self-interested groups, it seemed to justify abandoning those democratic formalisms that generated political legitimacy (Lowi 1979). Such criticisms led to a second generation of neo-pluralisms—for example, stratified pluralism, hyperpluralism, and privatized pluralism—each emphasizing that widespread group involvements failed to achieve democratic ideals (Manley 1982; Waste 1986).

Political scientists absorbed these deficiencies in pluralist theory and incorporated neo-pluralist understandings in two ways. Initially, they developed replacement paradigms of community politics—such as the "economistic" perspective of Paul Peterson (1981), regime theory (Elkin 1987; Stone 1989), and a "self-governance of common resources" perspective (Ostrom 1990)—in which some elements of pluralism were retained but others abandoned.

More recently, political scientists seem to have lost interest in having the study of community politics guided by any paradigm at all, as we witness a proliferation of more specialized research agendas guided by whatever theoretical perspectives seem useful to the question at hand. For example, in one of the few recent studies of the role of groups in local politics, Jeffrey Berry and his associates (2006) drew on "interest group theory," a perspective that uses concepts from studies of organized groups inside the Washington Beltway to examine differences between group involvements at the local and national levels. While there are important gains from such studies, the abandonment of broader paradigms seems anarchic, as scholarship that fails to have any consensus on key questions, concepts, theories, and methods is unlikely to attain the accumulation of knowledge that justifies being acknowledged as a scholarly discipline.

Perhaps urban studies should be multiparadigmatic, where alternative grand or general theories are developed and evaluated in relationship to one another. The newer paradigms certainly contain important insights, but marginalizing pluralism seems especially unfortunate if political communities are increasingly characterized by social and moral pluralism. Perhaps, orthodox pluralism and various neo-pluralisms are no longer tenable as candidates for paradigm status, but pluralist theory can be and is being reconstructed, especially by political theorists (e.g., Campbell and Schoolman 2008; Connolly 2005; Eisenberg 1995; Schlosberg 1998; Walzer 1983). These new formulations question, on both empirical and normative grounds, conceptions of politics where people bring only their self- or group interests and whatever power resources they possess to political struggles. They emphasize using public reason to resolve political issues, defending divergent positions in terms of general principles that are broadly accessible, and achieving outcomes that reflect as many principles that are relevant to the issue as possible. In short, a new pluralism is emerging that de-emphasizes a politics of group power and that emphasizes the role of diverse ethical and political principles in community politics (Schumaker 2010). Pluralism should not be rejected as a viable candidate for paradigmatic status in the study of city politics simply because scholars have a dated and narrow understanding of it.

The goal of this article is to contribute to this new pluralism, primarily by arguing that the old emphases on group involvements and conflict are too narrow. Groups surely play roles in community life, but perhaps groups are less important than commonly assumed, and perhaps the nature of group processes has changed. For example, Berry (2010) argued that group involvements at the local level have become less conflictive and more collaborative.

New pluralist formulations will have to account for any such changing roles, including how group processes and the pursuit of diverse principles interconnect. While a full account of a new (reconstructed) pluralism is beyond the scope of this article, I will conclude by providing some notes on its major differences with the old (orthodox) pluralism. In that discussion, I will show that the new pluralism has roots in philosophical claims that are a century old, long before pluralism attained its "orthodox" characteristics. Thus, today's pluralism is both new and a reconstruction of pluralism's origins.

My primary goal will be pursued by presenting findings about group involvements in eight cities during the past decade. The findings presented here are descriptive rather than explanatory. I summarize levels and patterns of group involvements in these cities rather than try to explain or evaluate variances in these involvements. While such variations can be pursued, I argue that theories and research on group involvements focus on a relatively minor (though still important) aspect of community politics. The descriptions here are provided in pursuit of a larger theoretical objective. If group involvements are less important than commonly assumed, then new formulations of pluralism might direct attention away from groups and toward the development, expression, and accommodation of various moral principles (focusing on what is good for the community), justice principles (focusing on the fair distribution of social goods), and comprehensive political doctrines (such as ideologies and public philosophies integrating beliefs and ideals).

A Study of Eight Communities in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area

As part of a larger study intended to contribute to the new pluralism, I completed 75 interviews with councilors and mayors in eight cities in two states in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. In all, four Missouri cities (Kansas City [KCMO], Lee's Summit, Raytown, and St. Joseph) and four Kansas communities (Kansas City [KCK], Overland Park, Lawrence, and Topeka) were selected for study because of their convenience and because they have a wide range of economic, social, and political characteristics, as shown in Table 1. While the sample is restricted geographically, choosing a most different sample of cities on other characteristics sought to minimize the concern that the findings here are limited to particular kinds of cities, such as suburbs having caretaker regimes.[2]

Between 2003 and 2007, I contacted current councilors and mayors in these cities, asking them to participate in extensive two-stage interviews. Their participation rate was high, ranging from 77% in Overland Park to

Table 1. Sample of Cities and Selected Characteristics

	Population (Thousands) 2010	% Nonwhite 2010	Median Income 2007[a]	Type of Place	Dominant Regime Type[b]	Influence of Chamber of Commerce[c]	Influence of Neighborhood Groups[c]	Number of Elected Officials Interviewed[d]
Missouri								
Kansas City	460	41	56	Metro anchor	Progressive	4.3	4.2	12 (7, 5)
Lee's Summit	91	14	82	Metro suburb	Developmental	3.6	4.1	9 (1, 8)
Raytown	30	32	47	Metro suburb	Caretaker	3.6	2.8	10 (1, 9)
St. Joseph	77	12	52	Independent	Caretaker	4.3	3.6	8 (1, 7)
Kansas								
Kansas City	146	48	44	Metro central	Progressive	3.9	4.6	9 (3, 6)
Overland Park	173	16	91	Metro suburb	Developmental	4.0	3.5	11 (1, 10)
Lawrence	88	18	62	Independent	Progressive	4.3	4.6	7 (7, 0)
Topeka	127	24	52	Independent	Caretaker	4.2	3.4	9 (2, 7)

a. Median family income in thousands.
b. Most frequent characterization provided by local elected officials.
c. Average estimate by local elected officials on a 6-point scale, where 0 = *no influence*, 1 = *very little*, 2 = *little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *relatively high*, and 5 = *very high influence*.
d. In parentheses are the number of interviewed mayors and councilors having citywide constituencies, followed by the number of such councilors representing districts.

100% in Lee's Summit. Among the many matters covered in these interviews were their perceptions about the contexts in which they make urban policy, such as how closely their cities corresponded to the various kinds of regime types stressed in the urban politics literature (Kilburn 2004), as reported in Table 1. To study group involvements, the interviews were conducted to capture the benefits and offset the limitations of the two major methodological approaches that have been used and contested by community power researchers (Aiken and Mott 1970).

Prompted by the reputational method, I sought *global* assessments about the involvements of 24 kinds of groups. During the first interview, officials served as informants who rated the overall organization, activity, and influence of each of these groups without regard to their participation in concrete issues. After these assessments were provided, I asked which of these types of groups they regarded as most harmful and helpful to effective city government.

Prompted by the decisional method, officials were also asked during the first interview about the groups that were involved in their particular campaigns to win election to the city council and to provide basic information on what they regarded as "the most controversial and/or significant" issues that had arisen recently or were then under consideration. After completing the first round of interviews in a city, I determined which issues had been most frequently mentioned and had been at least partially resolved (i.e., there had been at least some council votes on the matter).[3] I then proceeded to the second round of interviews that focused on between 8 and 10 concrete issues that arose between 2000 and 2007 in each city. For each of the 73 issues selected for study, I asked officials how they had voted and to explain, in their own words, the basis of their preferences and votes. Drawing on a technique pioneered by John Kingdon (1989), I followed up on their responses by going through a checklist of factors that might have played a role in the positions they took. Were their positions influenced by group pressures, public opinion, the views of other officials, economic considerations, legal considerations, jurisdictional considerations, the local political culture, and their own principles of morality and justice? After brief discussions of these factors, I asked officials to score the importance of each in affecting their voting behavior on the issue, using an ordinal scale that ranged from being irrelevant (0) to being the preeminent consideration for them (5); when officials said that they bucked a consideration as when they voted contrary to dominant group pressures, a score of "−1" was assigned. I also asked officials to identify the particular groups that were involved on each side of each issue and to describe their involvements.[4]

Pluralist methodologists would regard the information about group influence derived from the examination of group involvements on concrete issues as more credible than the global assessments that were initially gathered. But we shall see that group influence on concrete issues is hard to determine; thus, the data generated using "reputational" global assessments help to provide a more complete picture of group involvement in local politics. Although not conclusive, the data reported here facilitate global assessments of the involvements of various kinds of groups in city politics, estimates of group involvements in local elections, important insights into group participation, and possible influence on specific policy issues. They also provide more evidence that group involvements are less adversarial than suggested by orthodox pluralism and are often collaborative in ways suggested by Berry (2010).

Global Assessments of Group Involvements

Table 2 rank orders 24 kinds of groups based on global assessments by city officials of how organized, active, and influential they are in city politics. My efforts to clarify ambiguities about these types of groups can be found in the appendix.[5] While officials were asked to use a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *very low* to 5 = *very high*, various groups were scored as zero almost 20% of the time, when officials claimed a group had no organization in the community, were completely inactive, or without any influence. In only 15% of their assessments did officials claim a group to be highly organized and/or highly active, and they perceived a particular group to be highly influential less than 9% of the time.[6] As indicated by the many scores below "3," officials generally saw groups as more often poorly than well organized and more often inactive than highly active, and they assigned them even lower scores for overall influence.

Not surprisingly, the "usual suspects" can be found at the top of this ranking: (1) the Chamber of Commerce, (2) neighborhood associations, and (3) developers. Community task forces were fourth-ranked, suggesting that urbanists should pay more attention to this emerging form of community involvement.

The last column in Table 2 provides an index of mean perceived helpfulness, based on how often officials regarded officials as helpful rather than harmful to effective city politics. While officials usually perceived various kinds of groups as neutral in this regard, they more often regarded groups positively than negatively, a finding that supports the argument of Berry and his associates (2006) that group involvements in local governance have

become less conflictive and more cooperative and collaborative. Rankings based on assessments of helpfulness are quite similar to those based on overall involvement. Perhaps the most significant change in ratings concern developers who are highly ranked in terms of involvements but have a fairly mediocre ranking for helpfulness.

It might be interesting to analyze further the data in Table 2, but how telling would the results be for understanding how city officials resolve community issues? If groups are relatively uninvolved and if officials see groups as often without influence, then focusing on these ratings could be relatively unproductive. If a paradigm of city politics is to explain how the important decisions of municipal governments are made, it must look beyond the reputed involvements of groups to a broader examination of the various factors that influence policy outcomes in a manner that includes but does not focus too strongly on group pressures. Let us turn then to the relative importance of group involvements in local elections and on the decisions that are made by city councils.

Group Involvements in Local Elections

When asked to identify "the types of groups, organizations, and citizens that were most supportive to your campaign to get elected to the council," 7 (of our 75) officials claimed that they were independent of any group, but most claimed to have received some or extensive support from various groups. As shown in Table 3, business groups (usually the Chamber of Commerce) and neighborhood groups were viewed as more important than political parties and labor groups. Images of elections being waged by Chamber versus neighborhood candidates have some truth but exaggerate their roles at least in these cities. Officials most often said that their primary support base comprised friends and acquaintances who had urged them to run and who had agreed to serve as the steering committee for their campaigns. Perhaps such "grassroots" supporters can be seen as groups, but they serve largely as collections of individuals who make financial contributions and endorsements. Groups are clearly involved in local elections, but in general, the candidates themselves seem to be more central to local elections than groups.

Group Pressures on 73 Concrete Issues

Table 4 provides some evidence for the idea that city politics is "groupless" (Peterson 1981, pp. 116-19), as it shows that officials generally regarded group pressures as far less important to their policy-making behavior than a variety

Table 2. Various Groups Ranked by Their Involvement in Local Politics and Measures of Aspects of Such Involvement

	Involvement[a]	Organization[b]	Activity	Influence	Helpfulness[c]
Chamber of Commerce	13.13	4.61	4.51	4.01	0.87
Neighborhood groups	11.78	4.00	3.96	3.82	0.71
Developers	10.76	3.54	3.76	3.46	0.17
Task forces	10.74	3.71	3.64	3.39	0.56
Democrats	9.72	3.46	3.37	2.89	0.37
Nonprofits	9.69	3.41	3.30	2.98	0.47
Churches	8.86	3.18	3.03	2.65	0.23
Republicans	8.77	3.19	2.99	2.59	0.25
Historical preservationists	8.77	3.13	3.09	2.55	0.19
Public employees	8.37	2.97	2.83	2.57	0.28
Bankers	7.89	2.58	2.73	2.58	0.18
Labor in private sector	7.36	2.59	2.51	2.26	0.06
Professional groups	6.46	2.39	2.14	1.93	0.14
Women groups	6.45	2.30	2.21	1.94	0.17
National businesses	6.08	1.87	2.07	2.14	0.07
Clientele groups	5.79	1.79	2.04	1.96	0.07
Morality groups	5.40	2.01	1.86	1.53	–0.23
Minority groups	5.24	1.76	1.82	1.66	0.22
Global businesses	5.10	1.62	1.70	1.77	0.08
Environmental groups	5.07	1.76	1.70	1.61	–0.04
GLBT groups	4.09	1.44	1.42	1.23	–0.04
Ethnic groups	3.70	1.24	1.27	1.18	0.11
Community action groups	2.89	0.96	0.97	0.96	0.08
Other parties	0.72	0.31	0.23	0.18	0.00
Overall *mean* assessments[d]	7.20	2.49	2.47	2.24	0.20

a. These involvement scores were attained by adding the degrees of organization, activity, and influence, as reported in the next three columns.
b. The degree of organization, activity, and influence for each type of group are mean scores based on estimates provided by 75 officials in our eight cities, using a scale of 0 (*none*) to 5 (*highly*).
c. After estimating the involvements of various groups, officials were asked which groups they regarded as most and least helpful to effective local governance. Groups regarded as very or somewhat harmful were scored –2 and –1, respectively, whereas groups regarded as very helpful or somewhat helpful were scored 2 and 1, respectively.
d. Our 75 officials made a total of 1,800 assessments regarding these 24 group types.

of other considerations. They claimed economic concerns and their own ethical principles were normally primary considerations and that citizen preferences (conceived as citywide and/or as districtwide public opinion rather than as group concerns) were secondary considerations. Officials reported being more influenced by the arguments made by other officials (both fellow councilors

Table 3. Extent to Which 75 Elected Officials See Various Groups As Contributors to Their Electoral Success

	Not at All	Somewhat	Extensive
The Democratic Party	83%	12	5
The Republican Party	88	4	8
The Chamber of Commerce and/or other business groups	53	20	27
Public employee associations	75	11	14
Labor unions	73	11	16
Neighborhood organizations	65	15	20
Environmental groups	95	4	1
Other grassroots groups	43	18	39

Note: Numbers provided in the Table are percentage (%) value.

Table 4. Extent to Which Various Considerations Were Perceived by 75 Officials As Important Bases of Their Votes on 73 Concrete Issues[a]

Type of Consideration	Estimated Importance
Group pressures	0.56
Citywide citizen preferences	1.03
Citizen preferences within district	1.21
Arguments of other officials	0.70
Legal concerns	0.49
Jurisdictional concerns	0.49
Local cultural norms	0.40
Economic concerns	2.64
Their own ethical principles	2.13

a. Mean scores of the importance that officials attributed to these considerations when resolving 73 issues arising in their cities between 2000 and 2007, using the following scale: −1 = factor weighed against their position, 0 = factor was regarded as unimportant or irrelevant, 1 = factor was regarded as a minor (positive) consideration, 2 = factor was regarded as a moderate consideration, 3 = factor was regarded as an important consideration, 4 = factor was regarded as a very important consideration, and 5 = factor was regarded as the preeminent consideration on the issue.

and city staff) than by group advocates. The average "group pressure" score of 0.56 summarizes the finding that 69% of the time officials reported group pressures as irrelevant to their voting behavior, while they regarded such pressure as a very important or preeminent consideration less than 2% of the time.

Table 5. Perceived Importance of Group Pressures Across Cities and Issue Type

	Importance of Group Pressures[a]	*n*[b]
City		
Kansas City, Missouri	0.60	97
Lee's Summit, Missouri	0.40	79
Raytown, Missouri	0.40	89
St. Joseph, Missouri	0.49	70
Kansas City, Kansas	0.47	75
Overland Park, Kansas	0.27	89
Lawrence, Kansas	0.61	57
Topeka, Kansas	1.39	68
Issue type		
Governmental structures and personal	0.32	55
Provision of public services	0.49	142
Economic development	0.52	142
Regulation of property or economic activity	0.68	68
Regulation of behavior based on noneconomic (moral) concerns	0.67	68
Public assistance	0.64	148

a. Mean scores of the importance that officials attributed to group pressures when resolving various types of issues arising in their cities between 2000 and 2007, using the scale used in Table 4.
b. In all, 8 to 10 concrete issues were studied in each city, including 1 or 2 of the various types of issues listed in the bottom half of the table. Some of the interviewed officials did not participate in all issues studied in their city. This column indicates the total number of estimates provided by involved officials of the importance of group pressures on these issues in each city and by the primary policy domain of the issue.

The top half of Table 5 shows that officials in each of our sample cities viewed group pressures as minor considerations in how they resolved concrete issues. While group pressure seemed more important in some cities (such as Topeka) than in others, groups were not regarded as especially salient in any of our cities, regardless of their size, composition, location in the metro area, or political regime. The bottom half of Table 5 shows group pressures are generally of little importance on any of the various types of issues that political scientists often see as central to local politics. Peterson (1981) claimed that groups have little influence on issues of economic development and redistribution (labeled here as "public assistance")—where, he maintained, economic concerns dominate policy making—but he suggested that they

might still play a role in allocational issues. Sharp (2005) and other analysts of culture wars have since suggested that groups are highly involved in moral issues dealing with the regulation of "vices" and "sins" like gambling, homosexuality, consumption of pornography, using illicit drugs, and smoking in public places. Our data suggest that groups are of more importance on moral issues than on allocational ones, but the differences in the role of groups across issue areas are minimal.

Even if there are only minor differences in group activity and influence across cities and policy domains, four general patterns of group involvements were about equally evident across our 73 cases.[7]

Groupless Issues

In about a quarter of our cases, there was simply no significant group involvement. For example, when the Overland Park City Manager proposed a 5-year plan to cut the budget, the council adopted his plan with no significant group input. When the Lawrence City Commission voted to establish a municipal golf course, they received support from individual golfers but could recall no organized group getting involved in the issue, suggesting that people are golfing alone, as well as bowling alone (Putnam 2000). Overall, on 18 of our 73 issues, our officials claimed that group pressure was not a consideration in their decisions and failed to name any group that was active and/or influential on the issue.

Issues with Ineffectual Group Conflict

In about a quarter of our cases, officials identified groups as active on both sides of an issue but could name no group as having much influence on the outcome. On more than a dozen of our issues, officials recognized group conflict but they thought other considerations were far more important to their decisions. For example, issues of banning smoking in public places arose in both KCMO and Lawrence, generating conflict between the owners of bars and restaurants and health professionals (among others), but most councilors regarded the conflicting pressures as off-setting each other, enabling them to focus on the economic and health consequences involved and trying to gauge public opinion on the issue. In Topeka, a citizen advocacy group and a group of social workers supported adding gays and lesbians as a protected class under the city's antidiscrimination ordinance, while some conservative churches and morality groups rose up in opposition. Although officials acknowledged these group pressures, they insisted that their decisions

were based on their own (prior) moral judgments and estimations of broader public opinion in the community, not group pressures. Group conflict was also apparent on several economic development proposals, but officials saw the outcomes determined by the economic calculations of both potential investors and the city staff. In such cases, some groups won and some lost, but officials doubted they exerted much influence on these outcomes.

Group Conflict with "Power Over"

Another quarter of our issues showed a pattern of group conflict and power usually associated with orthodox pluralism. In this pattern, some groups mobilized their organizational resources, became active on an issue, and got some or all of what they sought, overcoming opposition to their demands, and thus potentially exercised a form of influence that Stone (1989, pp. 222-26) called "social control" or "power over." A budget issue that arose in Kansas City, Kansas, illustrates what is involved in achieving a stringent conception of "power over." Shortly after KCK and several smaller and more affluent neighboring communities formed a consolidated Wyandotte County government, the new Commission of that community sought an 11% increase in taxes to address a variety of needs, including increasing the salaries of public employees. An antitax group composed largely of residents of the newly incorporated neighborhoods raised such a howl that the Commission backed off and formulated a compromise proposal that would increase taxes by only 5.5%. But group pressure threatened even this compromise. The commissioner from the newly incorporated neighborhoods, who personally supported the compromise, felt particularly vulnerable to such pressure. With others initially divided evenly in support and opposition of the compromise, his capitulation could have caused it to fail, and this would have been the clearest instance among any issue in our sample of a group exercising controlling power on a community issue. However, just prior to the vote, a bare majority of the Commission (minus the commissioner from the incorporated neighborhood) assembled privately and hammered out an agreement in which each supported the compromise; they then informed the pressured commissioner that his vote was no longer needed (enabling him to vote in accordance with group pressures, knowing that his preferred outcome would nevertheless prevail). This outcome avoided ceding controlling power, by a stringent conception of that term, to the antitax group, even though its exercising significant "power over" (in moving the Commission toward a compromise proposal) can hardly be discounted.

The "power over" of active groups on other issues that seem to conform to this pattern is harder to access, but to avoid charges of minimizing possible instances of group influence to support my theoretical argument, issues can be identified that involved extensive group involvements on both sides of an issue and where some groups probably should be credited with exercising "power over." In Topeka, a business-oriented task force (GoTopeka) overcame the opposition of antitax groups to persuade both city councilors and city voters to accept a .25% sales tax increase to be used to facilitate economic development. On three issues, groups appeared to be important in pressuring officials to abandon some initiatives that they otherwise supported. For example, in Raytown, a NIMBY group protested a proposal for a low-income housing project, causing its abandonment and prompting an alternative proposal that was more acceptable to the neighborhood protest group because it stipulated that it would house only *senior*, low-income residents. On four other issues, neighborhood groups protesting economic developments were able to wring certain concessions from developers and city officials, even though these projects were not thwarted. For example, a neighborhood in northwest Lawrence organized in opposition to a proposed Wal-Mart development, and while they failed to overcome legal concerns that the land-use regulations in place permitted the development, they were able to have the original proposal scaled back and win certain aesthetic enhancements. On 10 additional issues where there was significant division on the council, one of two officials acknowledged that group pressures were at least a minor consideration affecting their votes on the issue; even though other considerations were regarded as more important by most councilors, prudence requires that certain involved groups be acknowledged as *possibly* having "power over" on an issue. For example, in Lee's Summit, a group comprising owners and pilots of private aircraft sought to have a new and longer runway built at the municipal airport for it to accommodate corporate jets; the Chamber of Commerce and some other business groups supported the project but residents of a nearby neighborhood organized to oppose it. The council defeated the proposal, with dissenters pointing to financial constraints and a lack of broad community support for the runway, but perhaps the neighborhood exercised "power over" on the issue.

Consensual Issues

On another quarter of our issues, there was extensive group involvement, but active groups were almost entirely aligned on one side of a policy alternative. In such cases, most of our officials claimed that they reached independent

judgments that coincided with a broad community consensus and that their votes were very little affected by group pressures. On these issues, many groups "won" as they supported adopted policies, but there is no evidence that they exerted significant influence on the council if having influence is defined as overcoming opposition. This pattern is illustrated by perhaps the most important issue in our sample: the initiatives of KCMO Mayor Kay Barnes and other members of the council to redevelop the downtown through a series of public and private investments that have totaled around $2 billion in the past decade. A coalition of groups—including city-appointed task forces, various developers and corporations, the downtown business community, labor unions, and civic organizations—all supported these initiatives, with opposition coming only from some relatively disorganized critics of the costs and municipal liabilities that might be incurred if these projects were unsuccessful. In this context, officials reported being uninfluenced by group pressures, as their motivations centered on economic considerations, their own values, and their perceptions of having broad community support. If influence involves getting what one wants in the face of opposition, or "power over," then groups do not exert influence, because they did not have opposition to overcome. When such consensus is achieved, officials greatly discount the presence and significance of group pressure.

Nevertheless, this pattern may involve another kind of influence, what Stone (1989, pp. 226-33) called "social production" or "power to." In this pattern, conflict arising from different group interests is minimized, because an outcome is envisioned that promises to further the core interests of various involved groups and because informal processes of collaboration and cooperation lead to consensus. As another example beyond that of the redevelopment of downtown KCMO, consider an issue that arose in St. Joseph. Hoping to rejuvenate an abandoned stockyard, its council considered a proposal to develop a pork processing plant there in 2001. But the initial proposal generated intense conflict and was abandoned. When another corporation, Premium Pork, proposed an alternative plant in that location that avoided the worst features of the original plan, various community groups rallied behind it and no significant opposition arose. Premium Pork was the single group most responsible for this successful outcome and can be credited with facilitating the "social production" of a widely sought goal.

In other cases in this pattern, some groups clearly contributed to "social production" and exercised "power to," but it is no straightforward matter to assess the distribution of influence among the various collaborating groups. However, when a group initiated an issue (or an aspect of a broader issue) or when it took a lead role in assembling various collaborating groups *and* when

a majority of officials regarded the group as having at least some influence over their decisions, I treat it below as having *possible* "power to."

The Involvements and Influence of Various Kinds of Groups

Table 6 summarizes officials' assessments of group involvements on our 73 issues. Minority, ethnic, women, GLBT groups, bankers, and political parties were involved in at most one of these issues, so they are omitted from the table. Other groups are classified on the basis of the coalitions emphasized by urban analysts (e.g., the growth machine and countervailing forces to it) or on the basis of having similar characteristics (e.g., occupational groups). The differences among groups within these coalitions seem sufficiently important to warrant their separate examination as reported in the table and discussed below.

Let us first consider four types of groups that were most active in initiating issues. First, national corporations initiated six issues by proposing to build such enterprises as a NASCAR speedway as a centerpiece to a new "West Village" development in KCK, the Wal-Mart in Lawrence, and the pork processing plant in St. Joseph.[8] In each case, councils approved and sometimes subsidized these projects in various ways. National corporations always "won," by getting the policies they sought. In half of these cases, they also overcame significant group opposition and thus could be regarded as exercising "power over." But in the other three cases, they engaged in collaborative political processes lacking any significant opposition, helping to produce a widely sought policy goal. National corporations are credited with exercising "power to" in these cases.

Second, local developers were involved in 13 issues, initiating 8 of them. On two such occasions, they withdrew their proposals for financial reasons; in terms of the outcomes of public policy, they were neither winners nor losers on these issues and ended up with no influence on them. On five such occasions, they encountered no organized opposition, and were generally credited with exercising "power to" by officials. On one issue initiated by a developer and on two other issues where developers organized to resist new regulations proposed by the council, the opposition of other groups had to be overcome. On these three cases, the developers are acknowledged as having exercised "power over" because they got what they wanted. On the other issues, developers and oppositional groups engaged in classic group struggle that resulted in five "ties," due to concessions that developers made to get their projects approved. Officials offered different judgments about whether developers exercised more influence than they conceded in these issues, and so I note these cases with a question mark in Table 6.

Table 6. Number of Involvements, Initiatives, and Various Outcomes for Different Kinds of Groups on 73 Issues in Eight Cities

						Potential Power	
Type of Group	Involvements	Initiatives	Wins	Ties	Losses	"Over"	"To"
Pro-growth groups							
Chamber of Commerce	24	0	16	3	5	0	0
Developers	13	8	8	5	0	3 (+5?)	5
Downtown business	9	1	7	2	0	1	0
Other local business	7	1	2	2	3	1	1
Corporate business	6	6	6	0	0	3	3
Newspapers and other media	4	1	4	0	0	0	1
Landlords	2	0	0	1	1	0	0
Countervailing groups							
Anti- and smart growth	3	0	1	1	1	0	0
Progressive parties	3	2	2	1	0	1	1
Historical preservation	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Environmental	2	1	2	0	0	0	1
Occupational groups							
Service providers	13	1	8	3	3	1	1
Public employee	7	0	4	1	2	1	0
Labor in private sector	5	0	5	0	0	0	0
Professional	4	1	2	1	1	1	1
Civic	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Other citizen-based groups							
Neighborhood	18	0	7	8	3	4	0
Users of public services	7	0	5	0	2	0	0
Antitax	7	0	1	1	5	1 (+1?)	0
Citizen advocacy	4	1	2	0	2	0	0
Churches	4	0	3	1	0	0	0
Morality	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
Community task forces	16	3	13	2	1	4?	6?
Total	16	2	102	35	29	17 (+10?)	14 (+6?)

Third, citizen advocacy groups, understood as community-wide ad hoc organizations pursuing a particular policy outcome, initiated a couple of issues—a hate crime ordinance in KCK and a living wage ordinance in Lawrence—and such groups were involved in campaigns in Lawrence and KCMO to ban smoking in public places and in Topeka to include gays in the city's antidiscrimination ordinance. They lost only in Topeka but their influence on the two issues in which they won is unlikely. While a few

officials credited them with important roles on these issues, they thought other considerations were much more important.

Fourth, community task forces were involved in 16 issues. Forming task forces and involving them in the policy process was the most important "governmental structure" issue in Lee's Summit, as the community made a commitment to form task forces around those issues that had previously generated extensive group conflict. They sought to include members of competing groups in these task forces, which could serve as forums for understanding group differences and seeking proposals that minimized disagreements. As a result, task forces played a major role in three issues that were resolved with little group opposition in Lee's Summit. Their neighbors in Raytown emulated this approach, forming task forces to address five of the issues studied there, but in Raytown group opposition persisted to several task force recommendations. Overall, task forces were highly successful, as their proposals were normally adopted. But while most officials supported task forces and their recommendations, they seldom cited them as being highly influential. While the reciprocal relationships between councilors and task forces are hard to sort out, it may be that officials saw task forces as vehicles for gathering support for policies they preferred, rather than being swayed by the recommendations of task forces. Given the uncertainties involved, I credit task forces as *potentially* exercising "power over" or "power to"—depending on whether their recommendations were adopted with or without the opposition of other groups—on 10 occasions, but I also note by the question marks, the uncertainties of attributing influence in these cases.

Table 6 details the involvements, wins, and potential influence of other types of groups. Perhaps most noteworthy are the records of additional groups that are often seen as dominating local politics.

The Chamber of Commerce was involved in almost a third of our issues, and accumulated an impressive won–loss record, but local Chambers never initiated an issue and were most involved in the consensual pattern of group involvement noted above. Officials never credited them with exercising more than minor influence on any issue.

Service providers, an eclectic group ranging from those agencies that provide social services to private trash haulers, were involved in 13 of our issues. They too had impressive won–loss records but were seldom seen as influential. Only Marillac, a consortium of agencies providing mental health care for children in Overland Park, possibly exercised "power over" when council officials granted it the zoning to build on a site despite NIMBY opposition. Various health care providers in KCMO may have

exercised "power to" when they led a group of community organizations that resulted in council and voter approval of a property tax increase to provide better indigent health care.

Neighborhood groups were involved in 18 of our issues, protesting proposed developments and housing redevelopment projects about half of the time and being part of a group consensus in pursuit of a public goal on the other occasions. More than any other type of group, their efforts had mixed results, as they got some concessions from developers that shielded a neighborhood from the worst effects of projects. While they had some influence, scored here as "power over," on four of these issues, they were not cited as exercising significant "power to," as leaders on issues having consensual patterns of group involvement.

Public employees—especially firefighter and policemen associations—were involved in seven issues in support of increased taxes and compensation. While they won more than they loss, their records are not as exceptional as portrayed recently by various state executives and legislators proposing and passing legislation to curtail their influence. Usually, no significant opposition materialized in opposition to their receiving some sort of increased benefits. Only on the previously discussed tax compromise in KCK did they seem to exercise some influence.

Antitax groups were active, but not very influential, on seven issues in our sample. As mentioned, they were probably influential in getting KCK commissioners to cut their proposed tax increase in half, but they could not achieve the greater reductions they sought. In Raytown, a proposed increase in sales taxes was defeated; while few councilors attributed that outcome to an active antitax group, their having had some influence cannot be completely discounted. On the other five issues in which antitax groups were involved, they were unsuccessful.

The overall pattern that thus emerges from Table 6 is of considerable group involvement and of more wins than losses for groups involved in local issues, but groups most often succeeded because officials adopted policies they supported for reasons other than group pressures. While some groups may have exercised some "power to" and "power over" on a limited range of issues, that influence was widely distributed. Perhaps community task forces comprising coalitions of city officials and groups with stakes in particular issues have become quite influential in community politics, but more "special interest" groups generally did not dominate city politics and no particular such group had broad influence in the resolution of issues of any city in our sample.

Conclusions About Group Involvements

Although city politics is not "groupless," groups are less central to local government than suggested by group theory. Communities suffer from less group domination than suggested by the neo-pluralist models that emerged from criticisms of Dahl's orthodox pluralist theory. Overall, officials provide global assessments of groups as generally not very well organized, not very active, and even less influential in city politics. While they recognize that some types of groups—like business and neighborhoods—are more involved and helpful than others, and while they see such groups as important supporters during their electoral campaigns, they do not regard themselves as deeply beholden to such groups and they do not see groups as being very influential on many issues.

While this study does not include the longitudinal data that enables assessments of changes in group politics at the local level, our overall findings seem similar to those from an extensive study of 82 cities in the San Francisco Bay area conducted during the 1960s (Zisk 1973). However, there may be some groups—like task forces, service providers, citizen advocacy groups, and GLBT groups—that are more involved than before and that deserve greater attention than they have received from urban scholars. Some groups—perhaps civic groups (Putnam 2000) and banks (Berry et al. 2006)—may be less involved than previously. But such matters may be sideshows to a more general understanding of city politics. If urban scholars want to explain the decision making of urban officials, focusing on those group actors who seldom have influence seems to be more a distraction than a productive enterprise. But if they want to continue to examine groups, they should focus at least as much on group collaboration as on group conflict.

Beyond Orthodox Pluralism

Those involved in the study of community politics might seek scholarly understandings not only of how urban policy is made but also whether urban politics conforms to some normative concerns of good and just governance and whether more democratic politics is possible (Fainstein 2010). Perhaps some of the new models of local politics such as regime theory and the common-pool resource approach will emerge as paradigms that effectively address these concerns, but pluralism should be included among the candidates for paradigm status in the discipline. Properly understood, both the old and the new pluralisms have sought to understand how communities do and should govern themselves democratically, in a manner that reflects their own

goals and values in contexts of moral pluralism, where there are differences among citizens and leaders about the community goals to be pursued and the values to be given priority. More than any other paradigm, pluralism challenges monist conceptions of politics. If communities have been dominated by cohesive social or economic elites, pluralism claims that broader democratic processes can be developed. If communities exhibit systematic biases in favor of (white) majorities, pluralism stresses the greater inclusion of minorities. If communities seem to be constrained by economic imperatives, pluralism reminds us that other social values can be emphasized.[9]

While there are continuities in pluralism over the past century, there are very important differences between the old (orthodox) pluralism and a new (reconstructed) pluralism having roots in philosophical considerations of social and political heterogeneity that preceded Dahl and his followers (Eisenberg 1995; Menand 2001). While there is a long tradition of analyses on changes in pluralism over the years (see, for example, Brand 1985; Campbell and Schoolman 2008; Manley 1982; McFarland 2004), the distinctions provided here are intended to persuade urban scholars that the orthodox pluralism that they have largely abandoned is not the pluralism that is now central to political theory and that might rejuvenate the urban politics field. While a full articulation of this reconstructed pluralism cannot be provided here, the major differences between the old and new pluralism can be briefly outlined.

While the developers of orthodox pluralism sought to establish a value-free, behavioral paradigm for the study of community politics, the new pluralism places values at the center of analysis. As political science became post-behavioral in the 1970s, neo-pluralists offered value judgments on deficiencies in community politics (Dahl 1982) and even explicitly introduced democratic values into subsequent evaluative analyses (Schumaker 1991). New pluralists are more descriptive than judgmental about the many values that are expressed in and about community politics, but they do produce research findings that can be used to evaluate shortcomings in the representation of value diversity and that help identify the conditions that promote the better representation of those values that have been neglected, marginalized, or excluded (Young 1990).

While orthodox pluralism viewed a diversity of expressed (and thus observable) group interests within political communities as the ontological starting point of their analyses, new pluralists revert back to William James' insistence that diverse individual values are the fundamental feature of human existence (Ferguson 2007). Political actors have many values—such as aesthetic judgments, personal identities, and ethical principles—that

influence their political preferences and actions, and these values may or may not align with their self- or group interests. Political communities are characterized not only by different group interests but also by political agents bringing to community decision making a wide variety of moral principles about the good society (Madsen and Strong 2003), justice principles about the fair distribution of social goods (Michelbach et al. 2003; Walzer 1983), and comprehensive religious, moral, and political doctrines (Rawls 1993). While orthodox pluralists were preoccupied with discovering whose and which interests were most reflected in the outcomes of community issues, new pluralists also seek to discover whose and which principles of morality and justice are reflected in community decisions (and nondecisions).

While orthodox pluralists limited their conception of the common good to descriptive statements about broad acceptance of a "democratic creed" featuring abstract political rights and procedural norms of fair play (Dahl 1961, pp. 309-25; Dahl 1989, pp. 208-308), new pluralists are concerned with a broader conception of the common good. They stress that political order requires an "overlapping consensus" on a wide array of political principles (Rawls 1993, pp. 133-72), but they do not claim that there is any universal justification for the norms that are dominant within particular communities. They acknowledge that a "Kantian *sensus communis*" or "common sense" can be used to maintain dubious subjugation of and hostility toward some people and their values that depart from any pluralist consensus (Schoolman 2007, pp. xiii-ix). New pluralists thus seek to describe and explain (both causally and functionally) the values that constitute an overlapping consensus within pluralist communities, but they remain very attentive to the values of those who criticize common sensibilities (e.g., Connolly 2005).

While orthodox pluralists focus on the power resources and influence that various groups bring to political issues and stress how the dispersion of power resources and influence leads to negotiation, compromise, and outcomes that are relatively responsive to many groups within the community, new pluralists stress that the emergence and resolution of community issues reflect not just applications of power but also the moral and justice principles that are brought to bear on issues (Schumaker and Kelly 2012; Scott and Bornstein 2009). Orthodox pluralists may concede that groups articulate principles on behalf of their interests, but (perhaps with an inadvertent nod to Marxism) tend to regard these principles as little more than camouflages for interests, not as factors that are at least partially independent of interests. In contrast, new pluralists regard policy processes as often including deliberation where participants use public reason

to resolve issues in ways that reflect various principles judged relevant and of high priority to the specific issue under discussion. How values are framed into principles can matter for outcomes. For example, those agents who wish to promote public assistance for the poor seem better served by claiming that municipal governments have a responsibility to provide social minimums on essential goods than by claiming that the poor have welfare rights that such governments must accommodate (Schumaker and Kelly, 2013).

In sum, the new pluralism provides a host of concerns and questions that have been too often neglected by urban scholars. It enables us to clarify the multitude of values and the various ways these are expressed, represented, and attained in community politics. It urges us to study the moral principles about what is good for the community and the justice principles about the fair distributions of policy benefits and burdens held and pursued by various agents. It prompts us to examine how such principles intersect with the interests of various groups, and whether principles (which ones?), when invoked, prompt agents to revise their values and become amenable to a politics of accommodation that tames conflict between competing interests.

Other important concerns about urban politics can be fruitfully explored and eventually assembled into a coherent new pluralistic perspective on politics. Overall, the new pluralism facilitates analyses of the values at stake in community politics in ways that facilitate value judgments by the consumers of our research without imposing on that research our own, inevitably partial, value judgments.

Appendix

Definitions and Examples of Group Types

When presenting officials a list of 24 types of groups to provide the assessments shown in Table 2, they often asked for clarifications. The definitions and examples provided for them are as follows:

With respect to Democrats, Republicans, and other parties, the concern is with the involvements of local-party organizations in city politics.

National and global businesses refer to those corporations that are active in national and global markets, respectively, and that are located in the city or propose to locate in the city.

Neighborhood groups include neighbors who organize on an ad hoc basis to address a particular issue (such as a NIMBY) as well as ongoing neighborhood organizations.

Community action groups are grassroots organizations that seek to mobilize local residents to address a particular social problem. Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is a national example. A local policy advocacy group, such as one organized to pursue a living wage ordinance, is another example.

Professional associations include both local chapters of national organizations of such professions as lawyers, doctors, and architects, and ad hoc groups of members of a particular profession that mobilize on a specific local issue.

Nonprofits include civic groups like the Rotary and Optimist Clubs that have community service missions and such nonprofit service providers as social service agencies.

Clientele groups concern both permanent and temporary associations of people who use or seek to use particular city services, such as residents who use transit services or depend on public health facilities.

Minority groups promote the interests of black, Hispanics, and Native Americans in the community.

Ethnic groups promote the interests of other minorities like Arab-Americans and Asian-Americans, or of identifiable nationality groups such as Italian-Americans, Jews, and Russians.

GLBT groups pursue rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals.

Morality groups organize to combat what they regard as sins (e.g., having an abortion) or vices (e.g., consuming pornography).

Task forces are organized by public officials to facilitate dialogues among diverse community interests and arrive at citizen-based recommendations regarding specific public issues.

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Notes

1. Other scholars who have observed that treatments of orthodox pluralism have focused on group power include Eisenberg (1995) and McFarland (2004). They also criticize this tendency.
2. See Schumaker and Kelly (2012) for further discussion of the difference characteristics of our sample cities. Beyond the eight Kansas and Missouri communities that comprise the database for this article, four cities in California were also included in our larger study on the role of ethics in urban politics, but they are omitted here because we gathered much less information about group involvements on concrete issues there than in Kansas and Missouri. However, the limited data we gathered on groups in California support the broad findings reported here.
3. Many of these issues were not resolved until after the interviews were completed, prompting some subsequent call-back phone interviews and delaying the completion of this project.
4. Depending on elected officials to provide assessments of group involvements might be regarded as a major limitation of this study, but previous research in one of these cities (Lawrence) revealed that interviews with both councilors and group leaders provided very similar assessments of group involvements (Schumaker 1991). Of course, interviews with group leaders could provide information about group characteristics that could affect their involvements, but this was not the concern of this study. Interviews with participants in broader policy networks could provide information of group involvements beyond the issues resolved by city councils, but the concern of the larger project from which this article is drawn was to understand the policy-making attitudes and behaviors of elected city officials. It is also noteworthy that the involvements of groups in Lawrence during the time period of the first study (1983-1987) were remarkably similar to those during the time period of this study (2000-2007).
5. As a result of learning (during the second round of interviews) more about the kinds of groups that were actually involved in city issues, I came to regret some aspects of this list and the definitions provided. For example, I wish I had distinguished civic groups from service providers, especially given the increasing role of service providers in local governance (Stein 1990). Indeed, I wish I had sought assessments of two separate kinds of service providers—nonprofits and for profit organizations (Lamathe, Lamathe, and Feiock 2008). I also wish I had used the

term *advocacy groups* rather than *community action groups* and emphasized the "citywide" composition of such groups as stressed by Berry (2010).

6. Berry (2010) argued that, in contrast to national interest groups, activity is more important than organization to the amount of influence that local groups achieve. Although these two aspects of group involvement are highly correlated in our data set ($r = .92$ for all 1,800 observations), influence is, as Berry suggests, more closely associated with activity ($r = .90$) than with organization ($r = .84$).
7. Characterizing particular issues according to which of these patterns it corresponds and estimating the power of various groups on each issue involve judgments by both interviewees and researchers; thus, a language of precision is often abandoned for one of approximation in what follows.
8. National corporations are hardly "local groups" as that term is most often used in the literature, but they are included in this analysis because they are part of civil society and because I am here pursuing an inclusive assessment of group involvements.
9. Another commonality between the old and new pluralism is their recognition that important political decisions often take place in settings other than city hall. For example, the old pluralism recognized the involvements of actors at various levels of government, and the new pluralism recognizes that decisions can be made by informal regimes and by policy networks.

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Bio

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