

The Power of Bureaucracy in Congressional Environmental Advocacy

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Objectives

1. Examine how members of Congress advocate for local environmental concerns and federal policy through the bureaucracy
2. Create more transparency in communication between legislators and federal agencies

Background/Methods

- By analyzing communication records of legislators, we study their environmental priorities
- Legislators send thousands of letters to federal agencies each year
- We obtain congressional letters through the Freedom of Information Act, filter this information into spreadsheets, and apply our codebook
- Using our codebook, we categorize each letter by the interests that congressional members advocate on behalf of
 - 2s, 4s, and 5s tend to be national concerns
 - 1s and 3s tend to be local concerns

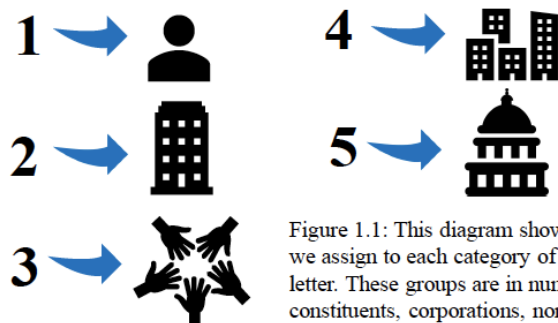


Figure 1.1: This diagram shows the numbers we assign to each category of congressional letter. These groups are in numerical order: constituents, corporations, non-profits and local governments, industries, and federal policy.

- After this process, these data are placed into an R program where congressional letters are matched with their congressional members



Hypothesis

Congressional members correspond with different agencies based on the groups they advocate for. Legislators that advocate for local interests will communicate with different agencies than legislators that advocate for federal policy.

Results

The following are broad advocacy patterns in various environmental agencies. They are ordered from most nationally-oriented (primarily 4s and 5s) to most locally-focused (primarily 1s and 3s).

- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**: focuses on the rulemaking of environmental regulations, members commonly advocate for rule exceptions or changes to this agency; negotiates international environmental policy
- **Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD)**: identifies major environmental disasters caused by environmental law violations by corporations
- **Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (DOE)**: mediates environmental concerns with offshore drilling (well control rule), members from coastal states often advocate for local industries
- **U.S. Geological Survey (DOI)**: deals with national monument concerns and funding for local public university research; emphasis on local compliance with environmental programs like streamgages
- **Office of the Solicitor (DOI)**: handles public land management, environmental studies, and boundary revisions for parks in the member's districts

Conclusions

- Legislators strategically communicate with agencies based on their level of concern.
- Local issues often overlap with federal policy. Districts depend on members of Congress to express their environmental concerns through appropriate agencies.
- Based on evidence from other coded agencies, members advocate more often for local interests rather than special interests and corporations.

References

FOIA Picture: <https://treenosoftware.com/freedom-of-information-act-and-right-to-know>. UW Madison Logo: <https://brand.wisc.edu/print/logos/>

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