

Tracing Interest-Group Populations in the US and UK

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Abstract

Based on the entries in the US-based *Encyclopedia of Associations* and the UK *Directory of British Associations*¹, this paper reviews the growth and development of the associational universe in two political systems. The cases have been coded by two separate national typologies, but to aid comparison the UK data has been recoded to use the US system which in turn uses categories comparable to those used in the Policy Agendas Project. In the longer term this will allow us to assess the linkage between the associational universe and public policy activities of national government institutions. The associational data are seen as a proxy for the interest-group systems. The two national systems share some similarities but also differ cross-nationally in ways that may reflect both the different social and economic contexts on the one hand and the different public policy context on the other. This is the first attempt at explicit comparative cross national work in these areas.

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¹ The authors thank the publishers of the directories used for their cooperation and for their initiative in assembling these data.

Explosion or Transformation?: Characterizing Interest-Group Population Change

The paper is something of a preliminary ‘demonstration project’ offering a first glimpse of two large new datasets which allow assessment of the current scale of the associational universes of the US and the UK – and patterns of change over time. Studies of the scale of interest groups are of course working soil already tilled by Walker (1983, p391). Twenty five years ago he noted that there were ‘almost no comprehensive descriptions of the world of interest groups in America ...’ Berry more recently (1999, p18) noted, ‘unfortunately for scholars studying interest groups, there is no standard data base to measure the population of lobbying organizations over time... Even measuring the participation of groups in a single year is difficult.’ Gray and Lowery (1996, p5) cite Salisbury (1994, p13) to call attention to the very real difficulties of measuring population level properties across multiple populations: they quote Cigler (1994, 29) who made the point that, ‘In large measure, data availability has been the major determinant of the interest group politics agenda, framing both the questions we explore, *and the topics we avoid.*’ (italics added).

The Assumption of Explosive Growth

Yet though there is a data deficit nonetheless there is a commonplace assumption in political science that there has been an explosion in interest group numbers - at least in the UK and USA. Jordan and Maloney (1997, p3) quote Cigler and Loomis writing on the US, ‘a participation revolution has occurred ... large numbers of citizens have become active in an ever increasing number of protest groups, citizen’s organizations, and special interest groups.’ Jordan and Maloney use British data from the *Directory of British Associations* to show how 48% of recently recorded groups had start up dates after 1968. They say (2007, p3), ‘Approximately at the same time as the explosion in the number and membership levels of groups, British political parties began to experience a hemorrhaging in the level of both membership and intra-organizational activity.’

So common theme is this theme in the US literature that Baumgartner and Leech (1998, pp100-102) include an entire section on ‘The Recurring Discovery of an

“Interest-Group Explosion”² tracing it back to the work of Croly (1915), Pollock (1927) Herring (1927), and Crawford (1939) and onward through virtually each decade of the 20th century. They note (p102) that, ‘There can be no doubt that the American interest- group system has grown dramatically over the decades.’ Nownes and Neeley (1996) similarly argue that, ‘Since 1960, the number of politically active public interest groups in the United States has skyrocketed. In fact, there are now more public interest groups active in Washington politics than at any other time in the nation's history.’

In ‘The Paradox of Interest Groups in Washington’ (1990, reprinted 1992, p340) Salisbury pulled together changes in the group system from 1960 under the heading ‘*The explosion in numbers.*’ He conceded, ‘we have no reliable baseline of observation’, but the following items he collated suggest the ‘magnitude of expansion of the interest group universe’.³

- the number of registered lobbyists increased from 3,400 in 1975 to 7,200 in 1985.
- the annual publication *Washington Representatives* managed to find and list more than 5,000 people in 1979; by 1988 it listed nearly 11,000 (Close *et al* 1988).
- the proportion of US trade and professional associations headquartered in and around Washington grew from 19% in 1971 to 30% in 1982 (Colgate, 1982).
- The number of lawyers belonging to the District of Columbia Bar Association (a requirement for practice in Washington) increased from 10,925 in 1973 to 34,087 in 1981.
- The number of business corporations operating offices in Washington increased from 50 in 1961 to 545 in 1982 (Yoffie, 1985).
- Some 765 of the citizens groups and 795 of the welfare groups in Washington in 1981 had come into existence since 1960. (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p76)

Other important sources underpinning the assumption of group growth included Walker (1983) and King and Walker (in Walker 1991, p63). They assemble

² At some time the literature on group explosion needs to be reconciled with the skocpol. Putnam decline of participation theme.

³ Salisbury was referring to the scale of group proliferation and that group number focus is the key to this article. Gray and Lowery (1996, p7) points out that Olson himself in his 1982 study of institutional sclerosis uses data on members of groups rather than numbers of groups ...

fragmentary evidence to sustain an impression that the ‘there is no doubt that the number of citizen groups has grown rapidly during the past twenty years in several policy areas.’ (See also 1983, p394; citizen groups correspond in that study to non occupationally based ones). In Chapter 4 of the 1991 volume King and Walker conclude (1991, p72):

Since about the time Martin Luther King, Jr. led “a march on Washington” by thousands of citizens in the civil rights movement in 1963, there has been a march to Washington by interest groups as well. We have witnessed an explosive growth in the number of groups finding voice and redress in Washington.

Walker (1983, p394) cites work such as Barbrook and Bolt (1980) and Freeman (1965) to support the identification of a patterns of growth.

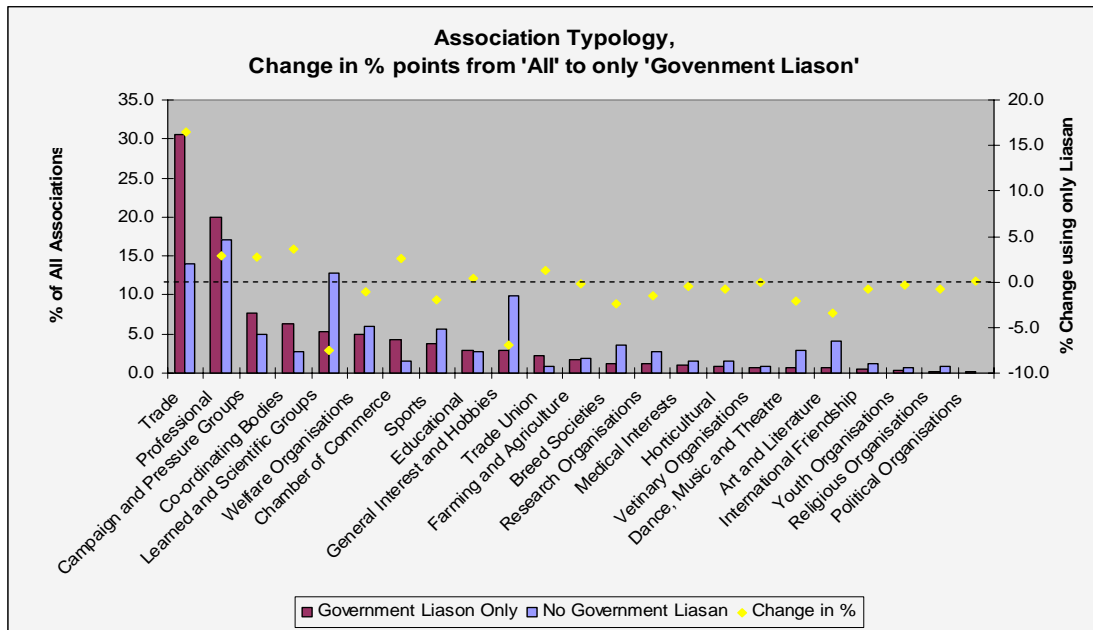
In sum, there is no doubt of the scholarly and journalistic consensus identifying the “interest group explosion” in both the US and the UK. The modern interest group system is said to be significantly more diverse, to include many more citizen and social-movement oriented organizations, and increasing numbers of members overall. Or at least that is the impression. Impressions, however, can be vague and sometimes contradictory. For example, we have a sense of the overwhelming business advantage, but also especially from Walker’s work that the 1960s may have led to a significant mobilization of citizen-based organizations, and that this may have altered the structure of bias in Washington in a fundamental way.

The same ‘explosion’ seems to be rediscovered in each decade. Fitting in with this pattern of rediscovery is an interpretation that assumes a continual transformation or churning with different elements of the population growing and declining at different rates. Such a pattern of sectoral instability appears to be a constant. This then leads to a qualification of to the basic explosion image – attractively bold though it is. The picture turns out to be much more complicated: Some sectors of the group population have indeed exploded in numbers in recent years whereas others have stagnated or even declined. (see Appendix 1). Moving to better understandings of these dynamics will require substantial historical and empirical work and that is the goal of our comparative project, though of course this paper represents only a first small step.

This seam of work largely is interested in using association data as a proxy for interest group information. At the suggestion of one of the authors the UK directory

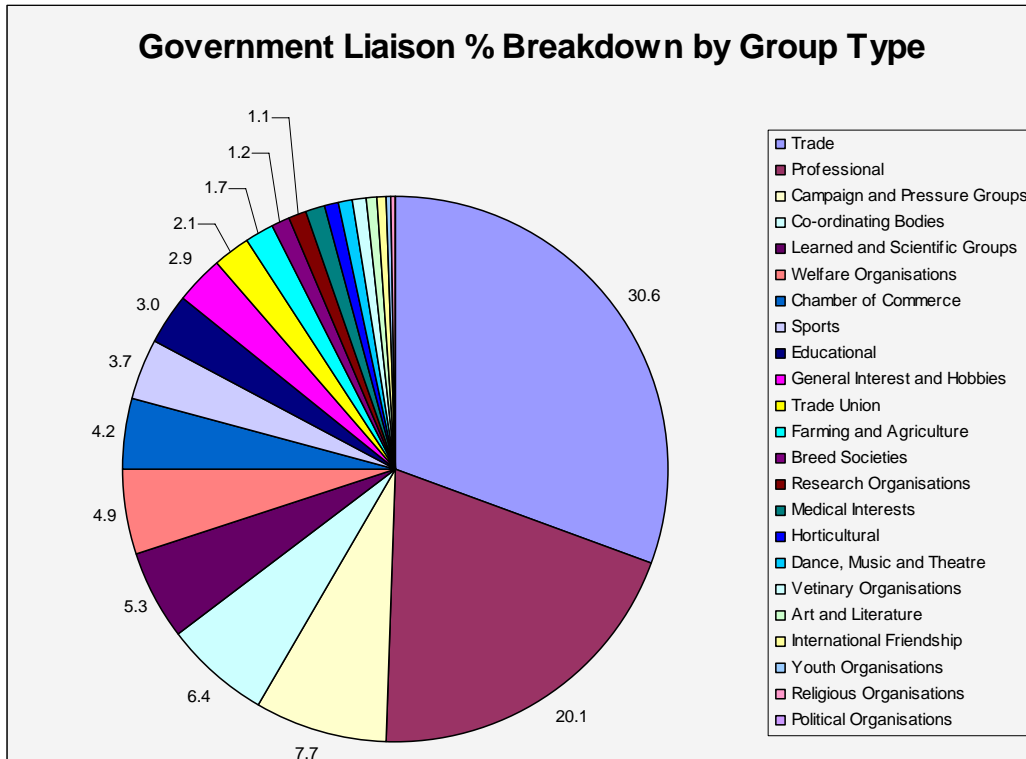
introduced a question in the early 90s that allows groups to signal as one of their concerns 'Liaison with government'. That gives a sub population of about one third that define one of their roles in this way. Potentially this gives a way to compare the more politicized organizations with the less ... (but the current paper maintains the focus on 'all associations.'

Figure 1 UK Associations identifying a Government Liaison role



The following chart shows that the politicized end of the associational spectrum in the UK is dominated by trade and professional bodies :

Figure 2 Government Liaison in UK by group type.



The US and UK Data Sets

The data that are reported here are based on the US-based *Encyclopedia of Associations* and the UK's *Directory of British Associations*. Both directories seek to list every national association active in the country, ranging from trade associations to hobby and leisure groups. Of course, many of these associations are apolitical. However, they are of interest because they represent the universe of national-level associational opportunities for the American and British publics, and a large percentage of the groups are indeed involved in government relations at many levels, even those groups which are not created with explicitly political or economic aims from the start.

The data collection part of our two projects is close to complete, but the data we reported may be still subject to some revisions. There is classification in each by the publishers and in addition for each association we have coded their major focus of activity by the topic classification system used in the US and UK Policy Agendas Project (www.policyagendas.org and www.policyagendas.org.uk).

The Broad Pattern of Data

Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of associations in the US and UK respectively, by policy area and over time.

Table 1. US Associations by topic (US coding version), 1975–2005.

Topic	1975	1985	1995	2005	Growth Rate (%)
Civil Rights	273	656	795	848	210.62
Family	139	274	371	401	188.49
Housing	69	160	183	192	178.26
Health	1044	1849	2331	2821	170.21
Law	192	380	468	507	164.06
Environment	226	362	513	564	149.56
Ideological	245	481	568	609	148.57
Other	69	116	128	143	107.25
Lands	74	122	161	151	104.05
Defense	329	553	689	655	99.09
Art	620	845	1375	1190	91.94
Social Welfare	242	414	479	464	91.74
Economy	44	84	85	83	88.64
Energy	98	239	214	184	87.76
Science	623	940	1139	1149	84.43
Agriculture	539	822	914	988	83.30
Hobby	516	934	1129	940	82.17
History	821	1089	1459	1481	80.39
Average for all group types					79.35
Sports	450	778	874	792	76.00
Government	249	450	455	424	70.28
Transport	488	902	1045	789	61.68
International	839	1216	1569	1322	57.57
Religion	609	852	1026	942	54.68
Business	2213	2747	2808	2879	30.09
Education	943	1084	1137	1212	28.53
Labor	328	407	443	418	27.44
Intl Trade	124	166	197	156	25.81

Local Government	85	98	102	98	15.29
Total	12491	19020	22657	22402	79.35

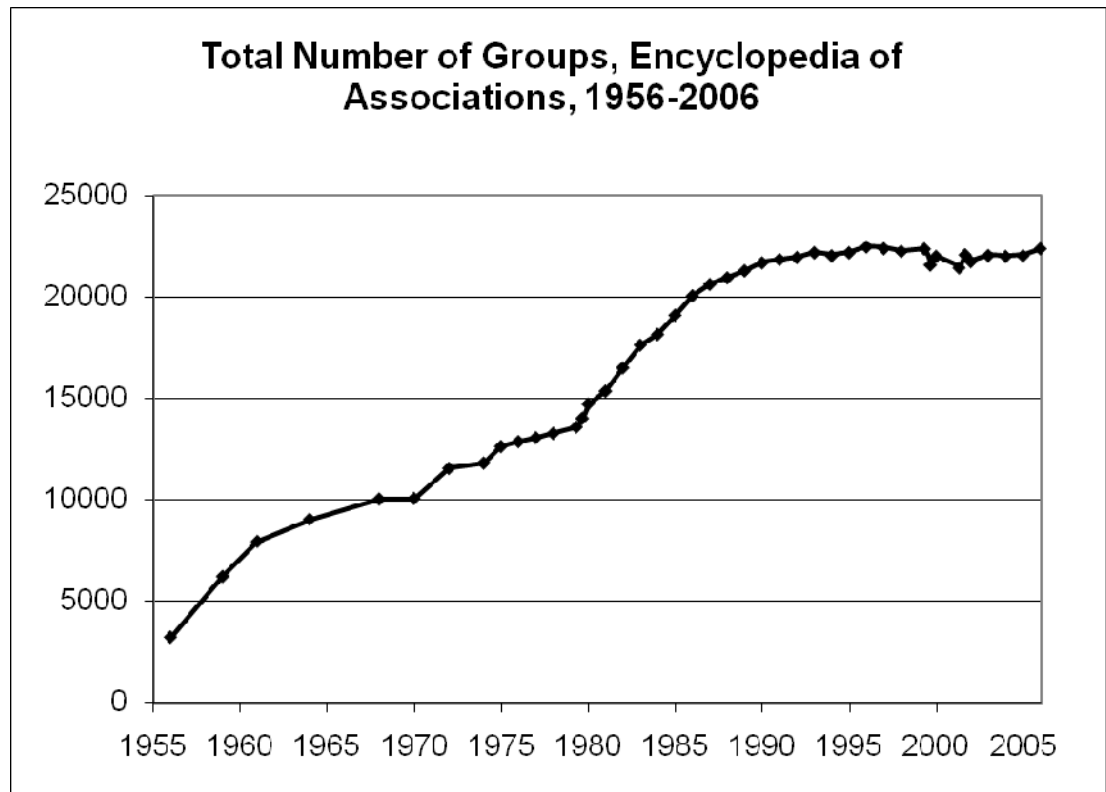
Table 2. UK Associations by topic (US coding), 1970–2005.

Topic	1970	2005	Growth Rate (%)
Economy	1	4	300.00
Hobby	154	581	277.27
Law	46	89	93.48
Social Welfare	213	388	82.16
Ideological	177	309	74.58
Art	273	464	69.96
Health	231	387	67.53
Agriculture	297	445	49.83
Government	8	11	37.50
Civil Rights	22	30	36.36
Sports	279	379	35.84
Environment	117	141	20.51
Other	22	27	22.73
Family	41	45	9.76
Science	846	920	8.75
Average for all group types			4.16
Education	282	258	-8.51
International	86	76	-11.63
History	70	58	-17.14
Local Government	42	34	-19.05
Transport	84	62	-26.19
Energy	15	11	-26.67
Business	2742	2002	-26.99
Defense	21	14	-33.33
Lands	3	2	-33.33
Religion	120	60	-50.00
Housing	36	17	-52.78
Labor	361	97	-73.13
Intl Trade	50	4	-92.00
Total	6639	6915	4.16

For the US data there are four observation points (1975, 1985, 1995, and 2005), and the bottom line of the table shows the overall growth in the size of the system: From 12,000 to 22,000 organizations, or 79 percent growth over the 30 year period. In the case of the UK we have observations in 1970 and in 2005 (mid point to follow in later analysis), and very limited *net* growth. The system is smaller (less than 7,000 associations) and there is just 4 percent growth over a 35 year period.

In the case of the US the growth in the absolute size of the entire system is indicated in Figure 3 below by plotting the number of associations listed in each of the 42 volumes of the *Encyclopedia* from 1956 to 2006. It shows rapid growth in the early years (possibly due to increased accuracy of the directory through the first several editions, but certainly not due only to that in later years), rapid overall expansion throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, then stagnation and even some annual declines in the 1990s and since then.

Figure 3. Number of Associations listed, *US Encyclopedia of Associations*, 1956-2006.



While tables 1 and 2 broadly sustain a characterization of ‘growth’, in the UK and to a lesser extent in US the term ‘explosion’ is not quite appropriate, at least not for the entire period. The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 present our best estimates of these differential growth rates. These data are presented by the policy topic areas used across all data-sets in the policy agendas projects, so we ultimately will be able to compare these trends with other trends in governmental activities. For now, we wish simply to explore the similarities and differences across the two national systems examining which sectors have seen the greatest growth patterns and which have lagged in relative or even absolute terms.

Variation by Policy Area

In fact the data confirms a strong sub theme reflected in the earlier literature – that while there may be growth in the system, it is unevenly distributed across topics.

Figure 4. Number of Associations listed by Category, *US Encyclopedia of Associations*, 1959-2005.

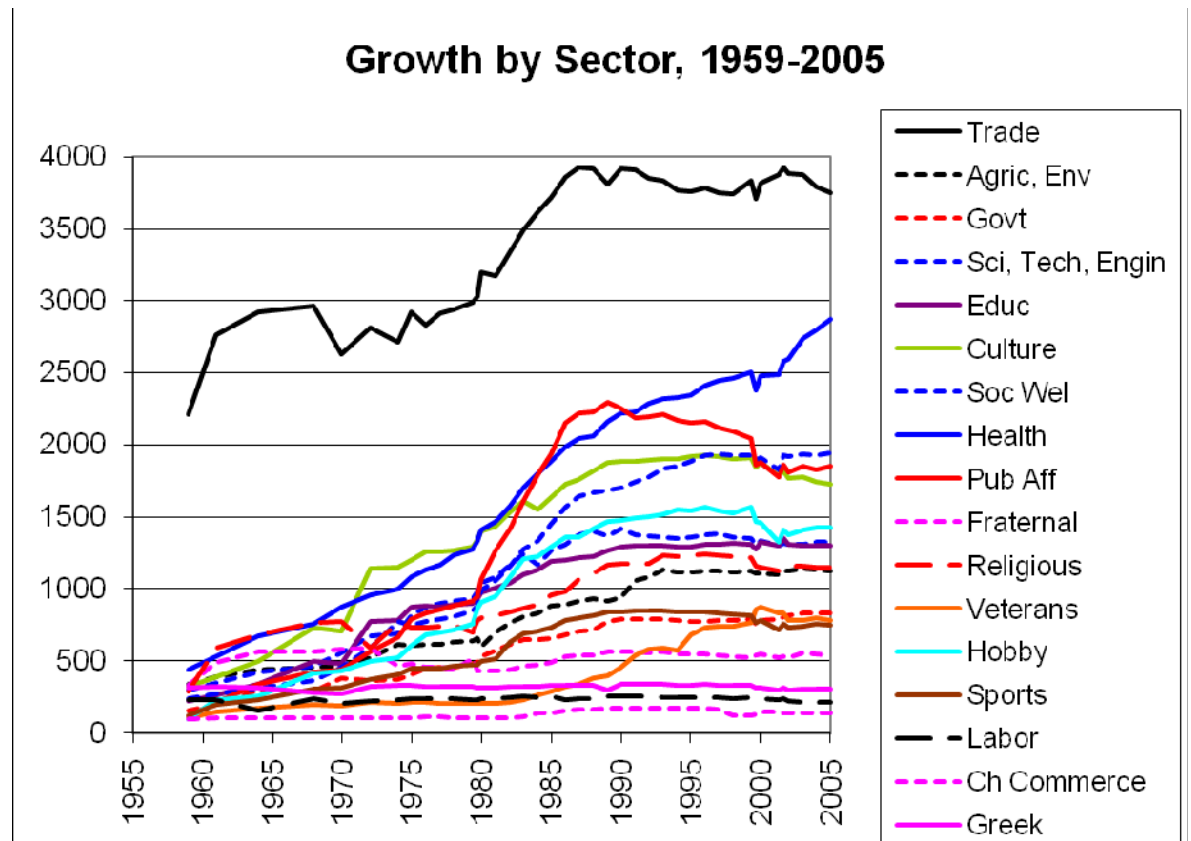


Figure 4 and Appendix 1 gives fuller confirmatory detail on a tendency to divergent growth rates identified earlier in the literature. For example Berry's *The New Liberalism* stresses the rising power of citizen groups (1999.) He suggested that the US is unique in its tendency to permit the emergence of lobbying groups and linked this to the existence of two broad vote maximizing parties allows 'policy maximizing' interest groups to develop. (Obviously such an explanation also stretched to the UK.) He argues that newly formed groups are like cable TV channels that can make money by finding a small but faithful audience. This explanation, he says, has underpinned, 'The staggering rise in the numbers of interest groups active in Washington ...'

In part Berry's argument utilizes the explosion image that we address here critically, but Berry also made an important qualification anticipating our skepticism. A strong sub theme for Berry and others is that growth was not uniform. He suggests that the prior three decades (1968-98) had been a bull market for lobbying groups, but he raises the question as to whether all group sectors had proliferated at equal rates. He said newspaper reports on the formation of new associations implied that the number of groups is increasing, 'but ... the number of citizen groups is growing more rapidly than all other types, creating a trend away from the predominantly occupational basis of the interest group system' (1983, p394).

Baumgartner and Leech (p103), exploiting the US *Encyclopedia of Associations*, show an increase from 5,843 to over 23,000 in 1995, (see Figure 3). (They also report Mark Petracca's [1992] work on Washington representatives yielding an increase from 4000 in 1977 to 14,500 in 1991.) But they too stress the variation across the sub populations. They note for example, that trade associations in the Encyclopedia increased from 2,309 in 1959 to 3,973 in 1995, but this represents a decrease in the percentage of all associations as the total population was growing even faster.

Figure 4 presents a fuller version of the data reported in Baumgartner and Leech (1998, p103, table 6.1). The lines in the figure represent the numbers of associations listed in each volume of the *Encyclopedia*, simply using the categories chosen by the publisher. Figure 2 makes clear that trade associations represent the largest single category of groups in the US system, but that this category is growing only very slowly in comparison to other types of groups. Other groups, health, public affairs, and others, have had overall growth rates in the period of up to 1,000 percent, as compared to the 79 percent growth rate across the entire system. Several

association types have remained relatively stagnant, such as labor unions, chambers of commerce, and trade associations.

King and Walker's Chapter 5 of *Mobilizing Interest Groups* begins 'In chapter 4 we saw that there has been a rapid growth in the number of national interest groups' – especially among groups in the citizen sector. Walker (1983, p395) says, 'Despite these reservations about each source of data, all available evidence points in the same direction, namely that there are many more interest groups operating in Washington today than in the years before WWII and that citizen groups make up a much larger proportion of the total than before.' We confirm these findings but also point to the more complicated nature of the situation; it is not *only* citizens' groups that have proliferated, and it is not *only* traditional economic groups that have stagnated. Still, the overall trends suggest that there is considerable value in King and Walker's generalization.

The least expected finding in tables 1 and 2 is the actual reduction in associational totals in some sectors in the UK (and Ireland). However reexamination suggests the data is robust. Ignoring the small cell case of international trade, some of the largest reductions are in business and labor groups. In fact this fits in with the academic literature on trade union evolution that has seen a huge wave of mergers in the area – in the face of related but not identical pressures of potential insolvency and membership losses. Business groups too in the UK have of course seen the coining of new groups to respond to economic change – as Truman expected, but the larger wave has been to associational simplification. This is partly through economies of scale and /or the incentives operating for association executives, but also to the increasing importance of evidence based policy making. Government departments have actively tried to reduce group proliferation in an attempt to simplify consultation and to secure better researched responses. In other words, with hindsight, a pattern of a shrinking population of business and union groups fits in with our knowledge of the field. Unrestricted growth is almost certainly the one outcome that will not be found over time.

A specific example of Chambers of Commerce in the UK highlights the usefulness of having more than one time point to study. In 1970 238 cases were listed and by 2005 this was down to 136 (difference of 102). This indeed is part of the explanation of the decline of business groups in the the UK reported above. But if we

look at the first few cases for each year it is immediately obvious that there has been turnover as well as shrinkage.

1970	2005
Aldershot & District Chamber of Commerce	Arab-British Chamber of Commerce
Andover & District Chamber of Trade	Ashford (Kent) Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Enterprise
Anglo-Israel Chamber of Commerce	Australia & New Zealand Chamber of Commerce UK
Armagh Chamber of Commerce	Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Ashford (Kent) Chamber of Trade	Ballymena Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Ashford (Middlesex) Chamber of Trade & Commerce	Banbury & District Chamber of Commerce
Association of British Chambers of Commerce (ABCC)	Barking & Dagenham Chamber of Commerce
Association of Chambers of Commerce of Ireland	Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain
Athlone Chamber of Commerce	Black Country Chamber
Aylesbury & District Chamber of Commerce	Brazilian Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain
Ayr Chamber of Commerce	Britain Nigeria Business Council
Ballymoney Chamber of Commerce	Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce
Barking & Dagenham Chamber of Trade & Industry	British & Colombian Chamber of Commerce
Barrow in Furness Chamber of Trade & Commerce	British American Chamber of Commerce Northern California
Batley & Birstall Chamber of Commerce	British Argentine Chamber of Commerce
Bechenham, Penge & Anerley Chamber of Trade	British Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce
Bedford Chamber of Trade	British Canadian Chamber of Trade & Commerce
Birkenhead Chamber of Commerce	British Chamber of Business in Southern Africa

This is not a case of a category with some shrinking over time: it is a case of a large population being replaced by an almost entirely new (though slightly smaller) population. One of the difficulties in this area is that often mergers disguise an underlying continuity, but this is not even a major part of the case just illustrated.

Previous Explanations of the Uneven Patterns of Group Mobilization

For most scholars, the more interesting task has been to account for the growth rather than document it. The implication of growth is obvious in discussions such as Salisbury or Truman's proliferation thesis. The assumption is that there is growth – and attention needs to focus on an explanation of the increase. Salisbury suggests that for Truman social and economic differentiation is seen as the basis for a wider range of groups. He argues (1969, p3) that Truman implied that 'Increasingly specialized sets of people are observed engaged in a growing range of particular economic activities or specific social roles and from this specialized diversity of interests or values as each newly differentiated set of people desires a somewhat different set of social goals.' The tone of the argument is that (captured in his agriculture exemplar) differentiation lead to 'specialized groups with specialized interests.' (p4). He summarizes the implicit proliferation thesis as a 'natural' response to 'conflicting claims of each differentiated set of interested parties.'

Baumgartner and Leech point out a passage in Pendleton Herring (1929, 51) that anticipates the Truman view. Herring noted that in the First World War the US government found it difficult to deal with separate industries and businesses and they welcomed organizational intervention. 'The war witnessed a great increase in the number of these group associations, but in many cases the end of the war did not witness their dissolution This trend toward organization along the lines of common interest, whether vocational, industrial, moral or social, was too fundamental to be affected by the end of the war.' (quoted in Baumgartner and Leech, p105). Indeed we can see in our data recognizable growth in associations around World War I and II (details below).

In any case, Salisbury (1969, 1992, p5) develops the following points:

- a) associations are the products of differentiated sets of values or interests;
- and b) over time there will appear more and more different, diverse, specialized groups in the political arena as the processes of social fission continue.

Salisbury also identifies a second 'proto theory' within Truman's account (but they are not very distinctive and Salisbury concedes 'they are not mutually exclusive'). He sees group formation as a response to a putative disturbance in equilibrium. The disruption, he says, could come from matters such as business cycle

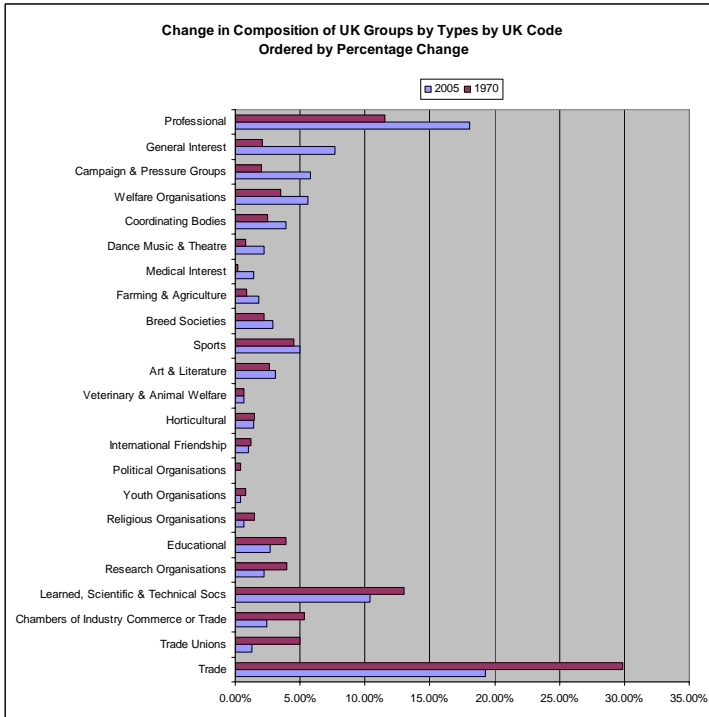
fluctuations, but he also sees technological innovation and industrialization as influences. Such disturbances to the system will so alter the balance in society that the disadvantaged will organize defensively. The process of group organization itself, then, could be an important reason for additional growth among other sectors.

As Salisbury noted, the proliferation argument was undermined by Olson's argument about importance of selective benefits. That Olson's argument was itself widely resisted as conflicting with the actual (apparent) proliferation did not seem to lead to a reacceptance of the proliferation idea. Though Walker (1983, p396) noted that the work of Olson largely undermined Truman's theory of the spontaneous generation of groups, and yet, despite the power of Olson's analysis, at first glance recent increases in the number of groups suggest that Truman has the evidence on his side.

The ideas of disturbance and proliferation perhaps suggest inevitable tendencies to increasing fragmentation and mobilization. Yet trends without limits are unusual. One important counter idea is the limit on population size borrowed by Gray and Lowery (1996, p3). They quote population biologist Paul Colinvaux (1978, p12) 'The way an animal breeds has very little to do with how many of it there are... The reproductive effort makes no difference to the eventual size of the population ...The numbers that may live are set by the environment, and these are quite independent of how fast a species makes babies.'

Figure 5 confirms that the apparently stable UK population totals concealing large intra sectoral changes – with a diminishing number of business groups as a particular feature.

Figure 5 Change in Composition of UK population over time.



In the next section we present a British example (Women’s groups) which illustrates a common mismatch between expectation of explosion and empirical pattern. While the notion of group ‘explosion’ in the 1960s and 1970s is frequently noted, this is not the British experience – even for women’s groups that are maybe seen as emblematic of the group response to societal change in the 1960s and 70s. . The argument here is very much *that group populations may be characterized in the second half of the 20th century by change rather than growth.*

Qualifying ‘Explosion’ – Gender-based Groups in Britain Before 1970

Some of the points that might be used to qualify the idea of explosion can be illustrated from the case of the women’s movement. Walker (1983, p394) for example uses a wide literature to claim a ‘sharp increase during the 1970s’ in women’s organizations, as did Debra Minkoff (1995). A feature that emerges from the 1970 UK volume, however, is the large number of groups for women that *were already in existence by that point*, before what was seen as an explosion. This pattern of pre-existing women’s issue groups in the early directory immediately prompts qualification of a simple notion that gender based groups exploded in the 60s and 70s: while there was growth, there was a large pre existing pool.

Perhaps some of these organizations had atrophied, but in the 1970 edition of the UK *Directory*, the Mother’s Union claimed 10,000 branches and 350,000 individual members. A superficial trawl of the *Directory* (1970) found the gender-based organizations listed as below

Table 3. Selected Womens’ Groups Listed in the 1970 *Directory of British Associations* (date of creation)

Society for Promoting the Training of Women 1859
Mother’s Union 1876
Fawcett Society 1866 (against female inequalities)
Women’s Farm and Garden Association 1899 ⁴
Women’s Protestant Union 1891
Women’s Liberal Federation 1886
Women’s Union of the Congregational Churches of Scotland 1898
British Federation of University Women 1907
Irish Countrywomen’s Association 1910
Irish Women’s Workers Union 1911
St Joan’s Alliance 1911 (feminist organisation working for equality all over the world Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom - British Section 1915
National Women Citizen’s Association 1917
National Federation of Women’s Institutes 1917

⁴ If one included groups relating to careers filled almost entirely by women nurses, secretaries, etc. the numbers would be much larger; these are not included here.

Scottish Women's Rural Institutes 1917
Women's Employment Federation 1918
Women's Amateur Athletic Association 1922
Fawcett Library 1926
Women's Amateur Rowing Council 1923
Women's Cricket Association 1926
Six Point Group 1921 (non party political organisation working to establish equality for women)
Women's Engineering Society 1920
Electrical Association for Women⁵ 1924

Women's League of Health & Beauty 1930
Women's Group on Public Welfare 1931
Women's Gas Federation & Youth Homemakers 1935
National Advisory Centre on Careers for Women (see Women's Employment Federation) 1933
Federation of Women's Institutes NI 1933
Women's Council 1932 (place of women in Asia)
National Association Women's Clubs 1935

Women's Royal Voluntary Federation 1938
Women's Squash Rackets Association 1934
Over 40 Association for Women 1934

Women's Advisory Council on Solid Fuel⁶ 1943
British Housewives League 1945 (effective voice)
Women's Tricycle Association 1954
Cruse Organisation for Widowed Families 1958
Scottish Women's Keep Fit Association 1952

National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependents 1965

The point of this list (with no attempt at being comprehensive) is to assert two things. First it is perhaps longer than anticipated. But secondly this is a *survivor* list: many other female related groups were created and died – or were seen as too minor to record as national level entities – in the period preceeding 1970. A much more comprehensive listing is found in the *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations, 1825-1960* by Gordon and Doughan. Moreover the Register of National Archives records 1,082 organizations with the word women in their title: such as,

- Association of Post Office Women Clerks 1901
- Association for the Education of Women in Oxford 1878
- Association for Promoting the Training of Women Teachers 1870
- Academic Women's Achievement Group 1979

One could argue that such cases does not counter a claim that a growth in women's organization was a feature of the mid 1960s and 1970s. Many of the groups were local rather than national, a reflection of a geographical dimension that meant that organizations were

⁵ 'Domesticating modernity: the Electrical Association for Women, 1924-86' Carroll Pursell, BJHS, 32, pp47-47

⁶ Mary Leigh, 'The housewife, solid fuel and the clean air bill', in Institute of Fuel, *Special Study of Domestic Heating in the United Kingdom*^{1/4}, London, 1956, 306±7.-,

often sub national until communication improved the opportunities for national level organization. One could argue that many of the earlier groups had domestic rather than feminist agendas – but that suggestion can also be exaggerated. Pursell’s article, for example, on the EAW (1999) records it as a rather challenging and radical group drifting over time into the mainstream. Many cases on the list above were quite clearly ‘betterment’ organizations for women’s political and economic situation. The real question this small illustration raises is how much “churning” there is in these associational universes, and how well we can know the past by looking only at those organizations that *survive* until the present?

The notion of a group explosion seems based on the relative prominence of groups as they are created – and the silence of group decay and termination. It may be there was a spurt in the number of explicitly feminist campaigning groups but if a broader definition is used there was no sharp growth. So the first qualification to the explosion idea is that rarely were groups populating growth fields without precedent. An idea of re-mobilization of constituencies over time might fit better. Our evidence certainly finds reflection of Salisbury’s (1969, 7) observation of a counter growth trend. In his study of agriculture he notes a rapid series of local organizational successes ... followed by official group aggregation under a broad group banner.’ Indeed he goes on to point out that the umbrella group itself could then have a rapid demise. He concludes poetically, ‘Yet the empirical landscape is cluttered with abandoned farm group vehicles and effective theory must deal with the relics as well as the survivors.’

Our impression of growth in fields such as women’s issues reflects an asymmetry of attention between birth and death. In an era of the expansion of groups in a field there is likely to be coverage of the problem with mention of groups, However if the vitality of the issue area is diminished this might lead to group morbidity but the low political prominence is likely to lead to an elephants’ graveyard of associations dying in privacy. Few political analysts devote their attention to those aspects of social, technological, and economic life that are withering away. Growth seems more interesting. This could be one reason for the continued identification of ‘explosions.’

A further reason for acceptance of the explosion image is the slippage between accounts of growth in the associational universe and the narrower idea of citizen group or campaigning group. (Or our eye may be caught by a sharp rise in national lobbying groups) Our data show that there are indeed many more public affairs, ideological, and overtly political organizations in the US and the UK, but there are also many policy areas (see Tables

1 and 2) where growth has been slow (US) or where there have been significant declines (UK).

A final proposition to account for the irresistible impression of steep growth is a consequence of the limitations of single time point studies. For example Walker said that the ‘Evidence of the recent growth in the interest group structure also exists in the data from my survey (1983, p394). He secured the start up date from the groups he surveyed in the 80s, (and he found an interesting variation between his types of groups). But as Walker immediately points out there is a flaw in this retrospective sort of exercise of drawing conclusions from surviving groups. He notes ‘It is possible, although unlikely, that citizen groups in areas ignored by historians were declining in numbers during the 1960s and 1970s, thus canceling out the reported gains. The analysis of founding dates of the groups in my survey is suggestive, but it may only be a statistical artifact because I have no data on the number of groups that were formed in earlier years but went out of existence before 1980, when the survey was conducted.’

We can address this issue directly because we have multiple annual directories in each country and we can compare the estimates we get of group populations from a “backwards projection” based on the groups’ reported creation dates and the actual numbers of groups listed in historically placed directories.

Studying Group Creation and Dissolution

A number of methodological issues arise in exploiting pre existing sources ones such as used here in studying trends of associational group populations. Each of these issues may create difficulties in the interpretation of trends reflected in comparison of trends across different editions of a directory of associations. For example increasing comprehensiveness in collection methods across editions of a directory can portray a false image of the growth in the volume of groups.⁷ Here we will discuss the issues of ‘backward projection’ and ‘entry lag’ and the difficulties each presents for making interpretations of trends in associational volume.

Table 4 and Figure 6 below show the number of groups by date of birth from the U.K. *Directory*, aggregated into 10 year blocks. Importantly this is not a discussion of total *volume* of organizations present in a decade, but of new start ups recorded. The following discussion tries to address a weakness that is well identified in the literature that stems from gauging

⁷ Elsewhere we have begun to assess this problem with the U.S. *Encyclopedia*. See Martin, et. al, 2005.

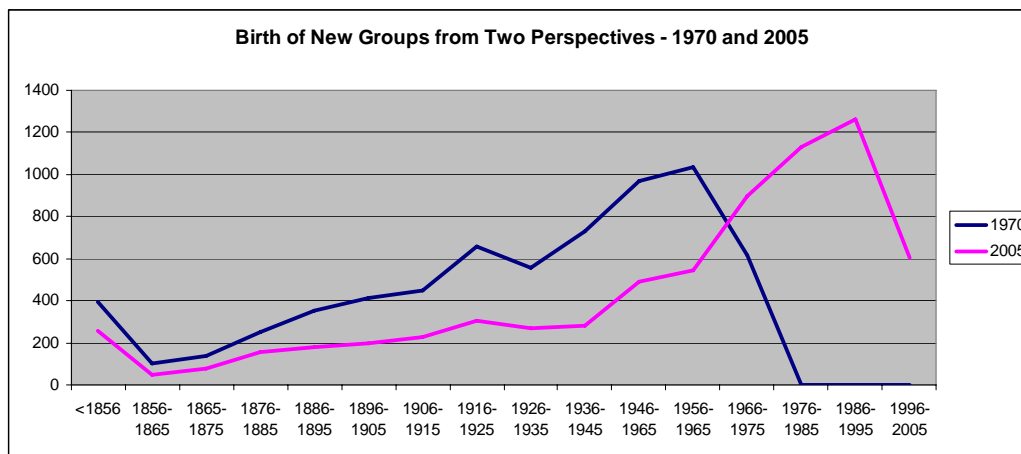
start up dates by single time point studies, and inferring earlier patterns of start ups. This is the so called ‘backward projection’ problem of founding patterns.

Table 4. Recorded Years of Creation for UK groups listed in 1970 and in 2005.

Recorded Birth Year of Groups from Perspective of 1970 and 2005						
Year	1970		2005		1970	2005
	Known	Projected*	Known	Projected*		
<1856	252	396	226	255	5.9%	3.7%
1856-1865	66	104	44	50	1.6%	0.7%
1865-1875	89	140	67	76	2.1%	1.1%
1876-1885	159	250	137	155	3.7%	2.2%
1886-1895	223	350	160	181	5.3%	2.6%
1896-1905	261	410	177	200	6.1%	2.9%
1906-1915	284	446	204	230	6.7%	3.3%
1916-1925	420	660	269	304	9.9%	4.4%
1926-1935	353	555	240	271	8.3%	3.9%
1936-1945	466	732	248	280	11.0%	4.0%
1946-1965	618	971	437	493	14.6%	7.1%
1956-1965	659	1036	485	547	15.5%	7.9%
1966-1975	394	619	797	899	9.3%	13.0%
1976-1985	0	0	1001	1130	0.0%	16.3%
1986-1995	0	0	1119	1263	0.0%	18.2%
1996-2005	0	0	537	606	0.0%	8.7%
Grand Total	4244	6669	6148	6938	100.00%	100.00%
(blank)	2425		790		36.36%	11.39%
Grand Total with Blanks	6669		6938		100.00%	100.00%

*Projections derived by redistributing blanks based on known dates of birth

Figure 6. UK Group Creations as Estimated from 1970 and 2005 Editions of the *DBA*.



Studies repeatedly find that rates of start ups appear to be greatest near the time of the observation. This appears to support the explosion interpretation with a growing rate of group generation. For example Walker said that the ‘Evidence of the recent growth in the interest group structure also exists in the data from my survey (1983, p394).

The UK data reported here presents data from two time points. Initial analysis was conducted using 2005 data (see chart, pink line) and shows a rapid increase in the number of new groups born each decade from around the 1930’s onwards, followed by a steep decline in the last 10 years. (The decline point will be dealt with later).

The pink line represents a fairly standard outcome in single point studies – but as Walker signaled there is a potential distortion in employing it to characterize earlier patterns. Some indication of the scale by which the rate of growth is exaggerated is shown by at the date of birth supplied by the 1970 information (blue line). The (pink) impression of the number of groups being born in decades further back from 2005 is artificially low as groups have ceased to exist in the time between their start up and the data recording in 2005. What Walker considered to be a possibility is captured in the simple graph and the blue line. Some of these ‘missing’ groups were ‘recovered’ by looking from a perspective closer to their birth decade 1970 (see chart, blue line). This line itself subject to revision if earlier data available) implies a shallower rate of increase than suggested from the perspective of 2005. The apparent acceleration in the birth rate of new groups is not as pronounced when the second time point introduced.⁸

This UK information ties in with Johnson and McCarthy’s (2005) systematic analysis of the difficulties of ‘backward projection’ using a sub-set of organizations from the US based *Encyclopedia*. Quoting from their Appendix 1, “Figure A1 displays two characterizations of the founding rate (3-yr rolling average) of all U.S. national environmental organizations listed in the *Encyclopedia*. One characterization is based upon evidence gathered at each of nine different time periods (the last of which is 2003), while the other uses only the 2000 edition of the *Encyclopedia* to capture the population and to project the rate of founding of new organizations backward in time. Each method shows that the population experienced low rates of founding of new SMOs from 1945 until the middle of the 1960’s. The more complete time-series, however, shows a much more elevated, and variable, rate of organizational founding between 1967 and the mid 1980’s than does the data derived exclusively from the 2000 edition of the *Encyclopedia*.”

It is clear that projecting backward from a recent edition of the *Encyclopedia* severely underestimates the total number of organizations found in the population. What is more problematic for analyses employing such estimates than the fact that founding rates are underestimated is that the underestimates are not consistent over time. The difference between the two lines in Figure A1 represents the number of organizations founded in each time period that disbanded before 2000. Between 1968 and 1972 roughly half of the organizational foundings are missed when employing backwards projections and from 1967 to 1984 this method results in underestimating the number of organizations founded by

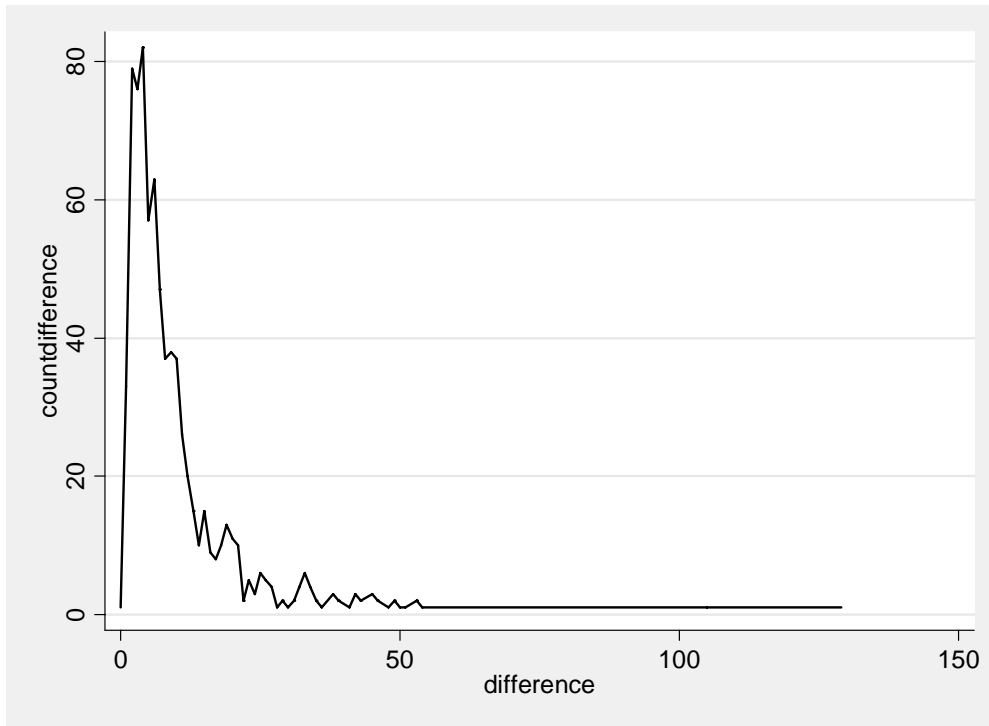
between 5 and 14 organizations per year. In the most recent time period, the differences in founding rates are minimal, less than 2 organizations per year from 1987 until the end of the time series. The 2000 based backward projections of founding rates do not provide good estimates for a period of about 20 years from the mid 1960's to the mid 1980's. This period, of course, saw the greatest expansion in the size of the population as a result of the elevated founding rate of environmental SMOs in the movement's history!

How does the misspecification of founding rates by projection backward from the present affect the specification of population density estimates? Figure 2 displays the equivalent characterizations of the density of the U.S. population of environmental SMOs by the two methods. The period of greatest divergence between "actual" and backward projected founding rates is the period of the greatest under-estimates of density in the U.S. national environmental SMO population. The actual density of the population is increasingly underestimated from the middle of the 1960s until the late 1980s. Of course, the estimated densities cannot show a decline in the size of a population and so the fact that the movement has actually been contracting at the national level since 1990 cannot be revealed in the backward projection." ‘

The apparent decline in the rate of growth in the decade before data collection shows for both 1970 and 2005 in the UK (figure 6) reveals another difficulty with the use of *Encyclopedias* such as these---the problem of "entry lag." When placed side by side with data from 1970, the reduction in new births seen in both curves almost exactly mirrors each other. The similarity suggests that this is another artifact of data collection. It appears there is a 'fairly common 'lag' between start up and inclusion in both the encyclopedias – the time taken for new groups to be absorbed into the data source.

Shaun Bevan has done a systematic analysis of entry lag problem using the U.S. *Encyclopedia* data, shown in Figure 7. That figure depicts the frequency of each difference in years between a group's founding date and its first appearance in the Encyclopedia of Associations' Public Affairs section. This was gained by subtracting the groups founding year from the year it first appeared in the database. As can be observed, the mean lag is more than ten years, while the modal lag is 4 years since a very small number of organizations are listed decades or even a century after their actual founding.

Figure 7: Differences between founding dates and first appearance in the Encyclopedia
Data from the Public Affairs Section



Mean	10.5 years
Median	6 years
Mode	4 years
Min	0 years
Max	129 years

Two general principles about the interpretation of associational trends from data sources like the ones used here can be advanced based upon the preceding discussion. First, while a few time points of comprehensive listings of national associations can provide useful evidence for describing trends in the volume of associations, multiple time points are necessary to a more adequate description of the creation and dissolution processes that have generated those trends in volume. And, second, given the pattern of entry lag documented for both the UK and U.S. directories show this entry lag is a common problem across all directories of this kind. Consequently, analysts should use caution in interpreting the most recent trends derived from those sources since they most likely underestimate recent rates of increase (and probably decrease) in associational populations.

Association Durability

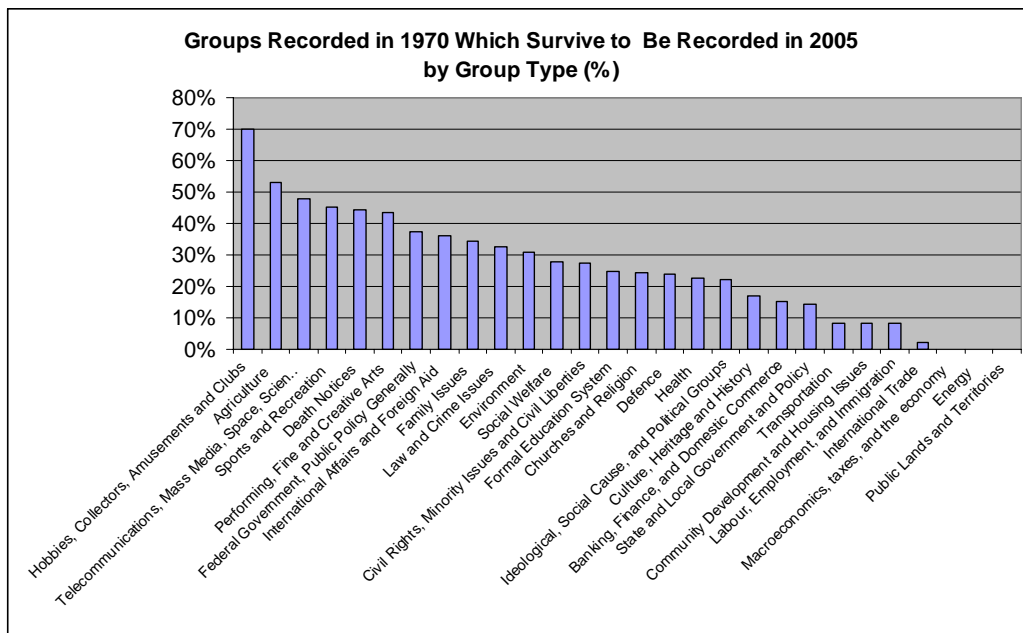
Figure 8 examines the durability of specific UK groups over time, and presents the findings by group type. To be recorded as ‘durable’ an organisation must be recorded in the DBA 1970, and again in 2005. Data column 1 counts all groups observed in the DBA 1970, data column 2 counts those which do not have a presence in the DBA 2005. Comparing these two figures allows us to present and ‘death’ and ‘survival’ rates for sectors. But of vital importance although many groups do not remain in existence in 2005, ‘death’ is not necessarily the explanation.

- **Change:** The group changes its name
- **Merge:** The group has merged with another group
- **Transferred:** The group has been moved to a different directory (particularly religious groups)
- **Missing:** The group ceases to appear in the DBA for no given reason.
- **Death:** The group has ceased to exist and has recorded the death date.

Exactly how common any one of the above causes is over the other remains hard to identify, but we see as a merit of the empirical investigation that these variable outcomes become clear. Uncaptured name changes, mergers and death are as likely as each other with transfers being somewhat less likely but still observed.

The global figure shows that of the 6626 UK groups present in 1970, 4937 (75%) of those did not survive *in their initial form* to be recorded in 2005; meaning that only 25% of groups recorded in 1970 did survive to be recorded in 2005. Looking to the distribution of survival rates by group type it becomes obvious that the system is certainly not homogenous. The group type most likely to survive to 2005 is that of Hobbies and Collectors (70%), followed by Agriculture (53%), and a large volume of Science and Telecoms sector (48%). In interpreting these figures it is perhaps best to imagine these group types as ‘most stable’ rather than survivors as they are more likely to avoid name changes and mergers as well as death.

Figure 7.



Conclusion

This paper is a very rough first cut at two data sets that offer some sense of the changing pattern of associational growth in UK and US over time. While the two exercises are (of course) imperfect attempts to fill the void identified in the opening paragraph, they offer (relatively) comprehensive data – and even more ambitiously – data over time. Thus the advantages are three fold:

- *The data sets are broad and yet allow sub fields to be abstracted to match less all embracing categories – eg campaigning groups, or trade associations.
- * There is measurement over time to look for patterns.
- * The UK data set has been recoded to offer direct comparison with US.

While best professional advice for conference writing is 'One Paper; One Idea,' this contribution instead has the excited focus of a five year old opening Xmas presents. It is clear that we are simply at the stage of poking at the resource to see what is possible with the data – and identifying limitations. In that mood suggestions for future directions of analysis are very welcome.

A main theme is to query the idea of an explosion in the associational population. Both US and UK findings show growth and the US position is much stronger. The national differences raises the question as to whether this is an artefact of data collection or national difference in group population evolution. It is *possible* that the UK rubric in the earlier period was less 'pure' in terms of including only national bodies. This might be part of an explanation but at least as important is a genuine morbidity in the field that is disguising the amount of new growth. The rather gentle British slope of increase is actually the net result of strong birth rates with offsetting deaths. Part of the death rate is the result of economic change meaning redundant interests: part is a shift to more national level administration and effective lobbying, partly finance driven merger activity.

While the idea of explosion needs qualification, a picture of uneven growth is much more sustainable in both systems. In the US this unevenness varies from 210% down to 15.9%. In the UK, (ignoring a very small example) the range was from 277% to *minus* 92%.

One might say in passing the common image of group explosion was often generalised from the pressure. Group/ ideological / campaigning group kind of example. The fact that there was undoubtedly growth in that sector lead to a spillover assumption that all groups were proliferating in like fashion. In the US the ideological group category increased from 245 in 1975 to 482 in 1985 and 6009 in 2005; in the UK the category grew from 177 in 1970 to 309 in 2005.

However the broad thrust of both data sets is that explosion might be an overdramatic image of the whole and certainly within the sub populations there is often apparent stability or even decline. But research in this area is simply troublesome to conduct. As we have seen in the UK Chamber of Commerce case, modest decline might actually mean – modest overall decline masking large scale termination and a volume of start ups.

This attempt at addressing the data gap identified in the early part of the paper could only ever be partially successful. The exercise has brought to the fore some obvious and some less easily anticipated practical problems. There are practical difficulties in operationalizing the (apparently) simple ambition of looking at the pattern of association populations over time. But even more difficult than the (considerable) problems of capturing

the data, there is the definitional issue over *what* is to be captured – particularly as the project is trying to offer the material that is internationally *equivalent*. So in addition to problem of recording national data, and the problem of deciding on a definitional focus, there is the added dimension of difficulty in seeking truly comparative findings with standard ‘equivalent currency’.

For some political science purposes a loose concept of ‘association’ is adequate (and indeed in some discussions ‘looseness’ might be valuable), but in other contexts a narrower interest group type focus is required. Thus a campaigning (interest) group is an association, but data on all associations might give an inaccurate impression about campaigning groups. Indeed not all campaigning groups are the same: discussion often assumes that campaigning groups are venues for individual participation – but in reality some groups raise money from patrons and lobby professionally.

Definitions are thus key in the exercise. A possible advantage in using the directory/encyclopedia is that the material was gathered by a third party to fit non-academic considerations: this removes the (subconscious) temptation to gather data in ways that further certain interpretations. But though the definition was not tailored to any pre existing academic argument, nonetheless any version has implications that need to be borne in mind. adopting someone else’s definition is attractive in avoiding the need for conscious decisions, but such second hand definitions also have their consequences. That the publishers’ interpretation of the core concept of ‘association’ does not map precisely onto the political science use, is for the most part because there is no agreed use within professional social science: the publishers approaches are defensible and consistent. And as credible as any single political science use. But it is not a standard political science interpretation.

Though the advantages of using this pre collected data are seen as compelling, nonetheless the exploitation of this commercial source as a research tool for political science purposes has two potential weaknesses. The first is the issue of comprehensiveness, consistency and competence in data gathering : however familiarity with the two projects give confidence about reliability. The more subtle concern is the extent to which coverage is a reasonable approximation to the population in which political science might be interested?

More, one suspects, than in most fields, the ‘population’ in interest groups studies is definition-dependent. There is an elasticity about terms such as association, pressure and interest group. This is not simply a difference between technical political science and more popular use, but also reflects major variations in scope in different academic interpretations.

For example there is a sophisticated discussion by Knoke (1986, p2) on terminology, but his conclusion that under ‘surface diversity and richness’ there was ‘underlying anarchy’ was maybe the most significant point. He argued, ‘Put bluntly, association research remains a largely unintegrated set of disparate findings, in need of a compelling theory to force greater coherence upon the enterprise. Without a common agreement about central concepts, problems and explanations and analytic tools, students of associations and interest groups seem destined to leave their subject in scientific immaturity.’

This project has not ‘solved/ resolved’ the definitional controversy en route to solid measurement, but it raises issues about the simple matter of counting that are hard to identify in advance of an effort at counting and comparing. Knoke suggests ‘a minimal definition of an association as a formally organized named group, most of whose members⁹ (sic) - whether persons or organizations – are not financially recompensed for their participation’. His purpose is to distinguish his ‘target pool’ from primary groups such as families or from bureaucratic organizations (such as agencies) or from private sector firms. He concluded his review of research on associations in down beat fashion:

Association research as a field has failed to achieve a sustained take – off into scientific maturity. Lacking consensus about the central issues and appropriate ways to study them, it remains a fragmented and unfocused enterprise at the margins of its parent disciplines. Sorely missing is an overarching paradigm that could crystallize attention and confer cachet upon the speciality. A fundamental theoretical goal must be to create coherence among the myriad empirical findings ... (1986, p17)

As per the start of this paper he noted that that interesting questions required new data - especially longitudinal and multilevel.

This project attempts to contribute to that task but even more fundamental than the need for new data and the ‘sharpening of theory’ that he identified, is definition. There seem to be two major impediments to counting. First there is recognising the subject : counting is in practice tricky and resource hungry with large populations but the attempt to count simply emphasises that deciding what to count is absolutely central. Definitional agreement is needed to permit consistent counting in different contexts. Definitions are needed to help individuals make decisions on matters such as mergers, take overs, name changes. Cross contextual comparison is where the difficulties arise - and benefits also rise.

⁹ In fact many large ‘mail order’ type groups have supporters rather than members.

Secondly, there is the empirical and mechanical difficulty in treating cases over time. We have seen how there is a big turnover in names from time A to time B. with small population areas of study such as political parties, minor examples in the record can be discounted and/ or case study research can document party histories. In large size data sets the temptation is to assume that a name that does not survive to time B has 'died'. In fact as discussed in the durability section, merger, take over, name change are at least 3 other possibilities. Some of these might represent group success rather than failure so identifying the key change event is important.

A particular operationalization of the idea of association might open the door to a myriad of local, possibly ephemeral, and non political groupings: these would not simply be difficult to count – but, more realistically, impossible. What is available though is data of the style in the the Directories used. The raw material for this project, is data on national, formal, member based organisations. These data sets will have limitations if the task is seen to be an understanding of all group activity over time. But data sets with limitations might be better than unreliable aspirations at measuring ephemera. Certainly the kind of data available offers both the reassurance of predictable figures that fit in with preconceptions – and unsuspected relationships accessible only by empirical discovery.

Appendix 1 Comparison of US and UK Groups by US Topic Code

US Coding Topic Code	US Groups								UK Groups			
	1975	1985	1995	2005	1975	1985	1995	2005	1970	2005		
Macroeconomics, taxes, and the economy	44	84	85	83	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	1	0.0%	4	0.1%
Civil Rights, Minority Issues and Civil Liberties	273	656	795	848	2.2%	3.4%	3.5%	3.8%	22	0.3%	30	0.4%
Health	1044	1849	2331	2821	8.4%	9.7%	10.3%	12.6%	231	3.5%	387	5.6%
Agriculture	539	822	914	988	4.3%	4.3%	4.0%	4.4%	297	4.5%	445	6.4%
Labour, Employment, and Immigration	328	407	443	418	2.6%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%	361	5.4%	97	1.4%
Formal Education System	943	1084	1137	1212	7.5%	5.7%	5.0%	5.4%	282	4.2%	258	3.7%
Environment	226	362	513	564	1.8%	1.9%	2.3%	2.5%	117	1.8%	141	2.0%
Energy	98	239	214	184	0.8%	1.3%	0.9%	0.8%	15	0.2%	11	0.2%
Transportation	488	902	1045	789	3.9%	4.7%	4.6%	3.5%	84	1.3%	62	0.9%
Family Issues	139	274	371	401	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%	1.8%	41	0.6%	45	0.7%
Law and Crime Issues	192	380	468	507	1.5%	2.0%	2.1%	2.3%	46	0.7%	89	1.3%
Social Welfare	242	414	479	464	1.9%	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%	213	3.2%	388	5.6%
Community Development and Housing Issues	69	160	183	192	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	36	0.5%	17	0.2%
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	2213	2747	2808	2879	17.7%	14.4%	12.4%	12.9%	2742	41.1%	2002	29.0%
Defence	329	553	689	655	2.6%	2.9%	3.0%	2.9%	21	0.3%	14	0.2%
Telecommunications, Mass Media, Space, Science and Technology	623	940	1139	1149	5.0%	4.9%	5.0%	5.1%	846	12.7%	920	13.3%
International Trade	124	166	197	156	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	50	0.8%	4	0.1%
International Affairs and Foreign Aid	839	1216	1569	1322	6.7%	6.4%	6.9%	5.9%	86	1.3%	76	1.1%
Federal Government, Public Policy Generally	249	450	455	424	2.0%	2.4%	2.0%	1.9%	8	0.1%	11	0.2%
Public Lands and Territories	74	122	161	151	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	3	0.0%	2	0.0%
State and Local Government and Policy	85	98	102	98	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	42	0.6%	34	0.5%
Weather and Natural Disasters	5	10	12	16	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Fires	6	7	12	10	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Sports and Recreation	450	778	874	792	3.6%	4.1%	3.9%	3.5%	279	4.2%	379	5.5%
Death Notices	22	22	23	22	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	9	0.1%	11	0.2%
Churches and Religion	609	852	1026	942	4.9%	4.5%	4.5%	4.2%	120	1.8%	60	0.9%
Ideological, Social Cause, and Political	245	481	568	609	2.0%	2.5%	2.5%	2.7%	177	2.7%	309	4.5%

Groups													
Performing, Fine and Creative Arts	620	845	1375	1190	5.0%	4.4%	6.1%	5.3%	273	4.1%	464	6.7%	
Culture, Heritage and History	821	1089	1459	1481	6.6%	5.7%	6.4%	6.6%	70	1.1%	58	0.8%	
Hobbies, Collectors, Amusements and Clubs	516	934	1129	940	4.1%	4.9%	5.0%	4.2%	154	2.3%	581	8.4%	
Other/Unknown	36	77	81	95	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	13	0.2%	15	0.2%	

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