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Power from Below?

*The Impact of Protests and Lobbying on School
Closures in Sweden*

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Abstract

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In recent decades, there has been a considerable expansion of citizen participation in protests and voluntary advocacy groups. To analyze this development, the social movement literature and the interest group literature have emerged. Yet these two bodies of literature have not communicated with each other and have rarely incorporated knowledge from other fields in political science. As a result, critical questions remain unanswered regarding the political influence of advocacy groups. How do they affect politicians? To what degree do informal groups use lobbying tactics? Are socioeconomically advantaged groups more influential? This thesis endeavors to address the above shortcomings by bridging the literature on social movements, interest groups and political parties. The purpose of the thesis is to explain if and how advocacy groups affect public policy and to analyze which resources that are required to influence political decisions. The focus is on informal and loosely organized social movement organizations (informal SMOs): parental networks, staff networks, and village networks. To test my arguments, I use a unique database on protests and lobbying against school closures in Sweden. Closures of public schools have been one of the most important drivers of political activism in Sweden. The results are presented in three essays.

Essay I tests new electoral mechanisms that could condition the political influence of advocacy groups. The results suggest that the political influence of informal SMOs on school closure decisions varies according to the type of voter they mobilize: swing voters or core voters.

Essay II demonstrates how informal SMOs use lobbying tactics, such as presenting policy-relevant information, to influence politicians. Social movement scholars often focus on protests and ignore lobbying tactics. However, the results show that SMOs that present policy-relevant information are more likely to stop school closures than SMOs that mobilize large protests.

Essay III analyzes which informal SMOs exchange policy-relevant information with politicians. Previous studies on the use of lobbying tactics have ignored activist resources. My results suggest that SMOs mobilizing high-income activists and activists with analytical and civic skills are more likely to present policy-relevant information. This is problematic given normative ideals of equal access to decision-making by all members of society.

Keywords: school closure, protest, lobbying, interest groups, social movements, welfare retrenchment, political parties

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List of papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Taghizadeh, J. L. (2015). Are Political Parties More Responsive to Advocacy Groups Mobilizing Core Voters or Swing Voters? Political Responsiveness to Citizens' Protest Movements in Swedish Local Governments. *Scandinavian Political Studies*. Prepublished 22 Dec, 2015. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9477.12061
- II Taghizadeh, J. L. (2015). Quality over quantity? Technical information, interest advocacy and school closures in Sweden. *Interest groups and advocacy*, 4(2): 101–119.
- III Taghizadeh, J. L. (2016). Informational Lobbying and Activist Resources: Comparing Mobilizations Against School Closures in Sweden. Unpublished manuscript. Department of Government. Uppsala University.

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Sammanfattning på Svenska

Under de senaste decennierna har det politiska deltagandet i Sverige förändrats. Traditionella former av politiskt deltagande, som att vara medlem i ett politiskt parti, har minskat. Samtidigt har det skett en ökning när det gäller deltagande i protestaktioner och i lokala intressegrupper. En av de politiska frågor som genererat mest politisk aktivism utanför de politiska partierna i Sverige är skolnedläggningar. Nyhetsmedia rapporterade om fler än 1300 protestaktioner mot skolnedläggningar mellan 1991 och 2010. Protesterna bestod bland annat av namninsamlingar, demonstrationer, skolstrejker och brev i lokaltidningar. Samtidigt som dessa aktioner ökar medborgarnas möjligheter att påverka politiken mellan valen så kan de underminera demokratin. Risken är att resursstarka intressegrupper påverkar politiken på bekostnad av majoritetens intressen och/eller mer resurssvaga grupper.

Syftet med denna avhandling är därför att studera medborgarnas aktivism mot skolnedläggningar samt dess politiska konsekvenser. Mer specifikt så undersöker jag hur lokala intressegrupper påverkar beslut om skolnedläggningar samt vilka resurser och färdigheter som krävs för att dessa grupper ska kunna påverka. Jag fokuserar på informella och löst organiserade intressegrupper: föräldranätverk, nätverk av personal och byanätverk. Jag testar mina argument genom en kvantitativ undersökning av protester och lobbying mot skolnedläggningar 2002–2010 i de 29 största kommunerna i Sverige. Jag använder mig av ett unikt datamaterial som består av protestaktioner uppmärksammade av media samt ca 300 brev som skickats från medborgare till politiker om skolnedläggningar. Resultaten, som i huvudsak bygger på statistisk samvariation, presenteras i tre artiklar. Då andra faktorer än de undersökta kan påverka utfallen bör resultaten tolkas med viss försiktighet.

Artikel I undersöker huruvida politiker är mer benägna att lyssna på protestnätverk om nätverken mobiliserar viktiga väljargrupper. Resultaten visar att så är fallet. Politiker är mindre benägna att lägga ner skolor efter demonstrationer och namnlistor om nedläggningen drabbar rörliga väljare (swing voters). En möjlig förklaring är att politikerna är rädda för att dessa väljare kommer att bestraffa dem för nedläggningsbeslut i nästkommande val. Resultaten visar också att politiska majoriteter som inkluderar Centerpartiet är mindre benägna att lägga ner skolor om nedläggningen drabbar kärnväljare till Centerpartiet. Min teori är att Centerpartiet räddar landsbygdsskolor av ideologiska skäl samt på grund av rädslan för att svika sina väljare.

Artikel II undersöker i vilken grad löst organiserade intressegrupper kan påverka skolnedläggningar genom lobbying. Artikeln fokuserar på en form

av lobbying där policy-relevant information överförs från intressegrupper till beslutsfattare via brev eller möten. I skolnedläggningsprocesser finns ofta en betydande osäkerhet gällande demografiska trender och ekonomiska kalkyler, vilket skapar en möjlighet för medborgare att ändra beslutsfattarnas uppfattningar om hur de kan nå sina ekonomiska mål. Resultaten visar att det är större sannolikhet att en intressegrupp får behålla sin skola om de förmedlar policy-relevant information till politiker: alternativa sparförslag, ny information om kapacitetsutnyttjandet i skolan (t.ex. information om bostadsbyggande) och/eller ny information om uppgifter som saknas i kommunens ekonomiska beräkningar (t.ex. ökade kostnader för skolskjuts). Långa namnlistor har däremot inga statistiskt signifikanta effekter på skolnedläggningar.

Artikel III undersöker de socioekonomiska egenskaperna hos de intressegrupper som lobbar politiker med policy-relevant information och de som protesterar. Resultaten visar att grupper i distrikt med många höginkomsttagare och föräldrar med tjänstemannayrken är mest benägna att förmedla policy-relevant information till beslutsfattare. Dessa grupper har större analytiska och organisatoriska färdigheter och större ekonomiska resurser och har således bättre förutsättningar att påverka skolnedläggningar än andra grupper. Grupper i resurssvaga distrikt med många utlandsfödda är i jämförelse mindre benägna att presentera policy-relevant information och kan få problem när de försöker påverka politiska beslut. Resultaten visar på små eller inga skillnader mellan de olika distrikten när det gäller mobilisering av demonstrationer och namnlistor.

Resultaten som presenteras i artiklarna har viktiga implikationer för aktivister. Protestaktioner förefaller bara kunna påverka politiker under speciella omständigheter: om protesterna mobiliserar viktiga väljargrupper. Aktivister som vill påverka politiska beslut borde således fokusera på lobbying eller, om det är möjligt, kombinera denna taktik med protester. Resultaten har också viktiga implikationer för beslutsfattare. Enligt demokratiska principer bör alla medborgare ha lika möjlighet att delta i och påverka politiken, oavsett politiska resurser eller ursprung. Resultaten antyder dock att det i dagsläget är lättare för socioekonomiskt starka grupper att påverka beslut om skolnedläggningar än för socioekonomiskt svaga grupper. Det svenska politiska systemet på lokal nivå tycks bygga på ett politiskt språk och ett sätt att argumentera som skapar genvägar för resursstarka medborgare att påverka, samtidigt som det tenderar att exkludera mer resurssvaga grupper och utlandsfödda utan färdigheter som passar in i denna lokala politiska kultur. När det tas beslut som påverkar medborgarna är det naturligtvis viktigt för politiker och tjänstemän att lyssna på de medborgare som kontaktar dem och ta hänsyn till deras erfarenheter och synpunkter. Men här bör det också finnas ett utrymme för kommunens beslutsfattare att närma sig medborgare som kanske i vanliga fall inte är de som hörs mest och även lyssna på mindre viktiga väljargrupper, vilket i förlängningen kan leda både till en mer jämlik process och till att ett större spektrum av perspektiv kommer med i planeringen.

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Prologue

The temperature in the debate about school closures was rising as the School Board was about to make a final decision on which schools would be closed down. A few days before, students and parents from Flogsta School approached the chairman of the School Board with a petition containing 900 names. The meeting was attended by about thirty teachers and parents, plus a dozen students with signs that read ‘Do not touch our school’ and ‘Flogsta School – The best school in the world’. Meanwhile, Valsätra School adorned its facade with a large banner made by the students reading ‘The Idea of Valsätra: Municipal Quality’, and parents, teachers and students have been marching with placards through central Uppsala demonstrating against the closure of their school.

“We want to keep our school,” the Student Council President said. “If the school is closed, the rural kids from Ramsta will have to travel for long distances to get to their new school.”

“No students are left out by the teachers at Valsätra,” the Student Council vice president said. “I am dyslexic and I was never able to get a passing grade in English at my previous school.”

The parents in Jumkil used a different tactic to save their school. They wrote a 40-page investigation criticizing the closure proposals. According to their investigation, the demographic data used by the municipality did not take into account private housing construction in their area. Their surveys of families living in Jumkil showed a higher number of students at the school in the future. They had also hired a consultant to do an alternative assessment of the state of the school premises.

But all schools were not as strident. The staff at Bäcklösa School were taken by surprise as they received signals that the school still was under threat of closure. Several parents asked the teachers to speak for them.

“We have many immigrant parents who have difficulties with the language and as a result you may not have heard so much from us,” a teacher said. “But I hope that the politicians will look at the facts when they decide on the closures. The strength of the parent groups should not be decisive for the outcome.”

This text was partly inspired by an article in the newspaper *Uppsala Nya Tidning* on November 7, 2007. Ever since the economic crisis in Sweden in the early 1990s, citizens have tried to stop closures of public schools all over Sweden by mobilizing protests and lobbying decision-makers. While some activists have managed to save their school, other mobilizations have failed. As

the text above illustrates, these actions could result in biased decision-making as some citizens are better equipped to stop closures. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the subject. Why are some groups able to stop closures? Which groups use what kinds of tactics? What are the consequences for political equality? This thesis aims to answer these questions.

1. Introductory Essay

Over the past decades, political participation and activism in Western Countries have undergone radical changes. Traditional forms of political participation, such as voting in elections and being a member of a political party have been on the decline (Lijphart, 1998; Scarrow, 2000). For example, between 1950 and the mid-1990s ‘aggregate party enrollment’ declined from 1.259 million to 582,000 in France, from 3.436 million to 820,000 in the UK and from 1.100 million to 376,000 in Sweden (Scarrow, 2000, p. 89). Meanwhile, there has been a considerable expansion of citizen participation in protests, voluntary advocacy groups and other forms of unconventional political action (Jennings et al., 1990; Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995; Norris, 2002). In 1955, the number of Washington DC-based organizations was just under 5,000. By 1995, it had risen to over 20,000 (Baumgartner, 2005, p. 9).

Studying the consequences of this development is important. While activism in social movement organizations¹ (hereafter called ‘SMO’) and in other types of advocacy groups² represents a significant expansion of the public’s means of influencing the democratic process between elections, it may have negative effects on political equality. Democratic principles suggest that citizens should have equal opportunities to participate in political activities and to influence public policy (Dahl, 1989). The outcome of elections is determined by the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ in order to guarantee the equal representation of citizens’ interests. This democratic principle, however, does not apply to the advocacy groups that are lobbying the government. If more resourceful advocacy groups influence the government at the expense of the general public and less resourceful groups, then this is clearly a democratic problem.

As a result of the growing importance of advocacy groups, the consequences of protest mobilization and the lobbying community have been the topics of heated academic debates during the last decades (e.g. Gamson, 1975, Lipsky, 1968; Hacker and Pierson, 2005; Beyers et al., 2008). Two separate bodies of literature emerged. The social movement literature in sociology focused on the *political outsiders*: loosely organized groups and organizations with a strong

¹‘Social movement organizations’ refer to voluntary organizations or networks that have a distinct collective identity and often use collective actions in order to influence the policy process (cf. Della Porta and Diani, 2009).

²‘Advocacy groups’ or ‘interest groups’ refer to all organizations or movements (including SMOs and highly professionalized interest organizations) independent of the political system that are attempting to influence the policy process (cf. Gamson, 2008; Beyers et al., 2008).

collective identity that were outside of ordinary politics and therefore used protest actions to spread their views (cf. Amenta et al., 2010).³ The interest group literature in political science, on the other hand, focused on the *insiders*: professionalized interest organizations, such as labor unions and business organizations, which had access to decision-making forums (cf. Beyers et al., 2008; Hojnacki et al., 2012).⁴ Yet, these two bodies of literature seldom communicate with each other and they rarely incorporate knowledge from other fields in political science. Meanwhile, the broader debate about democratic representation in political science has remained largely focused on elections, parties and voters, while ignoring the role advocacy groups play in the different stages of the policy-making process (Hacker and Pierson, 2005, p. 167; Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1105; Hojnacki et al., 2012, p. 394, but see Esaiasson and Narud, 2013). As a result, our understanding of advocacy groups and the role they play in the political system suffers from a number of shortcomings.

First, it is not clear how advocacy groups affect public policy and how much influence they have. After decades of increasingly elaborate and sophisticated research, review articles report that the empirical evidence regarding how much impact advocacy groups has is ‘mixed’ or ‘inconclusive’ (e.g. Baumgartner and Leech, 1998, p. 187; Smith, 1995, p. 123; Burstein and Linton, 2002, p. 394–395; Amenta and Caren, 2008, p. 476; Amenta et al., 2010, p. 288). One explanation of the mixed evidence regarding the influence of advocacy is that empirical researchers have primarily analyzed correlations between organizational resources and the political impacts of groups (cf. Burstein and Linton, 2002, p. 397; Burstein, 2014, p. 166) and have paid too little attention to the mechanisms that could explain how advocacy group activities affect elected officials (cf. Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1105; Uba, 2009, p. 434; Burstein, 2014, p. 98–99; Bosi et al., 2016, p. 15).

Second, when social movement scholars and interest group scholars *do* focus on the activities mobilized by the groups, they tend to study activities that have traditionally been studied in their body of literature and disregard other potentially important activities. Scholars focusing on SMOs tend to study protest actions and not analyze lobbying and the reverse has been the case when it comes to scholars studying professionalized interest organizations (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1110). It is therefore unclear to what extent informational lobbying activities play a role in the political impact of SMOs and loosely organized advocacy groups. Informational lobbying is defined as the exchange of policy-relevant information with politicians through direct

³For example, Charles Tilly, an influential scholar in the social movement literature, defines a SMO as ‘*persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation who make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support*’ (Tilly, 1982).

⁴The two bodies of literature have become less and less distinctive and today they sometimes study the same type of advocacy groups.

contact, i.e. meetings or letters (cf. Chalmers, 2011, p. 474–475; Klüver, 2012, p. 491–492).

Third, over time, the two bodies of literature have lost their focus on the issue of democratic representation. As social movement scholars have traditionally focused on groups that are seen as outsiders in relation to more resourceful interest organizations, they have not paid much attention to the representativeness of the movements (Burstein, 1998; Burstein and Linton, 2002). However, from the few studies that do exist (e.g. Aelst and Walgrave, 2001), we know that highly educated middle-class citizens are more likely to participate in protest activities than other citizens. In other words, what social movement scholars have traditionally perceived as outsiders are now often resourceful citizen groups. Interest group scholars, on the other hand, have been consumed with studying biases in the interest group community, measuring these biases in a variety of different ways (Hojnacki et al., 2012, p. 381). As one example, Strolovitch (2007) analyzes the representation of disadvantaged groups in interest group politics across demographic dimensions such as race, class, and gender. However, review articles report that interest group scholars to a higher degree should place more emphasis on considering whether upper-class bias affects the policies that emerge from government (Hojnacki et al., 2012, p. 394).

These shortcomings in the two bodies of literature are the starting point of the thesis. The purpose of the thesis is to explain if and how advocacy groups affect public policy and to analyze which groups, in terms of resources, are able to influence the policy process. The focus is on informal and loosely organized voluntary groups, such as parental networks, staff networks and village networks. I will refer to them as ‘informal SMOs’ because they have more in common with SMOs than with other types of advocacy groups and because they lack hierarchical structures, paid staff and some of them do not have a formal organization (cf. Staggenborg, 1988, p. 586–590).

The thesis will bridge the literatures on SMOs and professionalized interest organizations and incorporate insights from studies on political parties (e.g. Müller and Strøm, 1999), welfare state retrenchment (e.g. Weaver, 1986) and individual level political participation (e.g. Brady et al., 1995). My main theoretical argument is that we need to focus more on how different advocacy group activities relate to the motives of politicians, when analyzing the impacts of advocacy on public policy. To affect public policy, the activities mobilized by the advocacy groups and the decision-maker motives need to be compatible. Advocacy group activities, such as mobilizing demonstrations or sending letters, are most likely to influence public policy if they provide new information to vote seekers as to their prospects of re-election and/or policy-relevant information to policy seekers. Contextual factors such as political competition, public opinion or the type of political issue the groups are trying to influence, provide opportunities for advocacy groups to influence the two types of decision-makers. For example, by providing policy-relevant informa-

tion⁵ on highly uncertain and technical issues, advocacy groups could change the perceptions held by policy seekers concerning how to achieve their policy goals and hereby make them withdraw existing political proposals. However, generating such information requires civic and analytic skills and advocacy groups mobilizing highly educated activists are therefore better equipped to use this mechanism to influence public policy. This is problematic given normative ideals of equal access to decision-making for all members of society.

My arguments are tested by using a unique database on protests and lobbying activities against school closures in Sweden during the 2002–2010 period. I provide an overview of the database in the section labeled ‘The Empirical Study’ in the Introductory Essay. More detailed information regarding the variables and the analyses are presented in the three essays that form the body of this thesis. The three essays make several distinct contributions to the social movement literature and the interest group literature.

Essay I makes both a theoretical and an empirical contribution by considering ‘new’ electoral mechanisms from the party literature that could condition the political influence of advocacy groups. The results suggest that the political influence of informal SMOs on school closure decisions varies according to the type of voter mobilized by their protest activities: swing voters or core voters. **Essay II** makes an empirical contribution by demonstrating how informal SMOs use informational lobbying tactics to influence politicians in Swedish municipalities. Social movement scholars often focus on protests and ignore lobbying tactics highlighted in the interest group literature. However, the results suggest that SMOs that exchange policy-relevant information with decision-makers are more likely to stop school closures than SMOs that protest. **Essay III** makes both a theoretical and an empirical contribution by analyzing which informal SMOs, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, exchange policy-relevant information with decision-makers. Previous studies that try to explain the use of informational lobbying tactics among advocacy groups have primarily focused on organizational resources and have ignored activist resources. My results suggest that informal SMOs mobilizing high-income activists and activists with analytical and civic skills are more likely to use such tactics.

Together, the three essays help provide solutions to the three identified shortcomings in interest group literature and in social movement research.

⁵In Essays I and II, I use the term technical information instead of policy-relevant information. However, the two terms refer to the same thing: new information that relates to the main policy goal behind a political proposal.

1.1 Why School Closures?

If one wants to examine the political impact of advocacy groups on public policy, then it is natural to study how citizens attempt to influence the welfare state. In 2011, more than 50 percent of total government expenditure in OECD countries was spent on welfare services, social benefits and social insurance programs alone (OECD, 2011). In many European countries, the welfare state accompanies citizens from the cradle to the grave through programs and services such as daycare, schooling for children, sickness insurance, healthcare and old age pension. Changes to these institutions have a direct impact on people's lives. Cutbacks in transfer systems could worsen the living conditions among the sick and elderly. Closures of public welfare services such as schools and healthcare centers could result in long journey times for students and patients, larger school classes and longer waiting lists. As a result, the welfare state has been the core political arena for citizens in their daily lives (Solevid, 2009).

Among the welfare services that are most relevant for citizens in their everyday lives (healthcare, child schooling, university education and elderly care), issues related to child schooling have been the most important drivers of political activism both in Sweden (Solevid, 2009, p. 100,133) and elsewhere in Europe (Andersen and Rossteutscher, 2007, p. 239; Kriesi and Westholm, 2010, p. 259). Reorganizations of welfare services, such as schools and hospitals, lead to even more protests in Sweden than labor issues and cutbacks in social insurance programs (The Swedish Protest Database, see Uba, 2016b, p. 20). It is therefore surprising that this pattern has not been followed by a corresponding scholarly interest. Welfare state scholars have instead had a tendency to only focus on the transfer component of welfare states and on professionalized interest organizations such as labor unions. Informal client interests defending welfare services such as public healthcare and public schooling are often ignored (Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014). To address this limitation of previous research, I will focus on school issues in this thesis and more specifically on closures of public schools.

The alternative would be to focus on other welfare services: local healthcare centers, elderly care or hospital healthcare. However, protests related to welfare retrenchment are not as common in these areas as in the school sector (The Swedish Protest Database, see Uba, 2016b, p. 20). Furthermore, local healthcare has mainly been expanded in Sweden during the last decade to meet the higher demand (Socialstyrelsen, 2013, p. 30) and the number of healthcare centers and elderly care institutions will likely increase in the future due to the aging population. Hospital healthcare, on the other hand, has been restructured rather dramatically in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen, 2013, p. 32) and closures of hospital departments often lead to large protests. However, these protests are already covered in previous studies (e.g. Lindbom, 2014; Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014).

Focusing on the case of school closures provides an opportunity to study when advocacy groups succeed and fail in their efforts to influence public policy and whether these groups are representative of the public. Data on school closures suggest that Swedish local governments closed 17 percent (or 800) of all public primary schools between 1991 and 2009. The process involved more than 1300 protest events (Uba, 2016a). The large number of school closures and protests implies that proposals on closures have affected all kinds of citizens in Sweden: highly educated and less-educated citizens, citizens living in rural areas and urban areas and swing voters and core voters. The geographical distribution of school closures can be utilized to study how different groups reacted to school closures and which groups managed to save their schools. When it comes to other forms of welfare retrenchment (such as cutbacks in the national social insurance or hospital closures), a large part of the electorate is affected and voters tend to be socio-tropic and blame retrenching governments even if the cuts did not affect them directly (cf. Lindbom, 2007; Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014). In contrast, when politicians close down public schools, specific client groups are clearly affected (parents and children in the closed school and the receiving school) while others are largely unaffected (parents and children in the schools that are not threatened, citizens who are not parents). It is hence easier to identify which groups are most likely to protest in the case of school closures and which groups are most likely to be able to stop closures. As residential segregation has increased in Sweden in recent decades, Swedish schools are now clearly associated with different ethnic and socioeconomic compositions (Lindbom, 2010).

Focusing on the case of school closures also addresses an important flaw in previous research on advocacy groups: controlling for public opinion. One of the reasons why previous studies may have under- or overestimated the impact of advocacy is that they have focused on policies most likely to be influenced by public opinion (Burstein, 2014, chapter 3). Public opinion is often defined as the preference of the population on matters of relevance to government (Erikson and Tedin, 2015, p. 8). As elected officials can be expected to react more strongly to public opinion according to polls than they would to advocacy, it has been difficult to isolate the direct effect of advocacy group activities on public policy. While school closures are one of the major causes behind protest actions in Sweden, their direct costs are almost entirely limited to a relatively small amount of directly affected parents whose children may be forced to change schools (with consequences such as longer distance to the closest school, fewer teachers per students, etc., see Cedering, 2016). As most children attend other schools that are not threatened, it can be expected that the general public will be relatively indifferent to the issue.⁶ This is also what we see in the data. A recent study has demonstrated that school closures in

⁶However, it is possible that a larger share of the electorate is affected through tax increases in the longer run if the schools are not closed. It is also possible that school closures result in

Sweden have little, if any, effect on municipal election results (Wänström and Karlsson, 2012). Additionally, there are often no opinion polls available regarding school closures in Swedish municipalities. During my review of local newspapers in 29 Swedish municipalities, I did not encounter a single case of municipal opinion surveys regarding school closures. In summary, to the extent that I find a correlation between advocacy group activities and withdrawn proposals on closures, it is not likely that these withdrawals are only a result of public opinion polls (this, however, does not preclude that there may be other intervening factors that make it difficult to isolate the relationships, see sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3).

The results of this study could be generalized to numerous other political issues characterized by a high degree of political activism in industrialized countries. First and foremost, the results could be generalizable to closures of other public services, such as daycares, elderly care centers, local health-care centers, fire stations and post offices. Closures of public welfare services, such as schools, occur in most developed countries (cf. Bondi, 1987; Witten et al., 2003). Second, the results could be generalizable to cutbacks in social insurance programs. During economic crises, politicians may be forced to distribute cutbacks across different programs, such as sickness insurance, pensions and unemployment insurance. To decrease the electoral costs of retrenchment, the government is likely to avoid cutbacks affecting powerful interest organizations and important voter groups (cf. Lindbom, 2007; Dahlström, 2009). Third, the results may be generalizable to environmental issues that often lead to political activism, such as the location of renewable energy facilities (cf. Van der Hoorst, 2007), the location of power plants and other issues related to environmental protection. Fourth, the results from my study may be generalizable to infrastructure and construction projects that often lead to protests, such as the construction of wind power plants (cf. Wolsink, 2000) or new housing (cf. Pendall, 1999).

In general, the results could be generalizable to most political issues that fulfill two conditions. First, the issue must be characterized by a great deal of political or economic uncertainty so that the responsible decision-makers need electoral or policy-relevant information from the advocacy groups. Second, the issue must impose costs on a specific group, while leaving most of the population unaffected. Otherwise, the decision-makers will focus on following public opinion and the direct impact of advocacy groups may be small. As some issues with these properties are characterized by the NIMBY (not in my backyard) phenomena (i.e. citizens primarily oppose the policy proposals when they are directly affected), the thesis also contributes to the NIMBY literature (cf. Wolsink, 2000; Van der Horst, 2007). For more information regarding the possibilities to generalize the results, please refer to the essays.

electoral consequences for the incumbent in smaller municipalities with fewer schools. I will therefore focus on large municipalities in this thesis.

1.2 Why Sweden?

Most of the previous studies that analyze the impacts of SMOs on public policy focus on groups active in the US and in developing countries (Boudreau, 1996; Uba, 2009). In her meta-analysis of studies on movement outcomes in 11 well-known journals, Uba reported that 80 percent of the articles focused on the US and only 2.7 percent focused on Western Europe (Uba, 2009, p. 437). When scholars do study advocacy groups in Europe, they tend to focus on professional and permanent organizations in European Union institutions (e.g. Bouwen, 2004; Eising, 2007; Klüver, 2013). Against this background, Swedish local government is a particularly interesting case to study because local decision-making processes in Sweden are extremely different from those in Washington and in Brussels studied in the interest group literature. For example, decisions by local governments in Sweden are partly made by part-time politicians, which stands in sharp contrast to the professional full-time politicians who are active in the national and international arenas. The advocacy groups that mobilize against the local governments in turn primarily consist of associations or networks that lack organizational resources. Furthermore, quantitative data regarding corporatism, political institutions and type of welfare regime indicate large differences between Sweden and other countries (Swank, 2003). Swedish local politics is therefore an interesting case to study if one wants to provide insight into new circumstances where influential advocacy group theories may apply (cf. Essay II).

Sweden is also a good place to test advocacy group theories for practical reasons. As a result of the principle of public access to information (*Offentlighetsprincipen*), the public, the mass media and researchers are entitled to access most of the public documents relating to state and municipal activities. This law makes it easier to study lobbying as it enables me to obtain copies of all the letters and e-mails that were sent from parents and advocacy groups to politicians regarding school closures. Furthermore, Sweden has a long-standing tradition of national registries, which are a goldmine for research. Using registry data regarding Swedish citizens, I can analyze the socio-economic characteristics of the individuals who live close to the schools and who are likely to protest the closures.

There is also a need for empirical studies that analyze the role of client interests in Swedish welfare politics. In the scholarly debate about welfare state retrenchment and advocacy groups, it has been argued that welfare clients are weak in countries with a strong labor movement, such as Sweden, because they have been crowded out of the policy process by labor unions (e.g. Scarborough, 2000; Anderson, 2001). However, previous studies do not take into account the changing forms of political participation in Sweden. Political organizations such as parties and unions are losing members while an increasing number of citizens are engaged in social networks and use unconventional forms of political participation (Demokratiutredningen, 2000; Dir 2014:11).

Additionally, political institutions have been set up to incorporate citizens and welfare clients into decision-making processes on welfare issues. Today, many Swedish municipalities organize citizen dialogues (*medborgardialoger*) where citizens are able to discuss salient welfare issues with politicians. User boards are also common in public welfare services such as schools, child care and elderly care (Jarl, 2001). It is hence likely that client interests have become more powerful in Sweden. However, it is not clear how influential they are and whether they are able to stop welfare retrenchment (cf. Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014). This is one of the issues explored in this thesis.

1.3 Prior Research and Theoretical Starting Points

This section presents the literature that forms the theoretical basis behind the three essays. The section consists of three parts. I start by reviewing previous research on how advocacy groups influence the policy process. This is followed by a discussion regarding the tactical choices made by advocacy groups and the consequences of lobbying activities on political equality. In the third section, I summarize previous research on school closures.

To illustrate the mechanisms presented in the thesis, I use quotes from semi-structured interviews with (anonymous) politicians, activists and public officials active in Swedish municipalities and counties. In total, one public official, two activists and four politicians with central positions in the School Board and who closed down schools in a municipality during the 2007–2010 period were interviewed. I also use quotes from interviews with three politicians who closed down an emergency ward at a hospital in 2004 (see more in Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014).

1.3.1 Advocacy Groups and Political Influence

I will focus the following discussion on the theoretical aspects that have the foremost relevance for this thesis: how advocacy groups influence the decision-making process. I will hence ignore topics about advocacy groups that are discussed in other literature reviews such as: the process of group formation; what tactics groups use in what kinds of situations, and which type of issues advocacy groups focus on (cf. Beyers et al., 2008; Hojnacki et al., 2012). I will also focus on Western democratic countries and leave out mechanisms explaining advocacy group outcomes in developing countries (cf. Uba, 2007). Like most scholars focusing on advocacy groups, I follow the example of Schumaker (1975) and define the political impact of advocacy groups according to the extent of government responsiveness to their demands (Schumaker, 1975). Responsiveness is here defined in a strict sense. Politicians are responsive when they adopt policies that the advocacy groups indicate they prefer. According to democratic representation scholars, this is not the only

way through which representatives can demonstrate attentiveness towards citizens (cf. Esaiasson et al., 2013). By providing credible justifications for their actions and by acting in a way that convinces citizens that their views have been taken into account, citizens may find it easier to accept unfavorable policy decisions (Esaiasson et al., 2016). Hence, future studies on political responsiveness to advocacy groups should also take into account these forms of responsiveness.

Studies on the political impact of advocacy groups seldom explain how these groups exert an influence on elected officials (Uba, 2009, p. 434; Burstein, 2014, p. 98–99; Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1105; Amenta et al., 2010, p. 302; Bosi et al., 2016, p. 15). However, those studies that make assumptions regarding the causal mechanisms argue that decision-makers listen to advocacy groups due to their need for new information (cf. Burstein and Hirsch, 2007; Baumgartner et al., 2009). Because of the uncertainty that pervades political processes, decision-makers require information to establish their priorities and to predict the consequences of their decisions (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 54–57, 123–127). More specifically they need (1) new information on problems in society they should address, (2) new information about the social and economic consequences of policies, and (3) new information about the impact of the policies on their re-election chances (Burstein and Hirsch, 2007, p. 177). Advocacy groups provide these types of information to decision-makers through their activities and can therefore influence public policy. For example, protest actions that are larger than what the politician had anticipated provide new information on changes in public opinion (Lohmann, 1993, p. 319–322). The political reaction to the received information is assumed to depend on the electoral costs and benefits associated with the decision. If the politicians perceive that responsiveness to organized interests would be beneficial to securing re-election, they will accede to the demands (cf. Hansen, 1991; Lohmann, 1993; Kollman, 1998; Burstein and Linton, 2002; Luders, 2010). This mechanism is similar to the mechanism commonly referred to as ‘responsiveness’ in research on democratic representation. According to the ‘responsiveness mechanism’, representation between elections is archived when elected officials adapt their policies to changes in public opinion in ‘rational anticipation’ of electoral repercussions (cf. Stimson et al., 1995; Mansbridge, 2003; Esaiasson and Narud, 2013).

The hypotheses presented in the thesis are based on the assumption that advocacy group activities influence decision-makers by providing new information. I will also develop this theoretical framework further. Researchers who use information mechanisms in their research often assume that the political reaction to the received information depends purely on vote-seeking motives⁷ and on the responsiveness mechanism (e.g. Burstein, 2014, p. 112,130;

⁷Vote seekers are political actors who, above all, are governed by their interest in maximizing their electoral support (Downs, 1957).

Hansen, 1991, p. 227–230; Burstein and Linton, 2002, p. 386; Luders, 2010, p. 9).⁸ In reality, political actors are often torn between the need to attract new voters and their policy-seeking motivations. That is, they also wish to implement policies that reflect their political preferences as closely as possible (Strøm, 1990; Müller and Strøm, 1999). I will therefore incorporate policy-seeking motivations into the analysis.

There are also additional political motives for listening to advocacy groups that are often ignored in previous research. Some of them could be seen as variants of the main motives studied in this thesis: policy-seeking and vote-seeking. First, vote-seeking can manifest itself in two different ways: attracting core voters or attracting swing voters. The relative importance of different voter groups could explain advocacy group outcomes (see Essay I). Second, whether or not politicians listen to advocacy groups could depend on their values, perceptions and emotions in relation to these groups. Recent studies have suggested that advocacy group outcomes are shaped by how the elite perceive these groups in terms of deservingness and who the groups represent (Skrentny, 2006) as well as by elite attitudes in relation to the activities mobilized by the advocacy groups (Gilljam et al., 2012; Marien and Hooghe, 2013; Uba, 2016a). Third, decision-makers could listen to advocacy groups as a result of their duty to act as representatives for some parts of the electorate or to protect their reputation. A survey of politicians active on the local level in Sweden have shown that almost half of them view themselves as representatives of a particular group of people or a particular interest in the municipality beyond the political party (Bäck, 2004, p. 63–64). Finally, one could include party cohesion (maximizing party or coalition unity) as an important motive behind advocacy group outcomes. Advocacy groups could form alliances with political parties in the ruling coalition and these parties could in turn threaten their coalition partners that they may leave the government if they do not accede to the demands stated by the advocacy group (see Essay I). There is not room to cover all of these motives in this thesis. However, it is clear that more research is needed on how they shape the political influence of advocacy groups.

In the following two sections, I will discuss how different advocacy group activities can influence vote seekers and policy seekers. As different types of activities differ in how they transfer information (directly or indirectly) and are more or less suited to conveying different types of information to decision-makers (cf. Beyers, 2004, p. 213; Uba, 2009, p. 440), I will distinguish between protest tactics, on the one hand, and lobbying tactics, on the other.⁹ In the third section, I will discuss how contextual factors (e.g. public opinion,

⁸Similarly, research on welfare state retrenchment are often built on the assumption that the influence of client organizations depends on their ability to punish policymakers for their decisions in the elections (e.g. Pierson, 1994; Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014).

⁹In Essays I and II, I use the terms *outside lobbying* (instead of protest tactics) and *inside lobbying* (instead of lobbying) because these concepts are well known in interest group research.

issue context) affect the effectiveness of these tactics. In the final section, I summarize the previous sections by presenting a figure.

Protest tactics

Protest activities take place in the public arena and differ from lobbying activities in the sense that the transmission of information from advocacy groups to policy-makers occurs indirectly via media (cf. Kollman, 1998, p. 3; Beyers, 2004, p. 213–214). Hence, the politicians are not contacted directly. Examples of protest activities are demonstrations, petitions¹⁰, strikes and boycotts.

Most of the previous studies on the political impact of protest activities focus on SMOs. When social movement theorists try to explain why protests influence politicians, they often see them as ‘dramatic events’ which send information to politicians regarding stability or changes in public opinion (Uba, 2009, p. 434). The most influential theory in this regard is probably the signaling model by Lohmann (1993). Given that decision-makers do not have perfect information about the state of the world, she argues that they can get new information about the preferences of the populace from unexpected protests. Elected officials are more likely to be responsive to protests if they are larger than what the official anticipated and if the official perceives that responsiveness would be beneficial to securing re-election (Lohmann, 1993, p. 319–322). One of my interviews with local politicians in Sweden provides an illustration of the mechanism:

‘It was the public protests, and the feeling of insecurity that the citizens expressed, which led to change. . . . If we had successfully handled the opinion we would not have been forced to restore the hospital.’

More recent research has focused on how protest activities interact with public attitudes according to polls. These studies argue that protest activities and media campaigns could influence elected officials by raising the salience of issues and by amplifying public opinion (e.g. Agnone, 2007; Luders, 2010; Morales et al., 2014).

Relatively few studies have analyzed how protest activities could influence policy seekers and how activists frame their arguments (Polleta and Ho, 2006; Öberg and Uba, 2014; but see McCammon et al., 2007; McCammon, 2009; Cress and Snow, 2000; Trumpy, 2008). Unexpected protest activities, such as riots, could inform elected officials about problems in society. An important avenue for future research is therefore to investigate how protesters can influence policy seekers. For example, McCammon and her colleagues (2007)

¹⁰Petitions are somewhat difficult to classify because advocacy groups may send petitions directly to politicians. I classify petitions as protests because they are usually highlighted by local media and because they mainly convey electoral information (and not policy-relevant information).

demonstrate that women's rights activists, who framed their argument on getting women into court juries in terms of citizens' rights and duties, were able to persuade decision-makers to give women a place in these juries.

However, it is likely that protest activities are a less credible way of providing information to policy makers than contacting decision-makers directly (cf. Uba, 2009; Verba et al., 1993). A demonstration, for instance, is more efficient for transmitting values and emotions and less efficient for transmitting technical details and complex information regarding the consequences of political decisions (cf. Beyers, 2004, p. 215). Recent studies show that demonstrations, petitions and illegal protests are perceived by decision-makers as less efficient, in terms of influence, than contacting the decision-makers directly (Naurin and Öhberg, 2013; Marien and Hooghe, 2013). It is therefore problematic that social movement scholars only focus on protest tactics and ignore lobbying activities that are more likely to influence policy seekers (cf. Essay II, but see Andrews, 2001).

Lobbying tactics

In contrast to protest activities, lobbying activities transfer information *directly* to decision-makers (cf. Dür and Mateo, 2013, p. 664). Hence, lobbying tactics involve direct contact with politicians. I define lobbying in a broad sense to encompass not only the exchange of information in expert committees, agencies or advisory bodies but also through meetings or letters sent from advocacy groups to elected officials. Compared with protest tactics, lobbying are particularly useful for the transmission of policy-relevant information. The thesis focuses on a specific type of lobbying referred to as 'informational lobbying'. Informational lobbying is defined as the exchange of policy-relevant information with politicians through direct contact (cf. Chalmers, 2011, p. 474–475; Klüver, 2012, p. 491–492). I focus on this type of lobbying because providing policy-relevant information to decision-makers is often asserted to be one of the most important means by which interest groups influence the decision-making process (cf. Burstein and Hirsh, 2007; Klüver, 2013).

The importance of direct contact with decision-makers and of resources such as technical knowledge is often highlighted in the literature on professionalized interest organizations (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 110). Hall and Dearth (2006), for example, have developed a sophisticated theoretical model of lobbying as a congressional subsidy: lobbyists build relationships with congressional offices and exchange support in the form of political intelligence, policy-relevant information and campaign finances, for political influence. Other scholars conceptualize lobbying as a means of rational persuasion. Because of capacity constraints (time, resources, staff) and the uncertainty that pervades political processes, politicians often require information on the possible consequences of their decisions (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 54–57, 123–127). By providing new information regarding these consequences and alternative proposals, interest organizations can change the beliefs held by

politicians about the relationship between political proposals and their consequences and can thus change their preferences for policies (cf. Potters and van Winden, 1992; Austen-Smith, 1993; Grossman and Helpman, 2002; Essay II). One of my interviews with local politicians in Sweden provides an illustration of the mechanism:

‘When I said that I did not want to close down [school Y], the parents presented [an independent investigation regarding the state of the school premises and possible consequences of the closure] at our first meeting and they were able to convince me [to save the school].’

Lobbying activities differ from protest activities in the sense that they are both useful for providing elected officials with information regarding opinion surveys (electoral information) and policy-relevant information (cf. Austen-Smith, 1993; Hall and Deardorff, 2006). By also including policy-relevant information in their analyses, interest group scholars allow for the possibility that advocacy groups could influence policy seekers. However, as the lobbying literature often focuses on permanent and professionalized advocacy groups, existing empirical studies do not provide a clear picture of the degrees to which informal SMOs and other types of loosely organized advocacy groups exchange information for influence (but see Essay II).

Contextual factors affecting advocacy group influence: public opinion, political allies and type of political issue

There is now a general agreement in both the social movement literature and the interest group literature that the political impact of advocacy groups is not only dependent on their tactics, but also on contextual factors, such as public opinion support, the type of issue they focus on and their political allies (cf. Andrews, 2001; Amenta and Caren, 2004; Giugni, 2004; Beyers et al., 2008; Uba, 2009). How these contextual factors condition the political influence of advocacy groups, however, is less clear in the literature. Uba (2009), for example, argues that contextual factors affect the strength of the informational signals sent by social movement activities and also affect how decision-makers perceive the transmitted information. Yet she does not explain how contextual factors influence the signals and the decision-makers. Luders (2010) argues that political responsiveness to SMOs depends on the balance between disruption costs (from movement actions) and concession costs (from acceding to movement demands). These costs in turn depend on contextual factors, such as the relative electoral leverage of the benefit seekers and their allies as opposed to their opponents. However, he does not explain how these costs are calculated. I will propose an alternative way of analyzing contextual factors focusing on different decision-making motives in the next section. But first, I discuss previous research in relation to three contextual factors that are often emphasized in the literature: public opinion, political allies and type of political issue.

The debate about the relationship between contextual factors and the political influence of SMOs has primarily focused on the role of public opinion (Uba, 2009, p. 234). Numerous studies demonstrate that public policy is strongly affected by public opinion according to polls and surveys (Erikson et al., 1993, p. 80–81; Stimson et al., 1995, p. 557; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010, p. 182). Social movement scholars have therefore asked themselves if SMOs have any influence on public policy after taking into account public attitudes according to polls. The empirical evidence on how public opinion affects the influence of SMOs and vice versa is still inconsistent (cf. McAdam and Su, 2002; Santoro, 2002; Burstein and Linton, 2002; Soule, 2004; Giugni, 2004; Uba, 2009). Some scholars argue that public attitudes should ‘crowd out’ other interests: if elected officials must be attuned to public opinion, they cannot be swayed by other forces (Burstein, 1998; Burstein and Linton, 2002). Other scholars argue that protests could raise the salience of issues and hence amplify the effect of public opinion polls on public policy (Santoro, 2002; Agnone, 2007; Soule and King, 2006). What is often forgotten in this discussion, however, is that decision-makers do not have access to polls and surveys regarding public attitudes on many political issues. Advocacy groups could therefore have a direct influence on policy-making by creating a ‘perceived public opinion’ in the minds of the decision-makers through their activities (cf. Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014, p. 14). Furthermore, even if the groups are unable to mobilize numerous voters (or get support from a large share of the electorate according to polls), they could influence public policy by mobilizing important parts of the electorate, such as swing voters or core voters (see Essay I). One of my interviews with local politicians in Sweden provides an illustration of the mechanism:

‘I cannot say that it would have been possible to close down [school B]. Not with the Liberals and the Conservatives in power. We have 70 percent of the voters there.’

Another contextual factor that is often emphasized by social movement scholars is political allies. Political allies are usually equated with politicians or parties whose policy preferences correspond with those of the movement (Uba, 2007, p. 22). Proponents of this approach argue that SMOs can increase their chances of influencing policy by persuading members of the political elite to support them (e.g. Giugni, 2004). However, empirical studies have again demonstrated incoherent and mixed results (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). For example, it has been shown that left-party governments might encourage as well as discourage the mobilization of movements representing left-wing voters (Jenkins et al., 2003). In order to get more coherent results, I argue that scholars should focus more on why political parties form alliances with movements in the first place. Political parties may not only form alliances with movements on the basis of policy-seeking motives, but also according to

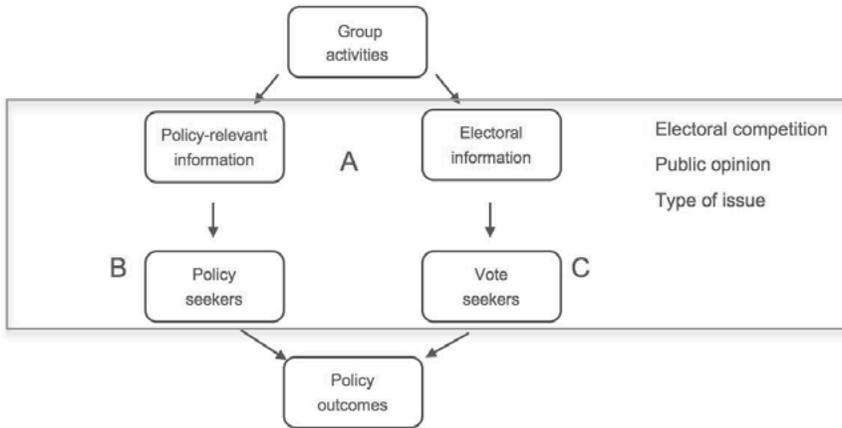
vote-seeking motives, such as attracting swing voters. Why should a left-wing government listen to an advocacy group if it mobilizes voters who would vote for them regardless of any concessions?

Finally, the nature of the political issue the groups are trying to influence is also assumed to affect their political impact. A prominent hypothesis in interest group research is that the success of informational lobbying activities varies according to the complexity of policy issues (Dür, 2008a; Woll, 2007; Klüver, 2011). Informational lobbying activities might be more influential on uncertain and technical political issues which the policymakers find difficult to solve and where the consequences of different proposals are uncertain. However, if a policy issue is of a very simple nature, interest organizations may find it difficult to lobby decision-makers because the decision-maker's demand for information is low (cf. Klüver, 2011). It might also be difficult to persuade politicians through informational lobbying on political issues dominated by political values and ideology. For more ideological issues, the arguments from the advocacy groups are more likely to conflict with the political aims of the decision-makers.

An illustration of how advocacy groups affect decision-makers

I will now summarize the previous sections by presenting an illustration of how advocacy groups affect decision-makers (figure 1.1). This model can be seen as a synthesis of knowledge from social movement research, interest group research and research on political parties. A limitation with past studies on the political influence of advocacy groups is that they seldom discuss under which circumstances different mechanisms of advocacy group influence are relevant (how contextual factors condition the political effects of different advocacy group activities). The purpose of the following discussion is to address this limitation.

Figure 1.1. An illustration of how advocacy groups affect decision-makers



A. Protest activities (e.g. demonstrations or petitions) or lobbying activities (e.g. providing information to decision-makers through letters or meetings) can influence elected officials if they provide new information as to the officials' prospects of re-election (electoral information) and/or the policy consequences of their decisions (policy-relevant information). However, the political effects of these activities are also determined by contextual factors. Electoral competition, public opinion and/or the nature of the political issues the groups try to affect (complexity, whether the issue is technical or ideological) provide opportunities for groups to influence elected officials through different motives: policy-seeking or vote-seeking.

B. Policy-seeking motivations provide advocacy opportunities when electoral competitiveness is low, when the issues are highly technical and complex and/or when the public is relatively indifferent about the issue (cf. Strøm, 1990). Examples are local technical issues that affect relatively few voters directly, such as cutbacks in and closures of smaller welfare services and local construction projects. Under these circumstances, advocacy groups are most likely to influence elected officials through lobbying activities that provide information on the social, economic or technical consequences of political decisions. In Essay II, I demonstrate that policy-relevant information provided by SMOs decreases the probability that proposals will result in school closures. Protests may be less influential under these circumstances, unless they mobilize relatively important voter groups, such as swing voters (see Essay I).

C. Vote-seeking motivations provide advocacy opportunities when electoral competitiveness is high and/or when a large part of the public care about the issue (cf. Strøm, 1990). Under these circumstances, advocacy groups are most likely to influence officials through protest activities that could create or amplify public opinion and hence threaten elected officials interested in

re-election (cf. Agnone, 2007). An example of a political issue with these characteristics is closures of public hospital wards. Hospital closures affect a large part of the population directly because anyone can get sick. In a previous study (Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014), it has been shown that political proposals to close down emergency wards often result in extremely strong protest actions. In some cases, as much as 10–20 percent of the population in the municipalities participated in them. The strong public opinion (created by protest networks) forced the politicians to withdraw their decisions. This vote-seeking behavior makes sense in this context given that voters actually punish political parties for emergency ward closures in elections (Lindbom, 2014).

In summary, advocacy group activities are most likely to influence public policy if they provide new information to vote seekers as to their prospects of re-election or provide policy seekers with new policy-relevant information. The motivations of the decision-makers and their demand for information are affected by contextual factors: the nature of the issue the groups are trying to influence, electoral competition and/or public opinion.

The model is of course a theoretical simplification of reality. One could imagine other pathways of influence where policy-relevant information could affect vote seekers and electoral information could affect policy seekers. For example, by scrutinizing political proposals in newspapers, advocacy groups could convince the public that decision-makers are making uninformed decisions based on incorrect information. This criticism could reflect poorly on vote-seeking politicians and threaten their re-election chances. Similarly, protest actions and electoral information could inform policy seekers about unexpected social consequences of their decisions and problems in society they should address.

1.3.2 Advocacy Groups and Political Equality

Moving on from the causal mechanisms of advocacy group influence, I now turn to the groups themselves and the question of democratic representation. The theoretical focus here is on which activists, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, are able to achieve their goals (cf. Essay III). Democratic principles suggest that citizens should have equal opportunities to participate in political activities and to influence public policy (Dahl, 1989). If only advocacy groups representing socioeconomically advantaged citizens are able to influence political decisions between elections, then this is clearly a democratic problem. It is therefore problematic that scholarship on democratic representation primarily focuses on the extent to which politicians are responsive to different parts of the electorate, and tends to ignore politicians' responsiveness to advocacy groups (Hojnacki et al., 2012, p. 394). One of the reasons for this is the historic divide between research on advocacy groups and other

fields, such as the field of individual-level political participation and the field of democratic representation (cf. Esaiasson and Narud, 2013, p. 3–6).

The issue of who participates in protests and who contacts elected officials is mostly discussed in studies on individual-level political participation (e.g. Verba et al., 1993; Verba et al., 1995; Van Deth et al., 2007). Empirical studies show that white highly educated individuals are more likely to participate in all kinds of political activities, including protests and direct contact (Verba et al., 1993; Van Deth et al., 2007). Studies also show that highly educated individuals, employed persons, and men are more likely to be involved in interest organizations than other individuals in Europe (Badescu and Neller, 2007, p. 169–177). There is thus a risk that politically influential advocacy groups only represent the interests of socioeconomically advantaged parts of the population, at the expense of less affluent groups. However, it is unclear if this is the case. The literature on individual-level political participation has largely neglected the question of political responsiveness to political activities (Teorell, 2006). Meanwhile, literature that focuses on the consequences of political actions by ordinary citizens, such as social movement literature, has not paid much attention to whether successful activists are representative of the general public (Burstein, 1998; Burstein and Linton, 2002).

Lobbying tactics and political equality

One way to study whether advocacy group activities lead to biased decision-making is to analyze which groups engage in the activities that are deemed most likely to influence politicians based on previous empirical studies. In light of the previous discussion on the political influence of advocacy groups, we would expect that groups who provide elected officials with new information as to the officials' prospects of re-election or the policy consequences of their decisions are more likely to influence public policy. Furthermore, we would expect that lobbying activities are a more efficient and a more credible way of transmitting these types of information than other activities (cf. Uba, 2009; Verba et al., 1993; Naurin and Öhberg, 2013; Marien and Hooghe, 2013).

Previous studies have highlighted two factors that constrain the use of lobbying tactics among advocacy groups that could be interesting from the perspective of democratic representation. The first factor is organizational resources. Several scholars in the social movement literature argue that processes of professionalization and organization-building stimulate the use of conventional interest group tactics among SMOs (i.e. lobbying) and decrease the use of more confrontational tactics (i.e. protests) (e.g. Piven and Cloward, 1979; Staggenborg, 1988; Koopmans, 1993; Rucht, 1999). Similarly, scholars in the interest group literature claim that interest organizations that have large organizational resources in terms of staff and economic resources are more likely to have access to decision-makers and provide them with policy-

relevant information (Dalton et al., 2003; Eising, 2007; Klüver, 2012; Dür and Mateo, 2013).

The second factor is institutional openness (or political opportunity structures). Institutional openness refers to the degree to which political institutions incorporate citizen demands for influence on decisions (Morales, 2009). When political institutions are open, they invite lobbying tactics: movements and organizations attempt to work through established institutions because these institutions offer points of access to decision-makers. My interview with activists provided an illustration of how institutional openness affects tactical choices:

'The municipality also invited us to a public dialogue. If they had just come with a decision, perhaps we would have acted differently [and focused on using protest tactics]. But now they invited us to this public dialogue. So it was important to manage it in a good way. Maybe we chose this type of tactic [lobbying] because there was an opening for a discussion at once.'

When political institutions are closed, on the other hand, advocacy groups are likely to adopt confrontational, disruptive tactics orchestrated outside established policy channels (cf. Kitschelt, 1986; Koopmans and Kriesi, 1995; Meyer, 2004). Institutional openness could also explain why groups who occupy subordinate positions economically and socially, such as the unemployed and ethnic minorities, are more likely to engage in disruptive protest (cf. Piven and Cloward, 1979; Scott, 1985). These groups lack access to institutionalized political and economic power and are therefore more likely to use confrontational tactics.

While the two theoretical perspectives presented can help us understand which advocacy groups use lobbying tactics, they are not sufficient. The perspective focusing on organizational resources cannot explain the variation in the use of lobbying tactics among informal and loosely organized voluntary groups, given that these groups lack organizational resources in the first place. The perspective focusing on institutional openness is useful in political contexts where certain groups are systematically disadvantaged and excluded from the political system and hence are not able to use lobbying tactics. However, this perspective may be less useful in countries with relatively open political systems, like Sweden.

In Essay III, I present a theoretical perspective that could explain the variation in the use of informational lobbying tactics among informal and loosely organized groups in open political systems. The theoretical perspective focuses on the economic resources held by the activists and their civic and analytical skills. I argue that groups of activists with these skills and resources are more likely to provide policy-relevant information to decision-makers and are therefore more likely to influence the policy process. While most people probably believe that more resourceful groups have better chances of influencing public policy compared to less resourceful groups, it is not always clear

which mechanism is at work. Connecting activist resources to information mechanisms can increase our understanding of which citizen groups are able to influence political decisions between elections.

1.3.3 Previous Studies on School Closures

I will end the theoretical part of the Introductory Essay by providing a summary of previous research on school closures for those who are interested in this political issue. Previous research on activism against school closures have shown that parent networks who present researched reports, parents who form political alliances with decision-makers and parents in neighborhoods with a rich associational life are less likely to lose their school. This thesis contributes to the literature on school closures by establishing these findings firmly in theory and by testing the theories using a larger dataset of school closures.

Previous studies on the consequences of school closures

Most of the previous studies on school closures are within school research and social geography and they are mainly concerned with the social, demographic and economic consequences of closures. Some of these studies provide clues regarding the motives behind anti-school-closure mobilizations and test the arguments used by activists.

First, activists often argue that school closures have negative effects on the local society, especially for rural communities. In line with this argument, Kearns and his colleagues (2009, p. 139) show that closures of rural schools disconnect communities from their past and shut down a crucial focal point and meeting place for the community (see also Cedering, 2016). Those families most affected by school closures are low-income families, which become isolated from the other locals when the school disappears (Witten et al., 2001). Bushrod (1999) also found that school closures resulted in reduced socialization and social control. However, mutual support and general service did not fall more than predicted by the dwindling population in itself. In summary, school closures seem to have negative social effects on neighborhoods, especially on rural communities. These negative effects together with the symbolic value of the rural school among rural inhabitants may facilitate the mobilization of protests against rural school closures (see Essay III).

Second, it has been suggested that a closure of a rural school renders the area it serves less attractive and can prejudice in-migration and encourage out-migration. This is also a concern embraced by the rural population in villages whose schools are threatened. The latest evidence provides limited support for this argument. Using geographically detailed population data, Amcoff (2012) finds no significant effects on migration patterns as a result of rural school closures, either in the immediate surroundings of the school or in its wider catchment area. Egelund and Laustsen (2006) show that the main problem for

rural societies is a lack of people and thus lack of human capital. A school closure is a sign of a community in the final phase of the death process, not a cause.

Third, it is argued that school closures often do not lead to the intended savings. Research shows that school closures often give rise to increased costs as a result of new costs for school transport, investment in refurbishment and costs for new teachers (Valencia, 1984; Lind and Gustavsson, 2003; Glesbygdsverket 1999, p. 12–13). These additional costs create opportunities for advocacy groups to criticize the basis behind closure proposals and influence elected officials (see Essay II).

Previous studies on activism against school closures

Searches on Google Scholar suggest that relatively few studies have been conducted on political activism against school closures compared with studies on the consequences of school closures. However, it seems to be common knowledge that public consideration of school closures often triggers worries, protests and opposition from the parents directly affected, as well as from entire communities (Egelund and Laustsen, 2006; Lind and Gustavsson, 2003; Glesbygdsverket, 2009). The major studies on anti-closure activism have been conducted by human geographers Ranu Basu and Liz Bondi and they are rarely referenced in political science journals. However, it is becoming more common that political scientists engage in the subject (cf. Wänström and Karlsson, 2012; Uba, 2015; Uba, 2016a). In the following paragraphs, I provide a summary of existing and upcoming studies in chronological order.

In the first study of its kind, Bondi (1987) examines the implementation of primary school closures in Manchester and how the protests were managed by the local authority. The negotiations with the parents were pluralist in character, different groups competing with one another to retain their local schools. The existence of an arena through which the public were able to articulate and present their views helped to preserve the legitimacy of the local authority proposing the closures. However, the parent groups were only able to influence the selection of schools for closure. Decisions about the general approach to primary school provision and the overall scale of the closures had already been made on the basis of corporatist agreements reached between the local authority and provider groups (including unions).

In a follow-up to her first study, Bondi (1988) takes a closer look at the impact of anti-closure groups in 29 cases of school closures in Manchester. After interviewing 11 protest groups, Bondi identified two particularly effective campaigning approaches: presenting researched and reasoned reports and foregrounding political alliances between protest groups and councilors. Anti-closure groups that had leaders in professional occupations were able to choose the most effective tactic from these options, whereas anti-closure groups in disadvantaged areas tended to adopt less efficient tactics. The only disadvantaged groups who saved their schools and who were able to use ef-

fective tactics were those that had the necessary social capital to draw professional parents into their campaign. Her arguments are similar to those presented in Essays II and III and the results from her qualitative study complement the results from the quantitative studies presented in my essays. Combined, our studies provide strong empirical support for her conclusions regarding effective campaign approaches and which groups present researched reports (policy-relevant information) to decision-makers.

Basu (2004) analyzes whether neighborhood civic involvement can explain the distribution of 138 school closures in Toronto. The results reveal that neighborhoods with denser forms of regular parental participation were less likely to lose their schools. Schools related to neighborhood-revitalizing programs, especially those used by disadvantaged marginal groups such as unemployed families with children, single-parent families and immigrant groups, were affected the most.

Hegelund and Laustsen (2006) study 30 closures of rural schools in Denmark and conclude that the strength of the reactions against rural school closures is related to the vitality of the villages. Strong protests are most common in villages where there are numerous families with children and in villages with a rich associational life.

Basu (2007) examines the failures and successes of various anti-closure groups in challenging closures of public schools in Toronto. The massive protests across the city led to adjustment in the criteria for closures and to fewer schools being affected. However, the later decision-making phases had a more individualistic neighborhood agenda. As a result, dissidents became scattered and fragmented across neighborhoods in the city, each school protecting its own interests and in some cases at the expense of other schools. Whether a community became a winner or a loser in this process depended on how the community consultation committees were able to present their cases and produce knowledge (cf. Bondi, 1988). The results regarding the importance of producing 'new knowledge' to stop closures are in line with the results regarding policy-relevant information from my quantitative study in Essay II.

Wänström and Karlsson (2012) study the electoral consequences of 63 closure decisions in 47 Swedish municipalities. Their results suggest that school closure decisions have no effect on municipal election results. However, they did not take into account whether there were any protests in the municipalities.

In an anthology on the consequences of SMOs, Uba (2016a) examines how attitudes toward different forms of protest vary among Swedish decision-makers, and which kinds of decision-makers tend to be more understanding toward petitioning or occupations of schools. She found the effect of protest experience on elite understanding of protests to be very small, and that it varies across the forms of action. However, the results also reveal that an experience of school strikes is related to a negative understanding of these actions. She also finds that female decision-makers respond more positively to the use of petitions than their male colleagues; and this gender difference in response

was reversed when activists visited politicians at their homes. Incumbents were less understanding of protest tactics than opposition members. The effect was not dependent on the ideological or party background of the target.

In a forthcoming article (Uba, 2015), Uba evaluates the deliberative quality of the arguments used in letters opposing municipal proposals to close schools, and investigates how different frames and the deliberative quality of the arguments affect the final decision on school closures. Her preliminary empirical analysis of 400 letters (the same letters used in this thesis) suggests that schools were more likely to survive if the activists used frames relating to emotions of pity and sympathy (toward children). On the other hand, when the examined letters expressed distrust, the schools were closed.

In summary, previous studies suggest that advocacy groups have limited influence on school closures. However, there seem to be some exceptions to this rule. Parent networks who present researched reports, parents in neighborhoods with a rich associational life and parents who form political alliances with decision-makers, seem to be less likely to lose their school. This thesis contributes to the literature on school closures by explaining why these particular groups are less likely to be affected by closures. By combining insights from the interest group literature, the social movement literature and the literature on political parties, the thesis increases our understanding of why politicians are more inclined to listen to activists who present researched reports (Essay II), why they form alliances with certain groups (Essay I) and which groups use these tactics (Essays I and III). I also contribute to the literature by testing hypotheses inspired by previous research on school closures (in particular the research by Bondi and Basu) using a larger dataset of school closures. By studying a larger sample of school closures in a different country, it is possible to make inferences concerning a larger population of cases.

1.4 The Empirical Study

In the previous sections, I presented a theoretical discussion on the processes by which advocacy groups can be expected to affect public policy and whether groups representing socioeconomically advantaged citizens are more likely to influence political decisions. I now turn to the empirical methodology used to test my arguments. This thesis focuses on mobilizations against closures of public schools in 29 Swedish municipalities. To test the hypotheses presented in the essays, I have collected and combined several kinds of data. The most important are (1) data on proposed school closures, decisions and implemented closures; (2) details on the protest actions that were mobilized against the proposed closures in the municipalities; (3) letters that were sent directly to politicians regarding the proposed closures and (4) socioeconomic data and data on previous election results in the electoral polling districts in which the threatened schools were located. I will provide a more detailed picture of these

types of data in following subsections. However, I will first present the case of school closures and discuss the empirical methodology used to measure the impact of advocacy groups on school closures.

1.4.1 Background: School Closures in Sweden

Closures of public schools in Sweden are mainly a result of three factors that often reinforce each other. The first factor is the financial situation of Swedish municipalities. In Sweden, the municipalities (the local governments) have the administrative responsibility for organizing and financing the school system within their territories. Economic crises force the municipalities to decrease their costs and one way to do so is to close down (unnecessary) school premises. For example, Swedish municipalities closed many schools as a result of the economic crisis in Sweden 1990–1994. The second factor is competition between public schools and independent schools. The school sector was opened for competition in 1992 and it became legal to open non-municipal independent schools (*friskolor*) financed by the municipalities (Lindbom, 2010). This reform led to competition between public schools and independent schools over students, teachers and resources and has caused closures of public schools. The third factor is demographic change. Demographic change been one of the main drivers of school closures and this is especially true for the period studied in this thesis. The number of school children aged 7–15 decreased in many municipalities during the 2005–2012 period, forcing the municipalities to close down hundreds of schools (Montin, 2008). Rural schools may have been particularly affected, because they were already vulnerable as a result of urbanization. In total, local authorities in Sweden proposed closing down around 1300 schools between 1991 and 2009 and around 65 percent of these closures were implemented (Uba, 2016a). Closures of public schools are not unique to Sweden and exist in other countries such as Canada, the UK and New Zealand (Bondi, 1987; Basu, 2007; Kearns et al., 2010).

The policy process on school closures in Sweden often starts with politicians initiating inquiries that are carried out by public specialists or by external auditing companies. In some cases, politicians propose that some schools should be closed down and the bureaucrats only do impact-assessments based on these proposals. This kind of process was most common during the 1990s and early 2000s. However, from the early 2000s and onwards, most of the closure proposals are based on comprehensive inquiries that focus on several factors, such as the past and projected relationship between the number of students and the capacity of the schools, the school's condition, the existence of other schools nearby and the expected number of students in the independent schools. The proposals are then presented at a School Board (*skolnämnd; utbildningsnämnd*), a board of politicians responsible for education in the municipality. Usually the media reports about the published proposals (or on

rumors of them) and these reports are then followed by protest actions against the proposals from the parents, the students and teachers. However, in some cases, the proposals are presented to parents and personnel before they appear in local newspapers. A decision on closures is then taken in the School Board, or in rare cases, in the general municipal legislative body (*kommunfullmäktige*).

Usually, all the political parties that are represented in the municipality have one or several representatives in the School Board and a representative of one of the incumbent parties heads it. Members of the School Board are appointed by the members in the general legislative body of the municipality, which in turn are appointed through proportional municipal elections. The political parties that have the majority of the seats in the general legislative body also have the majority of the seats in the School Board and are therefore able to make decisions regarding school-related issues as long as their appointed members in the Board support the proposals. Most of the members in the Board are not full-time politicians, but the Board often includes one or two full-time paid politicians who serve as Chairman of the Board and/or the leader of the political opposition. The chairman and the leader of the political opposition often have seats in the general municipal legislative body and communicate regularly with their party leadership regarding their decisions.

Out of the around 1300 schools threatened in the 1991–2009 period, more than half faced, according to local media, at least one protest against the proposed closure. Most of these events consisted of petitions and letters to the media (44 percent). There were also protests during public meetings (21 percent), demonstrations (16 percent) and school strikes (5 percent) (Uba, 2016a). The protests were primarily mobilized by informal and/or loosely organized advocacy groups, such as parent associations at the schools, parent networks, networks of students, village associations and village networks. Alliances between advocacy groups and political parties against closures of schools were rare, with the exception of alliances between rural networks and the (agrarian) Center Party. The Center Party has ideological and electoral reasons to save rural schools (cf. Essay I).

This thesis focuses on the 2002–2010 period and on the 29 Swedish municipalities with the largest urban population centers (see table 1.1¹¹ and figure 1.2 below). The data used in Essays I and II show that these 29 municipalities presented at least 339 proposals on full or partial school closures during the 2002–2010 period and around 200 of these proposals caused protest actions.

¹¹The difference in the number of reported demonstrations and letters in table 1.1 and in Essay III is mainly a result of differences in the units of analysis used: Essays I and II use closure proposals as the units of analysis and Essay III uses schools.

Table 1.1. *The 29 municipalities included in the study (data from Essays I and II)*

Municipality	Proposals	Closures	Letters	Demonstrations	Petitions	Population
Borlänge	12	11	3	1	2	47 399
Borås	2	1	1	1	1	100 221
Botkyrka	4	4	2	0	3	77 553
Eskilstuna	13	7	2	3	2	92 250
Falun	12	6	5	1	3	55 267
Gävle	18	10	7	5	2	92 416
Göteborg	27	15	17	4	11	489 757
Helsingborg	6	5	2	3	6	123 389
Jönköping	11	5	4	2	0	122 194
Kalmar	3	2	1	0	0	61 321
Karlskrona	12	1	8	1	2	61 844
Karlstad	8	6	3	0	2	82 878
Kristianstad	6	4	2	0	0	76 540
Linköping	19	7	8	0	4	138 580
Luleå	15	5	7	1	1	73 313
Lund	6	2	1	0	0	103 286
Malmö	15	6	3	2	2	276 244
Norrköping	14	9	5	3	1	125 463
Stockholm	29	9	11	3	6	782 885
Sundsvall	12	5	7	5	5	94 516
Södertälje	7	5	1	2	3	81 791
Trollhättan	6	4	0	0	0	53 830
Täby	4	3	2	0	0	61 006
Umeå	15	5	11	2	6	111 235
Upplands Väsby	5	5	3	0	0	37 848
Uppsala	20	8	14	7	9	185 187
Västerås	10	9	8	1	3	132 920
Örebro	17	8	5	4	6	128 977
Östersund	11	4	9	2	1	58 583
Total	339	171	153	53	81	3 928 693

Notes: Proposals refer to the number of proposals on full or partial school closures. Closures refer to the number of proposals that led to decisions on school closures before the following election and that were implemented. Letters refer to the number of proposals that led to letters sent to politicians from groups. Demonstrations refer to the number of proposals that led to demonstrations or school strikes. Petitions refer to the number of proposals that led to petitions. Population refers to the total number of residents that lived in the municipality 2006.

Figure 1.2. The geographic locations of the 29 municipalities included in the study.



It was unfortunately not possible to include all 290 Swedish municipalities when testing my arguments because I did not have the time and resources to collect and analyze thousands of letters. I focus on the 29 municipalities with the largest urban population centers for three reasons. First, focusing on municipalities where most of the threatened schools are located in urban areas increases the possibility of generalizing the results to larger cities in other countries. Second, the focus on municipalities with large urban population centers increases the variation between districts in terms of type of voters (swing and core voters), education levels and where the schools are located (rural and urban schools). In municipalities with smaller urban population centers, the districts are (more) similar to each other when it comes to parent characteristics, and a larger percentage of the schools may be located in rural areas. Had I focused on these municipalities, the low variation in the dataset would have created poor conditions for testing the hypotheses. Third, by focusing on larger municipalities in terms of population, I can partly control for the effect of public opinion on the closure decisions. Public opinion is more likely to amplify the effects of protest actions on school closure decisions in smaller municipalities than in larger municipalities. Smaller municipalities

have fewer schools and a larger share of the voters could therefore care about the school closure. Closures in smaller municipalities are also more likely to be highlighted by local media and the voters are therefore more likely to blame the local government even if the cuts did not affect them directly. Furthermore, local politicians are relatively well known in these municipalities and have good reasons to protect their reputation. Because of the selection of municipalities with a large urban population, the results in Essays I and II regarding the limited impact of demonstrations and petitions may not be generalizable to smaller municipalities in Sweden and to smaller communities in other countries. In smaller communities, politicians may be less likely to close down schools after protests than in larger communities.

Besides smaller municipalities, the results presented in these essays are not generalizable to school closure processes where the advocacy groups are unable to get in contact with the decision-makers and where the affected parents, students and personnel are not informed about the closure proposals before the municipal decision (or only a couple of days before the decision). In these cases, we would expect fewer protests and lobbying activities, and the mobilizations are probably less likely to influence the decision-makers. The 2002–2010 closure processes I studied were relatively open to the public and in many cases the politicians organized meetings with the affected parents before the decision on closure.

1.4.2 Measuring Advocacy Group Influence

How then can we measure the influence of advocacy groups on school closure decisions? Influence is generally understood as the ability of an actor to shape a decision in line with his/her preferences (Nagel, 1975, p. 29). Social movement scholars often follow the example of Schumaker (1975) and define the political impact of social movement mobilization according to the extent of government responsiveness to the movement's demands. When studies measure government responsiveness to advocacy groups they usually use one of three methods: process-tracing, assessing 'attributed influence' or gauging the degree of preference attainment (see Dür, 2008b for a review). Process tracing attempts to provide evidence that the cause precedes the effect and describe the processes by which causes affect outcomes (George and Bennett, 2005). 'Attributed influence' (March, 1955) is usually measured through surveys where groups are asked to provide a self-assessment of their impact on a political decision. Finally, in the method of preference attainment, outcomes of political processes are compared with ideal policy outcomes from the perspective of the advocacy groups (Dür, 2008b, p. 562–569).

Out of these three approaches, I primarily use the method of preference attainment. An advantage with the preference attainment approach is that it can be utilized in large-N studies (cf. Mahoney, 2008; Dür, 2008b). The

dynamics around school closures may vary from case to case depending on factors such as electoral competition, the motivations behind the closures and the type of politicians who are active in the School Board. In this respect, a statistical study with many cases creates good conditions for generalization. The hypotheses regarding advocacy group influence are therefore tested using quantitative analyses in which I examine the relationship between advocacy group activities against school closures and the likelihood that a proposal will result in a closure decision. As the analyses focus on advocacy groups that want to save a public school, I measure their preference attainment by analyzing whether the schools were closed. Hence, the analysis can demonstrate whether their objectives were achieved. The disadvantage of this more quantitative approach is that it provides weak evidence for the causal influence of advocacy group activities on policy withdrawals. To strengthen my argument that the groups could influence the elected officials through the mechanisms I propose, I have also conducted simple qualitative analyses. In Essay I, I ask three School Board politicians in a municipality whether they avoided closures affecting core voters and why they listen more to certain voter groups. In Essay II, I analyze municipal protocols and investigate whether alternative proposals made by advocacy groups led to actual decisions that saved schools. I also compare the policy-relevant information provided by the groups with the political proposals behind the closures to ensure that the information was new for the elected officials. I did not conduct more complex process-tracing analyses because the hypotheses tested in Essays II and III are already supported by case studies in previous research (cf, Basu, 2007; Bondi, 1988).

I did not utilize the method of ‘attributed influence’ because of the difficulty of distributing surveys to the advocacy groups. As I focus on voluntary and loosely organized groups that often lack a formal organization and/or that have different members at different points of time (the parent associations), it is often difficult to contact the activists responsible for the protests and lobbying activities. Furthermore, even if I was able to contact activists from most of the groups, the method may not provide an accurate picture of their political influence. It could be difficult for the activists to estimate their influence as they may have limited insight into the municipal decision-making process and/or because they do not remember.

Most studies on interest organizations avoid the question of political influence because it is so difficult to answer (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998, p. 13; Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1115; Dür, 2008b, p. 560; Richardson and John, 2012). Measuring interest group influence has been argued to be ‘*one of the most fraught, difficult and complex problems in political science research*’ (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1115). Interest group scholars often highlight three problems that hamper the measurement of influence (see Dür, 2008b, p. 561). I will now discuss how I handle these three problems in this thesis.

First, measuring influence is argued to be challenging because it can be exercised through many different channels and activities. Advocacy groups can

shape public policy both by lobbying decision-makers directly and by mobilizing protest activities. As studies seldom take into account all these activities, they may under- or overestimate the influence of advocacy groups (Dür, 2008b, p. 556). This thesis will handle this problem by including both protest and lobbying activities in the analysis.

Second, the existence of other actors lobbying the government (both supportive groups and counteractive groups) as well as public opinion makes it difficult to isolate the political impact of an advocacy group (Burstein, 2014, chapter 3; Dür, 2008, p. 556). If we do not take into account lobbying efforts of counteractive groups, we may underestimate the influence of the advocacy group of interest. Similarly, the influence may be overestimated if the political goals of a group are in line with public opinion (Burstein, 2014, chapter 3). These problems can be handled either by (1) including control variables or by (2) focusing on political issues that are not salient to the general public and/or where counter mobilizations do not occur. I used the second solution. It was not possible to control for public opinion as no polls or surveys were available regarding the school closures in my dataset. However, the limited effects of school closures on municipal election results (Wänström and Karlsson, 2012), and the lack of opinion polls regarding school closures, should limit the effects of public opinion on school closure decisions. Similarly, I did not control for counter-mobilizations as mobilizations to close schools did not exist in my dataset.

Third, influence can be wielded at different stages of the decision-making process: in the agenda-setting stage, when proposals are formulated, and when decisions are taken and implemented (Schumaker, 1975, p. 494). As it is challenging for one empirical study to measure influence at all these stages, it is difficult to draw general conclusions regarding the political influence of an advocacy group. The majority of recent studies on the political outcomes of SMOs focus on the adaptation of legislation or implementation of a policy that is congruent to social movement demands (Uba, 2007, p. 18). These studies have probably underestimated the influence of SMOs as they do not take into account blame-avoidance strategies used by decision-makers. Scholars of advocacy groups seldom discuss the relationship between blame-avoidance strategies and advocacy group influence. Blame avoidance theory in welfare state research predicts that vote-seeking decision-makers should anticipate voters' and advocacy groups' reactions and therefore avoid presenting proposals that could lead to organized opposition (Weaver, 1986; Pierson, 1994). If politicians expect protests from certain groups, they can be expected to adjust their proposals before the protesters act. From a blame-avoidance perspective, popular protest that leads to the withdrawal of reform proposals is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to advocacy group influence (cf. Lindbom, 2007). The problem with blame-avoidance theories, however, is that they are challenging to test empirically. It is difficult to get hold of policy information from the earliest part of the policy process when the blame-avoidance

strategies are used and politicians rarely want to admit that electoral concerns influence their decisions.

I will address the problems associated with the agenda-setting stage by including the earliest possible closure proposals that were available as the units of analysis. It is unlikely that the groups could have a direct impact on agenda setting earlier in the process because they were not aware of the closure proposals. The issue of blame avoidance, however, is more difficult to handle. I argue that the effects of blame avoidance on the closure proposals depend on whether the public officials formulating the proposals were controlled by the politicians or not. One could imagine two ideal models of the decision-making process: the professional bureaucrat model and the anticipatory bureaucrat model.

In the professional bureaucrat model, the proposals are formulated by public officials who are guided by their professionalism – a certain expertise and values that give direction to their work. Their power is regulated in formal negotiations with the politicians (cf. Clarke and Newman, 1997; Mouritzen and Svava, 2002; Svava, 2006). In the case of school closures, this implies that the closure proposals are based on the professional expertise held by the public officials in subjects such as demographics and economics. The effect of blame avoidance is minimized, as the officials have no interest in targeting special voter groups (cf. Dahlström, 2009, p. 217). The model is probably most common in municipalities where the closure proposals are formulated by external actors (in relation to the municipal school office), i.e. consultants or municipal property offices, as well as in municipalities where the closure investigations are based on technical non-political directives, i.e. the capacity utilization of the school premises, demographic trends and the status of the school premises. My interview with a public official who formulated the closure proposals in one of the municipalities provides an illustration of the professional model:

‘The politicians do not know which proposals we are working on. We do not work together. I have been very careful with this. There are some officials who want to know where the politicians are going. I’m not like that. [The closure proposals] should be based on the expertise [the public officials] possess / ... / If the politicians do not want to close down schools in rural areas and do not want such proposals, then they must write so in our mission statement / ... / It is extremely unlikely that they would stick their neck out and make a directive that would forbid us to present a specific proposal.’

The professionalism of the public official also led him/her to present closure proposals in the investigation that she/he knew would not become political reality:

‘Just look at school A, which I presented to the politicians three times. Eventually, they [the politicians] just laughed at me. You never give up, they told me’

In the anticipatory bureaucrat model, in contrast, the proposals are formulated by public officials who anticipate the politicians' reactions and primarily endeavor to implement their preferences in their work. These types of officials primarily see themselves as subordinates to the politicians and their professionalism is limited (cf. Bengtsson, 2012, p. 255–256; Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975, p. 95ff; Page and Jenkins, 2005, p. 108f). In the case of school closures, this implies that even the earliest closure proposals in the policy process could be shaped by political principles and blame-avoidance strategies. This model may be most common in municipalities where the public officials work directly with the politicians when formulating the proposals and where no clear directives guided their work.

Among these two models, I argue that the professional model provides the best description of my empirical case. My review of the investigations presenting the closure proposal suggest that these documents primarily focused on technical factors such as demographics and the state of the school premises. The limited impact of blame avoidance on the closure proposals can also be seen in the large number of proposals that were withdrawn after having been presented to the public (half of the proposals). These observations together with the methodological difficulty of analyzing blame-avoidance strategies prompted me not to analyze blame avoidance in this thesis. However, it is still possible that blame avoidance affected the closure proposal included in my dataset. Especially since the power of the politicians can be expected to increase when there is some uncertainty among the public officials, which is sometimes the case in school closure processes.

If the closure proposals were indeed affected by blame avoidance, this could affect the results in the essays in the following ways. In Essay I, one could imagine that politicians would remove some of the closure proposals affecting swing voters and core voters before the protests take place. This would reduce the likelihood that the swing hypothesis and the core hypothesis are supported by the empirical study (which focuses on closure decisions). If the results nonetheless support the hypotheses, the existence of blame avoidance would strengthen my argument that the type of voters mobilized by advocacy groups matters for their political influence. In Essay II, one could imagine that politicians would remove closure proposals affecting groups who could mobilize large protests. This could explain why I only encountered a small number of large petitions (mobilizing more than one percent of the electorate), which in turn made it difficult to study the effects of large protests on closure decisions. However, large protests are not central to the main argument of the article, which deals with policy-relevant information. In Essay III, the use of blame avoidance strategies could reduce the number of closure proposals affecting socioeconomically advantaged parents, as these groups are better equipped to mobilize large protests and to use local media to their advantage. This could reduce the variation in the dataset and hence make it more difficult to test the hypothesis: informal SMOs mobilizing high-income activists and ac-

tivists with civic and analytical skills are more likely to use lobbying tactics. However, more resourceful neighborhoods were equally affected by closure proposals as less resourceful neighborhoods in my dataset and as a result, I was able to test the hypothesis. In summary, the results presented and the conclusions made in the three essays hold even if we take into account blame avoidance.

1.4.3 The Dataset

School closure proposals and implemented decisions

To measure the preference attainment of the advocacy groups, I analyze whether their schools were closed. More specifically, I analyze if proposals on closures formulated by bureaucrats resulted in implemented school closures or not. To be categorized as a closure, the highest responsible political body must decide to close the lower level of the school (years 1–3) and/or the intermediate level (years 4–5 or 4–6) and/or the upper level (6–9 or 7–9), and/or transform the school into an independent school (*friskola*). The decision must take place before the following election. Furthermore, the decision must have been implemented and the students removed before 2014.

The units of analysis in Essays I and II consist of the earliest proposal that was available in a legislative term (2002–2006 or 2006–2010) regarding the recommendation for full or partial closure of a school. The proposals are based on municipal documents such as documentation for the School Board meetings, working material or investigations regarding the school premises. It is not necessary that the proposals were presented as a final proposal at a School Board meeting (at that point, the case is generally already settled). A review of the documents that presented the proposals suggests that they were primarily based on technical factors such as demographic trends and the state of the schools. As a result, the closure proposals control for these factors and decrease the likelihood that they affect the results.

To guarantee that the proposals resulted in closures (or not) and to cover as many proposals and decisions as possible in the 29 municipalities, I have used several strategies to collect data on proposals and decisions and I have triangulated between these methods. First, I have contacted each of the 29 municipalities through e-mails and phone-calls and asked them which schools they have tried to close (and when) and which ones they have actually closed (and when). I also asked them to provide me with all related documents which they were obliged to do as a result of the principle of public access to information (*Offentlighetsprincipen*). Second, I have used register data from SCB on all de-registered schools in Sweden from 1991 to 2010. Third, I have used a media database on protest actions against school closures (more on this in the next paragraph) assembled by Katrin Uba (cf. Uba, 2016a; Uba, 2016b). Fourth, I have searched for information regarding the schools using several

Internet media sources (local newspapers on the Internet, the Swedish media database Retriever, Google search). Fifth, to make sure that my list of closed schools was accurate, I have compared my data with information on the capacity of the schools provided by the homepages of the municipalities and with information on the number of students in the schools from 2002 to 2010 from The Swedish National Agency for Education's SIRIS-database (Skolverket, 2015). These five sources of information provided a final list of school closure proposals and of schools that were closed (and when they were proposed and closed).

Data on protests and letters

The dataset includes data on all activities mobilized against school closures in the 29 municipalities that were mentioned in Swedish media from 2002 to 2010. An activity is here defined as any action by a representative of a group or by three or more people that clearly states its opposition to the proposed closure of a school (cf. Uba, 2016a). My analyses primarily focus on five types of activities: petitions, demonstrations, strikes, letters in local media and letters/e-mails sent to politicians. The activities must have taken place before the final decision on closure was taken. Data on petitions, demonstrations, strikes and letters/articles in local media were taken from the protest database in Uppsala assembled by Katrin Uba (cf. Uba, 2016a; Uba, 2016b). The database is based on a systematic search for protests and threatened schools in news media reports (print and on-line media archives, Swedish Radio, and Swedish TV). The search was performed in tandem with the data on the proposals and decisions on school closures.

Like most protest event research, the protest database suffers from a selection bias as lobbying activities (such as meetings with decision-makers and letters sent directly to them) are often not reported by the media (cf. Ortiz et al., 2005; Burstein, 2014, p. 16). This bias is problematic as such activities may be better at transmitting technical details and information on the consequences of political decisions that could influence policy seekers. The data on protests mentioned in Swedish media was therefore supplemented with data on letters and petitions sent directly to the municipality, politicians or the School Boards by regular mail or e-mail. The 29 municipalities covered by this thesis were asked to provide all letters, e-mails and petitions they received regarding school closures. Around 800 unique letters were collected from individuals and groups and most of these would not have been found if only media reports had been used. These numbers suggest that previous studies on social movements exclusively considering media reports might have missed important activities.

All letters and newspaper-articles on advocacy group activities were categorized depending on whether the advocacy groups provided one of three types of policy-relevant information. The three types of information were chosen because they may change the perceptions held by decision-makers concern-

ing which policy options maximize their chances of obtaining their economic goals (cf. Essay II). The classification did not take into account the quality of the information provided.

The first type was alternative proposals that could save costs while simultaneously saving the school. See below for two examples from the letters:

‘Reportedly, the preschool Radiomasten is in need of expensive repairs. It is possible to move the preschool to the premises that are empty in Munkeberg School, thus reducing the costs of the premises.’

‘Why not wait to build a school in Mariehäll? The students could go to Ulvsunda School for a transitional period, given that the number of students in Bromma is expected to increase in the future.’

The second type was information on factors not included in the economic calculations behind the closure proposals that would lead to increased costs for the municipality.

‘According to information from the Transport Committee, no new buses would be deployed and the current buses would handle the new students. According to (our) estimates that would cost an additional 180 000 beyond the estimated costs.’

‘If the secondary school is closed, a variety of existing resources are spoiled, while extensive renovations must be done to accommodate the youth club in the new school.’

The third type was new information concerning the capacity utilization of the schools today or in the future.

‘The square area of the school is only calculated on the basis of the school students in the investigation presented to the School Board. This is absolutely wrong given that the school will also accommodate a preschool next term, thus decreasing the actual square meters per student.’

‘Neither GPF or the school premises plan takes full account of the ongoing construction work in the residential area Vretalund, to the east of Lyckebo. With 72 new family homes, the number of students may increase by 140 in a few years.’

Table 1.2 provides an overview of the advocacy groups who signed the letters and e-mails. Most of them were written by official parent associations at the schools (*skolråd; föräldraförening; föräldraråd; föräldragrupp*) or by more informal and temporary parent networks.¹²

¹²In the essays, both types of parent groups are described as ‘parent networks’ because the label ‘parent association’ could give the impression that these groups are professionalized interest organizations. Even though the parent associations at the schools are permanent formal organizations, they should be seen as informal SMOs rather than professionalized interest organizations because they lack paid staff, large budgets and a clear division of labor and the association only mobilizes parents at a particular school.

Table 1.2. *The advocacy groups behind the letters*

Advocacy group	Letters		Letters with pol-rel info	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Parent network	113	33.3%	60	34.7%
Parent association	99	29.2%	65	37.6%
Personnel network	52	15.3%	26	15.0%
Village association	20	5.9%	7	4.0%
Local area network	17	5.0%	12	6.9%
Economic association	8	2.4%	1	0.6%
Housing association	8	2.4%	0	0.0%
Church	5	1.5%	1	0.6%
Union	4	1.2%	0	0.0%
Sport association	4	1.2%	1	0.6%
Other	9	2.6%	0	0.0%
Total	339	100%	173	100%

Notes: The ‘advocacy group’ column presents the associations and networks that signed the letters. Parent association refers to parent associations at the schools (*föräldraråd; föräldragrupp, föräldraförening; skolråd*), village association refers to village councils (*byråd*) or village associations (*byförening; bygdeförening*) and personnel network refers to groups of teachers or principals at the school. In many cases, it was difficult to know whether an association or a network (without a formal organization) signed the letters. In these cases, I classified the letter in the network category. The ‘number of letters’ column presents the number of letters signed by the association or network. The ‘policy-relevant information’ column presents the number of letters that provided at least one of the three types of policy-relevant information.

Data on socioeconomic characteristics and previous election results in the districts in which the schools are located

The dataset also includes data on socioeconomic characteristics and previous election results in the polling districts in which the threatened schools are located. These types of data are used to provide a picture of the resources available to the advocacy groups, and whether they represent important voter groups. Data on education levels, income, country of origin and workplaces of the parents living in the districts are taken from the Geosweden database. The database contains yearly (longitudinal) geocoded data on all residents in Sweden during the 1990–2008 period, including demographic and socioeconomic data with precise coordinates and neighborhood area codes for homes and workplaces. The data collected is usually based on the year when the closure proposal was presented, although in a few cases the collected data is based on the year after or the year before the proposal was presented. I also used Geosweden to find out whether the schools could be seen as ‘rural’ schools. Schools are categorized as rural schools if they are located outside of

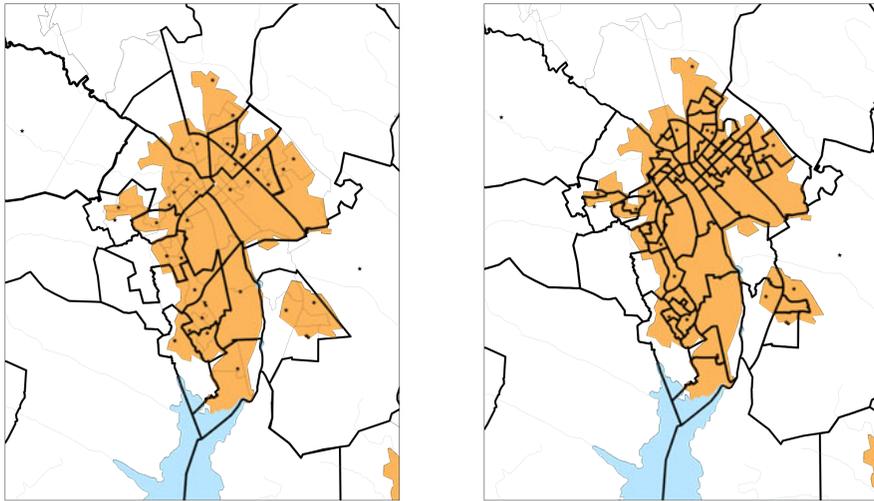
the largest population center (*tätort*) in the municipality.¹³ The definition of a population center (*tätort*) is that it consists of contiguous buildings with no more than 200 meters between houses. Data on election results in the districts before the closure proposal was presented were taken from the homepage of the Swedish Election Authority.

Because there are no available data on how individual parents have voted in previous elections and the socioeconomic characteristics of the parents that have children in lower and intermediate-level schools (years 1–6) for the 2002–2009 period, I use data on the residents living in the polling district in which the threatened school is located as a proxy. This proxy works reasonably well, at least for schools threatened from 2007 to 2010 that were not closed down (N=110). For these schools, there are data available on the actual characteristics of the parents with children in the schools in 2010, which makes it possible to test the accuracy of the proxy (cf. Skolverket, 2015). The correlation between the number of parents with higher education with children in these schools in 2010 and the number of parents with higher education in the districts in which the schools are located is reasonably strong ($r = .7089$). The same can be said about the correlation between the number of parents not born in Sweden with children in these schools and the number of parents not born in Sweden in the districts in which the schools are located ($r = .7906$).¹⁴ It was unfortunately not possible to use data based on the real catchment areas because most of the municipalities could not provide me with maps over these areas. I also considered creating artificial catchment areas through the veronoi method (cf. Trumberg, 2011). However, the veronoi method did not perform much better than the polling district method. Its performance did not justify the extra work it required.

¹³The advantage of this approach is that it performs well at capturing what I perceive as rural schools: schools located in smaller communities outside the municipal population center. Furthermore, the measure makes it possible to use the same method when categorizing schools in all municipalities. However, the variable can be seen as problematic in a couple of municipalities that have relatively large urban areas located outside of the municipal population center (Storvreta is categorized as a rural area in Uppsala for example). The effect of rural schools on the results might hence be somewhat over- or underestimated in the three essays.

¹⁴Given that I compare data on the polling districts from 2007 and 2008 (when I have data in my dataset) with data from 2010 on the actual characteristics of the parents, the proxies may perform even better than the correlation coefficients suggest.

Figure 1.3. Comparing the school catchment areas with the electoral polling districts in Uppsala (star= public school)



(a) School catchment areas

(b) Polling districts

The socioeconomic and electoral data were matched with the threatened schools through the following procedure. First, I analyzed where the threatened schools were located through Internet searches and register data on the addresses of the schools from Statistics Sweden (SCB). I then matched these locations with maps of workplaces where teachers worked in Sweden to get more precise coordinates for the schools. These workplaces were in turn matched with the polling districts in Sweden in 2006 (the first election when these maps existed in digital form).

Contextual variables not included in the analysis

The empirical analyses presented in the essays focus on advocacy group activities and district characteristics and include relatively few variables capturing the political context where the groups operate. While it is always desirable to include such variables when analyzing the political outcomes of advocacy groups, I argue that their inclusion is less important for my study. First, there are good theoretical reasons to assume that the variation in political context between the observations (the closure proposals) is relatively small. This study only focuses on one political issue (school closures) and proposals on school closures are often made on technical grounds (demographic trends). School closures are also a relatively non-ideological issue in Sweden and both right-wing and left-wing majorities close down schools. Furthermore, the political

bodies that decide on the closures look largely the same (School Boards consisting of part-time politicians). National legislation for the organization of municipal bodies makes variation very limited in comparison to the variation between political institutions in different countries like the UK, US and Sweden.

Second, even if contextual political factors affect the variation in school closures between and/or within municipalities, it is difficult to find theoretical reasons why they should also affect the independent variables of interest (the advocacy group activities).¹⁵ Omitted variable bias only occurs when the omitted variable is correlated both with the dependent variable (the closure decisions) and one or more included independent variables (for example the advocacy group activities). Correlations between omitted variables and the dependent variable reduce the precision of the estimates but do not affect the estimated effects of the included independent variables as long as the omitted variables are not correlated with the included independent variables (cf. Wooldridge, 2015, p. 89). Third, the main results presented in the essays hold even when I use models with fixed municipality effects. Hence, the results seem to be mainly driven by variation within the municipality rather than variation between municipalities. This suggests that municipality-level contextual factors have a limited effect on the results.

Although there are reasons to assume that contextual political factors are not important in my study, I have still spent some time thinking about relevant control variables and tested them during the workprocess. I will therefore discuss the contextual control variables that I considered including in more depth.

The first variable considered was the political ideology of the political coalition presenting the closure proposals. It is possible that the willingness of political parties to close down public schools differs depending on their political ideologies. For example, left-wing parties may not want to close down public schools because it could increase in the proportion of private (independent) schools in the municipality. A variable capturing the political ideology of the majority coalition is included in Essay II but not in Essay I. The variable did not affect the main results and its effects were not statistically significant and hence it was excluded from later analyses.

The second variable considered was the degree of political conflict in the School Board. In some cases, decisions about school closures are made by cross-coalition majorities (both right-wing and left-wing parties support the closures). This may increase the likelihood that the municipalities decide in favor of closures. In other cases, the political opposition takes a clear position against the closures and uses them for political purposes which could decrease the likelihood that the incumbent party closes down schools. Political conflicts could also lead to alliances between political parties and advocacy groups (al-

¹⁵If I had unlimited resources it would of course have been better to test them with actual data.

though such alliances are rare in my dataset). I do not include a control for the degree of political conflict in the School Board in the essays because municipal records were missing for a number of school closures, which made it difficult to find out whether the opposition was behind the decisions or not. It was also difficult to identify the positions taken by the political opposition on the basis of the records I had collected. To fully control for the degree of political conflict in the Board, I have to analyze the behavior of the parties in newspapers. It would have been challenging to collect this kind of data and there would still be significant uncertainty surrounding the results, as they would be based on how the newspapers interpreted the political conflicts.

The third variable considered was the degree of political competition in the municipality. It may be easier to close down schools in municipalities where the same parties have governed for decades and where the incumbent expect that they will stay in power. I control for this factor in Essay I by removing the municipalities that lack electoral competition in one of the analyses. In Essay II, I do not control for political competition because I focused on lobbying activities (providing policy-relevant information directly to decision-makers) that are mainly assumed to influence decision-makers through policy-seeking motives. Political competition is mainly assumed to affect vote-seeking motives.

The fourth variable considered was the economic situation in the municipality. The more difficult the economic situation is in the municipality, the greater the incentive to reduce the amount of school premises and the harder it becomes for advocacy groups to stop school closures. Similarly, advocacy groups may find it difficult to stop school closures if the municipality has extraordinarily high costs for school premises. I tested controlling for the economic results of the municipalities and their costs for school premises in all regression models but the effects of these controls were not statistically significant and they did not affect the main result. Hence, they are not included in the final versions of the essays.

The fifth variable considered was the projected future number of students in the threatened schools. Proposals and decisions on school closures are not only based on the enrollment trends of the schools in the past (which I control for) but also on projected future enrollment trends. I put much time and effort into collecting this type of data. However, the search was complicated by the fact that there was no national data and the data did not exist in digital form. As a result, I had to gather school closure investigations from all 29 individual municipalities myself. As each municipality presented several investigations during the 2002–2010 period and many of the officials behind the investigations had quit their jobs, it became difficult to find all the investigations. I therefore chose to prioritize an increase in the number of observations (adding more municipalities to the dataset) above adding controls the following years.

As a result of the incomplete data, controls for projected enrollment trends are not included in the dataset and if these trends were correlated with the

advocacy group activities, the effects of these activities may be over- or underestimated. However, the advocacy group activities are more likely to be affected by past enrollment trends (which I control for) than future enrollment trends.¹⁶ Furthermore, as enrollment trends could be relatively constant over time when it comes to some schools, my variable on past enrollment may also control for future trends. It is also possible that I control for future enrollment trends through my choice of observations. Given that I use closure proposals as the unit of analysis and these proposals are usually based on projected demographic trends, it is likely that most of the schools included in the dataset faced declining enrollment trends.

The final variable considered was political openness: whether the politicians were willing to discuss the school closures with the activists or not. This factor is problematic for me in the sense that it could easily affect both the dependent variable (the decisions on closures) and the main independent variable (the advocacy group activities), and the omission of this variable may therefore result in omitted variable bias. When municipalities invite the affected citizens in for dialogues, the politicians may be more uncertain about their proposals and the citizens may be more willing to forward suggestions and alternative proposals (informational lobbying). As a result, politicians in these municipalities may be less likely to close down schools. When municipalities do not invite citizens to participate in dialogues, on the other hand, the politicians may have already made up their mind regarding the closures and the citizens are in turn more likely to adopt confrontational tactics such as protests (see page 32). As a result, politicians in these municipalities may be more likely to close down schools. As I do not include a control for political openness in my analyses, the effect of the lobbying activities on the closure decisions may be overestimated and the effects of the protests may be underestimated.

I do not include a control for political openness in the essays because it was difficult to operationalize in a reliable way. There are no clear institutional differences between municipalities in terms of political openness in the same way as there are differences in political institutions between countries (cf. Kitschelt, 1986). Most of the municipalities organized some form of meeting with the directly affected parents and all municipalities received letters from activists. It is possible that there were informal differences in how the politicians responded to the arguments and suggestions from the activists at the meetings and in e-mails, but this would require a separate empirical analysis. And even if I had conducted such an analysis, it would be difficult to interpret the results as it is impossible to know whether the politicians influenced the advocacy groups or whether the opposite was true. For example,

¹⁶A trend of declining students in the past implies a lower number of parents to mobilize in the present. Such trends could also create a perception among the remaining parents that protesting and/or lobbying politicians is not worth the effort.

the advocacy groups could influence political openness by insulting the politicians.

I refrain from discussing public opinion here because I did not encounter any municipal opinion surveys regarding the school closures.

Data structure

To give the reader an idea of how the dataset is structured in Essays I and II, table 1.3 presents an example from Uppsala municipality.¹⁷

Table 1.3. *How the dataset is structured in Essay II: the example of Uppsala*

School	Proposal (year)	Closure decision (year)	Policy-relevant information	Petition	Demonstration	Education	Pedersen index
Täljstensskolan	1 (2004)	1 (2004)	1	0	0	.440	1.18
Gläntan skola	1 (2004)	1 (2004)	1	0	0	.614	1.39
Treklängen skola	1 (2004)	0	0	1	1	.292	.84
Länna skola	1 (2004)	0	0	0	0	.372	1.66
Bäcklösaskolan	1 (2007)	1 (2009)	1	1	1	.211	.64
Brantingsskolan (LM)	1 (2007)	1 (2007)	0	0	0	.317	1.02
Brantingsskolan (H)	1 (2009)	0	1	0	1	.317	1.02
Gottсандaskolan	1 (2007)	0	0	1	0	.266	.63
Heidenstamsskolan	1 (2007)	0	0	0	0	.324	.58
Bellmansskolan	1 (2007)	1 (2007)	0	0	1	.324	.59
Solskenets skola	1 (2007)	1 (2007)	0	1	0	.170	.55
Flogtaskolan	1 (2007)	0	1	1	0	.494	1.18
Lyckeboaskolan	1 (2007)	1 (2007)	1	0	0	.248	1.05
Johannesbäcksskolan	1 (2007)	1 (2007)	0	0	0	.317	1.02
Kvarngårdsskolan	1 (2007)	0	1	0	1	.351	.90
Järlåsskolan	1 (2007)	0	0	1	0	.209	.92
Länna skola	1 (2007)	0	1	0	1	.366	1.24
Valsätraskolan	1 (2007)	0	1	1	1	.657	1.24
Sverkerskolan	1 (2007)	0	1	1	0	.625	1.24
Jumkilskolan	1 (2007)	0	1	1	0	.294	.91

Notes: ‘Proposal’ indicates whether or not there was a proposal on full or partial school closure. ‘Closure’ indicates whether or not the proposal led to decisions on school closures before the following election (that were implemented). ‘Policy-relevant information’ indicates whether or not an advocacy group provided at least one type of information to the politicians: alternative proposals that could save costs, information on economic consequences or information on capacity utilization. ‘Petition’ indicates whether or not at least one group presented a petition regarding the closure. ‘Demonstration’ indicates whether or not there were any demonstrations or school strikes against the closure. ‘Education’ refers to the proportion of parents with at least one year of higher education in the polling district where the school was located. ‘Pedersen index’ captures the proportion of swing voters in the district divided by the mean proportion of swing voters in the municipality.

The units of analysis in Essays I and II consist of proposals on full or partial school closures that were presented during the legislative term of 2002–2006

¹⁷In Essay I, I use multi level models and the closure proposals from Uppsala are therefore grouped (nested) by municipality and electoral term: Uppsala 2002–2006 and Uppsala 2006–2010. This implies that the schools Täljstensskolan, Gläntan, Treklängen and Länna are in their own group, see Essay I for more information.

or 2006–2010.¹⁸ I focus on the earliest possible proposals regarding a school in the legislative term (however, usually only one proposal is presented per school and electoral term). Because Essays I and II focus on the proposals and not on the schools, a few schools that were threatened both during the 2002–2006 term and the 2006–2010 legislative term are included two times in the dataset (for example Länna school in table 1.3).¹⁹ Decisions covered in my dataset are those that took place before the following election. Hence, the outcome of each closure proposal is only covered to the end of the legislative term. If there were several decisions, I focus on the last decision regarding the school in the legislative term. In the analysis, I compare the differences between the schools that were not closed down and those that were closed down. More specifically, I focus on the relationship between the closure decisions, on the one hand, and the advocacy group activities organized against the closure and the socioeconomic characteristics of the polling districts where the schools are located (and previous election results), on the other hand.

The advocacy group activities covered in my dataset are those that took place between the time the proposal was presented and the time the school was closed down (if it was not closed down I only include the activities that took place before the end of the electoral term). The socioeconomic characteristics of the polling districts are in turn observed when the closure proposal was presented. Seven binary variables that indicate which year the first closure proposal was presented are included in the regressions to control for time-specific effects. Time-specific effects in this case are the effects of the point of time when the closure proposal was presented on the likelihood of the school being closed down.

The advantage of my data structure is that the dataset focuses on whether or not the advocacy groups achieved their goals (whether the closure proposals were implemented or not). This makes sense given that the thesis focuses on the political influence of advocacy groups. It is also relatively easy to build the dataset and analyze the results. The alternative would be to use time series data and analyze the schools or the advocacy group activities at various points of time. One could, for example, use survival analysis and analyze how school closures are delayed as a result of various types of advocacy group activities at various points of time. This would provide a more detailed picture of the

¹⁸In the analysis it is assumed that the units of analysis (the closure proposals and the advocacy group activities) do not affect each other. This is not the case in reality. The closure of one school could affect the probability that another school is closed and the advocacy groups protecting the schools may cooperate with each other. This could affect the precision of my estimates. In other words, the number of observations may appear to be bigger than they are and my standard errors may appear to be smaller. This is a problem I share with a lot of previous studies in the social sciences.

¹⁹A few schools, such as Brantingsskolan, are also included twice in the dataset during the same legislative term because the proposals affected different parts of the school. In the case of Brantingsskolan, half of the school was closed down in 2007 and the municipality presented proposals to close the rest of the school in 2009 (and not earlier).

groups and their possible influence. However, this would also create more complexity and I did not have exact dates for when some of the decisions and advocacy group activities took place.

1.5 Summary of Essays – Contributions and Implications

Essay I demonstrates that the type of voter mobilized by protest activities plays a role in determining whether advocacy groups are able to influence political decisions. Two hypotheses are tested. The first hypothesis predicts that protests in districts with numerous swing voters are more likely to achieve their goals. The second hypothesis predicts that protests in districts with numerous core voters are more likely to achieve their goals. In line with the swing hypothesis, the results show that the incumbent are less likely to implement closures after protests in volatile polling districts. The core hypothesis is only partly supported. Ruling coalitions including the Center Party are less likely to implement closures in districts with numerous Center Party supporters. However, on the basis of the results, it is difficult to know whether incumbents are also more likely to listen to protests in these districts.

The study contributes to social movement literature, interest group literature and political party literature in three ways. First, it fills a theoretical gap in the literature on advocacy groups by considering ‘new’ electoral mechanisms from the political party literature that may condition the political influence of advocacy groups. Theoretical perspectives focusing on swing voters and core voters have rarely been applied to explain political responsiveness to advocacy groups. Second, it contributes to the political party literature by suggesting that protest activities could influence the relationship between political parties and voters. In making decisions, political parties require information about how unpredictable constituencies stand on different issues and the salience of the issues. The essay suggests that advocacy groups can provide parties with such information by mobilizing demonstrations and petitions. Third, it questions the argument of welfare state scholars that client interests are weak in countries with strong labor movements. The protests against the school closures were primarily mobilized by ad-hoc client groups, such as parental networks, and the results indicate that these groups could be politically important.

Essay II demonstrates how informal SMOs use policy-relevant information to influence politicians on the local level in Sweden. Policy-relevant information is often regarded as the main currency for interest group influence. However, this argument has mainly been empirically tested in the case of highly professional and permanent groups. A hypothesis is tested: policy-relevant information from SMOs should decrease the probability that proposals will result in school closures. In line with the hypothesis, the results show that SMOs that provide information on unintended economic consequences or al-

ternative proposals that could save costs are more likely to keep their school. In contrast, petitions signed by a large number of citizens have no statistically significant effects on school closures.

The study contributes to social movement literature and interest group literature in two ways. First, it fills an empirical gap in the literature by analyzing to what extent the provision of policy-relevant information to decision-makers (informational lobbying) plays a role in the political impact of informal SMOs. Categorical distinctions between SMOs and other advocacy groups often rest on the assumption that SMOs primarily use non-institutionalized means of political actions, such as protest actions. However, the use of informational lobbying tactics by informal and loosely organized SMOs in Swedish local politics and the political impact of their lobbying activities suggests that these groups are not so different from professionalized interest organizations. Second, it makes a theoretical contribution by suggesting that unique features of local politics, in the form of part-time politicians and a shorter distance between citizens and politicians, may make it easier for loosely organized groups to influence political decisions.

Essay III builds on the second essay and analyzes which informal SMOs, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, are more likely to provide policy-relevant information to decision-makers and which SMOs are more likely to use protest tactics, such as petitions and demonstrations. Previous studies that try to explain the use of informational lobbying tactics among advocacy groups have primarily focused on professionalized organizations and on the role of organizational resources, such as paid staff and financial resources. It is therefore unclear why informal SMOs are able to use such tactics (see Essay II). A hypothesis is tested: informal SMOs mobilizing high-income activists and/or activists with analytical and civic skills are more likely to use informational lobbying tactics. In line with the hypothesis, the results show that SMOs in high-income districts and in districts with a large proportion of parents with white-collar jobs are more likely to provide policy-relevant information to politicians. The differences between the districts when it comes to the use of protest tactics, in contrast, are not statistically significant.

The study contributes to social movement literature and interest group literature in two ways. First, it explains the variation in the use of informational lobbying tactics among informal and loosely organized advocacy groups. It demonstrates that activist resources can explain the provision of policy-relevant information among these types of groups. Second, it furthers our understanding of which SMOs, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, are able to influence the policy process. Previous research on advocacy groups has not paid enough attention to whether influential groups are representative of the general population. My results demonstrate that informal SMOs that mobilize high-income activists are more likely to provide decision-makers with policy-relevant information. These groups have therefore better chances at influencing political decisions than less resourceful groups that do not provide such

information, such as immigrants. This is problematic given normative ideals of equal access to decision-making for all members of society.

General contributions

I identified three shortcomings in interest group literature and in social movement research in the beginning of the Introductory Essay. I will now discuss how I deal with these three shortcomings.

First, it was not clear how advocacy groups affect public policy. The thesis met this shortcoming by bridging the advocacy group literature and the political party literature. By highlighting the decision-maker motives behind advocacy group influence, the thesis increases our understanding of why politicians are affected by advocacy group activities and under which circumstances they are affected (Introductory Essay and Essay II). Protest activities primarily influence political decisions by providing electoral information to vote seekers (politicians that want to maximize their electoral support). The effect of protest activities on vote-seeking decision-makers is also affected by contextual factors. Advocacy groups are most likely to affect politicians through vote-seeking motives when electoral competitiveness is high and/or when a large percentage of the public care about the issue. Lobbying activities, in contrast, primarily influence political decisions by providing policy-relevant information to policy seekers (politicians that want to maximize their chances of obtaining their policy goals). Advocacy groups are most likely to affect politicians through policy-seeking motives when electoral competitiveness is low, when the issues are highly technical and complex and/or when the public is relatively indifferent about the issue. The empirical results from my studies are in line with the theoretical expectations and show that advocacy groups are more likely to achieve their goals if their activities provide politicians with electoral information (Essay I) or policy-relevant information (Essay II). This suggests that advocacy group scholars could get more consistent results regarding the influence of advocacy groups if they follow my advice and formulate hypotheses based on political motives to listen to advocacy groups.

By analyzing decision-maker motives, one can also identify new mechanisms through which protest activities can influence politicians. The thesis highlighted the importance of the type of voter mobilized by the advocacy groups (swing voters, core voters) when explaining the political impact of demonstrations and petitions (Essay I). Politicians governed by their interest in re-election should not only care about the number of voters that are protesting but also which type of voters are being mobilized. The empirical results presented in Essay I demonstrated the explanatory value of this argument.

Second, it was unclear to what extent lobbying tactics play a role in the political impact of informal and loosely organized groups. The thesis dealt with this shortcoming by bridging the interest group literature and the social movement literature. My empirical results demonstrated that in-

formational lobbying tactics used by professionalized advocacy organizations (providing policy-relevant information to decision-makers) also are used by informal SMOs and that these actions may be politically important (Essay II). The thesis also explained why informal SMOs are able to use such tactics (Essay III). By mobilizing activist resources such as money and civic and analytical skills, informal SMOs can compensate for their lack of organizational resources.

Third, more empirical research was needed on whether advocacy groups mobilizing socioeconomically advantaged citizens are more likely to affect decisions. The thesis dealt with this shortcoming by analyzing the socioeconomic characteristics of the informal SMOs that provide policy-relevant information to politicians regarding school closures. My empirical results demonstrated that informal SMOs mobilizing high-income activists and activists with white-collar jobs are more likely to do so (Essay III). There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that these groups are more influential than others. By providing policy-relevant information, these groups could change the beliefs held by politicians about the relationship between political proposals and their consequences and hence could change their preferences for policies. In line with this reasoning, the results presented in Essay II suggest that informal SMOs that provide policy-relevant information to politicians are more likely to stop school closures. Hence, I presented a way of studying political inequalities in the advocacy group system by combining studies analyzing the determinants of advocacy group activities (what resources they require) with studies analyzing the political influence of the activities.

A new side of Sweden?

In the scholarly debate about welfare state retrenchment and advocacy groups, it is often argued that class-based organizations (unions and business organizations) are the only central actors in Swedish welfare politics (e.g. Scarbrough, 2000; Anderson, 2001). In contrast, this thesis paints a more pluralist picture of the Swedish advocacy group system that is more consistent with that of other industrialized countries. At least when it comes to the case studied: welfare services in Swedish local governments.

Besides bargaining with unions, the political actors studied in the thesis are confronted by local client groups. The results from Essay I, Essay II and from Taghizadeh and Lindbom (2014) indicate that client networks and client organizations may be politically important in Swedish welfare services such as primary schools and hospitals. The results are surprising, as it has been argued that client interests are weak in corporatist countries with strong labor movements because they have been ‘crowded out’ of the policy process by peak-level labor unions (cf. Anderson, 2001). It seems that the traditions and norms of Swedish unions are not in accordance with grassroots protests organized at the local level against welfare retrenchment (cf. Taghizadeh and Lindbom, 2014). Most of the protests against school closures were mobilized

by parent associations and parent networks (see Essay III) and the letters written by teachers were primarily signed by a network of personnel and usually do not mention the local union or are signed by the union (see table 1.2, page 49).

The client groups also seem to have access to decision-making forums that share some similarities with corporatist institutions. Corporatism is often seen as a system of concertation between centralized interest organizations – primarily labor unions and business interests – and the state (cf. Öberg et al., 2011, p. 366) and Sweden is often regarded as one of the most corporatist countries in the world (Siaroff, 1999; Öberg et al., 2011 but see Lindvall and Sebring, 2005). The results from Essay II indicate that Swedish political parties integrate client groups into the policy process, and that they do so to get hold of new policy-relevant information (cf. Christiansen et al., 2010, p. 24). It may be easier for client groups to influence politicians by providing policy-relevant information in Sweden because of Swedish traditions of consensus-based decision-making and bargaining between advocacy groups and political parties. One of the politicians I interviewed argued that she preferred direct communication with advocacy groups (compared to protests):

‘I would say that I was immune to demonstrations and petitions / ... / It is the arguments that are important. / ... / If a person comes with a constructive proposal, I am willing to look at it.’

The politicians often organized citizen dialogues (*medborgardialoger*): forums where the affected parents could share their opinions and proposals regarding the closures. The Swedish corporatist tradition may also affect the tactics used by client groups. Many of the client networks studied in this thesis acted like the pragmatic union leaders that exist in corporatist countries and provided the politicians with policy-relevant information. Letters to politicians were more common than petitions, demonstrations and school strikes (see table 1.1, page 39).

How does my choice of Sweden as a case affect the possibilities of generalizing the main results from the essays to other industrialized countries? As I focus on a country with a proportional electoral system where swing voters may be less important, we would expect even stronger effects if we tested the swing hypothesis in Essay I on other countries (see Essay I, page 82). This conclusion is reinforced by the possibility that politicians may be less likely to listen to protesters as a result of the political culture in Sweden. The main results from Essays II and III regarding the use of informational lobbying tactics among loosely organized advocacy groups also seem to be generalizable to other countries. In line with my results, case studies on school closures in the UK (Bondi, 1987) and in Canada (Basu, 2007) have shown that parent networks write researched reports on school closures and that groups mobilizing parents with professional jobs are more likely to use such tactics (and

less likely to be affected by school closures). However, it is hard to argue that Sweden is a least-likely case in relation to the hypothesis tested in Essay II, as the corporatist tradition and the consensus culture in Sweden could increase the likelihood that SMOs provide politicians with policy-relevant information and that they are able to get access to decision-makers and influence public policy. Furthermore, it might be easier to influence politicians at the local level in Sweden because most of them are part-time politicians.

Implications for activists, decision-makers and for political equality

The empirical results presented in the essays have important implications for activists interested in policy change. Activities such as demonstrations, strikes and petitions may only influence decision-makers under certain circumstances (if the activists consist of swing voters, if they are able to mobilize a large share of the electorate). The use of lobbying tactics (i.e. exchanging information with politicians through meetings, calls or letters) may increase the likelihood that the activists will be able to reach their goals. These tactics do not carry the same reputational costs as protest actions. Furthermore, lobbying tactics enable advocacy groups to transfer policy-relevant information to politicians, and not only electorally relevant information (cf. Beyers, 2004, p. 213–216). Activists interested in policy change should therefore focus on lobbying tactics or, if possible, combine protest tactics with lobbying tactics.

The results also have implications for decision-makers and for the public debate about political equality. Taken together, the results from the three essays indicate that it may be easier for socioeconomically advantaged groups to influence public policy compared to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Swedish local politics are, at least partly, based on a type of technocratic political language that creates shortcuts for resourceful citizens to influence political proposals, while excluding less resourceful citizens who, as a result of their lower education levels or short time in Sweden, may not have the necessary civic, analytical and/or language skills (cf. Essay III; Taghizadeh, 2015). It might also be difficult for these groups to influence local politics through protests because they might not be seen as swing voters (they may be seen as loyal voters to left parties). When politicians make decisions that affect citizens directly, it is of course important that they listen to the experiences and arguments expressed by the citizens who contact them. However, it might also be a good idea for the politicians to approach less resourceful citizens who do not lobby them and also approach less important voter groups, which ultimately could lead to democratically more equitable processes. It could also lead to better political decisions as more perspectives and opinions would be taken into account and more political proposals scrutinized.

Ideas for future research

This thesis has identified four important areas for future research.

First, it is clear that more studies are needed on how loosely organized groups can influence policy seekers. Those few that have examined the information provided by informal SMOs, for example my own (Essay II), demonstrate that the provision of policy-relevant information can persuade decision-makers to change public policy. However, more studies are needed on the arguments, claims and facts presented by activists in protest and lobbying activities. To also address the information provided by activists, future studies on informal SMOs could follow my example and include letters in their analyses. Meetings and letters enable SMOs to transfer complex policy-relevant information to policy-makers, which could change their beliefs about the relationship between political proposals and their consequences (cf. Essay II). Prior studies that are only based on media reports might hence have missed politically important activities.

Second, studies are needed on how advocacy groups can influence decision-makers governed by other motives than policy-seeking or vote-seeking. For example, decision-makers could listen to protesters because they feel it is their duty to act as representatives and defend their electorate. Two of the politicians I interviewed saw themselves as representatives of certain geographical or electoral interests in the municipality and therefore felt an obligation to listen more to some parent groups. Decision-makers may also listen more to advocacy groups who have sympathizers among the ruling parties and that may threaten party or coalition unity. A politician I interviewed argued that a school was saved to avoid a dispute in the ruling coalition.

Third, more studies are needed on how different types of bureaucrats condition advocacy group influence. Political proposals can be formulated by public officials guided by their professionalism or by public officials that anticipate the reactions of the politicians and primarily strive to realize their preferences in their work. It is likely that professional bureaucrats are sensitive to lobbying tactics involving policy-relevant information while anticipatory bureaucrats may be more sensitive to protest tactics. However, these hypotheses need to be tested in empirical studies.

Finally, an important avenue for future research is the relationship between blame avoidance and advocacy group influence. Previous studies may have underestimated the political influence of advocacy groups because they do not take into account blame-avoidance strategies. If politicians expect protests from certain groups, they may adjust their proposals before the protesters act. From the perspective of blame avoidance, popular protest against closures that leads to the withdrawal of reform proposals is therefore only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to advocacy group influence (cf. Lindbom, 2007). One way to analyze blame-avoidance strategies is to study how politicians avoid cost-effective decisions that would result in protests. For example, in the case of school closures, one could show that there are municipalities that have not closed down schools despite facing economic difficulties and high costs for school premises. One could also interview politicians in these municipalities

and ask them why they have not implemented any closures to provide evidence on the causal mechanism.

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