

Anthony J. Nownes\* and Nurgul R. Aitalieva  
**The political activities of American  
corporate leaders**

**Abstract:** What is the nature and extent of corporate leader involvement in American national politics? The results of a mail survey of nearly 100 such individuals show that leaders are quite active, devoting an average of nearly 1 hour per day to national political activity. We also show that corporate leaders engage in a wide range of advocacy activities. Monetary activities loom particularly large in the political lives of American corporate leaders, as large numbers are approached by members of Congress for contributions, and many who are approached answer the call. In addition, we find that corporate leaders, unlike advocacy professionals, do a great deal of their advocacy work in private; for the most part they eschew public activities such as testifying before congressional committees. Speaking to the question of which leaders are most politically active, our data evince a strong relationship between firm political activity and firm leader political activity. In sum, politically active firms have politically active leaders. We thus contribute to the ongoing academic discussion of corporate political activity by showing that the CEO's office is an additional locus of political power within business firms, and that CEO political activity is instrumental rather than consumptive in nature.

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## 1 Introduction

Business firms dominate the American interest group universe.<sup>1</sup> Despite substantial research on corporate lobbying, however, we know little about how individual market actors participate in politics, and to what extent corporate leaders have entered the political arena. Though we might expect them to delegate their work to hired lobbyists, recent events suggest that business executives are far from marginal players in national politics. For example, a number of CEOs were

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<sup>1</sup> Schumaker and Getter (1983); Abney and Lauth (1985); Lowery and Gray (1998); Baumgartner and Leech (2001).

personally involved in the battle over President Obama's health care reform package.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when Congress and the president crafted a massive stimulus package during President Obama's first term, CEOs descended upon Washington, D.C. trying to get a piece of the action. And not surprisingly, auto executives pressed hard for President Obama's "bailout" of the auto industry.<sup>3</sup> Stories like these notwithstanding, we know very little about corporate leaders' involvement in national politics. While journalists and citizens alike appear to assume that corporate leaders are politically active, empirical studies of business leader political activity are lacking. This paper presents the results of an original survey of close to 100 American corporate leaders. While studies of business in politics are now common, few studies speak to the role of the men and women who lead and manage America's corporate institutions. Our results help us draw a broad portrait of corporate leaders' participation in American national politics.

## 2 Business and corporate leaders as actors in American politics

The Washington, D.C. interest group universe is very diverse. Diversity notwithstanding, business organizations dominate interest representation in the nation's capital. As Robert Salisbury has noted, "...it is institutions, especially those of business, which clearly dominate" interest representation in Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 Business political activity

Given this dominance, it is not surprising that scholars have sought to understand the precise nature and extent of business political activity in America. One particularly extensive strand of research asks: What factors affect whether or not a business firm is politically active? This literature is vast, and it has produced several answers. First, firm size matters, as large businesses tend to be more politically active than small businesses.<sup>5</sup> Second, policy competition – that is, the extent to which a firm's opponents push for policies contrary to its interests – tends to increase levels of firm

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<sup>2</sup> Terhune and Epstein (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Berr (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Salisbury (1984: p. 74). See also Baumgartner and Leech (2001); Baumgartner et al. (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Hillman, Keim, and Schuler (2004); Drope and Hansen (2006); Kim (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Hansen and Mitchell (2000, 2001).

political activity.<sup>6</sup> Third, firms in regulated industries are more politically active than firms in non-regulated industries.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, there is a positive association between government sales and level of firm political activity.<sup>8</sup> Fifth, as Mancur Olson theorized, concentration in an industry spurs firm political activity.<sup>9</sup> Sixth, levels of prior political activity affect levels of current political activity, as the former lowers the cost of the latter.<sup>10</sup> Seventh, there is a positive association between the level of international competition and a firm's level of political activity, as domestic companies attempt to influence policies that affect foreign competitors' ability to operate in the US.<sup>11</sup> Eighth, diverse firms are more politically active than non-diverse firms, as more diversity means exposure to more issues.<sup>12</sup> Finally, a sympathetic government may lead to more firm political activity. Generally speaking, more Republicans in office means more firm political activity, *ceteris paribus*.<sup>13</sup>

As for what corporate political activity actually looks like, the literature points to several general conclusions, including the following: (1) Businesses engage politically by hiring lobbyists (both in-house and contract) to petition government decision-makers, and by contributing money to government officials through their political action committees (PACs);<sup>14</sup> (2) Business lobbyists, like non-business lobbyists, target all three branches of government, but focus more upon the legislature than the other two branches;<sup>15</sup> (3) Some techniques, including testifying before congressional committees and meeting personally with members of Congress, are used by virtually all business lobbyists (and non-business lobbyists), while others, including engaging in litigation, and mounting protests, are used by relatively few business lobbyists;<sup>16</sup> (4) Despite a 50-year trend toward professionalization, business lobbyists (again, like other types of lobbyists) still utilize informal lobbying techniques such as meeting with government decision-makers over drinks or dinner;<sup>17</sup> (5) Despite the conventional wisdom that

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7 Grier, Munger, and Roberts (1991); Mitchell, Hansen, and Jepsen (1997); Hansen and Mitchell (2001); Kim (2008).

8 Mitchell, Hansen, and Jepsen (1997); Tripathi (2000); Hart (2001); Hillman, Keim, and Schuler (2004).

9 Olson (1965). See also Masters and Keim (1985); Grier, Munger, and Roberts (1991); but see Hansen, Mitchell, and Drope (2005).

10 Hart (2001).

11 Grier, Munger, and Roberts (1991); Schuler (1996).

12 Kim (2008).

13 Hersch and McDougall (2000); Tripathi (2000).

14 Wilson (1990).

15 Kersh (2002).

16 Schlozman and Tierney (1983); Kersh (2002).

17 Kersh (2002).

“grassroots” lobbying techniques are the purview of mass-based organizations, business firms also regularly utilize these techniques;<sup>18</sup> (6) Business firms and their lobbyists regularly enter into coalitions with other organizations (business and non-business);<sup>19</sup> (7) Many business firms engage in political activity through trade associations.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Individual political activity

While the determinants of firm (and industry) political activity have been subject to extensive research, the determinants of firm *leader* political activity have not. The determinants of individual political activity among the citizenry at large, however, have received considerable research attention. Most general theories of individual political participation proceed from a “rational economic person” assumption, and thus focus upon costs and benefits. Numerous studies show that affluence, more education, and being white are all positively associated with level of political activity.<sup>21</sup> All three of these factors drive down the costs of political activity, and the first two increase knowledge of the benefits of political activity. As for what types of benefits can induce political participation, scholars have identified three – material, solidary, and expressive (or purposive). A substantial body of literature shows that direct tangible rewards, including everything from magazines and t-shirts and coffee mugs to policy changes that directly affect one’s welfare, can induce political activity.<sup>22</sup> Other studies show that social benefits – benefits that flow from socializing with like-minded people – can help induce political activity.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, social pressure, which can increase the costs of non-participation, also encourages political activity.<sup>24</sup> Finally, expressive benefits – benefits that flow from the good feeling a person gets from doing his/her share or contributing to a good cause – also encourage many people to participate.<sup>25</sup>

The literature on the determinants of individual political participation is extensive, but it is unclear how much this literature has to tell us about participation among elites in general and business leaders in particular. We say this

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**18** Kollman (1998).

**19** Smith (2000).

**20** Wilson (1990).

**21** Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012).

**22** King and Walker (1992); McChesney (1997); Francia et al. (2003).

**23** Clawson, Neustadt, and Weller (1998); Francia et al. (2003); Skocpol (2003).

**24** Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008); Panagopoulos (2010); Rolfe (2012).

**25** Hildreth (1994); Whiteley and Seyd (2002).

because several of the insights gleaned from this literature simply are not helpful in explaining elite political behavior. For example, studies showing that more education, affluence, and being white increase participation are not helpful, because almost all business leaders are well-educated, well-off, and white (and also male). Thus, while these studies help explain differences in participation levels between business leaders and ordinary citizens, they are not helpful in explaining differences in participation levels among business leaders. Similarly, studies that emphasize the costs of political participation seem unhelpful because business leaders seem well-equipped to absorb any and all costs (including information and monetary costs) of political participation. The question of how social and purposive benefits affect business leader behavior remains an open one, and one we hope to address.

In sum, we have learned a great deal about corporate political activity in the last two decades. Yet while we know that large numbers of corporate leaders contribute money to candidates,<sup>26</sup> we know little else about business leader involvement in national politics. Specifically, we know very little about what business leaders do in the political arena, and why they do it. Our goal here is not an overly ambitious one. We do not set out to formulate a theory of corporate leader political activity. Neither do we pretend that our empirical results are definitive or comprehensive. In what follows, we take a first cut at building a foundation of substantive empirical knowledge about corporate leader political activity. It is our hope that further research will build on this foundation, and that this foundational knowledge may lead to inductive theory-building.

### 3 Data

Our data comes from a survey of 92 corporate leaders in the US, conducted between late 2011 and early 2012. We sent surveys to a random sample of 1000 corporate leaders listed in the volume, *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs*.<sup>27</sup> Each entry in the *Directory* contains information about an individual business firm, including its annual revenue, industry, leadership, legislative interests, and size. We sent our survey to the highest ranking person listed in each company's entry (usually the CEO). Of the 1000 surveys we sent, 23 were eventually returned as undeliverable, and 92 were returned completed. Thus, our response rate was 9.2%. This is an admittedly low response rate, but we believe

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon, Hafer, and Landa (2007); Ozer (2010).

<sup>27</sup> *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs 2011*.

that our sample is large enough for us to draw some general conclusions. Sixty-nine of our respondents are either CEOs or presidents, and 19 are chairwomen/men of the board. Four respondents removed the identifying number on their surveys, so we are unsure of what company they run and what role they play at that company. Table 1 displays basic information about the companies in our sample and shows that the companies our respondents lead are a disparate lot; some are small, some are very large, and many are in between. But, the figures in Table 1 show that our survey sample skews toward larger companies, indeed

**Table 1** Characteristics of sample leaders' firms (and characteristics of firms in an additional random sample).

Characteristic	Our survey sample	Additional random sample
Annual revenue <sup>1</sup>		
Median	\$1,180,000,000	\$1,205,000,000
Mean	\$2,709,000,000	\$2,890,000,000
Range <sup>1</sup>		
\$ Below \$1,000,000	1.4%	0%
\$1,000,001–\$50,000,000	10.8%	13%
\$50,000,001–\$200,000,000	9.5%	15%
\$200,000,001–\$1,000,000,000	20.3%	19%
\$1,000,000,001–\$2,000,000,000	28.4%	14%
\$2,000,000,001–\$3,000,000,000	9.5%	9%
\$3,000,000,001–\$4,000,000,000	2.7%	3%
\$4,000,000,001–\$5,000,000,000	8.1%	7%
Over \$5,000,000,000	9.5%	20%
Number of employees		
Median	3000	3300
Mean	10,631	11,041
Range		
1–100	13.9%	11%
101–1000	12.7%	20%
1001–5000	38.0%	28%
5001–10,000	10.1%	15%
10,001–20,000	10.1%	10%
20,001–50,000	10.1%	10%
50,001–100,000	3.8%	5%
100,001–130,000	1.3%	1%
N	92	100
(Ns may vary among individual items)		

Sources: Authors' data, and *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs*. Note: <sup>1</sup>Figures are rounded. The data necessary to replicate this study are available via the website <http://web.utk.edu/~anownes/>.

because the *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs* itself skews toward larger companies. We include our survey instrument in Appendix A.<sup>28</sup>

Though we introduced randomness into our sample selection (by choosing firms randomly from the *Directory*), we acknowledge that our survey sample essentially is a convenience sample. We say this because we relied solely on the *Directory*, which lists only a fraction of business firms active in the US. However, we resorted to a convenience sample for two reasons. First, a convenience sample allowed us to (relatively) quickly, easily, and inexpensively collect data on CEO political activity.<sup>29</sup> In short, we viewed a convenience sample as an efficient way to get a lot of data. Second, after some contemplation, we concluded that a true random sample would be impossible. There is no master population list of business firms in the US, and even if there was it would be massive and unwieldy. In addition, gathering supplemental data (for example, the leadership of each firm, its revenue, and its size) on each sample firm in such a master list would be difficult and time-consuming (though theoretically possible). All of this notwithstanding, we acknowledge that our reliance upon a convenience sample lessens our results' external validity. In the end, what this means is that our findings must be interpreted with some caution. Our convenience sample, despite our efforts to maximize the ability to generalize, does not allow generalization from our results to the entire population of business firms in the US with a high degree of certainty. We do not, however, believe that our reliance upon a convenience sample renders our results unusable. Convenience samples generally are considered useful for exploratory studies, especially those that generate questions for future research.<sup>30</sup> This study is exploratory, and our major goal here is to provide basic substantive information about business leader political activity.

Many methodologists contend that data obtained through convenience sampling should not be subject to statistical analysis, as statistical analyses assume probability samples. However, in what follows we do subject our data to statistical analyses. The population to which we generalize, however, is the population of leaders of firms listed in the *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs*. To ensure that even such limited generalization was possible, we sought to determine how our sample compared to the population of firms in the *Directory*. To do this, we conducted a test. First, we numbered each firm listed in the *Directory*. Second, we used a random number generator (in Microsoft Excel) to select 100

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<sup>28</sup> Before sending out our survey, we pre-tested it with five corporate executives. They provided feedback, and we made adjustments to several questions based on this feedback.

<sup>29</sup> This said, we still spent approximately \$2000 on supplies, copying, and mailing for our survey. Using a true random sample would have increased our costs substantially.

<sup>30</sup> Gravetter and Forzano (2012: pp. 151–152); Johnson and Reynolds (2012: p. 253).

firms at random from the *Directory* (none of the 100 selected were part of the sample under study). Third, we gathered information on these 100 firms – specifically, we determined each firm’s annual revenue and each firm’s number of employees. From here, we conducted a series of difference of means tests to see how our survey sample compared to this additional random sample. All our tests indicated that our survey sample and this additional sample come from the same population.<sup>31</sup> The second column of numbers in Table 1 shows the characteristics of firms in this “test” sample. This procedure convinces us that though our sample is not perfect, it at least reflects the population of groups in the *Directory*. It also convinces us that using statistical analyses is reasonable.

Before moving on to our findings, we wish to offer a general caveat. Leaders in our sample come from widely disparate companies. Most obviously, the sample contains leaders of very small companies *and* truly massive firms. Can we compare, as they say, “apples and oranges?” Our answer, in short, is “Yes.” As we point out above, though firm political activity has received a great deal of scholarly attention, firm *leader* political activity has not. At the outset of this project, we decided not to exclude businesses on the basis of size, as we believe that before we can either build a comprehensive theory of firm leader political involvement or drill deeper into the nature and extent and determinants of leader political activity, we need basic, baseline information on what leaders actually do. Moreover, whether or not size, for example, affects levels of activity, is an empirical question, and one that we intend to address. In the end, we are the first to acknowledge that our sample is not perfect, and thus our results are far from unassailable.

## 4 What corporate leaders do

We began our survey with a few general items designed to produce straightforward substantive information about the political activities of corporate leaders. Table 2 presents the results of these initial inquiries. First, we asked each respondent if he/she had traveled to Washington, D.C. in the past year to meet with a government decision-maker (see survey item #4). Almost half (48.9%) of our respondents report having done this, and among those who did, the average number of trips in the past 12 months was 3.3. Second, we asked each respondent how many hours per day he/she spent on national political activity, broadly defined (see survey item #5). Seventy-nine percent of our respondents (70 of 89) reported

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<sup>31</sup> The results of these tests are available from the authors.



**Table 2** Summary statistics on corporate leader involvement in politics.

Travel to D.C.	
% who had traveled to Washington, D.C. within past year	48.9
Number of trips to D.C. in past year, among those who had been to D.C. (mean)	3.3
Number of trips to D.C. in past year (range)	
0	51.1%
1	8.9%
2	18.9%
3	4.4%
4	6.7%
5 or more	10%
Time spent on national politics	
Number of hours per day spent on national politics (median)	1.0
Number of hours per day spent on national politics (mean)	0.9
Number of hours per day spent on national politics (range)	
0	21.3%
0.1–0.5	27.0%
0.51–1.0	33.7%
1.1–5.0	16.9%
5.1 or more	1.1%
% who serve on trade association board	58.7
% who belong to association of business leaders	53.3
% who made disclosable federal candidate, PAC, or party contribution(s)	63.5
Disclosable \$ contributed to federal candidates, PACs, and parties 2011–2012 (mean) (among those who contributed)	\$25,215
% who describe role as follows	
“I do not address national political issues as part of my job.”	21.7
“I address national political issues to some extent as part of my job, but do not play a leadership role in addressing such issues.”	21.7
“I play a leadership role within this company in addressing national political issues.”	46.7
“None of the above statements describes me well.”	9.8

Source: Authors' data. N=92. Ns may vary across survey items.

spending at least some time during the typical day on national politics. The median number of hours per day was 1.0, and the mean was 0.9. Third, we asked respondents if they served on the boards of any trade associations (see survey item #8). Nearly 59% (54 of 92) reported that they do serve on one or more boards. Fourth, we asked our respondents about their membership in associations of business leaders (e.g., the Business Roundtable; see survey item #9). Fifty-three percent (49 of 92) reported that they belong to at least one such association. Fifth, we examined Federal Election Commission (FEC) records to determine how many of our respondents reported making individual financial contributions to candi-

dates, PACs, and/or parties between January 1, 2011, and October 5, 2012 (the date of this writing).<sup>32</sup> We found data on 85% of our respondents, and nearly 64% of these 85 had disclosable federal contributions.<sup>33</sup> The average total contribution amount among those who had contributed was \$25,215. Finally, we asked each respondent to choose one of four descriptions of his/her role in his/her company *vis a vis* national politics (see survey item #3). As Table 2 indicates, 21.7% of our respondents reported that they “do not address national political issues” as part of their job, 21.7% reported that they “address national political issues to some extent” as part of their job, and 46.7% reported “playing a leadership role within” the company in addressing national political issues. About 10% said that none of the statements we provided described them well.

The results suggest some general conclusions. First, there are many forms of business leader political activity. In addition to lobbying (which we discuss momentarily), business leaders contribute money to candidates, parties, and PACs, belong to associations of business leaders that engage in political activity, serve on trade association boards, and travel to Washington. Second, business leaders spend a non-trivial amount of their time on national politics. One hour per day on politics is not an insignificant amount of time. Finally, it appears that almost all business leaders spend *some* time on national politics. Only 15% of our respondents reported spending no time during a typical day on national politics *and* never traveling to Washington in the past year. Within our sample, the group of virtually inactive corporate leaders is very small.

## 4.1 Techniques of influence

We turn next to what corporate leaders do when they engage in political activity. To explore this issue we inquired about our respondents’ use of several influence techniques (see survey item #11) mentioned in previous studies of lobbying activity.<sup>34</sup> Table 3 contains the results of this inquiry. For comparison purposes,

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**32** Specifically, we went to [fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov), and clicked on “Individual contribution search.” This took us to <http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/norindsea.shtml>, where we searched for each of our respondents by name.

**33** This number is lower than the numbers we report in Table 3 on the proportion of our respondents who contributed money to candidates, parties, and PACs. This discrepancy is probably explained by two things. First, some (small) federal contributions do not have to be reported to the FEC, and thus do not show up on its website. Second, respondents may have contributed money to non-federal PACs and party organizations.

**34** For example, Schlozman and Tierney (1983); Walker (1991); Kollman (1998); Nownes and DeAlejandro (2009).

**Table 3** The lobbying activities of corporate leaders.

Activity	% Using	
	Leaders	Lobbyists
1. Engaging in dialogue with other corporate leaders about national political issues	96	NA
2. Monitoring national government activity that may affect the company	93	NA
3. Making financial contributions to candidates for national office	89	58
4. Meeting personally with members of Congress	87	100
5. Meeting personally with congressional staff	80	–
6. Emailing members of Congress or their staff	77	–
7. Making financial contributions to non-company political action committees (PACs)	77	NA
8. Making personal financial contributions to the company's PAC ( <i>If company has a PAC</i> )	75	NA
9. Joining together with other corporate leaders to lobby government	72	NA
10. Making financial contributions to a political party	71	–
11. Meeting with company lobbyists or other company public affairs professionals	70	NA
12. Telephoning members of Congress or their staff	67	–
13. Meeting personally with executive agency personnel (i.e., bureaucrats)	64	100
14. Talking with people from the media or press about national issues	64	98
15. Submitting comments on proposed rules or regulations	61	–
16. Urging employees to contact members of Congress about important issues	60	NA
17. Contacting employees to inform them of the company's position on national issues	59	NA
18. Urging employees to contact executive agency personnel about important issues	34	NA
19. Publicly endorsing candidates for national office	33	22
20. Making speeches on national issues	31	–
21. Working on national electoral campaigns (e.g., for Congress)	26	–
22. Helping to draft regulations, rules, or guidelines	26	–
23. Serving on governmental advisory commissions or boards	22	79
24. Helping to draft legislation	24	–
25. Meeting personally with presidential staff	20	–
26. Writing op-ed pieces on national issues for newspapers	20	–
27. Testifying at congressional hearings	18	100
28. Testifying at executive agency (i.e., bureaucratic) hearings	17	88
29. Urging employees to contact the White House about important issues	15	NA
30. Meeting personally with the President	11	–
31. Emailing the President or presidential staff	8	–
32. Telephoning the President or presidential staff	8	–
33. Taking part in public protests or demonstrations	5	32

Sources: Column 1, Authors' data, N=92. Ns may vary across survey items. Column 2, Kollman (1998), *Outside Lobbying*, p. 35. NA, the survey item is not applicable; –, indicates that the item was not included in the survey.

we include in Table 3 the results of a similar (but less extensive) survey of Washington lobbyists conducted by Ken Kollman for his 1998 book *Outside Lobbying*.<sup>35</sup> The two most commonly used techniques of influence among sample leaders are rather passive: engaging in dialogue with other corporate leaders, and monitoring the national government. Almost all of our respondents reported doing these things. The next most commonly used techniques are making contributions to candidates, meeting personally with members of Congress, meeting personally with congressional staffers, emailing members of Congress or their staff, making financial contributions to non-company PACs, making financial contributions to the company's PAC (if the company has a PAC), joining together with other business leaders to lobby, and making contributions to a political party. As Table 3 shows, a few other techniques are used by a majority of respondents, including meeting personally with bureaucrats, telephoning members of Congress or congressional staffers, and talking with people from the media.

Table 3 points to several general conclusions about firm leader lobbying techniques. First, monetary techniques loom quite large for corporate leaders. Previous studies, including Kollman's, indicate that monetary contributions are a small part of the typical lobbyist's arsenal.<sup>36</sup> But for corporate leaders, making monetary contributions is a very important technique of influence. Indeed, among our respondents, four of the top ten most widely used techniques involve money. This emphasis on monetary contributions may reflect the fact that corporate leaders (unlike say, lobbyists) are by definition only part-time political actors who have more money to give than time. It may also be a function of the fact that corporate leaders are asked quite often for money. Indeed, as we will discuss later, 95% of our respondents report that members of Congress ask them for money either occasionally or often (see survey item #10b). Second, our data indicates that corporate leaders, unlike most lobbyists, do a lot of their lobbying behind proverbial closed doors. Kollman shows that most lobbyists tend to rely heavily upon several "public" lobbying techniques, including testifying at legislative hearings, and testifying at executive agency hearings.<sup>37</sup> These things are done in plain view of many other political actors. Our respondents, however, do a great deal of their lobbying in private – in meetings with government officials, and via private communications such as emails. It is striking that hardly any corporate leaders do two of the things that virtually all Washington lobbyists do – testify before legislative and agency hearings. Third, while journalists highlight a CEO's visit to the White House, corporate leaders clearly focus their

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<sup>35</sup> Kollman (1998).

<sup>36</sup> See also Schlozman and Tierney (1983); Walker (1991); Nownes (2006).

<sup>37</sup> Kollman (1998). See also Schlozman and Tierney (1983) and Heinz et al. (1993).

efforts primarily on Congress (and to a lesser extent the bureaucracy). Finally, the data shows that it is not unusual for corporate leaders to communicate with their employees and the media about political matters. Almost two-thirds of our respondents report talking with people from the media about political issues, and well over half say that they contact employees to inform them of their company's position on national issues. In addition, a majority of respondents report urging their employees to contact executive agency personnel about important issues.

To round out our description of the political activities of corporate leaders, we examine how often they are approached by other political actors for advice or counsel or money. Table 4 shows the results of these analyses. As we note above, 95% of respondents reported being approached frequently or occasionally by a member of Congress (MC) or his/her staff for a monetary contribution. To put this number in perspective, consider that almost as many corporate leaders receive requests from MCs for money as engage in *any* of the influence techniques we ask about. The data show that corporate leaders are valued (albeit not as much) for their advice as well as their money. Sixty-four percent of our respondents reported being approached by a member of Congress or his/her staff for advice occasionally or frequently in the last year (see survey item #10a).<sup>38</sup> Respondents were sought out for advice much less frequently by bureaucrats or the president (see survey items #10c and 10d). The data show that corporate leaders are sought out for advice by leaders of other organizations, however, relatively often (see survey items #10e and #10f).

## 5 The determinants of firm leader activity

Thus far, our focus has been descriptive and substantive. Next we ask: What factors determine the extent to which corporate leaders participate in national politics? We know that leaders vary in their levels of political activity, and now we explore why. Our data contains three measures of firm leader political activity: (1) *Number of hours per day spent on politics*; (2) *Number of trips taken to Washington*

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<sup>38</sup> Recent research suggests that different modes of solicitation/contact may affect individuals' willingness to engage in political activities differently (see especially work coming from the Institution for Social and Policy Studies at Yale, including Arceneaux (2007); Bennion and Nickerson (2011); Arceneaux, Kousser, and Mullin (2012); Shaw et al. (2012). Unfortunately, in crafting our survey, we designed general questions about whether or not MCs asked leaders for money, and whether or not various actors approached leaders for advice; we did not explore the many different ways that MCs might ask leaders for money (e.g., via telephone, email, or in-person), nor did we explore the different modes of communication various political actors might use to ask leaders for advice. These elisions were oversights on our part, as it is reasonable to assume that some forms of solicitation and advice-seeking are more likely to elicit a response than others.

**Table 4** When and what are corporate leaders asked for?

In the last year, how often did each of the following occur?	Never	Frequently	Occasionally
A member of Congress or his/her staff sought your advice on a policy matter	36%	61%	3%
A member of Congress or his/her staff sought a contribution to his/her electoral campaign	4%	36%	59%
The president or presidential staff sought your advice on a policy matter	88%	12%	0%
Washington executive agency personnel sought your advice on a policy matter	67%	33%	0%
Leaders from other companies sought your advice on a policy matter	15%	71%	14%
Leaders from non-business organizations sought your advice on a policy matter	29%	61%	10%

Source: Authors' data. N=89. Ns may vary across survey items.

in past year; and (3) *Disclosed federal contributions during the 2012 election cycle*. We obtained values on the first two measures from our survey, and values on the third measure from Federal Election Commission records.

## 5.1 Hours per day on politics

We begin with a closer look at how much time our respondents spend on politics during the typical work day. To address this issue, we estimate a Heckman selection model in which *Number of hours per day spent on politics* is the dependent variable. We estimate a two-stage model in which the selection equation is specified for whether or not a respondent spends any hours each day on politics, and the outcome equation is specified for how many hours each day the respondent spends on politics given that it is more than 0 hours. We utilize a Heckman selection model because we observe *Number of hours per day spent on politics* only for those who spend more than 0 hours per day on politics. We utilize this procedure to correct for selection bias. We consider the effects of several independent variables. First, there is *CEO*, which is coded 1 for a respondent who is his/her firm's CEO or president, and 0 otherwise.<sup>39</sup> Each respondent who is not a CEO or president is a Chairperson of the Board of Directors. We expect this variable to be negatively associated with the dependent variable, as we believe that CEOs are

<sup>39</sup> We determined the position of each respondent by reviewing each leader's firm's entry in *National Directory of Corporate Public Affairs*.

busier than board chairs (many of whom are retired from upper management), and thus are likely to devote less time to politics. In short, opportunity costs are higher for CEOs than they are for non-CEOs. Second, we include *Career time in legal* (range=0–50, mean=8.18) which is a measure of the percentage of time a respondent has spent during his/her business career in the legal functional area (see survey item #6b). We expect this variable to be positively associated with the dependent variable, as leaders with more legal experience may be more attuned to the importance of law and politics and government than leaders with little or no legal experience. Such leaders may also have lower information costs than leaders without significant legal experience. The general idea that the pattern of business functions that characterizes a leader's career may influence his/her decision-making goes back to Dearborn and Simon.<sup>40</sup> It is generally stated as follows: "executives are acculturated into the norms of any business function where they have spent a considerable period of time."<sup>41</sup> Third, we include *Government experience*, which is coded 1 for respondents with government experience, and 0 for respondents without government experience (see survey item #15). We expect this variable to be positively associated with the dependent variable, as we follow the literature suggesting that government experience leads to both policy expertise and personal political connections. Again, these things may decrease the costs of political activity.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, the costs of political activity go down with government experience, as investing new time and energy learning about politics is not necessary for the experienced leader. Government experience may also alter benefit calculations, as leaders with government experience may see the benefits of engaging in political activity more clearly than those who do not have such experience. We model the decision whether or not to spend any hours per day on politics solely as a function of *Firm political activity* (range=0–15.89, mean=7.85), which is the natural log of the total amount of money each respondent's firm spent on lobbying in 2011 and 2012 (until October 5, 2012) added to the total amount of money the firm's PAC expended during the 2012 election cycle.<sup>43</sup> We obtained data on lobbying from the US Senate's lobbying disclosure portal, and data on PAC contributions from the FEC's database on federal contributions.<sup>44</sup> We hypothesize that *Firm political activity* will profoundly and positively

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<sup>40</sup> Dearborn and Simon (1958). See also Waller, Huber, and Glick (1995).

<sup>41</sup> Barker and Mueller (2002: p. 786).

<sup>42</sup> Salisbury et al. (1989).

<sup>43</sup> This measure considers money spent on lobbying up until October 5, 2012, the date of this writing.

<sup>44</sup> Specifically, we used the search function here <http://soprweb.senate.gov/index.cfm?event=selectfields> for the lobbying data. We used the search function here [http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/candcmte\\_info.shtml](http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/candcmte_info.shtml) for the PAC contribution data.

affect the probability that a firm leader spends any time on politics as part of his/her job. In short, we believe that firm political activity begets firm leader political activity. We base this hypothesis on the notion that firm leader political activity is investment-oriented rather than consumption-oriented.<sup>45</sup> This means, essentially, that firms and firm leaders engage in political activity because they believe it is good for business. An alternative story views firm political activity as consumptive. According to this view, political activity is something in which individuals within companies engage to express themselves politically. If we find that firm political activity is not associated with the probability that a leader engages politically, we can reasonably conclude that this manifestation of firm leader political activity is not investment-oriented, but rather is consumption-oriented.<sup>46</sup>

The results of this analysis are found in Table 5 and largely conform to our expectations. First, the positive and significant coefficient on *Firm political activity* indicates that as level of firm political activity increases, so does the probability that a firm leader spends more than 0 hours per day on politics. This finding confirms our most important substantive hypothesis. As for the results of the outcome estimation stage, they show that having government experience and having spent a relatively substantial portion of one's career in the legal functional area are positively related to number of hours per day spent on politics. Finally,

**Table 5** Models of firm leader political activity, I: hours per day spent on politics.

	Number of hours/day	Selection model
Career time in legal	0.005 (0.000)*	–
CEO	–0.303 (0.000)*	–
Firm political activity	–	0.002 (0.000)*
Government experience	0.296 (0.000)*	–
Constant	0.914 (0.092)*	0.539 (0.126)*
Uncensored obs.	64	
Censored obs.	18	
Total obs.	82	
Rho	1 (SE=0.000)	
Log-likelihood	–93.6310	
Probability of two equations not being independent of each other	0.000	

*Source:* Authors' data. Standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed test.

<sup>45</sup> See Gordon, Hafer, and Landa (2007).

<sup>46</sup> We found one outlier – a respondent who reported spending 8 hours per day on national political activity, and we removed him from our analysis.



as per our expectations, being CEO is negatively associated with the number of hours each day a leader spends on national political activity.<sup>47</sup>

## 5.2 Number of trips taken to Washington in past year

We turn next to our second measure of firm leader political activity – number of trips taken to Washington in the past year. Again we use a Heckman selection model. We use the same set of independent variables that we utilized in the last model.<sup>48</sup> The results of this analysis appear in Table 6. The model is not particularly helpful in explaining variation in the dependent variable, but it does suggest that firm activity begets leader activity – higher levels of firm political activity are associated with a higher probability of taking more than zero trips per year to Washington. In addition, the coefficient on *Career time in legal* is significant

**Table 6** Models of firm leader political activity, II: trips to Washington.

	Number of trips	Selection model
Career time in legal	0.051 (0.027)*	–
CEO	–0.384 (0.804)	–
Firm political activity	–	0.088 (0.026)**
Government experience	0.468 (0.663)	–
Constant	2.87 (0.981)**	–0.804 (0.258)**
Uncensored obs.	38	
Censored obs.	44	
Total obs.	82	
Rho	–0.128 (SE=0.519)	
Log-likelihood	–123.2153	
Probability of two equations not being independent of each other	0.815	

Source: Authors' data. Standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < 0.10$ , two-tailed test, \*\* $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed test.

<sup>47</sup> We are aware that Heckman models are very sensitive. As such, we estimated another model in which we added two variables representing measures of firm size in the selection stage – *Annual revenue* (logged), and *Number of employees*. The results of this model are very similar to those we report here. The results of this analysis are available from the authors. We would also like to note that for this model and the others reported here, we checked for collinearity between the independent variables, and these tests were negative.

<sup>48</sup> Again, we found an outlier – a respondent who reported traveling to Washington 20 times in the past year. We removed this respondent from the analysis.

at the 0.10 level (two-tailed test), which suggests that more legal experience is associated with more trips to Washington.<sup>49</sup>

### 5.3 Federal contributions during the 2012 election cycle

We turn now to our final measure of firm leader political activity – level of federal contributions. For this analysis we use the dependent variable *Disclosed federal contributions during the 2012 election cycle*, which is the natural log of the total amount of disclosed federal contributions a respondent made during the 2012 election cycle. We utilize the same set of independent variables that we utilized in the last two models, with one addition. Here, we include a variable called *Member request*, which is coded 1 for respondents who report being asked frequently by members of Congress for monetary contributions, and 0 for other respondents. We include this variable in stage one to control for the effects of requests for money, which we hypothesize increase the probability that a respondent contributes money (this general hypothesis goes back to Rosenstone and Hansen,<sup>50</sup> who argue that being asked to participate is strongly associated with participation). The results of this analysis appear in Table 7. The selection model's results show that more firm political activity increases the probability that a leader makes financial contributions to federal candidates, PACs, and/or parties. The selection model also shows that being asked for money increases the probability that a leader contributes. As for the substantive equation, it does not allow us to reach any additional conclusions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Again, we are aware that Heckman models are very sensitive. Thus, again, we ran another model in which we added two variables representing measures of firm size – *Annual revenue* (logged), and *Number of employees*. The results of this model were very similar to those we report here. In addition, we considered the possibility that proximity to Washington might increase the number of trips a leader takes to Washington. To control for this possibility, we created a dummy variable called *Within 100 miles of Washington* (0=firm leader's corporate headquarters are not within 100 miles of Washington, 1=firm leader's corporate headquarters are within 100 miles of Washington). We intended to include this variable in the model along with *Annual revenue* (logged) and *Number of employees*. But we did not do so because only two leader's firms had headquarters within 100 miles of Washington, and neither of these two leaders reported taking any trips to Washington.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenstone and Hansen (1993).

<sup>51</sup> Again, we are aware that Heckman models are very sensitive. Thus, again, we ran another model in which we included the variables *Annual revenue* (logged), and *Number of employees* in the selection stage. The results of this model were similar to those we report here. The results of this analysis are available from the authors.

**Table 7** Models of leader political activity, III: disclosable federal contributions.

	Disclosable contributions	Selection model
Career time in legal	0.026 (0.025)	–
CEO	–0.348 (0.574)	–
Firm political activity	–	0.058 (0.024)*
Government experience	–0.598 (0.538)	–
Member request	–	1.02 (0.288)**
Constant	9.94 (0.508)**	–0.661 (0.280)*
Uncensored obs.	52	
Censored obs.	31	
Total obs.	82	
Rho	–0.768 (SE=0.217)	
Log-likelihood	–142.1928	
Probability of two equations not being independent of each other	0.049	

Source: Authors' data. Standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed test, \*\* $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed test.

## 5.4 Leaders who elevate politics

In our last quantitative analysis, we delve deeper into the question of which firm leaders see politics as an integral part of their job. As we note above, nearly 47% of our respondents when queried chose the “I play a leadership role within this company in addressing national political issues” response to our question about the role they play politically within their firms. Which leaders are most likely to choose this response rather than any other? To address this question, we cast a binary logistic regression model in which *Leadership role* was the dependent variable (1=respondent replies that he/she plays a leadership role in addressing political issues within his/her company, 0=respondent replies that he/she does not play a leadership role). As independent variables we include *Career time in legal*, *CEO*, *Firm political activity*, and *Government experience*. The results of this analysis are found in Table 8. The results largely confirm those of our previous analyses. Most important, the coefficient on *Firm political activity* is positive and significant, which suggests that as level of firm political activity rises, so does the probability that a leader views him/herself as a leader within the company on political issues. Having government experience also substantially increases the probability that a leader sees him/herself as playing a leadership role within the firm on political issues.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> We ran an additional model in which we included the two control variables *Annual revenue* (logged) and *Number of employees*. The inclusion of these two variables changed the results very little. The results of this analysis are available from the authors.

**Table 8** Logistic regression results: which leaders report taking a leadership role on political issues?

	B (SE)	Exp(B)
Career time in legal	0.023 (0.029)	1.023
CEO	0.865 (0.614)	2.375
Firm political activity	0.093 (0.043)*	1.098
Government experience	1.60 (0.693)*	4.964
Constant	-1.99 (0.754)**	0.136
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> =	0.110	
N=	82	
Log likelihood=	-50.523	

Source: Authors' data. \*p<0.05, two-tailed test, \*\*p<0.01, two-tailed test.

## 6 Discussion

We believe that the data we present here contributes to the study of business and politics. In the first part of the paper, we presented data on the nature and extent of firm leader political activity. The primary takeaway from these results is that business firm leaders are quite active in the national political arena. Our respondents represent a broad cross-section of business leaders in the US, and all but a small handful report engaging in political activity. Firm leader political activity takes many forms. Most of our respondents spend some time every day engaging in political activity, and a near majority report that they play a leadership role within their firms in addressing national political issues. When asked about specific techniques of influence, our respondents report engaging in a surprisingly large array of activities. Relatively passive activities such as monitoring are the most common techniques of influence that firm leaders use, but our data also evinces high levels of contact between firm leaders and members of Congress. Money looms large for the politically active firm leader. Firm leaders are less active in the executive branch, but a majority report having some contact with executive agency officials. Many politically active firm leaders are “hands-on” with other firm personnel. Seventy percent of our respondents report meeting with company lobbyists, and a solid majority report communicating with their employees about the company position on issues, and urging employees to contact members of Congress about important issues. All of this notwithstanding, our data demonstrates that we should not take a narrow view of business leader political activity. Monitoring, lobbying and contributing are not the only things that business leaders do. Many of our respondents engage politically by serving on trade association boards, and many others belong to associations of business leaders.

Our data indicates that the “arrow goes both ways” in the firm leader/government official relationship. On the one hand, we show that business leaders engage in a large number of lobbying activities; that is, they ask government officials for things. On the other hand, we show that business leaders are asked by government officials for things – mostly money, but also advice. The view of business leaders approaching government officials with proverbial “hats in hand” is mistaken. Our data show that in many cases it is government officials who approach business leaders with *their* “hats in their hands.”

## 6.1 Dual centers of lobbying power

In his ethnographic treatment of business lobbyists, interest group scholar Rogan Kersh has portrayed the typical corporate leader as rather out of touch with the lobbyists his/her firm counts on to represent the firm’s political interests.<sup>53</sup> This portrait contradicts that drawn in Heinz et al.’s massive *The Hollow Core*,<sup>54</sup> in which the authors conclude that business leaders closely supervise and monitor lobbyists’ behavior. But Kersh’s characterization is based on direct and sustained empirical observation, and thus must be granted more weight.<sup>55</sup> If Kersh is correct, our results suggest that scholars of business political activity must begin to pay more attention to leaders’ offices as loci of political activity.<sup>56</sup> Our findings imply that individual business firms engage politically via two different power centers – the public affairs office and the boss’s office. In fact, given the large number of board chairs in our sample and the (albeit limited) evidence that board members may be even more active politically than CEOs, it may be the case that there are actually three loci of power within the typical politically active business firm. Studies of interest group power and influence in general, and business power and influence in particular, seldom if ever consider the role of organizational leaders. Clearly this is an oversight. We have shown empirically that business leaders are important actors in national politics. And both our empirical and our theoretical work moving forward must begin to take this into consideration. If business firm leaders simply reinforce and mimic the activities of company lobbyists and public affairs professionals, then our collective ignorance of their behavior is not particularly troublesome for our theories of business power and influence. But if firm leaders are independent actors whose activities in some way deviate from

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<sup>53</sup> Kersh (2002).

<sup>54</sup> Heinz et al. (1993).

<sup>55</sup> Kersh (2002).

<sup>56</sup> Kersh (2002).

those of other company personnel – even if they are designed to serve the same goals – we must recalibrate our theories to account for this additional source of power. Empirically too, our treatments of business power and activity are bound to be incomplete if we continue to ignore the substantial political activities of firm leaders.

## 6.2 The instrumental value of leader political activity

Our exploration of the determinants of business leader political activity suggests that firm political activity is highly correlated with firm leader political activity. In short, firms that are politically active have leaders who are politically active, and firms that are not politically active have leaders who are not politically active. This finding provides support for the findings of Gordon and his colleagues who conclude that monetary contributions from corporate leaders are not consumption-oriented, but rather are investments by leaders.<sup>57</sup> We say this because, *ceteris paribus*, if firm leaders were engaging in political activity for consumptive benefits, we would expect to see leaders who work for non-politically active companies engaging in political activity at the same level as leaders of politically active companies. We see no such disconnect between firm and firm leader political activity. It is probably the case that a combination of external factors including industry concentration, international competition, and regulatory threats, and internal factors including firm diversity, firm size, and government sales, act to stimulate firm political activity, which in turn stimulates firm *leader* political activity. This is why, we believe, our data show an association between firm leader and firm political activity.

Does firm political activity indeed beget firm leader political activity? There is an alternate story to the one we tell here. That story goes like this: The arrow runs the other way; politically active leaders show up at firms personally inclined toward political activity, and drag their companies along. In other words, business firm leader political activity begets business firm political activity, not the other way around. Statistically, it is nearly impossible to untangle causality in the leader-firm relationship. As such, we must resort to theory. And the overwhelming body of theory on business firm political activity supports the view that business firms engage in political activity as a result of variables outside firm leaders' control. In short, extant theory implies that business firm leaders tend to respond similarly to forces outside their direct control when deciding whether or not their firms

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon, Hafer, and Landa (2007).

engage in political activity. But once this decision has been made, a firm leader is politically “activated” and the nature and extent of his/her political activities is affected by many variables, including some individual-level variables – especially government experience, legal experience, and position (that is, CEO or non-CEO). In other words, individual-level variables give us some leverage in explaining why some firm leaders are more active politically than others. Again, none of this may seem particularly novel to the seasoned observer of business and politics. But our data demonstrate a relationship – that between firm activity and firm leader activity – that others allege and assume rather than show.

In the end, our most obvious finding is that the determinants of firm political activity appear also to determine whether or not a firm leader is politically active. This is important because there is some confusion in the literature about how exactly political activity benefits business firms. The overwhelming consensus among people who study corporate political activity is that it does, indeed, pay off.<sup>58</sup> But precisely why it pays off – that is, precisely what the mechanism by which political activity leads to better sales,<sup>59</sup> better financial performance,<sup>60</sup> increased shareholder wealth,<sup>61</sup> and increased probability of being “bailed out” if necessary<sup>62</sup> is – is not completely understood. Lobbying by public affairs professionals and PAC contributions, it appears, explains some of this, as numerous studies show that lobbying and contributions can result in business-friendly government decisions.<sup>63</sup> But direct business leader involvement in politics may provide part of the answer as well. If, as our data show, politically active firms have politically active leaders, the positive effects of corporate political activity may flow from CEOs’ close relationships with government decision-makers, especially members of Congress. Of course, this is an empirical matter, and it requires further study.

One obvious weakness of this study is that it is largely atheoretical. However, our findings have obvious implications for future theory-building (as well as future empirical attempts to understand corporate political activity). First, they suggest that a basic cost-benefit assumption should be at the core of any overarching theory of firm leader political activity. Even simple things (such as government experience, and having more time to engage in political activity,

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**58** Goldberg and Maggi (1999); Faccio (2006); Cooper, Gulen, and Ovtchinnikov (2010); Schuler and Rehbein (2011).

**59** Faccio and Parsley (2009).

**60** Chen, Parsley, and Yang (2010).

**61** Faccio (2006).

**62** Faccio, Masulis, and McConnell (2006).

**63** Liebman and Reynolds (2006); Farber, Johnson, and Petroni (2007).

which we assume non-CEOs have) that affect cost-benefit calculi seem to affect levels of political activity among business leaders. Second, our findings suggest that a comprehensive theory must recognize that corporate political activity is not unitary. This point has been made elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> But generally it is raised to buttress the view that firm leader characteristics and proclivities drive corporate political choices to some extent. We agree with this claim, but our findings steer the discussion of the non-unitary character of corporate political activity in another direction. Specifically, they direct us to recognize that corporate political activity is not *one* thing, it is *many* things. Thus, our findings strongly suggest that defining a firm's political activity narrowly as, for example, the amount of money the firm's PAC contributes to candidates,<sup>65</sup> or the amount a firm contributes combined with some measure of the amount of lobbying the firm's lobbyists do,<sup>66</sup> is a bad idea. Theoretically, this means we have to be careful how we conceptualize the (usually dependent) variable *Firm political activity*. Empirically, it means that this variable must comprise some measure of what a firm's leaders do as well as what its PAC and its lobbyists do. Studies that define firm political activity narrowly are likely to reach errant conclusions; for business leaders are active in politics, and they are active on behalf of the companies they lead. Third, our findings suggest that any theory of corporate political activity must consider the possibility that within a given firm there are managers other than the boss who also contribute to the overall nature and extent of a firm's political activities. The literature on top management teams (TMT's) shows that a business firm typically is not led by one person, but rather is led by many.<sup>67</sup> This insight, coupled with our findings, suggests that to understand the true nature and extent of corporate political activity, we must consider the possibility that leaders other than the boss also contribute to an individual firm's political activity. More than anything else, this means that we should conduct empirical studies of corporate political activity that seek to determine the nature and extent of managers' (and perhaps even employees' and stockholders') political activities on behalf of their companies.

In the end, our findings beckon us to do two things. First, we must spend more time looking within the business firm rather than outside it to quantify, understand, and explain corporate political activity. We are hardly the first to make this suggestion.<sup>68</sup> But despite the need for inward-looking studies, they remain rare. Clearly, things inside a firm affect what it does in the political arena.

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<sup>64</sup> Hart (2004).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Boies (1989); Mitchell, Hansen, and Jepsen (1997); Ozer (2010).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Hansen and Mitchell (2000); Hansen, Mitchell, and Drope (2005).

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Ozer (2010).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Griffin, and Dunn (2004); Hart (2004); Ozer (2010).



Yet both our empirical and theoretical treatments tend to focus on external factors. Second, we must seek once and for all to determine the precise nature of the causal relationship between leader activity and firm activity. Here, we posit that firm activity begets firm leader activity. Another recent study posits precisely the opposite.<sup>69</sup> While we stand by our contention, we recognize that this question is far from settled. We believe that the only way truly to understand the relationship between leader activity and firm activity is to conduct more studies similar to Kersh's ethnographic studies.<sup>70</sup> We simply must spend some time watching firm leaders do what they do to understand fully their relationships with the organizations they lead.

## 7 Conclusion

By virtually all measures, corporate America dominates interest representation in American politics. In this paper we have attempted further to illuminate the nature of business power by presenting data on the activities of corporate leaders. In all, the data show that business firm leaders are quite active in national politics. More than anything else, *our data demonstrate the need for scholars of business and politics and interest group politics to consider more closely the activities of business leaders*. These activities are not just trivial adjuncts to firm-level corporate political activity. Far from being marginal participants in politics, business leaders engage in a great deal of political activity. Theories of business power and influence must begin to consider these players if they are fully to comprehend the mechanisms by which corporate America tries to get its way politically. Individual corporations are active politically through their lobbying and public affairs offices. But corporate leaders are part of the picture, especially for highly politically active firms. Indeed, the typical corporate leader in our study spends approximately 1 hour every day on national politics. Given all the responsibilities associated with being the boss, this is not trivial.

Does all this business leader participation result in influence? Do politically active CEOs and board chairs act as reinforcements for the political professionals within their firms, or are they independent sources of power within their organizations? Following Kersh, we tend to believe the latter is closer to the truth.<sup>71</sup> But in the end, these are empirical questions. And we hope that our findings here will stimulate attention to it and other related empirical questions.

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<sup>69</sup> Ozer (2010).

<sup>70</sup> Kersh (2002).

<sup>71</sup> Kersh (2002).

## Appendix A: The Survey Questionnaire

**Instructions:** I would like to ask you a number of questions about the national political scene in general, and about your political activities in particular. I believe you will find that none of the questions are particularly sensitive, but I want to assure you that your answers will remain anonymous. Moreover, if there is a question you do not feel comfortable answering, please feel free to skip it. This survey contains many questions, but most of them can be answered quickly, and thus the survey should not take too long to complete. Please remember that these questions are about **your** political activities on behalf of the company, not your company's political efforts (through, for example, its public affairs office). Also, please remember that these questions refer to your activities aimed at the **national government**, not state or local governments.

Thank you so much for your participation!

**Section 1.** I would like to begin by asking you a few general questions.

1. How long have you been with this company? **(Please specify)**

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS, AND \_\_\_\_\_ MONTHS

2. How long have you served in your current position? **(Please specify)**

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS, AND \_\_\_\_\_ MONTHS

3. Which of the following statements best describes you? **(Please circle number)**

1. I DO NOT ADDRESS NATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES AS PART OF MY JOB.
2. I ADDRESS NATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES TO SOME EXTENT AS PART OF MY JOB, BUT DO NOT PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN ADDRESSING SUCH ISSUES.
3. I PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE WITHIN THIS COMPANY IN ADDRESSING NATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES.
4. NONE OF THE ABOVE STATEMENTS DESCRIBES ME WELL.

4. Have you travelled to Washington, D.C. in the past year to communicate to a government official a position or preference on a national political issue? **(Please circle number)**

1. No
2. YES >>> HOW MANY TIMES? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many hours in a typical day do you spend on national political matters (including research, monitoring government activity, active advocacy, and anything else)? **(Please specify)**

\_\_\_\_\_ hours

6. Please estimate what percentage of your business career time (with this company and previous companies) you have devoted to each of the following functional areas. **(Please specify below)**

Functional Area	Percent Time
a. Finance/Accounting	
b. Legal	
c. Production/Operations	
d. Administration	
e. Marketing/Sales	
f. Engineering/R&D	
g. Other (something not listed above)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

7. For each of the following, please indicate if you believe it is no threat, a moderate threat, or a serious threat to the future of your company. **(Please circle appropriate responses)**

Possible Threat	Seriousness			
a. Excessive government regulation	1. NO THREAT	2. A MODERATE THREAT	3. A SERIOUS THREAT	4. NO OPINION
b. National or global terrorism	1. NO THREAT	2. A MODERATE THREAT	3. A SERIOUS THREAT	4. NO OPINION
c. Insufficient government oversight of business	1. NO THREAT	2. A MODERATE THREAT	3. A SERIOUS THREAT	4. NO OPINION
d. Government gridlock	1. NO THREAT	2. A MODERATE THREAT	3. A SERIOUS THREAT	4. NO OPINION

8. Do you serve on the boards of any trade associations or general business associations? **(Please circle number)**

- 1. No
- 2. YES>>> HOW MANY? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Are you a member of any associations of business leaders (e.g., the Business Roundtable)? **(Please circle number)**

- 1. No
- 2. YES>>> HOW MANY? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2.** Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your political activities. Remember, I am asking you about your political activities on behalf of your company, not those of your company.

10. In the last year, how often did each of the following occur – never, occasionally, or often? **(Please circle correct responses)**

Statement	Frequency		
a. A member of Congress or his/her staff sought your advice on a policy matter	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN
b. A member of Congress or his/her staff sought a contribution to his/her electoral campaign	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN
c. The president or presidential staff sought your advice on a policy matter	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN
d. Washington executive agency personnel sought your advice on a policy matter	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN
e. Leaders from other companies sought your advice on a policy matter	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN
f. Leaders from non-business organizations sought your advice on a policy matter	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. OFTEN

11. A corporate executive such as you can use many different techniques to try to influence the government and public policy. Below is a list of influence techniques. For each technique, please tell me if you use that technique never, occasionally, or regularly. Remember, we are asking about *your* political activities, not those of your company. **(Please circle appropriate responses)**

Activity	Frequency of Use		
a. Testifying at congressional hearings	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
b. Meeting personally with members of Congress	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
c. Meeting personally with congressional staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
d. Emailing members of Congress or their staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
e. Telephoning members of Congress or their staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
f. Helping to draft legislation	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
g. Testifying at executive agency (i.e., bureaucratic) hearings	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
h. Meeting personally with executive agency personnel (i.e., bureaucrats)	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
i. Submitting comments on proposed rules or regulations	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY

Activity	Frequency of Use		
j. Helping to draft regulations, rules, or guidelines	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
k. Serving on governmental advisory commissions or boards	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
l. Meeting personally with the President	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
m. Meeting personally with presidential staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
n. Emailing the President or presidential staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
o. Telephoning the President or presidential staff	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
p. Talking with people from the media or press about national issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
q. Writing op-ed pieces on national issues for newspapers	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
r. Urging shareholders to contact members of Congress about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
s. Urging shareholders to contact the White House about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
t. Urging shareholders to contact executive agency personnel about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
u. Urging employees to contact members of Congress about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
v. Urging employees to contact the White House about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
w. Urging employees to contact executive agency personnel about important issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
x. Working on national electoral campaigns (e.g., for Congress)	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
y. Making financial contributions to non-company political action committees (PACs)	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
z. Making financial contributions to candidates for national office	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
aa. Making financial contributions to a political party	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
bb. Publicly endorsing candidates for national office	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
cc. Making speeches on national issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
dd. Meeting with company lobbyists or other company public affairs professionals	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
ee. Contacting employees to inform them of the company's position on national issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
ff. Taking part in public protests or demonstrations	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
gg. Monitoring national government activity that may affect the company	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
hh. Engaging in dialogue with other corporate leaders about national political issues	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY

Activity	Frequency of Use		
ii. Joining together with other corporate leaders to lobby government	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY
jj. Making personal financial contributions to the company's PAC ( <i>If your company does not have a PAC, skip this item</i> )	1. NEVER	2. OCCASIONALLY	3. REGULARLY

12. When you interact with Congress, executive agencies, and the White House, how would you characterize your relationships with these actors – as normally cooperative, occasionally cooperative, seldom cooperative, or almost never cooperative? If you never have any contact with either Congress, executive agencies, or the White House, you may skip this question. **(Please circle correct responses)**

Target	Level of Cooperativeness			
a. Congress	1. NORMALLY COOPERATIVE	2. OCCASIONALLY COOPERATIVE	3. SELDOM COOPERATIVE	4. ALMOST NEVER COOPERATIVE
b. Executive agencies	1. NORMALLY COOPERATIVE	2. OCCASIONALLY COOPERATIVE	3. SELDOM COOPERATIVE	4. ALMOST NEVER COOPERATIVE
c. The White House	1. NORMALLY COOPERATIVE	2. OCCASIONALLY COOPERATIVE	3. SELDOM COOPERATIVE	4. ALMOST NEVER COOPERATIVE

**Section 3.** Finally, we would now like to learn a little more about you. This is the final section!

13. What is your sex? **(Please circle correct number)**

- 1. FEMALE
- 2. MALE

14. Have you ever served in the U.S. Military? **(Please circle correct number)**

- 1. NO
- 2. YES >>>> Which branch? \_\_\_\_\_  
>>>> What was the highest rank you achieved? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Have you ever held any of the following governmental positions? If not, just leave the table below blank. If so, please indicate and specify any elected, appointed, and staff positions. **(Please select all that apply, and please specify position(s) in boxes provided)**

Position	Local	State	Federal
a. Elected office			
b. Appointed office			
c. Staff position			

16. What is your highest level of education? **(Please circle correct number)**

1. SOME HIGH SCHOOL
2. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE/GED
3. SOME COLLEGE
4. COLLEGE DEGREE>>> What was/were your major(s) \_\_\_\_\_
5. SOME GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL WORK
6. GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE>>> (Please specify your degree[s] and subject[s]) \_\_\_\_\_

17. What is your party affiliation—Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else? **(Please circle correct number)**

1. REPUBLICAN
2. DEMOCRAT
3. INDEPENDENT
4. SOMETHING ELSE (Please specify)>>> \_\_\_\_\_

18. Generally speaking, how would you describe yourself—as liberal, middle of the road, or conservative? **(Please circle correct number)**

1. LIBERAL
2. MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
3. CONSERVATIVE

19. What is your race/ethnicity? **(Please circle all that apply)**

1. ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER
2. NATIVE AMERICAN
3. HISPANIC/LATINO
4. BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN
5. WHITE/CAUCASIAN
6. OTHER (Please specify)>>> \_\_\_\_\_

20. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years. **(Please specify)**

**Thank you for your participation. If you have any comments for us, please use the back of this page to write them**

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