A quantitative analysis of policy and sociocultural advocacy within a neo-corporatist context

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Abstract

Policy and sociocultural advocacy are still entrenched within their disciplinary silos. This makes that a lot of research is missing out on the complete picture of nonprofits' social change efforts. Moreover, this also relates to inconsistencies (i.e., determinants) and ambiguities (i.e., tactics) that are characteristic of the current 'morass' in which nonprofit advocacy literature finds itself today. In this study, we empirically analyze whether nonprofits engage in policy and/or sociocultural advocacy as well as whether determinants and tactics relate differently or similarly to both advocacy goals. Making use of a large-N survey database of Flemish nonprofits, our findings show that: (a) most nonprofits engage in advocacy in general and around half pursue both policy and sociocultural change, (b) the field of activity, age, public and market income are important explanatory variables and (c) not all advocacy tactics are used for pursuing both policy and sociocultural advocacy.

Word count

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Keywords

Nonprofit organizations, advocacy goals, policy change, sociocultural change, determinants, tactics

1. Introduction

In the last three decades, a growing body of scholarship has been devoted to nonprofits and their advocacy activities (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017). Andrews and Edwards (2004, p. 481) broadly define advocacy as *"the efforts of nonprofits to promote or resist social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies and groups"*. In recent nonprofit literature, a more thorough attempt has been made to capture which activities can fall under the header of broad social change by clarifying the distinction that is often made between two advocacy goals that can be pursued – developed in two strands of literature – namely policy and sociocultural advocacy (Mosley, Suárez, & Hwang, 2022; Shier & Handy, 2015). The former – policy advocacy – refers to nonprofit activities that try to influence the decisions and regulations made by institutional elites such as policymakers. This research is predominantly based on interest group studies (Beyers & Braun, 2014). The latter – sociocultural advocacy – is based on social movement studies and relates to activities that try to raise awareness and change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the general public that contribute to social injustices (Busso, 2018; Fung, 2003; Fyall & Allard, 2017; Lichterman, 2006).

However, only a handful of nonprofit scholars pay attention to both advocacy goals – and the interrelationship between them (i.e., pursuing these goals can go hand in hand or be at odds with each other) – in their theoretical framework (Mosley et al., 2022; Van Dyke, Soule, & Taylor, 2004). Thus, despite our growing understanding of different advocacy goals that can be pursued, most research still focusses on either policy or sociocultural advocacy when examining nonprofits and their activities – often depending on the academic field in which a scholar is active. We believe that addressing this limitation could bring clarity – in many ways – to the current 'morass' in which nonprofit advocacy research finds itself. First, this could explain why some researchers see nonprofits as being active in advocacy while others do not (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021; Suárez, 2020). For example, a nonprofit that tries to publicly question and change racist beliefs and behaviors in society might be considered to be actively pursuing advocacy from a sociocultural perspective, while scholars solely focusing on policy advocacy will hardly agree. Moreover – within empirical reality – there are clear indications showing that most nonprofits engage in both policy and sociocultural advocacy at the same time (Mosley et al., 2022). Specifically for these organizations, scholars risk to overlook some important advocacy features and activities when they only focus on one particular advocacy goal. However, by looking at nonprofit activities from both a policy and sociocultural change perspective, we can examine how many organizations pursue either one goal or the combination of both. In this way, we better capture how many nonprofits are involved in broad social change instead of research that only looks at organizations that either pursue a clear policy or sociocultural goal – thus possibly missing out on other elements of nonprofits' social change efforts. Second, we argue that inconsistent findings concerning the determinants of advocacy engagement can be explained – next to the research context – by the advocacy goals that nonprofits pursue (Lu, 2018). For example, the unclear effect of public income (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). We assume that the reliance on public income has a positive effect on pursuing policy advocacy (see infra) because public income could offer nonprofits more direct connections with policymakers and government administrators – and thus also the opportunity to use these connections for policy advocacy (i.e., nonprofits and policymakers are expected to more regularly interact in order to organize the practicalities of public grants and contracts as well as the nonprofit public service delivery that often comes with public grants) (Neumayr, Schneider, & Meyer, 2015; Verschuere & De Corte, 2015). However, these direct connections with policymakers and government administrators are less relevant for activities that predominantly pursue sociocultural advocacy because these are not targeted at institutional elites but on the general public (i.e., public norms and values). Thus, we argue that we cannot automatically assume that there always is a positive effect of public income on advocacy engagement as it could depend on the advocacy goals that are pursued. Third, it is not always clear which advocacy goal(s) a nonprofit pursues when using a certain tactic (Almog-Bar, 2017; Hamidi, 2022; Shier & Handy, 2015). For example, we could assume that a protest against racial discrimination tries (a) to pressure policymakers to adopt more stringent anti-discrimination legislation (i.e., policy advocacy) and/or (b) to publicly reject racist beliefs and behaviors that exist among the general public (i.e., sociocultural advocacy), while lobbying the government – for specific anti-discrimination executive orders – could be argued as solely focusing on policy change. However, by focusing on both advocacy goals in our research, we can empirically examine whether tactics can be used for pursuing policy and/or sociocultural advocacy, albeit that these will be modified for the specific goals that a nonprofit eventually pursues.

In this study, we will therefore examine: (a) whether nonprofit activities are characterized by policy and/or sociocultural advocacy, (b) whether some of the most commonly researched determinants of nonprofit advocacy engagement have a different or similar effect depending on the advocacy goal that is pursued and (c) whether different tactics are used to pursue policy or sociocultural advocacy. Based on these considerations, we can formulate the following research questions:

Do nonprofits pursue policy and/or sociocultural advocacy? Which internal and external determinants influence nonprofits to pursue policy and/or sociocultural advocacy? Which tactics relate to policy and/or sociocultural advocacy?

By answering these research questions, our contribution to nonprofit scholarship is twofold. First, we empirically examine nonprofit activities from the perspective of both policy and sociocultural change in one comprehensive study, allowing us to look at nonprofit social change efforts in its entirety. Second, through analyzing the determinants and tactics related to policy and sociocultural advocacy, we can partially address inconsistencies (i.e., determinants) and ambiguities (i.e., tactics) surrounding nonprofit advocacy involvement. This research is conducted within the nonprofit context of Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. This context is particularly interesting because nonprofit activities focused on policy change have long been regarded as the more common (Pauly, Verschuere, De Rynck, & Voets, 2020). However, recently there has been more attention for sociocultural change as well – from both nonprofit practice and scholarship (De Corte, Arys, & Roose, 2021). Therefore, it will be of interest to examine whether nonprofits engage in policy and/or sociocultural advocacy and which determinants and tactics are important.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

2.1. Policy and sociocultural advocacy within their 'disciplinary silos'

First, nonprofit activities characterized by the goal of policy advocacy can involve many different audiences, venues and tactics (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017). Policy advocacy can be defined as: *"trying to influence public policy or regulation"* (Mosley et al., 2022, p. 194). One of the most cited definitions makes a distinction between direct and indirect tactics (Donaldson, 2007; Kimberlin, 2010; Mosley, 2011; Onyx et al., 2010; Pekkanen & Smith, 2014). On the one hand, nonprofits work directly together with administrators within governments, lobby political parties, join advisory councils and attend private meetings with politicians. On the other hand and possibly at the same time, these organizations try to transform public opinion – by appealing to voter mobilization, organizing a demonstration or raising public awareness in general – with the intention of indirectly influencing institutional elites and the related policies (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Guo & Saxton, 2010; Mosley, 2010; Verschuere & De Corte, 2015).

Second, the literature also distinguishes another advocacy goal, namely a sociocultural one. Sociocultural advocacy can be defined as: *"trying to shape public opinion, cultural meanings or societal norms"* (Mosley et al., 2022, p. 194). Most scholarship related to sociocultural advocacy is of a theoretical nature and is predominantly situated within social and political theory (Dekker, 2009; Hamidi, 2022; Warren, 2001). However, there is also some empirical research available (e.g., Uhlin, 2009; Van Dyke & Taylor, 2019). These studies often focus on the public sphere, which can be conceptualized as the public arena where all kinds of actors debate and discuss about issues of collective concern (Dryzek, 2010; Elstub, 2010; Hendriks, 2012; Mendonça, 2008). As part of this public sphere, nonprofits are believed to contribute to its vitality by trying to influence norms, values, opinions, behaviors or attitudes – and even the dominant discourse in society (Lechterman & Reich, 2020; Mouffe, 2005; Stenling & Sam, 2020; Warren, 2003). Concerning the tactical repertoire, a similar distinction is often made between direct and indirect tactics (Mosley et al., 2022). On the one hand, nonprofits can interact with all kinds of audiences in the public arena and directly try to change their norms and values by, for example, organizing self-learning circles or sharing educational material. On the other hand, nonprofits can indirectly try to change norms, values and opinions by, for example, the act of public street art (Bebbington, 2007; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Dodge, 2015; Gaby, 2016).

However, although policy and sociocultural advocacy are depicted here as completely distinct, there exists clear overlap as well. Empirical reality shows that (a) many nonprofits engage in both policy and sociocultural advocacy to some degree (e.g., nonprofits related to 'Black Lives Matter') and (b) some tactics are used for both advocacy purposes as well (e.g., a protest or demonstration).

2.2. A false dichotomy and possible overlap?

To make our arguments more clear, we rely on the work of Mosley et al. (2022) and their graphical presentation of different advocacy goals (see figure 1). For this paper, we solely focus on the y-axis of this figure – which includes policy and sociocultural advocacy on a continuum (i.e., the x-axis – which focusses on the continuum of direct and indirect tactics – is not relevant for our research). Nonprofits' advocacy tactics can then be mapped on the y-axis (i.e., from lobbying to public street art), based on the extent to which these tactics are more oriented towards policy or sociocultural advocacy. By making use of this figure, we can discuss two possible overlaps.

First, it can be argued that nonprofits can engage in both policy and sociocultural advocacy. For example, a nonprofit can arrange a direct meeting with members of parliament trying to achieve a favorable change in legislation for their target group (i.e., policy advocacy), while also being involved in a public campaign with the intend to change – unjust – views and beliefs held by the general public about their constituents (i.e., sociocultural advocacy). As all of the advocacy tactics of a single nonprofit can be mapped on the y-axis, it can become evident whether nonprofits pursue policy and/or sociocultural change to some extent. Second, we assume that some advocacy tactics can be solely used for pursuing one advocacy goal, while others could be used for both policy and sociocultural advocacy. Take for instance three nonprofits: 'nonprofit X' organizing a demonstration to rally for bold climate actions that should be taken by the national government, 'nonprofit Y' demonstrating for a change in attitudes of the general public surrounding marriage equality (i.e., without pursuing policy change because same-sex marriage is already legal) and 'nonprofit Z' – which is focused on people living in poverty – demonstrating against both the low minimum wages (i.e., policy advocacy) and also the common belief in society that being poor is their own fault (i.e., sociocultural advocacy). These three rather straightforward examples make clear that – although all three involve advocacy and use the same tactic (i.e., demonstration) – they are different in the advocacy goals that are pursued (Halpin, Fraussen, & Ackland, 2021; Onyx et al., 2010; Shier & Handy, 2015). As Garrow and Hasenfeld (2014, p. 92) claim: *"… nonprofits may engage in similar tactics, or means, to pursue very different ends"*. In sum, while some nonprofits will solely engage in one advocacy goal, others will combine both. Moreover, while some advocacy tactics can reflect either policy or sociocultural change, other tactics could look for both. To address all of this, we will examine (a) whether internal and external determinants relate differently or similarly to policy and sociocultural advocacy and (b) whether advocacy tactics reflect policy and/or sociocultural change.

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

2.3. Theoretical framework

2.3.1. A neo-corporatist tradition and the predominant focus on policy advocacy

In this paper, we focus on the nonprofit sector in Flanders – the northern region of Belgium – which is characterized by a neo-corporatist tradition. As a particular system of interest representation, not to be confused with earlier anti-democratic corporatist systems, neo-corporatism is typified by its strong intertwinement between the government and nonprofit sector (i.e., a high level of public income and cofinancing, with some parts of the nonprofit sector even included within the government structures) (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). Agreements with government are negotiated through institutionalized channels in order to reach broadly supported social compromises (e.g., direct contact with politicians) (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). Eventually, this neo-corporatist tradition lead to a very stable and cooperative relationship between nonprofits and the government. Some scholars even describe this as *"a culture of policy advocacy"*, which stresses the societal importance attached to pursuing this advocacy goal (Arvidson, Johansson, Meeuwisse, & Scaramuzzino, 2018, p. 342). However, this can also explain – specifically for this context – why hardly any studies empirically investigate whether nonprofits also engage in sociocultural advocacy, notwithstanding clear indications showing that nonprofits actually do pursue sociocultural change (De Corte et al., 2021). Thus, our research proves very interesting for this context as we focus on both policy and sociocultural advocacy. Moreover, we also believe that it is imperative to take this context into account when theorizing about our determinants (i.e., organizational size and age, public and market income and field of activity) and their association with policy and sociocultural advocacy (Lu, 2018).

2.3.2. Institutional field of activity

The first determinant we want to discuss is the institutional field of activity (Verschuere & De Corte, 2015). A field of activity involves similar social actors – e.g., nonprofits, governments, businesses and the general public – and is characterized by stable patterns of interaction and field-specific institutional forces, also called institutional isomorphism (i.e., defined as the organizational need to conform to the predominant rules, values and norms within the field of activity in order to be perceived as legitimate) (Suárez, 2020). Said differently, fields are recognized areas of institutional life and nonprofits respond to the unique structures and pressures that are characteristic of the field they inhabit. Thus, we argue that all nonprofits belong to a certain institutional field of activity (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017; Neumayr et al., 2015), within which they tend to show similar or isomorphic behavior – such as pursuing policy and/or sociocultural advocacy. Moreover, research shows that also the national context needs to be considered, as these patterns of interaction and institutional forces can be different across countries or regions (Yanagi, Kobashi, Pekkanen, & Tsujinaka, 2021). Taking all of this into account, we give some examples. First, we could expect that the field of 'Business, Professional Associations and Unions' will be positively associated with policy advocacy (Suykens, Maier, Meyer, & Verschuere, 2023). This field namely relates to socio-economic issues in general, and more specifically the (lack of) government regulations that apply to it (e.g., paid sick leave). Then, nonprofits within this field will try to defend the interests of business branches, professions or employees by seeking favorable policy changes. Moreover, specifically for the Flemish context, it is the field of activity par excellence characterized by a neo-corporatist tradition (i.e., institutionalized tripartite consultations between businesses, nonprofits and the government concerning socio-economic topics) (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017; Lijphart, 2012). Furthermore, we do not expect a positive association with sociocultural advocacy as most nonprofits in this field – as well as other actors – uphold the values and norms of the market economy (e.g., the principles of profit and economic growth) (Pauly et al., 2020). Next, we assume to find a positive association between the field of 'Environment' and both policy and sociocultural advocacy (Dodge, 2009). Within this field, there is not only the concern about (a lack of) government regulations (e.g., wildlife protection laws), but also about the attitudes and behavior of parts of the general public that pressure the environment (e.g., buying unsustainable products) (Kagan & Dodge, 2023; MacIndoe & Whalen, 2013). Therefore, we assume for this field that relatively more nonprofits will engage in both policy and sociocultural advocacy. Third, previous research is convinced that there exists a positive association between the field of 'Social Services' and policy advocacy (Mosley, Maronick, & Katz, 2012). Nonprofits within this field often engage in coordination practices with the government for the public services they provide. These interactions often entail policy advocacy concerning, for example, the cofinancing of services as well as the constituents that are granted access to these services (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). Last, there are also clear indications showing that there is no association between the field of 'Religion' and both policy and sociocultural advocacy. Nonprofits within this field are argued to be predominantly interested in community building and providing services to their constituents (i.e., the religious community), instead of advocacy efforts (Suykens et al., 2023; Yanagi et al., 2021). ***Hence, we hypothesize that engagement in policy and sociocultural advocacy will vary depending on the field of activity (H1).***

2.3.3. Organizational size

The second determinant is organizational size which relates here to the number of paid employees with professional expertise. Most researchers see this as a proxy of organizational capacity (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007). It is argued – based on resource mobilization theory – that a higher number of paid employees entails more human resources, time, skills and expertise (i.e., internal capacity) for organizations to perform the activities they actually want – also policy and sociocultural advocacy (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Lu, 2018). This relates to the expectation that policy advocacy often involves specific knowledge (e.g., about the institutional system and the specificities of legislation) as well as time and labor intensive activities (e.g., building trust with policymakers as well as long-term efforts to indirectly try to change policies). Moreover, within a neo-corporatist tradition, policy advocacy predominantly centers around a dialogue between government and nonprofit professionals. This also holds true for sociocultural advocacy as trying to change the norms and values of (a part of) the general public can take substantial efforts and time (e.g., practicalities of organizing a protest and making sure you mobilize participants) (Christiano, 1996). ***Thus, we assume that there is a positive association between organizational size and both policy and sociocultural advocacy (H2a).*** However, some scholars take a more critical stance towards a higher number of paid employees, specifically related to sociocultural advocacy. It is argued that a stronger reliance on paid employees could be associated with more intense interactions with other (policy) professionals (i.e., also in the government and business sector) instead of with the general public – possibly involving an alienation from the ‘norm and value discussions’ in society (Mosley et al., 2012; Skocpol, 2003). Moreover, it is also assumed that paid employees’ professional background and education often involve some commonly accepted norms and values, which could be associated with less organizational willingness (i.e., rigidity) to debate on other values and viewpoints (i.e., sociocultural advocacy) (Suárez, 2020). ***In sum, we could also expect to find an association for organizational size which is positive for policy advocacy and negative for sociocultural advocacy (H2b).***

2.3.4. Organizational age

Third, we examine organizational age which is often considered a proxy of organizational capability. A burgeoning literature (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014) supposes that older – and thus more established – organizations have proven to be more legitimate actors in society as – over the years – they have developed stronger relationships and are endorsed by more powerful actors in the field (Deephouse, Bundy, Tost, & Suchman, 2017; Donaldson, 2007). It is assumed that these higher levels of legitimacy relate to the possibility for nonprofits to engage in both policy and sociocultural change activities – as these organizations can better deal with the legitimacy risks associated with advocacy engagement (e.g., a stakeholder who does not agree with your proposed change in policies or public norms) (Fyall & Allard, 2017; Lu, 2018). ***Thus, we suppose to find a positive relationship between organizational age and both policy and sociocultural advocacy (H3a).*** However, some researchers argue that age – or rather the era in which the organization is established – could play out differently (Onyx et al., 2010). Nonprofits established around the mid-20th century – the heyday of neo-corporatism – probably relate more strongly to policy advocacy. After the 2nd World War, nonprofits were predominantly concerned with regulations protecting their causes and constituents. This is different for organizations established after the end of the 20th century, as there has been a growing discussion – even polarization – around norms and values in society (i.e., related to sociocultural advocacy) (Alexander & Fernandez, 2020; Arvidson, Johansson, & Scaramuzzino, 2018). ***In conclusion, we could also expect to find an association for organizational age which is positive for policy advocacy and negative for sociocultural advocacy (H3b).***

2.3.5. Organizational income

Last, we discuss organizational income and more precisely the relative reliance on public and market income. First, we have a look at public income – which can range from lump sum subsidies to short-term contracts at all levels of government (i.e., local, regional and federal). Based on interdependence theory (Zhang & Guo, 2020b), scholars argue that (a) the government subsidizes nonprofits on which they have to rely for the provision of public services (i.e., government failure) and (b) nonprofits can only provide those public services when having enough – public – income (i.e., voluntary failure). It is then expected that nonprofits relying on public income will be considered more legitimate by governments – due to their interdependent relationship – which could stimulate policy advocacy engagement (e.g., related to the perception that policy advocacy is more effective when being considered a legitimate actor) (Mosley, 2012). Moreover, engaging in a more intense dialogue with governments – concerning the practicalities of public income and often public service delivery – is also related to more direct government contact and thus another stimulus to use these for policy advocacy (i.e., policymakers relate to 'the bigger questions' and administrators to 'the details') (Neumayr et al., 2015). Additionally, focusing on the neo-corporatist tradition, it is commonly assumed that the government provides public income – in most cases (still) structural subsidies with significant leeway and sometimes short-term contracts or tendering – in return for nonprofits 'filling the gaps'. This applies not only to service delivery but also policy advocacy – both cooperative and confrontational – for the constituents that nonprofits are ought to represent (Arvidson, Johansson, Meeuwisse, et al., 2018; Pauly et al., 2020). However, for sociocultural advocacy, we do not expect to find an association with public income – that is in line with the assumptions above – as the general public is the audience to be targeted and not the government (Shier & Handy, 2015; Warren, 2003). ***In conclusion, we expect to find a positive association between the relative reliance on public income and policy advocacy. Moreover, we assume that there is no association with sociocultural advocacy (H4).***

Second, we also focus on market income which ranges from the sale of goods to a contract fee for delivering services. Compared to (lump sum structural) public income, all these types of market income are characterized by a more fixed time frame, high accountability pressures and less leeway (Suykens et al., 2023). Most researchers are convinced that there exists a predominant negative association between the relative reliance on market income and advocacy engagement in general (Zhang & Guo, 2020a). Market actors generally prefer activities that can be commercialized and measured which is easier for service delivery compared to advocacy. This relates to nonprofits leaving the public and political arena in order to focus on – the commercialization of – services (i.e., crowding-out effect between advocacy and service delivery) (Fyall & Allard, 2017; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016). Furthermore, Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) also warn for the dangers of market income related to the potential democratic contributions of nonprofit organizations. They risk to completely alienate their social mission – related to their cause or target group – for a more economic or commercial one (i.e., mission drift) (Dong, Lu, & Lee, 2022). ***Thus, we hypothesize a negative relationship between the relative reliance on market income and both policy and sociocultural advocacy (H5).***

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

As a comprehensive database was lacking, we conducted a systematic mapping effort by analyzing different (membership) databases of both public institutions and umbrella associations. We were eventually able to identify 2,475 nonprofits at the Flemish regional level. Based on this mapped population, a sample was extracted (N=747) for our cross-sectional research. These organizations have been contacted and invited to participate in our study. A two-wave survey was developed aimed at nonprofit managers. Considering methodological prescriptions, the survey was pre-tested and respondents were incentivized by the promise of information about the results. After sending introductory letters, the first wave included a face-to-face interview conducted by trained interviewers. For the second wave, the respondents could opt for a second personal interview or a questionnaire via email or an online webtool. The first wave included questions about policy and sociocultural advocacy as well as the tactical repertoire, while the second wave included questions about organizations' age, size and types of income. Several reminders have been send and eventually, by the beginning of June 2018, 496 organizations responded to the first wave and 403 organizations to the second one. Thus, the response rates are respectively 66.4% and 53.9%.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent variables

Concerning the two dependent variables, we have used a binary scale to measure the involvement in policy and sociocultural advocacy (no/yes). Policy advocacy was measured by asking nonprofit managers whether their organization pursued activities that relate to the goal of changing government policies (Mosley et al., 2022). Sociocultural advocacy was similarly measured by asking respondents whether their organization engaged in activities that reflect the goal of changing citizens' behavior and attitudes (Mosley et al., 2022). Moreover, in the beginning of the survey, we also gave a clear definition of both social change as well as the tactics that can be pursued (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014).

3.2.2. Independent variables

As outlined in the theoretical framework above, we have selected five independent variables that are considered important for explaining advocacy. For our operationalization, we have made use of the literature review of Lu (2018). This researcher gives an overview of how scholars – throughout the years – have operationalized these independent variables. First, organizational size is measured by the number of paid full-time equivalents of the organization. This measure is more frequently used than other size measures such as organizational income. Moreover, for total organizational income, there is also the issue of multicollinearity as most nonprofits in the Flemish context are predominantly reliant on public income (i.e., a positive correlation between the relative reliance on public income and total organizational income that is too strong, leading to an unstable binary regression analysis). Second and rather straightforward, age is measured by the years of existence after its formal foundation. Third, public income is measured as the relative share of public income in the total nonprofit income. Fourth, market income is similarly measured, but here we look at the relative share of market income in the total income. Although market income is trickier to define, it is in general about selling goods and services with a profit motive as well as revenues generated from partnerships with corporations. In the survey, we made clear to the respondents what can be considered public or market income by giving some examples. Last, for the institutional field of activity, we have relied on the ICNPO that distinguishes twelve categories (International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations). However, for our sample, there are no organizations belonging to category 8 (Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion) and only one organization to category 12 (Other). Then, for this research, we distinguish ten categories that reflect the diversity of the Flemish nonprofit sector and also allow for cross-national comparison: Culture and Recreation; Education and Research; Health; Social Services; Environment; Development and Housing; Law, Advocacy and Politics; International; Religion; and Business, Professional Associations and Unions (Litofcenko, Karner, & Maier, 2020; Suykens et al., 2023). In appendix, we have included an explanation as well as the proportion of the sample that relates to each category (see appendix 1).

3.2.3. Advocacy tactics

In order to answer our research questions, we also have to look at the association between (a) policy and sociocultural advocacy and (b) different advocacy tactics. Based on previous research (Almog-Bar, 2017; Clear, Paull, & Holloway, 2018; Mosley et al., 2022; Verschuere & De Corte, 2015), we have made our own composition of seventeen advocacy tactics that could be pursued in the Flemish context (e.g., while we did not include voter mobilization – since voting is compulsory in Belgium –, we did focus on participating in an advisory council as this is a typical tactic for the Flemish neo-corporatist tradition) (see appendix 2). The involvement in these different advocacy tactics was measured by making use of a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'no tactic at all' to 'utmost important tactic'. Subsequently, nonprofit managers had to indicate the extent to which a certain tactic was important for their organization.

3.3. Statistical analysis

Our analyses have been performed by making use of the software program SPSS. First, we have engaged in a descriptive analysis of our sample by calculating the frequencies and percentages of nonprofits that self-report to be involved in policy and/or sociocultural advocacy. Moreover, we have looked whether a correlation exists between policy and sociocultural advocacy. Second, we have performed Pearson correlation as well as binary logistic regression analyses in which policy and sociocultural advocacy are the dependent variables. The assumptions – concerning a large enough sample size, no influential outliers (i.e., based on dbeta values < 2), no multicollinearity of independent variables (i.e., based on Variance Inflation Factors < 5), binary scales for the dependent variables (i.e., no/yes), independent observations (i.e., each respondent relates to only one nonprofit) and linearity of independent variables and log odds – are all met (Menard, 2002). Third, we have performed a partial Spearman correlation analysis to examine the association between (a) the seventeen advocacy tactics and (b) policy and sociocultural advocacy. We did choose for a partial correlation analysis because of the significant positive correlation between policy and sociocultural advocacy (Pearson correlation of .306, $p < .001^{***}$). Said differently, it seems that both advocacy goals are often pursued together. Therefore, if we want to examine whether there is an association between the seventeen advocacy tactics and on the one hand policy and on the other hand sociocultural advocacy, we have to control respectively for sociocultural and policy advocacy. Last, we have also controlled for common method bias through separating the dependent and independent variables in either a proximal (i.e., buffer items) or temporal (i.e., different waves) way. Also ex post, no evidence of this bias could be found (i.e., based on a Harman's single factor test < 50%) (Eichhorn, 2014).

4. Findings

4.1. Engagement in policy and sociocultural advocacy

The construction of both binary scales allows us to analyze whether nonprofits in Flanders are involved in policy and/or sociocultural advocacy. As can be seen in table 1 – based on a crosstab of the number of nonprofits engaging in policy and/or sociocultural advocacy – it becomes evident that nonprofit managers indicate that a significant number of organizations is involved in advocacy (i.e., only 18% reports no advocacy engagement at all). More into detail, the overall percentages of organizations that are involved in either policy (16.4%) or sociocultural advocacy (14.5%) are rather similar. Moreover, most nonprofits combine both policy and sociocultural advocacy (51%). Second, taking the above into account, we can report that a significant correlation could be found between sociocultural and policy advocacy (.306***). In sum, nonetheless this significant association, there are also organizations that focus on either policy or sociocultural advocacy.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

4.2. Explaining policy and sociocultural advocacy

Here, we analyze whether the involvement in policy and sociocultural advocacy can be clarified based on five independent variables that are considered important in advocacy literature (Lu, 2018). Thus, we test whether we can confirm our pre-defined hypotheses in the beginning of this paper. In table 2, we first look whether significant correlations can be found between our independent (i.e., size, age, public and market income) and dependent variables (i.e., policy and sociocultural advocacy). Considering sociocultural advocacy, the independent variables public income, age and size are positively correlated and market income negatively. However, these associations are only significant for market income (-.149**) and age (.099^{+}). If we compare this with policy advocacy, the results are somewhat similar. The independent variables size, age and public income are positively correlated and market income negatively. Moreover, the negative correlation with market income (-.154**) and the positive correlation with public income (.183***) and age (.089^{+}) are statistically significant. Nonetheless, binary logistic regression analysis offers a more elaborate overview of the possible explanatory value of our independent variables. While a correlation analysis only looks at the association between one independent and dependent variable, a binary logistic regression analysis tries to explain the dependent variable based on all the included independent variables.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

Thus, we have performed binary logistic regression analyses for both policy and sociocultural advocacy as can be seen in table 3. Our model for policy advocacy is statistically significant (Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 43.356, $p < .001$) and has a Nagelkerke R Square (i.e., the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables) of 17.3%. In this model, the hypotheses for public income, age and institutional field of activity are supported. In other words, a significant positive effect size can be found for both public income (.012**) and age (.008^{+}). Also for the institutional field of activity, there is a significant positive association with the 'Law, Advocacy and Politics' (1.197^{+}), 'International' (1.619*) and 'Business, Professional Associations and Unions' (2.133**) fields of activity. In this case, 'Social Services' is our reference category because it is the category with the largest number of observations – and thus allows for a more robust analysis (see appendix 1). The model for sociocultural advocacy is also statistically significant (Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 38.542, $p < .001$) and has a Nagelkerke R Square of 15.1%. For this model, we can also confirm the hypotheses for age and the institutional field of activity as well as the one for market income. More precisely, we can find a positive result for age (.008^{+}) and a negative one for market income (-.012*), both statistically significant. Furthermore, we also find a significantly positive association for three fields of activity, namely 'Education and Research' (1.076^{+}), 'Environment' (2.569*) and 'International' (2.372*). However, we should notice – when interpreting these results – that the 'Social Services' institutional field of activity is again the reference category.

[INSERT TABLE 3]

4.3. Tactics used for policy and/or sociocultural advocacy

Last, we examine whether the seventeen tactics are associated with policy and/or sociocultural advocacy. If we look at table 4 – which is based on a partial correlation matrix – we can see that there is a significant positive association between policy advocacy and all the included tactics, except for 'raising awareness among citizens', 'organizing debate and discussion' and 'setting up improvement actions in the own organization'. The most important tactics seem to be 'direct contact with government administrations' (.318***), 'direct contact with politicians' (.303***), 'participating in advisory councils' (.216***) and 'filing a legal complaint or setting up a lawsuit' (.189***).

Next, if we focus on sociocultural advocacy, we can see that a higher number of tactics is not significantly associated – for example – 'direct contact with politicians', 'direct contact with government administrations', 'direct contact with corporations', 'participating in advisory councils', 'investing in an own research department' and 'setting up improvement actions in the own organization'. The most important sociocultural advocacy tactics seem to be 'raising awareness among citizens' (.327***), 'mobilizing citizens to defend and propagate opinions' (.293***), 'applying the societal vision or views to its own services' (.159**) and 'giving space to voices that would otherwise not be heard in the public debate' (.134**). In sum, we can see that our list of tactics is more strongly associated with policy than sociocultural advocacy. However, this could possibly be explained by the fact that we have been relying more heavily on literature and tactics that, by definition, only focus on policy advocacy (e.g., ‘direct contact with government administrations’ that could be classified as solely direct policy advocacy). Nonetheless, there are also tactics clearly associated with both policy and sociocultural advocacy (e.g., organizing a rally or demonstration).

[INSERT TABLE 4]

5. Discussion and conclusion

With this paper, we contribute to the literature interested in nonprofit advocacy by (a) our encompassing study focusing on both sociocultural and policy advocacy engagement as well as their determinants and tactics and (b) the choice of research setting by looking at a neo-corporatist tradition. We believe that this paper helps to address the current 'morass' in which nonprofit advocacy research finds itself. Taking this into account, four conclusions can be drawn.

First, we can see that a significant number of nonprofits in our sample engage in some form of advocacy – policy and/or sociocultural advocacy (82%). This result sheds another light on existing literature that reports a significantly lower advocacy engagement or argues that advocacy is a neglected nonprofit function (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). This could possibly be explained by the fact that most research until now – often within their disciplinary silos (i.e., interest group or social movement literature and research) – is missing out on the total image of nonprofits' social change efforts (Mosley et al., 2022). By bringing different research strands together, we can sketch a more nuanced picture of nonprofit advocacy engagement that better fits with empirical reality as well (see supra, organizations related to 'Black Lives Matter') (Shier & Handy, 2015). Moreover, while around one-third of the organizations in our sample pursue either policy (16.4%) or sociocultural advocacy (14.5%), more than half of the nonprofits engage in both (51%) (i.e., there is also a significant positive association between policy and sociocultural advocacy). Nonetheless, there could also be a strategic reason why some nonprofits either engage in sociocultural or policy advocacy (e.g., the perception that – if they would rally for certain norms and values, thus pursuing sociocultural advocacy – their policy advocacy efforts could be in jeopardy due to the fact that the government does not agree and distances themself from these values and norms). In sum, this paper is one of the first research endeavors that empirically shows that most nonprofits pursuing advocacy engage to some extent in both policy and sociocultural advocacy – although both are characterized by distinct goals.

Second, the results above could also explain – albeit partially – why there exist inconsistencies related to the determinants of nonprofit advocacy engagement. Based on previous research, we assume that the effects of some determinants could be different depending on the advocacy goals researchers focus on and/or nonprofits pursue (Suárez, 2020). Therefore, we have examined which determinants have a different or similar effect on policy and sociocultural advocacy. First, we can confirm our hypotheses for organizational age (H3a) and market income (H5). This means that for both determinants, we can find significant effect sizes which are similar for policy and sociocultural advocacy, namely a positive effect for organizational age and a negative one for market income. Thus, we could argue that older nonprofits are indeed considered more legitimate actors in society that can handle the risk of pursuing both policy and sociocultural advocacy (Deephouse et al., 2017; Lu, 2018). Also for market income, it seems to hold true that this type of income relates to an alienation of the public and political arena (Maier et al., 2016). Moreover, it is assumed that nonprofits more heavily reliant on market income prefer service delivery and a commercial logic over respectively advocacy and a social logic (Dong et al., 2022). Next, we can also confirm our hypothesis for public income (H4), as we find a significant positive effect size for policy advocacy. Thus, it seems that we can confirm our assumptions based on interdependence theory (Neumayr et al., 2015). An interdependent relationship and a more intense dialogue with the government – both policymakers and administrators – are positively associated with policy advocacy (opportunities). Last, also the institutional field of activity proves to be an important determinant (H1). We can see that the fields of 'Law, Advocacy and Politics' and 'Business, Professional Associations and Unions' significantly and positively relate to policy advocacy (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017). This can be explained by the fact that the former category – by definition – focusses on the goal of policy advocacy (i.e., the definition of this category strongly relates to an interest group perspective) and the latter predominantly involves regulations concerning socio-economic collective issues.

Then, when looking at the fields of ‘Education and Research’ and ‘Environment’, we can see that there is a positive and significant association with sociocultural advocacy. We could explain the former finding by the fact that education also entails awareness raising and addressing certain norms and values, which fits with the definition of sociocultural advocacy (Suárez, 2020). For the latter result, many nonprofits in the field of ‘Environment’ engage with the general public to convince them that our environment and climate are under threat and that immediate actions should be taken by all of us (Kagan & Dodge, 2023). Another interesting result relates to the ‘International’ field of activity, which is significantly and positively associated with both policy and sociocultural advocacy. This result does not have to surprise as nonprofits want to go against the negative sentiments that are growing with regard to both governmental policies and the attitudes of the general public concerning international and intercultural affairs (Hilhorst & van Wessel, 2022). In conclusion, while organizational age and market income seem to have a similar effect on policy and sociocultural advocacy, this is different for public income and the institutional field of activity. Thus – although many more determinants could be important (e.g., the perception of effectiveness related to policy and sociocultural advocacy) – our framework is a first attempt to (a) address inconsistencies related to advocacy determinants and (b) explain why some nonprofits solely pursue one advocacy goal while others engage in both.

Third, this research could also help to address ambiguities related to the tactical repertoire. There is a lot of confusion – also due to the fact that different advocacy goals are not simultaneously taken into account – around which tactics can ultimately be used for advocacy. Our research addresses this gap by analyzing the association between different advocacy tactics on the one hand and policy and sociocultural advocacy on the other hand. Referring to figure 1, we can make clear that some tactics are associated with either policy or sociocultural advocacy, while others are clearly used to pursue both policy and sociocultural change. First, for tactics such as ‘participating in advisory councils’ or ‘direct contact with politicians’, it is evident that these are directed towards policy change. There is no interaction with the general public at all (Verschuere & De Corte, 2015). Second, tactics such as 'raising awareness among citizens' and 'organizing debate and discussion' are apparently associated with sociocultural advocacy. A possible explanation could be that these tactics more strongly relate to the more vague discussions about norms and values instead of the more concrete policy proposals (Warren, 2003). Last, there are also tactics that relate to both policy and sociocultural advocacy – for example – 'collaborating with other organizations' and 'organizing a rally or demonstration'. These tactics are often considered important in different research strands – interest group and social movement studies – reflecting that these can be used for pursuing both advocacy goals (Shier & Handy, 2015).

Fourth, we also focus on the neo-corporatist tradition. Although there has not been much attention for sociocultural advocacy, especially in this context, we clearly see that policy and sociocultural advocacy are equally important to take into account. However, there are still indications showing that the neo-corporatist tradition left its traces. First of all, public income is positively and significantly associated with policy advocacy. This also relates to the government providing public income – in most cases (still) structural subsidies with significant leeway – in return for nonprofits 'filling the gaps' in both services and policies (Pauly et al., 2020). Another element relates to the field of 'Business, Professional Associations and Unions', which is the field par excellence characterized by neo-corporatist tripartite policy discussions (i.e., strictly speaking, neo-corporatism is predominantly concerned with the interest representation and negotiation of socio-economic and labor-market related issues) (Lijphart, 2012). Last, also the tactics that are more strongly associated with policy advocacy reflect the neo-corporatist tradition (e.g., 'direct contact with politicians', 'direct contact with government administrations' and 'participating in advisory councils') (Öberg et al., 2011). These tactics are characterized by their cooperative and direct nature. However, this does not have to mean that nonprofits cannot be more confrontational and indirect (e.g., 'organizing a protest or protest campaign') (Arvidson, Johansson, Meeuwisse, et al., 2018).

Last, this paper also has some practical relevance and limitations. Nonprofit managers should know that the advocacy function of their organization is very broad and not necessarily limited to policy advocacy. Therefore, we believe that our research can shed another light on the ongoing discussions concerning (a) authoritarian governments and shrinking civic space and (b) a shift in advocacy tactics. First of all, we believe that this neo-corporatist tradition enables nonprofits to engage in policy advocacy. However, clearly this does not have to mean that nonprofits cannot engage in sociocultural advocacy or even pursue more confrontational tactics – if they have to – as these nonprofits are considered legitimate actors in society (Arvidson, Johansson, Meeuwisse, et al., 2018). Although not necessarily generalizable, these results can be interesting for other contexts as well because it gives an overview of the advocacy scope available to nonprofits. For example, when confronted with an authoritarian government that does not want nonprofits to engage with their policy decisions, nonprofits can still try to pursue sociocultural advocacy – perhaps in a more cooperative and direct way (Strachwitz & Toepler, 2022). In sum, this paper gives insight into how nonprofits strategically adapt to their context (i.e., the advocacy goals they pursue and the tactics that are used for it). Second, if there is indeed a shift from outsider to insider tactics, this could be more problematic for sociocultural than policy advocacy (Fyall & McGuire, 2015). By solely using insider tactics, nonprofits can still engage in policy but not sociocultural advocacy (e.g., direct contact with politicians) – which is per definition taking place outside the institutional system. Thus, research should focus more on the complex internal relation between policy and sociocultural advocacy. Concerning limitations, we know that binary logistic regression analysis cannot give the same explanatory value as parametric statistics such as linear regression analysis. Moreover, future research could also look at different types of public (e.g., lump sum or ad-hoc) and market income (e.g., immediate transactions or contracts) and how they relate to policy and sociocultural advocacy as well as the tactics that are used (e.g., less confrontational when the source of income is more uncertain). Furthermore, other determinants should be taken into account as well, next to the more common ones that were included in this research. However, this paper is a first attempt to empirically look at both policy and sociocultural advocacy in order to broaden our understanding of nonprofit advocacy. Thus, we believe that future research could build on these findings by engaging in parametric statistics, including other determinants, focusing on different research contexts and conducting longitudinal research.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations

Categories	**Explanation**	**Proportion of the sample**
Category 1: Culture and Recreation	Organizations and activities in general and specialized fields of culture and recreation.	42 (8.5%)
Category 2: Education and Research	Organizations and activities administering, providing, promoting, conducting, supporting and servicing education and research.	28 (5.6%)
Category 3: Health	Organizations that engage in health-related activities, providing health care, both general and specialized services, administration of health care services and health support services.	15 (3.0%)
Category 4: Social Services	Organizations and institutions providing human and social services to a community or target population.	198 (39.9%)
Category 5: Environment	Organizations promoting and providing services in environmental conservation, pollution control and prevention, environmental education and health and animal protection.	24 (4.8%)
Category 6: Development and Housing	Organizations promoting programs and providing services to help improve communities and the economic and social wellbeing of society.	70 (14.1%)
Category 7: Law, Advocacy and Politics	Organizations and groups that work to protect and promote civil and other rights, or advocate the social and political interests of general or special constituencies, offer legal services and promote public safety.	39 (7.9%)
Category 8: Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion	Philanthropic organizations and organizations promoting charity and charitable activities.	0 (0.0%)

Category 9: International	Organizations promoting greater intercultural understanding between peoples of different countries and historical backgrounds and also those providing relief during emergencies and promoting development and welfare abroad.	18 (3.6%)
Category 10: Religion	Organizations promoting religious beliefs and administering religious services and rituals; includes churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, shrines, seminaries, monasteries and similar religious institutions, in addition to related associations and auxiliaries of such organizations.	28 (5.6%)
Category 11: Business, Professional Associations and Unions	Organizations promoting, regulating and safeguarding business, professional and labor interests.	33 (6.7%)
Category 12: Other	Not elsewhere classified.	1 (0.2%)

Appendix 2: The tactical repertoire

Tactics	**Explanation**
Investing in an own research department	This relates to a nonprofit relying on an in-house department of paid professionals to research and analyze data and topics, producing knowledge available for advocacy efforts.
Collecting and mobilizing external knowledge	This includes collecting knowledge and information – which is provided by external sources – that could be used as an input for advocacy engagement.
Direct contact with politicians	Nonprofit employees that directly interact – sometimes even in person – with politicians in both the executive (e.g., a minister) and legislative (e.g., a member of parliament) branch at different levels of government for advocacy purposes.
Direct contact with government administrations	This tactic relates to nonprofits' direct communication with administrators in government – ranging from a government department to a decentralized agency – to support their advocacy engagement.
Direct contact with corporations	It relates to nonprofits engaging in direct interactions with corporations – specifically managers and members of the board – in order to contribute to their advocacy goals.
Participating in advisory councils	These councils are formed in order to bring expertise together and to give advice – sometimes binding – to the government on how to handle certain topics or themes, which entails a social change agenda.
Disseminating opinions in all kinds of media	This relates to nonprofits publicly spreading certain opinions about collective issues – often carefully prepared – by making use of different media channels (e.g., the radio, a news broadcast and a Facebook post) with a focus on social change.
Raising awareness among citizens	An advocacy tactic that is different from disseminating opinions, as a nonprofit not only wants to confront people with a collective issue but also help them to understand it and make them more

	conscious – which is different than to agree with it.
Organizing debate and discussion	A nonprofit that stimulates or engages in debate and discussion about a collective theme and that is interested in the respectful confrontation of different viewpoints, opinions and attitudes in order to contribute to broad social change.
Mobilizing citizens to defend and propagate opinions	It means that nonprofits also rely on people to spread and defend their opinions about collective issues in order to put more pressure on their social change demands.
Organizing a rally or demonstration	An advocacy tactic characterized by the nonprofit standing for a certain cause or concern of collective nature and publicly – often in group – showing their beliefs and views.
Organizing a protest or protest campaign	Different than a demonstration, characterized by the disapproval of something that relates to a certain collective cause or concern, warranting advocacy engagement.
Filing a legal complaint or setting up a lawsuit	Nonprofits can also focus on the judicial branch of government by translating their social change efforts into legal demands before a court of justice.
Setting up improvement actions in the own organization	Nonprofits can also engage in social change by showing the external environment that their internal procedures, rules and culture reflect the collective issues they find important.
Collaborating with other organizations	This relates to all types of collaboration – ranging from an informal network to a coalition – with different types of organizations (e.g., other nonprofits or businesses) that can strengthen nonprofits' advocacy involvement.
Giving space to voices that would otherwise not be heard in the public debate	Giving a platform to particular constituents and their voices – as it is often hard for them to have a say in the public and political arena – with the intention of bringing about social change.
Applying the societal vision or views to its own services	This tactic enables nonprofits to show that services can be designed in a different way, thus also in line with their social change agenda.

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