ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	MOBILIZED INTERESTS: HOW INTEREST GROUPS INFLUENCE GROUP MEMBER PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICS
	Amy D. Meli, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024
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In this project, I investigate how interest group mobilizations influence their members' perceptions of government and politics. I theorize that some groups – especially issue advocacy nonprofits whose issues have been incorporated into the Democratic or Republican party platforms – use partisan strategies focused on electing the leaders who can help them move their policy agendas in Congress. Other groups, especially trade and professional associations, choose not to affiliate with a pollical party and instead build relationships with policymakers on both sides of the aisle so that they can move their policy agendas regardless of who is in office.

I find that these two different policy strategies lead interest groups to communicate differently with their members, with partisan groups and issue advocacy nonprofits using more partisan and conflict-oriented language, while nonpartisan groups and associations use more pragmatic language. I find that these messages have effects on the people who read them. In a survey experiment, I find that independents and weak partisans who read pragmatic and

bipartisan messages have warmer feelings towards the other party, while strong partisans have warmer feelings towards the other party when they hear partisan messaging.

Notably, I find that these different approaches lead to varying effects on interest group members, including differences in levels of affective polarization and political efficacy. As professionals join their professional society and get more involved in their association's activities, they have more trust in government, higher levels of internal and external efficacy, and warmer feelings towards those in the out party. Through interview research, I find that members are influenced by a number of factors, including the public policy training they receive from their interest groups, interactions they have with members of Congress and others in the political system, and messages members receive about how groups use bipartisan strategies to accomplish member goals. All of these stimuli are contributing factors to these effects.

MOBILIZED INTERESTS: HOW INTEREST GROUPS INFLUENCE GROUP MEMBER
PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICS

by

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Dedication

For Brian.

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And finally, to my friends and family, without whom I could have never started, much less completed, this project. To Jack, who inspires me to do big things. To my parents, whose faith in me gave me the courage to make this leap. To my sister Erin, who gave me confidence when I didn't have enough of my own. To Ed for his mentorship and guidance for over 20 years. I wish you were still here so I could share this with you. To my running pals, who provided the spark that started me on this journey. And most importantly to Brian, my person. For your encouragement, for being my sounding board during moments of stress and uncertainty, and for picking up the slack when I couldn't. I couldn't have done any of this without your unending support.

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List of Abbreviations

Organization Name	Abbreviation
Affordable Care Act	ACA
Agricultural Retailers Association	ARA
American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology	ACOG
American Dental Association	ADA
American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations	AFL-CIO
American Library Association	ALA
American Medical Association	AMA
American Property Casualty Insurers Association	APCIA
Congressional Management Foundation	CMF
Environmental Protection Agency	EPA
Federal Election Commission	FEC
Linguistic Inquiry Word Count	LIWC
National Association of Relators	NAR
National Rifle Association	NRA
Party Proximity Index	PPI
Political Action Committee	PAC
Project Vote Smart	PVS
Republican Majority for Choice	RMC

Chapter 1: Introduction

Wherever, at the head of some new undertaking, you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association (Tocqueville 1838).

Interest groups are ubiquitous in the U.S. political system. In 2023, interest groups spent $4.2 billion in lobbying at the state and federal level (Massoglia 2024). 12,937 lobbyists registered with the federal government in 2023 (OpenSecrets 2024). For years, scholars have debated interest groups' effects on the political system. Much of this work has centered around the way interest groups have influenced the policymaking process (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1964; Deardorff and Hall 2006; Hansen 1991), bias in the interest groups system (Miler 2007; Schlozman 1984; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and the way interest groups engage members in the political process (Kollman 1998; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). This project focuses on the latter.

In the leadup to the 2022 midterm elections, two interest groups that advocate on the same issue – access to abortion – had different messages for their members. Both communicated with members about the importance of voting, but the groups had different strategies for encouraging participation. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), a professional society for physicians practicing obstetrics and gynecology, focused on the importance of voting's effect on jobs, education, and healthcare. NARAL Pro-Choice America[1] (NARAL), an issue advocacy nonprofit advocating for abortion rights, encouraged members to "fight back" against "MAGA Republicans" in November. These two messages, pictured in

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[1] In fall 2023, NARAL Pro-Choice America changed its name to Reproductive Freedom for All. In this document, I use the names NARAL Pro-Choice America and NARAL to refer to the organization.

Figure 1, were available on social media and the organizations' websites weeks before Election

Day (ACOG 2022; NARAL Pro-Choice America 2022).

Figure 1.1: ACOG and NARAL Get Out the Vote Messaging

These interest groups share a policy goal but use different strategies to accomplish that

goal. In this project, I identify the factors that drive this variance in messaging and how those

differences reflect diverging approaches to the strategies the groups use to accomplish their

public policy goals – particularly their lobbying and member mobilization activities. I argue that

interest group messages – which can be delivered via web ads like the ones pictured above, but

can be delivered via email and at in person events – have profound effects on the way interest

members perceive the political system around them. In an era marked by high levels of affective

polarization, questions about the legitimacy of democratic government, and distrust of

institutions of all kinds, it is important to understand how these messages influence the

perceptions of everyday Americans.

Interest Groups and Democratic Norms

Academics, the media, and the mass public are often skeptical of the role of interest

groups in the political system. Scholars suggest that interest groups exacerbate economic and

social inequality in the U.S. political system (Schlozman 1984; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady

1995). Others suggest that interest groups have exacerbated political polarization (Karol 2015). The public mirrors these concerns – in a recent Pew poll, 73% of respondents agreed that lobbyists have too much political influence (Cerda and Daniller 2021). These lingering concerns contribute to a conventional wisdom that interest groups have a normatively negative impact on the political system. I argue that while these concerns are legitimate, they also do not take into account the full breadth of the interest group system. The term encompasses a wide variety of organizations – from the AFL-CIO to Walmart, from the American Nurses Association to the American Heart Association, and from the National Rifle Association to Everytown for Gun Safety. These groups have a wide variety of members, and they are uniquely positioned to communicate with these members. This project focuses on that communication and a much less studied outcome of interest group involvement – support for democratic norms.

There are several reasons interest groups have an important role to play in the way individuals perceive the political system. First, groups act as a bridge between everyday Americans and the political institutions that represent them. As Kollman (1998) points out, the most common way for individuals to get involved in the political system other than voting is through interest group mobilization. This gives interest groups tremendous reach into large segments of the U.S. public, and interest group mobilizations provide an opportunity to shape individual opinions about politics and government. Relatedly, interest groups are an important source of political information for interest group members. Interest group leaders invest significant time and resources into civic engagement training, and this training has the opportunity to influence the way individuals view the political system. Given interest groups' reach and the scope of their activities, studying the effects of these activities can help us better understand how interest group members perceive the system around them.

In this research, I focus on three critical aspects of individuals' attitudes about politics — affective polarization, political efficacy, and support for bipartisan compromise, which all have implications for the health of U.S. democracy. Recent research finds that high levels of affective polarization can undermine support for democratic norms (Graham and Svolik 2022; Kingzette et al. 2021). As a result, there is an active line of political science research seeking ways to alleviate affective polarization (Kalla and Broockman 2021; Robison and Mullinix 2016). This project contributes to this work and demonstrates that interest groups – and the strategies they use – can be used to introduce people to policymakers from both sides of the aisle – a process that appears to have strong effects on affective polarization levels among interest group members.

Similarly, interest group members have higher trust in government, internal, and external efficacy. These concepts are intimately related to the consent of the governed – a key democratic norm (Finkel 2003; Osterberg-Kaufmann, Stark, and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2023). Finkel (2003) finds that civic education leads to higher levels of trust and efficacy. My research illustrates that interest groups spend significant time and resources on civic education, which for some may be the only civic education some individuals receive after their high school civics class. I argue that these civic education opportunities increase levels of both internal and external efficacy. In an era where there are nagging questions about government responsiveness, it is important to better understand the stimuli that influence people's perceptions of their own impact on government decision-making.

Finally, people who are involved in interest groups have stronger support for bipartisan compromise. Political scientists have found that public opinion about bipartisan compromise is often superficial – people mostly support bipartisanship when the compromise results in their

party earning concessions but oppose compromise if they perceive their party must give something up as a result of the compromise (Harbridge, Malhotra, and Harrison 2014). However, interest groups yield a type of support for bipartisanship that goes beyond these sentiments and illustrates conditions that can yield a true desire for bipartisan compromise. One interviewee likened this compromise to the way neighbors come together to fix a fence between neighboring cattle farms – both sides have to give something in order to solve the problem. Another interviewee expressed her frustration in Congress's inability to work across the aisle to solve problems – a phenomenon they observe when visiting Congressional offices. In her comments about Congress's inability to compromise on agriculture-related legislation, she remarked: "We're the United States. [We] are not the Republican states or the Democratic United States. We are the United States. So get over it and get something done. I just, I struggle with, -- you're there to do a job. Get the job done."[2] I argue that interest groups' focus on getting things done regardless of which party claims credit has a strong influence on their members' perceptions about bipartisan compromise. These sentiments, which go along with a genuine desire for Congress to make policy concerning interest group members' key policy priorities, are important political and social norms (Wolak 2022).

It is important to note that all three of these effects are limited to interest group members. Although the findings are skewed towards those from higher socioeconomic groups (Miler 2018; Schlozman 1984), the findings still apply to a broad segment of the U.S. population. While it is difficult to measure interest groups' reach, some estimates can help us understand that these findings apply to a significant portion of the U.S. adult population. While the share of labor union members has been shrinking over the past several decades, 14 million members represent

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[2] Interview with participant 8 from Trade Association 3.

10.3 percent of wage and salaried workers in the U.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). Looking at estimates of membership organizations more broadly, the American Society of Association Executives estimates that 63 million Americans volunteered through a member organization and that roughly 39 million Americans received training through a business or professional organization in 2015 (American Society of Association Executives 2015). This participation suggests that labor unions, trade associations, professional associations, and membership associations have a broad reach into the U.S. public. Given that most interest groups communicate political messages to their entire membership, it is likely that a significant number of individuals receive political messaging from interest groups. While participation in these groups remains biased towards wealthier Americans, the reach of these organizations is significant (Brady, Verba, and Lehman Schlozman 1995; Schattschneider 1960b). Given these findings, it is incumbent upon academics and practitioners to make these outcomes available more broadly.

Interest Groups and Their Members' Perceptions of the Political System

Recent political parties literature suggests that interest groups have contributed to the polarized political environment in the U.S. (Karol 2015). These effects are facilitated by the fact that interest groups – particularly single-issue groups and labor unions – have become incorporated into one of the two political parties (Karol 2015, 2019; Lacombe 2019). Karol's arguments build on earlier work suggesting that political parties are more than their formal structures – they are coalitions of intense policy demanders that shape the party's legislative agendas (Cohen et al. 2008). Intense policy demanders, which are made up of interest groups and party activists, have more politically extreme views than the average voter. As a result, groups

that have been incorporated into the party coalitions push the parties into increasingly polarized positions on issues.

Other scholars point out that some interest groups are neither liberal nor conservative ideologically(Bonica 2013; J. Walker 1991). In his landmark work on interest groups, Walker (1991) found that some interest groups operate in niche fields that are less impacted by partisanship and that other groups are able to work with either party to accomplish their policy goals. However, even during the less polarized era of the late 20th Century, Walker suggested that that organizations were trending away from more moderate views. His work leaves an open question about the extent to which groups were polarizing during that era – a question that endures today. More recently, Bonica (2013) suggests that while labor unions and single-issue groups tend to have more ideologically extreme views, companies, membership associations, and trade groups tend to occupy more moderate positions. As a result, Bonica questions these groups' role in contributing to polarization (Bonica 2013).

I argue that we will see variation in the extent to which interest groups associate with the political parties, and that this variation is driven by the group's organizational goals. Going back to the example in Figure 1.1, ACOG accomplishes its overarching goal of member maintenance by linking political activity to physicians' motivations for joining the organization – jobs and health care. These motivations influence ACOG's policy goals, which are wide ranging and include not only access to abortion but also other issues including physician reimbursement from insurance companies and medical liability reform. This combination of member motivations and policy goals lead ACOG to a nonpartisan public policy strategy. Consequently, groups like ACOG focus on teaching members how they can influence the political process to achieve their instrumental goals – in other words, the groups focus on the ways the organization's public

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policy strategy helps members achieve their objectives for joining the organization. Nonpartisan group strategies involve robust civic engagement programs, education about the way legislators receive communication from their constituents, and a concerted effort to link the organization's policy priorities to individual member goals. I find that these efforts, while resource intensive, lead to higher levels of political efficacy, lower levels of affective polarization, and increased support for bipartisan compromise.

NARAL also uses its organizational goals as the basis for its public policy strategy. NARAL's mission is to advocate for reproductive rights, which leads the organization to focus on securing abortion rights as its policy focus. This policy focus has been incorporated into the platform of the Democratic party, and consequently, NARAL chooses to affiliate with the Democratic party (Karol 2009). As a result, NARAL uses party cues and conflict-oriented language to link its members' goals – wins for the Democratic party and therefore for abortion rights – to its policy agenda. This type of language has implications for how members of groups like NARAL think about politics, including leading to higher levels of affective polarization and lower support for bipartisan cooperation.

This project explores how interest groups' organizational goals influence the strategies they use to achieve public policy goals, including the distance the group maintains from the political parties. Some groups affiliate closely with one party or the other, while others choose to remain neutral and maintain relationships with both political parties. This strategy in turn influences the way the group communicates with members, which then influences group member perceptions of the political system.

 Figure 1.2: The Effect of Interest Groups on Members' Perceptions of Government

| Organizational Goals | → | Party Proximity | → | Interest Group Strategy and Interaction with Members | → | Affective Polarization, Political Efficacy, and Support for Bipartisanship |
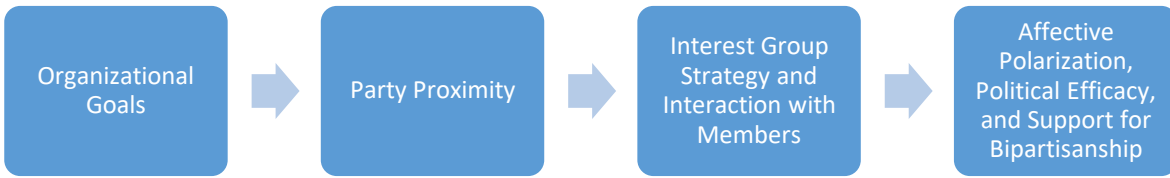
I argue that party proximity drives the strategies the organization uses to accomplish policy goals, including the content and tone of a group's communication with its members. Groups that are proximate to the parties are more likely to use partisan cues and conflict-oriented language in their member communication, while neutral groups tend to avoid this confrontational language and focus instead on the ways the group's policy agenda helps group members achieve their instrumental goals. In addition to communicating the group's approach to achieving policy goals, these messages can also shape member attitudes about politics, political parties, and our government institutions. In particular, repeated exposure over time to these messages can lead to differences in affective polarization, with partisan groups encouraging higher levels of affective polarization and neutral groups having a depolarizing effect on members. Further, because of the strategies these groups use, I expect members of nonpartisan groups like professional societies to have higher levels of political efficacy and support for bipartisan compromise. As people become more involved in their professional societies and exposure to these depolarizing messages increases, the effects should be stronger.

These differences are driven by two distinct patterns of behavior when comparing partisan and nonpartisan interest groups. Partisan interest groups work with their parties to elect leaders and gain control of government in order to achieve their policy goals (Karol 2015). When their party is not in control of government, partisan groups fundraise and organize so that they can regain control of government. With mobilization and fundraising as the primary tools to

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accomplish policy objectives, interest groups that have been incorporated into one of the political parties take advantage of the mobilizing effect of party identity cues to boost fundraising and response rates among their members. Consequently, partisan groups use language that invokes party identity and makes out-group bias salient.

In contrast, nonpartisan groups work with legislators from both parties to accomplish their legislative agendas. These groups tend to seek bipartisan cosponsors for bills or adjust their legislative agendas based on which party is in power. While some may have policy platforms that favor one party or the other, nonpartisan group intentionally and explicitly avoiding being incorporated into the political party system. One interest group leader, who represents rural constituents who skew Republican, summarized her group's approach: "It takes bipartisanship to advance anything in Congress. And I think we try to promote our friends on both sides. And let folks know that there's folks on both sides working hard on our issues[3]."

These groups contrast with partisan interest groups in fundamental ways. Nonpartisan groups tend to have memberships that cut across political parties. As a result, these groups choose strategies that avoid alienating interest group members and legislators from either political party. As one interest group leader told me, "absolutely everything we say, has a completely nonpartisan bent to it. To the point where we almost like tie ourselves into pretzels to make that happen, that everything that we write, or say, is analyzed from a lens of 'could anyone take this as a partisan comment?[4]'" As a result of this cross-cuttingness, leaders of nonpartisan groups tend to use different strategies to mobilize members, rely on different types of language when communicating with members, and provide opportunities for members to interact with

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[3] Interview with leader from Trade Association 3.
[4] Interview with leader from Company 1.

citizens and elected officials from both political parties. As one interest group member told me, "It doesn't make any difference to me, I could care less what party you're from. I'm here to try to get the job done and I don't care if you're which party you are at all[5]." It is also common for members of nonpartisan groups to attend grassroots meetings with people from different political parties, allowing group members to develop relationships across party lines. Without being able to rely on party identity as a way to energize members, these groups must use different mobilization techniques, which involve linking the group's political agenda to member goals.

My research reveals that professional associations and trade associations in particular have a depolarizing affect in their members, given the incentives they have to remain distant from both political parties. Associations' efforts to connect legislative activity with members' personal goals, expose members to the political process, and provide civic education lead to these outcomes.

Considering interest groups more broadly, groups display a variety of degrees of incorporation into the political party system, with some groups acting as part of the core of the Democratic or Republican parties, others with preferences toward one party or the other without full incorporation, and still others that remain nonpartisan by maintaining distance from both parties. These distinctions lead to important differences in the way groups lobby to make progress towards policy goals and mobilize their members.

Contributions to Political Science Literature

This project makes several contributions to the study of interest groups, political parties, and political behavior. First, my research on interest group party proximity sheds new light on

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[5] Interview with member 13 from Trade Association 3.

the relationship between interest groups and political parties. There have been notable projects measuring the ideology and policy preferences among interest groups (Bonica 2013; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020). However, these measures do not directly address partisanship among interest groups. Given the differences between ideology and partisanship, it is important to have a way to measure partisanship among interest groups as distinct from ideology (Ellis and Stimson 2012). Likewise, the relationship between a group's partisanship and ideology also varies in predictable ways. Trade associations, which are made up of institutional members and are therefore more insulated from the partisan preferences of the individuals involved in the group, are more likely to maintain a nonpartisan positions even if their political ideologies skew to the left or right. Conversely, professional associations, which have individual dues-paying members and are therefore more sensitive to their members' partisan sensibilities, are more likely to adopt a partisan posture to match their ideological preferences. In this way, my project contributes to both political parties research and interest groups literature. Since we can predict interest group behavior based on the group's partisanship, PPI can be a useful predictor in future interest groups research.

Second, my findings on interest group party proximity illustrate that there is significant variation in the strategies interest groups use to move their legislative agendas. We have a tendency to study interest groups as a monolith. Many excellent studies of interest group lobbying strategy do not distinguish between types of groups. Yet we know that groups differ in important ways – in the resources at their disposal, their size of membership, their longevity, and many other dimensions. I use this variation as a starting point – different memberships dictate different organizational goals. These differences can help us predict the ways interest groups choose to interact with the political system around them. My research finds consistent patterns in

group behavior based on group type. While some groups – particularly issue advocacy nonprofits and groups that make political contributions but do not lobby – are closely aligned with political parties, others – especially trade and professional associations – intentionally maintain distance from both parties as a way of achieving their policy goals. Understanding the types of groups that engage in these strategies provides a more nuanced understanding of interest groups and how the lobby policymakers and can help us understand the full range of lobbying strategies used by interest groups.

Third, this project also speaks to the growing literature on affective polarization. In recent years, political scientists have studied the various contributors to this phenomenon (Iyengar et al. 2019; Mason 2018). Up until now, there has not been a systematic study of the way interest groups contribute to – or alleviate – affective polarization. This study argues that nonpartisan and association interest group mobilizations – which include messaging focused on bipartisan compromise, civic education and training, and exposure to people with diverse political viewpoints – lead to lower levels of affective polarization.

Interestingly, my findings run counter to what many political scientists would expect from highly engaged individuals. Prior studies have found that people who are the most involved in politics are also the most likely to hold strong political views and have the highest levels of affective partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). The current study finds the opposite – that people who are very involved in their professional society are likely to have lower levels of affective polarization compared to those who are less involved or who are not members. These patterns demonstrate that political activity does not have to be polarizing and suggests that the techniques that yield these results – civic education, exposure to people of different political affiliations, and exposure to depolarizing messaging – might be leveraged in other contexts.

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I approach these questions in different sections of this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I discuss the existing literature on interest groups, public opinion, and the way these two concepts intersect. In Chapter 3, I focus on the relationship between interest groups and parties. I examine the distance between interest groups and the two political parties by developing a novel measure called Party Proximity Index (PPI). Rather than placing interest groups in one of the party coalitions, I argue that the relationship between groups and parties is better thought of as a continuum. After advancing the theoretical basis for the PPI, I then discuss the construction and validity of this measure. PPI draws on contribution data from 2,040 interest groups and examines the partisan patterns of their giving. Groups closest to the Democratic party have a PPI approaching -1, groups closest to the Republican party have a PPI of 1, and groups with equal distance from both parties have a PPI approaching 0. I find significant variation among groups, with professional and trade associations more likely to be nonpartisan and issue advocacy groups and labor unions more likely to be partisan. This novel measure reveals important patterns of how different types of interest groups – unions, professional associations, etc. – position themselves in relation to the political parties. These dynamics reflect different organizational goals and suggest important differences in interest groups strategy and behaviors.

In Chapter 4, I examine the relationship between PPI and interest group communication. I expect groups to use the most effective strategy available to mobilize their members. For highly partisan groups, electoral organizations, and issue advocacy nonprofits, this means more partisan cues and conflict-based messaging compared to nonpartisan groups, professional associations, and trade associations. I test these expectations by performing text analysis on a unique database of more than 14,321 emails from 227 interest groups.

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Finally, I investigate ways in which partisan and nonpartisan interest groups influence political attitudes among group members. In Chapter 5, I test the way interest group messaging influences the political opinions of those in the general public in a survey experiment of a random sample of U.S. adults. In this survey, I find that group messages have an impact, but the nature of the effect depends upon both the type of message the groups sends and the partisanship of the receiver. Weak partisans and independent leaners display lower levels of affective polarization after reading an interest group message that emphasizes bipartisan cooperation. Independents, partisan leaners, and weak partisans prefer groups that use bipartisan messaging compared to those who use partisan messages.

In Chapter 6, I explore the ways interest group strategies influence people who belong to those interest groups. I conduct qualitative interviews with 23 interest group leaders and members of two different interest groups who participate in their interest group's public policy activities. I also conduct a survey of over 3,700 individuals who are eligible to join a professional society to examine how political efficacy, support for bipartisan compromise, and levels of affective polarization are influenced by belonging to the professional society and level of activity in the group. Finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss the normative consequences of these findings and suggest paths for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theory

In this project, I examine the role that an interest group's organizational goals play in the way interest groups educate and mobilize their members on public policy issues and how that involvement influences members' affective polarization, efficacy, and support for bipartisan compromise. To understand how interest groups can influence attitudes among group members, we must first understand the ways interest groups engage with group members in a political context. Interest groups spend time and resources communicating with and educating members to prepare them to get involved in public policy issues. While these activities are ubiquitous among interest groups, they receive much less attention from academic compared to lobbying and direct engagement with policymakers. Groups with different types of members will have different organizational goals, which lead these groups to use different strategies to communicate with their members. This project seeks to understand how interest group communication varies by the different ways interest groups communicate with their members and, based on a group's type and party proximity, the effect these messages have on member perceptions of government and politics.

Literature Review

The Connecting Role of Interest Groups

In their study of interest groups, Baumgartner and Walker (1988, 926) identify interest groups as a "vast training ground for political activity and an important pathway through which citizens are linked to political parties." It is through this lens I will study interest groups throughout the course of this project. In this research, I highlight the unique role of interest

groups in our system in linking vast numbers of Americans to political institutions and shape their perceptions of politics and political institutions.

In his 1998 work, Kollman (1998) defines outside lobbying as the process by which interest groups mobilize their members in public policy debates to influence policymaker decision-making. This process, which is typically called grassroots advocacy by industry practitioners, can involve various stakeholders – members, employees, shareholders, and other interested individuals – communicating with policy makers in writing, via phone, or in person. Aside from voting, outside lobbying by interest groups is the most common way for members of the public to participate in politics (Kollman 1998). Kollman suggested that, at the time his book was published, 9 out of 10 interest groups engaged in outside lobbying at least some of the time, which means that most people with group affiliations have received some sort of communication about policy from their interest group (Kollman 1998).

Scholars have found evidence of the connection between the rise in constituent communication and interest group activity. Scholars in the mid-1990s attributed increases in participation not to an increase in constituent interest in politics, but to an increase in interest group mobilization (Berry 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Organizations promote political activity by reducing the costs of participation among their members (E. T. Walker 2009).

Although some literature finds that people are more likely to participate in passive forms of interest group participation than in previous years (Skocpol 2004), the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF), an organization assisting legislative offices and interest groups in more effectively responding to constituent communications, has documented an unprecedented growth in constituent communication over the past two decades (Hysom 2008). While individuals might involve themselves differently than before, increasing participation in

activities like writing a letter to Congress suggests that interest groups are mobilizing their members more frequently, and those members are responding by contacting their legislators more frequently. Logic follows that these types of activities can have an impact on the people who participate in these campaigns.

Outside lobbying, along with other tools interest groups use to engage on policy issues, can influence policymaker behavior. In a survey conducted by CMF, found that constituent contact – much of which is driven by interest group mobilization – is the most effective way to influence voting behavior in members of Congress when the member has not decided on an issue position (Hysom 2008). Academic studies have come to similar conclusions and find theoretical explanations for these patterns. Miler (2007) finds that due to accessibility heuristics, lawmakers are more likely to consider the positions of subconstituencies who communicate frequently with their offices. Bergan (2009) found that grassroots lobbying had significant impacts on legislator behavior during campaigns run by the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and the American Cancer Society. Henderson et al. (2021) found that grassroots communication from interest group members in the district plays a particularly important role – these communications help members of Congress reconcile the preferences of national interest groups with the preferences of people living in their district. Through interviews with Congressional staff, the authors find that outside lobbying is a core component of the way legislators understand constituent preferences (Henderson et al. 2021).

Taken together, the existing scholarship identifies constituent communication to legislative offices as an important component of both citizen advocacy and legislator decision-making. However, political scientists know relatively little about how interest groups drive this kind of constituency contact. Specifically, I address questions about the strategies and techniques

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used by groups, how these strategies vary across different kinds of groups, and the impact the strategies have on group members. While scholars find that interest groups play an important role in informing Congressional offices, little work has been done to study the effect these efforts have on interest group members. In his study of grassroots lobbying, Bergan (2009) suggests that interest group mobilizations can educate members about key issues. Lacombe (2019) finds that identity cues used by the National Rifle Association (NRA) lead members to use that same language in letters to the editor – suggesting that the cues have an impact on the way members think about gun rights. However, there has been no systematic study of the messaging used by a wide range of interest groups and how that messaging influences group member attitudes. This project will address unanswered questions about the effect of interest group communications on group members. Given interest groups' role in connecting citizens to the institutions and public officials that represent them, I focus on the way groups engage their members, and how those messages can affect member ideas about core features of democratic representation. In today's political environment of heightened partisan polarization and attacks on the core principles of fair elections and voting, understanding the role of interest groups in shaping citizens' ideas about democratic norms is essential work.

It is worth mentioning here that although interest groups play a unique role in connecting people with government, scholars have long discussed the normative questions around bias in interest group mobilization. While early scholars touted the pluralistic ideals that interest groups help to uphold, mid-20th Century scholars questioned whether the pluralist framework was possible for all groups (Olson 1965). Schattschneider (1960b) famously wrote that, "the flaw in pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with an upper-class accent" and that business interests dominate the interest groups landscape.

Later studies confirmed Schattschneider's suspicions. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) find that people of high socioeconomic status are more likely to get involved in political activity compared to their poorer neighbors. Verba and his colleagues (1995) find that group member activists are not representative of the U.S. population and find that a lack of mobilization leads people of lower socioeconomic status to be excluded from this political activity.

In her dyadic theory of subconstituency representation, Miler (2010) provides evidence that some subconstituencies are more visible to legislators due to their ability to communicate more frequently with a member of Congress's Washington office. As a result, more visible subconstituencies receive better representation than those that are less familiar to the office. This relationship further advantages the preferences of higher resourced groups over the preferences of groups that do not have interest group representation (Miler 2010). However, recent work suggests that when lower resourced groups do get involved in political activity, legislators are more likely to pay attention to their efforts (Gause 2022).

Bias in the interest group system also has potential implications for the story this project tells about how interest groups affect political perceptions among their members. While I argue that nonpartisan interest groups decrease levels of affective polarization, increase political efficacy, and increase support for bipartisan compromise among their members, these effects are not available to those who are not members of nonpartisan interest groups. Since the interest group system – especially trade and professional associations – is biased towards those of higher socioeconomic status, I expect these effects to be unevenly distributed as well.

The Relationship Between Interest Groups and Political Parties

Scholars have also turned their focus to the relationship between interest groups and political parties. In his landmark work on the development of interest groups in the 20th Century,

Walker (1991) theorized that as the interest group system grows, it becomes more polarized. In his analysis, Walker identified a "trend toward increased ideological differences within the group structure underlying the two political parties. Interest groups, as they struggle to advance their own programs, are steadily being drawn into the orbit of one of the two major parties, thus experiencing the consequences of electoral politics and conflict within policy communities" (Walker 1991, 146).

Walker noted, however, that some groups engage in activities that are inherently nonpartisan. Some operate in niche fields that are not affected by partisan changes in government. Others can do business no matter who is in the White House. In 1991, however, Walker observed that the presence of these groups was declining (Walker 1991). This project uses Walker's theory of party incorporation as a starting point to understand the extent to which parties have been incorporated, and the effects incorporation have on members, in the modern U.S. political system.

Since the time Walker wrote, party scholars have also theorized about the relationship between interest groups and political parties. In his early work on political parties in government, Schattschneider (1960a) suggested that parties were distinct from interest groups, with parties organized to gain control of government and interest groups focused on accomplishing specific tasks. Later scholars agreed that political parties are made up of political elites, including officeholders and candidates (Aldrich 1995; Schlesinger 1985).

More recent research questions this theory by suggesting that parties are made up not only of candidates, but also of "intense policy demanders" like interest groups and party activists (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008). Cohen et al. (2008) first raised the idea of parties composed of leaders, activists, and interest groups who seek to influence political nominations.

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Groups are motivated to get involved in nominations in order to secure a set of policy demands. These groups coordinate with each other to gain control of government as a way of achieving their policy goals.

Karol's work examines more deeply how interest groups are incorporated into political parties and the effect that trend has on various aspects of American politics. Like Walker, Karol suggests that groups with consistent opponents tend to get pushed into one of the political parties (Karol 2009; Walker 1991). In his 2009 book, Karol finds evidence that labor unions and single-issue groups have been incorporated into the party coalitions (Karol 2009). He also theorizes that the groups that constitute party coalitions are more stable than even the parties' issue positions (Karol 2009). The parties shift policy positions in efforts to expand and maintain their coalitions while group affiliations remain stable (Karol 2009). Karol theorizes that these groups vary in the degree to which they affiliate with party coalitions, with environmental groups and abortion-related groups more closely tied to parties than groups representing farmers or veterans (Karol 2009, 2017).

Victor and Reinhardt (2018) build on Karol's work by suggesting that the composition of party coalitions can vary over time depending upon the interest group's positions and how they align with the party's platform, how close the groups' ideologies are to the party median, and how loyal the groups are to the parties. The authors measure inclusion into the party coalition by identifying whether a group's policy priorities have been incorporated into the party's platform (Victor and Reinhardt 2018).

While these scholars identify variation in the extent to which groups affiliate with political parties, other researchers focused on a possible explanation for this variation, namely that interest groups adopt different strategies for working with lawmakers. While earlier scholars

believed that political contributions represented a quid pro quo, with legislators taking specific actions in exchange for interest group political contributions (Poole and Romer 1985; Welch 1980), more recent work has a more nuanced understanding of the role of interest group political contributions. Hall and Wayman (1990) find that instead of predicting voting behavior, interest group political contributions are associated with issue involvement, particularly at the committee level.

Around this time, scholars proposed an access-based contribution strategy for interest groups (Snyder 1992; Wright 1990). Using political contributions from labor unions, business associations, and trade associations, Snyder (1992) finds these groups contribute to incumbents more than challengers. Kalla and Broockman (2015) provide support to access-oriented theories in a field experiment that showed meeting requests from PAC donors are more likely to be fulfilled than those from non-donors.

Fouirnaies and Hall (2014) use political contribution data to identify two different legislative strategies among interest groups. Access-oriented groups are more likely to support incumbents, while ideologically-oriented groups are more likely to support challengers (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014). I argue that we can use Fouirnaies and Hall's (2014) theory of access versus ideologically-oriented groups, and the underlying contributions data these scholars use to make their arguments, to understand why an interest group would move close to one of the parties or remain neutral. As I will detail in the next section of this chapter, I expect these access-oriented groups to be more likely to maintain a nonpartisan status compared to ideologically-motivated groups. I argue that the driver behind the decision to maintain nonpartisan status or affiliate with a political party has its core in organizational goals and interest group leaders' determinations about the best way to achieve those goals. These organizational goals drive

interest groups' public policy strategy, which leads groups to choose to hew close to one of the parties or maintain distance from both parties. Since different types of organizations have different goals, we see different patterns of affiliation based on interest groups' organization types.

A Goals-Driven Theory of Interest Group Strategy

In this project, I argue that we can predict the political messaging and strategies an interest group will use based on its overall organizational goals, which will vary depending upon the group's members and the members' motivations for joining the organization. I build this theory by drawing in years of experience working with interest groups and through interviews with leaders from large national interest groups.

The Importance of Group Type

Drawing on this rich literature on interest groups, their strategies, and their relationships to political parties, I now turn to the ways an interest group's membership, and the strategies the group uses to attract and retain members, influences the group's strategy. Professional associations are primarily interested in member maintenance, meaning that associations need to continually provide value to members to keep individuals happy and paying their association dues. This dynamic leads professional associations to pay close attention to the reasons members join. The dynamic also makes professional associations avoid alienating members for fear of losing them. Members of professional associations tend to join to earn a material benefit, which can include access to journals, the attainment or maintenance of professional credentials, insurance discounts, and a variety of other incentives (Clark and Wilson 1961; Olson 1965). These motivations lead members to value legislative priorities that help members move towards

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their individual professional goals. Therefore, groups tend to focus their mobilizations on messaging that focuses on the way public policy helps members achieve their goals.

In addition to material incentives, some members join professional associations for advocacy purposes, which Clark and Wilson (1961) call purposive incentives. For example, members of the National Association of Realtors may join because they know that the organization advocates on behalf of the home mortgage interest deduction (National Association of Realtors 2021). However, professional associations lobby on behalf of a variety of issues, many of which do not fall cleanly into one party or the other.

Due to these motivations, which tend to be nonpartisan, and because most professions contain people who have a variety of partisan identities (Adamy and Overberg 2019), professional associations tend to avoid affiliating with one of the political parties. Favoring one party or the other can run the risk of alienating members, which provides a motivation for trade and professional associations to maintain political neutrality. For example, one large professional association I spoke with has a membership that consists of older, white, male military retirees. As one might expect, over half of members of this association are Republicans, but 17 percent are Democrats. Another professional association that I interviewed has a more demographically diverse membership and is located in a deep blue state. Despite this fact, the group's membership is fairly balanced, with 37 percent Republicans, 33 percent Democrats, and 29 percent other. These patterns will contribute the decision for most professional associations to maintain a neutral status when it comes to partisanship.

These member and policy goals play out in a variety of ways for professional associations, most of which lead the organization to maintain political neutrality. For example, most of the American Medical Association (AMA)'s priority issues are championed by members

of both parties. The No Surprises Act, a bill restricting surprise billing from hospitals and was

included in the 2021 Omnibus Appropriations Act, was sponsored by the leading Republican and

Democrat on the House Energy and commerce Committee – Representative Frank Pallone (D-

NJ) and now former Representative Greg Walden (R-OR) (Pallone and Walden 2019). The

AMA also advocates for updating the Medicare payment schedule. This bipartisan effort is led

by Reps. Ami Berra (D-CA) and Larry Buschon (R-IN) – both physicians in Congress

(Robezneiks 2021). Securing support from both sides of the aisle for these initiatives ensures that

the issues, which are often left unresolved during a session of Congress, have a chance at passage

when Congress switches hands. Since the AMA's public policy goals tend to be nonpartisan

issues, securing bipartisan cosponsors is an achievable task.

There are times when member maintenance goals and policy positions conflict with each

other. When the AMA has taken policy positions that alienate a significant proportion of

members, the association has lost members. For example, in 2010, the AMA lobbied in support

of the Affordable Care Act. While the political team did not see support of ACA as a partisan act

and tried to teach members about how the policy would be benefit AMA members and the health

care system in general, the policy was so closely associated with the Obama Administration that

such persuasive efforts were unsuccessful. The policy position alienated a critical mass of

Republican AMA members, which, which led to significant drops in membership (Collier 2011).

A more recent example came to light during an interview with Professional Association

1, which has a membership that leans Democratic while maintaining a bipartisan policy strategy.

When asked about how their members' partisan leaning influences the way the group talks about

issues, the leader of this group replied:

Group Leader: I would say that we try to stay as neutral as possible in our language. And that has been something that our staff internally feels very strongly about. So we try to be as

balanced as possible, but some of our issues skew on the Democratic side of the spectrum. So from that perspective, we have to... we do use language that I guess would appeal more to Democrats.

Amy Meli: Okay. Makes sense. So you've got Democratic sort of membership, Democratic-ish membership and Democratic issues, but you still want to be nonpartisan.

Group Leader: Yes. Yeah. There's what I would say. I think there is a reticence to... yeah, to appear partisan. And I do question sometimes if we would better position ourselves with swathes of our membership if we just took a hard line or were a little partisan on certain issues, more than we are now.

Amy Meli: It's a tough call…

Group Leader: It's a very tough call. Because right now, with a Republican Congress, we would be deeply disadvantaged. But at the same time, I think maybe we could push our issues more if we were more focused in a partisan manner.

Amy Meli: Yeah.

Group Leader: Yeah. It's tough. It's very tough, especially because we are so female. Our membership is like 85 to 90% female. So there's times where they want us to weigh in on issues that don't necessarily fall under our purview.

Amy Meli: I can imagine what those are...

Group Leader: Yeah, but there's also a side of that where we work with a lot of people who are disabled. And so when it comes to some women's rights issues, they're like, we're dealing with people in wheelchairs to get raped by caregivers. And you eliminated a means for them to live a full life and…

Amy Meli: Oh, wow. So it is kind of it's kind of related…

Group Leader: It's kind of related, but it's not a direct issue. The past year has been a tough... we did not release a great statement on that issue. So we polarized both sides of the aisle somehow. We made everyone mad. It was impressive.

Amy Meli: I mean, that's not surprising, but interesting. Do you find that having that nonpartisan status allows you to point to that when you decide not to get engaged in things like that? Like, would you think you'd get pulled into more things if you were actually a Democratic organization?

Group Leader: I think so... I think right now, we are at an inflection point with how we want to publicly talk about some issues. I think it was coming. I think it was a long time coming. If you want to know the truth, predating a lot of us getting there. A lot of people in my government affairs shop getting there. But I think there is a belief that at this point in time, we

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need to be taking a stronger stance on certain social issues, because they impact our membership and the community, they serve a lot more heavily than I think they've previously wanted to admit, I think that's quite the right terminology. But a lot of the social issues that are becoming hot button issues deeply impact our members[6].

These sentiments reflect the difficult reality many organizations I interviewed face when taking positions – or choosing not to take positions – on issues. Because of the skepticism associations face from members, associations spend a significant amount of time and resources explaining their policy positions and educating members about the value of nonpartisan policy strategies. And while there is always a push and pull associated with the strategic decision around partisanship, associations tend to maintain a neutral posture because, as the interviewee above mentions, it is important to have relationships with both parties since party control changes so frequently.

Trade associations have member maintenance goals similar to professional associations. However, since trade association members are companies instead of individuals, the goals translate into legislative strategy a little differently. Instead of appealing to individual members for material and purposive personal benefits, associations must appeal to member company goals. Some trade associations, like the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce, exist for the express purpose of lobbying on behalf of industry priorities. Other trade associations, like the National Restaurant Association and the National Retail Federation, provide professional development, business development, and other industry-related services for members in addition to lobbying. Since trade associations' members are institutional, membership decisions are made by companies that have money set aside for association membership and other industry-related activities. As a result, membership tends to be more

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[6] Interview with leader of Professional Association 1.

stable, which means there is less threat of departure for unpopular policy decisions compared to professional associations.

Like professional associations, trade associations tend to have diverse issue portfolios that do not fall cleanly into one party coalition or the other. For example, a large agricultural trade association's top issues include the Farm Bill, wide-ranging legislation that is reauthorized every five years, and biofuels policy, which receives periodic consideration from Congress and has regulations set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) each year. These issues tend to get support and opposition from both sides of the aisle.

While this association's membership tends to be white, rural, and Republican, this association maintains relationships with legislators on both sides of the aisle because the strategy helps the organization accomplish its legislative goals. The Farm Bill receives consideration from Congress on a regular basis – every five years is the most common interval – and it is impossible to predict which party will control Congress when reauthorization is due. As a result, the association is incentivized to have relationships with both Democrats and Republicans, since both parties have an equal chance at being in control when the bill receives consideration. In addition, provisions within the vast bill are supported by the Democratic and Republican parties at different rates, requiring association to lobby both sides the aisle to secure support for these provisions. For example, crop subsidies are more likely to receive support from Democrats than Republicans in the current Congress, while crop insurance provisions enjoy bipartisan support[7]. While the association's policy strategy makes sense given its members' support for crop subsidies and other agricultural policy, the organization expends substantial resources in educating members about the reasons for its bipartisan posture. Since most trade associations

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[7] Interview with leader of Trade Association 3.

have situations similar to that of the agricultural association described above, I expect that trade associations will be likely to maintain political neutrality and focus on access-oriented lobbying and political strategies with a few exceptions that I discuss below.

While members of trade and professional associations can become involved in public policy goals as a means to accomplish other goals, members of issue advocacy nonprofits tend to join these organizations for the express purpose of policy advocacy – what Clark and Wilson call purposive goals (Clark and Wilson 1961). Prior scholars find that party coalition building efforts have contributed to the trend for these types of groups to incorporate with one of the political parties (Karol 2009). These groups will tend to have membership from one party or the other, and will lobby on issues that are supported by one party and opposed by the other. As a result, issue advocacy nonprofits tend to side with the party that has absorbed their issue into their party coalition, with organizations focused on gun rights and restricting abortion access incorporating into the Republican party and gun safety, pro-choice, environmental policy, and racial justice organizations working with the Democratic party.

It is important to note that this strategy applies to issue advocacy groups whose issues have been adopted by one of the political parties. There are other issue advocacy nonprofits – groups that advocate on behalf of disease research, for example – that lobby on mostly nonpartisan issues. Since diseases tend to cut equally across party lines, a bipartisan approach here is particularly helpful. Many members of Congress who might otherwise have no connection to a disease group's request might have a personal experience with the issue and therefore be more sympathetic to the organization's lobbying efforts. As a result of all of these conditions, I expect that disease groups will not affiliate with either political party.

Labor unions also have member maintenance goals. Labor unions maintain their membership by advocating for better working conditions for their members. The most common tool for accomplishing these goals is collective bargaining – a tactic that, at the present time, Democrats support and Republicans oppose. As a result, the only choice labor unions have is to affiliate with the Democratic party, even when some labor unions' membership consists primarily of Republicans, as has been the trend for the past ten years[8].

One leader from a labor union I interviewed discussed these challenges. His employer is made up of blue collar workers that he estimates to be around 60% Democrat and 40% Republican. Many of the Republican members are strongly supportive of former President Donald Trump and are sensitive to union criticisms of Trump or his policies. However, the union's PAC will not contribute to members of Congress that do not support collective bargaining rights. So while the group's giving profile looks highly Democratic, the rhetoric the organization uses tends to be nonpartisan, and the lobbyists who work for the union maintain relationships with Republicans as best they can. In this way, labor unions do not act like traditionally partisan organizations in the same way partisan issue advocacy nonprofits behave. We will see this level of nuance in some of the empirical data in later chapters.

Corporations, which act as interest groups when they lobby policymakers on issues, make political contributions, and engage their stakeholders in public policy debates, have a different set of goals compared to other interest groups. Most corporations' end goal is to maximize profits. In the recent past, this motivation has led most firms to have a natural ally in the Republican party, which has historically supported tax cuts and fewer regulations. However, corporate lobbyists tend to use access-oriented strategies so that they can have relationships with

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[8] Interview with leader of Labor Union 2.

members on both sides of the aisle (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014; Wright 2002). This approach helps corporations achieve their policy goals when Democrats control one or both chambers of Congress, and helps corporations build relationships with members of Congress who have corporate presence in their districts regardless of the party affiliation of the member of Congress. Recently, many companies have started to reassess profit-making strategies, focusing on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) priorities and more actively advocating for social issues (Business Roundtable 2019). As a result, many large corporations have found themselves in opposition to the Republican party on key issues. For now, however, most corporations pursue a nonpartisan public policy strategy that values access over ideology. As one leader from a very large, well known consumer products company that some might perceive to lean Republican remarked, "We talk to our stakeholders generally about what is good for [the company]. And, you know, there are policymakers on both sides of the aisle that are working on things that are good for [the company], and policy makers on both sides of the aisle that are working on things that are problematic for us[9]."

Existing Methods for Measuring Interest Group Ideology

Another important consideration when trying to understand interest group strategy is the political orientation of the interest group. Some scholars have conceived of this in terms of interest group ideology and others have focused on partisan affiliation. However, none of the existing approaches provide a comprehensive look at which groups have affiliated with parties – particularly those that remain politically unaffiliated.

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[9] Interview with leader of Company 2.

One approach to capturing interest group strategy is to examine which candidates an interest group endorses in a campaign. Interest group leaders publish endorsements so that members will reference endorsed candidates when making voting decisions. Further, lists of endorsed candidates serve as signals to the outside world about what types of candidates a group supports. But while endorsement data can provide some insights about the partisan preferences of groups that endorse, using these data to analyze partisan affiliation provides an incomplete look at the interest group universe because not all groups make endorsements. In fact, one prominent professional association stopped endorsing candidates after the 2016 cycle because group leaders believed that the act of endorsing made the group appear more partisan[10]. Others prefer not to endorse because of the inherent risks involved in associating with a candidate so closely. These risk-averse groups prefer to use financial contributions to signal support instead of public endorsements. Consequently, we would expect to see groups more closely affiliated with political parties endorse, while groups farther from the political parties should choose not to endorse.

Scorecards also provide some promise in helping us understand the link between groups and parties. Scorecards, documents published by interest groups to provide "grades" on a 0-100 scale to legislators according to their votes on key legislation, are an effective way to operationalize a group's incorporation into the Democratic or Republican party when such data are available. However, using scorecards presents a challenge as well. Some groups encounter difficulty in finding floor votes that represent their organization's policy agenda and have stopped publishing scorecards over the past several years.[11] Other groups – particularly trade and

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[10] Personal interview with Doug Pinkham, President of the Public Affairs Council.
[11] Personal interview with Sherry Whitworth, Vice President at Fiscal Note, a large firm providing scorecard and other technology services to interest groups.

professional associations, use scorecard data in order to inform PAC contribution decisions, but do not make the data available to anyone outside of the group's lobbying team.[12]

Another challenge with scorecard data is more theoretical in nature. Interest groups use public scorecards as a proxy endorsement when they are unable to endorse due to tax status. Based on the findings of prior scholars, we can expect that these groups will tend to be labor unions and issue advocacy nonprofits – groups that have been increasingly incorporated into the party coalitions (McKay 2008). Using scorecard data to predict political affiliation could lead to the assumption that most groups are partisan, when instead, nonpartisan groups simply do not publish scorecards and therefore do not have data available to analyze.

Meeting with members of Congress can provide insights about relationships between interest groups and the political parties. However, it is difficult to connect activities with preferences or goals (Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2021). Further complicating matters, since data available through Lobbying Disclosure Act requirements does not provide bill positions, it is difficult to make a direct connection between a lobbying visit and the group's political position.

Political contributions provide a promising way to understand the relationships between interest groups, legislators, and their parties. A large number of interest groups actively engaged in lobbying have Federal PACs, which means that using political contributions allows for the building of a large dataset of interest groups. Unlike Congressional meetings data, Federal contribution data allow us to see not just interactions, but statements of support.

It is important to include a PAC's giving to all committees across an election cycle when assessing the relationship between group and party. Limiting analysis to certain election

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[12] Personal interview with Sherry Whitworth.

designations or committee types, for example, does not provide the full context of a PAC's giving and should be avoided. PAC directors use their budgets for an entire cycle to support their government affairs department's legislative strategies and their collective memberships' interests. For this reason, for each group, I include all political contributions across an election cycle, including hard money, independent expenditures, contributions to re-elects, leadership PACs, and party committees. This allows me to capture the full picture of interest group party preferences.

Hard dollar contributions are the disbursements PACs make directly to FEC-registered committees, including candidates for office. These contributions are subject to strict contribution limits and are disclosed by PACs on regularly-filed FEC reports. Independent expenditures are direct campaign expenditures PACs and other entities make on behalf of candidates for office. The expenditures typically take the form of advertisements or direct mail and expressly advocate for or against a candidate for office. While these contributions must be disclosed to the FEC, information about the funders of these contributions tend to be more opaque. While PAC hard dollar contributions are often used to secure access to incumbents, independent expenditures are used to influence election outcomes.

Since groups use independent expenditures to run ads that expressly advocate for or against a candidate, I expect that such spending will reveal information about an interest group's party preferences that might otherwise remain unknown. For example, the National Association of Realtors gives independent expenditures to candidates based on recommendations by volunteer-led advisory groups at the local level. These advisory groups tend to be led by Republicans, which means that a large majority of independent expenditures from the National Association of Realtors (NAR) goes to Republicans. As a result, even though NAR gives evenly

to the two parties through its hard dollar contributions, the group's independent expenditures lean Republican. Taking both hard dollar and independent expenditure contributions into account allows us to see a fuller picture of the interest group – an access-oriented association that emphasizes building relationships with legislators from both parties but leans Republican due to the party affiliation of group leaders at the local level.

I expect these two types of contributions to provide different information about group preferences. Taken together, the contributions can provide greater insights about a group's party proximity. PAC contribution totals, which are often used in annual reports to PAC members to communicate a PAC's partisan or bipartisan posture, are a public signal to interest group members and elected officials alike about the legislators with which the group hopes to build relationships. I expect a group's hard dollar contributions to, at times, reflect a more bipartisan posture compared to independent expenditure spending.

Developing a Novel Measure – Party Proximity Index[13]

In order to test my expectations around partisanship and lobbying strategies, I create an original measure that identifies an interest group's proximity to or distance from the two major political parties. Other scholars have used a variety of approaches in measuring the related notions of interest group ideology, including congressional scorecards, candidate endorsements, issue positions, lobbying data, and political contributions. One method for measuring ideology involves analyzing data from interest group endorsements and scorecards. McKay (2010) develops a measure of interest group ideology based on the ideological content of bills included

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[13] This section is adapted from my article, "Party People? Measuring Interest Group Affiliation with Political Parties," which was published in the journal *Interest Groups and Advocacy* September 19, 2023.

in interest group scorecards. The author finds that centrist groups shy away from evaluating Congressional votes due to interest group member retention concerns (McKay 2010). In fact, outside of large umbrella groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, McKay's dataset contains two professional or trade associations (McKay 2008), suggesting that using scorecards and endorsements alone can lead to overlooking an influential subset of interest groups.

Another potential source of data involves using issue position to impute ideology. Crosson et al. (2020) create a measure of interest group ideology by identifying ideal points based on group positions on legislation. Crosson and his colleagues find that groups making political contributions are more likely to take moderate or centrist positions on issues, and groups that focus on position-taking are more polarized than groups that lobby or make political contributions (Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020).

Other scholars use lobbying disclosure data to measure interest group ideology. One drawback of using lobbying data to derive issue position is that interest groups are required to disclose topics covered during Congressional meetings – not the group's positions on issues – in Federal lobbying disclosure reports. Scholars have addressed this shortcoming by inferring ideology from state-level lobbying disclosure data in three states that require issue position on disclosure reports (Thieme 2020). While this information is helpful for analyzing the behavior of state-level interest groups, the unique dynamics in states – especially the presence of permanent majority parties in the states where such data is available – makes translating these positions to the Federal level somewhat limited.

A number of scholars have used FEC data to understand the relationships between interest groups and parties and the related concept of ideology. McCarty and Poole (1998) use campaign finance data to develop their PAC-NOMINATE score, which helps to explain how

candidates choose between positions favored by interest groups and those favored by voters. Baker (2018), in her study of the efficacy of Federal PACs, used contributions to one of the national party committees as a proxy for a group's relationship with one of the political parties.

Perhaps most well-known, Bonica (2013, 2014) uses state and federal level contribution data to develop his CFScore, which identifies ideological ideal points for political candidates and contributors. Bonica relies on the total contributions from federal and state PACs to a given candidate to generate an estimate of the candidate's ideological position based on the argument that donors contribute to candidates who are similar to them. CFScores are helpful in identifying the ideology of candidates, interest groups, and individual donors, which can provide some insights into whether a campaign affiliates with a party. For instance Bonica (2013) finds that corporate and membership PACs are located at the center of a left-right distribution and that business-related groups give strategically (access-oriented) instead of ideologically (position-oriented) when contributing to campaigns.

In later work, Karol follows the incorporation of environmental groups, using interest group scorecard ratings and PAC contribution data to chart the progress of the Sierra Club, League of Conservation Voters, and Environment America from politically unaffiliated into the Democratic party coalition (Karol 2019). Because political contribution data is readily available from a wide distribution of interest groups and because political contributions uniquely signal group affiliation with political party, which is distinct from ideology, I use federal political contributions to build my measure of partisanship.

I build on the findings of prior scholars studying interest group ideology to link groups directly with parties, which are similar to but distinct from ideology (Ellis and Stimson 2012). Up until now, scholars have used ideology as a proxy for party when measuring interest group

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partisanship (Bonica 2013; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020). While partisanship and ideology are related concepts, there are some important theoretical differences that merit a separate measure for interest group party proximity. Parties, not ideology, hold power in Congress and dictate legislative agendas (Cox and Mccubbins 1993). As interest groups seek to influence policymaking in Congress, it is important to understand the relationships between parties and interest groups apart from ideology.

These differences can sometimes lead to misclassification if relying on ideology as a measure for partisanship. For example, the group Republican Majority for Choice (RMC), an interest group that supports pro-choice Republican candidates, exclusively supports Republicans (Center for Responsive Politics 2022). In light of this practice, we would assume the group is part of the Republican party coalition. However, since the recipients of RMC contributions are more ideologically moderate than the median Republican member of Congress, the group would fall close to the center of an ideological scale. Both measures might be accurate, but they lead to different conclusions since they are measuring two distinct concepts.

I expect groups that choose not to affiliate with political parties will attempt to give equally to candidates on both sides of the aisle, compared to the percentage the party occupies in Congress. This strategy enables groups to build relationships with legislators from both parties, which accomplishes their goal of maintaining membership and achieving legislative goals regardless of party control in government. The strategy also allows groups to prioritize giving to whoever holds the majority in Congress, providing more budget for committee chairs, subcommittee chairs, and others responsible for determining legislative agendas.

How Party Proximity and Group Type Influence Interest Group Communication Strategies

An interest group's type and its party proximity, and the strategy that flows from these attributes, will drive how groups communicate with members. Since we know that identity-oriented cues are powerful mobilizers, I expect the groups that are able to use partisan cues will leverage them to maximize response rates. Groups that work on bipartisan issues and have mixed memberships will leverage their members' motivations for joining an interest group to maximize participation. Partisan groups – particularly issue advocacy nonprofits – will be more likely to use party identity cues, conflict-oriented language, and negative tone to mobilize members. Nonpartisan groups – particularly professional associations and trade associations – on the other hand, will avoid focusing on partisanship and conflict and instead use more instrumental cues in their communication. These patterns in how different groups communicate with their members communicate should be consistent across all of communication sent to interest group members, including written communication, public statements made by interest group leaders, and communication during in-person interest group meetings.

Scholars suggest that identity cues can be particularly effective when encouraging political action. These theories are grounded in social identity theory, which posits that a person's self-esteem is intimately linked to their social identity and can therefore be a powerful motivator, especially in the presence of conflict (Sherif et al. 1961; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Sherif (1961) theorized that competition for scarce resources will result in out-group bias and intergroup conflict. Later, Tajfel and his colleagues (1971) found that while competition is a sufficient, but not necessary, component to out-group bias. The scholars found that social categories give our lives order and help us understand appropriate ways to act (Tajfel et al. 1971). They also discovered that while there must be a characteristic that binds the group

together, that characteristic can be minor – in their study, Tajfel and his colleagues found that a person's perceived over- or under-counting of dots was enough to create hostility towards the out-group – a phenomenon they called the Minimal Group Paradigm (Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Later, scholars studied the way intergroup conflict extends to members of organized groups. Huddy (2001) suggests that there is a difference between group membership, signified by the simple act of joining a group, and group identity, which involves the group as an important part of a person's self-concept. She also finds that political group identities are much more stable than those studied in earlier social psychological experiments (Huddy 2001). When applied to interest groups and social movements, scholars propose the concept of politicized social identity, which in the presence of shared grievances, the presence of an adversary, and societal involvement, can encourage people to take costly political action (De Weerd and Klandermans 1999). By looking at the messages embedded in NRA member letters to editors, Lacombe (2019) finds that the National Rifle Association has effectively built a social identity among gun owners that the organization uses to mobilize their members against gun safety legislation. Lacombe links these efforts to Clark and Wilson's (1961) solidary incentives for interest group participation. Kollman (1998, 10) suggests that interest groups "fan the flames of constituent anger," which can be an effective way of mobilizing people who have a strong social identity (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015).

Party identity can be a particularly strong motivator. Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe (2015) find that party identity generates action-oriented emotions, which in turn encourages political involvement. In our current political environment with high levels of partisan polarization (Hetherington 2001; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015, 2018), party identity cues

should be an effective tool for highly partisan groups and those that have high concentrations of partisan members and focus on partisan issues. In particular, groups whose issues – like abortion, gun policy, immigration, and environmental policy – have been incorporated into the one of the political parties, can save resources by capitalizing on party identity cues in its member mobilizations.

How Interest Group Communication Varies by Group Type

The literatures referenced above suggest that party identity and conflict-based cues should be some of the most powerful strategies a group can use to mobilize interest group members to take action. I predict that we will find some groups that rely more heavily on these strategies, while others will stay away from conflict and party identity cues. These decisions are driven by a group's organizational goals, which play out differently depending upon the group's type and the group's proximity to one of the two political parties.

I expect issue advocacy nonprofits, electoral organizations, and highly partisan groups to rely on partisan cues in their member mobilizations. Members of issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations tend to join their organizations for the express purpose of policy advocacy – what Clark and Wilson call purposive benefits (Clark and Wilson 1961). Prior scholars find that party coalition building efforts have contributed to issue advocacy groups incorporating into one of the political parties (Karol 2009). These groups will tend to have membership from one party or the other, and will lobby on issues that are supported by one party and opposed by the other.

Issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations tend to have permanent allies and adversaries, with opponents typically consisting of members of the other party's coalition. This condition satisfies one of Simon and Klandermans' three criteria for politicized collective

identity – the presence of an opponent (Simon and Klandermans 2001). For example, pro-choice groups, which have been incorporated into the Democratic party, are in permanent opposition to pro-life groups and the Republican party because of the way abortion issues have been polarized (Karol 2009). In these cases, messages that cue either the in-party or the out-party have a good chance at grabbing group member attention and boosting response rates.

Finally, I expect issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations to rely on the most effective cues available because these groups rely on mobilizations for their continued survival. Unlike professional organizations, whose primary drivers of dues involve material items that benefit the profession like academic journals and professional development opportunities, issue advocacy nonprofits rely on voluntary member contributions to stay financially solvent. By priming party identity, these groups use a powerful strategy to ensure maximum participation, and ultimately contribute to the organization's ability to effectively fundraise.

Similarly, I expect groups that are part of the Democratic or Republican party coalitions to use partisan cues in their member mobilization messaging. Highly partisan groups can draw on this strategy because their membership comes primarily from a single party. In addition, partisan groups' policy strategies are grounded in helping their party maintain or regain political power. Consequently, using partisan identity cues both activates their members to respond to an alert and helping shore up party support to give it the best chance to win on Election Day.

Conventional wisdom holds that groups engage in conflict expansion when they appear to be on the losing side of a fight with an opposing interest (Schattschneider 1960b). This is true for partisan issues, which tend to have opposing groups on both sides of the issue. These types of conflicts are pervasive in electoral politics, where Democrats and Republicans are each other's permanent and only adversaries (Drutman 2020). This dynamic is common in social movements

as well, which often take the form of two sides, each of which has an affinity for one of the political parties, debating over shared grievances. Examples here include debates over environmental policy, abortion, and guns. In these situations, whichever side can garner the most political power, legislator backing, and constituent support wins the day. While these issues can take decades to resolve before the process restarts, the battle lines for these types of campaigns are clear and remain constant over time. For this reason, groups working on issues with two clear sides on an issue will take a conflict-oriented approach with their issue engagement. Groups close to the parties will focus on winning and losing and will therefore use more conflict-oriented language than groups that work on issues that do not have clear battle lines.

Groups working on less partisan issues will use a different approach in their issue mobilization strategies. For these types of issues, there is often no organized adversary. Instead, groups working on these issues are racing against time and prioritization to achieve their policy goals. Take, for example, the issue of federal flood insurance. A variety of groups – from property casualty insurers to apartment owners to real estate agents – advocate for flood insurance when it comes up for reauthorization. The coalition has no organized opponent, but must advocate for the issue so that federal flood insurance is taken up in a Congress that must deal with dozens of other pressing issues. In these situations, the key is to convince legislators that a group's issue is important enough to shepherd through the legislative process ahead of the other issues in any given legislative session (Bachrach and Baratz 1963; Lorenz 2019). As a result I expect these groups, including professional associations and trade associations, to use less conflict-oriented language than issue advocacy nonprofits. Issue advocacy nonprofits, electoral organizations, and partisan groups will use more conflict-oriented language than nonpartisan groups, trade associations, and professional associations.

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For the reasons detailed above, trade and professional associations avoid using party cues and conflict-oriented language to mobilize their members, even though these strategies are effective methods of encouraging political action. As a result, associations must find other messaging strategies to engage their members in public policy issues. Like other interest groups, association strategies are grounded in the groups' organizational goals.

Professional associations are primarily interested in member maintenance, meaning that associations need to continually provide value to members in order to keep individuals happy and paying their association dues. This dynamic leads professional associations to pay close attention to the reasons members join. The dynamic also makes professional associations avoid alienating members for fear of losing them. Members of professional associations tend to join to earn material benefits, which can include access to journals, attainment or maintenance of professional credentials, and insurance discounts (1961). These motivations lead members to value legislative priorities that make progress towards their professional goals. As a result, these types of groups often find that mobilizations that are framed with these goals in mind have the best response rates.

In addition to material incentives, some members join professional associations for advocacy purposes, which Clark and Wilson (1961) call purposive incentives. For example, members of the National Association of Realtors might join because they know that the organization advocates on behalf of the home mortgage interest deduction (National Association of Realtors 2021). However, professional associations tend to lobby on issues that relate directly to material motivations – the home mortgage interest deduction allows Realtors to sell more houses, for example.

Trade associations have member maintenance goals similar to professional associations. However, since trade association members are companies instead of individuals, the goals translate into legislative strategy a little differently. Instead of appealing to individual members for material and purposive benefits, associations must appeal to the member company's goals. As with professional associations, these goals can be either material or purposive, although the purposive goals will always feed the company's material incentives for joining the association. Like professional associations, trade associations tend to have diverse issue portfolios.

As referenced earlier in this chapter, one example is the agricultural trade association's advocacy for the Farm Bill and biofuels policy, which are priorities relate directly to members' material concerns. Both of these issues tend to receive bipartisan support in Congress. As a result of the material concerns that underpin both trade and professional associations' policy advocacy activities, I expect these groups to focus their mobilization messaging on cues that focus on passing legislation that will help members achieve their material goals. I call these messages instrumental cues.

Instrumental cues are not as effective as the identity-based cues referenced in the first two sets of hypotheses. As a result, the political teams of associations place a strong emphasis on advocacy training so that members understand the legislative process and how progress on legislation ultimately helps association members achieve their personal and professional goals. I expect to see associations leverage this training by using instrumental cues that reference the way progress on bills and other policy priorities help associations meet their members' goals.

Prior scholars suggest that labor unions have incorporated into the political parties (Karol 2009, 2019). I find evidence to support these expectations in Chapter 3, in which I theorize that even though labor unions have memberships that draw from both parties, they must coalesce

with the Democratic party due to the Republican party's opposition to collective bargaining rights. Even though labor unions are in coalition with Democrats for electoral and policy purposes, I do not expect this affiliation to influence their member communication in the same ways as other partisan groups. Because labor unions must be sensitive to their members' political affiliations, I expect labor unions to avoid using partisan rhetoric.

Similarly, scholars have found that labor unions use conflict-oriented rhetoric when negotiating with management (Brimeyer, Eaker, and Clair 2004; McEdwards 1968). However, I do not expect these strategies to carry over to the communication strategies labor unions use when the labor union acts as an interest group. Remember that conflict-oriented cues act as a prime to trigger out-group bias (Sherif et al. 1961). In the case of labor unions, which have politically diverse memberships, the out-group is management, not members of one or the other political party. Therefore, a conflict-oriented cue will not be an effective way to encourage labor union members to get involved in public policy activities.

While it has been well established that leveraging a politicized identity is possible in the presence of opposition (De Weerd and Klandermans 1999), social scientists have also found that in-group love without the presence of an out-group can be enough to trigger a social identity (Brewer 1999). I therefore expect that labor unions, which invest significant resources into developing a labor union identity among members (Bruno 2000), to leverage this identity when mobilizing their members on public policy issues. I therefore expect labor unions to use more affiliation-oriented language compared to other types of interest groups in their communication to members.

A Note About Interest Group Typology

A foundational part of any study of interest groups involves settling on a classification system for the groups. There have been a variety of different approaches to this task over time. In their classic study of voters, Berelson et al. (1954) developed a typology that classified organizations into sports, fraternal, economic/professional, church, military, neighborhood, civic, political, and service categories. In his landmark work, Olson (1965) identifies four primary types of groups involved in the political system: labor unions, professional lobbies, business lobbies, and non-economic lobbies. Walker (1983) created an interest group typology that included for-profit, mixed sectors, nonprofit, and non-occupational citizen groups. Baumgartner and Walker (1988) proposed modifying Berelson et al.'s system by adding labor unions, issue groups, and cultural groups to the list.

Party incorporation literature's primary distinction is between labor unions, issue groups, and business groups (Karol 2015). For this reason, I adopt a modified version of Olson's typology, with four primary group types: labor unions, professional associations, trade associations, and issue advocacy nonprofits, with two additional categories added. Since the majority of organizations that maintain Federal PACs and file lobbying disclosure reports are corporations, I include companies in my dataset. Due to the prevalence of issue PACs that make political contributions but do not lobby on issues – for example EMILY's List – I also include a type for electoral organizations. I use information from each organization's website to assign groups to these categories. All groups fell cleanly into one of the four categories based on the following set of criteria.

Groups describing themselves as labor unions were coded as such. Groups with institutional members were coded as trade associations. Groups with individual members that are

not labor unions were coded as professional associations. Nonprofit groups engaged in advocacy that did not fit into any of the other three categories were coded as issue advocacy nonprofits. I use the terminology issue advocacy nonprofit instead of single-issue groups, preferred by Karol, because some groups in this category are active on a number of issues. Groups that do not lobby or engage their members on policy issues were classified as electoral organizations.

The Effect of Interest Group Communication on Member Attitudes Towards Politics

While it is important to understand the types of messages groups use to communicate with group members, the key to this project is understanding how these messages influence the way group member think about politics and government. I argue that, through the communications that interest groups have with their members in writing, at in-person events, and through public policy interactions they arrange for members, these messages have a strong effect on the way interest group members perceive politics, the government, and the people around them. Given the attention paid to partisan groups, I instead choose to focus on how nonpartisan groups – particularly trade and professional associations – influence their members. I look at three effects in particular – feelings of political efficacy, support for bipartisan compromise, and levels of affective polarization.

Interest Groups' Influence on Members' Levels of Political Efficacy

Efficacy – the extent to which individuals believe that the government is open to feedback from citizens and that they are capable of influencing government decision-making – is a concept that I argue is deeply connected to interest groups. The term efficacy[14] has been used in political science since the mid-20th century to describe the extent to which people believe they

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[14] Social psychologists use a different term – self-efficacy – to describe the same phenomenon.

can influence government decision-making (Campbell et al. 1960). Political scientists have long

linked efficacy and political participation. In his seminal work on the topic, Finkel (1985)

provides evidence that high levels of efficacy lead to higher levels of political participation and

that the reverse is also true – increased participation leads to higher levels of efficacy.

In 1954, Campbell (1954) identified that political efficacy is made up of two distinct

components. Internal efficacy is a person's perception that they are capable of advocating for

what they want in front of government, while external efficacy is the extent to which the person

believes the political system is responsive to the people it represents. Internal and external

efficacy have different relationships with political behavior. Pollock (1983) suggests that when

levels of both internal and external efficacy are low, people are likely to withdraw from political

activity altogether. When internal both internal and external efficacy are high, people are what

are likely to be called "complete participators" but are not likely to engage in protests. When

people have low external and high internal efficacy, they are less likely to vote, but are likely to

have higher levels of other types of political activity, including participation in protests. People

with low internal and high external efficacy are likely to vote but are less likely to participate in

protests. Valentino (2009) finds a link between emotions and efficacy by providing evidence that

internal efficacy boosts participation by facilitating anger instead of fear in the presence of policy

threats. Later scholars find that politicians have the highest levels of efficacy, followed by strong

partisans, while unaffiliated voters are likely to have the lowest levels of efficacy (McGlothlin

and Killen 2010).

There are several other predictors of high levels of political efficacy. Galston (2001) finds

that people with high levels of civic education are less likely to feel alienated from public life

and are less likely to mistrust institutions. Other scholars find that increased social capital can

lead to higher levels of civic participation, which in turn create higher levels of trust in government (Keele 2007). Rosenstone and Hansen find that high political efficacy extends past voting into non-voting forms of political participation, including writing letters to elected officials and signing petitions (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Political efficacy is sometimes conflated with trust in government. These are related but distinct concepts (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). Trust in government typically measures a respondent's feelings about whether or not the government will make good decisions. This is a concept that is closely linked with external efficacy, which is the extent to which a person believes that the government is open to feedback from citizens. Since these two concepts are closely linked, I include both in my analysis of the effect of interest groups on citizen perceptions of government, although my primary focus is on efficacy.

People who belong to an interest group are likely to have higher levels of internal efficacy, external efficacy, and trust in government compared to people who are not involved in interest groups. Similarly, people who are more involved in their interest group are more likely to have higher levels of all three of these measures, enabling the creation of Pollack's "complete participators." There are several reasons why engagement with an interest group increases individual members' sense of efficacy.

First, I expect that individuals who interact with government officials more frequently will have higher levels of external efficacy. Mettler and Stonecash (2008) find that individuals who have positive experiences working with government have higher levels of political efficacy, which lead to higher rates of participation. I argue that a similar phenomenon occurs with interest group-driven political participation. As individuals experience for themselves that public officials are responsive to their feedback, their levels of external efficacy are likely to increase. I

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expect these personal interactions to have a strong influence on individual perceptions of responsive government.

Absent personal experience working with elected officials and their staff, interest group-provided civic engagement training will also have positive impacts on external efficacy. A key component of many interest groups' civic training involves informing participants about why constituent contact is important and how members of Congress use constituent feedback to help with decision-making and that members of Congress want to hear from their constituents. Even without direct interaction with public officials, I expect this civic education to have a positive effect on beliefs about elected officials' responsiveness to constituent communication.

Similarly, these types of interaction will have an effect on the level of trust interest group members have in government. Nonpartisan interest groups often communicate with members about their legislative wins to keep advocates excited and willing to participate in grassroots advocacy. Highlighting times when Congress acts on issues the interest group cares about will have a positive effect on the extent to which individuals trust government to do what is right. As individuals become more involved in their interest groups, they become more likely to experience these events themselves during interactions with members of Congress. While these interactions will not be universally positive, overall, they should have a positive effect on trust in government.

The mechanism driving increases in internal efficacy, or a person's feeling about their own preparedness to influence government decision-making (Pollock 1983), is slightly different. In this case, the key aspect of interest group communication is how groups train their members on how to engage with policymakers in the government. Interest groups spend a great deal of time on civic engagement training. Some of this training is provided in person or via video

before individuals meet with their members of Congress, while other training materials are available on organizations' websites or printed materials. Sometimes this training focuses on government basics: refreshers about how Congress works, explanations of why the group focuses on particular legislative committees, and information about the legislative process. Other messages focus on giving members confidence about their ability to comment on specific legislation due to their subject matter expertise. One example, featured on the advocacy website of a prominent professional association, argues that "no one is more qualified to help guide these [congressional] decisions than those who deliver care to patients" (American Medical Association 2022). As individuals become more involved in their interest group, they will be more likely to have experience communicating directly with member offices, either by sending an email to their policymakers, making phone calls, or meeting directly with their members of Congress. I expect individuals who have direct interactions with Congress to have particularly high levels of internal efficacy.

Interest Groups' Influence on Members' Levels of Affective Polarization

Over the past two decades, scholars have debated the presence and intensity of polarization in American politics. Scholars tend to arrive at different conclusions depending upon the way they define polarization. For this project, I focus on affective polarization, which is the idea that Americans have polarized based not on issues, but on their political identities, which leads partisans to have negative feelings towards people in the out-party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015).

Theories about affective polarization are built on social identity and intergroup conflict theory from social psychology. As discussed earlier, social identity theory is based on the idea that social categories give our lives meaning and help us understand appropriate ways to act

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(Tajfel et al. 1971). Early work on social identity and group conflict suggested that, when forced to compete for resources, people in opposing groups will dislike each other (Sherif et al. 1961). Sherif (1961) tested this theory through a series of experiments in which teenaged boys were assigned to groups in a camp setting. After a week of letting a group identity develop, the researchers exposed the group to a rival group. When put into competitive situations, these groups would engage in aggressive behavior towards each other. When given a superordinate goal to accomplish together, the violence subsided (Sherif et al. 1961).

A few years later, Tajfel and his colleagues expanded upon Sherif's work. They find that for a group identity to form, there must be an internal characteristic held by all group members (Tajfel et al. 1971). The scholars called this concept the minimal group paradigm because the group identity can be based on a characteristic with little to no inherent meaning (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Once a group identity is in place, group members seek to punish members of the out-group, even without the presence of competition (Tajfel et al. 1971). As a result, Tajfel argued that social identity is a cause of intergroup conflict, not a byproduct of it (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Brewer (1999) suggests that attachment to groups produces love for in-group members, but does not necessarily require hostility towards those outside of the group. Instead, she argues that preferential treatment of in-group members, born out of reciprocal altruism, is a frequent cause of discrimination (Brewer 1999). Brewer also argues that concentric loyalties can alleviate out-group bias since cross-cutting identities can help with decreasing out-group hostility (Brewer 1999). Brewer's work is especially pertinent to this project because members of nonpartisan interest groups – particularly professional associations – can create a superordinate identity that joins Democratic and Republican members of the group in a united cause. For example,

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Republican and Democratic members of the American Medical Association both identify as physicians, which is an identity superordinate to party affiliation (Heaney 2012).

Scholars have identified a strong link between identity and political action. Klandermans and his colleagues provide a compelling account of politicized social identity among farmers influencing involvement in protests (Simon and Klandermans 2001; De Weerd and Klandermans 1999). De Weerd and Klandermans (1999) suggest that group identification plays a role in political protest by preparing people for costly action. In later work, Simon and Klandermans (2001) suggest that group identity can become politicized under the right conditions. The authors describe three necessary components to politicized identity: the presence of shared grievances, the presence of an adversary, and societal involvement in an issue. The authors suggest that leveraging a social identity under these conditions will politicize that identity, leading individuals who identify with that organization to take political action. While Klandermans' research takes place in a social movement context, we see this strategy at work in interest groups as well. The National Rifle Association regularly uses identity-based appeals to generate action (Lacombe 2019).

Scholars find that affective polarization has increased dramatically in recent years (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Mason (2015) finds that partisan sorting, which results when social networks have fewer cross-cutting ties, has contributed to these increases. In other words, as the political parties have become more socially and demographically homogenous, affective polarization has intensified. Using feeling thermometers and likes/dislikes about people in the out-party, Mason finds that people with more homogenous social networks have more negative feelings towards people in the opposite party (Mason 2015). Mason's research is pertinent to this project because nonpartisan interest groups are composed of members from both political parties

and work across the aisle to accomplish their legislative priorities. I expect that for many partisans, their nonpartisan interest group is the only place where they will hear messages about the benefits of working across party lines. I am interested in the effects that these messages have on the levels of affective polarization among members of nonpartisan interest groups.

Existing scholarship provides evidence that elites can influence levels of affective polarization, and the logic found in these studies are also relevant to interest groups. Robison and Mullinix (2016) find that media criticism of polarization leads people to more positively evaluate members of the opposite party. Similarly, Kalmoe and Mason (2022) find that elites can encourage or discourage political violence because followers use cues from leadership to understand how to behave in the political system. Druckman et al. (2018) find that people who are more informed about politics can spread polarizing messages they learn from partisan media to their less-informed friends and family. Interest groups can produce similar effects by, on the one hand, using less polarizing language and focusing on working with elected officials on both sides of the aisle, or conversely by leaning on partisan cues and conflict-oriented language to encourage political action.

Scholars have discussed interest groups' role in polarization, but the studies in this area are somewhat limited and tend to focus on groups as components of party coalitions. Masket (2009) finds that informal party organizations, which include interest groups, drive elite polarization since candidates adopt extreme positions to appeal to these groups in their efforts to win primary elections. Karol (2015) suggests that the incorporation of interest groups into party coalitions has led to greater levels of polarization in the American political system. While these theories accurately reflect the effect that partisan interest groups have in the political system, they do not consider how nonpartisan and partisan groups act differently. I argue that while

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groups like the National Rifle Association contribute to polarization, groups that deliberately choose not to affiliate with a party have a different effect on members (Lacombe 2019). However, groups that work with bipartisan bill sponsors use language that speak to instrumental goals and intentionally avoid partisan cues will not contribute to affective polarization levels among members, and may even have a depolarizing effect.

Members of nonpartisan groups should display lower levels of polarization compared to members of the general public. Nonpartisan groups are more likely to use instrumental cues when communicating with their members because these cues link back to members' motivations for being part of the interest group and because partisan cues are not available to them. These messages appear not only in action alert emails, but in speeches made by group leaders, in-person interest group events, and at civic engagement trainings. As an interest group leader of a nonpartisan professional association with evenly split membership remarked when asked how people from different partisan groups interact with each other at his group's events (emphasis added):

> *We don't ask our members what party affiliation they are, just because we want to make sure they understand that this is really a bipartisan event that's going or I should say, in that case, a nonpartisan event, because we don't know who they are. They do know obviously the members they're meeting with. Occasionally we'll get somebody they'll say, I don't know if I feel comfortable doing something like that meeting with this person. That doesn't happen very often at all.* **They understand by the time they get to Washington, that they're representing the association and not their own political views**. *And for the most part, I can't remember there being an incident where that line got crossed, which is great.* **But we do a lot of educating them about what it means to be a bipartisan organization and what it means to be involved with public policy from the sense of we don't elect people that are in those offices.** *We're there to communicate with them. And to explain to them why we want to communicate with them, regardless of what party they are[15].*

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[15] Interview with leader from Professional Association 2.

There are several key points in these comments that illustrate the effect this group has on members' perceptions of politics. First, the leader admits that he doesn't always know the political affiliations of his members when they come to Washington to meet with members of Congress. This is something that came up in a number of interviews and contrasts sharply with the conventional image of interest groups as simply fitting into the partisan environment. Moreover, it illustrates that, at least when members are in Washington to meet with their policymakers, they come to represent the views of the association and often do not share their own political views with the people around them. The leader also mentioned that by the time members get to Washington, they understand the task at hand. These comments are a reference to the intensive training that this and other associations provide to members as members prepare to engage in public policy conversations with lawmakers. The leader also mentions that the trainings focus on the importance of bipartisanship and working with both sides of the aisle. Focusing on the group's work in key areas where all association members agree – which tend to be nonpartisan – drives this point home for members.

In addition to messaging, individuals build relationships that cut across party lines through their involvement in nonpartisan interest groups. For example, an individual attending a fly-in[16] sponsored by a nonpartisan group is likely to attend meetings with legislators of different political parties alongside fellow members from a variety of different political backgrounds. Since professional and trade associations have significant proportions of people both parties, cross-cutting relationships are likely for anyone involved in nonpartisan interest groups. These

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[16] A meeting organized by interest groups in which group members come to Washington, D.C. to meet with their elected officials.

relationships humanize interest group members from the out-party and out-party elected officials, whom partisans might otherwise assume act in bad faith.

The extent to which a group polarizes or depolarizes will vary depending upon a person's level of involvement in the group. Individuals who regularly attend events that feature nonpartisan political messages are more likely to internalize these messages and spend time with people from the out-party. Several groups, including NAR and the American Dental Association (ADA) have intentionally cultivated a nonpartisan group identity intended to encourage political activity among members. This identity can act as a superordinate identity that can counteract out-group bias (Brewer and Pierce 2005). In groups that do not cultivate a strong identity, the absence of party cues and repeated exposure to messaging about cooperation and instrumental goals can have an effect on members' attitudes as well. Consequently, I expect highly involved individuals to display lower levels of polarization than those with nominal membership in nonpartisan groups.

Highly involved members are more likely to take cues from group leaders, allowing elites to have a stronger effect on highly involved members' political attitudes. Further, any depolarizing effects will be the result of repeated exposure to depolarizing conditions. In other words, one depolarizing email will not have a strong effect, but years of interactions with a group of people with cross-cutting political identities, depolarizing messages, and depolarized political education will decrease polarization levels among members.

Interest Groups' Influence on Members' Support for Bipartisan Compromise

In recent years, scholars have debated the extent to which elected officials are willing to compromise with the other party to solve problems. Mann and Ornstein (2012) described the ways in which members of Congress unwillingness to compromise with each other lead to

increasing gridlock. Lee (2016) argues that members of Congress are disincentivized to compromise since it is more politically expedient for the minority party to campaign on the issue to attempt to win back control of Congress than to work with the majority party to solve problems, although other research suggests that bipartisan efforts can still be effective ways to make policy (Harbridge-Yong 2015). Gridlock and the lack of bipartisan compromise that leads to it has an impact on public opinion. On issues where there is public consensus, Americans prefer bipartisan compromise to gridlock (Flynn and Harbridge 2016). Later work, however, finds that members of Congress avoid compromise for fear of being punished by primary voters even though large majorities of Americans prefer bipartisan compromise (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge -Yong 2020).

While large majorities of Americans prefer bipartisan compromise over gridlock, this should be especially true for members of bipartisan interest groups. The drivers behind these differences will be similar to those that lead to lower levels of affective polarization – namely, training programs designed to encourage bipartisanship, advocating for bipartisan legislation, and viewing the legislative process up close. As members become more involved in their interest group, these effects will be stronger due to increased exposure to these stimuli.

Chapter 3: Measuring Interest Group Party Proximity[17]

In Chapter 2, I argue that interest group partisanship influences the group's lobbying strategy, its member communication, and ultimately the way its members perceive the political system. I expect that understanding a group's party proximity will reveal valuable information about the group. In this chapter, I create a novel measure – Party Proximity Index (PPI) – that allow us to measure an interest group's distance from the political parties. PPI which plots interest groups on a continuous scale. This measure allows us to see the full breadth of how interest groups associate with political parties, including groups that give exclusively to one party or the other, groups that split their contributions between the parties but lean towards one party or the other, and groups that maintain complete neutrality by giving in ratios equal to each party's presence in Congress.

PPI places each interest group on a scale from -1 to 1. Groups closest to the Democratic party have a PPI approaching -1. Groups closest to the Republican party have a PPI approaching 1. Groups with a score approaching 0 are equidistant from both parties. Since the hypotheses in this project involve the level of partisanship regardless of party, I use Folded PPI Index to test hypotheses. This variable uses the absolute value of PPI to determine the group's distance from either the Democratic or Republican party.

Developing the Measure

To develop PPI, I use data compiled from the FEC. For each of the 2,040 interest groups in the dataset, I select PAC contributions to any committee with a partisan affiliation, which

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[17] This chapter is adapted from my article, "Party People? Measuring Interest Group Affiliation with Political Parties," which was published in the journal *Interest Groups and Advocacy* September 19, 2023.

includes all candidate committees, leadership PACs operated by current candidates for office, and party committees. To execute this task, I use bulk data available from the FEC and selected all contributions from political action committees during the 2015-2016, 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 election cycles, including PACs, independent expenditors, and Super PACs. To isolate interest groups that are engaged in political contributions nationally, I omit from the dataset party committees, individual contributors, committees controlled by a single federal officeholder, committees that contribute to a single candidate for office, and committees that represent subnational organizations. I then identify the interest group controlling each committee and consolidate all contributions from committees controlled by that interest group into a single unit of analysis. For example, if an interest group maintains a Federal PAC, a Super PAC, and an electioneering committee, contributions from all of those committees are aggregated into a single record in order to analyze behavior across all of the interest group's committees. This extra step of grouping committees that are maintained by a single interest group is a time-intensive but important step that ensures the structure of the data more accurately captures the fragmented reality of campaign finance filings that results in a single interest group maintaining multiple committees. Independent expenditures are more difficult to trace than hard dollar contributions to candidate committees. While all independent expenditures – direct mail or advertisements for example – must be reported to the FEC, independent expenditors are not required to disclose the source of their funding. This means that when an organization maintains its own Super PAC, as NARAL does with the NARAL Freedom Fund, it is possible to use FEC data to identify the candidates an organization supports or opposes through its independent expenditures. These independent expenditures, which are available for bulk download from the FEC, are included in my dataset.

For each interest group, I calculate the total dollar amount of PAC contributions to committees affiliated with each party during an election cycle. Since independent expenditures involve contributions supporting or opposing an identified candidate for office, I isolate the contributions made in opposition to a candidate and code that money not as in support of the candidate's party (since it's spent to oppose that candidate), but rather as spent in support of the other party (e.g., contributions made opposing a Democrat are coded as Republican and vice versa). From those totals, I determine the percent of contributions made by a given interest group to all Republican committees. I then subtract the percent Republican contributions in the cycle from the percent Republicans in Congress for the cycle in which the contribution was made in order to compare the group's contribution ratio to party ratio in Congress.

Comparing these two ratios is an important feature of the measure since the party ratio is what many groups use as a baseline when planning their PAC budgets. For example, if Republicans hold 60% of seats in the House and Senate during an election cycle, a non-partisan group would give in ratios equal to the party ratio in the body by giving 60% of their PAC contributions to Republicans. If the ratio shifts to 40% Republican in another election cycle, a non-partisan group would give in ratios equal to the party ratio in the body by giving 40% of their contributions to Republicans. Without comparing the party giving ratio to the party ratio in Congress, groups might appear to be swinging from favoring one party to the other when in reality, they are acting strategically with respect to the party ratios in Congress.

Given this construction with the focus on the difference between an interest group's party ratio for contributions and the actual party ratio in Congress, the maximum and minimum difference values will fluctuate depending upon the percent Republicans in Congress during a

63

cycle. As a result, I rescale the variable to ensure consistent maximum and minimum values. To maintain a consistent midpoint of 0 and consistent end points of -1 and 1, I rescale the difference by dividing positive values by the absolute value of the maximum value and dividing negative values by the absolute value of the minimum value. To check that rescaling did not affect results, I also test all hypotheses using the un-rescaled PPI variable. Substantive conclusions do not change.

I use the average rescaled differences from the most recent three election cycles (2015-2016, 2017-2018, and 2019-2020) to calculate PPI. Using three cycles smooths out some of the variation that can happen in reaction to events in a particular Congress. For example, the events of January 6, 2021 will temporarily cause some PACs to give to fewer Republicans even when those PACs do not necessarily favor Democrats (Doyle 2021). Using running the average across the most recent three election cycles, which will incorporate new contribution data every two years, also allows for groups' relationship to the parties to change gradually over time, as has been suggested in party literature (Victor and Reinhardt 2018). For purposes of robustness, I also operationalize the party ratio difference variable using only data from the 2020 election cycle, and the substantive conclusions do not change.

Take for example the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA) and the challenge of determining their partisan affiliation. The group's PAC gave a 0.85 proportion of their partisan PAC contributions to Republicans during the 2020 cycle. The proportion of Republicans in the chamber for the same period was 0.47. This means that ARA PAC's chamber difference for 2020 is 0.38, which indicates that the ARA gave notably more support to Republicans than their share of Congress would have suggested. The maximum possible chamber difference for the

2020 cycle was 0.53, which represents the chamber difference for a PAC that gave all of their contributions to Republicans.[18] During the 2018 cycle, ARA gave 0.82 of their partisan contributions to Republicans. The proportion of Republicans in the chamber for that cycle was 0.54, which means ARA's chamber difference for 2018 was 0.27 out of a maximum of 0.46. During the 2016 cycle, ARA gave 0.89 of their partisan PAC contributions to Republicans, while the proportion of Republicans in Congress was 0.56. ARA's chamber difference for 2016 was 0.32 out of a maximum of 0.44. The PPI scores for ARA, which represent the rescaled party differences, during the three sessions for 2016, 2018, and 2020 are 0.75, 0.60 and 0.72, leading to a final PPI of 0.69.

The Distribution of Party Proximity Index

Upon initial inspection, PPI scores appear to reflect what we would expect of partisan proximity and interest groups. Groups with the closest proximity to the Democratic party include EMILY's List, Unidos U.S., Planned Parenthood, and the American Federation of Teachers, all with PPI scores of -1.0, which means the groups give exclusively to Democrats. Groups most proximate to the Republican party include Citizens Against Government Waste (1.0), American Conservative Union (1.0), Family Research Council (0.98), and National Rifle Association (0.98). Associations occupying the midpoint of the scale include the Auto Care Association (0.02), the American Pharmacists Association (0.00), the American College of Cardiology (0.03), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (0.01).

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[18] A group that gives exclusively to Republicans would have a party ratio of 1.00, but Republicans make up 0.47 of Congress, so the difference between the two is 0.53.

When we take a look at the different type of interest groups, we see that some trade associations lean heavily Republican, including groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (0.68), National Federation of Independent Business (0.96), and associations representing the building trades. Other trade associations occupy more neutral territory, like the United Fresh Produce Association (0.05) and the Toy Industry Association (-0.02). Labor unions like the National Treasury Employees Union (-0.89) and Communications Workers of America (-0.97) appear to be part of the Democratic coalition. Professional associations tend to occupy the middle of the distribution, including the American Optometric Association (0.02), American Institute of Architects (-0.04), the American Medical Association (-0.03), and National Association of Realtors (0.14).

Figure 3.1: Distribution of PPI Scores

Figure 3.2: Distribution of Folded PPI Scores
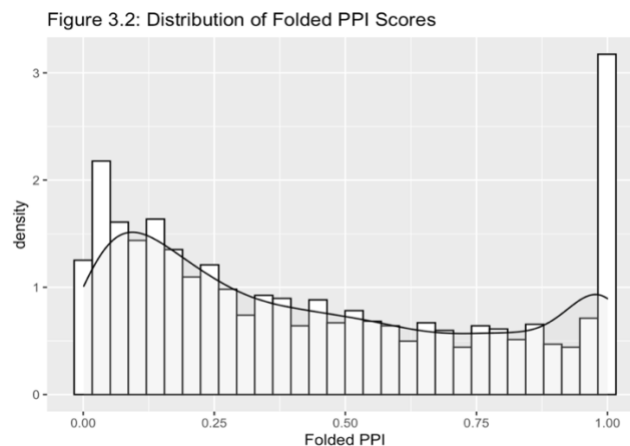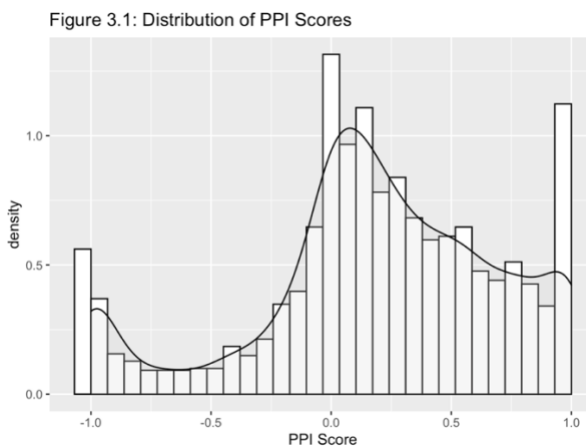
Stepping back, however, there is much more to interest groups' relationship to parties. The distribution for PPI index, pictured in Figure 3.1, indicates that the groups are fairly evenly distributed across the scale. The distribution for Folded PPI, which appears in Figure 3.2, shows a modal value of 1.0 – a score closest to the political parties – with significant variation across the distribution of scores. The modal group is very close to the midpoint of the scale. In examining groups at the poles of the scale, it appears that more groups contribute to mostly

Republicans compared than mostly Democrats, although these patterns vary depending upon group type. When examining PPI Score distribution by group type in Figures 3.3 through 3.8, we can see that distributions to group types conform to the expectations laid out in the theory. Professional associations are the most likely type of interest group to maintain a nonpartisan posture. Firms and trade associations are also more likely to be nonpartisan, while Labor Unions, Issue Advocacy Nonprofits, and Electoral Organizations are more likely to be partisan.

Fig. 3.3: Distribution of PPI Scores for Firms
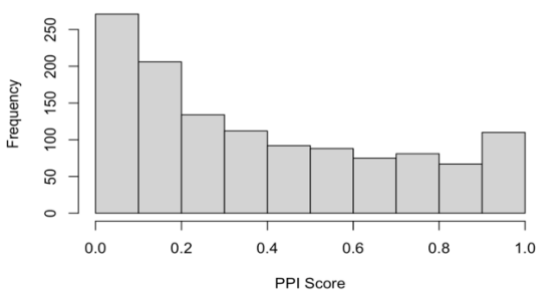
Fig. 3.4: Distribution of PPI Scores for Trade Assns
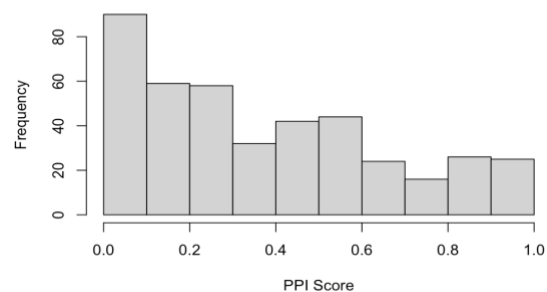
Fig. 3.5: Distribution of PPI Scores for Professional Assns
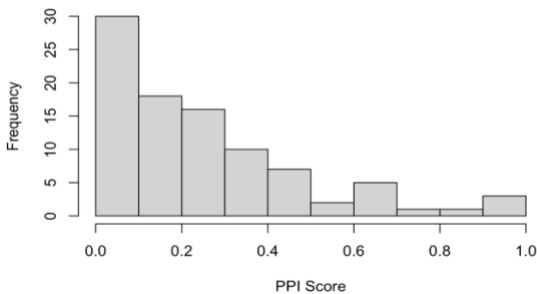
Fig. 3.6: Distribution of PPI Scores for Labor Unions
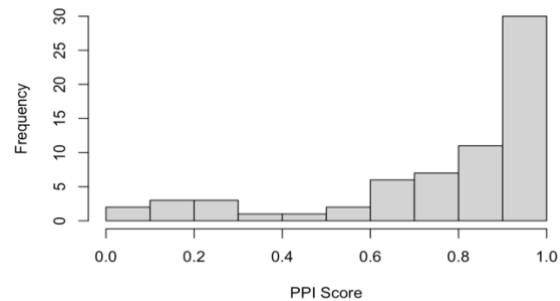
Fig. 3.7: Distribution of PPI Scores for Issue Advocacy Nonprof
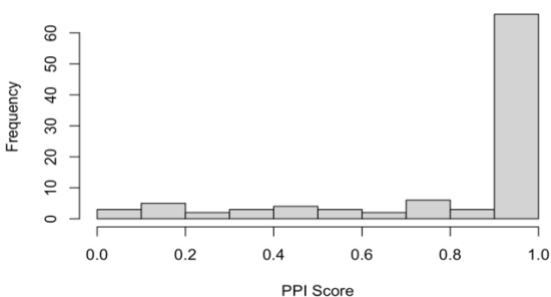
Fig. 3.8: Distribution of PPI Scores for Electoral Orgs
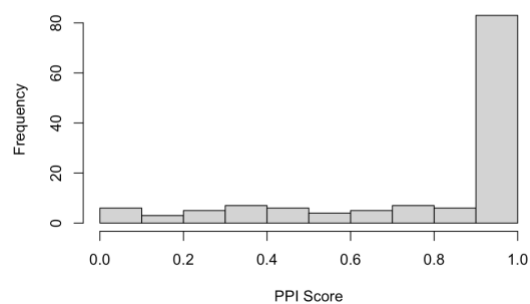
The mean PPI score is 0.19, which means the average group gives fairly evenly to Democrats and Republicans with a slight Republican lean. The median PPI score is 0.19, which indicates a fairly even distribution with few outliers. Perhaps most interesting is that the standard deviation for PPI score is 0.52, which means 68 percent of values on the scale fall between -0.33 and 0.71. Theoretically, this is significant since a large majority of interest groups maintain distance from both political parties. The mean Folded PPI score is 0.44. The median score is 0.37. The Standard Deviation is 0.34, meaning that 68 percent of groups fall within 0.10 and 0.78.

Comparing PPI to Existing Measure of Interest Group Ideology

One important validation step is comparing PPI Score with existing measures for interest group ideology. Since partisanship and ideology are related but separate concepts, I expect an interest group's ideology to predict its PPI Score with some theoretically significant exceptions for trade associations, firms, and labor unions. In order to test this expectation, I compare PPI Scores to IGScores, a measure of interest group ideology developed by Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz using public positions taken on issues by 2,510 interest groups (Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020). Of the 2,510 records in the IGScores dataset and 2,040 records in the PPI dataset, 637 appear in both datasets. This indicates that there is a fair amount of overlap in the datasets, but also that focusing on different data sources leads to identifying a more comprehensive set of interest groups. Notably, 72.35 percent of organizations that take positions on issues do not make Federal contributions to candidates, and 68.77 percent of organizations that make Federal contributions to candidates do not take positions on issues. These differences suggest that there is

a potential to use both datasets to gain a better understanding of the interest groups universe in the U.S.

Comparing the 637 groups that have both IGScores and PPI Scores, there is a strong correlation between the two scores (Pearson's R = 0.61). Identifying the similarities and differences in the two scores is best accomplished by visualizing the comparison between IGScores and PPI Scores, broken out by group type. Since electoral organizations do not lobby, there are no such groups with both PPI and IGScores. In Figure 3.10 we can see that there is a strong relationship between IG Score and PPI Score among issue advocacy nonprofits. This conforms with the expectation that most issue advocacy nonprofits align with the party that has adopted its issue into its party platform.

As illustrated in Figure 3.10 professional associations are the most likely interest group type to maintain nonpartisan status. However, among professional associations with more partisan PPI scores, there is a strong relationship between the two measures. This relationship reinforces the expectation that professional associations will have nonpartisan policy goals, but will also be responsive to demands to match member partisan preferences in order to maintain a membership that is relatively sensitive to political disagreements.

The relationship between IGScore and PPI Score is less direct with firms, trade associations, and labor unions. Firms and trade associations have similar patterns, with many groups clustered in the center right of both distributions, which is something that Crosson et al. (2020) also discussed. However, observing the trend lines for firm and trade association panels in Figure 3.10, we can see that as IGScores increase, the values for PPI Score remain relatively stable. I argue that this is due to the tendency for companies and trade associations to use access-

oriented strategies to accomplish their policy goals. Unlike professional associations, which must be sensitive to members' party identities, trade associations and firms are more insulated from these pressures due to the nature of members' relationships with the organizations, and thus are more likely to use a bipartisan strategy that will provide access to decisionmakers regardless of which party is in power.

Fig. 3.10: Comparing IGScores and PPI by Group Type
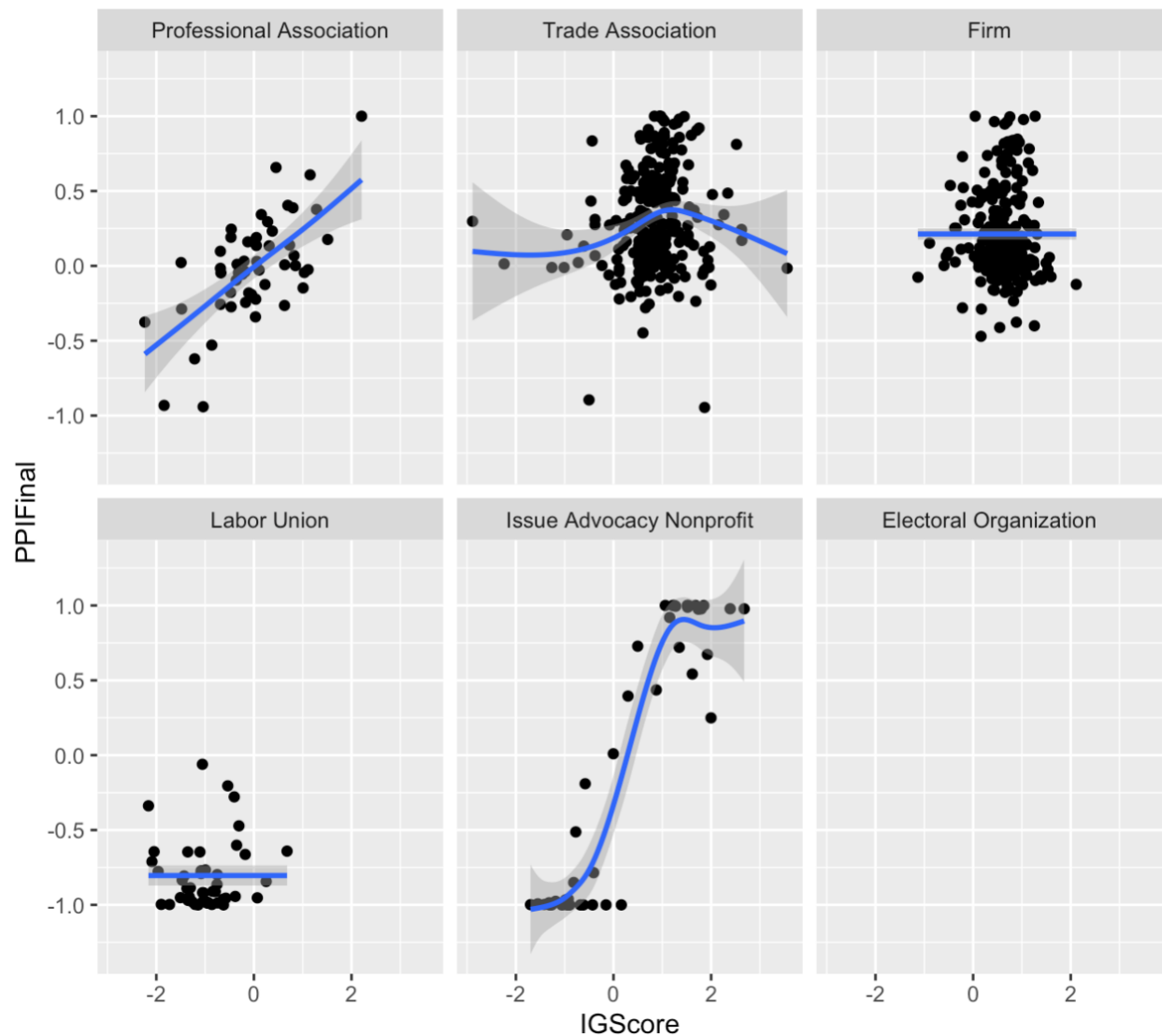
Labor Unions' IGScores and PPI Scores are predictably located in the left/Democratic quadrant for both distributions. However, the trend line illustrates that as IGScores move from the most ideologically liberal to a more centrist policy approach, PPI Scores remain strongly Democratic. This trend supports the expectation that while some Labor Unions might have more or less liberal policy platforms than others, Labor Unions will remain reliably Democratic due to the party's support for collective bargaining rights. Overall, the relationship between IGScores and PPI Scores, when examined by group type, support the expectations laid out in the current theory and suggest that there is utility in understanding both an interest group's ideology and its partisanship, since these two dimensions measure separate but related concepts.

Hypothesis Tests

In the preceding section, I establish face validity of PPI by comparing it against existing measures of ideology. Establishing that PPI correlates with other indicators of partisanship will provide an objective way to evaluate the measure. To accomplish this task, I test two hypotheses. The first relates to political endorsements and scorecards. As discussed in Grossman and Dominguez (2009), the candidates a group endorses can provide insights about the party with which the group is aligned. Although nonpartisan groups have moved away from endorsements, many use scorecards, which serve as proxy endorsements. Consequently, I expect that groups that endorse or publish scorecards will be more partisan than non-endorsing or scorecard producing groups.

The second comparison relates to the likelihood of different types of groups being incorporated into political parties. Scholars have identified issue advocacy nonprofits and labor unions as the types of groups most likely to have been incorporated into party coalitions (Karol

2019). Scholars also suggest that business-related groups are likely to engage in an access-oriented strategy (Wright 2002). Since firms, trade associations, and professional associations use access-oriented strategies to accomplish their organizational and public policy goals, I expect those groups to be less partisan than labor unions and issue advocacy nonprofits. Many trade and professional associations intentionally balance their political giving in order to appease members and secure relationships on both sides of the aisle.

Variables

Endorsements/Scorecards: To test the first hypothesis, I use data aggregated by Project Vote Smart (PVS) and collected from interest group websites to create an indicator variable for groups that endorse candidates for office or publish scorecards (Vote Smart API 2021). PVS is a common source of scorecard and endorsement data (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; McKay 2008). Of the 2,040 groups in the dataset, 221 of the groups endorse or publish scorecards (10.83 percent).

Group Type: Since the second hypothesis predicts that interest groups of certain types will engage varying partisan behavior, I created a variable for Interest Group Type. I used information gleaned from each group's website to assign groups to one of six types: labor union, trade association, professional association, firm, issue advocacy nonprofit, and electoral organization. I use the terminology issue advocacy nonprofit in lieu of single-issue group, which is language used by earlier scholars, because some groups are active in a variety of issues. I include the electoral organization group type in the dataset because of the relative prevalence of organizations that do not lobby or take positions on legislation, but get involved financially in electoral campaigns – EMILY's List is the most prominent example of such an organization. All

groups fell cleanly into one of the six categories based on the following set of criteria: Trade

associations are groups made up of institutional members, while professional associations are

made up of individual members. Labor unions are collective bargaining units. Issue advocacy

groups are nonprofits that engage in lobbying on issues, while electoral organizations are groups

that make political contributions but do not lobby. I use the terminology issue advocacy

nonprofit in lieu of single-issue group, which is used by earlier scholars, because some groups

are active on a variety of issues.

Fig. 3.9: Distribution of Group Types in PPI Dataset
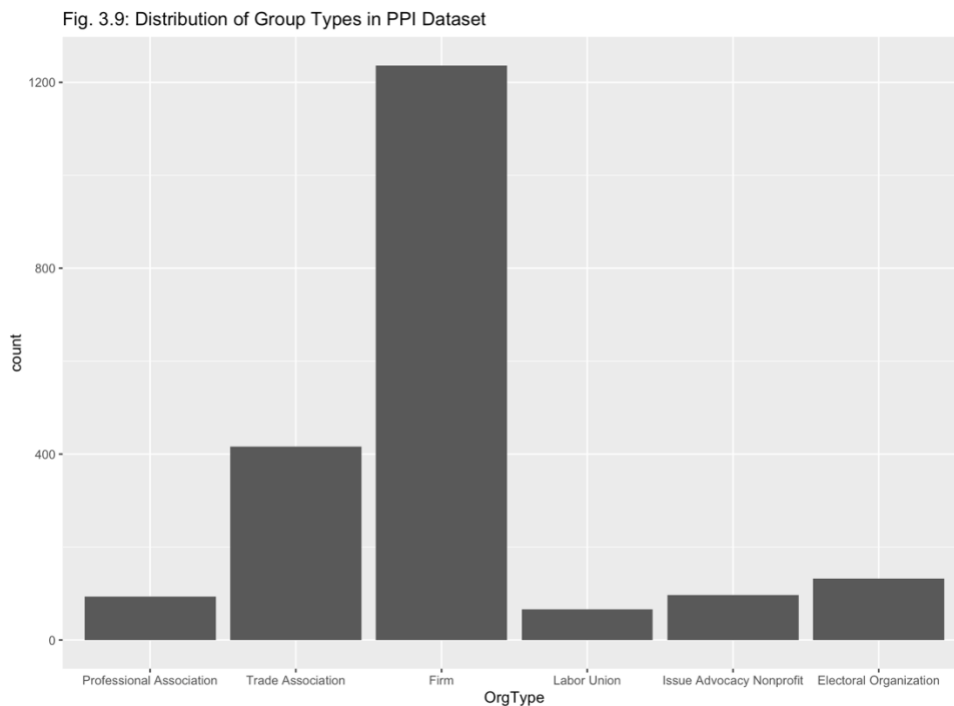
The full dataset includes 97 issue advocacy nonprofits (4.75 percent), 66 labor unions

(3.23 percent), 93 professional associations (4.56 percent), 416 trade associations (20.37

percent), 1,236 firms (60.53 percent), and 132 electoral organizations (6.46 percent). The

prevalence of firms is consistent with the long literature on the dominance of economic/business

interests in the interest group universe (Schlozman 1984, 2010). A visualization of this

distribution is provided in Figure 3.9.

Results

As observed in the previous section, groups that endorse or publish scorecards are more

likely to be partisan than those that do not engage in those activities. Therefore, if PPI is a valid

indicator of an interest group's proximity to one of the political parties, then Folded PPI score

will be positively correlated with the indicator variable for political endorsements and

scorecards. I test this hypothesis using OLS regression with Folded PPI score as the dependent

variable and the indicator variable for endorsements/scorecards as the independent variable.

Table 3.1: Predictors of Party Proximity Index (PPI)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Endorses/Scorecards	0.43*		0.24*
	(0.02)		(0.03)
Electoral Organization		0.54*	0.47*
		(0.04)	(0.04)
Labor Union		0.52*	0.35*
		(0.05)	(0.05)
Issue Adv. Nonprofit		0.57*	0.44*
		(0.04)	(0.04)
Firm		0.13*	
		(0.03)	
Trade Association		0.12*	0.13*
		(0.03)	(0.03)
Constant	0.40*	0.26*	0.22*
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Observations	804	2,040	804
R-square	0.28	0.20	0.44
Adjusted R-square	0.28	0.20	0.43

Note: * Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Dependent variable is
folded Partisan Proximity Index (range = 0-1). Baseline for Models 2
and 3 is an indicator variable for Professional Associations.

OLS results in Model 1 of Table 3.1 indicate that endorsements and scorecards have a positive and statistically significant relationship with Folded PPI ($p<0.05$). The model predicts groups that do not endorse or publish scorecards will have a mean Folded PPI score of 0.40, while groups that endorse will have a mean Folded PPI score of 0.83. In other words, moving from non-endorsing to endorsing results in an increase of more than one standard deviation in Folded PPI score. Referencing Figure 3.11, which plots predicted PPI scores for both endorsing and non-endorsing groups, we can see groups that endorse or publish scorecards have PPI scores among the most partisan of groups in the dataset, while groups that do not endorse are more likely to be politically neutral or lean slightly toward a party.

Fig. 3.11: Predicted Value of PPI Scores by Endorsements
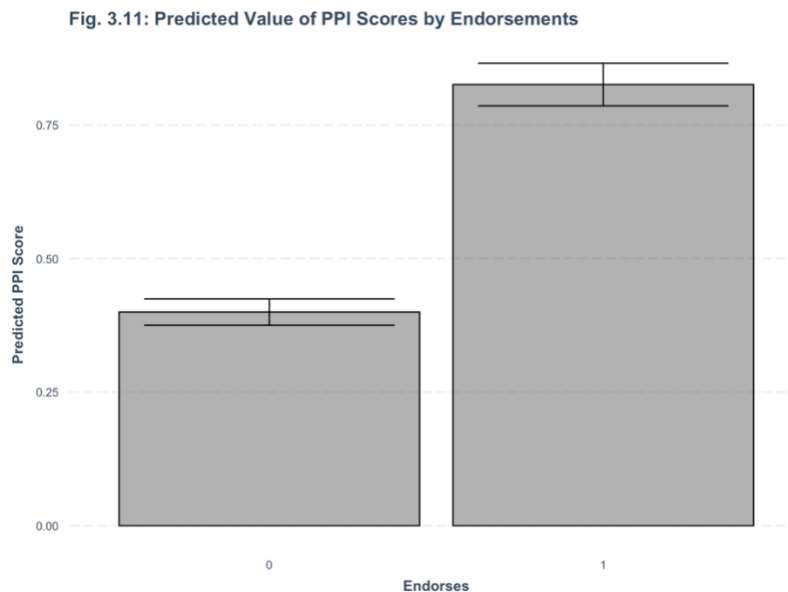
I test the second hypothesis using OLS regression with Folded PPI score as the dependent variable and organization type as the independent variable. Since it is conventional wisdom among interest group practitioners that professional associations, trade associations, and firms tend to be less partisan than labor unions and issue advocacy nonprofits, I expect to see higher

Folded PPI scores among labor unions, issue advocacy nonprofits, and electoral organizations and lower Folded PPI scores among trade associations, professional associations, and firms.

Fig. 3.12: Predicted Value of PPI Scores by Organization Type
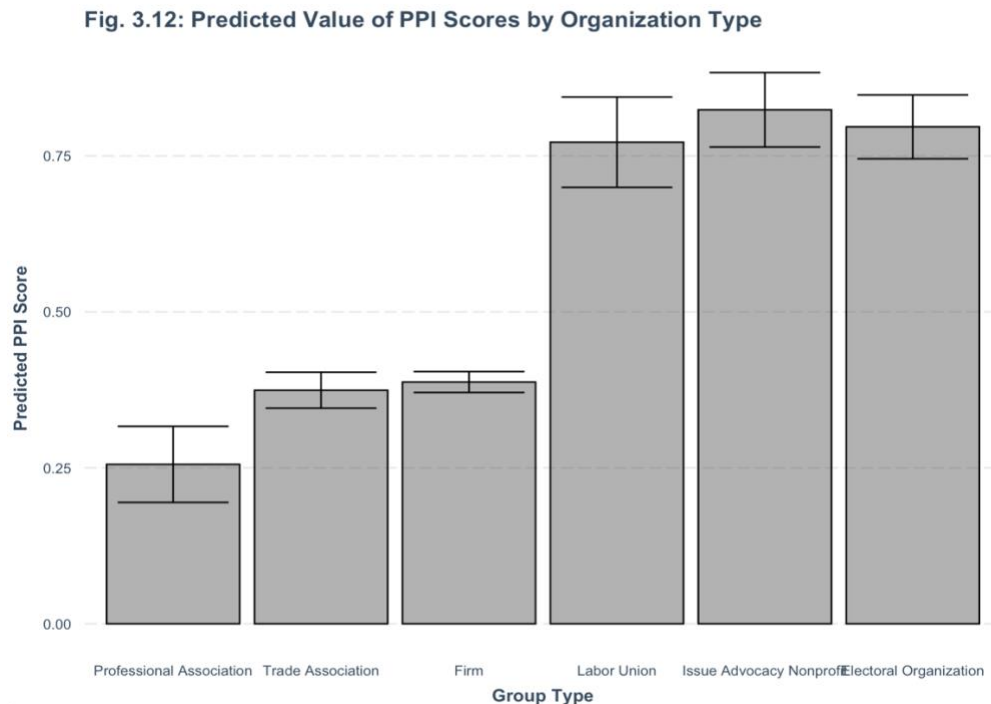
The results in Model 2 of Table 1 indicate that the relationship between Organization Type and Folded PPI score is positive and statistically significant ($p<0.05$). The relationship is also substantively significant. The baseline value for Organization Type is Professional Association, which the model predicts would have a Folded PPI score of 0.26 - the least partisan of all organization types. Trade Associations are predicted to be slightly more partisan but still fairly neutral with a predicted Folded PPI score of 0.38. Firms have a score similar to Trade Associations, with a predicted folded PPI score of 0.39. Labor unions are expected to have a closer proximity to one of the parties with a predicted Folded PPI score of 0.78. Issue advocacy nonprofits are predicted to be the most partisan type of group, with a predicted Folded PPI score of 0.83. Electoral Organizations have a similarly high predicted Folded PPI of 0.80. In Figure

3.12, we can see that trade associations, professional associations, and firms have lower

predicted Folded PPI scores than issue advocacy nonprofits, labor unions, and electoral

organizations.

Model 3 in Table 1 includes a full model with variables for endorsements/scorecards and

organization type. The relationship between party proximity and endorsement practices remains

statistically significant, as does the relationship between party proximity and organization type

($p<0.05$). With the results of this model, we can see that the most partisan type of group is an

electoral organization that endorses or produces scorecards (predicted Folded PPI score of 0.93,

which approaches the top of the range of values), while the least partisan type of group is a

professional organization that does not endorse or produce scorecards (Folded PPI score of 0.22,

which is relatively neutral). This model has an adjusted r-square of 0.44, which indicates the best

fit compared to the other models. I expect that this better model fit is due to Model 3 better

explaining the variation in labor unions and trade associations, both of which have a good

amount of variation in Folded PPI score. By isolating the labor unions and trade associations that

produce scorecards and endorse, we can better predict the partisanship of those types of groups[19].

These findings are promising, but there are some limits to using PPI score to impute

partisanship. We are unable to assign scores to groups that do not make federal political

contributions. So while the National Farm Bureau Federation, for example, is an influential

group in the area of agriculture policy, we are unable to assign a PPI score to the group since it

has no Federal PAC. However, PPI provides insights into a variety of other groups that are not

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[19] A model that includes a variable for PAC size has no statistically significant effect on the effect of organization type and endorsement practices on party proximity.

present in other datasets including the Farm Credit Council, the American Pharmacists Association, and the American Maritime Officers Union. Given the complexity of the interest group landscape, it may be that multiple measures/approaches are necessary to capture the totality of interest groups involved in policymaking and politics.

Second, the focus on contributions means that this measure may produce different results during different campaign finance regimes. We might expect different behavior, for example, before passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, which banned interest groups from making soft money contributions to national party committees, or prior to the Citizens United decision, which loosened regulations on independent expenditures. For this reason, additional study is needed to understand how PPI might perform over time.

Discussion

The model results provide evidence that PPI is a way to conceptualize an interest group's proximity to one of the two major U.S. political parties. Groups that engage in partisan activities like endorsements and issuing public scorecards are likely to have highly partisan PPI scores. Labor unions, issue advocacy nonprofits, and electoral organizations also have highly partisan PPI scores. Evidence suggests that trade associations, professional organizations, and firms are the least partisan groups, although some trade associations lean towards one party or the other for strategic reasons. Ultimately, these findings support the theory that groups go about accomplishing their policy goals in different ways - some by affiliating with a political party and others by building relationships with policymakers on both sides of the aisle.

The findings in this chapter provide opportunities for future extensions for scholars of interest groups. Given the primacy of policy goals behind a group's partisan lean, we might use PPI score to learn more about lobbying behavior in groups with different partisan dispositions. I expect that including PPI in models of interest group decision-making will shed additional light on the strategic decisions of interest groups at different positions on the PPI scale. Scholars can use PPI scores across multiple election cycles to track possible realignment among business groups - a nascent trend that has been identified in media accounts of corporate involvement in politics (Ball 2021).

Interest group party proximity also has important implications for the current study. Most immediately, PPI score can also help us understand the strategies groups use to mobilize members. I expect that an interest group's party proximity will influence the strategies it uses to mobilize members to get involved in the political process, a topic I explore in Chapter 4. I then examine the effects of these strategies in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4: Using Interest Group Type and Partisanship to Predict Member Mobilization Strategies

In Chapter 1, I provide an example of two interest groups that lobby on the same issue but use different messaging to mobilize their members. The focus of this chapter is to understand why these groups choose to use such differing strategies when mobilizing their members. This is a notable question since the most common way for people to get involved in the political process, aside from voting, is through interest group mobilization (Kollman 1998; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). I argue that interest groups will use the most effective mobilization tools available to them to engage their members in public policy issues. Given the volume of emails people receive, interest group leaders look to strategies that will break through the clutter and get their members' attention.

Strategies to encourage members to take action during the mobilization process, however, will differ depending upon the nature of the group and the motivations of group members to belong to their organization. In Chapter 2, I discuss the social psychology literature that suggests party identity and conflict-based cues should be some of the most powerful strategies a group can use to mobilize interest group members to take action. Because party and conflict cues are tied to social identity, which is a powerful motivator, I expect these cues to be some of the most powerful available to interest group leaders looking to mobilize members to take action. A group's organizational goals, which are driven by the group's party proximity and group type, will predict whether groups utilize or avoid conflict and party identity cues.

As I describe in Chapter 2, cues that leverage social identity can be powerful mobilizers, but they are only available to some interest groups, depending upon the motivations of the groups' members. I expect issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations whose issues

have been incorporated into one of the political parties to rely heavily on party identity and

conflict-oriented cues. These groups are likely to draw membership from one party or another,

and since the issues have been adopted by one of the political parties, these groups will freely

leverage party cues into their communications to boost response rates. I expect the same

behavior from highly partisan interest groups, after controlling for organization type. Trade and

professional associations, on the other hand, are less likely to use party cues due to their

politically diverse memberships and their advocacy for issues that are not associated with one

party or the other. Instead, I expect these groups to link the legislative process to the reason the

members chose to join the group. For example, if the American Medical Association (AMA)

mobilizes its members on medical malpractice reform, it will discuss Congress's consideration of

the bill and how that consideration links back to doctors' desire to reform medical malpractice

laws - key reason that many doctors join the AMA.

Given the theory I laid out in Chapter 2, I test the following hypotheses:

H1a: After controlling for partisanship, issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations will use more partisan language in their member mobilizations compared to other types of interest groups.

H1b: After controlling for group type, interest groups with higher levels of partisanship will use more partisan language in their member mobilizations compared to less partisan groups.

H2a: After controlling for partisanship, issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations will use more conflict-oriented language than other types of groups.

H2b: After controlling for group type, interest groups with higher levels of partisanship will use more conflict-oriented language than less partisan groups.

H3a: After controlling for partisanship, trade and professional associations use more instrumental language in their member mobilization messaging compared to other types of interest groups.

H3b: After controlling for group type, interest groups with lower levels of partisanship will use more instrumental language than more partisan groups.

H4: Labor unions will use more affiliation-oriented language in their member mobilization communication compared to other types of interest groups.

<u>*Method*</u>

To test these hypotheses, I built a novel dataset of 14,321 emails from 233 interest groups sent from February 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023. I collected these emails by registering to be part of all available mailing lists for the interest groups in the Partisan Proximity Index (PPI) dataset that I discussed in Chapter 3. To register for email alerts, I sought to register for the email lists of the 831 non-company interest groups with PPI scores. 421 (50.66%) of the groups allowed me to join their mailing list[20], although some of the groups did not send emails to their list during the period of analysis. Excluding companies, the original PPI dataset is made up of 103 issue advocacy nonprofits (12.39%), 68 labor unions (8.18%), 148 electoral organizations (17.81%), 96 professional associations (11.55%), and 420 trade associations (50.54%)[21]. The list of organizations sending emails for this project is made up of 58 issue advocacy nonprofits (24.89%), 22 labor unions (9.44%), 19 electoral organizations (8.15%), 37 professional associations (15.88%), and 97 trade associations (41.63%).

There were three types of organizations that were significantly more (or less) common in the email dataset compared to their presence in the PPI dataset. The share of issue advocacy nonprofits went up from 12.39% in the PPI dataset to 24.89% in the emails dataset because most of these groups had email sign-up features on their website. Since issue advocacy nonprofits facilitate signing up for email, this type of group saw less drop-off compared to other groups. In contrast, electoral organizations dropped from 17.81% in the PPI dataset to 8.15% in the emails

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[20] Other groups either did not maintain a mailing list or sent message only to its dues-paying members.
[21] These calculations exclude companies, which are omitted from the discussion because they do not distribute information about their policy goals to the public.

dataset. This reflects the fact that there were a significant number of electoral organizations that did not maintain websites at all, which means that these groups do not allow the public to sign up for their email list. It is likely that the groups that do not maintain websites do not seek support from the general voting public and instead receive the bulk of their support from a small number of supporters. Similarly, a number of trade associations did not have email sign-up features on their websites, and their share dropped from 50.54% in the PPI dataset to 41.63% in the emails dataset. This is because it is common practice for trade associations send policy information via email to their points of contact at member companies, who in turn send messages to member company employees.[22] For this reason, many trade associations did not have an email signup on their website. Therefore, it is possible that there is bias in the sample of trade association emails. I expect the groups that have email signups on their website are more likely to have consumer-facing advocacy programs and might be more reluctant to use controversial language in their email messages than those that send messages to members only.

Table 4.1: Presence of Organizations by Type in PPI and Email Datasets		
Organization Type	PPI Dataset	Emails Dataset
Issue Advocacy Nonprofit	103 (12.39%)	58 (24.89%)
Labor Union	68 (8.18%)	22 (9.44%)
Electoral Organization	148 (17.81%)	19 (8.15%)
Professional Association	96 (11.55%)	37 (15.88%)
Trade Association	420 (50.54%)	97 (41.63%)
Total	835	233

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[22] Personal conversation with Kristin Brackemyre, Senior Director of Programs, Public Affairs Council.

To conduct the analyses, I exported the data from the email account that captured interest groups emails, cleaned the emails by removing stop words and extraneous HTML code[23], and appended the interest group's name using the sending email address. Next, I , performed text analysis using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010). LIWC is a supervised learning method of text analysis that uses dictionaries to identify the psychological attributes of a corpus, or body of texts. This method is commonly used in political science literature (Pearson 2015; Vera and Vidal 2020). LIWC contains a variety of pre-existing dictionaries that measure standard linguistic dimensions and psychological processes, including the use of positive and negative emotions, emotional cues, and verb tenses (Boyd et al. 2022). LIWC calculates the percentage of total words that appear in a dictionary. For example, if a corpus has a LIWC score of 2.5, then 2.5% of that corpus are words that appear in the dictionary in question.

Since pre-existing dictionaries that identify partisan and instrumental language were not available, I developed two custom dictionaries to test hypotheses related to the use of partisan and instrumental cues. To validate these custom dictionaries, I used a multi-step process prescribed by the creators of LIWC (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010). First, I used information from interviews with interest group leaders and my own knowledge of mobilization emails to develop possible words for each dictionary. For example, interviews with interest group leaders suggest that invoking the names of party leaders can cue party identity. As a result, terms like "Biden," "Trump," "Pelosi," and "McConnell" are included in the partisan dictionary. Similarly, terms strongly associated with one of the political parties like "woke" and "progressive" also

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[23] Stop words are commonly-used words that provide no content. Some examples are a, an, and the. Extraneous HTML code was included in many emails in the conversion from Gmail email format to text format and include things like hyperlinks and formatting-related code.

appear in the partisan dictionary[24]. The instrumental dictionary contains terms that are used to communicate the way policy progress helps the interest group accomplish its larger organizational goals. Instrumental cues are designed to prime the advocacy training interest group members receive that links public policy to association member goals. As a result, words like "consider," "bill," and "amend" are included in the instrumental dictionary. The complete partisan and instrumental dictionaries are available in Appendix A.

After developing the dictionaries, I recruited three domain experts to evaluate their external validity before using them in the analyses.[25] to independently rate whether each word on the list was appropriate for inclusion in each of the dictionaries. If at least two of the three experts agreed that the word should be included, then the word remained in the dictionary. If only one expert rated the word as appropriate for the dictionary, it was dropped. After evaluation by the three judges, no words were dropped from the instrumental dictionary (100% adoption rate) and two words were dropped from the partisan dictionary (95.24% adoption rate). I also verified the validity of the dictionaries by calculating Cronbach's alpha and the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20, which measure inter-item consistency. The results (Cronbach's alpha = 0.18 for partisan dictionary, 0.37 for instrumental dictionary, Kuder-Richardson = 0.61 for partisan dictionary, 0.77 for instrumental dictionary) suggest that there is a significant level of consistency between words in the dictionary.

To test the hypotheses about conflict-oriented language (H2a and H2b), I used the pre-existing LIWC conflict dictionary, which includes 305 words related to interpersonal conflict,

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[24] Due to time constraints, I plan to conduct additional validation of dictionaries in a later version of this project. Validation will involve manual coding of a random sample of emails, then comparing manual coding results to LIWC results.
[25] Domain experts selected were PhD students who are familiar with American politics, interest groups, and affective polarization literature, and were not involved in the research.

including words like "fight," "attack," and "kill" (Boyd et al. 2022). To ensure this dictionary was appropriate to use in a political context, I checked to see if there were inherent differences in the use of language in a political context versus the inter-personal context for which LIWC scholars created the dictionary. To complete this task, I validated the dictionary itself to ensure that words in the dictionary were appropriate for use in a political context. Out of the 305 words in the conflict dictionary, the vast majority of them are applicable to political conflict. For example, the word "kill" might be used to describe the process of killing in a literal sense in a typical corpus, but in emails that refer to the legislative process, "kill" is often used to refer to the act of defeating a bill. In total I determined that only 18 words (6%) were not appropriate indicators of conflict in the political context, and these were mostly because these words could be used in reference to specific public policy issues (ex: cyber-bulling, homicide, rape). To further see if there were differences between the original dictionary and the modified dictionary with the 18 words removed, I ran the emails through both dictionaries (mean = 0.42, sd = 0.84). I then ran hypothesis tests for the modified dictionary. Substantive and statistical results did not change (see Appendix B for model results comparing the original and modified conflict dictionaries). Since results did not change and the original dictionary has been extensively validated, I used the original conflict dictionary for the analysis in this paper.

When using pre-existing dictionaries that were created for use in other contexts, it is important to validate the dictionaries for the current context (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). To identify whether the content in my emails dataset is consistent with typical email datasets, I first compared the descriptive statistics from the interest group emails dataset to the descriptive statistics for general emails provided by LIWC. The mean and standard deviation for conflict score in my dataset is 0.26 and 0.35, while the mean and standard deviation for conflict score for

general emails is 0.13 and 0.35. This means that there are similar levels of variation in the

emails, but interest group emails use more conflict-oriented language compared to other email

datasets measured by LIWC.

To test my hypothesis that labor unions are more likely to use affiliation-oriented

language (H4), I used the pre-existing LIWC dictionary for affiliation-oriented language, which

includes 374 words related to affiliation, including words like "we," "our," and "tribe." Again, I

take the step of evaluating all of the words in the preexisting dictionary for their appropriateness

to particular context of interest groups. Unlike the conflict dictionary, there are six words (1.60%

of the dictionary) in the existing affiliation dictionary, including "brotherhood," "association,"

and "union," – that could create bias in this application because they appear in some of the

interest group's names. To account for this, I use a modified dictionary that removed these words

for all descriptive statistics and models.

I also compared the descriptive statistics from the emails dataset to the descriptive

statistics for general emails provided by LIWC. The mean and standard deviation for affiliation

score in my dataset is 4.66 and 3.61, while the mean and standard deviation for affiliation score

for general emails is 2.15 and 1.71. This means that interest group emails use more affiliation

language on average compared to general emails, and there is more variation on average in

interest group emails compared to general emails. This different use of language makes sense

given that interest groups are speaking to their members, who have an affiliation with the group.

As with the conflict dictionary, I checked the affiliation dictionary to detect words that

could be used in a policy context and therefore might cause bias in hypothesis tests. These are

different from the words described above that appear in the interest groups' names. I identified

10 words, including variations of the words "marriage and "gang," which might be used to

describe interest group policy positions (ex: marriage equality, gang violence). To test the differences between the raw results and results with the 10 words omitted, I ran the emails dataset through this modified dictionary. I then tested hypotheses for the results and compared to results from the hypothesis tests using the unmodified dictionary. Overall, the difference between the original and modified dictionaries are minimal and were not substantively or statistically meaningful in the analyses. Substantive and statistical results did not change (see Appendix B for model results comparing the original and modified affiliation dictionaries). Since results did not change and the original dictionaries have been externally validated, I used the original affiliation dictionary for the analysis in this paper.

Variables

To evaluate these primary hypotheses about the relationship between types of interest groups and the way the communicate with their members through email, I estimate a series of linear mixed effects models. For each model, the unit of analysis is email nested by interest group. I also consider a number of variables at the group and email level that might shape the language used.

Independent Variables

Group Type: I used information gleaned from each group's website to assign groups to one of five types: labor union, trade association, professional association, issue advocacy nonprofit, and electoral organization. Trade associations are groups made up of institutional members, while professional associations are made up of individual members. Labor unions are collective bargaining units. Issue advocacy groups are nonprofits that engage in lobbying on issues, while electoral organizations are groups that make political contributions but do not

lobby. I use the terminology issue advocacy nonprofit in lieu of single-issue group, which is used

by earlier scholars, because some groups are active on a variety of issues. All 233 groups fell

cleanly into one of the five categories.

Folded PPI Score: In all models, I include an independent variable for party proximity

of the interest group (Meli 2022). As detailed in Chapter 3 and in previously published work

(2022), this measure was developed to measure interest groups' proximity to one of the two

political parties on a continuous scale (0, 1). Groups with a score of 1 are closest to one of the

political parties. Groups with a score of 0 are equidistant from both political parties.[26]

Dependent Variables

Partisan Score: The dependent variable for H1 is partisan score, which is the percentage

of words in each email that appear in the partisan dictionary. If an email's partisan score is 5.00,

then 5% of the words in the email appear in the dictionary (mean = 0.81, sd = 1.34).

Conflict Score: The dependent variable for H2 is conflict score, which is the percentage

of words in each email that appear in the modified conflict dictionary (mean = 0.42, sd = 0.84).

Instrumental Score: The dependent variable for H3 is affiliation score, which is the

percentage of words in each email that appear in the modified affiliation dictionary (mean =

2.43, sd = 2.53).

Affiliation Score: The dependent variable for H4 is affiliation score, which is the

percentage of words in each email that appear in the modified affiliation dictionary (mean =

4.66, sd = 3.61).

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[26] Mean = 0.57, sd = 0.40.

Results

Before reviewing hypothesis tests, I first examine descriptive statistics to understand the baseline values of partisan, conflict, and instrumental language used by interest groups. Figure 4.1 provides a visualization of the distributions for each of the dependent variables. The modal value for mean partisan score and mean conflict score are near 0, while the modal value for instrumental score is around 1.5 - 2.0 and the modal value for affiliation score is around 2.5 – 3.0. In general, groups use more affiliation-oriented words compared to the other dictionaries, while groups use relatively few conflict words.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Partisan, Conflict, and Instrumental Scores by Interest Group
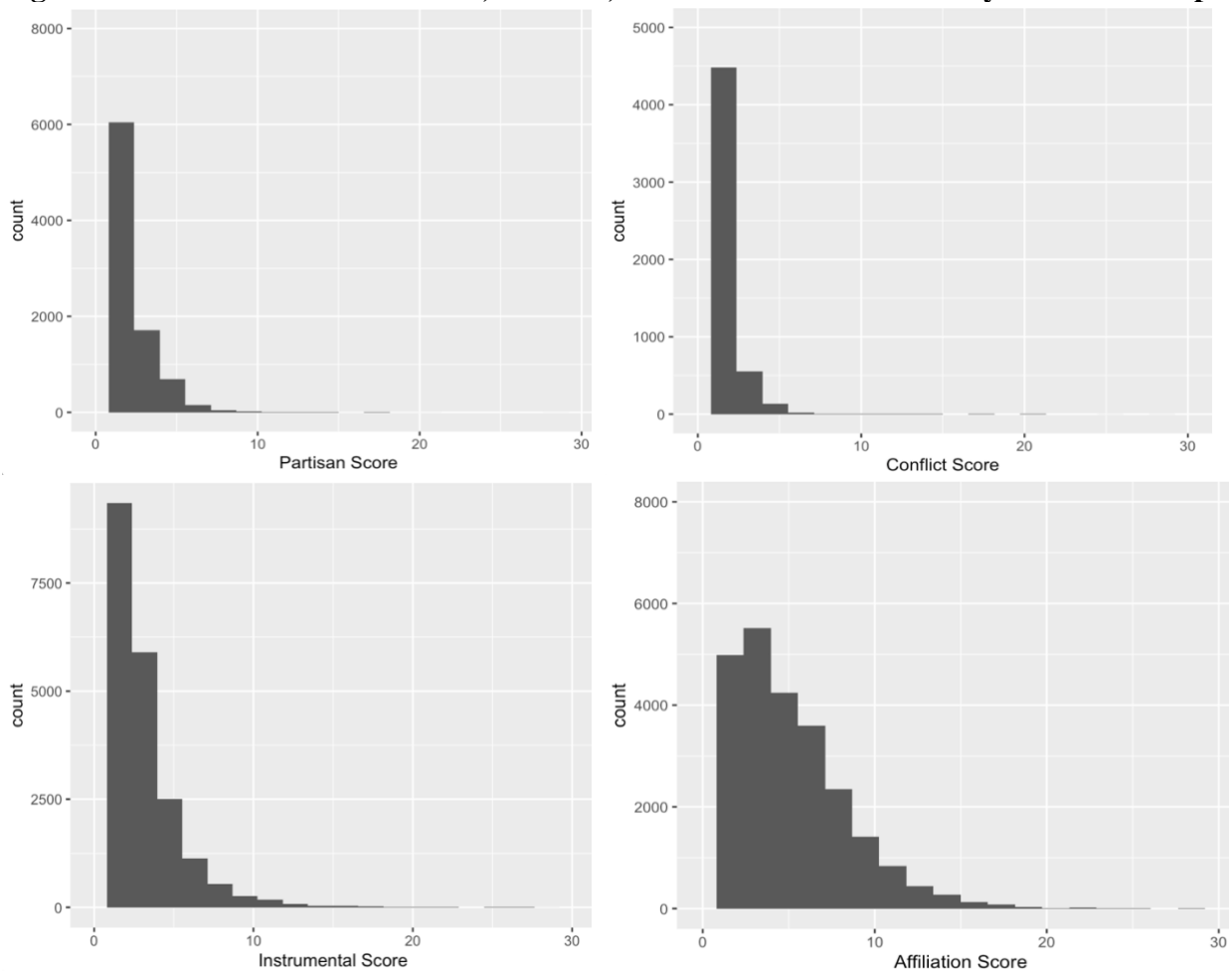
I use linear mixed effects models to conduct hypothesis tests for H1a and H1b, which predict that issue advocacy nonprofits, electoral organizations, and partisan interest groups will use more partisan language than associations and nonpartisan groups. These models allow me to conduct analysis on individual emails, but also allows me to consider differences between emails sent by different groups. The independent variables are organization type and folded PPI score. The dependent variable is partisan score. In Table 4.2, the Partisan Model predicts no statistically significant relationship between trade associations and labor unions' use of partisan language compared to the baseline group, which means that trade associations and labor unions use a statistically similar amount of partisan language as the baseline group of professional associations. After controlling for party proximity, there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations ($p<0.05$). Similarly, after controlling for group type, groups closer to the political parties are more likely to use partisan language compared to less partisan groups ($p<0.05$, two tailed).

The results of the Partisan Model support my expectations about use of partisan language by group type and group partisanship. In the baseline condition, representing professional associations, the model predicts a very low level of partisan language. When controlling for interest group partisanship, labor unions and trade associations are no more likely to use partisan language than professional associations, which conforms to expectations given the diversity of partisanship among these types of groups. Groups of all types with the highest levels of party proximity are predicted to use 0.21 percent more partisan words in each email – representing a modest increase in the use of partisan language when comparing the least partisan groups to the most partisan groups. Given that the baseline group uses 0.26 percent partisan words in their

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emails, this represents an 80 percentage point increase in the use of partisan language when

moving from the least partisan groups to the most partisan groups.

Table 4.2: Predictors of Partisan, Conflict, Instrumental, and Affiliation Oriented Language in Interest Group Messages

	Partisan Model	Conflict Model	Instrumental Model	Affiliation Model
Folded PPI	0.21*	0.27*	1.19*	-0.08
	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.52)	(0.53)
Issue Advocacy	0.68*	0.24*	-2.26*	2.22*
Nonprofit	(0.13)	(0.08)	(0.44)	(0.50)
Labor Union	0.16	0.00	-2.97*	1.72*
	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.54)	(0.55)
Trade Assn.	-0.08	-0.02	-1.40*	-0.38
	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.50)	(0.39)
Electoral Organization	1.44*	0.20^	-2.09*	2.82*
	(0.37)	(0.12)	(0.63)	(0.67)
Constant	0.26*	0.10*	3.76*	3.84*
	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.47)	(0.39)
N	26,791	26,791	26,791	26,791
R-Square fixed effects	0.16	0.09	0.03	0.14
R-Square combined	0.41	0.22	0.38	0.60

Note: $* < 0.05$, two-tailed. $^ < 0.10$, two-tailed. Estimates are linear mixed effects. Groups in the baseline condition are professional associations.

We see a more substantively significant effect when we look at issue advocacy nonprofits

and electoral organizations' use of partisan language. After controlling for party proximity, the

model predicts that partisan words will account for a greater share of words in issue advocacy

nonprofit emails compared to professional associations. The model predicts that partisan words

will occupy 0.68 percent more partisan words compared to the baseline group, which represents

nearly a threefold increase in the use of partisan language. Electoral organizations are expected

to use even more partisan words in their emails compared to the baseline group. The model

predicts that these groups will use 1.44 percentage points more partisan language compared to

professional associations, which represents more than a five-fold increase over professional associators' use of partisan words in emails to members.

To test expectations related to conflict-oriented words, I also use a linear fixed effects model, results of which are presented in Column 2 in Table 4.2. The model predicts a very low amount of conflict-oriented language in the baseline group (professional associations), with no statistically significant difference between labor unions' and trade associations' use of conflict-oriented language and conflict language used by the baseline group. However, two types of groups issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations – use more conflict-oriented language in their communications with members ($p<0.05$ and $p<0.10$ respectively). There is also a positive and statistically significant relationship between party proximity and the use of conflict-oriented language ($p<0.05$, two-tailed).

Taken as a whole, the results of the Conflict Model in Table 4.2 support my hypotheses. The model predicts that groups affiliated with the political parties will use more conflict-oriented language than those that remain politically neutral ($p<0.05$, two-tailed). After controlling for organization type, the most partisan groups' emails are predicted to contain 0.27 percent conflict-oriented words, which represents an more than two-fold increase in the use of conflict-oriented words. Similarly, issue advocacy nonprofit emails are predicted to contain 0.24 percentage points more conflict-oriented words, which also represents more than a two-fold increase. Electoral organization emails are predicted to contain 0.20 percentage point increase, which represents two-fold increase compared to the baseline group.

Moving to hypotheses related to instrumental language, I examine the use of instrumental language by interest groups. I predict that nonpartisan interest groups will use more instrumental language than partisan groups and that associations will use more instrumental language than

issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations. We can see that in the Instrumental Model (column 3) in Table 4.2, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between an interest group's partisanship and instrumental language ($p < 0.05$). The models do not provide evidence to support H3a. After controlling for interest group type, more partisan groups are more likely to use instrumental language than nonpartisan groups. These results are substantively significant – the model predicts that partisan group emails will contain 1.19 percentage points more partisan words in emails compared to nonpartisan groups, which represents a modest increase in the use of instrumental language.

Figure 4.2: Predicted Effects of Group Type on the use of Instrumental Language in Emails
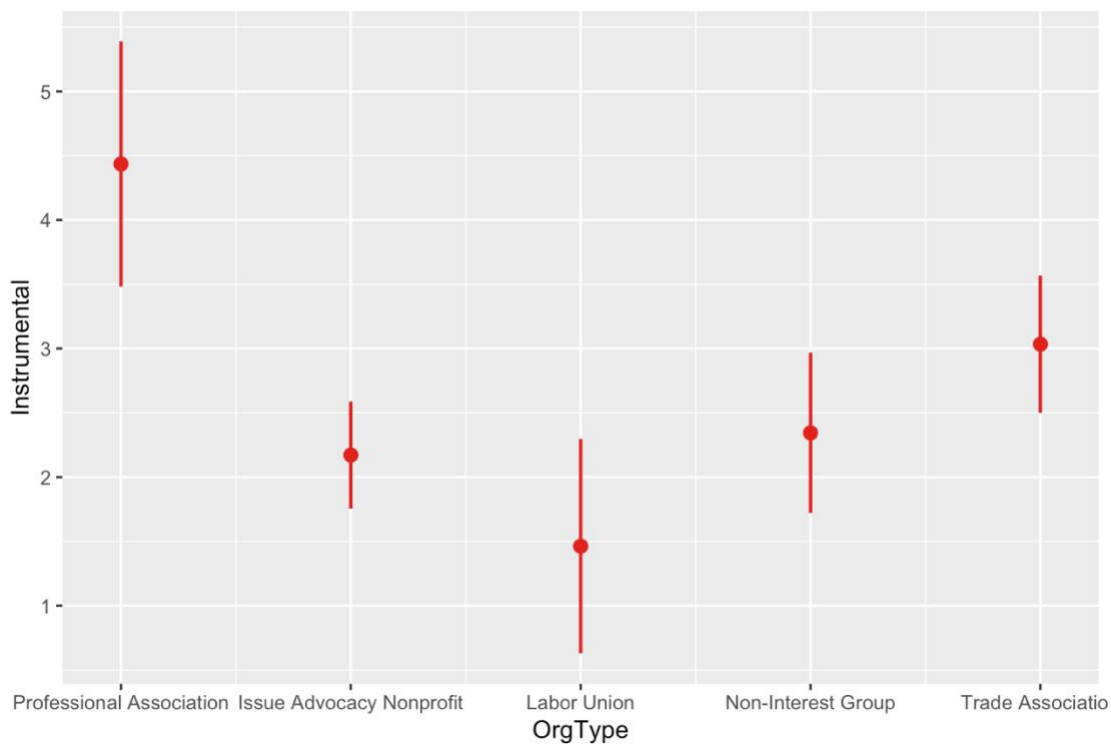
In contrast, the model results support H3b, which predicts that trade and professional associations will use more instrumental language than other types of groups because of association efforts to link legislative activity directly with member goals. There is a negative and

statistically significant relationship between instrumental language and issue advocacy nonprofits, labor unions, trade associations, and electoral organizations (p<0.05). After controlling for group partisanship, the model predicts that professional association emails will contain 3.76 percent instrumental words. By contrast, the model predicts that issue advocacy nonprofit and electoral organization emails respectively will contain 1.50 percent and 1.67 percent instrumental words – decreases of more than 50 percent. The model also predicts that labor unions will use 0.79 percent instrumental words, which represents nearly an 80 percent decrease of instrumental words in labor union emails. Trade associations are also expected to use fewer instrumental words than professional associations, but the difference is more muted – trade associations are predicted to use 2.36 percent instrumental words in their emails. Figure 4.2 illustrates the relative effect of interest group type on the use of instrumental words from the Instrumental Model in Table 4.2. We can see that professional associations use significantly more instrumental language compared to the other types of groups. Trade associations also use more instrumental language than the other types of groups, but the difference does not appear to be statistically significant.

The results of the Instrumental Model in Table 4.2 raise additional questions about what is happening with instrumental language with different group types and suggest that the effects of partisanship may be conditional on group type. To further investigate, I subset the data by interest group type and run linear mixed effects models on each dataset with a dependent variable of instrumental language and an independent variable of PPI. Results are presented in Table 4.3. The relationship between instrumental language and party proximity was not statistically significant for any of the group types except for trade associations (p<0.05, two-tailed). Figure 4.3 illustrates that for Trade Associations, instrumental language increases as the

groups get more partisan. Put differently, nonpartisan trade associations are likely to use 2.02 percentage points less instrumental language in emails than their partisan peers.

Table 4.3: Predictors of Instrumental Language by Party Proximity in Different Interest Group Types

	Prof Assn	Trade Assn	Labor Union	Issue Group	Electoral Org
Folded PPI	-1.05	2.02*	-3.10	0.08	0.83
	(1.80)	(0.80)	(3.97)	(0.58)	(2.26)
Constant	4.29*	2.19*	4.82	2.55*	2.05
	(0.63)	(0.31)	(3.57)	(0.52)	(2.34)
N	835	6,167	947	4,979	1,467
R-Square fixed effects	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01
R-Square combined	0.54	0.38	0.64	0.21	0.35

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Estimates are linear mixed effects. Groups in the baseline condition are professional associations.

Figure 4.3: Effect of Party Proximity on Instrumental Language in Trade Associations
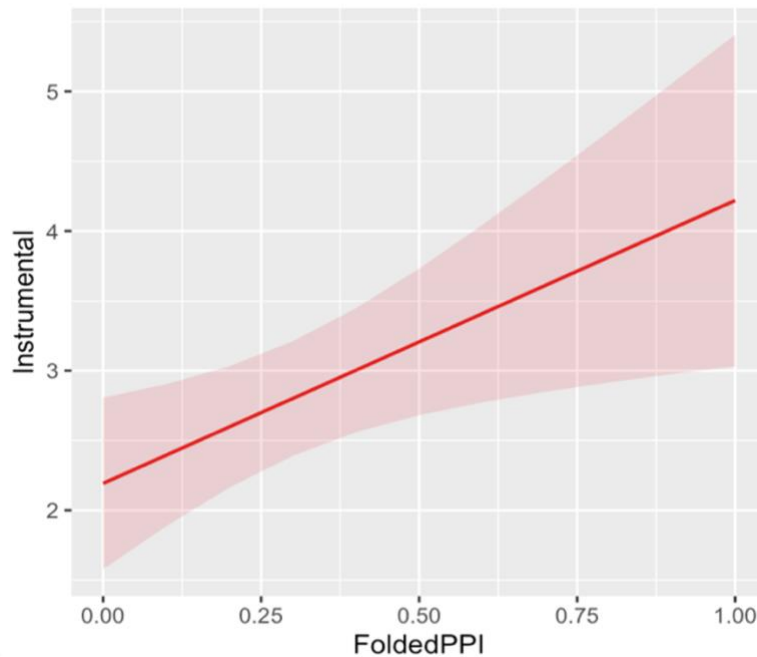
While these results are not what the hypotheses predicted, they do conform with the findings discussed in Chapter 3. When examining Party Proximity Index's relationship with ideology scores, I find that as trade associations get more partisan in their political giving, their positions on issues do not become more polarized – meaning that the organization is able to maintain a more ideologically moderate strategy even when they have a stronger partisan preference in their political giving. Contrast this behavior with that of professional associations, which took more ideologically polarized stances on issues as their political giving became more partisan. In Chapter 3, I theorized that this pattern was due to professional associations' need to be more responsive to their members. When a professional association is made up of dues-paying partisans, it is more likely to take more ideologically extreme positions on issues. Comparatively, trade associations serve institutional members who are less sensitive about the organization matching their partisan preferences. We may be seeing the same phenomenon here with email language. While professional associations will use more bipartisan strategies in their email messages when the group has a more bipartisan posture but reverse course when the group – and presumably its members – lean towards one party or the other, trade associations do not face this same constraint. Instead, we can see that trade associations use a more bipartisan approach in communication even when their political priorities lean towards one or the other political party.

Another potential explanation for these differences is the potential bias in the emails dataset I identified earlier in this chapter. Since they are made up of institutional members, I was not able to join the mailing lists of a significant portion of the trade associations in the PPI dataset and theorized that the groups that allowed me to join are more likely to have consumer-facing grassroots programs. For example, the American Property Casualty Insurance Association

(APCIA) does not allow the public to sign up for its member-facing action alerts, but encourages consumers to join Securing Our Future, which is a grassroots organization designed to engage the customers of property casualty insurance companies. I suspect that emails sent by trade associations to the general public will be even less likely to contain partisan messages than those sent to their member company contacts, although there is no way to test this theory since these data are not available for analysis.

Finally, I test expectations related to affiliation language. Results so far indicate that labor unions are less likely to use partisan, conflict, and instrumental language in their message to members. As I discuss in Chapter 2, I expect that instead of using partisan, conflict, or instrumental language, we will see labor unions rely on affiliation-oriented cues. Labor unions use this type of language to leverage the strong social identity labor unions build during the formation and collective bargaining process. The Affiliation Model in Table 4.2 predicts that labor unions will use 1.72 percentage points more affiliation oriented language compared to the baseline group of professional associations ($p<0.05$). This represents nearly a 50% increase compared to the baseline group. We also see that issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations are likely to use, respectively, 2.22 and 2.82 percentage points more affiliation language compared to the baseline group. There is no statistically significant difference between trade associations' use of affiliation language and affiliation language use among those in the baseline group ($p<0.05$).

These findings are consistent with social identity theory. Groups that have had their issues incorporated into the party platforms – issue advocacy nonprofits and electoral organizations – use more partisan language, which triggers a group identity and makes people more likely to respond to mobilizations. Along with these partisan cues, we are also likely to see

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affiliation-oriented language to provide additional group identity cues. Trade and professional associations, which do not have party identity available to them and can't always rely on group identity to mobilize members will instead use instrumental cues. Labor unions do not have party cues available to them due to their membership makeup. However, labor unions are able to leverage group identity, which allows them to effectively mobilize members without cuing party identity.

Discussion

The results of this study show that different types of interest groups communicate with their members in predictably different ways. I find strong support for the predictions that trade and professional associations rely on instrumental cues in their member mobilizations; partisan organizations, issue advocacy nonprofits, and electoral organizations use more partisan and conflict-oriented language in their mobilizations; and labor unions use affiliation language to mobilize their members. These insights speak to the wider literature around access-oriented versus ideological organizations (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014; Powell and Grimmer 2016). Issue advocacy nonprofits capitalize on their close association with the political parties and the pull of party identity by embedding partisan and conflict cues in their messages. Trade and professional associations stay away from these polarizing cues and use instrumental cues to mobilize their members. These groups have different legislative strategies, which extend to the way groups communicate with their members. Partisan and issue groups tend to work with one side of the aisle, while nonpartisan groups and associations tend to work with legislators from both parties to promote their policy agendas.

The findings presented here are both statistically and substantively significant, but it is important to note that the method used here is a conservative test for these hypotheses. Since

LIWC looks at each word in isolation and does not consider the full meaning of sentences, it can miss important cues present in emails. For example, after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, groups advocating for and against abortion sent a flurry of emails to members, some of which contained conflict-oriented phrases. One email from NARAL contained the sentence "We told anti-choice politicians that if you come for our rights, we'll come for your seats." This is clearly a message designed to prime conflict to more effectively mobilize members, but since none of the words appear in the conflict dictionary, the language in this email would not appear in the conflict model. In reality, I expect the existence of these types of messages to appear more than the models predict.

The findings also suggest that groups of different types might have varying effects on polarization within the political system. While issue advocacy nonprofits use divisive language in their member messaging, trade and professional associations avoid these types of cues and instead focus on teaching members how the legislative process helps groups achieve their member goals. We can expect from these results that people involved with trade and professional associations hear messages that run counter to polarizing messages available in partisan media and other popular sources of political information. Issue advocacy nonprofits, on the other hand, echo the polarizing messaging available in other parts of the political system. In the next two chapters, I take up the issue of the impact interest group language can have on its members. First, in Chapter 5, I examine the effects that group messages have on the public, with particular attention to affective polarization, political efficacy, and attitudes toward the group itself. In Chapter 6, I move beyond email messaging to understand the types of messages members receive from groups to which the belong through various forms of member education and activity.

Chapter 5: The Effects of Interest Group Messages on the Mass Public

In Chapter 4, I established that interest groups are likely to send different types of messages depending upon their partisanship and their group type. Partisan interest groups, electoral organizations, and issue advocacy groups are more likely to use conflict-oriented language compared to nonpartisan groups, professional associations, and trade associations. I also find that trade and professional associations are more likely to use instrumental language, especially if the group is nonpartisan. Recall as well that in Chapter 2, I note that nonpartisan interest groups and associations spend time and resources educating their members about the policymaking process, the values of bipartisanship, and the ways that policymakers incorporate constituent comments into their decision-making process. However, we know little about the whether these different strategies effect members' attitudes about government and politics. In this chapter, I explore the ways that groups' communication patterns influence the way members of interest group perceive politics, government, and the people around them.

I focus here on three effects – interest group messaging's impact on affective polarization, its influence on internal efficacy among members, and its influence on individuals' perceptions of the group sending the email. In Chapter 2, I discuss the ways that interest groups influence affective polarization levels among members. Through exposure to people with different political views, an emphasis on nonpartisan issues, and civic education around the importance of nonpartisan policy strategies, members of association and nonpartisan groups are likely to have lower levels of affective polarization compared to the general public. In addition to these effects, in this chapter, I also explore the impact of interest group messages on individual perceptions of the group sending the message. Understanding these effects are important for two reasons. First, analyzing the way individuals react to interest group messaging can help us

understand how a group's messages influence member retention, which is of vital importance to interest group leaders. Secondly, studying reactions to interest group messaging provides reveals new information about the types of messages people like and dislike. If a member knows nothing about an interest group except for a message the group has sent, we can infer information about their reaction to the group's message from the relative warmth of their feelings for the interest group.

As established in Chapter 2, interest group messaging comes in a variety of formats, including interpersonal communication, interest group events, advocacy mobilizations, and other written communications from group to member. In this chapter, I focus on written communication from interest groups. I test the types of communications that I observed in interest group emails or that interest group leaders described in interviews. I conduct a survey experiment on a random sample of U.S. adults to understand the effects that different messaging strategies have on members. In the experiment, individuals are divided into three treatment groups and a control group. The treatment groups each read a message sent from an unnamed interest group, then answer questions about their perceptions of politics. The control group does not read a vignette and instead goes straight to answering questions about their perceptions of politics. The first type of communication relates to conflict-oriented and partisan messages, which in Chapter 4 I found to be more prevalent in partisan groups, electoral organizations, and issue advocacy nonprofits. The partisan vignette used in the experiment in this chapter was adapted directly from action alerts sent by partisan interest groups, and accurately reflects the type of messaging that some groups use.

The second type of communication involves pragmatic language – messages designed to help interest group members understand the ways policymakers use feedback from constituents

in their policy decision-making process. This type of communication is common in many interest group communications, as evidenced by groups' use of research conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF). Staff from CMF even refer to one chart illustrating the importance of constituent communication "the mother of all charts" because it is so commonly used in interest group trainings and educational materials (Fitch and Goldschmidt 2017).[27] The language in the pragmatic message vignette was adapted from actual training materials used by interest groups in member training programs.

Figure 5.1: The Congressional Management Foundation's "Mother of All Charts"
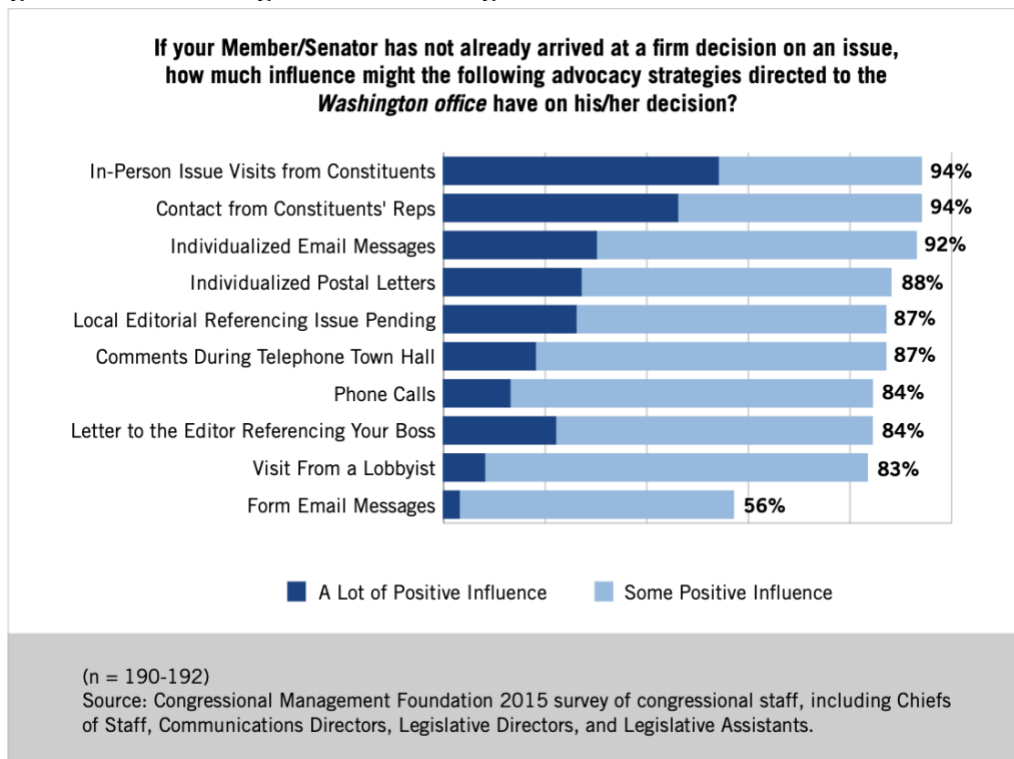
The third type of message involves bipartisan language, which are messages that discuss the value of a bipartisan approach to policy advocacy. One theme that emerged from my interviews with interest group leaders involved the time and effort groups spend defending their

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[27] Interview with Kathy Goldschmidt, former Director of Strategic Initiatives, Congressional Management Foundation.

bipartisan approach to skeptical interest group members[28]. Interest groups train their members on the value of bipartisanship and even hire outside consultants as third-party validators to explain this approach to their members. The language in the bipartisan vignette used in this chapter's study was adapted from presentations used by interest groups during public policy events with their members.

It is important to note that I expect the effects of group messages on perceptions of government to be stronger among people who are members of interest groups – a concept I explore in Chapter 6. Hearing a message from a trusted source like a professional society or an organization with which someone has an affinity will have more impact than simple words on a page. However, testing the effects of these messages in a survey experiment of a random sample of the public addresses key questions that arise when thinking about the effects of interest groups on member perceptions. The most pressing of these concerns involve questions about whether an interest group influences members once they join or whether there is a selection effect – that individuals who are less polarized, have higher levels of support for compromise, and have higher levels of efficacy are more likely to join interest groups in the first place. The results of this study can help address some of those concerns by establishing internal validity of my theory. By testing the effect of common interest group messages on a random sample of the public, we can see how the messages effect people while controlling for factors like baseline levels of efficacy, affective polarization, and support for bipartisan compromise.

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[28] Interview with interest group leaders from Trade Associations 2 and 3.

To test the expectations I have about interest groups' influence on attitudes, I examine whether interest groups' use of partisan, pragmatic, and bipartisan messages influence member perceptions in the three areas identified above: affective polarization, political efficacy, and feelings about the interest group. My first hypothesis involves affective polarization. I expect that groups using bipartisan or pragmatic messages will have a depolarizing effect on members.

As discussed above, interest groups often use pragmatic language in their messages to interest group members. These messages, which focus on how constituent contact influences policymaker decision making, are designed to boost response rates and help interest group members understand their role as constituents who can pressure lawmakers to take their preferred position on issues. Since these messages de-emphasize partisanship and instead place importance on a member of Congress's responsiveness to constituents, I expect individuals who read these types of messages to have lower levels of affective polarization compared to those who receive no prompt at all.

Similarly, groups that use bipartisan strategies spend time and resources explaining their bipartisan approach to policy advocacy. These messages emphasize the value of working with both parties and focus on the importance of moving towards legislative goals ahead of political one-upmanship. These bipartisan messages are likely to prime positive attitudes about bipartisan compromise that are already held by large majorities of the U.S. public (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge -Yong 2020). As a result, I expect that since these strategies emphasize the importance of working with both parties and de-emphasize and out-group conflict, they will have a depolarizing effect on interest group members.

> *H1: Overall, individuals will have lower levels of affective polarization after they read*
> *pragmatic or bipartisan vignettes compared to the control group.*

Given differences in the perceptions of the out-party across different levels of partisanship (Mason 2015), I expect that these strategies will have different effects on individuals depending upon their strength of partisanship. I expect strong partisans, who have higher baseline levels of affective polarization and lower opinions of the other party, to be more skeptical of messages encouraging bipartisanship. Weaker partisans and independent leaners, on the other hand, will be more open to a bipartisan approach (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge - Yong 2020). Therefore, I expect there to be some variation in the effects of the partisan, bipartisan, and pragmatic messages when comparing the reactions of strong partisans to those of other respondents.

> *H1a: The strength of a respondent's partisanship will reduce the impact of pragmatic and bipartisan messages on affective polarization.*

The communication that interest groups send to members also has an opportunity to impact the way that members perceive government and individuals' level of external efficacy. Political science scholarship has shown that people with higher levels of external efficacy are those who believe that the system is open to receiving input from outside actors (Finkel 1985). Therefore, nonpartisan interest groups and associations should impact levels of external efficacy among members because these groups provide civic education programs that explain the ways members of Congress rely on constituent communication to in their decision-making processes. We would expect that people who are aware that members of Congress consider constituent opinions when making policy decisions would be more likely to believe that policymakers are open to their input. I therefore expect that individuals in the pragmatic condition, which emphasizes how legislators receive information from constituents, to have higher levels of external efficacy compared to respondents in the baseline condition.

H2: Respondents in the pragmatic condition will have higher levels of efficacy compared to respondents in the control condition.

I also expect that the strategies a group uses will influence the way individuals perceive the interest group itself. I expect that the three treatments will produce differing impressions of the interest groups. Political science research has found that most Americans want the political parties to work together to solve problems (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge -Yong 2020; Harbridge, Malhotra, and Harrison 2014; Skelley 2021). Consequently, I expect that respondents will have warmer feelings towards interest groups that use bipartisan strategies than those that use partisan messages to mobilize their members.

H3: Respondents will have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the bipartisan condition compared to the partisan condition.

I expect, however, that these effects will be conditional on the individual's strength of partisanship. I expect that the bulk of the warmer feelings we will observe in H3 is due to the strong effect these messages will have on independents and weak partisans, who have looser ties to their party and are more likely to be receptive to messages touting bipartisan cooperation. I do not expect these findings to hold with strong partisans since we know that partisan identity has a strong relationship with the way people perceive external events (Bisgaard 2015; Malhotra and Kuo 2008). In contrast, since strong partisans have warmer feelings towards members of their in-party and are motivated by conflict and partisan cues (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015), I expect strong partisans to have warmer feelings towards interest groups that prime partisan conflict.

H3a: Independents and weak partisans will have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the bipartisan condition compared to the partisan condition.

H3b: Strong partisans will have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the partisan condition compared to the other two conditions.

To test these expectations, I conduct a survey experiment among 4,933 respondents in October 2023. Respondents consisted of a random sample of U.S. adults acquired from Lucid. In the experiment, respondents read a vignette and responded to a series of questions. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four groups: control, partisan, pragmatic, and bipartisan. Respondents in the control group did not read a vignette and proceeded directly to the survey questions. Respondents in the treatment groups read the appropriate vignette, which are provided in Table 4.1. For the partisan vignette, Democrats read a statement about Republicans and Republicans read a statement about Democrats. Independents in the partisan treatment group were randomly assigned to read either the Democrat or Republican vignette.

Table 5.1: Vignettes Included in Survey Experiment
Partisan treatment viewed by Democrats   It's time to fight back against extremist Republicans! Trump and his allies have been hard at work getting harmful legislation passed. That's why it's so vital that we mobilize and fight back! Extremist Republicans want to strip us of our freedom. It's up to us to show them we're not backing down.
Partisan treatment viewed by Republicans   It's time to fight back against woke Democrats! Biden and his allies have been hard at work getting harmful legislation passed. That's why it's so vital that we mobilize and fight back! Woke Democrats want to take away our rights. It's up to us to show them we're not backing down.
Pragmatic treatment viewed by all parties   Did you know that legislators rely on feedback from their constituents when making decisions on public policy? A recent study by the Congressional Management Foundation finds that the most effective way to influence legislators is through contact from constituents in their district. That's why it's so important for you to get involved!
Bipartisan treatment viewed by all parties   A bipartisan approach to policymaking is the most effective way to accomplish legislative goals in today's political environment. Since it's impossible to predict which party will hold control of Congress when our bill will be considered, it's essential that we maintain relationships with both sides of the aisle. This is why we need your help today to contact your legislators – regardless of their party affiliation – about our issues.

After reading the vignette, respondents answered a series of questions related to the hypotheses. For affective polarization, questions included feeling thermometers for the Democratic and Republican parties and a question related to how they would feel if their child married someone from the other party. For external efficacy, respondents answered a question about the extent to which they believe elected officials care about what people think. Respondents in one of the treatment groups also provided their feelings about the interest group attributed to the vignette.

The Experimental Condition is the primary independent variable in all hypothesis tests and indicates whether the respondent was in the control, partisan, pragmatic, or bipartisan condition. Respondents were evenly split among the four experimental condition groups. In some hypotheses, I expect to variation based on strength of partisanship. To create this variable, respondents answered questions about their partisan identification using a standard 7-point scale. I place strong Republicans and Democrats in the Strong Partisan category (2,062 respondents, 40.81%) weak Republicans and weak Democrats in the Weak Partisan category (1,310 respondents, 26.56%), Independents that lean Republican and Democrat in the Lean Partisan category (784 respondents, 15.89%), and true Independents in the Independent category (777 respondents, 15.75%). In models where I expect strong partisans to behave differently from other respondent groups, I use an indicator variable in which strong partisans are coded 1 and other respondents are coded 0 (2,062 strong partisans in the sample, which comprise 49.62% of partisans and 41.80% of all respondents).

In H1 and H1a, I expect experimental condition and strength of partisanship to influence levels of affective partisanship. To measure affective polarization, I use the Feeling Thermometer Difference as the dependent variable. To create this variable, I subtract the

respondent's feeling thermometer score for the opposite party from their feeling thermometer score for their own party (mean = 50.93, sd = 36.93). Smaller values in this variable represent individuals with lower levels of affective polarization since there is less distance between the respondent's feelings about their own party and the out party. For instance, a Republican respondent who reports a thermometer score of 85 for their own Republican party and a temperature of 55 for the Democratic party would have a feeling thermometer difference of 30 points, revealing a relatively modest level of affective polarization. I included strong partisans, weak partisans, and independent leaners in this analysis since independents who lean towards one of the parties behave more like partisans than like independents (Theodoridis 2017). I do not include independents in this hypothesis since affective polarization is related to partisans' perceptions of the out party.

For H2, I expect levels of external efficacy to vary depending upon the nature of the message from the interest groups in the vignette. The dependent variable for this hypothesis test is respondents' agreement with the statement "Public officials care about what people like me think." Response options included strongly agree (5), mostly agree (4), undecided (3), mostly disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The external efficacy variable is coded as continuous (mean = 2.56, sd = 1.17).

For H3, 3a, and 3b, I expect respondents to have varying feelings for the interest group attributed to the treatment message depending upon the respondent's treatment group and strength of partisanship. I expect that strong partisans will be attracted to the partisan message, while independents and weak partisans will be attracted to the pragmatic and bipartisan messages. The dependent variable for this hypothesis test is Interest Group Thermometer Score, which is the rating provided by each respondent when asked their feelings about the interest

group after they read the associated vignette (mean = 64.77, sd = 23.81). Individuals in the control condition did not see this question since they did not read a vignette and therefore were not included in this hypothesis test.

In all models, I control for level of education because education is correlated with political efficacy (Finkel 1985). I create this variable from a question about educational attainment with the response options less than high school (1), high school graduate or GED (2), some college but no degree (3), associate's or two year college degree (4), bachelor's or four year college degree (5), and graduate degree (6). Education is coded as a continuous variable (mean = 3.61, sd = 1.41). It is also important to control for key demographic characteristics like age and level of education due to the effect that these characteristics have on partisan sorting and affective polarization (Mason 2015, 2018). I control for age by years. I also control for gender because I expect there to be some differences in levels of efficacy across different gender groups. To control for gender, I include an indicator variable for males, who are coded 1. All other respondents are coded 0 (2,338 males in the sample, 47.48%).

Results

To test H1, I estimate an OLS model with Feeling Thermometer Difference as the dependent variable and Experimental Condition as the primary independent variable. Results are provided in Model 1 of Table 5.2. The model results support my hypothesis that individuals in the bipartisan condition will have lower levels of affective polarization compared to the control group (p<0.05). The model also predicts that respondents in the pragmatic condition will have a mean feeling thermometer difference score that is 4.38 points lower than those in the control condition. The substantive effect here is modest – this change is equivalent to around 12% of a standard deviation decrease in the affective polarization measure. However, given that there is

great interest in strategies that can alleviate affective polarization (J. Druckman and Levy 2021; Levendusky 2021; Simonsson, Narayanan, and Marks 2022), it is notable that a conservative test like a vignette on an online survey has an effect on this phenomenon.

Table 5.2: Predictors of Affective Polarization

	Model 1	Model 2
Partisan Condition	-3.17*	0.10
	(1.53)	(2.14)
Pragmatic Condition	-4.38*	-2.69
	(1.52)	(2.13)
Bipartisan Condition	-2.72^	-2.54
	(1.54)	(2.14)
Strong Partisan	26.00*	28.71
	(1.08)	(2.19)
Age	0.32*	0.32*
	(0.03)	(0.05)
Is Male	-6.10*	-6.01*
	(1.08)	(1.08)
Education	-0.65^	-0.65^
	(0.38)	(0.38)
Strong Partisan x Partisan Condition		-6.61*
		(3.06)
Strong Partisan x Pragmatic Condition		-3.53
		(3.05)
Strong Partisan x Bipartisan Condition		0.52
		(3.07)
Constant	31.16*	29.62*
	(2.57)	(2.55)
N	3,972	3,972
Adj. R-Square	0.16	0.16

Note: $* < 0.05$, two-tailed. Dependent variable is Feeling Thermometer Difference.

There is also some evidence that bipartisan messaging has a statistically significant relationship with lower levels of affective polarization ($p<0.10$). Substantively, however, this

relationship is not as strong as the one between pragmatic messaging and affective polarization. The model predicts that respondents who viewed the bipartisan message will have affective polarization levels that are 2.72 points lower than the control group, which represents a change of 7.36% of a standard deviation change. This smaller substantive effect combined with the fact that the statistical relationship falls short of a 0.05 test means that the relationship is not strong enough to provide full support for the hypothesis.

One interesting and unexpected finding from this model is that individuals in the partisan condition also have lower levels of affective polarization compared to the control group ($p<0.05$). Although the effect is smaller than the effect of the pragmatic message, the effect is stronger than the effect on those in the bipartisan condition. It is puzzling that Republicans who read a message about "woke Democrats" will have warmer feelings towards Democrats than those who read no message about Democrats at all.

While solving this puzzle will require additional testing and study, there are several possible drivers behind this finding. First, levels of affective polarization are already very high among strong partisans – the mean difference in feelings between the in party and out party for strong partisans is 64.18, which represents a sizeable gap. It is possible that there is a ceiling effect with strong partisans, which means that baseline scores are so high that it is not possible for levels of affective polarization to go higher, leading to small decreases in affective polarization for all treatments. Another possibility is that strong partisans get pleasure from a rival group's failures, which derives from a psychological principle called the Disposition of Mirth (Havard et al. 2014; Zillmann and Cantor 1976). This phenomenon happens often in sports rivalries – imagine how Michigan fans feel when Ohio State loses a big game – and could be happening here as well. It is possible that strong partisans derive joy when an interest group

insults the out party, as happens in the partisan treatment. However, if this were the case, the partisan's appraisal of both parties would go up, leading to no change in the feeling thermometer difference measure. Finally, political scientists have found that extreme polarized rhetoric against the out-party can lead to decreases in levels of affective polarization (J. N. Druckman et al. 2019). It is possible that the message I use is simply too negative about the out party and leads to a similar backfire effect. In future tests of these hypotheses, which I plan for this spring, I will include variations on the original test to identify the true cause of this unexpected outcome.

Figure 5.2: Predicted Values of Affective Polarization Conditional on Experimental Condition and Strength of Partisanship
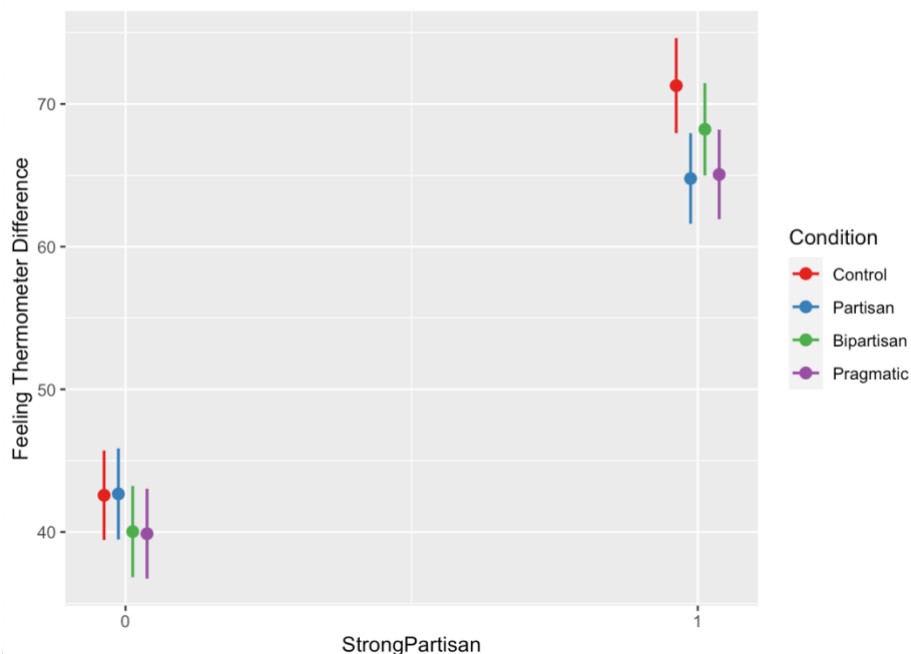
In H1a, I expect that the response to experimental conditions will be conditional on the respondent's strength of partisanship. To test this hypothesis, I re-estimate the first model in Table 5.2 with the addition of an interaction term between strong partisanship and the partisan condition. I control for gender, education, and age. The model results, provided in the second column of Table 5.2, find a statistically significant interaction between strength of partisanship

and the partisan condition ($p<0.05$). This means that strong partisans have different reactions to the interest group messages compared to independents and weak partisans, providing evidence to support H1a that strong partisans will have different reactions to a partisan message. Viewing Figure 5.2, we see that strong partisans in the partisan condition have levels of affective polarization that are lower than those in the control group. In other words, after a strong Republican or Democrat reads a message that contains partisan and conflict-oriented language about the out-party, their levels of affective polarization go down compared to when strong partisans see no interest group message at all.

Figure 5.2 also provides us with some intuition about what is happening in the results for H1 and H1a. We can see that among strong partisans, the difference in their affect towards their own party and the other party is smaller, meaning that they are less likely to see their own party very favorably and the other party very negatively, in the partisan and pragmatic conditions. Affective polarization also decreases slightly in the bipartisan condition, but the difference is slight and not statistically significant. For weak partisans and independent leaners, levels of affective polarization decrease slightly in the pragmatic and bipartisan conditions and do not change in the partisan condition. Although the effects among weak partisans and independent leaners are not strong enough to provide evidence for a hypothesis test, we can see the pattern that led to the statistically significant relationship between affective polarization and partisan condition identified in the results to H1.

To test my expectation that a pragmatic message from interest groups will increase external efficacy (H2), I estimate an OLS model with external efficacy as the dependent variable and experimental condition as the independent variable. I control for age, education, and strength of partisanship. I predict that individuals in the pragmatic condition will have higher levels of

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external efficacy compared to those in the control condition. The results of the External Efficacy model in Table 5.3 reveal that there is not a statistically significant relationship between external efficacy and the pragmatic condition ($p<0.05$). In fact, none of the conditions produced any statistically significant change in levels of external efficacy.

Figure 5.3: Relationship Between Independent Variables and External Efficacy
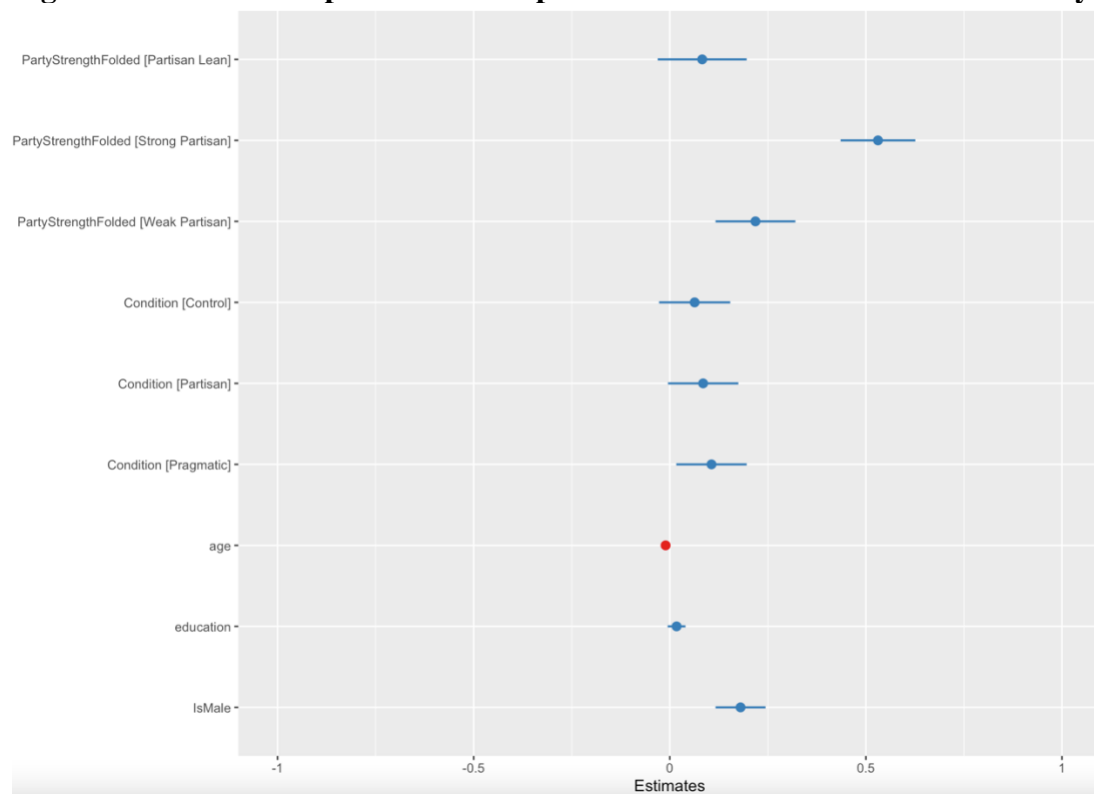
This is surprising given theoretical expectations and the way that interest group leaders talk about their use of this kind of messaging. However, viewing Figure 5.3, we can see that the coefficient for the pragmatic factor is positive although not strong enough to cross zero, suggesting that information about politicians' responsiveness might be positively associated with external efficacy in other contexts. I expect that efficacy messages will take time for people to absorb because they run counter to the popular narrative of the way lawmakers make decisions.

Therefore, I do not expect a single message to have a strong effect on efficacy levels, but I expect that repeated exposure by trusted sources of information will have a greater impact. I explore this relationship in greater detail in Chapter 6 through observational studies and interviews with interest group members.

Table 5.3: Predictors of External Efficacy

	External Efficacy
Partisan Condition (2)	0.02 (0.05)
Pragmatic Condition (3)	0.04 (0.05)
Bipartisan Condition (4)	-0.06 (0.04)
Strong Partisan	0.54*(0.05)
Weak Partisan	0.22*(0.05)
Lean Partisan	0.08 (0.06)
Age	-0.01*(0.00)
Is Male	0.18*(0.03)
Education	0.017 (0.011)
Constant	2.62 (0.08)
N	3,972
Adj. R-Square	0.06

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. Dependent variable is Level of External Efficacy.

To test H3, which predicts that respondents will have warmer feelings towards the interest group attributed to the vignette when respondents are in the bipartisan condition, I estimate an OLS model with the dependent variable Interest Group Feeling Thermometer and an independent variable Experimental Condition. I control for education, age, gender, and strength of partisanship. The baseline condition of this model is the partisan condition since respondents

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in the control condition did not view the vignette from an interest group and were therefore not asked the question regarding their feeling about the interest group.

Figure 5.4: Effect of Experimental Condition on Interest Group Feelings, Conditional on Strength of Partisanship
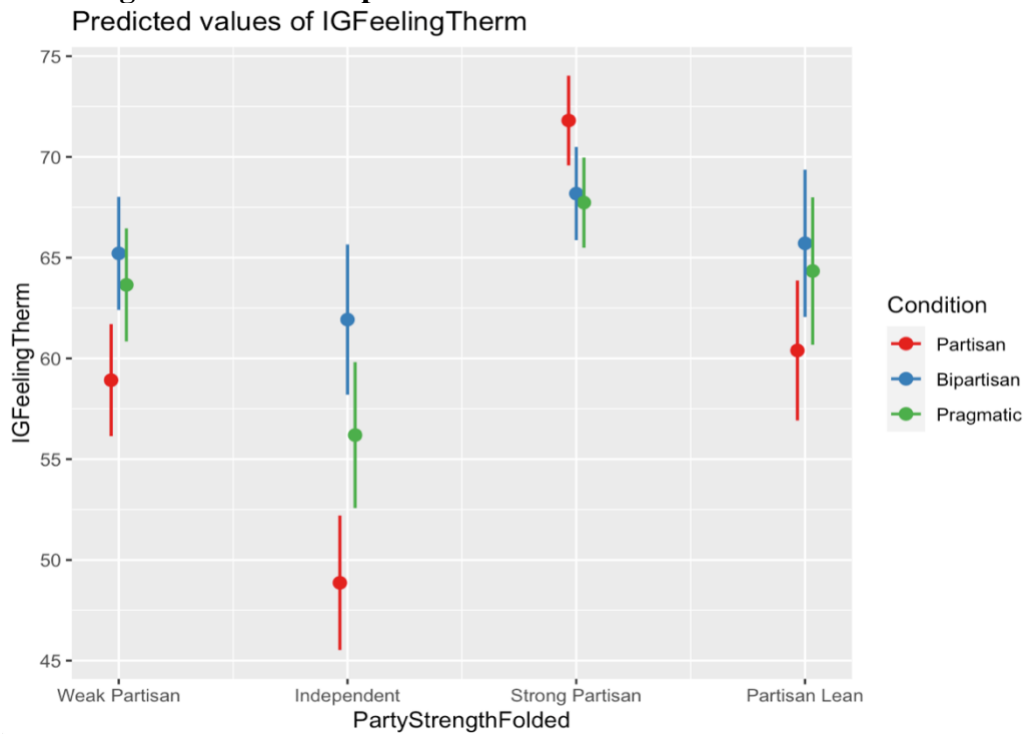
Model results, which are provided in Model 1 of Table 5.4, show a statistically significant difference between the bipartisan condition and warm feelings about the interest group (p<0.05). Substantively, respondents in this condition are predicted to have an increase in warm feelings for the interest group of nearly 3 points, which represents 12% of a standard deviation increase. This a moderate but notable change, given the fact that the vignette is the only thing respondents know about the interest group they are being asked to rate, and suggests that members feel more positively about groups that espouse bipartisanship. There is no statistically significant difference between respondents in the pragmatic and partisan conditions

(p<0.05). The results of this model support H3 and indicate that bipartisan messaging can help individuals have warmer feelings for interest groups that send bipartisan messages.

H3 predicts that, on the whole, bipartisan messaging leads to warmer feelings towards the interest group sending the message. However, I expect that this relationship will be conditional on the strength of the individual's partisanship. H3a and H3b predict that independents and weak partisans will have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the bipartisan condition, while strong partisans will have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the partisan condition. The results shown in Model 2 of Table 5.4 show that the same message will have different effects on people depending upon their strength of partisanship.

Model 2 in Table 4.4 predicts that independents will have warmer feelings about the interest group in the bipartisan condition compared to the partisan condition (p<0.05). We can see the substantive effect of these differences in Figure 5.4. Independents in the partisan condition have much lower thermometer ratings for the interest group than independents in the bipartisan condition. Figure 5.4 also shows that independents who lean towards one of the parties will also have warmer feelings towards the interest group in the bipartisan condition. However, this relationship is not statistically significant (0.05). The model predicts a statistically significant difference in the bipartisan condition, which means that weak partisans will have warmer feelings for the interest group in the bipartisan condition compared to the partisan condition p<0.05). Messages had the opposite effect on strong partisans, who have slightly cooler feelings towards the interest group in the bipartisan condition compared to the partisan condition. These differences are slight and fall just short of conventional levels of statistical significance (p<0.05).

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Table 5.4: Predictors of Interest Group Feelings

	Model 1	Model 2
Bipartisan Condition	2.93*	13.06*
	(0.99)	(2.49)
Pragmatic Condition	1.21	7.33*
	(0.98)	(2.45)
Strong Partisan	14.08*	22.94*
	(1.21)	(1.96)
Weak Partisan	7.34*	10.06
	(1.31)	(2.16)
Lean Partisan	8.15*	11.53*
	(1.46)	(2.39)
Age	-0.04^	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Is Male	1.08	1.01
	(0.81)	(0.80)
Education	-0.26	-0.29
	(0.28)	(0.29)
Strong Partisan x Bipartisan Condition		-16.69*
		(2.91)
Strong Partisan x Pragmatic Condition		-11.40*
		(2.86)
Weak Partisan x Bipartisan Condition		-6.77*
		(3.15)
Weak Partisan x Pragmatic Condition		-2.60
		(3.13)
Lean Partisan x Bipartisan Condition		-7.74*
		(3.52)
Lean Partisan x Pragmatic Condition		-3.39
		(3.50)
Constant	51.56*	51.56*
	(2.17)	(2.17)
N	3,739	3,739
Adj. R-Square	0.05	0.05

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. Dependent variable is Feeling Thermometer Difference.

We can also observe differences in feelings about the interest group when comparing the partisan and pragmatic conditions. Independents have slightly warmer feelings towards the interest group in the pragmatic condition compared to the partisan condition. The differences for the independent leaners and weak partisan groups are not statistically significant, but follow a similar pattern as independents in terms of direction – warmer feelings for the interest group in the pragmatic condition compared to the partisan condition. Again, the exception is with strong partisans, who have colder feelings towards the interest group in the pragmatic condition compared to the partisan condition.

Discussion

The results of this study provide several important takeaways in our understanding of the way interest group messaging influences member perceptions of government and politics. First, on the whole, bipartisan messaging leads to decreases in affective polarization and warmer feelings about the interest group sending the message. This discovery is a notable contribution to political science literature and can help us understand the ways interest groups influence member perceptions of the political system.

The relationship between experimental treatments and external efficacy is not statistically significant. Given the importance that interest group leaders place on the external efficacy of their members, the null finding is somewhat unexpected. However, given the literature on the impact of civic education and training on levels of efficacy (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) it is not entirely surprising that a vignette would fail to meaningfully move levels of efficacy. Although not statistically significant, the direction of the relationship appears to support my theory – pragmatic messages are positively related with levels

of efficacy – and merits further study. As a result, I explore efficacy in a broader context in Chapter 6.

These differences in levels of efficacy, polarization, and feelings about the interest group in the experiment are conditional on strength of party affiliation, with strong partisans reaction differently to messages compared to weak partisans, independent leaners, and independents. My findings related to affective polarization and efficacy answer some questions but raise others that will need to be addressed in future studies. It is intuitive that an interest group can be more appealing to independents and weak partisans when they discuss the value of bipartisanship. It also makes sense that strong partisans will have warmer feelings towards an interest group that belittles the out-party and mobilizes copartisans to fight back. But why would strong partisans experience reductions in affective polarization when groups speak ill of the out party? Given the possible causes I laid out earlier in this chapter, more study is needed to understand the theoretical mechanism that underlies this finding, and I will have an opportunity to conduct a follow-up experiment while working on the larger book project.

Taken as a whole, the findings in this chapter illustrate that interest group messaging can influence the way individuals perceive the interest group and others in the political system. Results also address concerns about the self-selection of interest group members. One possible question that could arise from this stream of research revolves around whether interest groups are made up of people who, at a baseline, have lower levels of affective polarization and higher levels of efficacy. The fact that we can find differences in these outcomes in an experimental environment provides evidence that the messages interest groups use have an effect on members regardless of the differences we can observe between interest group members and non-members.

It is important to note that this experiment yielded these findings with a conservative test – individuals had no information about the interest group except for a paragraph on a page from an unnamed interest group. I expect that in a more realistic context, when individuals receive messages from groups that they know and belong to, when the messages are delivered by people the individual knows and trusts, and when messages are delivered in a variety of media (in person, via email, etc.), these effects will be stronger. I explore the broader context of these messages in Chapter 6. While this chapter has focused on interest group messages effects on a random sample of the general public, in Chapter 6, I investigate the effects that these messages have on actual interest group members by examining the way interest groups interact with and train members in a public policy context and how levels of efficacy, polarization, and support for bipartisan approaches vary depending upon the member's level of involvement with the group.

The changes related to affective polarization and the partisan condition are concentrated in those with the highest level of partisanship, while the bipartisan message has a similar effect on both strong and other partisans. That affective polarization levels decrease for everyone is a surprising finding, especially given that we might expect those with high levels of affective polarization to be less open to hearing these types of messages. I explore the effects of these bipartisan messages in a real-world context in Chapter 6. The pragmatic message also has a similar effect on partisans of all types, although the effect is slight for both groups. I revisit these pragmatic messages in a real-world context in Chapter 6 as well.

Chapter 6: Title of Chapter 6

Introduction

Having shown how messages influence members of the general public, I now focus on how these conditions influence actual interest group members through interviews with interest group leaders, interviews with interest group members[29], and a survey of people who are eligible to join nonpartisan professional societies. In this Chapter, I use multiple methods to shed new light on the way interest groups influence their members feelings of efficacy, trust in government, support for bipartisan compromise, and levels of affective polarization.

In Chapter 2, I argue that nonpartisan interest groups will have impacts on the ways in which their members support democratic norms. I argue that through interest group activities including civic education and training, fostering interactions with elected officials and fellow interest group members of different political parties, focusing on how the political process can help members achieve instrumental goals, and education about the value of bipartisan compromise, members of these groups are likely to have lower levels of affective polarization, higher levels of internal and external efficacy, and higher levels of support for bipartisan compromise compared to members of the general public. I also expect higher levels of involvement in nonpartisan groups to lead to more exposure to these stimuli, more openness to these messages, and higher adoption of these traits. A greater level of involvement will therefore have a greater effect on all of these outcomes than lower levels of involvement or no involvement at all. Traditionally, studying the effects of interest groups on the political opinions

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[29] Interviews used in this chapter have been lightly edited for clarity. This involves removing non-substantive words such as "like," "you know," "right," or unintended repetition.

of their members has been difficult because interest group audiences are difficult to access for public opinion surveys. The methods I use in this chapter allow me to uncover phenomena that were, before now, unseen.

In this chapter, I use three methods to explore these dynamics. The first involves interviews with leaders of 22 different interest groups that uncover how interest groups of different types prioritize their issues, how the groups approach policy advocacy, and the ways in which groups interact with their members. Secondly, I conduct interviews with highly involved members of two different interest groups to learn how some of the most involved members view politics and how they came to adopt these views. Finally, I conduct a survey of people who are eligible to join an interest group to observe differences between non-members, less involved members, and highly involved members. My findings support my theory that as people join and become more involved in nonpartisan interest groups, they see politics differently than those who choose not to join or stay less involved. Among the most involved members, in fact, I find that members have a keen understanding for governmental processes and the strategies lobbyists use to influence policy.

To conduct the survey in this chapter, I partnered with the Civic Health Institutions Project to include questions on their large sample survey[30]. Using this method to survey interest group members provides a unique opportunity to understand an audience that is notoriously difficult to reach. I chose professionals who are eligible to join one or more professional societies as the focus of this study. Professional societies provide an excellent way to study nonpartisan interest groups for several reasons. First, as I establish in Chapter 3, professional societies –

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[30] The Civic Health and Institutions Project, a 50 States Survey (CHIP50), NSF Grants SES-2241884, SES-2241885, and SES224-1886, Matthew Baum, James Druckman, David Lazer, and Katherine Ognyanova, Principal Investigators.

along with trade associations – are the most likely types of interest groups to maintain distance from both political parties, allowing me to focus on the strategies of nonpartisan organizations. Secondly, professional societies offer individual memberships – meaning that people pay their dues directly to the association as opposed to having a membership through their employer, as with most trade associations. This setup provides the highest likelihood that respondents will know that they are a member of a professional association, as opposed to having to guess whether their employer is a member of a trade association. Third, most professional societies are voluntary, which means that I can expect a good mix in the sample of people who choose to join their association and people who choose not to join. Finally, many professional societies have robust civic engagement programs, which means that members are likely to be exposed to civic engagement training, nonpartisan messaging, and opportunities to get involved in the policymaking process.

Interest Group Leader Interviews: "Everything we say has a completely nonpartisan bent[31]"

During the spring and summer of 2023, I conducted interviews with leaders from 22 different interest groups. Leaders were primarily political directors, vice presidents of government or public affairs, and other senior political or policy staff. I selected a variety of interest groups to provide sufficient variation in group type and partisanship, which are the two important features of interest groups that I study in this project. Of the groups, eight are trade associations (36.37%), six are issue advocacy nonprofits (27.28%), four are corporations (18.19%), and two each are labor unions and professional societies (9.10% each). Figure 6.1 provides a visualization of the distribution of interviewees by type of interest group.

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[31] Interview with leader from Company 1.

Figure 6.1: Types of Interest Groups Participating in Interviews
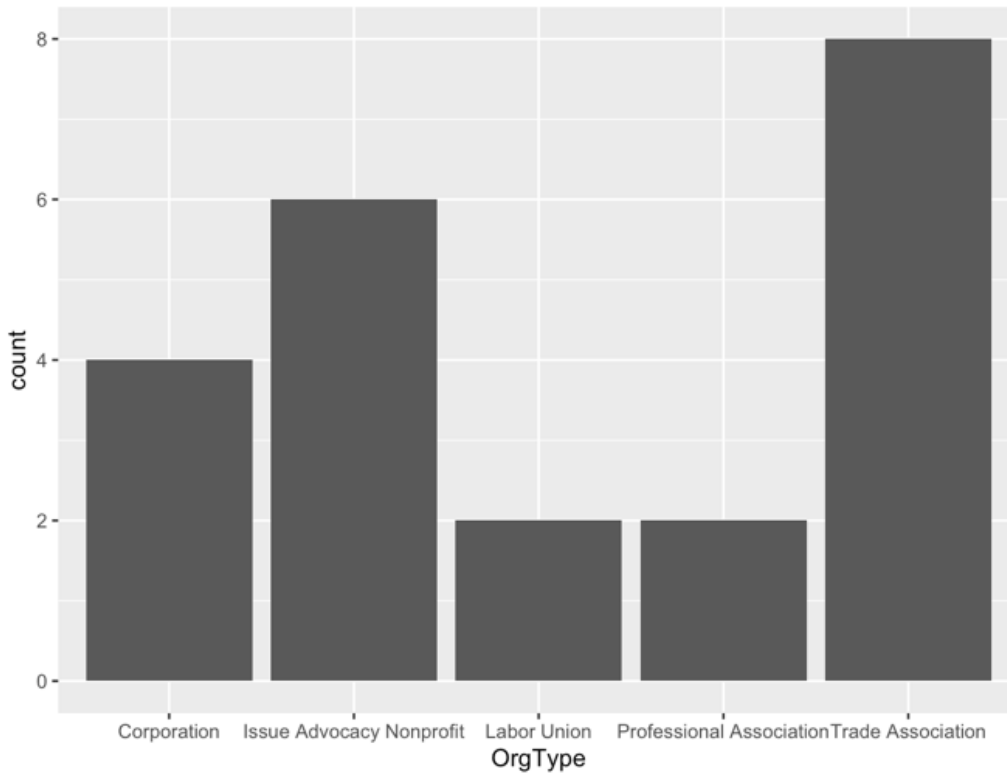
Of the 22 interest groups that participated in interest group leader interviews, 18 have PPI

scores (81.82%). All of the groups that do not have PPI scores are issue advocacy nonprofits,

which matches conventional wisdom that issue advocacy groups are less likely to have political

action committees compared to business, labor, and professional groups. Figure 6.2 provides a

look at the distribution of PPI scores by group type. As my hypotheses in Chapter 3 predict, issue

advocacy nonprofits are the most likely to be highly partisan (mean = -1). We can see that this is

the case among interviewees – there is very little variation in PPI among issue advocacy

nonprofits. Labor unions participating in interviews also had a Democratic lean, but with a

significant amount of variation in PPI scores (mean = -0.56). Trade associations trade were less

likely to be partisan, but leaned Republican (mean = 0.29). Companies (mean = 0.05) and

professional associations (mean = -0.02) were the least likely to be partisan, with PPI scores very close to political neutrality.

The purpose of these interviews is to better understand the strategies interest groups use to achieve their policy goals and how those strategies translate into communication to interest group members. In each interview, I asked interest group leaders about how they perceived the partisanship of their membership, whether that perceived partisanship influenced their policy or communication strategy, the types of political events and communications the group hosts, and their observations about their members' reactions to all of these activities. A full list of interview questions is available in Appendix C. Interviews were conducted from February through May 2023. Most of the interviews were conducted in person, although a few were conducted via Zoom when the interest group leader was not available to meet in person. Interview length ranged from 17 to 47 minutes.

Figure 6.2: Partisanship of Interest Groups Participating in Interviews
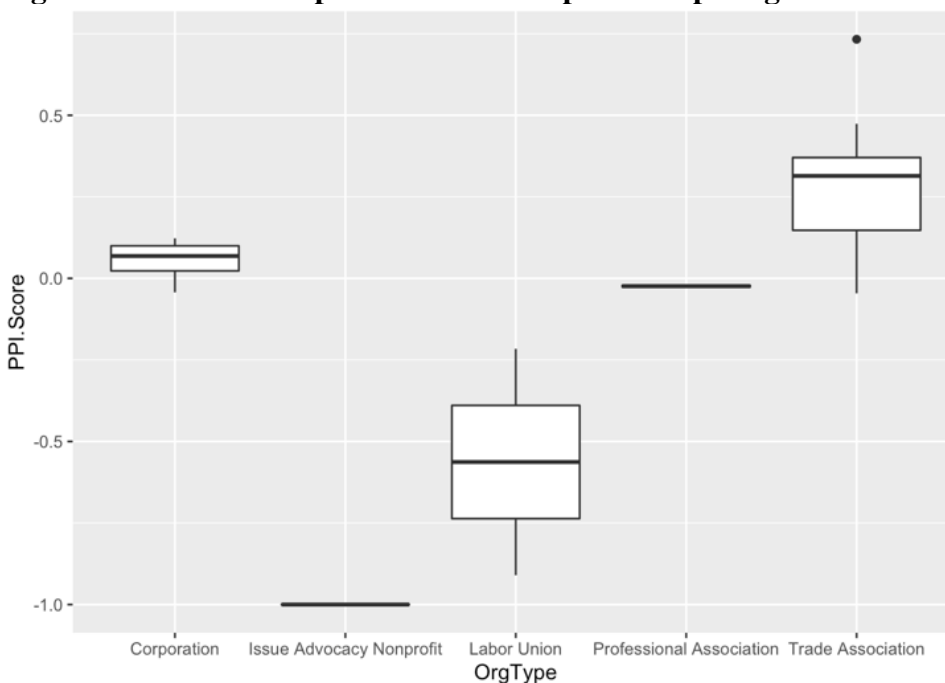
In the interviews, interest group leaders reported overwhelmingly preferring bipartisan

strategies to policymaking and to member communication. This is especially true among the less

partisan interest groups, but is also the case for some of the more partisan groups. One issue

advocacy nonprofit, which does not make political contributions and therefore does not have a

PPI score but lobbies on abortion, which is a highly polarized issue, emphasized how the group

looks for support from policymakers from both sides of the aisle to attract bipartisan support for

the cause[32]. A trade association with a PPI score between 0.70 and 0.80, which is a score that is

fairly close to the Republican party[33], lobbies on a wide variety of business-related issues and

emphasized that they are a nonpartisan organization seeking to work with both parties. When

talking about the group's approach to policy advocacy, the leader from this group said,

I mean, obviously, on our issue sets, we tend to work more closely with one party, but we want to work with everyone. And we're very upfront about that with our members. And that we believe even when our members are frustrated with one party or the other, we are always talking about the importance of being at the table and being able to shape [policy]. Even though we may not like the direction it's taking, it's better to know what's coming and be at the table than be shut out.[34]

These types of bipartisan strategies were echoed in many interest group leader interviews.

However, not all other groups use a bipartisan approach. One issue advocacy group leader, who

works for an organization with a -1.0 PPI score that advocates for abortion rights, answered the

same question this way:

I think I think the organization has a really hard job, frankly, in the post Trump era because the attacks have become… I mean, we lost Roe, even though we knew it was a possibility, years and years ago. I mean, what a sobering reality, right? That our country literally retracted on human rights, from decades prior. That directly influences at least half of our nation's population. That being said, I think all people, regardless of gender, are beneficiaries of a safe, legal, and accessible abortion. So I think the organization in many ways, has become bolder and less apologetic in how it defends its ideology, and works with policymakers and tries to influence new policymakers. So I think the message

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[32] Interview with leader from Issue Advocacy Nonprofit 1.
[33] Scores range from -1 to 1, with 1 being closest to the Republican party.
[34] Interview with leader from Trade Association 8.

maybe from the organization has been more you know, liberal, progressive, if you will, in that spectrum. And I don't think it's alienated others, I think on that spectrum[35].

These comments are an important reminder that while this chapter focuses on groups that use nonpartisan policy strategies, there are groups that reject this approach and instead focus on messages that prime ideology – a strategy that makes sense for groups made up of members of a single party and that advocate exclusively on issues that have been incorporated into one or both of the parties' platforms. These groups and their more partisan messaging, however, represent the dominant view of interest groups and so I focus on the lesser known dynamics of bipartisan messaging by interest groups to gain a better understanding of the full range of ways that groups behave and the impacts on their membership. While it is true that interest groups can be a polarizing force in politics, it is also true that groups can play an important role as a counter to partisan polarization.

Bipartisan policy strategies are important because they inform the way groups communicate with and train members. One trade association, which the leader estimated has a membership that is 80% Republican and has a PPI score of 0.34 (bipartisan with a Republican lean), spends a significant amount of time defending the organization's bipartisan policy advocacy strategy. During our interview, we had an exchange that illustrates the challenges interest group leaders face when their membership is skeptical of a bipartisan policy strategy. First, the leader described the organization's bipartisan policy strategy:

> *We always say we don't want to just take a back seat when the House and Senate are Democratically controlled. …Because we lobby on all of those issues, we need to be active no matter who's in control. And because we have all those different issues, there's usually something we could work with most members on. So if they're against us on the labor issues, they might be with us on, you know, tax issues. So usually, there's somewhere we can find common ground.*

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[35] Interview with leader from Issue Advocacy Nonprofit 4.

When I asked about whether staff talks to membership about these strategies, the leader continued:

Definitely more in recent years, since things have gotten a little more contentious. It really… we never even really publicized our party split before. Just because it never, you know, people would ask, we wouldn't hide it, we would tell them when they asked, but it was not something we really had to share too much before. And now we get that question more often. So now we do put it out there when we do presentations to the membership, just to kind of get ahead of it, I think. And then when we get, you know, sometimes they'll be angry and say, Why are we supporting these people, they're against me on this, this and this, then we say, you know, there's value in having those relationships across the aisle, they are helpful on these things. And it gives us more of an opportunity to lobby them on the issue, they are typically against us on just to educate them more on some of those things.

When I asked the leader how people react when they receive this information, she continued:

Usually pretty well, so we... our PAC chairman, he is very Republican. He asked me that question kind of angrily when he first came on. And I explained it to him. And he was quiet for a second and was like, I guess that makes sense. I was like, Yeah, okay, good. And then he's really been an advocate for it. Because he'll be talking to people, and they will say 'I know they, they supported this guy, and I hate that guy. But they're right. And this [good policy outcome] is what's happening because of it.' So, and I think that resonates a lot more, because they trust him [the PAC chairman]. They know him. And they know he thinks the same way they do. But if he's on board with this, then they can be too[36].

These comments underscore a few themes. First, the Trade Association 2 chooses a bipartisan strategy even though its members lean towards one of the political parties. Second, the members are not always on board with this approach – at least not before interest group staff help the members understand the value of a bipartisan strategy. And finally, once leaders within the membership are on board with the bipartisan approach, leaders provide valuable assistance in helping their peers understand the approach and why bipartisanship is an important way to approach public policy.

[36] Interview with leader from Trade Association 2.

I heard several of these themes echoed in another interview with an interest group leader, who works for a trade association with a PPI of 0.34 (bipartisan with a Republican lean) that represents farmers of commodity crops, describes her group's bipartisan strategy this way:

It takes bipartisanship to advance anything in Congress. And I think we try to promote our friends on both sides. And let folks know that there's folks on both sides working hard on our issues. I'd say we'd probably try to make a bigger point out of that sometimes with Democrat members, just so that we can have the best informed membership possible.

The leader of this group estimated that 70-80 percent of her members are Republican. When asked about how members respond to this bipartisan policy approach, the leader described her members' general reaction:

I've gotten positive reaction, people saying that it's good for us to understand this. You know, just because of what we believe on certain core partisan issues - pro-life [or] gun rights - that they kind of have to separate that from this kind of business environment that we function in for them….

When asked if she ever received pushback to this approach, she responded:

You know, somebody asked me once as a PAC contributor, I would struggle with my money going to anyone who wasn't pro-life. And I said, I understand that. I said, we're working for your business, maybe you ought to think about taking a portion of what you would contribute to our PAC and supporting a PAC that aligns with you on a different level, and, you know, kind of a divide and conquer strategy[37].

This framing – that interest group PACs exist to advocate on behalf of specific issues that are beneficial to members – was something that I heard echoed across all nonpartisan interest groups. PAC directors at these organizations are used to getting these questions from members and have developed responses that help their members compartmentalize their thinking about the PAC's contributions as different than their personal political positions, so that members see how building relationships with individuals that disagree with them on non-interest group related

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[37] Interview with leader from Trade Association 3.

issues can be beneficial to the interest group and its members. This is a key skill that I saw

echoed in the interest group member interviews as well - the most involved members have

internalized this way of thinking.

Another interview with a leader from a corporation based in a southern state with a PPI of

-0.04 (politically neutral) and has an employee base that is fairly evenly split between the parties

described her company's policy approach this way:

> *[We are] really careful that absolutely everything we say, has a completely nonpartisan bent to it. To the point where we almost tie ourselves into pretzels to make that happen, that everything that we write or say is analyzed from a lens of "could anyone take this as a partisan comment"? And if so, we need to make sure that we clarify what we're trying to get across in every case, it's either policy or politics to explain how it affects policy.*

The leader continued when asked about why a nonpartisan strategy is beneficial to the company:

> *So from our perspective, there are a couple things, we know that anything we put in writing and we communicate could [be distributed] anywhere. So we also want to be really mindful of the brand there. And part of what we create and communicate actually is intended for outside audiences. So we do a newsletter, as well as advisories that explain the latest legislative or regulatory issues. And that's very dry and obviously nonpartisan, they're really careful to make sure that everything else we say comes across as nonpartisan, so that we're a trusted voice with those third parties, because that's actually helping our membership, particularly agents who sell. We want them to have that as a tool in their toolkit and [if] our newsletters are seen as having a partisan bent or anything else we've produced to see in that way, then we know that that impacts their ability to then say, oh, no, these guys know what they're talking about.*

Here, it is important to note that company leaders think of multiple stakeholder groups as

they formulate their public policy strategies. Employees, contractors, customers, and other

external stakeholders are all considered when developing these messages. While the calculus in

this case is more complicated than with a membership association – which would be primarily

focused on member retention – the strategies are the same. As the interview continued, we talked

about how employees react to messages when they perceive that the messages are partisan:

> *Interest group leader: This past week, we did our January newsletter, I think, had a note in it about how some individuals still believe the 2020 presidential election results were*

invalid and what impact that had on the 2022 elections and what we expect the impact to be in the 2024 elections, and that we relied on data that looked at the lawsuits and analyzed the numbers and just said, this is what never made it fully to court, this was thrown out all the things. And we received two emails that were like, "please take me off of your far left leaning liberal list." And when there was nothing, it was literally... there was no partisanship in any of it. So we definitely had that. And we were really careful. But there's always somebody who thinks that we've gone one direction or the other. And I think there's no getting around that anymore.

Amy Meli: Does it happen with Democrats too?

Interviewee: Less with Democrats. Occasionally, they'll be like, "we think you're being too conservative, we want you to push more" or like, "why aren't you saying the quiet part out loud?" But they seem to be wanting to read between lines more or trying to see something that isn't there or willing to grant a little more grace. I find that the Republican side is faster to send the angry email[38].

This exchange highlights another trend that I observed during these interviews. People who are less involved in the interest group's public policy activities tend to be less understanding of the bipartisan approach, while those who are more involved in public policy are more willing to have conversations with government affairs staff about the bipartisan strategy. This is a trend we also saw in the conversation the interviewee from Trade Association 2 had with her PAC president – while he was initially skeptical of the PAC's bipartisan approach, the government affairs staffer was able to engage him in a conversation and explain the benefits of the approach. Eventually, the member bought into the idea and was able to share his support for the approach with his peers.

These conversations provide several key takeaways. First, there are specific reasons why organizations choose bipartisan strategies – to provide an opportunity for access when both parties are in control of Congress, because the group's issue sets are broad enough that they can find something in common with members of Congress from both parties, and to avoid alienating

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[38] Interview with leader from Company 1.

partisans of either party within the group's constituency. Secondly, organizations that have memberships that skew towards one party or the other do not always affiliate with that party. However, when a group decides to pursue a bipartisan strategy when their members fall primarily into one of the parties, membership is not always on board immediately. It falls to the leaders of these organizations to convince members that the bipartisan strategy is the best way to achieve member goals. Often, groups do this by bringing the conversation back to the organization's issue priorities, which link directly to member goals. Finally, staff rely on volunteer leaders of the organization to carry these messages to rank-and-file members.

From these takeaways, we can understand that organizations devote significant resources to educating members about the organization's key issues, how those issues link back to the members' reasons for joining the organization, and if the organization pursues a bipartisan strategy, why that strategy is the best approach to achieving the organization's goals. These findings have important implications for my expectations about how these strategies influence member perceptions of government and politics. First, in a polarized political environment, these pragmatic approaches to policymaking may be the only exposure members have to the value of bipartisanship. Second, I expect that the most involved members of these organizations will have more exposure to these messages and will therefore absorb the messages more than those who are less involved. I investigate these expectations in the two sections that follow.

Member Interviews: "Kind of gives you faith that the system still works. [39]*"*

During the summer and fall of 2023, I attended Washington, DC-based Advocacy Days for two interest groups. The first fly-in was hosted by a trade association focused on agricultural

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[39] Interview with participant 3 from Trade Association 3.

issues and the second is an issue advocacy nonprofit focused on disease-related health care advocacy. I spoke with 13 members of the trade association and 9 members of the disease group while they were in Washington, DC to participate in the event. Participants were similar in many ways, including the longevity of their affiliation with the group, their motivations for involvement, and high levels of understanding of the day-to-day operations of Congress. The average number of years individuals have been involved with the group are similar, although there is more variation with the disease group (trade association mean = 13.08, sd = 5.57, disease group mean = 13.56, sd = 9.42).

The initial motivations for participating in the organizations are also similar and revolve around securing a strong future for their children. For the trade association, the most common reason for getting involved was to ensure that farming is a viable line of work for future generations – an incentive made more powerful because most of the interviewees' families have been involved in farming for multiple generations. The most common reason for members of the disease group to get involved was having a child diagnosed with the disease, although several of the interviewees had been diagnosed as children and had been involved in the organization for most of their lives. One difference in this regard is that most of the farmers I interviewed listed public policy as one of the primary reasons for getting involved in the group, while members of the disease group tended to get involved in disease support activities (kids' camps, fundraising walks, etc.) and came to advocacy through their involvement in non-policy activities.

It is important to note here that although disease groups are technically issue advocacy nonprofits, they tend to use strategies that resemble trade or professional associations more than those of partisan issue advocacy nonprofits. Since disease groups' issues have not been incorporated into the parties like those of other issue groups, since disease groups tend to have

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volunteers from across the political spectrum, and because diseases impact people of all political affiliations equally, bipartisan strategies tend to work well for these types of groups.

Members of both groups made explicit the distinctions between policy and politics. Participants viewed their meetings with members of Congress as policy-oriented, and did not see themselves as involved in politics. One member of the disease group remarked, "There's nothing political about it, now, because it's bipartisan stuff. Not about this way, that way, it's about, okay, this is stuff that impacts all Americans, regardless of a political party. And what we're going to be talking about is not anything to do with politics[40]." Members of both groups echoed these sentiments. Relatedly, members reported not talking about their political views with other members of the group.

There were also differences between the groups. The agricultural group consisted of members who served in some capacity as volunteer leaders. Many of the members I interviewed had met with members of Congress and state legislators dozens, if not hundreds, of times before. As a result, members of the trade association were well educated and informed. In fact, many of them spoke like lobbyists. In contrast, a significant number of the disease group attendees had never attended a fly-in before. While they were supportive of the group's policy goals and strategies, it was clear that their level of involvement had provided them with less direct experience working with policymakers, and their impressions of the political system were more general and based on the training they received rather than their direct experiences.

Several themes emerge when considering how interest groups have affected these members. The first involved perceptions of efficacy among those who are highly involved in

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[40] Interview with participant 5 from Disease Group 2.

their interest group's policy activities. One member of the trade association described how his

participation in the organization influenced the way he sees constituent communication:

> *It's always funny the way the government actually works versus what you think it works. But yeah, every time you can get in there, especially if you can do personal stories, or you can if you explain how it affects you, it seems like it carries more weight. Yeah, it's easy to turn off emails, but I think those just build up. And I think it's easy to compartmentalize those, but if you can actually talk to somebody, and especially if you have a message, it goes a long way[41].*

Another member echoed similar experiences:

> *It's really interesting to watch their [members of Congress's] observations, and how they react and change their opinions over time, because they're people just like us, you know, they just chose this path of public service. There's good ones and bad ones. Yeah, just like there is in every industry. Yeah, I think it's definitely influenced how I view government. The role that the average citizen can play is really influential… I've personally been a part of conversations in meetings where if we had not had that interaction with that member of Congress, things would have been different. Yeah. It's really something special. Yeah. For sure. Kind of gives you faith that the system still works.[42]*

Another theme echoed in several interviews involves the way members' experience with

the group acts as a sort of inoculation against polarizing information they may be exposed to

outside of their involvement with the interest group. This dynamic appeared to be confined to

the most involved volunteers. Several participants in the trade association's fly-in mentioned that

the information they receive through training and through participating in advocacy activities –

particularly in meetings with policymakers – give them the skills to interpret political news more

accurately. One interviewee remarked:

> *When you see headlines on social media or whatever, they're meant to attract the reader. Sometimes they are kind of exaggerated or, you know....there's always more to the story. That's not right. There's a part of the story that wasn't covered or didn't get two sides to every coin basically[43].*

Another member of the same association mentioned a similar theme:

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[41] Interview with participant 2 from Trade Association 3.
[42] Interview with participant 3 from Trade Association 3.
[43] Interview with participant 3 from Trade Association 3.

I think the news is always, it's just a snapshot of what's going on. And of course, they're going to try to capture the snapshot that's going to gather the most eyes for their network, I believe, so their business too. And so, if you let yourself just be in that bubble, of only relying on the nightly news or the mainstream news, it's gonna sway your idea and your point of view of the government into thinking that nothing good happens here, it's all negative. But when you do actually get here and or do your part in seeking out more of what is going on here you'll find that actually there's a lot of bipartisan things that get taken care of there's a lot of good bills and policy that gets done[44].

Similarly, members of the disease group also shared how their experience working with legislators changed their perceptions of how policymakers and their staff receive information from their constituents:

We were very well received. And everything she said so far is very true. I've been in the hallway. I was in the closet almost one day, because that was the only space and we were standing up. So I understand all of that, and the people who are there. One of the most one special meetings I remember was, I had an aide who was totally new. And she had a family member who had [disease]. And Lord have mercy when she found that what [disease] we were dealing with, she asked more questions that we had to back out the door to make it to the next appointment. She was getting so much information that day…. And she was very much engaged[45].

While most of the comments reflected positive experiences dealing with members of Congress and their staff, not all member engagement led to favorable impressions of government. On the contrary, a higher level of exposure means that members are exposed to both positive and negative experiences dealing with members of Congress and their staff. One interviewee described his experience:

I didn't know that it was so divided and [they] didn't work together. I thought that, you know… I thought you'd go in and you reason together, like I would with my neighbor. I would reason with him and say "Hey, our fence is bad, is it okay if I fix half the fence and you fix half the fence and we'll keep the cows in and they won't get into the corn." And we'll work this out together. It doesn't seem like it's that way, when you go to a legislator in politics. They're trying to work on things, that [don't] have anything to do with what you're trying to fix. Because there's something down the line that they're wanting back from you or from them. And so politics is not my deal. I don't like politics of separation. I think you should try to go and work out the problem to the best for the United States. And

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[44] Interview with participant 5 from Trade Association 3.
[45] Interview with participant 6 from Disease Group 2.

then come up with that solution and go with that, even though it may not be perfect for your, like if you're a Democrat, It may not be perfect. To come together and solve the problem. Yeah, and that's what I do at home. And that's what I kind of thought it was like, politics. But it's not... So if I'm gonna get my man elected, I have to do this, even though I know it's not the best for them.[46]

Interviews with interest group members reveal several important takeaways for this study. First, higher levels of involvement appear to be associated with higher levels of efficacy. The mechanism here is personal experience working with members of Congress and their staff – as members meet with policymakers, they are able to experience for themselves how constituent meetings inform officials' decision-making. Secondly, among the people I interviewed, there is universal buy-in on a bipartisan approach to lawmaking. Highly involved participants understand the need to have relationships with both sides of the aisle and indicated that since their issues impact everyone, it is important to talk with policymakers from both political parties. Finally, highly-involved interviewees discussed some of the underlying reasons why we can expect their levels of affective polarization to be lower. Three reasons in particular stand out. Since these volunteers have hands-on experience working in the policymaking process, they are less susceptible to media accounts that can lead to higher levels of polarization. Their exposure to and relationships with people from both political parties create a type of cross cutting relationships that we don't see in other venues. And since volunteers are trained to compartmentalize, they are able to put on their "farmer hat" or "disease advocate hat" and put their opinions about unrelated issues aside in a way that might not be possible for people without this type of training.

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[46] Interview with participant 13 from Trade Association 3.

The findings from the leader and member interviews provide support for my expectations that group leaders' choice of message contributes to interest group members having higher levels of trust in government, internal efficacy, external efficacy and support for bipartisan compromise and lower levels of affective polarization. I test these expectations in a survey in the final empirical component of this project.

Trust in Government

It is well established that levels of trust in government area at historic lows, which mirror levels of trust in most other institutions (Pew Research Center 2019). Political science research suggests that these drops in trust are related to decreases in social capital, which have also been on the decline in recent years (Keele 2007; Putnam 2000). Specifically, Keele (2007) links trust and social capital by describing trust as "a result of how much the public engages in civic life and the attendant attitudes of trust and reciprocity that develop in civic activity." In other words, we would expect levels of trust in government to be higher among people who have opportunities for civic engagement. Since interest groups are one of the primary ways individuals engage in the political and civic process (Kollman 1998), we can expect members of professional associations, and those who are more involved in those associations, to have higher levels of trust in government.

> *H1a: Professionals who are members of their professional society will have higher levels of trust in government compared to those who are not members of their professional society.*
>
> *H1b: Professionals who are more involved in their professional society will have higher levels of trust in government compared to those who are less involved in their professional society.*

Internal Efficacy

Similarly, political science scholarship has established that higher levels of civic education lead individuals have higher levels of internal efficacy – that is, the feeling that an individual's actions can influence the government system (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Data gathered during interviews suggest that nonpartisan interest groups spend considerable time and resources educating members about how the government works, how constituents can influence policy, and other basic information about the government system that individuals would not receive elsewhere. Those who are most involved in these interest groups are the most likely beneficiaries of such training. I therefore predict that members of interest groups will have higher levels of internal efficacy than non-members. I also predict that as individuals get more involved in their professional association, the are likely to have higher levels of internal efficacy compared to those who are less involved in their professional society.

> *H2a: Professionals who are members of their professional society will have higher levels of internal efficacy compared to those who are not members of their professional society.*

> *H2b: Professionals who are more involved in their professional society will have higher levels of internal efficacy compared to those who are less involved in their professional society.*

External Efficacy

As established in Chapter 5, interest groups also spend time and resources informing members about the ways public officials consider constituent feedback during the policymaking process. Interest groups that are unable to use partisan and conflict-oriented cues due to the constraints discussed in Chapter 2 especially rely on these types of messages to mobilize their members to take action on public policy issues. While we did not observe that these messages have a strong effect on respondents in the survey experiment in Chapter 5, I expect that when

group members receive these messages from individuals they trust and groups they feel an affinity towards, these messages will have an impact. Once again, I expect the effects to be stronger among the most involved members for two reasons. As previously noted, the most involved members are likely to have more exposure to such messages. Additionally, those who are more involved in their interest group are more likely to trust the people delivering these messages, which means the messages will have more impact.

> *H3a: Professionals who are members of their professional society will have higher levels of external efficacy compared to those who are not members of their professional society.*

> *H3b: Professionals who are more involved in their professional society will have higher levels of external efficacy compared to those who are less involved in their professional society.*

Bipartisanship

As established in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, nonpartisan interest groups use a bipartisan approach to lawmaking. They often seek cosponsors from both sides of the aisle to hedge against switches in party control of the House and Senate that have become increasingly frequent in recent years (Lee 2016). Nonpartisan groups spend time and resources educating members about these approaches to address concerns by members about these strategies. I expect those who are more involved with their interest group to have more exposure to these messages and to be more receptive to the messages.

> *H4a: Professionals who members of their professional society will have higher levels of support for bipartisan compromise compared to those who are not members.*

> *H4b: Professionals who are more involved in their professional society will have higher levels of support for bipartisan compromise than those who are less involved in their professional societies.*

Polarization

As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 5, interest groups offer opportunities for members to interact with other members and policymakers who are both Democrats and Republicans. These opportunities can counteract the partisan sorting that we see in many other parts of modern American life (Mason 2015). I except these interactions, along with interest group messaging promoting bipartisan strategies, to have a depolarizing effect on interest group members. As with the other predictions in this chapter, I expect these effects to be stronger among those who are more involved in the interest group compared to those who are less involved.

> *H5a: Professionals who are members of their professional society will have lower levels of affective polarization compared to those who are not members of their professional society.*

> *H5b: Professionals who are more involved in their professional society will have lower levels of affective polarization compared to those who are less involved in their professional society.*

Interest Group Survey

To test these predictions, I conduct an online survey of individuals who are in one of 18 different professions that have professional societies that are active in the political or policymaking process. Figure 6.3 provides an illustration of the distribution of professions. The most common are teachers (25.82%), engineers (16.90%), accountant (12.00%), and registered nurse (11.14%). The survey was included in the Civic Health Institutions Project large sample survey[47], which had a total of 24,151 respondents.

Figure 6.3: Professions Represented in Interest Group Survey

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[47] The Civic Health and Institutions Project, a 50 States Survey (CHIP50), NSF Grants SES-2241884, SES-2241885, and SES224-1886, Matthew Baum, James Druckman, David Lazer, and Katherine Ognyanova, Principal Investigators.
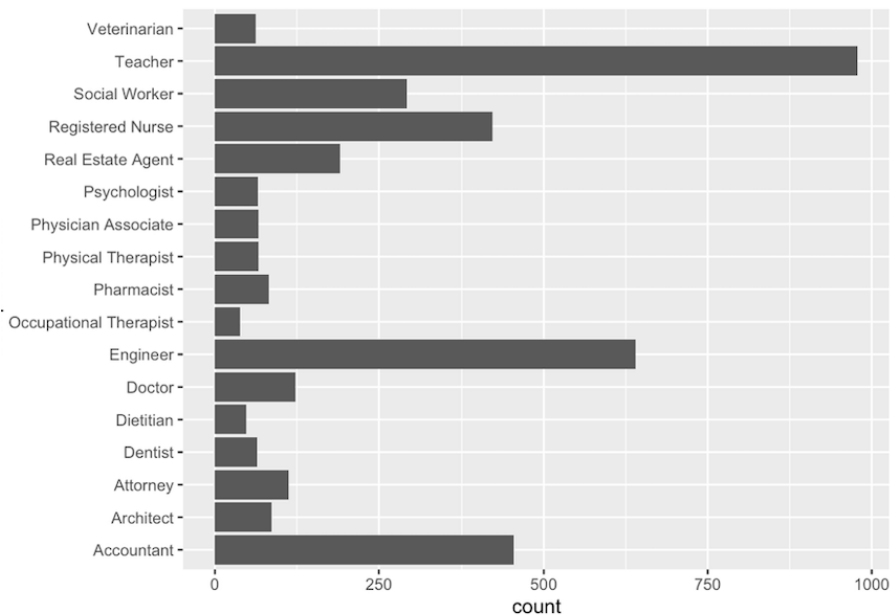
Of all respondents in the large sample survey, 3,788 (15.68%) of them indicated that they

work in one of the 18 occupations of interest for this study. These 3,788 respondents who

identified as being in these professions are included in the analyses for all hypothesis tests in this

chapter. Figure 6.3 provides a visual depiction of the professions present in the sample. The

independent variable in all models with predictions related to membership in associations is

membership in a professional society.

Respondents across these professions who report belonging to their professional

association indicated a varying level of involvement in their professional societies. Of

respondents in the 18 professions, 2,048 (54.07%) respondents indicated that they are members

of their professional society[48]. When asked how often they participate in activities hosted by

their professional society, the most common response was "non-member," with 1,795[49] (47.39%)

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[48] Analysis of rates of association participation broken out by profession is provided in Appendix E.
[49] Some respondents did not answer this question, so the totals do not add up to 3,788.

of professionals indicating that they are not a member of their professional society. Among other respondents, around 12 percent of members never participate in activities, 17 percent participate once per year or less, 25 percent participate a few times per year, and around 30 percent participate once per month or more. Full details on interest group participation levels are provided in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4: Professionals by Level of Involvement in Professional Society
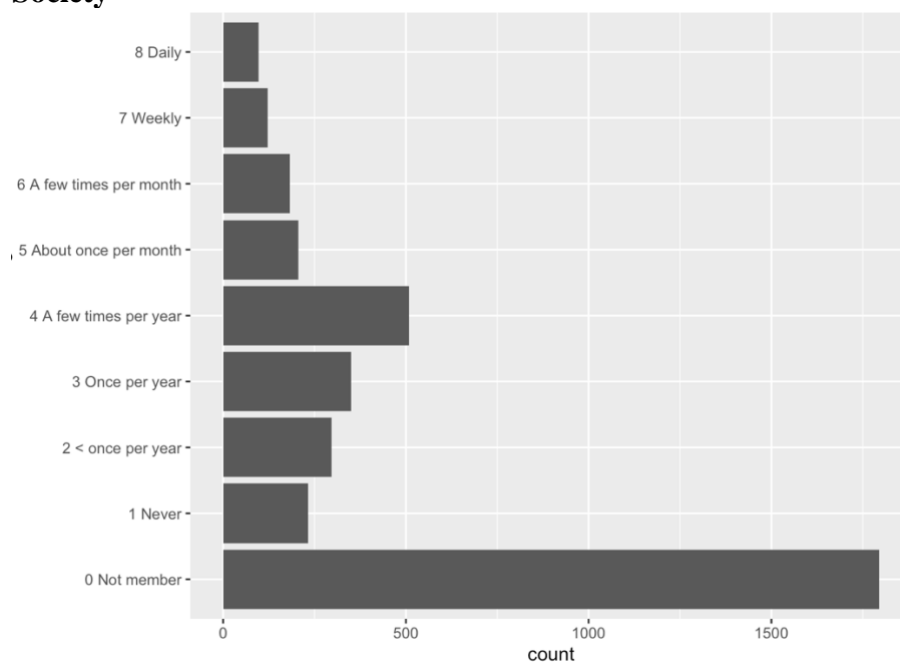
I control for age, education, and strength of partisanship in my hypothesis tests. The mean age of respondents is 42 years (sd = 16.63). Nearly 30 percent have advanced degrees, another half of respondents are college graduates, and the remainder have some college or less.

The level of education is higher than in a typical random sample because many of the professions in this study require at least a bachelor's degree, and several require postgraduate study. I also control for profession in all models[50].

Strength of partisanship is a categorical variable with the values Strong Republican (545, 15.08%), Weak Republican (412, 11.40%), Lean Republican (260, 7.19%), Independent (680, 18.82%), Lean Democrat (205, 5.67%), Weak Democrat (642 (17.76%), and Strong Democrat (870, 24.07%). In the affective polarization tests, I group independent leaners with other partisans. There are a higher than expected number of Independents in this study, which ANES estimated to be at 11.8% in 2020 (American National Election Studies 2020)This difference may be related to a sample that with a high educational skew (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

The dependent variables for the trust in government, internal efficacy, and external efficacy are on a 7-item Likert scale. I use responses as continuous variables with 7 as the highest level (strongly agree) and 1 as the lowest level (strongly disagree) for each variable. The trust in government variable was created from a question on the survey that asked respondents about how often they can Congress to do what is right (mean = 2.67, sd = 0.87). I created the internal efficacy variable from a survey question that asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "People like me have a say in what the federal government does" (mean = 3.83, sd = 1.68) (Pollock 1983). The external efficacy variable came from a survey question that asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "Public officials care about what people like me think" (mean = 4.06, sd = 1.58) (Pollock 1983). A survey question that asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "What

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[50] To make the results tables more readable, I omit the indicator variables for each profession in the results of this document. Full results are available in Appendix E.

people call compromise is really just selling out one's principles," which is a common way of measuring support for bipartisan compromise, was used to create the variable indicating support for bipartisan compromise (mean = 4.17, sd = 1.48) (American National Election Studies 2020). Responses for this question are also on a Likert scale, but are in the reverse order of the other variables, with 7 as the lowest level of support for bipartisan compromise (Strongly Agree) and 1 as the highest level of support for bipartisan compromise (Strongly Disagree).

The dependent variable for H5 is level of Affective Polarization. For Republicans, I use respondents' responses to a feeling thermometer question about the Democratic party (mean = 25.34, sd = 24.19); for Democrats, I use respondents' to a feeling thermometer question about the Republican party (mean = 25.71, sd = 24.86). Both of these are continuous variables on a 0-100 scale.

Results for Membership-Related Hypotheses

To test these hypotheses about the impact of membership in a professional society on individuals' attitudes, I estimate a series of four OLS models that examine trust in government, internal and external efficacy, and support for political compromise. Across all four models I find strong support that belonging to one's professional association shapes attitudes about government and politics (see Table 6.1). All models are estimated using OLS and include controls for age, education, party strength, and profession[51]. Results that include the 18 professions are available in Appendix E. To test whether involvement in interest groups is associated with higher levels of trust in government, estimate on OLS model with controls for age, education level, party strength, and profession. Results of the Trust Model, shown in Table

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[51] Results that include the 18 professions are available in Appendix E.

6.1, provide evidence to support my hypothesis that members of professional societies will have

higher levels of trust in government compared to professionals who are not members of

professional societies (p<0.05). These differences are significant, with members' measure of

trust in government 0.25 points higher than non-members, which represents around 30% of a

standard deviation increase. The model also suggests that older people and democrats are also

more likely to have higher trust in government (p<0.05).

Table 6.1: The Effect of Professional Society Membership on Trust in Government, Efficacy, and Support for Bipartisan Compromise

	Trust Model	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Compromise Model
Professional Society Member	0.25* (0.03)	0.50* (0.06)	0.46* (0.05)	0.29* (0.05)
Age	-0.003* (0.001)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)
Education	-0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.13* (0.03)
Party Strength	0.04* (0.01)	0.14* (0.01)	0.11* (0.01)	-0.07* (0.01)
Constant	2.21* (0.08)	2.85* (0.16)	3.37* (0.15)	5.44* (0.14)
N	3,778	3,778	3,778	3,778
Adj. R-Square	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Baseline is strong Republicans who are not members of their professional association.

To understand whether involvement in a professional association influences internal

efficacy, I create an OLS model with controls for age, education, party strength, and profession.

The Internal Efficacy model results (see column 2 in Table 6.1), predict that professional society

members will have higher levels of internal efficacy compared to non-members (p<0.05). These

difference are significant, with members' internal efficacy 0.50 points higher than those of non-

members, representing an increase of 30% of a standard deviation. The model also suggests that

Democrats are more likely to have high external efficacy compared to Republicans (p<0.05). Model results support my prediction that members of interest groups will have higher levels of external efficacy compared to non-members.

To test whether involvement in a professional society affects internal efficacy, I use an OLS model with the same controls as above. The external efficacy model results (column 3, Table 6.1), predict that professional society members will have external efficacy levels that are higher than those of non-members (p<0.05). These differences are substantive, with members having external efficacy measures that are 0.46 points higher on average compared to non-members. As with the first two models, these results represent around 30% of a standard deviation increase in external efficacy levels, which supports my hypothesis that members are more likely to feel like government cares about what the people think (external efficacy) as compared to non-members.

In H4a, I predict that professional society members will have higher levels of support for bipartisan compromise compared to professionals who do not belong in their professional society. The bipartisan compromise model in column 4 of Table 6.1 provides evidence that, contrary to my expectation, members will have lower levels of support for bipartisan compromise compared to non-members (p<0.05). The difference between members and non-members is more muted in this model compared to the other four – members have levels of support for bipartisanship that are 0.29 lower, which represents about 20% of a standard deviation increase.

To test whether group membership influences levels of affective polarization, I create two different models – one for Democrats and the other for Republicans[52]. The dependent variable for the Democrat model is feeling thermometer for Republicans that ranges from 0-100, and the dependent variable for the Republican model is a feeling thermometer for Democrats. Model results, depicted in Table 6.3, indicate that for both Democrats and Republicans, members of professional societies have warmer feelings towards the other party than non-members ($p<0.05$). For Democrats, the model estimates a difference of 8.24 points, which represents one-third of a standard deviation increase in warm feelings for Republicans. For Republicans, model estimates a difference of 6.49 points, which represents around a quarter of a standard deviation increase in warm feelings for Democrats.

Table 6.2: Relationship Between Affective Polarization and Membership in Professional Societies among Democrats and Republicans

	Democrats	Republicans
Professional Society Member	8.24*	6.49*
	(1.21)	(1.51)
Age	-0.26*	-0.27*
	(0.04)	(0.05)
Education	-2.22*	0.00
	(0.67)	(0.81)
Strong Partisan	-5.02*	-9.38*
	(1.57)	(1.86)
Weak Partisan	3.15*	4.50*
	(1.63)	(1.97)
Constant	42.64*	38.21*
	(3.34)	(4.11)
N	1,883	1,217
Adj. R-Square	0.11	0.12

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Baseline groups are Independents who lean toward the appropriate party.

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[52] Since Independents have no party affiliation and are therefore not included in affective polarization expectations, they are omitted from models that test H5.

Membership in Professional Societies' Effect on Member Attitudes

As the results from the hypotheses above illustrate, membership in professional societies predict a number of differences in the way professionals view the government and the larger political system. I find that membership in professional societies is associated with higher levels of trust in government and internal and external efficacy and lower levels of affective polarization. Contrary to my expectations, members have lower support for bipartisan compromise. On the whole, these findings provide evidence supporting my theory that nonpartisan interest groups support a number of normatively desirable outcomes within their memberships.

However, my theory also predicts that we can learn more about the individuals who are more and less impacted by these effects if we examine individuals' level of involvement in professional societies in addition to the simple choice of whether or not to join a professional society. As I argue in Chapter 2, professional associations' training programs, nonpartisan activities, and civic engagement programming are likely to have a stronger effect on those who show up to society events. These individuals are both more "bought in" to their organizations' mission and strategy and are more likely to hear the society's message due to their increased presence and attention to society messaging. In the following section, I examine how level of involvement influences the dependent variables discussed in this section.

Results for Level of Involvement-Related Hypotheses

Similar to the empirical tests of the effects of belonging to a professional association on attitudes, here I estimate a series of four OLS models to examine how the level of involvement in

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professional associations influences trust in government, efficacy, support for compromise, and affective polarization. Results of the Trust Model in Table 6.4[53] provide evidence that as members become more involved in their professional society, their trust in government increases (p<0.05). Respondents who participate in their professional society's activities at least once per year are predicted to have higher levels of trust in government compared to those who are less involved in their professional society or are not members at all. As involvement in the professional society increases, the level of trust in government also increases – people who

Table 6.3: The Effect of Level of Participation on Trust in Government, Efficacy, and Support for Bipartisan Compromise

	Trust Model	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Compromise Model
Never (1)	-0.02	-0.18	-0.15	0.22*
	(0.06)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)
< Once Per Year (2)	0.09^	0.16	0.19*	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Once Per Year (3)	0.14*	0.36*	0.36*	0.23*
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)
A Few Times Per Year (4)	0.23*	0.38*	0.32*	0.21*
	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Once Per Month (5)	0.32*	0.67*	0.55*	0.44*
	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
A few Times Per Month (6)	0.41*	0.71*	0.77*	0.41*
	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Weekly (7)	0.51*	1.14*	1.01*	0.96*
	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Daily (8)	0.59*	1.24*	1.20*	0.67*
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	0.01	0.05^	0.04	-0.12*

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[53] In the interest of making these tables readable, I have not included indicator variables for the 18 professions in these results. Full model results including coefficients for professions are available in Appendix E.

	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Party Strength	0.04*	0.14*	0.12*	-0.07*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.14*	2.72*	3.28*	5.34*
	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.13)
N	3,778	3,778	3,778	3,778
Adj. R-Square	0.06	0.09	0.08	0.08

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Baseline group is comprised of strong Republicans who are not members of their professional association.

participate at least weekly have levels of trust in Congress that are more than 25% higher than those who are not members of their association, while those who are involved monthly have levels of trust in government that are 38% of a standard deviation higher than those in the baseline condition. We can see how coefficients increase as level of involvement in the interest group increases in Figure XX. Given the strong relationship between the extent of member involvement and trust in government, results from this model support H1b.

To test H2b, which predicts higher levels of internal efficacy among those who are more involved in their professional society, I use an OLS model and control for age, education, party affiliation, and profession. The internal efficacy model, results of which are shown in Table 6.4, Column 2, shows that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between increased involvement in a professional society and internal efficacy levels. People who participate in professional society activities at least once per year have higher levels of internal efficacy compared to those who are less involved or who are not members of their professional society p<0.05). As level of involvement increases, so do respondents' level of internal efficacy. Members who are involved at least once per month have levels of internal efficacy that are 39% of a standard deviation higher than those in the baseline condition, while those who are involved at least once per week have levels of efficacy that are 74% of a standard deviation higher than

the baseline. We can see from the model predictions in Figure 6.5, levels of efficacy increase at each point of increased involvement in professional societies – evidence that supports H2b.

Figure 6.5: Level of Involvement Relationship with Outcome Variables
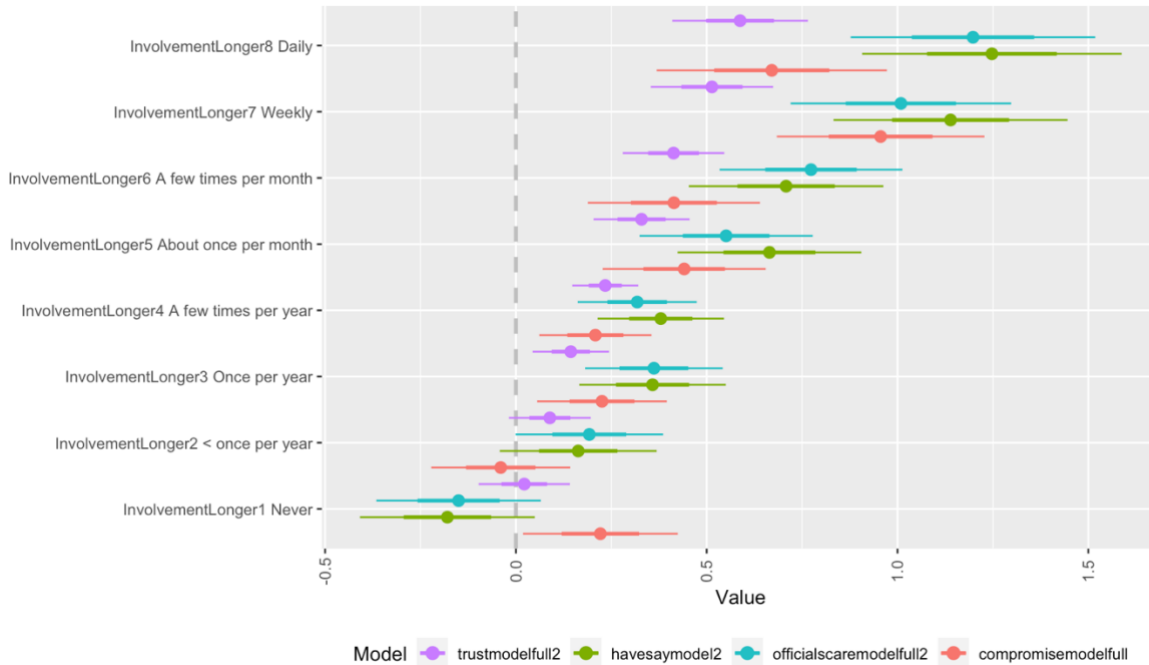
To test H3b, which predicts higher levels of external efficacy among those who are more involved in their professional society, I use an OLS model with a dependent variable of Officials Care and an independent variable Level of Involvement. I control for age, education, party affiliation, and profession. The external efficacy model in column 3 of Table 6.4 reveals that individuals who are more involved in their professional society are likely to have higher levels of external efficacy compared to those who are not involved or who choose not to join their professional association (p<0.05). As with the first two models, as levels of involvement increase, so do levels of external efficacy. Those who participate in professional society activities at least once per month have levels of internal efficacy that are 35% of a standard deviation higher than those who are not members of their professional society. Respondents who

participate in professional society activities once per week have levels of external efficacy that

are 76% of a standard deviation higher than those in the baseline condition.

Table 6.4: Relationship Between Affective Polarization and Involvement in Professional Societies among Democrats and Republicans

	Democrats	Republicans
Never (1)	4.41^	-0.87
	(2.51)	(2.62)
< Once Per Year (2)	3.70^	0.65
	(2.06)	(2.60)
Once Per Year (3)	8.44*	6.30*
	(1.93)	(2.46)
A Few Times Per Year (4)	5.52*	6.02*
	(1.68)	(2.16)
Once Per Month (5)	7.75*	9.67*
	(2.50)	(3.02)
A few Times Per Month (6)	15.64*	7.10*
	(2.51)	(3.29)
Weekly (7)	21.41*	9.45*
	(3.03)	(3.84)
Daily (8)	10.16*	5.84
	(3.31)	(4.58)
Age	-0.25*	-0.23*
	(0.04)	(0.05)
Education	-2.56*	0.04
	(0.63)	(0.76)
Strong Partisan	-5.58*	-8.99*
	(1.51)	(1.78)
Weak Partisan	3.73*	5.26*
	(1.56)	(1.86)
Constant	43.04*	34.98*
	(2.93)	(3.58)
N	1,883	1,217
Adj. R-Square	0.12	0.11

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Baseline groups are Independents who lean toward the appropriate party. Dependent variable is warmth of feelings for the out-party.

Next, I use an OLS model to test whether increased involvement in a professional society are associated with higher levels of support for bipartisan compromise, controlling for age, education, party affiliation, and profession. Results for H4b shows that people who are more involved in their professional society are likely to have lower levels of support for bipartisan compromise. Results of the Compromise Model, which can be found in the last column of Table 6.4, support these expectations ($p<0.05$). It is important to note that support for bipartisan compromise among all respondents is relatively high, which matches expectations established by other scholars who study bipartisanship (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge -Yong 2020). Even in light of the high baseline levels of support for bipartisanship, support generally erodes with increased involvement in professional societies. Viewing model results from Figure 6.4, however, it is clear that the results of this model are not as linear as the other three models. However, respondents who are members of professional societies who participate in activities at least once per year are likely to have lower levels of support for bipartisan compromise ($p<0.05$). Respondents who participate monthly in their professional society have levels of support for bipartisanship that are 30% of a standard deviation lower than the baseline, while those who participate weekly have levels of bipartisan support that are 65% of a standard deviation lower than the baseline.

Finally, I create two models (one for Democrats and the other for Republicans) to test whether people who are more involved with their professional society have lower levels of affective polarization. The dependent variable for the Democrat model is warmth of feelings towards Republicans, and the dependent variable for the Republican model is warmth of feelings towards Democrats. Results of both models provide evidence to support H5 ($p<0.05$). In both the Democrat and Republican models, most respondent groups who participate in their professional

society at least once per year are likely to have warmer feelings for the out-party compared to those who are not involved at all or who are not members of their professional society (p<0.05).

There are, however, some differences in the models. Baseline levels of affective polarization are different among the two groups. While the mean values of out-party feeling are similar (25.71 for Democrats and 25.33 for Republicans), the baseline levels in the model are quite different due to demographic differences in the populations like age, with baseline level Democrats having significantly warmer feelings for Republicans than baseline Republicans have for Democrats. Secondly, while the effect of low levels of involvement appear to be similar when comparing Democrats and Republicans, very high levels of participation in professional societies appear to have a stronger effect on Democrats than Republicans. This may be due to the way that the parties have polarized asymmetrically (Grossmann and Hopkins 2015). Democrats who participate weekly have feelings about Republicans that 86% of a standard deviation higher than the baseline, while Republicans have feelings about democrats that are 39% of a standard deviation higher than the baseline. Interestingly, those most involved in their professional society have fewer differences than those with slightly lower levels of involvement. While Democrats who are involved in their professional association daily have warmer feelings for Republicans compared to the baseline group (p<0.05), the differences are much more muted than those who participate weekly or a few times per month. Republicans who are involved in their professional society daily have no differences in warmth of feelings about Democrats compared to the baseline group (p<0.05).

Discussion

The results of the interest group survey provide strong support for many of the findings from the interviews – membership in professional societies and a person's level of involvement

in their society are substantively and statistically associated with increases in efficacy and trust in government and associated with decreases in levels of affective polarization. Participation in professional society activities at least once per year appear to have an effect on these outcomes, and the people who are impacted the most strongly are those who participate at least once per week in their interest group's activities.

Those who are members of their professional association and who are highly involved in their association have lower levels of support for bipartisan compromise. This is surprising in light of the strong bipartisan support that highly involved members illustrated during interest group member interviews. These findings are also puzzling because highly involved members are less supportive of bipartisan compromise while at the same time displaying lower levels of affective polarization. More study is needed to understand the dynamics that lead to such views. However, if these findings hold true, the fact that individuals can hold highly ideological views while at the same time have lower levels of affective polarization mean that individuals can disagree strongly on policy without the negative consequences of high levels of affective polarization.

The results of the survey experiment, interviews, and interest group survey together shed additional light on what is happening with efficacy in an interest group context. In the survey experiment (Chapter 5), we did not see strong effects of messaging that emphasizes the way lawmakers receive constituent communication on recipients' sense of efficacy. In the interviews with fly-in participants, we can see why – individuals are driven to these views through their personal experiences. In short, reading about lawmaker responsiveness is not enough – people must see for themselves how lawmakers behave in order to have higher feelings of efficacy. This is why we see much higher levels of efficacy among highly involved members than we do in

those who are not involved or who are not members of their professional society. Ultimately, these findings contribute to efficacy literature by helping us understand working with government officials and observing their responsiveness can lead to higher levels of efficacy.

The findings that interest group membership and engagement results in a decrease in affective polarization are novel and striking. Scholars have found that increases in political participation, such as voting and contributing to a candidate, lead to higher levels of affective polarization (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). But here, I find something quite different. As a person becomes more involved in their professional society, members have warmer feelings for members of the out-party. We also see these effects in the comments from those involved in their interest groups. Interviewees demonstrated a level of understanding of people in the opposite party that we do not see in the general public.

These findings build on prior work to find ways in which increased participation can decrease levels of polarization (Levendusky 2021). My findings suggest that professional societies – and potentially other nonpartisan interest groups – can have strong effects on the way their membership perceives government. Participation in interest group-driven political activities are different from conventional ideas of political participation in that they are mediated by the group, involve intensive training on civic engagement and government structures, involve centralized policy goals that tend to be nonpartisan, and involve collective engagement in problem solving. It makes sense that the effects of this type of involvement will be different from the effects of voting and other common forms of political activity.

These findings are also notable because, when looking at the broader political environment, voters are exposed to media and campaign messaging that have the opposite effect on many of these outcomes (J. N. Druckman, Levendusky, and McLain 2018; Prior 2013). After

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people graduate from high school, participation in a nonpartisan interest group may be the only exposure people have to civic education content. This type of education is a little-studied area of political science, but warrants attention given the impacts that it appears to have on political perceptions. Additional work is needed to understand the mechanisms that cause these changes to come about. For example, how is this type of education different from the content that is delivered in secondary education civics curricula, and how are the effects of these two different types of education different from each other? Does the unique mix of content and delivery mechanism yield the results we see here? Moving forward, I plan to test these questions with additional experimental manipulations to understand how broadly these findings may apply outside of the interest group context.

These findings also provide some evidence that addresses the question of self-selectivity in the effects of interest group participation. It is logical to ask whether any differences we observe in interest group members and nonmembers are related to latent differences like personality and differences in social capital that are related to the choice to join an organization. However, the results here suggest that there are no statistical or substantive differences in levels of trust in government and efficacy between those who chose not to join their professional society and those who join and do not participate in their interest group's activities. While these findings do not address the question of inherent differences between those who are highly active and those who are not active, the findings between members and non-members provide some evidence that there may not be an inherent significant difference between members and nonmembers.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this project, I lay out a theoretical argument – that based on a group's organizational goals, interest groups choose different strategies to accomplish their policy goals. Those policy goals and the way the group communicates them to membership influences the way members feel about the government and the political system – particularly in member' levels of political efficacy, support for bipartisan compromise, and levels of affective polarization. I come to these findings using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, which allow me to approach questions about effects on members that are difficult to accomplish and seldom attempted. Additionally, my interviews focus on both elites and the mass public, which allow me to analyze both the interest group's engagement strategies and how those strategies influence members.

Overview of Findings

Group-Level Findings

This project reveals important new information about both interest groups and their members. At the group level, this study reveals that there is significant variation in the distance interest group maintains from political parties. Some groups are close to one or the other party and work exclusively with that party, while others maintain distance from both parties and work with members on both sides of the aisle. There are also a significant number of organizations that lean towards one party or the other, but still employ a bipartisan policy strategy.

Issue advocacy nonprofits and groups that work solely on electoral campaigns whose issues have been incorporated into one of the political parties are the groups that are most likely to be close to one of the political parties. Labor unions are also likely to affiliate – primarily with the Democratic party – although there is some variation in party proximity among unions. Trade

associations and professional associations are the least likely to affiliate with political parties. Companies are also likely to maintain distance from both parties, although there is a significant amount of variation in party proximity among companies. The drivers of this variation in company party proximity is unknown at this point.

This project also reveals that partisanship drives interest group public policy strategy, which in turn influences the way the groups communicate with group members. Issue advocacy groups, electoral organizations, and other partisan groups are more likely to use partisan and conflict-oriented language, which are likely to boost response rates by priming social identity – an effective way to mobilize political action. Associations and nonpartisan groups are more likely to tie issues back to the reasons members joined the interest group and focus on progress towards these goals. This nonpartisan strategy is a more complicated process and involves intensive civic engagement training.

While partisanship is an important predictor of which strategy an interest group will use to pursue its public policy goals, interest groups are also responsive to member concerns when deciding which type of policy strategy to pursue. One notable example is labor unions – while unions typically work in coalition with Democrats due to Republican opposition to collective bargaining rights, a growing number of labor union members identify with the Republican party[54], which means that labor unions tend to refrain from using partisan and conflict-oriented cues when mobilizing their members. This reality extends to lobbying strategy as well – even some of the most partisan labor unions pursue relationships with policymakers on both sides of the aisle[55].

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[54] Interview with leader from Labor Union 2.
[55] Interview with leader from Labor Union 2.

Given the current political reality in Washington, with party control changing hands nearly every election cycle, these bipartisan strategies can also be a way to avoid political risk. Several of the interest group leaders I interviewed shared that while their group tends to side with one party or the other on policy, they maintain bipartisan relationships and a bipartisan policy strategy to enable the groups to work with both parties as power changes hands. Groups that engage in this bipartisan work while maintaining a partisan-leaning membership must train its members about the value of a bipartisan approach, especially in light of the findings described in Chapter 6, in which highly involved members are less supportive of bipartisan comopromise.

Pursuing these bipartisan policy strategies without bringing membership along poses a risk of a mismatch between members and staff. One recent example of this comes from the American Library Association (ALA) – an association comprised of both libraries (organizations) and librarians (individuals). The ALA is the accrediting body for librarians and libraries across the U.S. and also lobbies on issues related to library funding and the accessibility of books. Members tend to join for accreditation or to take advantage of the association's extensive community grants program. The policy team pursues a bipartisan strategy by lobbying members on both sides of the aisle and joining bipartisan coalitions (American Library Association 2024) even as their membership skews towards the Democratic party. However, this message has not been clearly articulated to members, and given the recent move to ban books from school and public libraries, the ALA is now in the spotlight in a new way (Italie 2023).

Given the asymmetric polarization present in our current political environment (Hacker and Pierson 2015), convincing Democratic-leaning members of the value of a bipartisan strategy is particularly difficult. This task is made even more difficult when one of the issues the group lobbies on has been incorporated into the political party platforms, as has book banning. Despite

these challenges, the ALA has been unable to convince a significant portion of its membership

that a bipartisan strategy is preferable to a partisan strategy[56]. Recent leadership has raised the

salience of these issues – recently, the volunteer ALA president referred to herself as a Marxist,

which caused a number of prominent red state libraries to withdraw from the association

(Kingkade 2023). Since that statement, scrutiny has intensified, with the Georgia legislature

considering a bill that would prohibit public libraries in the state from joining the ALA and

remove accreditation requirements for librarians in the state(Sei 2024).

The situation with the American Library Association shares similarities with the example

I discuss in Chapter 1. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists lobbies on

behalf of abortion rights, which is also a politically-charged issue. This policy position is not

without its consequences – conservative OB-GYNs have broken from ACOG to form their own

professional association, which opposes abortion. However, due to ACOG's otherwise politically

neutral stance, the association has been able to avoid other, more serious threats to the

organization's continued ability to operate. This political neutrality includes maintaining

relationships with Republican policymakers and using bipartisan messaging in training with

ACOG members. The ALA, in contrast, faces questions of its continued viability due to internal

conflict around its public policy strategy, and faces external threats to its continued viability

from critical lawmakers.

The challenges the ALA faces illustrate why it is important for interest groups to continue

to train members about the importance of a bipartisan strategy. With highly involved members at

lower baseline levels of support for these strategies, it is incumbent upon interest group leaders

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[56] Interview with Doug Pinkham, President, the Public Affairs Council.

to educate members about why this strategy is valuable. This process takes time and money –

resources that are scarce, but important for the future viability of bipartisan policy strategies.

Member-Level Findings

In addition to the new information this research uncovers about interest groups as

institutions, there are also a number of findings about the ways interest group influence the

political behavior of its members. Repeated exposure to nonpartisan messages and interactions

with policymakers lead interest group members – and particularly those who are most involved

in their interest groups – to have higher levels of trust in government, political efficacy, support

for bipartisan compromise, and lower levels of affective polarization compared to those who are

not members. Findings suggest that involvement as infrequent as once per year can yield these

effects.

These findings are surprising, especially since existing political science literature

suggests that as individuals become more involved in the political system, their levels of

affective polarization will increase. These findings have potential normative consequences for

our understanding of political involvement by providing a new way to alleviate affective

polarization. Through further study of this phenomenon, we can understand the specific stimuli

that lead some methods of engagement to lead to more polarization and some methods to

depolarize. The fact that interactions are mediated by interest group leaders to have a strong

effect on these outcomes. Additionally, the activities that interest groups encourage (writing

letters, coming to Washington to meet with members of Congress, and learning about

government processes to understand how different policies benefit different professional groups)

– are fundamentally different from those that are typically studied (voting, putting up a yard sign,

making a political contribution to a candidate). The types of activities could influence these outcomes as well.

This study also suggests that civic education provided by interest groups to their members contributes to normatively desirable outcomes. Civic education programs in interest groups are quite extensive, and involve face-to-face training programs, opportunities to participate in training via streaming or live video, and written information available on the interest group's website or newsletter. Interviews illustrate that at the highest levels of engagement, interest group members think pragmatically about political solutions and take ownership of issues. In this way, interest groups are creating amateur lobbyists who understand how Congress works, can explain to their friends and neighbors the things the government does to solve problems, and value progress towards policy goals over partisan brinkmanship.

It notable that this training may be the only civic education people receive after graduating from high school. The value of this education is clear. However, since these benefits are available only to members of interest groups, the benefits will be unevenly distributed across the U.S. population (Miler 2018). Normatively, it is important to consider ways to extend the reach of these programs so that all have an equal opportunity to learn and engage.

Paths for Future Research

The findings in this study help us understand interest groups and political involvement in novel ways, but they also provide several opportunities for future study. First, this research pays particular attention to nonpartisan interest groups because they are so often overlooked in scholarly and popular accounts in today's partisan environment. In particular, Chapter 6 focuses primarily on the effects of involvement in nonpartisan interest groups, including professional associations, trade associations, and nonprofits that advocate on bipartisan issues. The interest

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group survey and fly-in interviews do not study the effects of involvement in partisan groups. There is the potential to conduct similar research in a partisan group context to better understand how involvement in these groups might differ in their effects on trust in government, efficacy, support for bipartisan compromise, and affective polarization.

Second, in Chapter 3, I identify a significant amount of variation in the party proximity of companies. Companies are different from other interest groups studied in this project because instead of existing to advocate for specific issues or for the needs of members, companies exist to turn a profit. In addition, companies can rely on trade associations and business groups to carry out some of their policy priorities, leaving companies to carry out their own agendas differently. Therefore, the factors that guide companies' lobbying strategy might vary from those identified for associations. I expect that a company's customer base, employees, executives and owners will all influence these decisions. While, this study is outside the scope of the current project, I recommend additional study on this phenomenon so that we can better understand how companies fit into the larger framework presented here.

Similarly, labor unions have their own challenges, especially related to the changing party preferences of many union members. Additionally, as the Republican party recognizes this new constituency, it is possible that the party will change its stance on collective bargaining in the future, which could change labor unions' partisan outlook in the long term. While we understand some of the factors that influence unions through this study, scholars should revisit the question of where labor unions fit in the partisan puzzle as party realignment continues.

This study also reveals that interest groups fill an important gap left by secondary education institutions when it comes to civic education and civic engagement. While education researchers have studied the effects of social studies education, no such research exists on the

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civic education provided by groups that lobby Capitol Hill. Better understanding how outcomes

differ between these two approaches can both help us understand how to improve interest group-

led civic education and expand interest group civic education to new audiences.

Finally, the focus of this study has been on the way interest groups communicate with

members and how that communication influences member perceptions of government and

politics. However, this study does not address whether either of these strategies is more effective

at mobilizing members. I expect that, as is the case with many of the findings here, the efficacy

of the strategies will be conditional on individual strength of partisanship. Additional study is

needed to understand how these strategies mobilize or demobilize members, which can also

influence policy outcomes.

Appendices

Partisan Dictionary	**Instrumental Dictionary**
Activist	Act
AOC	Advocate
Bannon	Amend
Biden	Authorize
Blue	Bill
Cancel culture	Budget
Conservative	Chamber
Cruz	Co-sponsor
Deep State	Consider
Democrat	Cosponsor
Elizabeth Warren	Decrease
Equal*	Enact
Equit*	Fund*
Extrem*	H.R.
Freedom	Hearing
GOP	House
Justice	Increase
Kamala	Introduce
Left	Issue
Liberal	Law
Liberty	Legislation
Majority	Maintain
McCarthy	Markup
Minority	Omnibus
Overreach	Oppose
Partisan*	Pass*
Party	Policy
Patriot*	Provision
Pelosi	Reauthorize
Pence	Reconciliation
Progress*	Regulat*
Radical	Rule
Reactionary	S.
Red	Senate
Republican	Sign
Right	Sponsor
Taylor-Greene	Support
Tradition*	Suspend
Trump	Tax
Woke	Treaty
	Unanimous*

Vote

Predictors of Conflict Language – Comparing Conflict Dictionary with Modified Conflict Dictionary

	Conflict	Conflict Modified
Folded PPI	0.27*	0.27*
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Issue Advocacy Nonprofit	0.24*	0.25*
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Labor Union	0.00	0.00
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Trade Assn.	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Electoral Organization	0.20^	0.20^
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Constant	0.10*	0.10*
	(0.04)	(0.04)
N	26,791	26,791
R-Square fixed effects	0.09	0.09
R-Square combined	0.22	0.21

Note: $* < 0.05$, two-tailed. $^ < 0.10$, two-tailed. Estimates are linear mixed effects. Groups in the baseline condition are professional associations.

Leader Questions

1. What types of issues does your group lobby on?
2. What is the partisan makeup of your group's membership? Does that influence the way you communicate with your members on issues involving public policy?
3. Does your CEO or President ever talk about politics in front of members?
4. If yes
   a. In what types of venues? (publicly, member-only events, written communication, casual conversations, etc.)
   b. What does he or she say?
   c. Does he or she write their own remarks, or does someone else help?
5. What kinds of political activities do you encourage your members to get involved in?
6. (If in person events are included)
   a. What kinds of in-person political events does your group host?
   b. How many people typically attend?
   c. Do you perceive differences between your general membership and the people who attend these events? If so, what kinds of differences do you observe?
   d. Have you noticed any differences in perceptions of government and politics after a person attend an in-person political event? If so, can you describe?
7. When members with different political views interact with each other, what kinds of behavior have you observed?
8. I am interested in speaking with interest group members about their experiences participating in interest group-sponsored activities. If you are planning a fly-in over the next six months, would it be okay if I attended and interviewed some of your members? As with this interview, all member interviews will be confidential and completely voluntary.

Member Questions

1. For how many years have you been a member of this group?
2. What was your initial reason for joining this group?
3. Can you tell me what kinds of activities you have participated in as a part of this group?
4. (If they talk about meetings with legislators)
   a. Which legislators have you met with?
   b. What were the meetings like?
   c. Did the meetings influence the way you think about the government or politics?
5. (If they talk about doing things in person)
   a. Who else participates in these in-person activities with you?
   b. Have you developed relationships with others who participate in these activities?
   c. Do you know if any of the people you participate with have different political views from the ones you hold?
6. Do you receive information about public policy from this group? If so, how do you receive it? (email, mail, social media, in person, etc.)
7. (If yes) What kinds of things do you learn from the information you receive?
8. Do you recall the President or CEO of the organization talking about politics?
9. (If yes) What do you remember about what the President or CEO said when they talked about politics?
10. Do you think about politics differently because of your involvement with this organization?
11. Are you a member of any other groups? If so, which ones?
12. (If yes) Do you participate in any activities with those groups? Please describe.
13. How old are you?
14. What is your party affiliation?
15. Where do you live?

Appendix D: Rates of Participation in Associations by Profession

Profession	Number of Professionals	Number of Society Members	% in Professional Society
Accountant	454	190	41.85%
Architect	86	55	63.95%
Attorney	112	77	68.75%
Dentist	64	50	78.13%
Dietitian	48	35	72.92%
Doctor	123	86	69.92%
Engineer	640	294	45.94%
Occupational Therapist	38	30	78.95%
Pharmacist	82	57	69.51%
Physical Therapist	66	37	56.06%
Physician Associate	66	39	59.09%
Psychologist	65	46	70.77%
Real Estate Agent	191	153	80.10%
Registered Nurse	423	279	65.96%
Social Worker	291	150	51.55%
Teacher	978	438	44.79%
Veterinarian	62	32	51.61%

The Effect of Level of Participation on Trust in Government, Efficacy, and Support for Bipartisan Compromise

	Trust Model	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Compromise Model
Never (1)	-0.02	-0.18	-0.15	0.22*
	(0.06)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)
< Once Per Year (2)	0.09^	0.16	0.19*	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Once Per Year (3)	0.14*	0.36*	0.36*	0.23*
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)
A Few Times Per Year (4)	0.23*	0.38*	0.32*	0.21*
	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Once Per Month (5)	0.32*	0.67*	0.55*	0.44*
	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
A few Times Per Month (6)	0.41*	0.71*	0.77*	0.41*
	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Weekly (7)	0.51*	1.14*	1.01*	0.96*
	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Daily (8)	0.59*	1.24*	1.20*	0.67*
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	0.01	0.05^	0.04	-0.12*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Party Strength	0.04*	0.14*	0.12*	-0.07*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.14*	2.72*	3.28*	5.34*
	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.13)
Architect	0.10	0.45*	0.26	0.13
	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Attorney	-0.15^	0.00	0.03	-0.38*
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.16)	0.15
Dentist	-0.12	-0.36^	-0.15	0.37^
	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.19)

Dietitian	-0.12	0.15	0.11	0.10
	(0.13)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Doctor	-0.19*	-0.18	-0.10	-0.22
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.15)
Engineer	0.03	0.26*	0.16	0.20*
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Occupational Therapist	0.02	-0.02	0.23	-0.37
	(0.14)	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.25)
Pharmacist	0.00	-0.07	0.08	-0.26
	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Physical Therapist	-0.06	-0.24	-0.22	0.00
	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Physician Associate	0.09	-0.05	0.00	0.19
	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Psychologist	-0.12	-0.29	-0.29	-0.16
	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Real Estate Agent	-0.15*	-0.10	0.08	0.03
	(0.07)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Registered Nurse	-0.20*	-0.40*	-0.39*	-0.11
	(0.06)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Social Worker	-0.18*	-0.14	-0.08	-0.22*
	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Teacher	-0.12*	-0.13	-0.15^	-0.11
	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Veterinarian	-0.35*	-0.76*	-0.59*	-0.18
	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.19)
N	3,778	3,778	3,778	3,778
Adj. R-Square	0.06	0.09	0.08	0.08

Note: * < 0.05, two-tailed. ^ <0.10, two-tailed. Baseline group is comprised of strong Republicans who are not members of their professional association. Baseline profession is accountant.

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