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PARTISAN POLICYMAKING: RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY IN AN ERA OF POLARIZATION

A Dissertation Presented
by
ZACHARY ALBERT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2019

Department of Political Science

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PARTISAN POLICYMAKING: RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY IN AN ERA OF POLARIZATION

A Dissertation Presented
by
ZACHARY ALBERT

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DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The dissertation process is long and daunting, and even more so without the generosity of colleagues, family, and friends. I was lucky enough to be surrounded by people willing to give their time and encouragement throughout this process. I hope to thank some of them here.

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on the topics of web scraping and network analysis, and the ability to work with him throughout my graduate career instilled in me the importance of rigorous analysis and allowed me to develop the concrete methodological skills used here. Finally, Brenda Bushouse introduced me to the study of the policy process and has been an indispensable source of guidance on this topic. She frequently encouraged me to engage with new literatures and questions, and the project benefited significantly from her involvement.

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on with encouragement as I presented at conferences (most likely for the trips to New Orleans). I am excited and grateful to move forward with you by my side. Her family, especially her parents Jim and Wendy Richard, have also provided support and encouragement throughout, and I am incredibly thankful to them. Finally, my sister Megan and brother Jake, two of my best friends, have been indispensable allies throughout my life. Their humor and kindness helped me through the most frustrating times, and their joke of calling me "doctor" since my first graduate school acceptance letter kept me, ironically, grounded.

ABSTRACT

PARTISAN POLICYMAKING: RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY IN AN ERA OF POLARIZATION

MAY 2019

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Directed by: Professor Raymond J. La Raja

In recent decades, partisan polarization has not only grown but also extended to a wide variety of political processes. Despite this fact, we lack a strong understanding of the *policy process* under conditions of relatively extreme polarization. The roles of interest groups and think tanks in this environment are particularly understudied. How have research producing institutions changed in response to partisan polarization? And which types of organizations are most influential under the current system? Existing theories often lack an appreciation of the role of partisanship and assume relatively unstructured pluralistic competition in the development and debate of public policy. To help rectify this limitation, I view actors in the policy process as part of a system structured mainly by partisan dynamics. This changing "marketplace for ideas" has incentivized some interest groups and think tanks to invest in a single political party to enhance their influence and accomplish their goals. The result is a

policy system defined by two competing *extended party networks*, or loose coalitions of formal party members and outside research institutions. Under such conditions, influence accrues to those organizations that engage in relatively partisan research and advocacy efforts.

In the first empirical chapter, I use interview results to show that members of Congress require information, ideas, and talking points from outside actors. These politicians seek out resources that will help further their individual and partisan goals (which are increasingly distant from the opposing party). This decision-making calculus has downstream effects on research institutions, incentivizing many to become party allies across a range of issue areas. Not all groups have responded this way, though. There still exists a cohort of academic and/or politically moderate organizations that have changed more slowly in response to increased polarization. Problematically, groups that are both partisan (in terms of their preferences and behavior) and political (in terms of their direct advocacy strategies) are growing in number and influence. In the second empirical chapter, I levy a wide range of evidence to show that these "Partisan-Political" groups are designed to produce research that consistently supports a particular ideological or partisan vision. These types of groups also develop reputations as key party allies and thick ties to members from their preferred party. In the final empirical chapter, I use a case study of the debate surrounding cap-and-trade regulations to show that these partisan advocacy strategies pay off, as Partisan-Political groups have significant influence over the discourses of their preferred party. In general, the textual and network analyses in this chapter

demonstrate that ideas and talking points flow mostly along party lines, prohibiting compromise and allowing extended party actors to institutionalize their preferences.

Thus, there is significant evidence for "polarized policymaking", with two relatively distinct extended party networks developing alternative ideas and discourses in policy debates. These findings have implications for the presence and continuation of partisan polarization, the legislative process, and democratic representation.

PREFACE

The initial idea for this project arose during research for an edited book chapter on the role US political parties play in conducting policy analysis. The book was part of a larger series studying policy analysis in a number of countries, and indeed the topic of "party policy analysis" is an important one in nations where the parties have formalized procedures for assessing and developing public policies. It did not take long, however, to realize that American parties do not engage in anything remotely close to this type of rigorous policy analysis. Rather, in the pluralistic American political system, the two main parties are highly reliant on outside actors who perform the intellectual heavy-lifting required for policy development. These policy experts occupy a wide range of institutions, from governmental organizations to universities to interest groups, think tanks, and high-brow media outlets. What is clear from both observation and empirical analysis (e.g. Webb and Kolodny, 2006; Drutman and Teles, 2015), however, is that few (and fewer) experts are in the employ of American political parties. Formal party organizations, in short, have not invested in the incentives and institutions needed to craft responsible public policy.

One could envision a scenario where the separation of *political* parties and *intellectual* experts is a boon to democracy. Indeed, writing in 1861, John Stuart Mill argued that elected representative bodies and the parties that control them are not fit to create and administer public policies. This critique – which might resonate with

observers of the modern American Congress – derives from the facts that, firstly, elected representatives are not selected for their expertise and, secondly, they carry with them biases and predispositions that prohibit objective reasoning. When it comes to understanding and designing laws, Mill wrote, “There is hardly any kind of intellectual work which so much needs to be done, not only by experienced and exercised minds, but by minds trained to the task through long and laborious study” (Mill, 1861, 109). Given a legislature’s unfitness for this task, “its proper province is not to do it, but to take means for having it well done by others.” Mill, in short, wanted legislation to be crafted and administered by qualified, unelected experts.

Early 20th century Progressives echoed this call. The backlash against party machines and patronage politics led to calls for more efficient, rational, and dispassionate administration (March and Olson, 1983). At the same time, a number of prominent think tanks emerged to provide empirical guidance to policymakers (Rich, 2004). Congress, it seemed, was finally delegating responsibility for policymaking to qualified experts. Political science research in the middle-to-late 20th century generally supported this view. In his incredibly influential *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John Kingdon argued that policies result from the intersection of three independent “streams”: problems, solutions, and political will (Kingdon, 1984). While political will relied on parties and politicians, it was widely assumed that solutions (and problem definition, to some extent) were the purview of experts. At any given time, these experts created a “policy primeval soup” of ideas and solutions just waiting for a problem and a political moment to make them possible. Concepts like “iron

triangles" (Adams, 1981), "issue networks" (Heclo, 1978), and "advocacy coalitions" (Sabatier, 1988) all flowed from this model of policymaking.

These inquiries typically focused on the abnormally bipartisan era of the middle 20th century. With Democratic dominance of Congress, it may well have been true that experts peddling policy solutions were simply waiting for the right political moment to advance their ideas, with both parties respecting moderate policies advanced by prominent outside actors. Indeed, Matt Grossmann (2014) finds that policymaking in the 20th century (especially the "uniquely activist period" from 1961 to 1976) was sustained by a stable group of core actors who built coalitions, negotiated compromises, and operated across different governing configurations. This focus on "governing networks" – or the constellation of ties amongst policy entrepreneurs and political actors that lead to policy change – is an important improvement in our understanding of modern policymaking. Still, Grossmann's timeframe provides limited insight into our current polarized era, when party networks are strongly divided and governing networks often seem to follow this same polarized pattern. Today, parties are much more competitive (Lee, 2016), meaning that policy battles often boil down to predefined either/or choices between Democratic and Republican alternatives. Furthermore, the ideological *distance* between the two parties has grown substantially across a range of issues (Layman et al., 2010). What happens when outside experts exist within – and get caught up in – an environment defined first and foremost by partisan polarization?

Existing theories of the policy process have not paid sufficient attention to the ways in which increased partisanship and polarization have changed policymaking.

In ideologically coherent parties, policy problems and solutions are not independent, but rather highly dependent on one another and the goals of the political parties and their allies. Similarly, the political will to implement a particular policy solution is highly contingent on intra-party dynamics, including the preferences of key outside actors. In short, existing theories tend to underemphasize the importance of *power politics* – intertwined with party politics – in structuring the evolution and spread of policy ideas within particular parties. Rather than a "primeval soup" of solutions floating about, policy research and ideas are structured by the main interpretive framework of modern American politics: partisanship.

This fact can be seen in any number of recent, salient policy debates. On minimum wage increases, gun control, and upper class tax cuts, for example, the two parties arrive at the bargaining table – if at all – with entirely contradictory ideas about the efficacy of alternative courses of action. In such debates, the value of moderate, nuanced, or objective research is limited, and certainly less valuable compared to past eras. Research production is not a matter of matching expertise with policy problems, but rather matching political demand for particular actions with the supply of expert ideas and information (and vice versa). In short, modern members of Congress are *demanders* of information that supports their partisan goals. Recent scholarship brings us closer to an understanding of policymaking under such conditions. Frances Lee's (2016) important work has shown that parties seek ideas and take actions that make them distinctive from their opponents, thereby granting them a competitive advantage in elections. In the process, Bawn et al.'s (2012) theory of extended party networks (EPN's) suggests, parties seek to pass policies that benefit their supporters,

including interest groups, think tanks, party activists, and partisan media outlets. (Surprisingly, given that EPN theory emphasizes the importance of outside groups as *policy demanders*, to date I have been unable to find any systematic analysis of the impact these groups have outside elections.)

Surely the realities of growing partisan polarization and teamsmanship – not to mention the increasingly competitive universe of outside experts – has changed how outside research producing organizations operate, the emergence of new groups, and the success they enjoy in the policy process. Dan Drezner's (2017) recent work on *The Ideas Industry* highlights some of these dynamics. He focuses, in part, on how political polarization and ideologically-driven think tanks have led to the advent of "thought leaders", or individuals who spread a "big idea" to wide audiences. His focus on individuals, though, largely brackets the fact that the main drivers of ideas are the stable institutions that engage in policy advocacy across a range of issues. These are the actors that are processing big ideas, conducting policy research and advocacy, and spreading them throughout their partisan networks. As I note throughout this work, however, engaging with the party system (or, more accurately, a single political party) is not the only option available to outside groups. Progressive-style research institutions still exist, with influential groups like the Brookings Institution continuing to occupy prominent positions in the hierarchy of research production. What has changed is that such groups cannot ignore the reality of partisan polarization and the ways it has changed the production of policy research, with increasing prominence accruing to organizations that use partisan polarization to their competitive advantage.

Thus, while recent research has started to triangulate an answer to the question of how partisan polarization has impacted the production and spread of research by outside actors, no systematic study has comprehensively addressed this topic. We still need to investigate how partisan polarization might provide structure in the policymaking process, even as it makes the actual passage of policy more difficult. In short, we need a theory of how party actors relate to outside research-producing institutions in the modern era. This is the main task of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

POLICY RESEARCH IN A POLARIZED ERA

The story of modern American politics is one of political disagreement. The two parties – and their supporters, to a growing degree – are completely at odds across a wide range of issues. These disputes are not simply matters of philosophical differences, though they tend to be couched in such terms. Oftentimes, the two parties wage policy battle using entirely different and ostensibly rational facts, information, and research. On the topic of the Affordable Care Act, for instance, Democratic lawmakers assured citizens that the healthcare reform bill would lower insurance costs, increase coverage, and improve the overall insurance marketplace. Republican politicians, on the other hand, were certain that the bill would raise costs and amount to an inefficient government takeover of the healthcare system. Politicians from both parties pointed to empirical "proof" of their viewpoints. Similar dynamics define most prominent legislative attempts since at least the 2000's, including Democratic efforts to introduce cap-and-trade environmental regulations, raise the minimum wage, and institute stricter gun control measures, and Republican attempts to lower taxes on the rich and build a border wall along the Mexican border.

The fact that these debates saw the two parties "talking past" one another (while referencing empirical research with very different conclusions) suggests that *the process* of modern policymaking might be subject to the same polarizing forces that

have affected other aspects of American politics. More specifically, it seems that the two parties operate within distinct informational environments, precluding compromise even before official legislative action is taken. Indeed, the number of research producing institutions with fairly overt partisan preferences has grown substantially over time. These include think tanks (like the Heritage Foundation or the Center for American Progress) as well as interest groups (like the National Rifle Association or Emily's List) who oftentimes produce policy research that supports the political goals of a particular party. Given the recent hollowing out of the political middle, these organizations rightly perceive strong incentives to work through a single political party to accomplish their mutual objectives. In other words, it seems that polarization has impacted not only the broader policymaking process, but also the actual processes of research production and advocacy.

At the same time, prominent organizations in the Progressive mold – groups that value objectivity and appear uninvolved in power politics – can still be found in the modern era. The Brookings Institution is a well-known example. Even though Brookings is perceived by many as "left-leaning", most observers consider their research to be far less political and partisan than the products created by certain newer organizations. Thus, while the impact of partisan polarization on politicians has been fairly pervasive, it seems that its impact on outside research producing organizations has been uneven. This realization raises a host of questions about the role of such institutions in the modern era, the translation of outside research in the political process, and the differential responses to increased polarization. How have research producing institutions reacted in the face of increased partisan polarization? What research and

advocacy strategies are most successful in the modern era? And do those who engage with the polarized partisan system enjoy greater policy influence?

These are important questions for reformers concerned with growing Congressional gridlock, partisan animosity, and biased public policy. Parties do not produce and advocate particular policies in isolation, but rather are highly reliant on outside groups who provide ideas, research, and talking points to support particular courses of action. Still, politicians set the parameters within which outside organizations produce and disseminate policy ideas. If politicians are in the "driver's seat" but lack directions, then outside research organizations can be thought of as the "co-pilots" providing road maps to guide them to their mutual destination.

With highly polarized parties, politicians incentivize research that supports particular polarized views, raising concerns that *partisanship* has replaced *credibility* in determining which ideas are drawn on in policy debates. This fact implies that the quality of policy research and policy designs has declined over time, with important implications for the long term viability of key public policies. Furthermore, if many research producing organizations exist to advance rather than resist partisan polarization, it seems unlikely that the intensity of policy debates will subside in the near term. As these organizations promote particular partisan visions, they may be able to move public policy in particular directions that reflect their narrow or ideological interests, perhaps at the expense of the average citizen.

Despite the importance of this topic for questions of policymaking, polarization, and systemic bias, extant scholarship has not adequately addressed the impact of partisan polarization on public policymaking. Scholars studying the policy process,

for example, tend to underestimate the importance of *power politics* in structuring the development and acceptance of particular policy solutions. Scholars of American politics, similarly, have framed policymaking in terms of pluralistic competition and compromise, failing to understand how increased polarization hardens policy battle lines and often precludes compromise. By and large, then, we lack an understanding of policy research, advocacy, and development under conditions of extreme partisan polarization.

This dissertation hopes to rectify these limitations. It understands members of Congress as *demanders* of policy information and outside groups as *suppliers* of these resources. These formal party members do not demand information of the highest quality, but rather information that supports their partisan goals. Many interest groups and think tanks have recognized this fact and produce research and ideas that mainly align with the goals of a single political party. This is not, however, always a case of calculated strategy. As the ideological distance between the two parties grows, the increasingly clear choices they provide mean that the independent goals of certain outside groups fit most naturally within a single party. Thus, much like citizens, it seems that outside research producing organizations have both *polarized* and *sorted* into the appropriate polarized party. A key difference is that groups that have actually become more partisan also tend to engage in *advocacy strategies* that help further their policy ideas and political goals.

In the aggregate, the polarization of key outside groups results in what appear to be two competing partisan networks of formal party members, think tanks, interest groups, and the party activists who peddle their ideas. These *extended party networks*

share overlapping goals and coordinate their efforts to accomplish them (Bawn et al., 2012). And, importantly, policy research and ideas developed and spread throughout these networks are often influential, as they have the support of a range of party actors. Thus, *the groups producing and advocating ideas within these partisan networks are in a privileged position to influence public policy debates.* By playing the game of partisan politics, they increase the odds that their ideas are drawn upon by their preferred party.

It is easy to see how such an arrangement could prohibit compromise. Especially on highly salient issues, members of the two parties are often enmeshed in very different informational environments. They receive signals that frame ideas and findings in different and sometimes contradictory ways. It is important, though, to not overstate the prevalence of partisanship amongst outside research organizations. Prominent organizations still engage in what could be described as "academic" and politically disengaged research production, and these organizations – including the Brookings Institution, RAND Corporation, and Urban Institute – still have reputations, perhaps somewhat diminished, as key players in federal policymaking. Unfortunately, the number and prominence of groups outside this academic mold has increased in recent decades. In other words, groups today are, on average, more partisan and more political. This general trend is certainly worrying, but the continued viability of groups like Brookings mean that there is hope that policymaking can be improved. The first step in this endeavor is to understand how groups have reacted in the face of increased polarization and how these decisions impact the broader policymaking process.

1.1 Beyond Garbage Cans and Unstructured Competition

Our current understanding of Congressional policymaking is largely informed by two literatures with, until recently, little overlap. First, scholars studying the full *policy process* draw attention to the range of actors – inside and outside government – who impact policymaking. Many of the theories in this mold assume that political actors are boundedly rational, with limited attention and information, who must adopt information processing strategies to focus their attention. These are important insights that I borrow from in the next chapter. Beyond their shared focus on bounded rationality, policy process theories also tend to draw on Cohen, March and Olsen's (1972) *garbage can model* of choice, which says that various policy problems and solutions are "dumped" into the garbage can as they are generated by participants. Decisions are then made, when they are called for, by selecting amongst the various alternatives available at the time.

Kingdon (1984) provides perhaps the most prominent extension of this model to the policy process in his *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies.* In this work, Kingdon argues that policy change occurs when three independent streams – problems, solutions, and politics – are coupled at key moments by policy entrepreneurs. In this view, problems are identified and solutions are developed in relative isolation, with policy action potentially occurring when political conditions are ripe for change. The strongest parallel between this research and Kingdon's model occurs in the solutions stream. Kingdon describes available solutions as a chaotic mass of choices – a "policy primeval soup" – that evolves over time through the natural selection of policy ideas. These ideas are developed – mostly outside of government – without

much thought given to the types of problems that would captivate the public and lead to calls for a solution, and without much concern for the political will to implement them. Only when a "policy window" is opened do these three streams join together and (potentially) lead to policy change.

This framework seems far too unstructured to make sense of modern policymaking, when political ideologies and partisanship carry far greater weight in decision-making. Most simply, problems and solutions are not now – if they ever have been – developed in isolation from one another (Zahariadis, 2014). Specific ideologies and partisan affiliations foreclose certain solutions from serious consideration, and the definition of problems themselves might stem from the desire for specific solutions. As I outline below, many research producing organizations are *policy demanders*, not problem identifiers, and they work to promote problem definitions and frames that support their particular solutions. And, both problem definition and the development of solutions are conditioned by political dynamics. Parties determine which ideas are accepted, and – given the ideological coherence that accompanies increased polarization – the criteria for these decisions are potentially more public than they have ever been. Thus, researchers working on policy solutions might have political and especially *partisan* dynamics at the front of their minds. Though they operate in the realm of ideas, their impact is contingent upon dynamics of *power politics* outside their control, providing some external and partisan structure to research production.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) adds some of this structure in its account of policy change. Importantly, the ACF adopts a longer-term perspective and focuses less on the type of chance alignments that Kingdon emphasizes. In

this framework, policymaking is a *contentious* process with purposive actors forming coalitions, outside of formal political institutions, that advocate for policy change in geographically and substantively defined "policy subsystems" (Pierce and Weible, 2016). Most often, ACF scholars attempt to map out the various stakeholders in an issue area and the connections amongst them, typically using surveys of policy actors (e.g. Elgin and Weible, 2013; Pierce, 2016; Weible and Heikkila, 2016). This research typically focuses on policy outcomes as a result of coalition formation, strength, and framing.

One of the main findings in this literature is that coalitions form based on shared "belief systems" and "coordinate their behavior... partly in response to a shared threat" (Pierce and Weible, 2016, 22). While ACF scholars tend to focus on shared threats to policy regimes, it seems increasingly likely that coalitions form on the basis of shared *partisan* belief systems and in response to the common threat posed by the opposing party's policy platform. Indeed, the ACF concept of the "devil shift" – whereby actors tend to exaggerate the power and maliciousness of their political opponents (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014) – will sound familiar to scholars of affective polarization (e.g. Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012). Still, the ACF would benefit from a more explicit consideration of the ways in which political parties and partisanship structure coalition formation, behavior, and influence.[1]

[1] In one of the only direct tests of these dynamics, Henry (2011) finds that shared ideology is the primary driver behind policy subsystem collaboration. He shows that, in regional planning subsystems in California, policy elites largely form ties with those with similar ideologies and avoid forming connections with actors who hold opposing beliefs.

The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) takes steps in this direction. Drawing on E.E. Schattschneider's (1960) notion of parties as the vehicles through which social conflict is organized, PET assumes that societal battles over "policy images" can expand the scope of conflicts, draw in new actors, and possibly result in policy change (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). PET scholars argue that policy regimes are typically defined by a structurally-induced equilibrium supported by institutions designed to privilege certain approaches to policy problems. These "policy monopolies" can stay in place for decades, especially if the "winners" under this system are able to restrict agenda access. This equilibrium, however, can be disrupted when other actors – the "losers" under the current regime – are able to change policy images and shop their ideas in alternative institutional venues, disrupting the underlying policy monopoly.

Oftentimes this venue shopping involves attracting the attention and support of one of the two parties, but political parties are only one of many institutional options available within the PET framework. I argue here that political parties are *essential* actors in the policy process, providing the main structure within which policy debates and change occur. Indeed, in a study of Belgian policymaking, Walgrave and Varone (2008) find that image and venue change are important predictors of policy change, but also that *political parties* are the actors responsible for determining whether or not this change occurs. Few other PET theorists have adopted this approach to policy change.

Much like the ACF, then, PET does not do enough to incorporate political parties – especially polarized ones – in the policy process. Given increased polarization, policy images are not only frequently contested but also increasingly uniform within

each party. These images might be said to comprise a "belief system", though PET does not use such language. Importantly, greater ideological coherence within the two parties means that altered policy images and venue shopping might not be sufficient for policy change if there has not been a change in the composition of government. Even if the out-party (including its extended network) is able to mobilize new supporters through innovative framing of an issue, they are left with few institutional options for policy change if the majority party opposes these ideas. Rather, their best hope is to win the next election and take control of government (Lee, 2016), at which point they are likely to draw on the ideas and images advocated by affiliated groups. Furthermore, when policy images are contested within each partisan network it is true that outside groups often lead these battles, but these same groups are responding to incentives and constraints provided by formal party members. In terms of both aggregate policy change and particular issue images, then, it seems that increased polarization provides *partisan-induced equilibrium* in the policy process.

In sum, existing policy process theories are, to varying degrees, apolitical or at least apartisan in their approach to policy change. They often lack a grounded understanding of raw power politics and the role of information in such an environment. In this dissertation I argue that the two major parties provide the main structure within which policy research is conducted, change is advocated, and legislation is voted on. In the aggregate, the effect of this increasingly partisan structure is a policy system in which outside research producing organizations often align quite strongly with a single party across issues and time. Some of these groups advocate their ideological visions across many separate issues areas – a fact policy process theorists have been

slow to recognize[2] – and as such are essential actors in the two extended party networks. This state of affairs does not describe all research producing organizations in the modern era. Still, it seems that an increasing number of actors have reacted to the realities of partisan polarization and competition by becoming, for all intents and purposes, an extension of their preferred party in the policy process.

1.2 From Pluralism to Structured Party Warfare

While policy process theorists have generally under-emphasized the *political* side of policymaking, theories deriving from the American politics tradition have been acutely aware of how competition and power drive policy outcomes. Indeed, in the early days of the nation James Madison (1787) advocated institutional arrangements that would result in numerous competing factions so that "ambition [could] be made to counteract ambition." Mid-20th century scholarship on this topic generally found that pluralism – the participation of many groups, representing competing interests, in political processes – was a beneficial hallmark of American democracy (e.g. Truman, 1951; Dahl, 1961). Multiple streams theorists, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and the theory of Punctuated Equilibrium all draw, to varying degrees, on this notion of pluralistic competition in the policy process.

Critics were quick to point out, however, that the universe of interest groups and policy activists was (at best) a distorted image of broader American society. Instead,

[2]Many policy process scholars utilize substantively-defined policy subsystems as their unit of analysis, and as such much of this work focuses on single-issue case studies to understand policymaking dynamics. In this dissertation I take a broader approach, focusing on how actors and ideas predictably interact, based on partisanship, across issue areas (though I do use a case study as one part of this analysis).

they argued that interest groups and public policies were biased towards corporate interests and professional associations (e.g. Schattschneider, 1960; Lowi, 1979). E.E. Schattschneider (1960, 35), for example, wrote that "the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent." More recent empirical evaluations have generally supported this notion of *biased pluralism*, with public policy responding to the preferences of economic elites and organized business interests rather than average citizens and even mass-based interest groups (Gilens and Page, 2014). Still, public policies were said to represent compromise and bargaining amongst this biased group of actors. In a slightly different formulation, Matt Grossmann (2012) argues that the political advocacy sector is defined by *behavioral pluralism* – where the most politically active citizens are best represented by interest groups – and *institutionalized pluralism* – where certain groups become the "taken for granted... surrogates for public groups and perspectives" in policy debates (8).

These theories add somewhat more structure to policy competition – conflict occurs between elites and average citizens, or amongst various insiders representing different constituencies. Still, much like the policy process theories discussed above, even concepts of biased or institutionalized pluralism understate the importance of political parties. To give just one example, in later work Matt Grossmann (2014) draws on his theories of behavioral and institutionalized pluralism to argue that policy outcomes are the result of fairly stable "governing networks", or arrangements amongst "policymakers and activists, the artists of the possible" (6–8). Importantly, these configurations often arise independent of changes in government, include a relatively diverse set of actors, and typically result in bipartisan compromise. However,

Grossmann studies an era of unusual bipartisanship (1945 to 2004), and a contemporary observer can point to numerous examples of major policies – the Affordable Care Act or the 2018 tax cuts are but two – that were entirely partisan affairs that resulted from a change in control of government. On issues like these, increasing partisan polarization results in significant partisan competition, and even less salient issues often lead to partisanship based in "teamsmanship" rather than actual ideological disagreement (Lee, 2009).

Part of the reason that pluralistic theories are ill-equipped to explain polarized policy processes is because they tend to view political parties as endogenous institutions created to benefit the politicians in them (Schattschneider, 1942; Downs, 1957; Aldrich, 1995). In this candidate-centered view of parties, the main objective is to win elections and control government. As such, parties are thought to "formulate policies in order to win elections rather than win elections in order to formulate policies" (Downs, 1957, 28). Thus, parties lack principled platforms and instead identify policies to pursue based on their perceived electoral value (Schlesinger, 1984). Under such conditions, parties are thought to converge on the preferences of the median voter (Downs, 1957) and, as such, are far more open to bargaining and compromise when crafting public policy. Outside groups can take advantage of this calculus by themselves bargaining, collaborating, and compromising to achieve their desired ends, with some form of biased or institutionalized pluralism as the result.

The concept of relatively unprincipled parties fits uneasily with modern polarization. It is for this reason that scholars have begun to revive elements of party theory that view political parties as *coalitions* of formal members and outside groups who,

importantly, seek *specific public policy outcomes*. If we view parties not as endogenous and candidate-centered but rather as networks of interests or *group-centered*, we must also adjust our assumptions about pluralism in the modern era. Rather than multiple interests 'cancelling out' the potentially undue influence of others, many groups now align with a single political party and structure their advocacy and influence efforts along party lines (e.g. Sinclair, 2006). Thus, battles outside government might come to resemble the types of polarized and partisan disagreements we see in Congress. This is because, as the parties drift further and further apart, many outside actors see a single party as their best bet for accomplishing the policy ends they seek. The National Rifle Association, Chamber of Commerce, and Susan B. Anthony List, for example, all work (mostly) through the Republican Party to accomplish their diverse goals, resulting in a loose network of actors with overlapping of at least non-contradictory policy preferences. In this way, political parties provide structure, across a range of issues, to the otherwise unstructured pluralism that might define policy research and advocacy.

1.3 A Theory of Party Policy Networks

The critique of pluralist theory outlined above stems in part from the relatively new theory of *extended party networks (EPNs)*. EPN theory diverges from candidate-centered accounts of political parties by focusing instead on the coalitions of policy demanding groups that make up each party. Thus, in the EPN framework parties are viewed as networks of formal party actors (e.g. members of Congress and formal party organizations) connected to ideologically affiliated interest groups, think tanks,

media outlets, and political activists (Bawn et al., 2012). The informal groups within the EPN seek policy outcomes that benefit their members or their ideological base, and they find that banding together with like-minded groups and investing in a single party over time increases their policy returns in the long run.

Most EPN scholarship has focused on the efforts of extended party groups in elections, particularly nominating contests. Recent studies have shown that partisan coalitions work to screen and nominate candidates that are acceptable to the EPN and who will help implement a mutually supported agenda once in office (e.g. Cohen et al., 2008). Because primaries have relatively low rates of participation (Hirano et al., 2010), these networks have been able to exert considerable control over party nominations (Masket, 2009) and even general election outcomes (Dominguez, 2011; Desmarais, La Raja and Kowal, 2015). And because there exists an "electoral blind spot", or a "policy region over which aggregate electorates do not enforce their preferences" (Bawn et al., 2012, 577), these networks are also said to have considerable control over party policy decisions. In fact, the core network of group supporters is likely more influential than the average citizen and even the average party supporter in determining the direction of the two parties. Nevertheless, despite EPN theory's emphasis on outside groups as *policy demanders*, I have been unable to find any research on how these groups influence policy outcomes outside of elections and whether or not these efforts are successful.

Conceiving of parties in the policy process as extended networks is a valuable framework, as it accounts for the fact that outside groups must operate within a political environment defined by partisan polarization. On the one hand, outside group

activity can be considered a *cause* of this polarization, as their non-representative policy demands and candidate screening efforts push the parties further away from the median voter. On the other hand, more moderate groups have had to adjust their tactics to fit with contemporary political conditions. Even groups that might have been described as bipartisan access-seekers in past decades – the Chamber of Commerce or AARP, for example – have increasingly aligned with a single party on major policy issues. This is because the polarization of the two parties across a range of policy issues has increasingly presented a black and white choice for groups choosing allies to further their policy goals (Sinclair, 2006).

The effect of this polarization should be the creation of a policy system in which stable partisan loyalties and demonstrated commitments are an important prerequisite for policy influence. This is because politicians – and policy researchers, to a lesser extent – are time-constrained actors who face an oversupply of information and must prioritize these inputs (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Much in the way that voters use heuristics to make decisions based on limited information, members of Congress must also find informational shortcuts to manage this oversupply. This does not mean that members seek out the most accurate information, but rather the most *useful* information in terms of furthering their individual and partisan goals. In an era of extreme partisan competition and polarization, one likely heuristic members might use to identify useful information is the 'partisan fit' of the group providing it, or the degree to which the group is invested in the success of the member's party. Thus, groups that have consistently provided a party with useful information in the past might be in a privileged position to provide information as new issues arise.

From the policy researcher's perspective, then, formal party members seem to demand information and ideas that support their partisan goals. This fact should have downstream effects on the supply of policy research – the groups producing this research recognize that, due to polarization, not only do their own preferences align more strongly with a single party, but the actors within that party will be more likely to accept their ideas if they consistently support their mutual goals. Thus, partisan polarization has altered the entire marketplace for policy research. I discuss these dynamics in greater detail in Chapter 2.

As I note throughout the following chapters, however, groups have responded differently to this changing marketplace for ideas. This appears to be due to two competing incentives that research producing organizations face: a norm of scholarly credibility and a desire to be influential (and thus partisan) in modern policy debates. These two incentives combine in unique ways at different organizations, resulting in four ideal type organizations. At one extreme, some groups can be described as Moderate-Academic – they adhere to fairly rigorous scholarly norms and do not seek to directly influence political outcomes. At the other extreme, however, are Partisan-Political organizations, or groups that have quite clear partisan preferences and engage in direct advocacy efforts to advance them. Between these two extremes are Moderate-Political groups (i.e. access-seeking interest groups) and Partisan-Academic organizations (i.e. fairly disciplined research institutes with preexisting ideological viewpoints). Importantly, Partisan-Political groups should be most influential in the modern era, as they not only fulfill the needs of party members, but have also invested significantly in direct political advocacy. In a town where "thick"

social ties are important, Partisan-Political groups have invested in developing these connections in a variety of ways. I explore these organizational characteristics in greater detail in Chapter 3.

A policy system defined by EPN dynamics, then, would be one in which the two major parties draw on relatively distinct ideas and discourses developed by long-term allies. Cognizant of this fact, many outside groups are likely to produce research with party elites in mind, collaborate with other co-partisan organizations, and develop ideas and talking points that support mutual partisan goals. Due to the realities of modern politics, influence should accrue to those groups that engage with the party system in this way.

1.4 Studying Policy Research and Advocacy

This theory is inherently difficult to test. Groups and politicians are rarely transparent about their true motives and decision-making processes. Connections between policy actors are often informal and fleeting. And the notion of "influence" over policy discourse and design is difficult to observe, with influence sometimes overt and other times quite opaque. For these reasons, I take an expansive approach to the study of policy research and public policymaking. I focus on a wide range of actors that produce or disseminate original research, including interest groups and think tanks from several issue areas and various ideological backgrounds. At times I engage in an in-depth exploration of prominent organizations, but I also take a systematic approach that focuses on groups of varying notoriety. I employ a number of different methods to triangulate answers to my research questions, including interviews,

case studies, textual analysis, and network analysis. I discuss these methodological decisions in the following sections.

1.4.1 The Main Players

This is a study of policy researchers and research institutions, their reactions to increased polarization, and their impact on public policy in the modern era. It is also a story, though, of political parties and changing policymaking dynamics within Congress. Thus, the sample of actors studied here includes not only research producing institutions – namely interest groups and think tanks – but also politicians and party leaders. Together, these actors might comprise the *policy research* arm of the extended party network.[3]

To systematically define this sample – and thereby avoid biasing the findings of this study – I rely on existing lists of well-known and active interest groups and think tanks. For interest groups, I turn to Project Vote Smart's *National Special Interest Groups* database, which lists all organizations that publish issue positions or endorse candidates during elections. This selection criterion provides an initial indication that these groups are active in the political process beyond simply donating to candidates. For think tanks, I use the University of Pennsylvania Think Tank and Civil Societies Program's annual *Think Tank Index Reports* to identify influential American think

[3] The extended party network framework outlined by Bawn et al. (2012) does include additional actors as members of the two EPNs, with partisan media outlets and party activists notably absent from this study. I choose here to focus on organizations and actors that would potentially be involved in actual policy research and design, bracketing the admittedly important role that media and activists play in spreading these ideas once they are developed. For theoretical and methodological simplicity I also exclude universities and academics from the sample, unless they are publishing through an interest group or think tank (including university-affiliated think tanks).

tanks. These reports rank think tanks according to 28 criteria measured by international surveys of roughly 7,500 scholars, public and private donors, policymakers, and journalists. I include all groups that are listed amongst the most influential American think tanks in these reports from 2008 to 2014. For both interest groups and think tanks, I exclude any organizations that focus primarily on international or foreign policy issues, limiting attention to domestic policy research institutions. The full sample – and more detail on the sampling process – can be found in Appendix A.

I study this sample in two distinct ways. First, I analyze prominent organizations that receive frequent media attention, high levels of institutional funding, and repeated mentions amongst my interview subjects. These groups are likely the dominant players in policy debates, and their dynamics provide insight into broader trends in the policymaking process. In the next two chapters, I study these prominent groups in detail to identify ideal type organizations, highlight divergent trends in how they have reacted to polarization, and develop hypotheses about the influence of different organizational types. In the final chapter, I take a more expansive approach to the study of research producing institutions, examining the policy discourse of the full sample of groups to understand how influence operates within partisan networks.

Because this is a study of *partisan polarization* and its impact on research producing organizations, it is important to accurately operationalize the ideology and partisanship of these outside groups. Unlike politicians, the partisan preferences of outside groups are difficult to pin down. First, think tanks are required by law to be non-partisan actors, in name if not in practice. This does not mean that these groups lack partisan preferences, but only that they are not upfront about them. Second,

partisanship is a relative term in the world of think tanks and interest groups. While it is true that certain groups align with a single party on most issues, there are few groups that agree with the same party across every political issue. Even the Heritage Foundation, for instance, has been critical of President Trump's approach to trade policy while supporting most other aspects of his agenda.

For these reasons, I rely on a number of indicators to triangulate the ideology and policy positions – as a proxy for partisanship – of particular organizations. First, when possible, I rely on Project Vote Smart's categorization of interest groups into ideological clusters. For those without ideological classifications, I examine groups' campaign contributions in Federal Election Commission (FEC) records, classifying groups that consistently contribute more than 60 percent of their funds to candidates from a single party as informal members of that party (and all others as centrists). Finally, for groups without data on campaign contributions, I examine group mission statements and assess their ideological content. I also examine mission statements to determine the ideology of think tanks. More information on this coding can be found in Appendix A.

I classify groups with Republican preferences or conservative ideologies as Republican affiliates, those with Democratic or liberal preferences as Democratic affiliates, and all others as centrists or non-partisan organizations. I mostly use these terms interchangeably, though ideological language (i.e. liberal, conservative, and moderate) suggests that group preferences generally *align* with the corresponding party, while partisan terms (i.e. Democrat, Republican, centrist) suggest a more explicit preference for a particular party. Operationalizing partisan preference in this way brings

us closer to an EPN definition of partisanship, where actors are considered to be embedded within the same party if they have overlapping or non-contradictory goals and they typically work through the same party to accomplish them. In a highly polarized era, groups with conservative (liberal) policy preferences are likely to find that the Republican (Democratic) Party is often their best avenue for policy success, leading them to frequently align with that party across a range of issues.

1.4.2 Data and Methods

I rely on a range of data sources and methodological approaches to study how these organizations have reacted to and operated under polarized politics. Each source and approach helps illuminate particular aspects of group behavior and influence, though no single perspective highlights the full range of trends examined here. These analyses focus on both *micro* and *macro* dynamics, providing insights into individual and organizational decision-making as well as broader trends that define research production in the modern era.

First, to study the incentives and constraints faced by groups, their internal decision-making processes and behaviors, and their reaction to partisan polarization, I rely on interviews with policy researchers and institutional managers. These interviews provide an insider's view of research production in the modern era – a view that is otherwise difficult to obtain. Between June and July of 2017 I interviewed fourteen actors involved in research production in Washington, D.C. (see Appendix B for more detail). These subjects were employed at a variety of institutions – in terms of prominence, ideology, partisanship, and issue focus – and in a variety of roles, in-

cluding policy researchers, research directors, and executive officers. Many subjects had lengthy experience producing research, and five had been previously employed at at least one other research institution. These actors in particular were able to provide insight into organizational differences that impact research production in the modern era.

Because the worldview of interview subjects might be limited by their own experiences – and because they tended to paint a rather positive picture of their own research production – I also attempt to validate these findings with a variety of publicly available data sources. For example, I utilize 990 tax documents to understand how groups are financed and which activities they prioritize. I also use groups' annual reports to understand how they position themselves within the broader research world and which topics and activities they emphasize. And, to study whether groups engage in conversations with ideologically diverse actors, I use publicized lists of event participants at key organizations. Taken together, these data sources provide crucial insights into the incentives, behaviors, and decisions of interest groups and think tanks under conditions of heightened partisan polarization.

For the most part, the data sources and analyses described above focus on micro-level decisions and dynamics. To gain a more systematic understanding of relationships and influence in the policy process, however, I also employ textual and network analysis techniques to study the influence of organizations over the policy discourse of other groups and members of Congress. With the help of undergraduate research assistants, I have collected a large corpus of "policy statements" made by interest groups, think tanks, and members of Congress on the topic of cap-and-trade envi-

ronmental regulations. This case – which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4 – was chosen because it is difficult to interpret with existing theories and frameworks. The final cap-and-trade policy design represented a relatively moderate proposal that would conceivably attract bipartisan support. Nevertheless, the discourse and votes on this issue were quite partisan. What explains the presence and continuation of polarization on this issue? I attempt to answer this question by tracking the spread of policy discourse across actors, identifying persistent informational pathways amongst outside groups and between these organizations and formal party members. I assess whether common partisan commitments condition the spread of ideas and qualitatively analyze policy narratives to ground this analysis in real-world debates. I also focus on the influence of Partisan-Political groups relative to more moderate or academic organizations to test the theory that partisan groups gain special prominence in modern policy debates.

Taken together, these analyses provide a nuanced view of the different ways in which research producing organizations have responded to increased partisan polarization. By focusing on both the micro-level, internal decision-making processes of individual groups and the aggregate effects of these decisions on policy debates, I hope to paint a comprehensive picture of policymaking in a polarized era.

1.5 Research and Influence in the Modern Era

The results from these analyses provide reason for both hope and pessimism for reformers fed up with the state of contemporary policymaking. In the next chapter, I explore the changing marketplace for policy ideas and find that members of Congress

face an informational paradox: despite a tremendous increase in the amount of available policy information, members lack the resources and desire to process it. For this reason, they use simplifying heuristics – namely, the degree to which inputs (and the groups providing them) align with their partisan goals – to sort through the mass of policy information. In this way, the *demand* for policy research has changed over time, with members increasingly likely to accept ideas that support their party's goals *even if* it is of lower quality than alternative ideas.

The consequences of this changing marketplace for information are nuanced. In general, all research producing organizations have sought to remain (or become) relevant by improving their "public face" amongst policymakers and average citizens. When it comes to research production and political advocacy, however, groups have responded quite differently. In the next chapter I develop a typology of research producing organizations and show that some have embraced a more aggressive advocacy style of research production and dissemination, while others have resisted (to a greater degree) these tendencies and still pursue what could be called a Progressive style of research production. In Chapter 3, I explore how these differential responses to polarization lead to (or are reflective of) particular internal organizational decisions. I show that the most partisan and activist organizations have internal decision-making processes that lead to greater institutional oversight, more coherent communications, and fewer ties with opposing organizations. As a result, these types of organizations tend to produce research that consistently supports a particular ideological or partisan perspective, potentially granting them greater influence over the policy process.

Indeed, in Chapter 4 I find that common partisan commitments are important predictors of the diffusion of policy ideas and discourse from one actor to another. Using textual and network analysis techniques, I create a diffusion network that identifies persistent informational pathways between actors. While there are bipartisan informational ties in this network, membership in the same EPN explains many of the ties that form, suggesting that groups who invest in a single political party over time are best able to influence members of their preferred party. Furthermore, the most influential groups within these party networks tend to be Partisan-Political or, to a lesser degree, Partisan-Academic in their approach to policy research and advocacy. Thus, it seems that influence does accrue to actors who engage with the modern system of politics, defined first and foremost by partisan polarization. Importantly, the aggregate effect of this discursive influence is the development of two competing but internally consistent partisan narratives about the issue of cap-and-trade. As a result, members of Congress were "talking past" one another in these debates.

Taken together, the findings presented here indicate profound limitations and biases in the modern policy process. They speak to several important topics in American politics, including partisan polarization, institutionalized bias, policy outcomes, and democratic representation. First, the results suggest that the *process* of policy research and development – just as much as roll call voting – is subject to partisan polarization. As members of the two parties receive divergent ideas and information, it is no wonder that they struggle to find common ground. Formal party members, though, are not passive players in this game – they have encouraged the development of partisan policy ideas to further their goals. The outside groups that have recog-

nized and taken advantage of this fact gain special prominence in the modern policy process. They have, on the basis of party lines, become institutionalized actors in the development of party policy. To the degree that these extended party actors are unrepresentative of the broader public (and there is reason to believe they are), yet another form of bias has been introduced to American democracy.

Because of this polarization and bias, the policy process has been subjected to greater gridlock. When policy does pass, it is typically supported by a partisan coalition and subject to assault when control of government changes. Republican attempts to overturn the Affordable Care Act are perhaps the best example of this fact. Furthermore, as policy ideas are increasingly developed with partisanship rather than accuracy in mind, the informational basis for public policy is degraded. As a result, the policies that are enacted might be ill-informed and poorly designed, though I do not investigate this here. Taken together, these three developments – increased polarization, institutional bias, and poorly designed policy – suggest that outside groups and formal party members have short-circuited represented democracy in America. When outside actors are able to institutionalize their preferences through their research and advocacy efforts, the preferences of the average voter are, to some degree, circumvented.

On the more hopeful side, however, is the fact that prominent think tanks in the Progressive mold still exist and are, for the most part, surviving the onslaught of more partisan and political research organizations. It is true that the balance of power has shifted towards the latter type, but these trends result from rational responses to a changing marketplace reflecting (and contributing to) increased partisan

polarization. This means that they can be reversed. As I discuss in the concluding chapter, one answer to the problem of polarized policymaking would be to increase the capacity of Congressional staff and institutions to address policy problems. This would most likely decrease members' reliance on outside research institutions, but it would probably not alter their decision-making when it comes to the acceptance and utilization of research itself. Perhaps a better answer would be to provide incentives – in the style of certain European democracies – that privilege the work of academic organizations and encourage members of Congress to draw on this information. I discuss some of these reforms in the final chapter.

Regardless of the solution, it is clear that there is a problem with the way policy is created. A variety of developments have led to a system in which motivated research is not only accepted but actually incentivized, and ideologically extreme or narrowly focused organizations have been eager to take advantage of these developments. Scholars and reformers need a better understanding of these trends if they hope to reverse the tide of polarized policymaking.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLVING MARKETPLACE FOR IDEAS

> *"Barack Obama signaled the kind of change liberals had in mind... It was change, indeed. But not the kind of change most Americans wanted. Predictably, it triggered a massive backlash."* (Heritage Foundation 2009 Annual Report)

> *"By the time we closed the book on 2017, the Trump administration had embraced 64 percent of our 321 recommendations. Congress embraced many reforms too... And once again, Washington observers referred to Heritage as 'the president's think tank'"* (Heritage Foundation 2017 Annual Report)

Following the elections of Barack Obama and Donald Trump to the American presidency, the Heritage Foundation's annual reports summarized their respective first years in office quite differently. In 2009, the prominent conservative think tank quite clearly sided with the opposition to President Obama's push for "change", while in 2017 the organization proudly advertised its influence over President Trump's agenda and its triumphant return as "the president's think tank." What had changed so dramatically in just eight years? Although there were important internal changes at Heritage throughout this period[1], it seems that a key difference was the election

[1] The most important change at Heritage during this time, according to observers in Washington, was the selection of Jim DeMint as Heritage President. This decision had important impacts on the day-to-day operation of the think tank, though many interview subjects suggested that DeMint's selection was both a cause and a consequence of broader changes at Heritage, namely a turn to greater political activism and confrontation. I discuss these trends throughout this chapter.

of a Republican president and Republican control of Congress. Under Democratic government, the Heritage Foundation was a reactionary force; under Republicans, Heritage was once again a major player in Washington politics.

This overt display of partisanship fits uneasily with the historical and legal understandings of the role of think tanks in US policymaking. Think tanks originated in the Progressive Era and aimed to apply "scientific knowledge" to pressing public problems. These organizations valued concepts such as "efficiency" and "objectivity", and for much of the early 20th century they served as relatively neutral information-producing institutions (Rich, 2004). As prominent think tank scholar Andrew Rich (2004, 37) notes, the earliest think tanks sought to "maintain a distance from political debates and an exclusive focus instead on careful investigation."

This early orientation fits well with the contemporary legal categorization of American think tanks, which are classified as 501(c)3 tax-exempt organizations that "may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of [their] activities and... may not participate in any campaign activity" (Internal Revenue Service, N.d.). And, for a variety of reasons, partisan politicking was seen as a losing strategy by think tanks for much of their history. More recently, however, the activities of the Heritage Foundation and organizations like it suggest that the Progressive notion of think tanks as apartisan and apolitical bodies is being severely challenged. These organizations align – if only in practice – with a single political party; they establish affiliate groups that engage in direct advocacy efforts and electoral politics; and they are viewed increasingly favorably by members of their preferred party and with growing skepticism and

outright anger by their opponents.[2] These developments raise important questions about the role of think tanks in an era of partisan polarization.

At the same time, policy practitioners point to some prominent examples of think tanks that seem to have resisted the temptation to become more partisan in the face of increased polarization. The Brookings Institution – while frequently described as "left of center" by pundits – is viewed by many policy researchers as an organization that attempts to carry on the legacy of Progressive objectivity. A small number of new think tanks have also been founded around the explicit notion of counteracting the tendency towards ideological and politicized research. The Niskanen Center, for example, was founded in 2015 to "meaningfully engage with a broad range of ideological and political actors – a valuable asset in a world where odd-bedfellow coalitions are increasingly necessary to get anything accomplished."[3] The contrast between the Niskanen Center and the Heritage Foundation raises important questions about think tanks in the modern era. Why have certain think tanks seemingly adopted a non-partisan or bipartisan approach while others have often engaged in outright partisan politicking? Have these alternative approaches lent certain types of organizations more influence in the policy process?

Similar questions can be asked about interest groups, which also produce or at least utilize policy research in their advocacy efforts. Furthermore, unlike think tanks,

[2] To give just one example of the growing animosity surrounding more partisan think tanks, in April 2017 several hundred protesters gathered at the Heritage Foundation to decry the organization's influence over the Trump Administration budget. When asked about the incident, a Heritage employee said that this was the first such protest in her memory.

[3] Niskanen Center Conspectus (2017).
`https://bit.ly/2TkEk1p`

interest groups are legally allowed to lobby, campaign, and support candidates, granting them the tools to directly support their preferred party. Still, throughout most of the 20th century scholars tended to view these organizations as "access-seekers" (e.g. Truman, 1951; Hansen, 1991) who eschewed overt partisanship due to the costs of aligning too closely with a party which, at some point, would become a minority in Washington. The influence of interest groups was thus seen to hinge on their ability to cultivate relationships with incumbents from both parties (Lowery and Brasher, 2004), a strategy that was possible – and at least mildly successful (Hall and Wayman, 1990; Hansen, 1991) – in an era of relative bipartisanship.

Given increased partisan polarization, however, some scholars have suggested that certain interest groups now align, sometimes strongly, with a single preferred party (Sinclair, 2006; Bawn et al., 2012). This is especially true for single-issue groups like the National Rifle Association or EMILY's List, which are popularly understood to be Republican and Democratic affiliates, respectively. The polarization of the parties on the issues of gun and abortion rights means that these organizations find fewer and fewer allies in the opposing party (and more and stronger allies in their preferred party). Quasi-party interest groups like Swing Left or various Tea Party organizations are also, unsurprisingly, quite partisan in their efforts.

Even traditional "access-seeking" interest groups, however, appear to be more partisan in their efforts than in the past. The traditional business interests of the Chamber of Commerce, which bills itself as above the fray of partisan politics, now find a more comfortable home in the modern Republican Party, and as such the Chamber has strongly supported Republican initiatives like the 2018 tax cuts through their

research. Similarly, the American Association of Retired Persons is often aligned with the goals of the Democratic Party, and in fact its support of the Affordable Care Act led to the founding of a number of "conservative alternatives" to the group. Empirical investigations generally support the notion that even traditional interest groups are now operating in more partisan ways. In an analysis of group contributions in the 2016 election, I find that 60 percent of PACs contributed at least three-quarters of their funds to candidates from a single party. Relatedly, Brunell (2005) shows that groups have partisan preferences even when they contribute to candidates from both parties, with PACs directing "sincere" (i.e. electorally useful) contributions to candidates from their preferred party and "strategic" (and less impactful) donations to others. In the aggregate, Grossmann and Dominguez (2009) find that interest groups form two competing, *partisan* coalitions in their endorsements and contributions but not in legislative debates, though their measure of legislative coordination – operationalized as mentions of group coalitions in the Congressional Record – is fairly strict.

Aside from anecdotal examples and studies of PAC contributions, however, little research has been conducted on the potentially evolving nature of *research production* at think tanks and interest groups in an era of partisan polarization. As a result, important questions remain. How, if at all, has increased polarization impacted the demand for and supply of policy research? Have organizations changed their policy research and advocacy efforts to meet these new incentives? Have others resisted these polarizing tendencies, and if so which types of organizations are likely to adapt

rather than resist? And, perhaps most importantly, do those organizations that adopt a partisan approach have a stronger impact on the policymaking process?

I leverage a wide range of data sources to attempt to answer these questions. In this and the next chapter I investigate two important and interrelated phenomena in explaining the impact of partisan polarization on the world of policy research. First, at the same time that partisan polarization has increased substantially, Congress' capacity to conduct policy research and develop policy proposals has declined precipitously. Congress – including its component institutions (i.e. parties and committees) and individual members – requires at least a minimal amount of information to inform and justify decisions. In other words, members of Congress are *demanders* of policy information.

For most Congressional actors, however, policy information is akin to a "credence good" in economics (Darby and Karni, 1973), meaning that consumers lack the knowledge to understand the quality of the good or service they are receiving. In such a market, factors like advertising, social connections, and trust are important conditioning factors in any transaction. Furthermore, members of Congress are awash in information and surrounding by organizations willing to provide it, compounding the problem of information processing and prioritization in Congress. This is one of the main paradoxes of the modern Congress: despite declining internal capacity, Congress actually faces an *oversupply* of policy information.

In such an environment, actors must develop strategies for sorting through informational inputs. And, in an environment defined by partisan polarization, an increasingly prominent heuristic adopted by members of Congress is the *partisan fit*

of the information and, relatedly, the organization providing it. In short, members are likely to seek out information that advances their preexisting beliefs – and these beliefs are increasingly tied to the preferences and goals of their political party. In the aggregate, this means that members of Congress are more likely to receive and accept information that affirms their partisan goals, and to welcome and utilize information produced by trusted or well-connected organizations that consistently support the efforts of their party.

Secondly, the changing demand for policy information has downstream effects on the incentives for outside groups producing such research. These outside groups can be considered informational *suppliers*, and they must match their research production with the market for such services. In attempting to match their supply of information with the demand for it in Congress, outside groups perceive two incentives which are often in conflict with one another.

First, given partisan polarization, groups face pressure to consistently "invest" in a single party and develop a long-term reputation as a trusted party ally in order to achieve policy influence. These organizations strive to become the go-to source for information in their preferred party, and they often adopt aggressive advertising and advocacy strategies to ensure their ideas are readily identifiable. In the process, such groups become trusted by and well-connected with party members (including other informal allies), helping to overcome the problem of information asymmetries in their transactions with members of Congress. This mode of operation could be described as an *advocacy strategy* based on developing and providing the most useful – in a partisan, electoral, or legislative sense – information to Congressional allies. Importantly,

useful information is not necessarily nuanced or objective, but rather persuasive for members of a particular party and minimally defensible in policy arguments.

On the other hand, however, many outside groups believe that they still trade on their credibility and reputation for strong empirical research, and that organizations who consistently violate this norm will face strong criticism from opposing members of Congress and other outside actors. Thus, some groups pursue a *Progressive* or *enlightened* operating strategy, producing the "best" empirical research based on available evidence and maintaining their reputation as moderate voices in an extreme era. Unfortunately, though, partisan polarization means that nearly every piece of evidence promoted by one party will be challenged by the other, so that the costs of violating the norm of credibility have declined, relatively, in the modern era. As a result, it seems that groups in the Progressive mold have become a smaller subset of the overall universe of research-producing organizations. Furthermore, to stay effective in a marketplace where transactions are based on trust and social capital, even these groups have adopted some of the same marketing and promotion strategies found at more partisan organizations.

Thus, it seems that the current marketplace for ideas places a premium on politicized, partisan information. While it is true that some organizations have resisted these incentives, it is probably more accurate to say that some groups have changed in less significant ways in response to polarization while others have readily entered into the political fray. If more and more groups view partisan politics as an effective influence strategy, an important implications is that the production of research is now defined less by pluralistic dynamics and more by a coalitional model, where

groups predictably align with a particular party and one another in their research and advocacy efforts.

The tension between incentives for partisan versus credible information leads groups to align along two dimensions. On the first dimension, groups differ according to their level of direct engagement with the political system, with organizations in the Progressive mold maintaining a disengaged and more *academic* orientation and many partisan organizations pursuing a strategy based around *direct* engagement with politics. The second dimension differentiates groups according to the extent of their ideological or partisan preferences, with some organizations pursuing a *moderate* or *access-oriented* strategy while others adopt an explicitly *ideological* or *partisan* orientation.

Thus, I am able to identify four ideal type organizations that differ across these two dimensions. Still, as spatial metaphors, each dimension should be considered a spectrum. Groups can and have moved along these dimensions over time, representing varying degrees to which organizations have changed in response to growing polarization. In general, the overall tendency seems to be towards organizations becoming more *direct* in their efforts to influence politics and more *partisan* in their strategies, though there are notable exceptions. In the next chapter, I investigate various indicators that seem to differentiate these organizational types, including group funding sources and expenditures, internal decision-making processes, and inter-group collaborations.

The methods employed in these chapters can be considered a "kitchen sink" approach to the study of this topic. Because the internal operations, thought processes,

and considerations of political groups are opaque at best, I leverage numerous data sources to triangulate answers to my questions. Interviews with policy researchers and advocates in Washington, D.C. inform the bulk of the analysis, as policy practitioners themselves are likely best able to articulate the pressures and incentives that they face. However, to validate these findings and provide greater detail, I also analyze groups' financial records found in 990 tax forms to investigate funding and expenditure dynamics; annual reports to understand the degree of partisan and political engagement; and event participant lists to assess the extent of inter-group collaboration.

As a final note, the opacity of most research producing organizations also informs my decisions regarding which groups to focus on in this chapter. For a variety of reasons, large interest groups and think tanks are most likely to provide information on their funding and collaborations to the public. Thus, I focus here on prominent, national, "full service" think tanks that address multiple domestic issue areas in their research,[4] as well as well-known national interest groups that address relatively broad issue areas (e.g. the economy). I focus on these prominent groups as ideal types, though there is reason to believe that smaller organizations behave in similar ways but on a reduced scale. In the final chapter I expand my focus to include many smaller interest groups and think tanks, though I continue to emphasize the importance of prominent, multi-issue groups, which I show are the most important actors in most policy debates.

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[4]This approach is similar to the one adopted by Rich (2004) in his famous study of American think tanks.

2.1 Research Incentives in the Modern Era

Contemporary members of Congress often lack the resources and expertise needed to craft detailed policy arguments and legislation (e.g. Jones, 1976; Ehrenhalt, 1991; Curry, 2015). The individualization and intensity of modern campaigning means that emergent politicians tend to possess strong electoral skills but lack the ability or desire to formulate coherent policies (Ehrenhalt, 1991). In modern Congresses there have been few policy experts in the style of, for example, Wilbur Mills, with prestige instead accruing to strong fundraisers and campaigners. These same electorally-minded politicians tend to employ staff with *political* connections and experience rather than policy expertise (Romzek and Utter, 1997; Webb and Kolodny, 2006). Aside from certain pet projects and geographically relevant issue areas, then, rank-and-file members of Congress are often left "legislating in the dark" (Curry, 2015).

As individual members with limited policymaking experience make up more and more of the legislative body, congressional committees – the traditional workhorses of Congress – have also experienced a notable decline in their policymaking powers (Rohde, 1991; Sinclair, 2006). Between 1990 and 2015, committee staff shrunk by nearly 45 percent in the House and 19 percent in the Senate (Reynolds, 2017), siphoning policy resources away from once dominant committee chairs. Instead, decision-making power on many major issues has concentrated in the hands of Congressional leadership, especially in the House of Representatives (Curry, 2015). As one senior researcher at the Chamber of Commerce noted, "Like a gravitational body, the Speaker's Office over time drew more and more power unto itself... The Speaker's Office and the rest of leadership... has reabsorbed an enormous amount of power

and the [committee] chairmen are largely irrelevant" on most major issues.[5] These leaders utilize their informational advantages "to influence how legislation is drafted, how lawmakers perceive the legislation, and ultimately what is passed in committee and on the floor" (Curry, 2015, 7).

The proximate result of these internal developments is an institution with limited congressional capacity, or the ability to fulfill its legislative and oversight responsibilities (Lewallen, Theriault and Jones, 2016). Indeed, a recent survey of congressional staffers found that 95 percent of respondents thought it was very or somewhat important that "Members have adequate time and resources to understand, consider and deliberate policy and legislaton" but only 24 percent were somewhat or very satisfied with current time and resource levels (Goldschmidt, 2017). According to several interview subjects, the concentration of Congressional power – intertwined with increasing Congressional gridlock – plays an important role in defining incentives for members of Congress, encouraging contemporary legislators to neglect investments in policymaking. For example, the same Chamber of Commerce researcher stated:

> Unfortunately, because members of Congress and Senators spend so much time fundraising [and] doing institutional business and managing their offices, they don't seem to spend as much time on subject matter [or] becoming experts as they once did... It used to be that, if you're a member of Congress after a couple terms, you need to be quite familiar with an extraordinary range of topics and you accumulate knowledge over time if you apply yourself. [And] then there would be those one or two issues that were of particular interest to you and/or your district and you became an expert in those. Well, if legislation rarely passes or if you rarely get to influence the legislation that does pass, why would you do that?

[5] Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

With limited individual and institutional policymaking capacity, members of Congress have become increasingly reliant on information produced and disseminated by other actors. Of course, some observers might object that contemporary legislators are not all that interested in policy information given their nearly "single-minded focus" on reelection (Mayhew, 1974). Passing party policies, however, is an activity that collectively benefits members in their reelection bids (Cox and McCubbins, 1993), and legislators need some minimal amount of information to justify their votes to constituents. Thus, rank-and-file members require what might be termed "talking points", or rationales – often premised on empirical research – for their policy decisions. At the institutional level, committees and leaders require ideas, information, and even legislative language as fodder for policy designs. Given declining congressional capacity, these resources often originate outside of these formal institutions.

This reliance on outside actors, though, does not necessarily mean that members must draw on the often motivated research conducted by think tanks and interest groups. Indeed, several prominent governmental institutions – namely the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressiona Budget Office (CBO), and Congressional Research Service (CRS) – exist to serve the informational needs of members in an objective fashion. As a longtime researcher at the CRS noted of the organization, "the whole mission of the place is to provide objective, nonpartisan [information]. That's... the statutory mandate." Still, as Figure 2.1 shows, since 2010 member requests for CRS reports have declined precipitously and do not seem to correspond to the overall workload of Congress, suggesting that members (or at least leaders) are turning to other organizations for information.

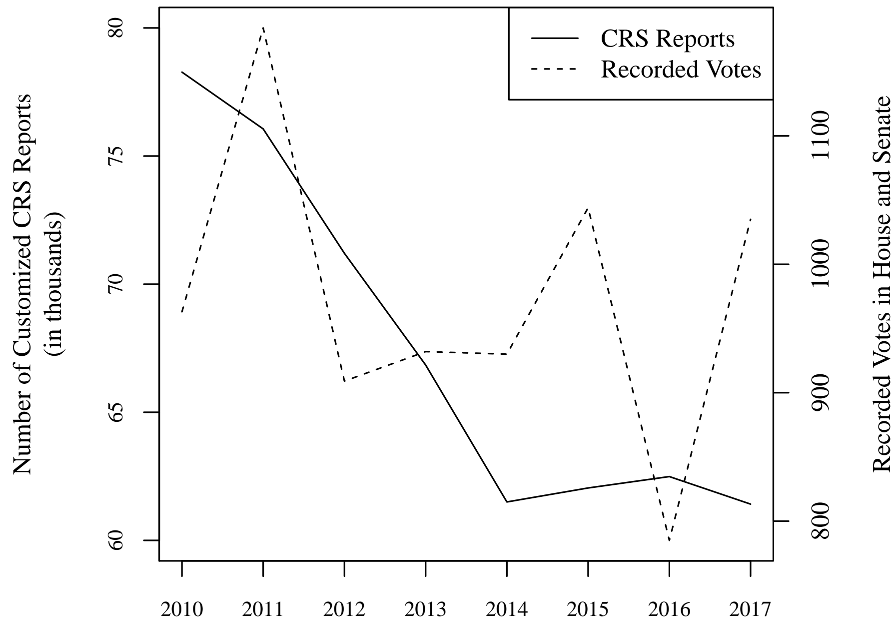

Figure 2.1: Number of Congressional Research Service reports and congressional workload, 2010-2017. Customized CRS reports for members of Congress are charted on the left axis and recorded votes in the House and Senate on the right axis. Report data comes from the Congressional Research Service. Data on recorded Congressional votes comes from the Brookings Institution's *Vital Statistics on Congress* (Reynolds, 2017).

This intuition is corroborated by policy researchers and advocates in the Capitol. A Heritage Foundation researcher, for instance, stated that members of Congress "really rely heavily on outside groups to inform them and [even] write their legislation sometimes." She went on to describe the importance of "working groups..., personal meetings with staffers..., [and] coalition groups" to ensure that Heritage is able "to know about possible legislation before it gets introduced and... to influence that process [by] shar[ing] our knowledge and information. There is always a great need

for context, policy data, and a lot of information [because of] the high turnover in Congress."[6]

Similarly, when asked how changes in Congressional capacity had impacted the influence of outside groups, one researcher suggested that an internally weak Congress is more reliant on – and susceptible to – information provided by other actors. He traced these developments to the early 1990s, noting that "when Gingrich came in [as leader of the House, he] cut back on staff all over the place. It's still a legacy today in part, which I'm sure interest groups and executive [staff] love."[7] Indeed, most outside groups are proactive in attempting to convey their ideas and preferences to members of Congress. One lobbyist, reflecting on his time as a Congressional staffer, said that "you get a lot [of research] delivered to you whether you want it or not. A lot of lobbyists and a lot of advocacy people would present [their ideas]."[8] These are not neutral developments, as members of Congress face an abundance of information from outside actors with their own particular and often opaque interests – interests that do not necessarily reflect the will of the average voter.

This fact highlights one of the great paradoxes of the modern Congress: despite the decline of institutional policymaking resources, members of Congress actually face an *oversupply* of policy relevant information. One lobbyist suggested that – given technological change and the proliferation of think tanks – modern members of

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[6]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[7]Interview with Congressional Research Service Senior Specialist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[8]Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

Congress are confronted with a "tsunami of information."[9] Similarly, a think tank executive stated:

> I think policymakers have problems identifying [good ideas]. There's just too much information and... lobbyists and think tanks [trying to] help people identify ideas... And then professors are out there doing research, and [so] it's very hard to get [your ideas] into the policy process.[10]

As a result, members of Congress – or more likely their staff and institutions like committees and party leadership – must develop methods for sorting through the vast supply of policy ideas and information. In broad terms, this "information processing" (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005) can be viewed as a transaction between informational demanders (members of Congress) and information suppliers (outside groups), where the suppliers are almost always better informed about the quality of their research product. These informational asymmetries mean that policy information is akin to an experience or credence good (Darby and Karni, 1973), where it is very costly or impossible for a consumer to determine the quality of a good before it is obtained and – in the case of credence goods – even after it has been 'purchased'. The crowded nature of the market for policy research compounds the problem of identifying quality information. In such a marketplace, consumers are likely to rely on "credentialing", "highly simplying heuristics", and inherent biases when making decisions (Andersen and Philipsen, 1998). In much the same way, politicians must develop informational shortcuts to aid in the selection and interpretation of policy information.

At the same time, on the supply side, outside groups hope to make their research and ideas stand out within a crowded space. If policy information is a credence good,

[9] Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[10] Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

this means that groups – by and large – cannot rely on the inherent quality of their research as a marketing strategy. Of course, the revealed credibility of an organization in the long term might act as a sort of "credentialing" within the policymaking community, but there is an alternative – and increasingly common – strategy that groups can adopt when promoting their research: playing on the inherent biases of members of Congress and the most commom heuristics that they employ in decision-making. In an era of extreme polarization, the dominant bias amongst members of Congress is most certainly partisanship, and the most common heuristic employed is quite likely to be the partisanship of the promoting organization. Thus, the long-term partisan reputations of information providers send important signals about a product whose quality is otherwise unknown. Common partisan commitments – in other words, membership in the same extended party network – essentially signals that the actors will promote something akin to a member's long-term interests and therefore has valuable resources to add in partisan policy battles. Conceiving of members of Congress as *demanders* of policy information and outside groups as the *suppliers* of this resource, demonstrated partisan loyalty might act as a "brand" that guides consumers (here, politicians) to particular products (here, useful policy information).

2.1.1 Information Processing: Some Basics

In broad terms, this project is focused on institutional information processing, both within Congress and at outside research producing institutions. A lengthy literature on this topic has established that most institutions – especially pluralistic, non-hierarchical ones like Congress – are inundated with information, shifting the

analytical focus from how institutions *search* for information to how they *prioritize* it (see, for example, Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Furthermore, the emphasis on institutional prioritization has led to a micro-level focus on how the *individuals* that comprise these institutions make decisions, with a sizable faction in the field of economics arguing that individuals are "boundedly rational", making partially informed decisions based on limited information, cognitive capabilities, and time (Simon, 1983). Institutions, in other words, are the aggregation of decisions made at the individual level. In Congress, recent scholarship has shown that certain actors – namely leadership – have greater informational and decision-making power, and therefore have a greater effect on the overall decision-making of the institution (Curry, 2015). These assumptions – of informational oversupply, imperfect information processing, and informational asymmetries – provide an important basis for the study of contemporary Congressional policymaking (though, as I note below, extant literature on these topics has several glaring blind spots).

The literature on information processing in the policy process starts from the premise that policy preferences are part of broader informational systems that need to be explained in order to fully understand policy outcomes. Most models in this vein adopt the "garbage can" approach discussed in the previous chapter, assuming that individual actors are embedded within complex institutional configurations defined by pluralistic, redundant, and parallel channels of information resulting in informational oversupply (Jones, Baumgartner and de la Mare, 2005). Within such an environment, cognitively limited or "boundedly rational" actors require strategies to sift through informational inputs (Workman, Jones and Jochim, 2009). As Jones and

Baumgartner (2005) note, "Oversupply calls not for search, but for prioritization" (78). Most scholars in this field, then, focus on how institutions 'select' problems and solutions, a process more broadly termed "agenda setting."

Importantly, the fact that individuals are less than fully rational means that ambiguity and bias creep into agenda setting processes. Ambiguity, according to Jones and Baumgartner (2005), means that the same information is subject to multiple interpretations. In later work, they write that "the search for information is tightly connected with the implementation of solutions; therefore, our attitudes and curiosity about the nature of a social problem are closely tied with our beliefs about the value of government responses to the public policy challenges we face" (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015, 2). The inherent "political power of information," they continue, means that actors are biased in their interpretation of it, so that "sometimes these efforts become highly charged partisan battles" (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015, 196-197).

These are important insights, and they fit with the general theory advanced here. Still, while this literature draws attention to individual decision-making processes, it is surprisingly neglectful of the actual micro-level considerations that individuals draw on when prioritizing information. Walgrave and Dejaeghere (2016, 231) offer an excellent assessment of the state of the field in their study of Belgian policymakers, writing that the "agendasetting literature... does not study individuals but institutions. It studies policy output, the *result* of information selection, not the selection process itself." They further explain that:

> Bounded rationality provides a useful framework by suggesting that selection is key. But this framework is not very concrete as to *how* this selection task is accomplished. Bounded rationality simply pinpoints the

> fallibility of the human mind and says that drastic information reduction is unavoidable. One way in which politicians (and other humans) organize their selective processing of information, the literature says, is by relying on *heuristics*... Yet, again, extant work in political science is not very specific as to *which* heuristics politicians employ and whether there are other "tricks" they have in place to wade through the information maelstrom (230).

Furthermore, the artificial limits that information processing scholars place on their analyses – namely, their focus only on the role of information in agenda setting – seems to miss important information processing aspects later in the policymaking process. Once the agenda has been set (i.e. a policy problem has been identified and deemed worthy – by some segment of elites – of government action), how is information processed and used? Or, in other words, given that a problem has been defined – itself an incredibly important part of politics and power – how do members of Congress process and utilize information to advance their ideas and battle their political opponents?

To fill this theoretical gap, I focus on the *how* of information processing, or *which* heuristics and biases members employ when selecting information. I also focus far less on problem definition – a key component of agenda setting studies – and to a greater degree on the use of information in exogenously defined policy debates. I ultimately arrive at the conclusion that members of Congress rely heavily on *partisan fit* as a heuristic when selecting information. This process can also be described as confirmation bias, where members are more likely to accept information that confirms their preexisting (partisan) beliefs and more likely to critique and reject information that challenges their preferences. In the long-term, groups can develop reputations

as providers of such information, institutionalizing – if only informally – their role in a particular party's network.

Before turning to these findings, however, two more proximate questions should be addressed. The first concerns the actual goals of individual legislators – in processing information, what are the ultimate objectives of legislators and what role does policy information play therein? The literature on this topic clearly demonstrates that members seek reelection to office, perhaps even at the expense of other goals (Mayhew, 1974), though others have suggested that power and policy goals are also important outcomes that members seek (Fenno, 1973, 1977). Policy information is not in itself all that helpful in aiding reelection – most constituents care little about the specifics of any given policy – but it is useful to the degree that passing public policy aids in reelection and to the degree that policy information is necessary to justify policy positions. Thus, we would expect members to seek out 'minimum informational justifications' for their policy stances.

This is more than just an individual story, however. Cox and McCubbins (2004) argue that electoral outcomes hinge not just on individual reputations but also on a party's reputation or "brand name", which itself derives from the party's legislative record. As such, individual members delegate powers – including over informational resources – to party leadership in an effort to develop the common good that is party reputation.[11] If anything, growing partisan polarization should increase the

[11] As in the case of the information processing literature discussed above, Cox and McCubbins (2004) focus the majority of their attention on delegated authority over agenda setting institutions (e.g. committees), though they do mention that parties seek to control policymaking resources more generally. I focus here on one such type of resource: policy information.

importance of party branding and accelerate the tendency for rank-and-file members to defer to party leaders (indeed, there is some evidence of this; see Curry, 2015). At the very least, polarization means that individual and partisan goals are less in conflict with one another than they once were (see, for example, Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). Party leaders, committee chairpersons, and other decision-makers – much like individual legislators – require information to justify policies, and likely more than just the 'minimum informational justifications' that rank-and-file members seek out. In committees, caucuses, and legislative drafting, information and references to external authorities are potent weapons in what are most often partisan policy battles (Stone, 1996), not to mention the basis for actual policy design. While it may be true that policymaking is *less* informed than it once was – and this is an open empirical question – we are certainly not at the point where policymakers craft legislation without informational inputs.

Thus, based on existing literature we can surmise that members of Congress seek policy information to the degree that it aids in their reelection and policy goals, with the two objectives intertwined with one another. This occurs within the context of partisanship – a successful party oftentimes means a successful legislator. It follows that members, leaders, and parties should seek out information that furthers partisan legislative goals.[12] In the aggregate, this tendency to accept information that fits

[12]This is not to say that members are necessarily disingenuous or dishonest, but only that their partisan preferences and goals are likely to cloud their interpretation of new information. Studies have shown that average citizens engage in such "partisan motivated reasoning", where they seek out – and weight more heavily – information that confirms their preexisting beliefs while also "counterarguing" discordant information more forcefully (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). There is reason to believe that government elites reason in much the same way.

with preexisting partisan beliefs should have a profound effect on the transfer and dissemination of information within Congress.

Beyond the *desire* for partisan information, however, there is another reason that members might be more willing to accept information from trusted partisan allies. This brings us to the second important question: what type of good is policy information and how does this affect informational transactions in the policy process? It was noted above that policy information is akin to a credence or experience good in economics. This conclusion is based, quite simply, on the fact that policy information is *not* a "search good", or a good for which judgments about product quality can be made by a consumer prior to purchase (Nelson, 1970). Because members lack specialized knowledge in most policy areas, they are unable to seek out the best – i.e. the most objective or empirically valid – policy research. In other words, independent knowledge about product quality is almost entirely lacking. Furthermore, in these exchanges members of Congress lack pricing information, a key signal of quality in economic markets.

Thus, policy information should be viewed as either an experience good or a credence good. The former suggests that members can learn something about the quality of the information once they have "consumed" it, while the latter would mean that members do not possess the knowledge to judge quality even after utilizing the information in their debates and public statements. If we think of information as an experience good, this would mean that members learn more about the quality of research as they utilize it in debates, with other actors and groups providing feedback. There is some reason to believe that members would be unlikely to internalize critiques

of low quality research due to factors like confirmation bias and motivated reasoning, but it is still possible that criticism (or praise) from allies would alter their decision calculus moving forward. This would, in essence, mean that a member has learned something about the quality of particular research – and a particular organization – through the experience of utilizing said information in policy debates. If we conceive of information as a credence good, however, even the act of employing particular research or information in a policy debate would add little to the member's knowledge of the quality of said information.

In the end, the distinction between experience and credence goods is not all that important here, as the selection processes involved with both types of goods are impacted by similar factors. The key similarity for both types of goods is that there are *information asymmetries* between buyers and sellers prior to the purchase of a good (Dulleck and Kerschbamer, 2006). In other words, sellers know far more than consumers about the quality and required level of the good they are providing. Consumers, in fact, often know nothing when it comes to directly assessing quality. As a result, consumers must rely on indirect indicators of product quality. One such indicator is credentialing, or establishing "confidence based on external evidence" like professional accreditation, third party verification, or customer loyalty (Andersen and Philipsen, 1998, 7). But, there are no formal accrediting institutions in the realm of research producing organizations. Customer loyalty – or an organization's status as a "go-to" voice on a particular policy topic (Grossmann, 2012) – may act as an indicator of quality, but loyalty – for the reasons outlined above – may be conditioned by partisan bias.

Indeed, scholars of experience and credence goods note that "the application of biases and highly simplifying heuristics" form the basis of most transactions (Andersen and Philipsen, 1998, 4). We have now come full circle, as the information processing literature similarly suggests that preexisting goals are more important for understanding information uptake than searching for new information (Simon, 1983). Conceiving of policy information as a credence good helps us understand why: members not only face *too much* information, but – absent the costly decision to become subject matter experts – they lack the requisite knowledge to discern between alternative pieces of evidence. Thus legislators, aside from just desiring partisan information, also rely on partisanship as a necessary simplifying heuristic when sorting through informational inputs. In an era of partisan polarization, this is likely one of the most common biases introduced in the policymaking process.

However, as noted, there has been limited attention paid to the types of biases and heuristics that arise in information processing in the policy process. The study by Walgrave and Dejaeghere (2016, 230) is a notable exception, though they study Belgium, a less polarized political system than the United States. Nevertheless, their study finds that members deal with informational oversupply by, first, instituting procedures that "shield them from raw information" and, second, by applying "heuristic filters" such as ideology and efficacy. In a related study on information processing in U.S. congressional committees, Lewallen, Theriault and Jones (2016) find that members are now receiving more one-sided information and are spending less time learning about potential alternative solutions. Together, these studies lend some

credence to the idea that partisanship plays an increasingly important role in how members interpret information.

Indeed, policy practitioners in the Capitol describe an increasing propensity for members of Congress to accept information that fits with their party's agenda and reject information that challenges it. In some cases this means that members of Congress and their staff simply ignore informational inputs that are perceived as against their partisan interest. For instance, one Heritage Foundation researcher noted:

> I've never talked to a Democratic member of Congress... I can't imagine that happening. If a Democratic member of Congress asked me to come to their office and brief them on [my issue area] Id just about fall out of my chair... Id be happy to, but itd be extremely unusual. [The reputation of our think tank] short-circuits [our influence] at that initial stage. I think they probably assume we don't do good research, which is inherently tied to them thinking maybe the assumptions we make don't make sense.[13]

Another subject similarly noted that Republicans would be unlikely to interact with or draw on research advocated by organizations associated with Democratic Party goals. He said:

> I think people on the Republican side, I don't think many of them would look at [the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities'] documents. They just wouldn't. They'd skim through the title [and] say, "Wait a minute, almost all of these are attacking ideas that we've developed, why on earth should we have [interactions] with this organization?" So [the impact of partisanship is] almost self-fulfilling.[14]

In other cases, however, subjects noted that Congressional staff might read research conducted by a wide range of actors but reject outright conclusions that contradict their beliefs. Such a strategy can help policymakers anticipate their opponents'

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[13]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Research. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[14]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

arguments, serving their own needs but not necessarily resulting in robust discussion or engagement with the opposing side. A researcher who has worked at both the Heritage Foundation and the Brookings Institution noted:

> A lot of staff that will look at organizations' work, they will look at the information and material they pulled together and sometimes they will just look at the conclusions. Because they're kind of just interested to see what the scholar or organization says, but they're not going to be influenced by those conclusions. I remember when I was at Heritage we would often go over to Democratic members and staff and have really good conversations with them and many of them, in some way, would jokingly say, "You know, we get your stuff. And we read the first two-thirds, which is all of the analysis, but when we get to conclusions we just rip them off and throw them away." And that's probably an exaggeration, but it underscores the point that a lot of people say, "Yeah, we're really interested in seeing how a conservative institution would look at this issue. And there's always good stuff in there, things we didn't know and good arguments we should be thinking about. But we're not going to do what you tell us we should be doing because we just don't agree with you."[15]

Each of these statements highlights the increasing importance of partisan reputations and commitments for the reception and selective interpretation of policy research by members of Congress. Most respondents framed this dynamic negatively – i.e. members are unlikely to internalize ideas advocated by organizations affiliated with the opposing party – but others suggested that members of Congress are also *more likely* to accept ideas developed by trusted partisan allies (see the next section). In such transactions, the long-term, demonstrated commitment of an organization to the goals of a particular party serves as a heuristic that helps members sort through a mass of information and identify the most useful pieces of evidence. Through these informational shortcuts, members are able to overcome – if only imperfectly – the profound informational asymmetries that define policymaking. An important impli-

[15]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

cation of this finding is that outside groups can actually *benefit* from investing in a single party over time and developing a reputation as a producer of trusted partisan information. This fact is a key change that has resulted from – and likely contributed to – increased partisan polarization. While it is certainly true that politicians have always preferred information that advances their goals, it seems to be that certain organizations are *consistently* aligned with members' goals across a range of issues, that these goals are highly correlated with partisan affiliations, and that policy actors are increasingly aware of these reputations and utilize them when processing informational inputs. In other words, the demand curve for policy research has shifted due to partisan polarization, and as a many result research producing organizations have altered their "supply" of research.

2.1.2 Informational Demands and Group Incentives

The increasing impact of partisanship on information processing has important effects on how outside groups operate and which organizations are successful. Just as politics is said to be "downstream" from culture, policy research institutions are downstream from partisan politics, reacting to the incentives provided by those in positions of power. Research producing organizations, then, might be viewed in terms of "outsourcing" or "consulting" – they provide information to meet the demands of the political marketplace, determined first and foremost by those in positions of power. In a similar way, Hall and Deardorff (2006) describe lobbying as a "legislative subsidy", where outside groups provide allies with resources to aid them in their efforts to pass mutually acceptable policy. To stay relevant and impactful, outside

groups must match their supply of research with the demand for particular types of information.[16] If members of Congress desire – and are more likely to accept and utilize – information that fits their pre-existing beliefs and partisan goals, then groups that consistently provide such information might develop long-term reputations that enhance their policy influence when their preferred party controls government.

The Heritage Foundation, according to most interview subjects, epitomizes this relationship between partisan reputations and policy influence. Founded in 1973, Heritage was in many ways a conservative reaction to the perceived detachment and liberal bias of existing think tanks. Instead, Heritage endeavored, from the start, to directly influence political outcomes, with particular advocacy strategies – like the formation of an advocacy organization, the encouragement a "revolving door" culture, and the adoption of aggressive marketing tactics – flowing from this decision. Heritage scholars, more than mere academic researchers, were expected to be fierce advocates for conservative ideas, with a 1985 *New York Times* article quoting Heritage's then-Vice President of Research as saying, "Everyone here is an advocate. We all recognize that we are here to do battle."[17] The same article stated that "Heritage analysts are not expected to develop highly original ideas in major books or articles that will shape scholarly thinking on an issue. Rather, they are expected to cultivate sources

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[16]It is worth noting again that information is a catchall term. When it comes to members of Congress it is highly unlikely that they demand particular *types* of research (e.g. credible or quantitative), but rather they value particular types of information based on their implications and the conclusions that they support.

[17]Quoted in "Heritage Foundation: Success in Obscurity" (Boffey, 1985).

in Congress and the Administration, sense what issues are becoming ripe and produce terse position papers that can be used to sway political argument."

In line with this view of Heritage, one employee described the organization as a "do tank" that "wants to be effective in accomplishing conservative policy victories... so we have to work with those actors that are in the positions to implement policy."[18] Another subject recalled that:

> Heritage... consciously founded themselves to be more relevant. [I heard] a story about some of the founders of Heritage actually put[ting] fake dust on [another organization's report because they had...] held off on putting out recommendations because the debate was going on [in Congress]. They didn't want to prejudice the outcome. Maybe that's true. Maybe that's just the iconic story of why they felt like, "Oh, well we have to be more relevant. We have to put out talking points that are going to go to the Hill that they can use in the debate."[19]

This founding vision – aimed at enhancing the influence of Heritage by directly investing in and engaging with the political system – has an important effect on the strategies of the think tank. In short, directly and successfully engaging with politics in the modern era means engaging with a system defined mainly by partisan polarization. As a result, the Heritage Foundation has focused its research and advocacy efforts in such a way that they work almost exclusively through the Republican Party to accomplish their goals, as Republicans closely reflect their preferences on most issues (and the Democratic Party is increasingly antagonistic towards them). As one former employee stated:

> What happened in the last few years I was at Heritage was... [the organization] tended to focus much more on seeing the Republican Party –

[18]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[19]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

> and even a subset of the Republican Party – as the primary vehicle to move conservative ideas forward... Clearly in the last several years, Heritage was really focused more and more on a subset of conservative[s], and more recently the Trump Administration, to move ideas forward. And thats sort of taken them out of the mainstream of think tanks that traditionally can work together on issues. So you don't tend to see Heritage scholars so frequently now in these sorts of broader activities or projects or convenings where you'll get a whole range of scholars [on the] left and right. They don't tend to be there anymore.[20]

Thus, it seems that Heritage – responding to political reality and incentives for certain types of research – has operated in such a way that it can reasonably be described as an informal affiliate of the Republican Party, or a member of the Republican extended party network. Other organizations – even more moderate ones – have earned similar partisan reputations. One conservative respondent, reflecting on perceptions of research he conducted at Heritage (his former employer) as opposed to Brookings (his current employer), noted:

> When people think of Brookings... [they] think of Brookings as a left wing organization. Therefore, if I write something at Brookings a lot of people on the left read what I write. If I wrote the identical document from the Heritage Foundation, or even maybe from the American Enterprise Institute, they would discount it. They don't read it [when I'm at Heritage], but they'll read what I write if it's [from] Brookings... I'm making the same arguments and actually the language I'm using isn't that different than what I would [use] at Heritage. But because I work at the Brookings Institution, people will read it and say it's really interesting and assume it's kind of middle of the road when it's not really.[21]

In an era defined by partisan polarization, then, policy practitioners tend to view groups in polarized terms. The research that groups conduct seems to feed into perceptions of these groups as affiliates of or 'leaners' towards a particular partisan view, and these reputations condition the influence of this research on various audiences.

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[20]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[21]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

Still, some organizations seem to more actively promote their partisan reputations. The selection of Jim DeMint – a former Republican Senator and Tea Party leader – as the head of Heritage was cited by several interview subjects as both a cause and effect of Heritage's long-term reputation as a Republican ally. One former Heritage staffer, reflecting on the appointment, recalled that "DeMint changed how [Heritage] functioned. It's not expert-heavy anymore. Under DeMint, he wanted the think tank to take a political position and ask the policy people to find out how to support it. His vision was different."[22] The title of one 2014 *New York Times* article simply stated that there was, "In the DeMint Era at Heritage, A Shift From Policy to Politics."

Other indicators of Heritage's alignment with the Republican Party frequently arose in interviews. As noted previously, one Heritage researcher said that he had *never* been asked to visit a Democratic member's office to discuss policy. The same interview subject described how, in general, think tanks that invest in a particular party as an influence strategy alter their behavior in more subtle ways. He stated:

> I think it's generally true that if you rely on one party for influence, you would be foolish to disregard or be cavalier with the working relationship with that party. It would be very foolish to not take into consideration maintaining that working relationship and maintaining good dialogue. And will that mean in many cases being less critical than you might be otherwise? Yeah, definitely, but maintaining that working relationship is so pivotal. If you lose that, if you're too harsh, you closed the door to your influence entirely.[23]

In other words, influence and access are the coin of the realm for outside groups like Heritage, and efforts to maintain a working relationship with members of their

[22]Quoted in "The Real Reason Jim DeMint Got the Boot" (Johnson and Cook, 2017).

[23]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Research. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

preferred party often take priority. Another Heritage researcher described "long-standing relationships" with Republican actors and the "institutional reputation" of Heritage as a trusted Republican ally as important components of the organization's influence. Maintaining these connections and reputation "doesn't necessarily mean you're changing the policies," she noted, "just that you're putting emphasis on a certain aspect of that policy change."[24]

Importantly – and perhaps worryingly – this investment in the success of the Republican Party seems to pay dividends for the Heritage Foundation, enhancing its influence over policy outcomes when Republicans control government. As the introductory quote to this chapter noted, the Heritage Foundation proudly proclaimed its influence over the Trump Administration in its 2017 annual report, citing a 64 percent policy success rate. Similarly, both interview subjects at the Heritage Foundation pointed to the direct impact of Heritage reports – for example, their Blueprint for Reorganization and various tax reform reports – on Republican priorities in the 115th Congress. This influence was enabled by two factors, according to one researcher:

> One [reason was] this administration didn't have much policy depth. So when they won the election, they were sort of like, "Now what do we do?" And that's where Heritage comes in. We're like, "We work on these issues year round, so we'll stand by your side and help guide that administration." [And secondly,] we also had a team dedicated to staffing the new administration. They were collecting resumes in these big binders, basically assembling hundreds of recommendations for conservatives all across the country that would be available to be hired by the administration and to be appointed for administration positions. And I think thirty of my colleagues actually went and worked... for the administration or at least helped during the transition... And so we actually had people power, we had manpower in the White House and in the executive agencies where

[24]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

> it was relevant. And then we also had long-standing relationships with many of the Presidents appointees that Heritage had built over many years. And I think that's where the institutional reputation really comes in and is so important... We were aware of what they were trying to do and then we would produce a product specifically for them. [We would] talk to them about our proposals, get more insights into what they were trying to accomplish so we can tailor our proposals... in terms of what they're trying to accomplish.[25]

In this quote, we see the importance that a lack of "policy depth" amongst politicians plays in enhancing the influence of outside groups in policymaking. Perhaps more importantly, though, we also see the importance of *thick social ties* in determining which groups have access and influence over largely uninformed politicians. Organizations and ideas do not randomly fill the vacuum of policy ignorance, as the garbage can model of choice predicts, but rather influence is conditional on on factors like "long-standing relationships" with people in positions of power and "institutional reputation[s]" for particular types of research. The fact that Heritage seems to tailor products to particular policymakers again hints at their attempts to directly influence debates (and may serve as an indictment against the objectivity of Heritage research).

In sum, then, it seems that the Heritage Foundation – and others like it – can actually benefit by developing a reputation as a trusted ally of a particular political party. Such organizations – operating as 'realists' within a political environment defined by partisan polarization – are responding to formal party members' demands for politically valuable research.[26] The theory tested here suggests that these in-

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[25]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[26]It is worth mentioning that the causal relationship between research producing organizations and partisan polarization is a messy one. These "realists" might not only be reacting to polarization but also driving it, making them active participants rather than passive reactionaries. And, in fact, many of these organizations are funded by individuals and groups – the Koch network is the most

centives should, to varying degrees, structure the research and advocacy efforts of outside groups. The Heritage Foundation may be an extreme example of this tendency, but overall outside organizations exist in a similar political space which has surely impacted their behavior. Before turning to a discussion of the impact of partisan polarization on the universe of policy actors, however, it is important to note that there is a counterbalancing incentive – institutional credibility – that might place limits on the extent to which groups can act as partisan affiliates. Unfortunately, it seems that credibility has become less important – relative to partisan loyalty – in determining which groups are most influential in the policy process.

2.1.3 Constraints on Politicized Information

The tradeoff between research credibility and partisan fit highlights the fact that members of Congress desire *useful* information that furthers their goals. In a pluralistic political environment – especially one with polarized parties – suspect research has limited value because it will certainly be challenged by opponents. As one interview subject noted:

> [If] I was a lawmaker and somebody comes in from the oil industry, what are they going to tell me...? They're going to talk about the benefits of oil. Sure, I'll listen. And then I might say, "Hey, what are some of the downsides of what you're saying?" And the probabilities are good lobbyists will also tell you straightforwardly that here's the problem with it. If they don't my response is, "Listen, I have environmental groups waiting to see me next. So somebody will tell me outside. So it's in your interest." The coin of the realm for good lobbyists is also to be truthful and honest with the staff and the members because if their credibility is lost... another member's [going to] stand on the floor and say, "Hey,

notorious example – who are also selecting extreme candidates, financing partisan issue campaigns, and generally contributing to increased partisan polarization.

> you're full of baloney, here's the real information, CRS said this or GAO said this."[27]

Or, as another subject stated:

> The consequences, long-term, for you giving them something not defensible are very great or could be very great... You have to do something impactful... [but] also in the long-term you cant make mistakes because your impact will diminish, for obvious reasons.[28]

Thus, outside groups must balance their preferences – and the goals of their preferred party – with their long-term reputation as a credible policy research institution. Groups that can occupy the space between partisan goals and credibility should be in a privileged position to influence public policy. In many instances this balance is achieved by producing objective, empirical research built on assumptions that fit with a particular ideological or partisan objective. One researcher described this dynamic, noting that "you have to be credible [but]... you can massage the numbers any number of different ways by the assumptions you've used. But they're not infinitely malleable and you have to be reasonable to some extent, work within the realm of the possible, that's [a] constraint."[29] In this way, groups pushing for disparate partisan goals can lay credible claim to reason and objectivity while also advancing a particular viewpoint.

Because party members lack the time or expertise to fully understand these assumptions, they can reference an institution's credibility while also utilizing their research in quite partisan ways. For this reason, we often see formal party members

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[27]Interview with Congressional Research Service Senior Specialist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[28]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Research. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[29]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Research. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

arguing entirely different points and coming to entirely different conclusion than their opponents, with these arguments and conclusions rooted in ostensibly credible policy research. One interview subject compared this phenomenon to scholarly debates rooted in theoretical or methodological disagreements. He said:

> Like in academia..., the assumptions you build into a model can lead you to very different conclusions even with the same data underlying [them]. So in a way no ones wrong, its just a matter of how that influence[s] the political process or the discourse. Well it does make it so people talk past each other, but I dont think thats the fault of the think tanks. Theyre making the assumptions that they think are most descriptive of the phenomenon or theyre making the assumptions that they think are most relevant or theyre using the data that they think is most relevant. So in a way that can only take you so far, and its really incumbent upon the practitioners to come in, look at the data, and see who they agree with, see whose assumptions they agree with. And its not really the think tanks job to look at the range of think tanks and adopt a median set of assumptions. Thats crazy. So its the practitioners job to do that work on the back end. But too often that doesn't happen. So in a way, its natural that people start to talk past each other... There are several sets of assumptions that are defensible depending on what you think is most important about a phenomenon. Thats a source of polarization thats reflective of a reality, its not... artificial.[30]

Of course, some assumptions – methodological or otherwise – are more defensible than others, but groups that frequently engage with a particular party work to expand the realm of the credible to enable advocacy for a particular viewpoint. This is not the only option faced by outside groups – many maintain their credibility by keeping their distance from partisan politics and conducting solid research – but it seems to be an increasingly attractive and influential strategy in the modern era.

[30]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Research. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

2.1.4 Informational Supply and Demand

To summarize the argument presented in this section, it seems clear that members of Congress require outside information to develop policies and policy arguments. In other words, they *demand* policy research and ideas. At the same time, as the two parties pull farther and farther apart on a range of issues, members are unlikely to seek the 'best' research available. Rather, they should seek out information that furthers their partisan goals while also providing credible justifications for their stances. Groups that can thread this needle – providing information that is *useful*, in a partisan sense, and *defensible*, in an academic (or at least political) sense – should be in a privileged position to influence the agenda of their preferred party. Thus, it seems likely that the *supply* of policy research has been altered by the increased partisan polarization in Congress. As a result, one might ask: How has increased partisan polarization impacted the broader universe of policy research institutions?

2.2 The Changing Organizational Landscape

The evidence presented in the previous section suggests that groups who seek to influence the policy process face two competing incentives. On the one hand, information is useful – and thus influential – only to the degree that it is viewed as credible by a sufficient number of interested actors. Thus, outside groups have an incentive to provide nuanced and well-supported analyses in order to maintain their reputation as important and trustworthy policy actors. This can be described as the "enlightened" or Progressive model of policy research, where groups aim to produce the *best available evidence* for a given policy topic. While these organizations might

shift debates through agenda setting and framing – and while it is generally true that many of these groups have adopted more aggressive marketing strategies in the modern era – their policy research is generally viewed as even-handed by other policy researchers.

On the other hand, many decision-makers desire information that supports their preexisting beliefs and partisan goals, and they appear to use organizational reputations – of partisan loyalty, ideology, and the like – as a heuristic when interpreting outside information. Their perception of which organizations are credible might also be colored by their particular beliefs and preferences. Thus, some organizations might perceive an incentive to provide information and research that supports commonly shared partisan goals, perhaps at the expense of their long-term credibility in the broader policymaking realm. This is not to say that credibility is always achieved at the expense of partisan loyalty, but only that groups who *consistently* provide useful information for a particular party might earn reputations – often rightly deserved – as biased actors. This model of research production is more akin to an advocacy strategy, where groups aim to produce the *most effective arguments* to further their particular partisan or ideological preferences.

Given these competing incentives, it is logical that the wide range of outside groups have pursued alternative strategies in the contemporary political environment. Indeed, interview subjects described several emergent ideal type organizations and suggested that alternative organizational strategies, missions, and characteristics correspond to these group types. One subject described these broader changes

utilizing a market metaphor similar to the one employed here, noting that changing demand for research has altered the universe of research producers. He stated:

> In general, if you look across the world of think tanks in Washington, they are all... evolving in very deep and fundamental ways and new institutions are cropping up. The "Old Guard" - if you think of the Old Guard being [the] American Enterprise Institute, Brookings [Institution], Urban [Institute], Council on Foreign Relations - the Old Guard is for most part pulling back from policy and less relevant than they used to be. And a New Guard has cropped up, which is intensely more political. They are specifically designed to work with the political processes and parties, not always on a partisan basis, but definitely on a political advocacy basis. And they had to do that in part to be consistent with the evolution of political processes... away from the center to the extremes. Well, the market for think tank activity followed that movement and in some cases, once they saw where the movement was going, [they] went to lead it... which is the natural entrepreneurial to do. What Heritage was doing was part of this process of all think tanks changing the way they operate, either become more ivory tower-ish or more political and less [about] simply writing good policy papers to try to advance ideas.[31]

Other subjects similarly differentiated between groups with more academic or more political orientations, with many noting that groups engaging in direct advocacy efforts were becoming both increasingly numerous and influential. As a researcher at the Bipartisan Policy Center noted:

> I do think that there's probably a move [toward] all think tanks having a little more [of a] quick and dirty explanation for things. I think there was always a little bit of that... [but] they probably do more of it... The new think tanks... will go advise staff and members of Congress on what to do this second rather than [in] the long run.[32]

When contrasted with such politically-minded organizations, the concept of "Old Guard" groups – a term which subjects often paired with adjectives like "objective", "academic", and "ivory tower-ish" – carries with it a certain normative affinity for

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[31]Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[32]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

organizations that embody the Progressive ideal of rational inquiry and dispassionate debate. Such views are likely exaggerated – most Brookings scholars, for example, would likely agree that they are passionate about particular policy problems and have strongly held beliefs about correct solutions – but nearly every subject noted that Old Guard groups were qualitatively different than newer, more political organizations. Furthermore, Old Guard groups generally place a greater emphasis on concepts like "objectivity" and "independence" in their reports, while newer organizations are far more upfront about their particular biases. For example, the Urban Institute's mission statement describes it as "the trusted source for unbiased, authoritative insights" and "a nonprofit research organization that believes decisions shaped by facts, rather than ideology, have the power to improve public policy and practice." The Heritage Foundation's mission statement, in comparison, begins with a direct statement of the impact of ideology on their research, writing that "The mission of The Heritage Foundation is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense."

In describing the difference between these types of organizations, subjects typically made a distinction between academically-oriented organizations focused on the "long term evolution of ideas" and more activist institutions seeking political "impact", often at the expense of nuanced research.[33] In the aggregate, interview subjects

[33]It is worth noting that Stone (1996) distinguishes between 'old guard' and 'new partisan' think tanks in much the same way as my interview subjects. She writes that "The 'old guard' are a more academic and non-political tradition of think-tank, while the 'new partisans' are increasingly entrepreneurial and likely to be more specialised, more directly policy focused and partisan in their

most often described the Brookings Institution, Urban Institute, Cato Institute, and American Enterprise Institute as Old Guard academics, while overwhelmingly associating New Guard political groups with the Heritage Foundation, Center for American Progress (CAP), and – to a lesser extent – the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC).

However, as these fairly eclectic groupings reveal, the simple distinction between Old Guard and New Guard institutions obscures another important difference in the universe of policy research organizations. Certain groups – in both camps – were described as *ideological* or *partisan* organizations (e.g. AEI or CAP), while others – again spanning the Old/New Guard distinction – were characterized as more *access-oriented* or *non-partisan* (e.g. Brookings or BPC). Thus, it seems that the Old Guard/New Guard dichotomy is not synonymous with the credible/partisan distinction outlined in the previous section. More academically-minded groups cannot be assumed to be non-ideological, and groups engaged in more direct political advocacy are not necessarily partisan in these efforts.

For this reason, it is useful to distinguish modern research producing organizations according to two dimensions. Each dimension should be thought of in spatial terms, where groups in the same quadrant might vary in their intensity and have likely shifted over time. Table 2.1 outlines these two dimensions and provides descriptions and examples of the types of organizations that occupy each quadrant. The first spectrum concerns the extent to which an organization involves itself in the day-to-day practice of politics. At one extreme are groups that are very academic in their

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research and analysis" (18). As I note below, however, the dichotomy employed by both my subjects and Stone obscures important differences found at research producing institutions.

	Access-Oriented/ Non-Partisan	**Ideological/Partisan**
Academic Orientation (Indirect Engagement)	Moderate-Academic	Partisan-Academic
	More centrist, Old Guard think tanks	Old Guard think tanks with ideological or partisan preferences
Examples:	*Brookings Institution, Urban Institute*	*American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute*
Political Orientation (Direct Engagement)	Moderate-Political	Partisan-Political
	Traditional interest groups and "Problem-Solver" think tanks	Many newer think tanks (with advocacy arms) and ideological interest groups
Examples:	*AARP, Bipartisan Policy Center*	*Heritage Foundation, Center for American Progress, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Chamber of Commerce, National Rifle Association*

Table 2.1: Typology of research producing interest groups and think tanks. Organizations differ according to their level of a) direct engagement with politics and b) ideological or partisan preferences.

approach to policy research, abstaining from direct attempts to influence politics or the policy process. At the other extreme are groups that have very political orientations, directly engaging in electoral politics and the policy process in an effort to influence political outcomes. As I explore below, there has been a general trend in which all groups have become more direct in their advocacy and marketing strategies, though there are still major differences between more academic and more political organizations.

The second dimension along which groups differ concerns the degree to which they display preferences for a particular ideology or political party. This dimension ranges from access-oriented and non-partisan organizations – who often produce more moderate, non-ideological research – to more ideological organizations (whose research consistently supports a particular policy viewpoint which may overlap considerably with a single political party) and even some explicitly partisan organizations (who may be willing to alter their agenda or even research to fit with party preferences). Importantly, ideologically motivated and partisan organizations appear to be growing in both number and influence. Of the domestic policy think tanks listed amongst the top 25 in either the 2008 or 2017 *Think Tank Index Report*, more than 70 percent have clearly identifiable ideologies, and two – the Heritage Foundation and Center for American Progress – were described by respondents are having strong partisan preferences (see Table 2.2) (McGann, 2017). And, the influence of these two partisan organizations increased – substantially, in the case of CAP – over the nine year period.

2.2.1 Academic and Indirect Strategies

The top row of Table 2.1 provides several examples of organizations that are closer to *academics* in their approach to policy research. This description is not necessarily normative, but it does indicate that groups in this vein are significantly less involved, compared with other organizations, in efforts to directly impact the political process. Rather, these institutions conduct research in an effort to inform political debates, without taking the additional step of forcefully advocating for the acceptance of their ideas by those in positions of power (though individual scholars may engage in such

Think Tank	Ideology	2008 Ranking	2017 Ranking	Trend
Brookings Institution	Slightly Liberal	1	1	–
Heritage Foundation	Strongly Conservative	5	4	↑
Center for American Progress	Strongly Liberal	17	7	↑↑
Cato Institute	Conservative	9	10	↓
Urban Institute	Centrist	20	11	↑↑
National Bureau of Economic Research	Centrist	14	12	↑
American Enterprise Institute	Conservative	8	14	↓↓
Resources for the Future	Liberal	24	22	↑
Manhattan Institute	Strongly Conservative	23	29	↓
Mercatus Center	Conservative	30	39	↓↓
New America	Centrist	22	43	↓↓

Table 2.2: Top US think tanks, focused primarily on domestic policy, according to the University of Pennsylvania's 2008 and 2017 *Think Tank Index Reports*. The report ranks think tanks according to journalist and scholar ratings of influence and importance. Think tank ideologies are based off of interview subjects' own perceptions as well as the stated mission of the organization. The trend of an organization indicates whether its ranking on the list has increased or decreased over the period and the intensity of the change.

self-promotion). For example, the Brookings Institution was described by one respondent as "a long way from Capitol Hill" – both physically and symbolically – and "much more like a university setting" where ideas are investigated, debated, and developed.[34] The group's mission statement describes its research as "rooted in open-minded inquiry" and notes that "the Institution does not take positions on issues" as part of its "commitment to... the individual independence of its scholars." The Cato

[34]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

Institute – despite having a libertarian perspective – is another example of an academic, indirectly engaged organization. A respondent described the role of the Cato Institute as helping to address the fact that policymakers are often "poorly informed and there's stuff out there that people don't even know about that's appeared in a journal somewhere that's really important, [that] really has implications."[35] Organizations in this category attempt to rectify these limitations, disseminating academic research to a broader audience.

One key characteristic of organizations in the indirect mold is that they are almost exclusively think tanks. Indeed, because interest groups are founded around the express purpose of directly influencing politics, one could say that all academic (i.e. non-political) research centers are think tanks, though not all think tanks have an indirect or academic orientation. Furthermore, the inclusion of a think tank in the academic category does not mean that they are non-ideological or non-partisan. In fact, both the American Enterprise and Cato Institutes were described by respondents as Old Guard academic as well as ideologically driven. (The Cato mission statement acknowledges this odd combination, noting that the organization is "dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace" – an inherently ideological standpoint – at the same time that "its scholars and analysts conduct independent, nonpartisan research on a wide range of policy issues.") The key factor that unites places like Brookings and the Urban Institute with AEI and Cato is the fact that, even if they possess ideological viewpoints, they do not engage in

[35]Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

significant efforts to advance these perspectives beyond traditional think tank research functions.

Indeed, while researchers at these organizations often testify before Congress and do, in fact, inform policy debates, they do not engage in the types of direct advocacy and promotion that characterize other actors. In fact, some academically-oriented institutions refrain from directly engaging in political debates *even at the expense of* their ability to inform policy designs and outcomes. A former Cato Institute employee recalled such an occasion, noting:

> I remember once during [the] McCain-Feingold [debate]... somebody in Congress called someone at Cato. I learned that they wanted me to come to the office and help to design some poison pills about a vote that was upcoming and the decision was [made] not to do that. It was just getting too involved with politics.[36]

Several other interview subjects brought up a similar, canonical story in the think tank world in which the American Enterprise Institute waited to publish a relevant policy report because Congress was voting on a similar issue. The reason, as the story goes, was that AEI "didn't want to prejudice the outcome" of the Congressional vote[37] – a position that is almost unthinkable in the modern era, when many organizations publish specialized reports aimed at impacting specific votes.

Rather than through direct advocacy, the impact of indirect organizations is often felt more subtly. At the Cato Institute, for example, an executive described the organization's influence as "kind of indirect..., just slow, stead[y]" – the role of the think tank, as he saw it, boiled down to "moving debates in the direction of freedom

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[36]Interview with Institute for Free Speech executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[37]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

even though you're not getting too many specific... Cato proposals passed."[38] Still, this focus on the long-term evolution of ideas has not fully insulated academic organizations from the realities of politics. In a world where influence is often measured by social media engagements and newspaper op-eds, even academically-oriented groups have become increasingly public-facing. Still, they have not paired these strategies with direct efforts to lobby and influence government, and so they do not employ the kind of all encompassing advocacy strategy found at more political organizations.

2.2.2 Direct Political Activism

This kind of indirect advocacy can be contrasted with organizations that possess more of a *political* orientation and directly engage in political processes. In this category we find both interest groups – including traditional, access-oriented groups like AARP as well as ideologically-driven groups like the American Conservative Union – and think tanks. Importantly, most think tanks in this grouping can be characterized as strongly ideological or partisan; it seems that the decision to directly engage with politics goes hand-in-hand with the decision to pursue an ideological or partisan agenda. A notable exception to this rule is seen in the Bipartisan Policy Center, an organization that can be described as a "Problem-Solver" think tank aimed at working within politics to reduce polarization and improve governance. As I note below, however, even access-oriented interest groups and problem-solver think tanks have – in their efforts to impact political outcomes – been subjected to the influence of polarized politics.

[38] Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

The concept of direct engagement with politics refers to traditional interest group strategies such as base mobilization, candidate support, policy advocacy, and lobbying. Different types of interest groups place different emphases on various strategies, with mass-based organizations most likely to engage in "outsider" electoral tactics. For example, a director at the National Rifle Association (NRA) noted that, in attempting to influence policy outcomes:

> The best thing we can do is rely on what our strongest asset is... And that is to make sure that our grassroots - our members and supporters - are constantly communicating to their elected officials, and they're constantly communicating to candidates to office, and they're constantly communicating with their neighbors and friends about why it is that we believe gun control will not achieve the goals that we all seek.[39]

Still, groups like the NRA rely on or engage in policy research in order to justify their stances and bolster their arguments with lawmakers. As the same NRA respondent remarked:

> Policy research does play a role in my job..., to kind of validate why we believe our arguments are most sound and our policy positions are most sound... I rely almost exclusively on outside research and data to kind of provide the statistical and academic backing of the philosophical point that I make, to show why we believe our positions are superior to those of our opponents.

Thus, for some direct engagement organizations, policy research plays a supporting role in their efforts to impact political outcomes. For other interest groups – especially traditional business interests and others without large membership bases – policy research is a potent tool through which to directly impact politics. As one in-house lobbyist at a large insurance company stated simply, policy research "is the most important thing because I can't do my job if I'm not delivering facts or fact-based

[39]Interview with National Rifle Association Director. July 14th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

analysis to people up on the Hill."[40] Policy research, then, is in many ways weaponized by direct engagement organizations in order to further political goals.

Most think tanks in this vein similarly orient their direct influence efforts around their research production. As one respondent suggested, think tanks like Heritage emphasize "the objective of working through the political process... to get policy changes and not just doing research. The research [is] designed to build a case, to make the argument for policy change."[41] This focus is borne out in the Heritage mission, which states that the organization aims to both "formulate" and *"promote"* conservative policies (emphasis added). Unlike academic organizations, however, politically engaged think tanks pair scholarly research with the kinds of direct advocacy efforts that were previously reserved for interest groups. The Center for American Progress, for example, notes that its approach is not only to "develop new policy ideas" but also to "challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate... [b]y employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape."

Think tanks in this category frequently have affiliated 501(c)4 organizations – often called "action funds" – that allow groups to skirt the lobbying limits placed on 501(c)3's and contribute campaign funds through associated Super PACs. Heritage Action for America, for instance, was created in 2010 out of a desire to "be able to spend money to push legislation we think the country needs without the obstacles

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[40]Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[41]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

faced by a nonprofit like the Heritage Foundation" (Fuelner and Needham, 2010). Heritage Action raised roughly $11.5 million in contributions in 2016, using this money to advertise Heritage research and influence, identify "key votes" and grade members on their stances, and engage in direct lobbying efforts to influence policy outcomes.[42] The Center for American Progress Action Fund – imitating and perhaps improving upon the activist Heritage model – received $7.6 million in grants and contributions in 2016 despite the fact that the CAP think tank has a much smaller overall budget than Heritage.

These action funds and, to the degree that they are allowed, think tanks themselves engage in activities and strategies quite similar to those employed by traditional interest groups. A researcher at the Heritage Foundation, asked to reflect on differences between Heritage and the Brookings Institution, listed a wide range of direct action strategies that distinguished her employer. The main difference, she noted, is that direct advocacy is *institutionalized* at the Heritage Foundation: while "there might be a few folks at Brookings who take it upon themselves to get hands-on, at Heritage it really is a culture."[43] This hands-on approach revolves around establishing and encouraging a *revolving door* between Heritage and government institutions ("because that access is valuable and also, having that institutional knowledge..., that is highly prized"); *training* the next generation of policy practitioners ("it allows us to instill in them our conservative ideas and intellectual leanings and... build long-

[42]It is worth noting that the Heritage Foundation think tank raised $88.8 million – significantly more than Heritage Action – in 2016.

[43]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

term relationships"); and *socializing* with those in positions of power ("to strengthen bonds... and give members an alternative to just the Speaker's Office in Congress where they usually get most of their leadership"). 'Thick' individual and institutional ties within the EPN, then, seem to be important avenues of influence in the policy process.

Direct action think tanks also seem to care much more about how their research and ideas are received, not only by members of Congress but also by the general public. Much like the NRA subject, this Heritage scholar described efforts to mobilize popular support for conservative ideas and attempts to use this support – alongside their research – to influence politicians:

> I've noticed that not just our organization but other organizations as well have become much more concerned with winning over hearts and minds. So not just talking to the lawmakers and providing technical guidance, but also being a bit more effective in a public-facing way. And I think in many ways it has to do with trying to organize the grassroots to get support from the bottom up for policies.[44]

At Heritage, these tactics even include the adoption of marketing strategies to further particular viewpoints, revealing a keen focus on the overall political influence of their research:

> What we try to do [at Heritage] is have the best research that's accurate, factual, timely and relevant, but also marketed in a digestible way. So we put a lot of resources into message testing. We have a group here dedicated to American perceptions... where we do polls and focus groups. We work with organizations that specialize in this to get key insights into what the American people think about certain issues and how they respond to certain words and phrases so that we can better tailor our research in a way that is going to be more attractive, will be better received and therefore we can be more impactful.[45]

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[44]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[45]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

In general, modern research producing institutions are much more concerned with media 'hits' and other quantitative indicators of influence. This can be seen in the fact that both the Heritage Foundation and Brookings Institution – as well as other organizations – publish statistics on social media followers, newsletter subscribers, file downloads, and website visits in their annual reports. These efforts are aimed at demonstrating *impact* to donors, lawmakers, and the general public. And, certain think tanks have recognized that influence and impact can be furthered through direct engagement with the political system. For this reason, it is important to remember that *most* organizations have shifted closer to the political end of the spectrum, adopting somewhat more direct strategies to market their research. The *trajectories* of various organizations, however, differ substantially, with some groups employing aggressive advocacy strategies that are typically not found at more academic institutions.

As a final note on direct action groups, it is once again true that politically-minded organizations can be either access-oriented and non-partisan or more ideological and partisan. Traditional interest groups still tend to seek access (and thus influence) in order to further the particularistic goals of their members. Increasing partisan polarization has also resulted in a distinct breed of direct action groups focused specifically on encouraging bipartisanship, such as the Bipartisan Policy and Niskanen Centers. On the other hand, some think tanks and interest groups – mostly founded within the last several decades – possess strong ideological and/or partisan preferences and directly engage with partisan politics to further them (e.g. Heritage, CAP, and the NRA). In fact, it seems that there is a tendency for *all* direct action groups to "play"

the game of partisan politics. This is because the decision to engage with politics necessarily means that groups engage with *polarized* politics, and so we often see them becoming more partisan in their efforts over time. The AARP, for instance, faced strong criticism from the right for its support of the Affordable Care Act, and as a result conservative Republicans have often turned from the organization in favor of several smaller conservative groups representing the retired. Even those organizations that have strongly resisted polarization still must work through a process defined by two distinct political parties. As a researcher at the Bipartisan Policy Center stated:

> Were not asking [politicians] to stop being Republicans or Democrats, were just asking them to sort of hammer it out... [W]e are actually seeking out what a real Republican and a real Democrat can do, so thats different than some other places... It can mean horse trading, it could mean meeting in the middle... That, in a way I think, is a value of being bipartisan rather than, "Hey, everybody agrees that the thing you should do is this." I mean, theres no credibility.[46]

Unfortunately, as this same respondent noted, the spaces in which Republicans and Democrats might agree have shrunk over time, making bipartisan efforts increasingly difficult and, conversely, encouraging further partisanship and division in the policy process.

2.2.3 Access and Non-Partisan Strategies

Throughout the previous sections I have frequently mentioned the fact that influence strategies are not predictably related to the level of partisanship at research institutions. Both academic and political organizations, for example, produce access-

[46]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

oriented or non-partisan research. One subject described this orientation as *practical* rather than ideological:

> We are wedded to the practical and that usually involves compromise, which is a dirty word because compromise is antithetical to raising large sums of money, right? So institutions like the Chamber and many think tanks - the old line, old guard think tanks, oftentimes the unions - have fairly practical concerns. They have political [aspects] to them obviously because we live in a political world, it's policy, but... thats a very different market process.[47]

These more practical groups seek to produce research that will inform debates and shift policy – often at the margins – towards their preferences. In the case of interest groups, this could be research that furthers particular material interests, though these interests do not entirely overlap with the goals of a particular party or ideology. In the case of non-partisan think tanks, their research may similarly have a "perspective" that is not consistently tied to a single party. For example, one lobbyist described his efforts as fairly bipartisan:

> I don't take party positions except in the sense that the company itself [has a position]. And right now the way [our PAC works] is we give about 60/40, 60 percent to Republicans, 40 percent to Democrats. Should ratios or control change, we change... Its really just a reflection of the balance of power... And I would say, based on my familiarity with other lobbyists, that... a lot of companies do the same thing.[48]

But, to reiterate, even non-partisan groups must be cognizant of partisan polarization, the dominant force in contemporary politics. It would be reasonable to say that access-oriented and non-partisan organizations have biases that arise independent of – or predate – the two parties' contemporary, polarized policy positions. However, a

[47]Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[48]Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

key implication of partisan polarization is that *more internally coherent party positions make ideologically consistent groups appear more partisan even if they have not changed their positions.* Thus, when surveying the universe of policy research organizations, many appear to be more partisan than they once were. The cases of AARP and the Chamber of Commerce – seen by many as Democratic and Republican, respectively – highlight this point. Even if these groups have not actually become more partisan, many decision-makers behave as if this were true, and their preferences now align fairly consistently with a single political party.[49]

For many non-partisan groups, the impact of polarization often arises subtly, reflecting these changing perceptions amongst those in positions of power. One subject described how his background in Republican politics was a reputation that follows him to this day, impacting his ability to convince Democratic members. In fact, he noted that most lobbying operations alter their strategies to accommodate the partisan biases of members of Congress, stating:

> I'm a Republican, or at least that's where I came from, my background being on the Hill. I was not hired to be a Republican... but like a lot of companies, we divvy up responsibilities when it comes to interacting with members of Congress or the administration along party lines. So... it's more infrequent that I engage with Democrats... What differentiates maybe what I do from somebody who worked at say a think tank that's affiliated with a particular ideology [is] I still have to go out and lobby [Democrat] Richie Neal, I gotta work with Ron Kind from Wisconsin and I gotta go up and deal with Ron Wyden from Oregon... [But] because

[49]The alignment of preferences with a single political party has even moved some previously access-oriented groups from the non-partisan category to the partisan category. This is the case for the Chamber, which has contributed considerably more to Republican candidates in recent years. For this reason, I consider the Chamber to be a Partisan-Political group.

> I've channeled my activities more toward [Republicans] Ill end up having better relationships.[50,51]

Thus, access-oriented or non-partisan groups recognize that partisan polarization impacts their influence, but they are unwilling to invest in a particular party in the way that other organizations might. Such a strategy would certainly subject their influence to the ups and downs of partisan politics. Or, as one respondent noted, they "operate like we need friends on both sides and we need to find people to work with because we're going to be here long after they're gone."[52] At the same time, however, respondents recognized that a non-partisan strategy "makes it harder to find a way to be effective" in the modern era.[53] As such, an increasing number of organizations appear to be pursuing influence strategies based in partisan politics.

2.2.4 Ideological and Partisan Strategies

Because of changing demands for policy research in Congress, it seems that more and more think tanks and interest groups have adopted *partisan* research and influence strategies. In some cases this might mean that academically oriented think tanks possess an ideological agenda that aligns most closely with a single party. Groups like the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, for example, have fairly consistent conservative and libertarian perspectives, respectively. At both of these

[50] Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[51] This quote also provides further evidence that members of Congress want information for reasons other than its informative value. Rather, social trust is an incredibly important conditioning factor in the exchange of information.

[52] Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[53] Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

organizations, their right-leaning ideologies actually predate the modern era of partisan polarization, and they appear to be relatively consistent in their approach to policy research. At the same time, the polarization of the two parties means that groups with more conservative ideologies are increasingly aligned with the goals of the Republican Party. Liberal actors, in much the same way, now closely align with the Democrats. This process is in many ways similar to the concept of "partisan sorting" (e.g. Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2005) – while neither Cato nor AEI appear to be growing *more* ideologically extreme in their views, at least in comparison to the two parties, their ideas are now best reflected in the agenda of the Republican Party, and this fact has become increasingly clear as its distance from the Democratic Party grows.

Thus, one respondent remarked that certain groups can predictably associate with a single party yet still produce credible research, as their partisan alignment is somewhat incidental to their overall ideological perspective. He said:

> [There are] a lot more groups that are affiliated with the Democratic Party [or] the Republican Party, and it's not that... the research is [not] highly competent... But that means you've got a point of view, right? That's what they're there for and so they share that point of view with lawmakers, and lawmakers know that as well.[54]

On the other hand, groups in the mold of the Heritage Foundation, CAP, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities can be considered partisan *affiliates*, meaning that they purposefully align with a particular party because they see it as the best avenue for influence. Rather than sorting, these organizations seem closer to

[54]Interview with Congressional Research Service Senior Specialist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

active participants in the process of polarization. To again quote a US Chamber of Commerce researcher, such organizations "saw where [politics] was going [and] they went to lead it."[55] Or, as another respondent noted:

> Theres a much, much wider array of institutions of big sizes and a lot of them do line up pretty closely to one party one way or the other. And I do think that's what the pressure is now... When you look at something like the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, for example, they are heavily just seen by the Democratic Party, almost like the Democratic think tank. Technically that's not true, it's not [part of] the party, but almost everybody there... would align with the Democratic Party enthusiastically and see that it was really the only vehicle to get ideas developed. I think the pressure is on an organization to become even more aligned in a party way right now.[56]

Groups in this mold have often adopted new strategies to thrive in an era of polarization. As one subject stated, partisan groups are "changing the way they operate [and] becoming more political and less [about] simply writing good policy papers to try to advance ideas."[57] Because many of these groups are also direct advocacy organizations, these strategies tend to revolve around the traditional interest group tactics discussed previously. Importantly, these advocacy strategies typically differentiate partisan-ideological organizations that have enthusiastically entered the political fray and participated in the polarization of politics from those who have been "pulled" into a polarized system.

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[55]Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[56]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[57]Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

2.2.5 A Contemporary Typology of Research Producing Organizations

Having outlined the two dimensions along which modern research producing institutions operate, we are now able to distinguish four ideal types. Like all ideal types, these categories are abstractions, but they highlight the important – and contradictory – forces operating on outside groups and the various strategies they have adopted to meet them. The four ideal types include:

1. **Moderate-Academic Organizations:** Groups in the Moderate-Academic mold – which, to the best of my knowledge, include only think tanks – most closely resemble the Progressive ideal of research production. They generally adhere to strong internal research norms and abstain from institutionalized efforts to directly influence political outcomes. These think tanks tend to be older – such as the Brookings Institution (founded in 1916) or the RAND Corporation (founded in 1948) – and their founding missions and decades of practice have resisted, as much as possible, the polarizing tendencies that others have succumbed to. Often these organizations adopt an explicitly non-partisan or non-ideological approach. It is easy to view this configuration as normatively 'better' than other strategies, and indeed this is a viewpoint that I am sympathetic to. However, it is important to remember that these groups exist in an era of partisan polarization, are often viewed in partisan terms, and produce research that is used and abused by partisan actors. Thus, true Moderate-Academic organizations appear to be an increasingly rare entity, and the mod-

erating influence that they could potentially play in contemporary politics is likely underrealized.

2. **Moderate-Political Organizations:** Much like Moderate-Academics, groups classified as Moderate-Political pursue a centrist or non-ideological approach to their policy research. Often, though, this orientation is a simple reflection of the fact that partisanship is a poor strategy for groups seeking *access* to policymakers in order to push policy towards particular interests. Thus, most Moderate-Political groups are interest groups that directly engage in politics but do so in a way that furthers narrow interests that are not predictably associated with any one party. To the degree that these groups align with a party, it is often "just a reflection of the balance of power" and subject to change should a different party take control of government. Still, these organizations are heavily involved in the day-to-day activities of politics. They invest in strategies such as grassroots mobilization, electoral politics, and lobbying to further their aims. And, the growing internal cohesiveness of the two parties has meant that these groups are often perceived to be (e.g. AARP) or actually (e.g. the Chamber of Commerce) moving towards the preferences of a single political party. This movement, though, is slower and less deliberate than at other organizational types.

3. **Partisan-Academic Organizations:** Groups considered Partisan-Academic, on the other hand, tend to have particular ideological or partisan viewpoints, but they maintain an academic approach that limits their willingness to engage

in direct advocacy or influence strategies. As one subject noted, even though these groups have ideological perspectives, they "often will work on issues at a more academic level and stay within the intellectual framework of an issue."[58] These organizations tend to be part of the original Old Guard of think tanks, founded as high-quality research institutions with particular ideological orientations. The American Enterprise Institute (founded in 1938) and the Cato Institute (founded in 1977) exemplify this model. And, as noted above, it does not appear that Partisan-Academic organizations have significantly altered their beliefs or strategies in the modern era. As one responded noted, "I tend to think a place like AEI still has... an intellectual mission, even though it has a conservative viewpoint."[59] Instead, it seems that these organizations – due to their consistent ideological approaches – have found themselves better aligned with a single party as the two parties have grown apart.

4. **Partisan-Political Organizations:** The final ideal type identified is the class of think tanks and interest groups defined as Partisan-Political organizations. Such organizations combine encouragement of partisanship and polarization with an active participation in these processes. Many of these groups are among the "New Guard" of entrants since the 1970's, and they share a blending of research production and direct, partisan political advocacy. As one responded remarked, "They've got PhD's, yes, but they've [also] got people with lots of

[58]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[59]Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

political experience."[60] Think tanks in this mold – such as Heritage and CAP – were readily identified with a single political party by my subjects and, in fact, admit that their goals are best accomplished through the Republican or Democratic Parties, respectively. They also pair their partisan preferences with interest group strategies such as lobbying, revolving door practices, and organized political pressure. They view themselves as "do tanks" and work closely alongside politicians to advance their agendas. At such think tanks, the line between research and advocacy – the line between their 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 arms – is often blurry. A Heritage Foundation employee, for instance, described how "I'll sometimes go along with a member of our 501(c)4, which is Heritage Action. They have strong relationships with members of Congress and if there's something that a Congress member wants to know more about or there's a bill and they're hesitant, they don't know the history of the legislation [and they] are wondering what some of the possible ramifications of some language might be, [then] I might come in and give them a little background or just give them a refresher course."[61] Interest groups in this category – such as the NRA or American Conservative Union – similarly engage in direct advocacy, though research production is a relatively smaller portion of their overall influence strategy.

[60]Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[61]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

2.2.6 An Unequal Arms Race

Of these four ideal types, it seems clear that the momentum is on the side of Partisan-Political organizations. These groups occupy a unique intersection: they produce the kind of research that is most strongly desired by members of Congress, and they engage in direct advocacy efforts to ensure that members are aware of their research products. While changing political dynamics mean that most groups are now more closely aligned with one party or the other, these groups are actively participating in partisan policymaking. As such, they likely have the strongest *reputations* as producers of valuable partisan information; they have established themselves as the trusted, go-to source for information within their EPN. As one Heritage researcher stated, "I think we have that conservative brand that is strong, where I get a lot of leverage out of the organization that I'm affiliated with."[62] Implicit in this statement is that the "leverage" is over like-minded conservative organizations and Republican members of Congress.

According to most respondents, Partisan-Political groups comprise the bulk of organizations founded in the last several decades. Many of these groups – such as CAP and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – explicitly modeled themselves after the success of the Heritage Foundation, the quintessential Partisan-Political organization. Thus, one respondent concluded that the "terrain" of partisan advocacy "is well populated on the left and the right... You've got very sophisticated organizations... [that are] solidly ideological and more linked with people in a party... It's the people

[62]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

who want to somehow figure out a way to break down some of these differences and... draw a wider coalition together [that are lacking]... There are fewer of those kinds of institutions."[63] In other words, when it comes to the prevalence of Partisan-Political versus other organizations, it is not "an equal arms race."[64]

Does the inflow of newly partisan interest groups and think tanks mean that such organizations have greater influence over policy debates, designs, and outcomes? While this question is addressed in detail in later chapters, it is worth noting now that, according to practitioners in the Capitol, this is in fact the case. One respondent, reflecting on the Cato Institute's "intense concern to avoid pay-for-play or the appearance of" it, acknowledged the downsides of a more academic approach to policy research:

> The benefit [of our approach] would be that you might actually be able to maintain some independence, but the obvious cost is the other side, right?... Libertarians are different in that there's a kind of – it's weird that they're drawn to Washington because they [hate] politics... I don't know, I liked that when I was younger. Now I'm thinking I see the costs more than the benefits.[65]

Conversely, both Heritage Foundation researchers I interviewed noted that their unique approach was highly effective, especially compared to other research organizations. Others concurred, noting:

> [At] Heritage you just feel like [they're saying] "what are the needs of the Republican Party today?" They'll turn out something to satisfy those needs, [which] probably does give them more direct influence... [I]t's certainly easier in a sense to measure what Heritage does.[66]

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[63]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[64]Interview with New York Life Lobbyist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[65]Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[66]Interview with Institute for Free Speech executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

Before turning to questions of influence, however, it is worthwhile to explore the alternative institutional practices that are employed by various types of organizations and that help explain why Partisan-Political groups likely have greater influence in the policy process. This is the task of the next chapter, in which I investigate the alternative organizational processes and strategies that differentiate Partisan-Political groups from more academic and less ideological organizations.

CHAPTER 3

MONEY, MANAGEMENT, AND MEETINGS

> *Foundations are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity and from lobbying elected officials about legislation...Yet a notable portion of foundation spending - a growing portion for some foundations - is targeted almost directly at the political process. This spending is intended to win the "war of ideas" under way in American politics. It supports research and advocacy that aims to influence how elected officials and the public think about a broad range of policies.* (Rich, 2005)

> *Our belief is that when the research product has been printed, then the job is only half done. That is when we start marketing it to the media... We have as part of our charge the selling of ideas, the selling of policy proposals. We are out there actively selling these things, day after day. Its our mission.* (Herb Berkowitz, former Vice President for Communications at the Heritage Foundation)[1]

The growing number and prominence of Partisan-Political organizations has fundamentally altered the universe of research-producing institutions. While groups claim to value academic integrity and a general disengagement from politics, in reality the line between academic research production and direct political advocacy has been blurred at many organizations. A growing segment of scholars believes, as the above quote from Herb Berkowitz suggests, that research production is but half the battle in their efforts to influence policy outcomes. As a result, we see a notable

[1] Quoted in Rich (2005).

increase in the types of activities "targeted almost directly at the political process" (Rich, 2005).

These strategies are now commonplace at Partisan-Political organizations, and they are becoming relatively more common at other types of groups as well. Still, beyond some of the most obvious indicators of direct influence – like lobbying, revolving door hiring, and public advocacy campaigns – we know relatively little about the day-to-day practices that various types of groups engage in. Do more political groups have institutional designs and practices that enhance their influence over the policy process? Are more academic groups set up more like research universities? And how do decisions regarding organizational structure and activities influence the nature and influence of groups?

In this chapter I argue that the everyday operations of Partisan-Political groups differ substantially from the practices found at more academic organizations. These differences are both a *cause* and a *consequence* of the decision to (not) engage directly in the political process. Understanding how various groups operate, though, is not merely an exercise in validating the group typology outlined in the previous chapter. Rather, the operational practices found at different types of groups lead to very different predictions about the degree of influence each type has over the policy process. In the most extreme case, Partisan-Political groups have centralized control over funding and review processes, spend substantial amounts on direct political advocacy, and tend to engage in more symbolic, relationship-building collaborations with like-minded partisans. In this way, think tanks and interest groups with clear partisan preferences have become central players in their respective extended party

networks, which should enhance their influence over the policy process when their party controls government. More academic organizations, on the other hand, tend to spend money on traditional research enterprises, including internal review processes that screen for academic credibility and research collaborations with a diverse set of actors. While such activities help these groups maintain an aura of credibility, it is unclear whether this is an effective strategy in the modern era.

To highlight these differences, I focus in this chapter on four organizational characteristics that highlight not only the alternative objectives of various groups but also provide clear predictions about which groups will be most influential in the policy process. In particular, I investigate the various ways in which organizations are funded; the relative importance and intentions of internal review processes; the activities and programs that groups prioritize; and the extent and composition of external research collaborations. Though not the central focus of this chapter, this approach does have the added benefit of validating the typology of research producing organizations presented in the previous chapter. As I show throughout the chapter, the level of direct political engagement and partisanship at an organization is revealed in a wide range of behaviors. The most important pattern, for our purposes, is the fact that Partisan-Political groups engage in notably different activities than their more academic or non-partisan counterparts. Once again, however, we will see that the general trend amongst research producing organizations is towards more direct engagement and advocacy of their policy ideas.

3.1 Behind Closed Doors: Funding and Review Processes

Two of the characteristics investigated here can be described as internal to an organization. Such decisions are often made 'behind closed doors' and are opaque to the public, relating instead to how an organization operates (and why they do so). These strategies inform the internal operation of groups, from the day-to-day activities of scholars to the overall organizational mission. The way in which a group is *funded*, for example, is tied not only to its goals but also the degree of academic freedom enjoyed by its scholars. Academic independence, in turn, is reflected in and conditioned by the types of research *review processes* employed by the group. These two characteristics combine to grant more partisan organizations substantial centralized control over their scholars and their overall messaging. This control appears to be used to further the ideological goals of the group and the (mostly) individual donors who fund them. Furthermore, the ability to present a coherent, unified organizational message to the public is likely a necessary prerequisite for policy influence. At academic organizations, however, scholars enjoy greater freedom in how they utilize research funds and what findings they publish. This academic freedom is important for maintaining an aura of objectivity, but it can also result in mixed messaging that undermines direct political influence. Thus, the different institutional 'cultures" found at these ideal types are reflected in, driven by, and fed back upon the day-to-day processes of fundraising and research production, with important implications for policy influence.

3.1.1 Organizational Funding

First, nearly every interview subject suggested that organizational funding dynamics are intimately intertwined with a group's degree of engagement with the political system and the extent of their ideological or partisan preferences. At this time it is not worth untangling whether funders inform group strategies or whether particular group strategies attract certain types of funding, and it is likely that the two are mutually reinforcing (Lowry, 1999). Regardless of the causal direction of this relationship, however, two aspects of organizational funding emerge as important correlates of group strategies and influence: the extent to which contributions come mainly from *institutional* as opposed to *individual* funders, and the degree to which fundraising is an *individual* as opposed to a *collective* enterprise.

3.1.1.1 Institutional and Individual Funders

Because most interest groups and think tanks are highly reliant on voluntary contributions, an institution's fundraising portfolio – or the distribution of funds from various sources – should be related to (and have a strong effect on) the strategies adopted by that group. To ensure continued institutional viability, rational executives may adjust their focus to attract funds from particular types of donors. As Lowry (1999, 759) found in his study of non-profit citizen groups and think tanks, "Governance structures and program activities... are choice variables... and the choices made affect the likely mix of funding sources. Once these decisions are made and patterns of financial support are established, they become mutually reinforcing." Describing this phenomenon, one interview subject suggested that non-endowed or-

ganizations are the most susceptible to market forces deriving from the preferences of their contributors, stating:

> If you think about think tanks [it's] overgeneralizing, but it's useful [they] come in two flavors, not political, but structural. The one is they raised the money that they spend and the other is they have a large endowment and they don't worry about raising money very much. The ones that raise [the] money they spend are going to behave the exact same as your local restaurant: right there in the marketplace. They're trying to raise money. The more money they raise, the more they can do what they want to do. And by the way, the leadership gets a bigger paycheck. Just like a business, it's a marketplace. The endowed foundations tend to... make grants and they give grand speeches [and] people listen to them because we're hoping to get one of those grants.[2]

To this observation I would add that organizations raising funds mainly from individuals are likely operating within a different "marketplace" than those that draw contributions largely from institutional sources (e.g. businesses, foundations, or government). Scholars studying campaign contributors in the modern era of polarization have found that individual donors tend to support more ideologically extreme candidates, with traditional party and interest group organizations tending to fund relative moderates (e.g. La Raja and Schaffner, 2015). While empirical studies of individual contributors to think tanks and foundations are severely lacking, there is reason to believe that those who take the relatively rare step of giving to policy research institutes are similar to – and perhaps even a more extreme version of – those who give to campaigns. In other words, they are likely highly interested and active in politics, strong partisans, and ideologically extreme in comparison to the general public.

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[2]Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

Indeed, subjects described individual funders as quite similar to party campaign donors. One simply stated that “I think it’s just more natural to raise money... for a cause [from] groups of people who are related to party givers. There’s some people who feel more comfortable giving to ideas than the party.”[3] Furthermore, most subjects noted that individual contributors are qualitatively different than their institutional counterparts. One difference derives from the motivations for giving – while institutional funders generally seek out benefits like good will, access, or information (Lowry, 1999), individual funders tend to give in order to support the long term mission, ideas, or perspective of an organization. A Cato Institute executive, reflecting on the types of donors Cato attracts, noted that:

> Cato doesn’t take money from the government or business. Businesses can give [but] we don’t get a lot from business, we don’t get anything from government. So it was going to be individuals or foundations, mostly individuals. So you need a donor core that is willing to hang in there... [B]y the time I come into the picture in the late eighties or nineties, [think tanks are] all going on about influence. “We want to have influence. How do we have influence?.”.. [But] our donors have selected out [of that mindset] and they’re willing to tolerate the bigger picture and talk about the long game... These are donors who are willing to say, “Well, I recognize that maybe next week we’re not going to change things.”[4]

Another difference between individual and institutional donors derives from the extent to which they are willing to accommodate new, unorthodox, or ideologically extreme ideas. Institutional funders seeking good will or policy influence are unlikely to support organizations whose research ‘rocks the boat’, as such ideas can be detrimental to both public perceptions and the policy goals of the donor. Furthermore, many institutional contributors seek simply to protect the status quo and

[3]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[4]Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

would therefore be unlikely to support an organization, like the Cato Institute, that is focused on the long term evolution of ideological ideas. Motivated individuals, on the other hand, face no such constraints, and – if they are invested political activists with strong pre-existing beliefs – they may actually *prefer* institutions that invest in partisan or ideologically motivated ideas. An interview subject at the Chamber of Commerce – whose funding sources are unknown but likely include mostly business interests rather than individuals – described the importance of different funding sources for organizational approaches:

> [Our members have] a very practical point of view. We can't afford the extreme partisan[ship], right? Well [on] the other hand, the [groups] who are more extreme can't afford necessarily to be practical. They're subject to a very simple reality which is the American people today respond to the loudest screamers and, when they respond, money follows. So when money follows the organizations are then incentivized on the extremes to continue to be extreme and to not compromise. Because that's what allows them to raise money. It is a market response. [A] political market response as reflected by cash.

Because individual donors are less averse to extremism, we would expect more ideological or partisan organizations (like those in the right hand column of Table 2.1) to draw most of their funds from individual contributors. Indeed, the Heritage Foundation – the quintessential example of a Partisan-Political think tank – proudly proclaims on its website that "Heritage relies on the private financial support of the general public – individuals, foundations, and corporations – for its income, and accepts no government funds and performs no contract work." Further examination of their funding since 2010, depicted in Figure 3.1, reveals that individual donors are the single largest source of contributions, comprising close to 80 percent of their funds

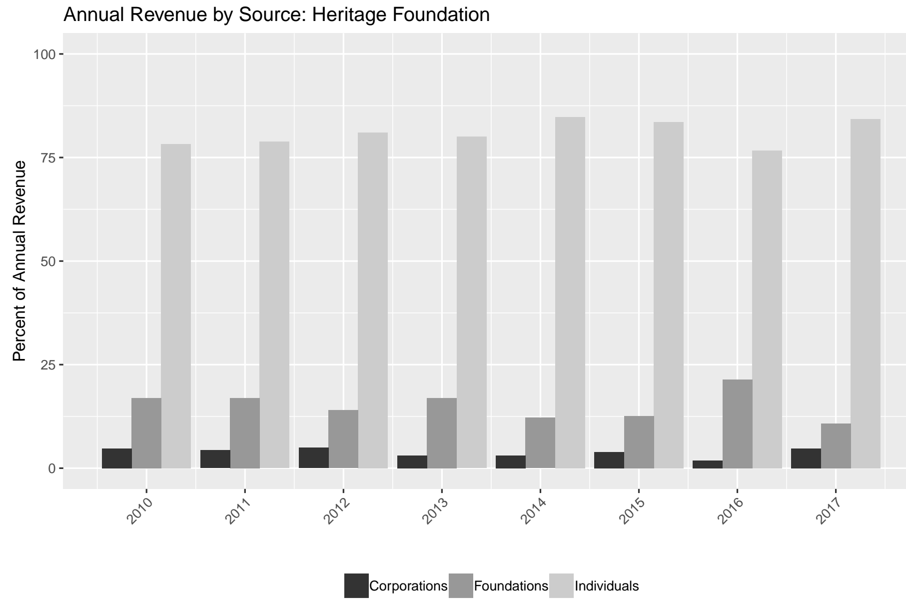

Figure 3.1: Heritage Foundation annual funding by source. Data comes from Heritage Foundation annual reports, 2010-2017.

in any given year. A survey of these contributors would almost certainly find that they are strongly conservative Republicans.

Similarly, the American Enterprise Institute draws a plurality of its funding from individual donors, though its status as a Partisan-*Academic* organization seems to also attract significant amounts of money from corporations and foundations (see Figure 3.2). In general, it seems that organizations operating at the intersection of academic research and ideological promotion are able to attract funding from both institutions – who may appreciate the ability to further their material goals, intertwined with a particular ideological viewpoint, while also being able to point to scholarly credibility – and individuals – who appreciate and embody the particular ideological bent of the organization.

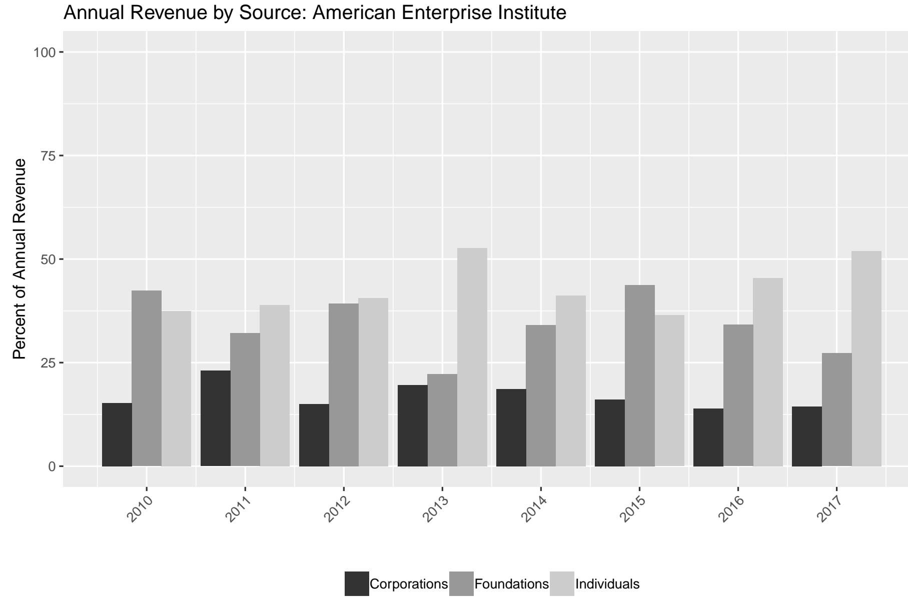

Figure 3.2: American Enterprise Institute annual funding by source. Data comes from AEI annual reports, 2010-2017.

On the other hand, organizations that are more traditional (and less ideological) in their approach to research should attract greater institutional funding. Many such institutions – including government agencies, large foundations, and corporations – seek empirical research that can credibly be used to further their material or foundational goals. Access-oriented and non-partisan organizations, regardless of whether or not they engage in direct political advocacy, should be in a privileged position to meet these needs. Indeed, when we look at the funding distribution for the Urban Institute (a Moderate-Academic organization) in Figure 3.3, we see that the institute collects the majority of its funds from foundations and government grants. Funding from corporations represents a relatively small portion of Urban Institute revenue in most years, and individual funders comprise only 1-2 percent of total operating revenue in any given year.

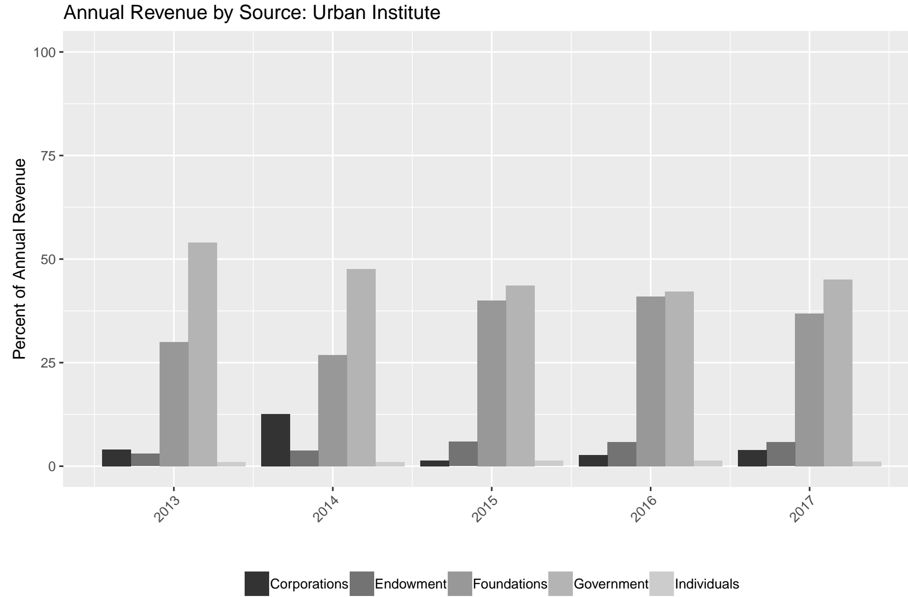

Figure 3.3: Urban Institute annual funding by source. Data comes from Urban Institute annual reports, 2013-2017.

In general, then, it seems that institutions funded mainly by individuals have the freedom – and perhaps the mandate – to produce more politically or ideologically motivated research. As one Heritage Foundation researcher remarked:

> Because Heritage is not dependent on any particular pot of funding – our funding pool is highly diversified – we can be independent because we're financially independent. And that also gives us political independence because upsetting a lawmaker here or there... if we were dependent on, you know, a smaller funding pool, then we would have to be more responsive to those concerns. But we really are able to push forth what we believe is the *conservative message*... at the risk of occasionally offending and upsetting some of our allies (emphasis added).[5]

Furthermore, although individually-funded organizations often pursue more ideological or partisan strategies, their relative independence from corporate funding – seen by many as "corrupt" – actually grants them a unique form of credibility. As one respondent noted, individual funders remove the appearance of "pay for play" or fi-

[5]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

nancially motivated research.[6] In this way, certain organizations that are predictably aligned with a single political party may actually be able to lay claim to a form of credibility – perhaps more accurately described as "purity" – outside of the traditional notion of academic objectivity.

3.1.1.2 Individualized and Collective Fundraising

Aside from the source of funds, another major difference arises between organizations that have more centralized, bureaucratic fundraising operations and those that rely more heavily on individual scholars to attract grants and contracts. Understandably, groups that raise funds largely from individual contributors tend to also have centralized fundraising operations or "development" offices, as few scholars have the resources to collect money to support their research via many smaller individual contributions. The individual contributors giving to these organizations are often contributing to a broader *cause* and, as a result, care more about an institution's viewpoint than the reputation of any particular scholar. Conversely, groups that attract government and foundation grants or contracts often rely more heavily on individual scholars' efforts to raise funds for particular issues or projects. This is because institutional contributors – unlike individuals – tend to support research on particular topical problems and are therefore likely to care about the track record of the scholars conducting the research, in addition to the overall institutional reputation of their employer.

[6] Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

At the Heritage Foundation, for example, one scholar stated that "at a lot of places, if you are a research fellow you're doing some amount of development. I don't do any development."[7] Instead, Heritage has a robust development team tasked with collecting and centralizing money to be distributed to various researchers, projects, and objectives. This team – according to a 2017 internship advertisement – includes staff working on "Donor Relations" (with eighteen fundraisers travelling nationwide to solicit funds); "Donor Relations Advancement" (with staff producing written materials and other gifts to distribute to major donors); "Gift Planning" (where staff help solicit long-term gifts from individuals and estates); and "Membership Programs" (with staff providing products for Heritage's rank-and-file members).[8]

The Brookings Institution, on the other hand, typically has one development staffer tied to each research program, with much less emphasis on donor cultivation and retention. Instead, individual researchers often perform these functions, with a Brookings employee describing the organization as a "condominium of scholars where... people are buying their own 'units' but then there's common services that you pay for."[9] Similarly, while the Urban Institute has several employees working on development, they also have a robust "Contracting Department" that aids scholars in attracting funds, reflecting the importance of contracted work and grants at the organization.

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[7]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[8]Heritage Foundation. October 25th, 2017. "Development/Fundraising." `https://herit.ag/2UKPjT3`

[9]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

Respondents employed at organizations with centralized, bureaucratic fundraising operations noted that this setup results in "very, very significant" academic freedom, as "the donors aren't really calling the shots in the same way" that they might if particular projects were tied to outside funding.[10] In another way, however, centralized fundraising operations simply shift researchers' attention from the preferences of outside donors to the preferences of the organization that employs them. A centralized pot of money allows think tank and interest group executives to engage in more hierarchical monitoring of their scholars' agendas and their institution's messaging. Unlike organizations where scholars can look outside for interested donors, the viability of a particular project is tied to the willingness of the organization itself to fund it, as "the funding is not as earmarked for particular people and particular projects."[11] As such, bureaucratic fundraising organizations have significantly more positive and negative agenda setting power. While scholar-fundraisers may be more attentive to the desires of their institutional backers, researchers at centralized organizations must be more responsive to the goals and demands of their employer. In this way, the *processes* of fundraising – as much as the source of these funds – impacts the internal dynamics and strategies at particular organizations.

3.1.2 Internal Review Processes

This fact is seen most clearly in the different internal review processes employed at various types of institutions. In general, it seems that organizations engaged in

[10] Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[11] Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

more direct political advocacy also tend to have more centralized, hierarchical review processes. In the case of both think tanks and interest groups, this centralized control results from – or is reflective of – the fact that individual scholars have little access to independent funding. More academic organizations, on the other hand, tend to have fewer formalized review processes and less direct control over the scholarship that their researchers are producing. This design likely reflects not only the fact that individual scholars have greater control over funding, but also a norm of scholarly independence that pervades such organizations. In many ways, scholars at indirect academic institutions resemble academics in a university setting.

Indeed, one subject said that "I think its fair to say that AEI and Brookings are more like universities and let the scholars do their own things... Whereas some of the other places are much more, you run things up the flagpole."[12] As a result of this scholarly independence, at academic organizations there is often a wider array of scholarly opinions and a more ideologically diverse set of researchers. The Brookings Institution is perhaps the best example of such an organization. One interview subject, previously employed by the Heritage Foundation, noted that he was recruited by Brookings in part because his ideological perspective was in the minority at the organization. He described the "idea that you can get a range of opinions" as "one of the hallmarks of Brookings."[13] Many academic organizations value this diversity because it contributes to their reputation for even-handedness and credibility. Or, as

[12]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[13]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

one subject noted in jest, hiring "people who are a little off the ideological bent of the place, the joke is that's great for your tax status."[14] Beyond maintaining their status as 501(c)3's, though, it seems that ideological diversity is built into the norms of some academic organizations.

Of course, ideological diversity is a relative term. At organizations like the American Enterprise or Cato Institutes, for example, there is a clear rightward or libertarian preference, but these groups are still more likely than Partisan-Political organizations to employ or engage with (see below) scholars who hold alternative views. Even the Brookings Institution has at least a mild ideological perspective. According to an employee there:

> Brookings does... independent [research] – which means nonaligned, it doesn't mean that the scholars all have the same views in the middle of the spectrum. I think it's quite fair to say the overwhelming proportion of people at Brookings are on the center left. That said, there's voices right across the spectrum. There may not be as many conservatives here as you would get somewhere else, but the conservative voice is very strong here. I mean, my [more conservative] work... is very strongly promoted by Brookings. There's no hesitation about that.[15]

Thus, what seems to distinguish academic-minded organizations is the importance placed on bringing in alternative viewpoints – even if all perspectives are not evenly represented – and allowing scholars the freedom to pursue their research independent of centralized organizational control. Elaborating on this point, the same subject noted a key difference between academic and political groups:

> [Brookings] doesn't have quite the full complement of views on the center-right that Brookings would hope to have quite honestly. But it's doing

[14]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[15]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

> what it can, I think, to... have a wide range of opinions that are collegial... Even though we disagree that's very much the Brookings model. It's the model of a number of thinks tanks [like the Urban Institute and] some of the more contract think tanks... You would see that two individual scholars have their own view. And then you get a think tank like Heritage or [Center for] American Progress and, to an extent, the American Enterprise Institute, and groups like that that tend to have a more kind of corporate position. Even if technically they say they don't, they sort of do.[16]

Thus, the comparative ideological diversity at academic organizations is often accompanied by relatively lax monitoring of scholars and fewer internal review processes through which executives can control the organization's overall messaging. Conversely, the "corporate positions" found at political organizations are necessarily accompanied by more centralized control over both the work of individual scholars and the overall messaging of the institution. It is useful to once again think of Brookings and organizations like it as a "condominium of scholars" who share certain resources (and perhaps general goals and perspectives) but who are not subjected to a significant amount of oversight from their employer. Political groups like the Chamber of Commerce and the Heritage Foundation, on the other hand, act more like corporations, with a single corporate position on most issues and an organizational structure build around hierarchical relationships. Or, as one subject framed it:

> Here at Brookings, we are more like independent scholars in a condominium... [while] at Heritage you're part of a team and the team makes decisions and decides how to approach a particular issue. You have a collective responsibility... [W]hen I was at Heritage, [they] don't tell people what to do [or] what to say and think about something, but when [they] make recommendations as Heritage - and this is the same for [the Center for] American Progress [and] a number of think tanks that are like this - there is a conversation in the organization about how to approach a certain issue. And when [they] put recommendations together

[16] Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

> [at] somewhere like Heritage, they are the recommendations of the Heritage Foundation... [At] Brookings they are the scholars recommendations and conclusions. That's why at Brookings, you can get two different scholars having opposing views about what to do and it often happens because there isn't the 'Brookings' position', even though you read in the paper that Brookings says so and so... It's always an individual scholar. That's a big difference.[17]

In other words, political organizations are much more likely to utilize research review processes to more aggressively police the messaging of their scholars and ensure that research production feeds into the political goals of the group.

What do these differing internal review processes look like in practice? It seems that they differ in terms of both the extent of *centralization* as well as the *objectives* of such editing processes. Academic organizations tend to have decentralized review processes – one subject said that Brookings, for example, had no mandatory guidelines for copy editing – that prioritize factors like academic integrity and style. Political organizations tend to have more formalized, centralized, and hierarchical review processes that edit for factors like "fit" or "consistency" with the organization's message and ideology. Several subjects – including those who had worked at both academic and political organizations – outlined this comparison in their interviews. For example, someone who worked at both Heritage and Brookings described how the former edited for both arguments (i.e. academic credibility) and recommendations (i.e. the translation of this research to the political sphere), while the latter had no formalized review at all. He stated:

> [At places like Heritage] you tend to get a lot of review, including review even of the style of a product by that project team. [At Brookings] when

[17]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

> I first came it was kind of individuals and there was really no formal review process which really surprised me. At Heritage there was a very strict review process at two levels: there was one that really reviewed the arguments and [one that reviewed] the recommendations... [I]t was kind of a collective cause, youre part of the team and the team develops the recommendations, so at Heritage we would have a conversation... about their recommendations and... I would avoid overruling anybody, but we [would] have an argument sometimes, [or] certainly a discussion about what the recommendation should be. So there was that process which is common in any situation where you have a team developing anything – [it's the] same in a commercial situation. So then we would have a very strict editing process and [the research would go] to a professional editor, raising issues about arguments and copy editing... Brookings does not do that kind of that kind of editing review.[18]

Similarly, a subject previously employed at Brookings but now at the AARP noted that centralized review processess are quite common at interest groups, saying:

> At Brookings... I was the research director, so I would say, "Okay, I'm going to work on this paper, we're going to write this paper soup to nuts." I'd be involved in it... and then there wasn't much of a vetting process. I didn't have to get clearance from various people, didn't have to make sure that it didn't get anybody hot... We didn't have to go through layers and layers of review. Whereas over here, AARP is big and it's dynamic. It has lots of different issues that it works on. A lot of people work on those issues. And so you just need to coordinate your activities with the whole range of other people, not just in the policy shop.[19]

The greater degree of centralized review at political organizations enables stronger control over group messaging and policy recommendations. This control, in turn, allows these organizations to predictably support their ideological view and, potentially, align with a single party. While it is not the case, as noted above, that political organizations "tell people what to do, what to say and think about something," it is true that higher-ups at an organization like Heritage have much greater agenda setting

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[18]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[19]Interview with American Association for Retired People Public Policy Institute Vice President. June 27th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

power. This agenda setting is likely both positive – meaning leadership helps determine which topics are focused on – and negative – where leadership has the power to restrict attention to an acceptable realm of relatively agreed-upon topics. Restricting attention to consensual issues is an especially important aspect of political advocacy and EPN maintenance. Such agenda setting means that scholars at more political organizations write – to a greater degree – with their organizational mission as a central frame (though some of this may be due to self-selection into a particular organization – and its viewpoint – rather than altered behavior). As one Heritage scholar noted:

> In both [academia and at Heritage] theres a real editing process, so youre writing with editors in mind to some extent in both some places. In academia youre writing with a potential outside reviewer in mind, or several depending on if youre writing something for an edited volume, book, or an article. Here youre writing with our higher ups in mind and... rarely in life do you get to just write what you think exactly.[20]

While I suggest here that centralized review could be problematic for objectivity, it is true that such hierarchical control has some positive benefits. One subject suggested that strong and formalized review processes make scholars more attentive to how their work will be interpreted, perhaps resulting in a greater focus on solid research production. He said:

> At Heritage... in a way you have to be more careful. The expectation is a greater degree of care [because] leadership is going to be [more involved] and there are people who are going to be reading it with an extremely critical eye. So... everything you say has to be rigorously footnoted and you can't be taking any poetic license with the truth. So in a way I think that the editing process has the same effect here as the reviewing process has in academia. Both settings you know that someone is going to be looking over your shoulder, looking at your numbers, making sure that the citations that you lay down say what you claim they say, etc... In

[20]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

> fact, Im more cautious with my claims maybe at Heritage, knowing that it would reflect very poorly on the organization if I was wrong or not as careful as I should be and also knowing that there are people who are reading Heritage's work [and who] would [like to] embarrass Heritage very much.[21]

Still, on balance it seems that organizations with stronger internal controls produce research that supports a consistent ideological position, casting doubt on the notion that such research is *more* objective.

As a final note, centralized review processes do not always result in more ideological research. In fact, they have the potential to improve objectivity, but only if these review processes prioritize accuracy over organizational fit. In other words, it matters what the overall objectives of these review processes are. At most ideological groups the objective is likely to ensure that research is sufficiently in line with pre-existing beliefs and preferences. At the CRS, on the other hand, there are "a lot of reviews before a product goes out" to ensure that said product fits with the agency's goals, or is "objective [and] non-partisan in terms of the information and how it's presented."[22] These very different objectives are likely to have very different effects on the quality, conclusions, and influence of policy research.

3.2 The Public Face: Programs and Collaborations

Groups differ not only in their internal fundraising and research processes, but also in the ways that they engage with the broader public, other research organizations, and those in positions of power. If the previous section addressed the question of

[21] Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[22] Interview with Congressional Research Service Senior Specialist. June 26th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

how these groups are operating, this section aims to understand *what* they are doing in the policy process and *who* they are doing it with. Together, these activities and interactions represent the "public face" of an organization, or the ways in which they transmit their research to the world. I focus on two specific indicators of public engagement. First, I investigate how groups spend their money and the programs that they prioritize. This indicator helps address the question of what these groups are doing (or not doing) to promote their research. Second, I study group collaborations – revealed in event participation – to understand whether or not groups utilize partnerships to signal diversity and independence or, alternatively, to further a particular partisan or ideological viewpoint.

Once again, different types of organizations prioritize different strategies and objectives, leading to the expectation that more political and partisan groups have become increasingly influential in the policy process. For example, political organizations are much more likely to spend money on programs that educate the public and push for policy change, while academic groups tend to focus more exclusively on research production for its own sake. When it comes to group collaborations, partisan organizations tend to partner with ideologically similar actors – resulting in relatively symbolic endeavors that help maintain partisan coalitions – while nonpartisan groups engage in more diverse collaborations that signal widespread buy-in and academic independence. These two findings combine to paint a stark picture of Partisan-Political organizations as groups that are willing and able to forcefully advocate a unified policy message to their preferred party.

3.2.1 Expenditures and Programs

To begin, I focus on how various groups prioritize certain activities. These differences are seen most clearly in organizational expenditures and programming. Aggregate expenditures can provide a clear indication of the overall trajectory of an organization, while itemized expenditures can provide insights into their priorities and goals. Prominent organizational programs, similarly, can reveal a group's top strategies and objectives.

First, it is instructive to examine trends in aggregate expenditures at several organizations.[23] Are certain types of groups experiencing notable growth? Are others more stagnant? To answer these questions, Table 3.1 provides data on group expenses in 2001 and 2016 as well as statistics on the percentage increase and the average annual increase in group expenditures over the period. The groups are listed in order of growth, with the top organizations experiencing the greatest increase in expenditures in recent years. The Center for American Progress (1,509% increase) and National Rifle Association Foundation[24] (424% increase) stand out in terms of their exceptional growth.[25] The Brookings Institution also experienced notable growth (246%).

On the other hand, the Urban Institute (34% growth) and the American Medical Association Foundation (31% growth) have been relatively stagnant. We should be

[23]I focus here on expenditures, which I believe are the best indicator of organizational growth, but it is worth noting that organizational revenues closely track expenditures for all groups.

[24]When possible, I compare think tank expenditures to expenditures at interest group research arms (mostly foundations) to focus attention on research productivity (rather than, for instance, electoral or lobbying efforts).

[25]It is worth noting that CAP was founded in 2003, and so its growth may simply be an indication that new organizations experience more substantial growth than well-established groups. Still, over a thirteen year period the group's expenses grew by a factor of more than fifteen.

Group	2001 Expenses	2016 Expenses	Percent Increase	Avg. Annual Increase
Center for American Progress	$2.9*	$47.4	1,509%	$3.1
National Rifle Association Foundation	$8.99	$47.1	424%	$2.4
Brookings Institution	$35.0	$104.6	246%	$5.9
AARP Foundation	$64.7	$163.1	152%	$6.11
Heritage Foundation	$33.5	$80.7	141%	$4.24
American Enterprise Institute	$16.3	$38.6	137%	$2.44
Cato Institute	$14.0	$29.2	108%	$0.93
Urban Institute	$64.5	$86.7	34%	$0.74
American Medical Association Foundation	$2.26	$2.96	31%	-$0.03

Table 3.1: Group expenditures, 2001 to 2016. All dollar amounts represent millions of dollars. Data comes from 990 tax forms. *As the Center for American Progress was not founded until 2003, this figure represents their earliest expenditures.

cautious about overgeneralizing based on this limited data, but there does appear to be a fairly clear trend: most ideological organizations have experienced notable growth in the last fifteen years. This is especially true for organizations like CAP, the NRA Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute. The Brookings Institution – as a Moderate-Academic organization – is a notable exception to this trend. Similarly, the AARP Foundation – though described by many as somewhat liberal – is by most accounts a traditional access-oriented interest group that has also grown substantially in the last fifteen years.

These trends are even more pronounced if we compare similar organizational types, thereby isolating potential differential effects on expenditures at interest groups as opposed to think tanks. Comparing the three interest groups in the sample – again, based on very limited data – there appears to be a positive correlation between the degree of partisanship and the extent of growth. The fastest grower, the NRA Foundation, has strong Republican preferences, while the AARP Foundation, with slightly Democratic preferences, has grown at a relatively slower (though still impressive) rate. The American Medical Association Foundation (a presumably non-partisan organization), on the other hand, has had limited growth.

A similar story emerges when we examine think tanks, though the Brookings Institution represents an aberration from the pattern. By far the fastest growth is found at CAP, an explicitly Democratic think tank. The Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute – considered either Republican or conservative actors – have also had modest growth. Aside from Brookings, the remaining centrist think tank – the Urban Institute – has had slow growth. There is, however, a very

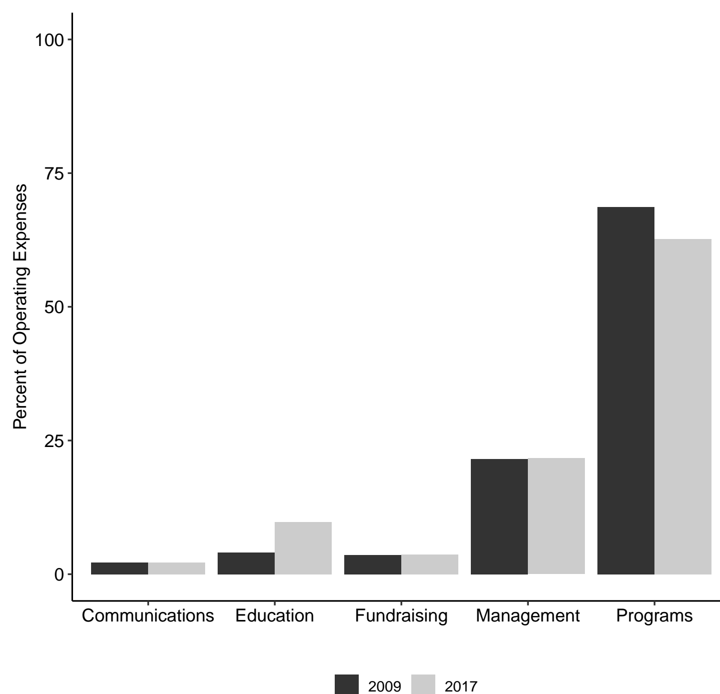

Figure 3.4: Brookings Institution expenditures by category, 2009 and 2017.

important caveat to these trends: in terms of overall expenditures, the Brookings Institution and Urban Institution – with 2016 annual expenditures of $104 million and $87 million, respectively – still rank amongst the most prominent organizations examined here. In fact, of the four organizations with the largest expenditures, only one (the Heritage Foundation) has strong partisan preferences, suggesting that the progressive legacy might still privilege Old Guard organizations when it comes to revenue and expenditures.

How are these groups spending their funds? In answering this question we again observe key differences between various organizational types, revealing differing motives and objectives. One way to understand group priorities is to examine trends in broad expenditure categories over time. Many think tanks publish, in the name of

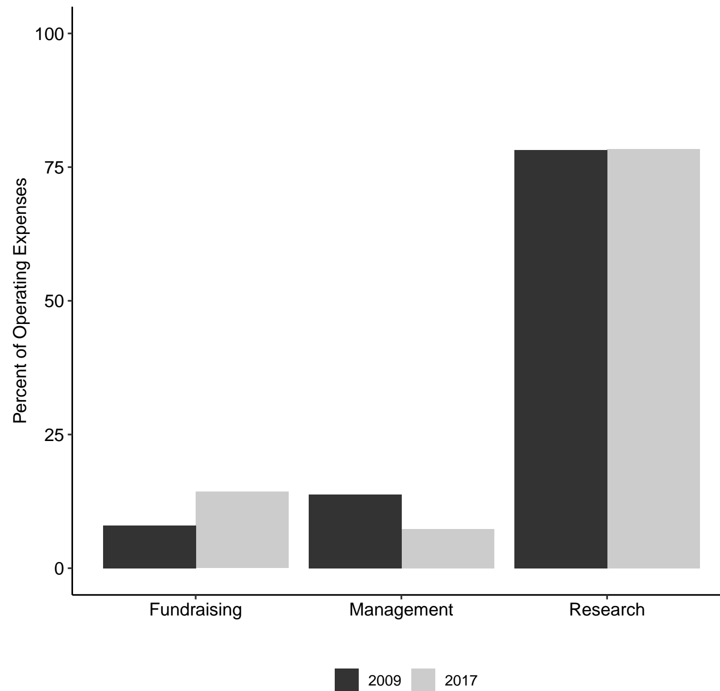

Figure 3.5: Cato Institute expenditures by category, 2009 and 2017.

transparency, such information in their annual reports. This data is self-reported, and expenditures are categorized in different ways at different organizations, so caution is in order. Still, Figures 3.4-3.6 – which present self-reported expenditures for the Brookings Institution, Cato Institute, and Heritage Foundation in 2009 and 2017 – indicate that the two academic organizations spend the vast majority of their budgets on actual policy research while the Heritage Foundation spends much more on activities like public education, fundraising, and media and government relations.

The Brookings Institution, for example, spent close to 69 percent of their budget on "Programs" – mainly research-oriented (see below) – in 2009. By 2017 this figure had dropped somewhat to 63 percent, with "Education" efforts comprising a larger portion of the budget. This trend suggests, as discussed earlier, that Brookings and

other Moderate-Academic organizations have become *relatively more concerned* with their "public face" and their overall "influence" at the expense of research activities. The Cato Institute, on the other hand, also spends a lot on "Research" but has not reduced their allocations to these efforts in recent years.

The strong focus on research production at academic organizations can be contrasted with the more political Heritage Foundation, where "Research" activities comprise only 34 percent and 30 percent of the budget in 2009 and 2017, respectively. Based on budget allocations, Heritage seems to be roughly equally concerned with non-research activities like educational campaigns, fundraising, and media and government outreach. And, in fact, in 2017 the organization prioritized education (roughly 34 percent of the budget) over research production. Far more than Brookings, then, the Heritage Foundation increasingly engages in efforts to influence the public and elected officials. Research production at Heritage is but one of many goals, and in fact was not the primary financial focus in 2017.

Unfortunately, most interest groups do not make the same type of information on expenditures available to the public. Of the interest groups listed in Table 3.1, the NRA and AARP Foundations provide only aggregate data on "programs" that is not informative for highlighting differences between the groups,[26] and the AMA Foundation does not publish expenditures data. We can obtain a general understanding of interest group allocations, however, by focusing on the NARAL Pro-Choice America

[26]In 2017, the NRA and AARP Foundations, respectively, spent 85 and 80 percent of their budgets on "program services." The remaining funds were spent on fundraising (12 and 11 percent, respectively) and administration costs (3 and 9 percent).

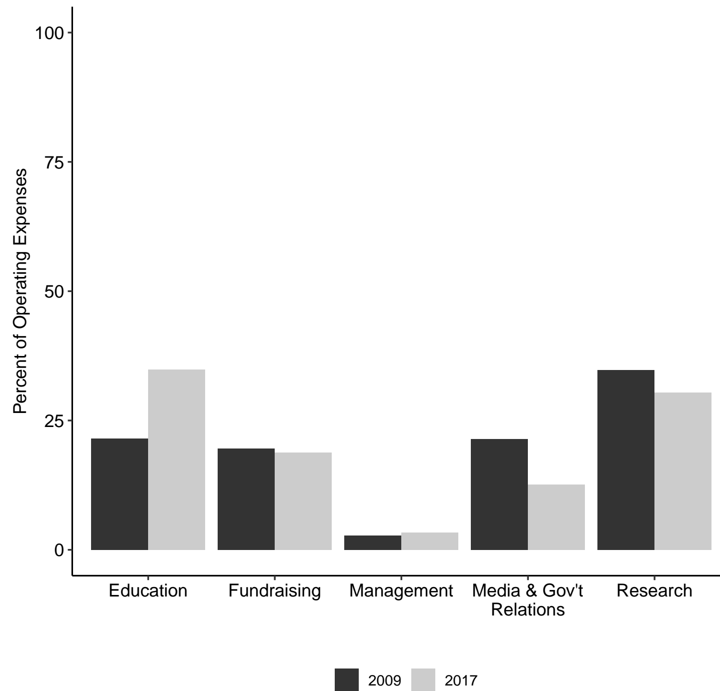

Figure 3.6: Heritage Foundation expenditures by category, 2009 and 2017.

Foundation, a traditional pro-choice interest group that publishes relatively detailed data on expenditures (see Figure 3.7). As expected, NARAL is much more likely to allocate funding to "Campaigns and Programs" and "Communications" than "Policy," reflecting the fact that – for most interest groups – original policy research is a relatively minor tool used to influence political outcomes.

As a final indicator of organizational priorities, it is worthwhile to examine the most prominent programs at various types of groups. While the aggregate expenditures data presented thus far generally obscures the actual activities of each organization, these same groups are required to report, in their tax forms, the three activities on which they spent the greatest amount of money. Based on the evidence presented thus far, we would expect more academic organizations to prioritize original research

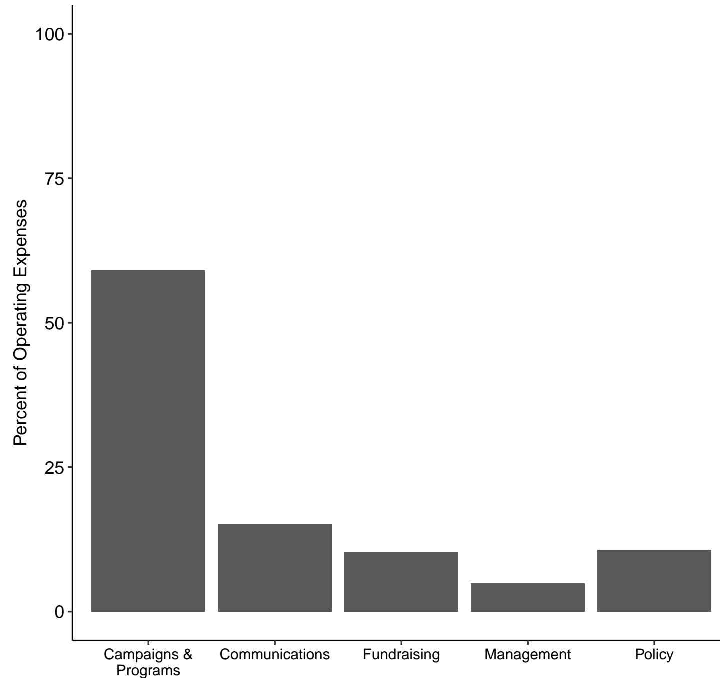

Figure 3.7: NARAL expenditures by category, 2017.

production, while more political and partisan organizations should be more likely to engage in direct advocacy efforts like outreach, education, and policy advocacy and lobbying.

Indeed, the activities at various types of organizations – combined with descriptions of each program – generally confirm these predictions. This fact can be seen in Table 3.2, which depicts the frequency with which each organization listed a particular type of activity amongst their three largest expenditures between 2002 and 2016. Political organizations – including all interest groups as well as Heritage and CAP – tend to combine their research activities with a focus on outreach and education efforts and direct policy advocacy. At the AARP Foundation, for instance, 33 percent of their top activities were aimed at education and 29 percent were aimed at policy

Group	Outreach[a]	Education	Policy[b]	Research[c]	Overhead
AARP Foundation	–	33%	29%	–	33%
Brookings Institution	–	–	–	100%	–
Cato Institute	5%	5%	–	90%	–
Center for American Progress	17%	39%	–	44%	–
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities	–	–	–	100%	–
Heritage Foundation	–	33%	–	66%	–
NARAL Foundation	37.5%	–	12.5%	25%	25%
NRA Foundation	–	100%	–	–	–
Urban Institute	–	–	–	100%	–

Table 3.2: Top group programs, by category, from 2002 to 2016. Data is self-reported by organizations in their annual tax forms and includes the name, description, and total expenditures associated with the three largest (in terms of spending) group activities. Each activity was coding into one of five categories, with percentages indicating the frequency with which a particular activity was one of the top three expenditures over the time period.
[a]The Outreach category includes programs aimed at communication with the public, fundraising, and non-policy events.
[b]The Policy category includes non-research policy efforts like advocacy and lobbying.
[c]The Research category includes original research activities and publishing.

advocacy. At the NARAL Foundation, outreach and policy advocacy comprised 50 percent of their top activities, with research comprising 25 percent. And at the NRA Foundation, education was the only type of activity listed during the period.

At most of the more partisan think tanks, these types of educational and outreach programs are paired with research activities, again indicating that research production is part of a broader influence strategy at such groups. At the Heritage Foundation, for example, educational efforts represent one-third of activities while research production comprises the remainder. In fact, in each year for which data was collected, the Heritage Foundation's top activities paint an image of an organization focused on

research production, publication, and dissemination to elected officials and the public. The yearly descriptions of these strategies state that Heritage engages in:

- **Public Policy Research** – "This program produces hundreds of research papers annually on policy matters ranging from economic to defense oriented. Papers address current and alternative policy"

- **Publishing Findings** or **Media and Government Relations** – "This program distributes research products to those from members of congress to the general public. Information distributed through print, digitally, radio and TV"

- **Education Programs** – "The [Heritage Foundation] hosts events to educate many populations from gov't (sic) officials to the general public on a wide variety of topics"

Similarly, the Center for American Progress combined public-facing advocacy efforts (outreach and education represent 56 percent of activities) with research production (44 percent of activities). The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, on the other hand, stands out amongst partisan-political think tanks as the only group to devote their top activities entirely to research production. These programs include topics like "State Fiscal and Related Projects," "State Low-Income Program and Related Projects," and "Federal Policy, Research and Analysis."

The activities of CBPP are more in line with those of academic think tanks like Brookings, Cato, and Urban. At Brookings and Urban, for instance, 100 percent of their top activities revolved around research production. At Cato, 90 percent of activities dealt with research production while outreach and education each comprised

5 percent of the top activities. In other words, these types of organizations do in fact appear to be primarily focused on the "long-term evolution of ideas." Traditional interest groups and activist think tanks, on the other hand, appear to engage in activities aimed at *translating* their research to the public sphere and *advocating* for its influence in policy debates.

3.2.2 Research Collaborations

The final characteristic of various group types investigated here concerns the extent and composition of external collaborations with other institutions and scholars. Nearly ever organization examined here collaborates with other groups, resulting in research products that are co-authored and often co-sponsored by multiple organizations. These collaborations often arise from repeated interactions amongst policy researchers, or as one scholar described it:

> These groups come together... [and] they just kind of keep going, going, going forever. I guess people read each other's stuff and e-mail, and then [meet at] conferences, and you have these events on these different things and you meet people, you meet speakers. This is kind of small [town], I mean in D.C. there's tons of events..., so you see all the people in the audience are people who work on this issue, you see the same people over and over again and you exchange cards.[27]

Thus, it appears that interpersonal ties in the D.C. community play an important role in structuring interactions and research collaborations. Given increasing partisan polarization and animosity, it seems likely that these ties are increasingly formed within partisan camps, perhaps disrupting bipartisan collaboration. Still, these are only hypotheses. Are scholars at certain types of groups interacting mainly with

[27]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

others from the same ideological or partisan background? Can certain groups bridge the divide between the parties through collaborative research and advocacy?

Respondents generally suggested that cross-institutional collaborations lend research products greater reach and credibility. They signal buy-in from relevant actors, enhance the credibility of the research product, and suggest the viability of an approach to a wide range of allies. However, the main pattern that emerged from interviews and other data sources suggests that Partisan-Political groups – because they hold more rigid ideological and partisan perspectives – are participating in *fewer* and *less ideologically diverse* research coalitions. The ties they do form with other groups and individuals tend to be with like-minded actors, often those within the same extended party network. This fact may result from purposeful decisions to avoid collaborations and the potential to dilute a particular viewpoint, but it may also be because Partisan-Political organizations have strong reputations for motivated research and, as a result, other groups may be unwilling to collaborate with them.

These reputations develop over time. The Heritage Foundation, for example, has historically taken part in well-known research collaborations with actors like the Brookings Institution and AEI. In fact, Campbell and Pedersen (2014) list Heritage as one of several groups that frequently collaborate with organizations from diverse political backgrounds. This is almost certainly an overstatement, or at least not as true now as it once was. My subjects – including employees at the organization – almost always said that Heritage tended to interact with other conservative organizations and has been part of fewer diverse collaborations in recent years.

Again, though, this is a relatively new trend that appears to be accelerating as a result of increasing polarization and the growing reputation of Heritage as a Republican ally. Campbell and Pedersen (2014) describe a working group – called the Brookings-Heritage Fiscal Seminar – that held meetings with a bipartisan selection of budget experts. The meetings – which included researchers from Heritage, Brookings, Urban, the Progressive Policy Institute, and others – were truly diverse, but the working group does not appear to have issued any public reports or statements since 2009. Another example of a relatively diverse collaboration offered by Campbell and Pedersen (2014) is the "Fiscal Wake Up Tour," a joint public engagement initiative sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, Brookings Institution, and Concord Coalition. This collaboration, however, was aimed mostly at educating the public on agreed upon policy problems, and it ended around 2005. In fact, even at the time, the authors quote a Heritage Foundation researcher who said that the organization had trouble finding groups who were willing to collaborate due to Heritage's reputation. The authors write of the collaboration process:

> [T]hese organizations still have to perform a delicate dance. Despite their interests in cooperation they want to advance their own policy agendas... This is why participating in cooperative initiatives may alienate organizations from one another who share political convictions. For example, sometimes when the Heritage Foundations Stuart Butler has gone with a proposal for joint activities to some of the centrist research organizations they have told him, "We have problems with people on our left. We are getting flack. He explained, "They could name organizations that are very angry with them for doing this, very angry [because] they have made the decision to essentially hang out with people like me.

My own research (see below) suggests that these issues have only intensified over time. Even if diverse collaborations involving Heritage were more common in the past – and indeed, Campbell and Pedersen (2014) descibe a Heritage-Brookings-AEI

research triumvirate as commonplace in the early 2000's – these types of relationships become increasingly difficult as Heritage's reputation as a Republican ally intensifies.

On the other hand, Moderate-Academic organizations seem to participate in more – and more ideologically diverse – research coalitions. The Brookings Institution is especially well known for its collaborative research, including many projects conducted with ideologically diverse organizations. A cursory search of the Brookings website found mentions of the following collaborations, among others:

- The American Well-Being Project (with Washington Universty in St. Louis)
- The USC-Brookings Schaffer Initiative for Health Policy (with the University of Southern California Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics)
- The AEI-Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity (with AEI, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Ford Foundation)
- The Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative (with the Urban Institute, AEI, and Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative)
- The Tax Policy Center (with the Urban Institute)
- States of Change: Demographics and Democracy Project (with the Center for American Progress, Bipartisan Policy Center, and Public Religion Research Institute)

These collaborative projects and centers are diverse not only in terms of the types of actors (including academics, university centers, think tanks, and foundations) but also in terms of the *ideological diversity* of the actors in them.

The frequent collaborations between AEI and Brookings are an excellent example of this fact. Several subjects noted the importance of the personal relationship between Norm Ornstein (AEI) and Thomas Mann (Brookings) in giving rise to some of these collaborations. One remarked that "the thing about Norm and Tom is they went to graduate school together thirty years ago and they had this weird, long personal connection, and this is [why they are] probably politically closer than the institutions were."[28] Together, this "Mann-Ornstein partnership" produced a number of books, academic articles, and op-eds. Even though AEI and Brookings might be politically 'distant', the strong personal relationship between their scholars helped initiate collaborations and resulted in widely respected research products. It is easy to imagine that – absent such personal connections – two ideologically distinct organizations would be far less likely to collaborate. And, there is some evidence that such ideologically diverse personal relationships are less common than they once were in Congress (e.g. Alduncin, Parker and Theriault, 2017). To the degree that the same is true in the policy research world, collaborative efforts that span the ideological spectrum are likely to decline in number.

Still, the value of such collaborations are clear. Reflecting on the AEI-Brookings Election Reform Project – another Mann-Ornstein collaboration – one researcher recalled that the final recommendations were a function of the fact that "we were able to have the resources of each big [think] tank and it's connections to bring other

[28]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

people in."[29] Aside from just resources and manpower, however, these collaborations also send an important signal about the quality and perspective of the research. This is especially true in projects that attract ideologically diverse actors. The AEI-Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, for example, resulted in a "consensus plan" with the grand conclusion that:

> The only way forward... is to work together. No side has a monopoly on the truth, but each side can block legislative action. We therefore created a working group of top experts on poverty, evenly balanced between progressives and conservatives (and including a few centrists). We obtained sponsorship and financial support from the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. We worked together for fourteen months, drawing on principles designed to maximize civility, trust, and open-mindedness within the group. We knew that the final product would reflect compromises made by people of good will and differing views.[30]

The lofty concepts of "evenly balanced" experts, "civility, trust, and open-mindedness," and "compromise made by people of good will and differing views" hearken back to the Progressive ideals of research production (though the authors still acknowledge that these experts bring their ideological baggage to the table). More importantly, they signal to readers that the research produced is nuanced, even-handed, and inviting to actors from a variety of backgrounds. Unfortunately, as noted in the previous chapter, it appears that the demand for this type of research has declined over time.

Both Moderate-Political and Partisan-Academic organizations are also likely to frequently participate in inter-institutional collaborations with relatively diverse actors. While Moderate-Political groups (mainly interest groups) may participate in

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[29]Interview with Bipartisan Policy Center Policy Researcher. July 29th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[30]AEI-Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity. 2015. "Opportunity, Responsibility, and Security A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream." `https://brook.gs/2CBwSGy`

such coalitions to signal widespread support for their ideas, Partisan-Academic groups might do so to bolster their reputations as academic research institutes. For example, I sat in on an event at the American Enterprise Institute (Partisan-Academic) on the topic of poverty and income assistance. This event included AEI researchers as well as scholars from academia, Results for America (a relatively non-partisan group), and the Center on Budget and Policy Prioties (a liberal organization), revealing a willingness on the part of AEI to engage in debates with a wide range of organizations. Indeed, the conversation at this event was nuanced, collegial, and empirically-based. The only notable indication of AEI's ideological orientation was seen in the audience questions, which generally revealed a pre-existing bias amongst attendees towards conservative policies. At a similar event held by the Cato Institute, two scholars from different extremes on the issue of campaign finance regulation engaged in a traditional debate over the topic, presenting the audience with an alternative to Cato's libertarian stance. At both these events, Partisan-Academic groups revealed a greater willingness (compared with Partisan-Political organizations) to engage in dialogue with their apparent political opponents.

These anecdotes and quotes, then, suggest strong and potentially growing differences in the types of collaborations that various groups engage in. To more rigorously test these general observations, I collected data on the institutional affiliations of participants in public events like these from January to December 2018.[31] Because

[31] I focused on a relatively small sample of groups as a starting point. These groups are the American Enterprise Institute, Bipartisan Policy Center, Brookings Institution, Cato Institute, Center for American Progress, Chamber of Commerce, and Heritage Foundation. Though small, this sample

groups advertise these events to the public, they can be systematically analyzed in a way that collaborative publications cannot. I consider participation in an event a "connection" between these scholars and their respective institutions, and I use this indicator to operationalize institutional collaborations. Using network analysis techniques, I created a directed tie between two organizations if the first group hosted an event in which a representative from the second group participated. These ties are weighted according to the number of times an institution's scholars have participated in another group's events. Thus, this network can help reveal the extent to which groups collaborate as well as their willingness to collaborate with groups from different ideological backgrounds.

Before turning to this network – which focuses only on connections amongst interest groups and think tanks – it is informative to examine the prevalence of connections with a wide range of different actor types. Table 3.3 presents the percentage of event participants, at each organization, from various types of institutions. The Chamber of Commerce is fairly unique in the fact that it tends to interact with business and industry representatives (41 percent) and has few connections to think tanks (2.1 percent) and academia (1.7 percent). The Chamber also has fairly strong connections to other interest groups and the executive branch (14 percent each) and foreign or international actors (13 percent). Thus, the Chamber seems to reveal, in its interactions with those in the private sector and in government, its role as a business representative and its emphasis on a direct advocacy approach.

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has good balance across the ideal types outlined here, and the data collection procedure results in a much larger number of organizations represented overall.

	American Enterprise Institute	**Bipartisan Policy Center**	**Brookings Institution**	**Cato Institute**	**Center for American Progress**	**Chamber of Commerce**	**Heritage Foundation**
Academia	15.4%	8.8%	17.2%	16.3%	8.8%	1.7%	8%
Business & Industry	9.7%	16.9%	8%	7.1%	4.8%	41.3%	8.1%
Executive Branch[a]	7.5%	13.9%	5.9%	4.5%	2.2%	13.8%	7.7%
Interest Groups	**1%**	**4.5%**	**1.5%**	**2.8%**	**3.7%**	**13.8%**	**4.3%**
Judicial Branch	–	0.2%	–	1.1%	–	0.2%	0.7%
Legislative Branch	6%	8.1%	1.3%	1.3%	6.6%	1.1%	4.1%
Media	2.2%	4.1%	4.7%	4.9%	2.6%	2.8%	1.6%
Nonprofits	4.2%	10.5%	5.6%	4.5%	15.1%	3.2%	5.9%
Think Tanks	**47.9%**	**24.4%**	**37.7%**	**49.6%**	**36.4%**	**2.1%**	**46.3%**
Foreign & International[b]	2.9%	1.5%	14.6%	3.7%	3.3%	12.9%	6.3%
State[c]	2.7%	6.9%	2.3%	0.6%	12.8%	5.9%	0.7%

Table 3.3: Policy event participants, by the type of organization the participant is affiliated with. Columns might not add up to 100 percent because of an omitted "other" category.
[a]The Executive Branch category includes those in the White House as well as federal agencies.
[a]The Foreign & International category includes agents of foreign governments and non-governmental organizations as well as international organizations.
[c]The State category includes those employed by state governments or at non-governmental organizations whose activity is limited to a particular state.

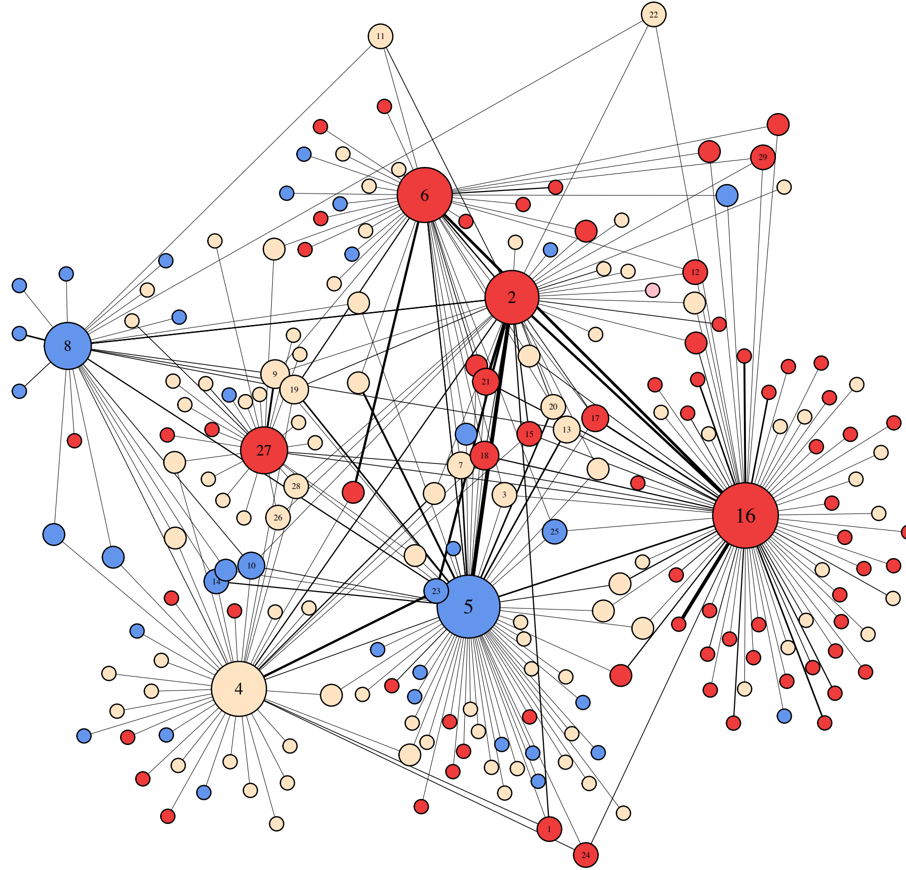
Academic think tanks, on the other hand, are much more likely to interact with academics and other think tanks. At AEI, Brookings, and Cato Institute events, representatives from think tanks and academia represent the majority of participants. The Brookings Institution also interacts at fairly high rates with foreign and international actors, indicative of their stronger research focus on foreign affairs. Furthermore, for all three organizations, interest group representatives are a small percentage of event participants (no more than 2.8 percent). Thus, it seems that academic organizations – with varying degrees of partisanship – are truly academic in their focus: they tend to interact with scholars from academia and other think tanks, and less so with more explicitly political organizations like interest groups.

Surprisingly, Partisan-Political think tanks are not all that different from these more academically-minded research organizations. At the Heritage Foundation, think tank actors represent a plurality (46.3 percent) of participants, followed by representatives from business and industry (8.1 percent), academia (8 percent), and the Executive branch (7.7 percent). Heritage, then, is somewhat more likely to interact with those in positions of power, but they still display a preference for other think tanks and academics. The same is true at the Center for American Progress, where think tank employees and academics represent 45.2 percent of participants. CAP, though, is unique in its focus on nonprofits and state actors, perhaps as a reflection of their emphasis on state-level activism and hands-on work.

Some of these results, then, fit with expectations about differences between academic and political organizations, but others (e.g. the importance of think tanks and academics at political think tanks) are a bit surprising. Still, it could be that the *types*

of think tanks these groups interact with are qualitatively different. More specifically, political groups might interact with a more ideologically similar and homogeneous set of think tanks. To test this hypothesis, Figure 3.8 depicts a network connecting hosting organizations to the interest groups and think tanks they invite to their events. Ties between groups are weighted according to the frequency of event participation, and nodes are colored according to their partisan preferences (Democratic affiliates in blue, Republican affiliates in red, and non-partisan actors in tan). The network graph suggests that the ideological homophily hypothesis holds for both Heritage and CAP. Both organizations form connections, almost exclusively, with co-partisans and non-partisan actors, and they form very few ties with opposing partisans. More academic organizations like Brookings, AEI, and Cato, on the other hand, display some level of partisan homophily but also form a significant number of ties with opposing partisans.

This fact can be seen more clearly in Table 3.4, which presents the percentage of ties each organization formed with actors from various ideological backgrounds. The distributions suggest that Heritage and CAP – the two Partisan-Political organizations in the sample – are significantly less likely to form ties with actors from opposing backgrounds (and significantly more likely to form ties with co-partisans). This is especially true for the Heritage Foundation – 72 percent of their ties are sent to conservative organizations, while only 4 percent are formed with liberal groups. AEI and Cato – both Partisan-Academic – are somewhat biased in their tie formation but have a more even distribution of ties across conservative, liberal, and centrist groups.



1	American Action Forum	11	Chicago Council on Global Affairs	21	R Street Institute
2	American Enterprise Institute	12	Competitive Enterprise Institute	22	German Marshall Fund
3	Atlantic Council	13	Council on Foreign Relations	23	Urban Institute
4	Bipartisan Policy Center	14	Economic Policy Institute	24	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
5	Brookings Institution	15	Ethics and Public Policy Center	25	American Civil Liberties Union
6	Cato Institute	16	Heritage Foundation	26	America's Health Insurance Plans
7	Center for a New American Security	17	Hudson Institute	27	Chamber of Commerce
8	Center for American Progress	18	Manhattan Institute	28	National Governors Association
9	Center for Strategic and International Studies	19	New America	29	Tax Foundation
10	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	20	Peterson Institute for International Economics		

Figure 3.8: Policy events participation network. Nodes represent interest groups and think tanks that have hosted or participated in events, and they are colored according to their partisan preferences. Ties represent participation in an event hosted by one of the seven organizations investigated, and they are weighted according to the number of times an actor from a particular organization participated in the hosting organization's events. Nodes with degree greater than two (i.e. they hosted or participated in at least two events) are labelled. The network is arranged according to the Davidson-Harel algorithm.

Participant Ideology	**American Enterprise Institute**	**Bipartisan Policy Center**	**Brookings Institution**	**Cato Institute**	**Center for American Progress**	**Chamber of Commerce**	**Heritage Foundation**
Centrist	31.2%	41.5%	50.5%	27.6%	35.3%	87.5%	23%
Conservative	40.3%	26.4%	26.3%	55.2%	11.8%	6.2%	71.9%
Liberal	27.3%	32.1%	23.2%	17.2%	52.9%	6.2%	4.3%

Table 3.4: Ideological distribution of policy event participants from interest groups and think tanks.

The Brookings Institution is even more even-handed – they form half their ties with centrists and roughly a quarter of their ties with conservatives and liberals.

My own interview results corroborate these findings and provide greater detail on the dynamics of cross-group collaborations. In general, respondents described how Partisan-Political groups like Heritage and CAP have changed over time, becoming less willing to participate in broad-based research collaborations. This fact is related to the inherently *political* goals of such organizations. Because Partisan-Political groups seek political influence, often by working through a single party, they are likely to assess potential collaborations in terms of the ideological composition of the coalition, the signals they will send to policymakers, and the effects they will have on their overall influence. While there is certainly value in signaling, through diverse coalitions, that a particular approach has widespread buy-in, it appears that the relative value of such coalitions have declined over time. The cause of this trend seems to be the market dynamics outlined in the previous chapter: politicians and parties find research that is consistent with their goals to be more valuable than research that is nuanced and objective. Ideologically homogeneous collaborations, not surprisingly, lend themselves to the first type of research, incentivizing certain groups to invest more heavily in them.

At the same time, more academic or moderate organizations might be less willing to work with Partisan-Political groups because of their well-deserved reputations as ideologically motivated. In other words, it seems that the decision to engage in direct political advocacy necessarily restricts the domain of actors that are willing to collaborate with Partisan-Political organizations. Thus, a cycle is initiated whereby

more partisan organizations engage in more homogeneous coalitions and, in turn, drive more moderate organizations away. Describing these changes, one subject noted:

> When I was [at Heritage] running the... domestic research departments... eight years ago I certainly – with the support of Heritage – reached out on many occasions to work with other organizations... The staff were engaged quite heavily in projects and panels and so forth with other institutions. [But] in the last few years that I was there – and particularly just before I left – [these projects] became more political... in the sense of focusing on sort of longer term political strategy and the politics of issues rather than trying to look at how to build coalitions on particular issues across the spectrum... And thats sort of taken them out of the mainstream of think tanks that traditionally can work together on issues. So you dont tend to see Heritage scholars so frequently now in these sorts of broader activities or projects or convenings where youll get a whole range of scholars [on the] left and right. They dont tend to be there anymore.[32]

Because groups like Heritage have been "taken... out of the mainstream of think tanks," the ideological composition of groups and scholars that they collaborate with has become more homogeneous. One Heritage scholar, asked which organizations she frequently collaborates with, listed a number of organizations, all on the center or more extreme right of the ideological spectrum:

> I have allies, some of them more centrist and moderate and then others that are also more steadfast ideologically. So I work closely with the Cato Institute, the Mercatus Center, the [Committee] for a Responsible Federal Budget, I would call that a more centrist-moderate group. Americans for Prosperity, the Koch Network. The National Taxpayers Union, the Coalition to Reduce Spending, a number of smaller groups that work in the same issue areas as I do... And we do occasionally have working groups where we meet every couple of weeks or every month when we trying to organize the coalition toward one particular goal and going in one direction.[33]

These collaborations, then, seem to mix research production and policy advocacy, thereby restricting membership to those that are in agreement on particular political

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[32]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[33]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

issues and approaches. The notion that groups from similar ideological or partisan backgrounds are better able to work towards "one particular goal" is also an important indicator that such coalitions might have greater influence over policy debates and designs. At the very least, it means that collaborators are not seriously exposed to many ideas supported by the opposing party, likely precluding compromise even in the initial stages of policy research and discussion. As a Heritage researcher focused on civil service reform noted:

> The people who are our adversaries are never at the table... They're just not there... There's sort of like a distance factor that sort of hangs over everything, but they're never really at the table so we never really run into them... Heres a "for instance": there's a working group that I'm a part of that met today. Was there a public sector union representative? No. The reason is because that would not be productive. You know what I mean? So if there's [someone who] is going to be so radically outside of your envelope, they're probably not going to be at the table. And should they be? I don't think so, because you know what they're going to say. It's not like it's going to be any sort of mystery. They're going to oppose every single thing that's coming up. And that would not be productive.[34]

Of course, collaborations at places like Heritage are not entirely ideologically homogeneous. As discussed, there have been prominent coalitions between Heritage, Brookings, and other center-left groups. Such collaborations seem to be less common as partisan polarization and perceptions of group commitments have increased. One subject noted that, in the past, "Heritage and Brookings did... a number of things together" but "that's kind of less [common now because] even though Brookings has not really been a [leftist] organization, people kind of think of it that way."[35] This fact is a reflection of both conscious decisions by Heritage as well as political reality.

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[34]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[35]Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

Another subject described how the degree of polarization in research collaborations depends on the extent to which an issue is politicized by the parties:

> Usually you're going to run into people with the same ideological commitments, [but it] somewhat depends on the issue area. In mine, a little less so. Because there's a lot of, well they're just more bipartisan, there's just more bipartisanship when it comes to civil service reform. So... it's a wider spectrum... than maybe there would be on, oh, I don't know, abortion policy or reproductive policy. So it depends, not every issue is equally polarized.[36]

In general, though, it seems that Partisan-Political organizations view ideological consistency in their external collaborations as a potent political tool that increases their policy influence. Indeed, several subjects suggested that ideologically disparate groups could find common ground on most topics, but they make *political* decisions that prevent such compromise. Such decisions are reflective of polarized politics and the demands of members of Congress. In other words:

> What [polarization has] done is increasingly forced discussions to happen in camps, and not a lot of discussion... I could sit down with a couple buddies from a right think tank and a couple of buddies from a left tank and – if Senator Schumer and Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan and President Trump said, "you guys come up with an answer" – we can come up with an answer for ourselves, but it wouldn't be passable. You have to set the political box for the solution and then we can come up with an answer. The problem isn't knowing what to do... Folks at Heritage, folks at Brookings, folks at Center for American Progress can all come up with reforms to fix [the problem]... The problem is political decision as to what those reforms should look like in broad terms. So it is not about labels, it's not about struggling to find answers..., it's about making a political decision about what the structure of those answers should look like.[37]

As noted, the fact that certain groups work in ideological "camps" and coordinate their advocacy efforts may enhance their overall influence. By aligning the prefer-

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[36] Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 13th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[37] Interview with US Chamber of Commerce Senior Researcher. June 25th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

ences of consistently liberal or consistently conservative organizations, such coalitions can send strong signals to members of a particular party that certain ideas are well-supported by important EPN actors. Thus, coalition building and maintenance is important for overall influence. One infamous forum for such activities – the Wednesday Meetings held weekly by Americans for Tax Reform – demonstrates how more partisan organizations may be aligning together to further their goals. These meetings – which attract conservative and Republican interest group and think tank representatives as well as sitting and aspiring politicians – are in many ways the opposite of the relatively diverse meetings I attended at AEI and Cato. Rather than bringing in alternative views to further debate and institutional credibility, the Wednesday Meetings thrive on a shared sense of commitment to the conservative movement. Thomas Medvetz (2006), in one of the only studies of the secretive meetings, describes them as an important forum in which conservative groups both coordinate *material resources* and engage in *symbolic practices* to establish and maintain the meaning of conservativism. Representatives from conservative research institutions concurred with this assessment, describing the meetings as an important "institutional relationship-building forum."[38] Another went so far as to say that the meeting "is the most important two hours of my week without even a blink" because "you have a room full of conservatives" that you can convince and unite, resulting in a "distribution network" for research and ideas.[39]

[38]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

[39]Interview with Citizens Opposing Prohibition Specialist. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

This ideologically conditioned distribution network stands in contrast to the more diverse networks that define most group interactions outside of Partisan-Political organizations. It is well known that interest groups, for example, work to expand the scope of their coalitions to signal widespread support for their ideas (e.g. Hula, 2000). Moderate-Political organizations like this utilize relatively diverse external collaborations as a political tool. Much like Partisan-Political groups, they hope to enhance their policy influence, but unlike more partisan groups they do so by seeking out relatively bipartisan input on particular topics. According to one respondent, the value of such bipartisan engagement is an institutional reputation for "being thoughtful, being relevant, and being interested." She elaborated on this point, saying:

> On the external side what's really important... is to be at the table to be part of the conversation. So externally, what we try to do is to signal through various means that we have value and we can contribute to the conversation. And we can do that by publishing on the topic. We do that by convening events. So if we do the research and we have some new policy solutions to offer, we'll have this big event... and then we invite a lot of stakeholders to it... [W]hat we have been able to do very well at the Public Policy Institute is we've been able to have these off the record, small conversations where we invite stakeholders with diverse points of views and bring them in and kind of talk through, "These are the issues, some of the challenges, what are some of the different perspectives? And then how can we come together and come up with a solution?" And sometimes we do come up with a solution, sometimes we don't, but just the conversation itself will illuminate how different stakeholders think about an issue... And we actually have a great reputation of being able to pull in people from both sides of the aisle... [W]e do try to bring in balanced points of view... The idea there is we want to present ourselves as being thoughtful, being relevant and being interested.[40]

Thus, it seems that oftentimes bipartisan input simply means engaging with opponents' views, as actual compromise is frequently precluded by partisan politics. The

[40]Interview with American Association for Retired People Public Policy Institute Vice President. June 27th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

same researcher described these interactions by saying, "I wouldn't call it cooperation, [but] there's conversation. It's different [than] on the Hill... where its ideology and other things that's driving the conversation."[41] These conversations are facilitated by bringing together actors with disparate positions and goals. At the AARP, for example:

> We always try to bring in somebody who might have [different views]. We just think about the balance. So for instance, we had an event a while back where we brought people in to talk about Medicare and where they see Medicare going, and we wanted to make sure we had people who would talk about premium support, for instance..., and that tends to align with a lot of Republicans... So we have that perspective and then there are a lot of people on the other side of the aisle who think very differently. So we brought them in as well... These are difficult problems to solve and the people who are working in that space..., everybody knows everybody, even if they're from opposite sides of the aisle. And what I've always found is by and large people are pretty respectful, so you bring them in.[42]

Similar dynamics seem to define academically-oriented think tanks as well. As the network analysis revealed, groups like Brookings and AEI are highly connected to a range of policy actors. Public events at AEI and Cato fit with this finding, demonstrating a willingness to engage with opponents and their ideas. For think tanks, the value of such collaborations seems to be greater credibility and reach. As one subject described it, "to have Heritage and Brookings together, to most people sounds like you're covering the water front of ideas" and thus exposing a wider range of actors to the research and ideas.[43] However, the changing nature of Partisan-

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[41] Interview with American Association for Retired People Public Policy Institute Vice President. June 27th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[42] Interview with American Association for Retired People Public Policy Institute Vice President. June 27th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

[43] Interview with Brookings Institution Senior Fellow. July 5th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

Political groups like Heritage seem to be making it harder to compile these types of broad-based coalitions. Thus, cross-ideological connections tend to form most often between academic or access-oriented organizations. Oftentimes this is reflective of the simple reality that scholars at these groups are more likely to read each others' work, know each other personally, and have a more open mind regarding policy debates and research. To give just one example, a Cato executive noted that:

> We have friends at Brookings. People think we're all fighting with Brookings and all that stuff, [but] none of that's true... [On the other hand,] we tried to get some people from Center for American Progress to come to some of our debates, [and] it's harder because you may not know them... It's just the way that networks form for people that work at think tanks... It happens for younger people in particular... You're not going to know many people from there... But there is something odd going on where we made these conscious efforts [where] we asked them to events and they don't [come]... And that [is] the way politics is. Do I really want to go over – I've been to CAP and it was fine and they were nice people – but I guess you don't know what you're walking into. Do you want to go to a dinner [at] which everybody around the table is a damn fool from your point of view? And then you gotta fight with them about it because they're saying things you think [are wrong]. It's just a matter of comfort.[44]

Thus, it could be said that Partisan-Political groups are increasingly marginalized from the mainstream of policy research institutions. The overall extent and effect of this marginalization, however, remains an open empirical question. In the next chapter I attempt to operationalize and measure connections between policy actors and assess the impact such connections have on overall policy influence.

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[44]Interview with Cato Institute executive. June 28th, 2018. Washington, D.C.

3.3 Conclusions

In this chapter and the last I have utilized a range of data sources to document the changing demands for policy research and the various incentives these changes have provided for policy research institutions. The main findings suggest that members of Congress are *information demanders* who are heavily reliant on outside actors for policy ideas and arguments. However, due to partisan polarization, these members seem to seek out information that best fits with their partisan goals. Thus, outside groups face new incentives for and constraints on their policy research – the marketplace for ideas has been fundamentally altered. Some seem to rightly perceive that they can gain prominence and influence by consistently providing research that supports the views of a single political party. This is not always a simple case of callous partisanship – sometimes it is a reflection of the fact that ideologically motivated groups are now consistently aligned with a particular polarized party. And, in fact, there is a key factor, at least historically, that limits the ability of groups to become partisan shills: their concerns about their long-term reputations for credibility.

Because of the competing incentives between partisanship and credibility, groups have responded differently to the modern era of politics. In the think tank world, some groups have become scholar-advocates, producing motivated research and then forcefully advocating it using strategies traditionally reserved for interest groups. These groups tend to support a single political party in these efforts, making them recognizable elements of a particular extended party network. These Partisan-Political think tanks are joined by a growing number of interest groups with de facto – and sometimes even explicit – partisan preferences.

While some seem to have doubled down on more traditional objectives like research quality, cross-ideological or bipartisan engagement, and a general disengagement from politics, others seem to have adapted to an era that places a premium on ideologically consistent and politically useful partisan information. These alternative strategies manifest themselves in a variety of ways. At academic institutions, for example, scholar-fundraisers face fewer internal constraints on their research production and therefore have greater control over the interpretation of their findings. They also seem to be freer – and perhaps encouraged – to engage in dialogue and even collaborations with scholars across the spectrum of groups. The result of these dynamics is typically an organization with a reputation for credibility, nuance, and relative objectivity, even as these organizations have become increasingly public-facing.

At more political groups, on the other hand, centralized fundraising operations and detailed review processes allow for greater control over group messaging. External collaborations that clash with an organization's ideological or material goals are also less common, especially at Partisan-Political organizations. In the case of interest groups, these dynamics allow for consistent advocacy on issues of importance to the groups' members. In the case of Partisan-Political think tanks, funding dynamics and centralized internal review processes allow leadership to have greater control over messaging and allow these organizations to advocate a particular partisan and/or ideological mission. Ideologically consistent external collaborations do not disrupt this motivated vision, and indeed they may help to further particular ideological or partisan goals and enmesh the organization within a robust party network.

An important implication of these findings is that members of Congress seem to bear the brunt of responsibility for the changing nature of interest groups and think tanks. Of course some outside actors are more proactive in taking advantage of this polarized era, but ultimately all seem to be responding to changing incentives from formal party members. Thus, efforts to inform and improve Congressional policy-making would likely be most effective if they took aim at the underlying cause of dysfunction: partisan polarization. In other words, while increasing the number and experience of staff inside Congress and related agencies (e.g. CRS, GAO, and OMB) might help members become more informed on the issues they face, members still face competing demands (e.g. reelection, partisan teamsmanship) that are unlikely to be resolved through such reforms. Similarly, efforts to improve the research produced at external organizations – which would be legally and practically difficult to design and implement – might simply increase the influence of those who are able to walk the line between credibility and partisan usefulness.

Indeed, as it stands Partisan-Political groups should be key actors in the policy process because they produce consistent, easily digestible, and useful partisan information. In other words, they seem to be important providers of ideas and arguments that support their preferred party's legislative agenda.

CHAPTER 4

POLICY IDEAS, FRAMES, AND INFLUENCE

> *"[T]hink tanks are the single worst, most undisciplined example of communication Ive ever seen Every time you use the words "privatization and "Social Security in the same sentence, you frighten seniors This is a specific and perfect example of the intellectual goo-goo heads who are more interested in policy than they were in success They would rather communicate their way and lose the issue than communicate in a sensible way and win. The fact is, ideology and communication more often than not run into each other rather than complement each other."* (Frank Luntz, 2003)[1]

> *"We put a lot of resources into message testing. We have a group here dedicated to American perceptions... where we do polls and focus groups. We work with organizations that specialize in this to get a key insights into what the American people think about certain issues and how they respond to certain words and phrases so that we can better tailor our research in a way that is going to be more attractive, will be better received and therefore we can be more impactful."* (Heritage Foundation Researcher, 2018)[2]

Late in 2003, prominent Republican consultant and pollster Frank Luntz echoed a common indictment of think tanks: that these research organizations are more interested in ivory-tower ideas than effective political communication. This charge carried weight, as Luntz is famous for developing political talking points, testing messaging with focus groups, and eliciting emotional reactions in voters. In short, Luntz does all the things that, at the time, were thought to be lacking in "undisciplined" think tank communications. And yet, less than fifteen years later, a Heritage Foundation

[1]Quoted in (Frontline, 2003).

[2]Interview with Heritage Foundation Policy Researcher. July 9th, 2018. Virtual Interview.

researcher described to me the great lengths to which the organization goes to market-test their ideas and language. Heritage's aim – which Luntz would certainly applaud – is to "better tailor our research in a way that is going to be more attractive, [that] will be better received and therefore... more impactful."

Heritage is not alone in focusing intently on the framing and dissemination of their ideas. As the previous chapters noted, even more academic organizations are increasingly concerned with their public face, reflecting an acute awareness that policy influence is contingent on political influence (and that political influence derives, in part, from effective public communication). Furthermore, as these groups work to directly impact public opinion, they are also working to provide their political allies with talking points that offer them political cover as they pursue common interests. This view of policy research suggests that information is often meant to *support* pre-existing (and shared) political goals rather than *persuade* hesitant legislators to adopt a particular policy approach. Indeed, Hall and Deardorff (2006) argue that one prominent form of lobbying involves providing "legislative subsidies" to allied members of Congress. They write:

> [L]obbying is primarily a form of legislative subsidy – a matching grant of costly policy information, political intelligence, and labor to the enterprises of strategically selected legislators. The proximate objective of this strategy is not to change legislators minds but to assist natural allies in achieving their own, coincident objectives. Their budget constraint thus relaxed by lobbyists assistance, already like-minded legislators act as if they were working on behalf of the group when in fact they are working on behalf of themselves.

In much the same way, interest group and think tank *research* activities might be viewed as efforts to assist partisan allies as they pursue mutually acceptable goals.

This perspective fits well with the theory that members of Congress are embedded in extended party networks populated by outside groups with overlapping preferences.

Given the importance of ideas, framing, and talking points in the policy process, I focus here on similarities in, and the spread of, policy *discourses* used by research producing institutions and members of Congress. To do so, I identify salient phrases used in think tank and interest group publications and public statements made by members of Congress in e-mails to constituents. I then systematically trace the flow or *diffusion* of this language across actors using network analysis (see below for more detail). This is but one indicator of the potential influence of outside groups over those in positions of power, but for a variety of reason I believe it to be an improvement over existing measures. First, unlike more explicit measures of influence (e.g. lobbying), an analysis of discourses allows for the discovery of subtler information pathways and the indirect impact of ideas. Furthermore, this analysis focuses on *inherent* connections based on discursive similarity rather than observed connections identified by, for example, third party policy historians. Secondly, network analysis allows for the systematic identification of the "policy entrepreneurs" who initiate ideas and talking points, as well as relationships amongst these actors and others. And, the logic behind network analysis fits neatly with the theory tested here, which views actors as embedded within extended party networks. Finally, a focus on texts also allows for the quantitative and qualitative identification of salient arguments in specific policy debates.

In this analysis, I attempt to answer two questions deriving from the theory and evidence presented thus far. First, I ask whether policy ideas and arguments "flow"

along predictable partisan lines. This question gets at the heart of the theory advanced here: that political parties (and partisanship) provide exogenous structure to the research and advocacy activities of outside groups. If, in fact, discourse disseminates most strongly through partisan networks (i.e. EPNs), this would provide support for the notion that policy influence hinges on thick ties and that, in turn, these ties are increasingly formed along party lines. Second, I ask whether Partisan-Political groups are amongst the most influential actors within these networks. The results presented up to this point suggest they are – these groups have bought into the current system, defined by partisan polarization, and have most heavily invested in activities that would enhance their direct political influence.

At this time, I answer these questions by focusing on the policy ideas advanced in debates surrounding cap-and-trade regulations. I focus on related policy research and publications leading up to formal legislative action on this issue. In 2009, the Democratic House voted on the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES), and a related bill was introduced in the Democratic Senate in 2010. Neither bill became law, though the House version did pass, mostly along party lines. As I outline below, the failure of these bills represents a puzzle for existing theories of policymaking, and the theory of extended party policy networks might help explain these failures. Specifically, the theory predicts that the two parties heard ideas and arguments mainly from co-partisan groups, resulting in distinct and opposing partisan narratives. If members of Congress were "talking past" one another in these debates – because they were receiving very different informational signals – then the lack of compromise on this issue makes more sense.

To test these predictions, I first collected – with the help of research assistants – detailed data on the public statements made by relevant policy actors. I then used this data to construct a policy idea diffusion network that traces the flow of language across these actors. To the degree that the partisan and ideological commitments of these groups structure the flow of language, it can be said that partisanship is an important conditioning factor in the acceptance of ideas and a potential reason that the stances of the two parties have diverged on so many important policy issues.

4.1 Data and Methods

To conduct this analysis, research assistants identified and collected online statements published by interest groups and think tanks – including blog posts, policy reports, white papers, and other related texts – that contained keywords related to the topic of cap-and-trade and the first legislative action taken in this area.[3] To collect formal party member publications, coders downloaded all e-mails to constituents (starting in 2009) that contained one or more of the relevant keywords and retained all paragraphs containing at least one keyword.[4] This data was compiled by Lindsey Cormack (2017) in a comprehensive dataset of congressional e-mails to constituents.

The decision to focus on congressional communications with constituents – rather than, for example, discourse in committees – is informed by a number of factors. First, like the online publications made by groups, the language used in member e-mails is

[3]These keywords included "cap and trade," "American Clean Energy and Security Act," "ACES," and "Waxman Markey."

[4]The decision to focus on paragraphs rather than full texts for members of Congress was made because their newsletters often contain discussions of multiple issue areas of bills.

intentional rather than ad-libbed, allowing for direct comparisons with the language employed by groups. Second, it is important to see how members explain issues to their constituents, as these talking points provide insight into members' public-facing justifications for their votes. Finally, Broockman and Butler (2017) find that even when politicians offer their constituents *minimally-justified* positions on issues, this communication can sway constituent opinion, suggesting that elite communications have independent effects on public opinion. If members themselves are influenced by the language and preferences of outside groups, then these groups might have an indirect impact on constituent opinion. Still, the results from this analysis should be interpreted in light of this methodological decision: the findings speak to the influence of outside groups over the public discourse of members of Congress. Future research will aim to extend this analysis to other areas in which members are active, namely in Congressional committees and floor debates.

Together, these statements comprise the *corpus* of interest group, think tank, and formal party member publications. The full corpus was limited to substantively relevant documents, or publications that 1) make a policy prescription, 2) outline an argument for or against a particular policy prescription, or 3) outline an argument for or against a related bill (or other form of government action). Altogether, the cap-and-trade corpus contains 1,132 distinct publications from 144 unique actors.

There are significant differences across actors in terms of the number of publications and the average words per document. Because the methods employed here might be more likely to identify influence ties amongst the most prolific actors, the analysis that follows controls for differences in actor word frequency. Additionally, although

the corpus of formal party member publications only extends to 2009 (whereas the group corpus includes publications going back to 2001), more than two-thirds of the corpus documents were published after 2009, suggesting that there is limited missing data for formal party members.[5]

To understand the diffusion and influence of the language in these texts, I utilize common textual analysis techniques to focus attention on meaningful concepts and then use network analysis techniques to identify the persistent pathways through which these ideas diffused across actors. Because not all language is substantively relevant – the initial corpora of publications contain a great deal of 'noise', or words that are either quite common or quite rare and thus have limited analytic value – I employ several common textual analysis techniques to focus attention on meaningful discourse that can then be traced throughout the network of actors (see Appendix B for further details of this process). In short, I focus on the earliest usage of the most meaningful bigrams – or two-word phrases – by each actor.[6]

These bigrams are 'traced' from the earliest users of such language to actors who adopted the same language at a later point in time. For this reason, any bigrams which were not associated with at least three unique actors were removed, resulting in 12,169 unique phrases that could potential diffuse across 144 actors in cap-and-trade debates. Using the *Network Inference* algorithm, implemented in the R statistical program by

[5]There is also reason to believe that members of Congress – given their intense workload and limited attention – are unlikely to discuss issues that have yet to reach the governmental agenda.

[6]Bigrams were chosen as the unit of analysis because they are more likely than singular words to capture underlying concepts and normative evaluations. For example, the bigrams "energy tax" and "energy efficiency" have very different connotations and therefore better distinguish between two actors than the singular term "energy."

Linder and Desmarais (2017), these time-stamped bigrams were used to create a latent diffusion network that approximates the actual spread of language across actors. The algorithm was originally developed to assess how state-level policy adoptions spread across the American states, but can generally be employed to identify the underlying diffusion patterns of any event (here, discourse use) across a set of nodes. Specifically, it utilizes three main factors when determining the likelihood that a diffusion tie will form: the number of times actor A uses a bigram before actor B; the length of time between usage for A and B; and the precision with which actor A's usage predicts actor B's use. If actor B frequently utilizes terms for the first time shortly after actor A first uses them, and if actor B is significantly less likely to utilize terms if actor A did not previously employ them, then a persistent influence tie or "edge" is likely to form from actor A to actor B.

Based on these criteria, the algorithm iteratively adds the highest performing ties, preferring those that explain the use of other bigrams that have not yet been adequately explained by current edges. Across multiple iterations, the algorithm adds edges and performs a Vuong test to determine each additional tie's statistical significance. At a specified p-value of 0.01, the NetInf algorithm settled on 786 edges across 142 actors. The final diffusion network, then, connects actors based on the extent and order of adoption of common bigrams, with the assumption that rhetoric that has diffused from one actor to another is indicative of some degree of inter-actor influence. In this analysis, the true *mechanisms* of this diffusion are unknown, but previous chapters suggest that institutional and individual collaborations, working groups, lobbying, and a variety of other tactics are used to spread ideas.

Such an approach to the diffusion of policy ideas has numerous benefits. First, by forming ties based on the overall extent of bigram diffusion, the method enables the identification of substantively significant pathways of informational and discursive transmission. Thus, this method is ideal for assessing the potential conditioning role of partisanship on the spread of ideas. Second, this method allows for the identification of policy entrepreneurs based not just on how early that actor adopted particular language but also how strongly that early adoption can explain later usage by other actors. This is useful for assessing the relative influence of various types of actors and testing the theory that Partisan-Political groups have pronounced influence in policy debates.

I utilize an Exponential Random Graph Model (ERGM) to rigorously analyze the *processes* that resulted in the observed network. Unlike linear regression models, ERGMs appropriately model the interdependence inherent in social networks (Cranmer and Desmarais, 2016). Furthermore, ERGMs allow for the comparison of an observed network to many possible alternative configurations, enabling insight into the network- and node-level processes that lead to the observed network structure. In other words, ERGMs help distinguish between alternative processes that could result in the same observed network, allowing for the identification of distinct effects deriving from differing theoretical mechanisms. The model presented here had the lowest Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) value of the alternative specifications examined (not shown). Furthermore, analyses in Appendix B show that the model converged – or was not degenerate – and the simulated networks in the model have a good fit with the observed data.

In the analysis that follows, the model includes terms that assess the relative importance, in predicting the formation of influence ties, of network *reciprocity*, or the tendency for influence ties to be mutually formed; *partisan homophily*, or the tendency for ties to form between co-partisans (i.e. members of the same EPN); and *partisan reciprocity*, or the tendency for mutual ties to form between co-partisans. The model also includes network-level covariates to account for tie interdependence. These covariates – which are typically used to improve model fit but are not very substantively meaningful – include the number of *Edges* in the network (akin to the intercept in a regression model) and controls for the number of nodes with *Edgewise Shared Partners* equal to 0. Additionally, the model includes covariates that account for ties that form between nodes with common issue commitments or organizational structures. These variables include whether or not the nodes are *Both Environmental* groups (or members of an environmentally-focused Congressional committee) and whether or not they are *Both Interest Groups* or *Both Think Tanks*. Finally, the model includes a control for the *Absolute Cascade Difference* between two actors, or the absolute difference in the total number of bigrams used by the tie sender and the tie receiver. This term effectively controls for the possibility that prolific actors might be more likely to send influence ties to those with fewer associated publications simply because they are associated with a large number of bigrams.

Additionally, the model includes several covariates that test alternative theories of tie formation. The first – the *Mutual Reciprocity* term – tests whether an influence tie from B to A is more likely to form if A also influences B. This term represents a network process that should be controlled for, but it also has substantive impli-

cations, testing if directed ties tend to be reciprocated regardless of actors' partisan affiliations. Second, two terms – *Both Democrats* and *Both Republicans* – test the main theory of influence tie formation advanced here: that ties are more likely to form between actors with shared partisan commitments, or those within the same EPN. In contrast to ties formed based on reciprocity, such ties form on the basis of partisan homophily. For both the reciprocity and homophily terms, positive and statistically significant coefficients would suggest that these factors increase the probability of a tie forming between two actors. Finally, two interaction terms – *Mutual x Both Democrats* and *Mutual x Both Republicans* – test the possibility that reciprocal ties might form conditional on both actors being members of the same EPN.

4.2 Discourses and Influence in Cap-and-Trade Debates

I begin by focusing on the ideas, influence patterns, and narratives surrounding the policy issue of cap-and-trade regulations. This became a salient topic following Barack Obama's election in 2008, and the Democratic-controlled House and Senate attempted to pass cap-and-trade legislation in 2009 and 2010, respectively. In both cases, the legislation aimed to limit industrial pollution by creating a market structure with limits on the amount of pollution that can be emitted by a firm in a given time period. In this system, firms are either allocated or sold permits for a set amount of emissions. Firms can then trade these permits amongst themselves so that polluters who can cheaply reduce emissions will do so and those who cannot will pay some additional price for their emissions. In June 2009, the House narrowly passed (219-212) a cap-and-trade bill, the American Clean Energy and Security (ACES) Act,

almost entirely along party lines. The bill was not considered by the Senate during the 111th Congress, but Senators Kerry and Lieberman introduced similar legislation, called the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act, in 2010. This bill was never voted on by the full Senate.

The issue of cap-and-trade is well-suited as an initial case study of the partisan influence effects hypothesized here. First, the issue could, in theory, lead to bipartisan compromise rather than partisan polarization, though it is true that environmental policies tend to elicit intense partisanship (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). In both bills, Democratic lawmakers introduced policy solutions that reflected ideas and policy instruments that are inherently conservative in their approach. The bill adopts a market-based approach (as opposed to, for instance, a direct tax on pollutants) that had been previously supported by conservative groups and business interests (e.g. British Petroleum and DuPont) as well as Republican presidents (namely Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush) (Meckling, 2011). Furthermore, scholars have found that even Republican voters' opinions on climate change are heterogeneous and vary geographically, suggesting that some Republican members of Congress might have supported the bills (Mildenberger et al., 2017). In fact, at the time a cap-and-trade policy was supported by a majority of voters.[7]

Thus, we are left with a puzzle regarding *how* this issue was polarized and this level of polarization was sustained. Prior research suggests that corporate funding

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[7]Rabe and Borick (2010) found that 86 percent of Americans thought the federal government had some or a great deal of responsibility for taking action to reduce global warming. They also found that 53 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly supported a cap-and-trade system while only 36 percent somewhat or strongly supported increased taxes on fossil fuels.

has led to polarized advocacy on this issue (e.g. Farrell, 2016). I take this a step further, focusing on how outside groups use their research (and the advocacy of this research) to impact policy debates. If extended party groups use research and ideas to push their party toward their preferred outcome, we should expect to see an influence network with distinct coalitions of actors divided along ideological and partisan lines – reflecting their material and ideological preferences – with the members of a given coalition utilizing similar language to discuss the topic over time.

Figure 4.1 depicts this cap-and-trade influence network, with directed ties representing the influence – across many bigrams – of one actor's discourse over the discourse of another. Larger nodes represent actors that have many outward influence ties, and these nodes are colored according to the partisan preference of the actor. Interest groups are represented by square nodes, think tanks by circular nodes, and members of Congress only by their name. In the aggregate, the network depicts the systemic diffusion of language across actors in the sample.

Several insights can be gleaned from this visualization. First, a limited number of groups had many diffusion ties while the average actor had a total of only 5.5 inward and outward ties. The median number of outward ties is 0, indicating that many actors – most often members of Congress – did not influence anyone. Given their high number of outward-facing diffusion ties, large and centrally located nodes can be described as influential senders of policy ideas and discourses. On the liberal side, the most influential nodes include several environmental interest groups (e.g. the National Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, and Environmental Defense Fund) and a number of broadly liberal or environmentally-focused think tanks (e.g.

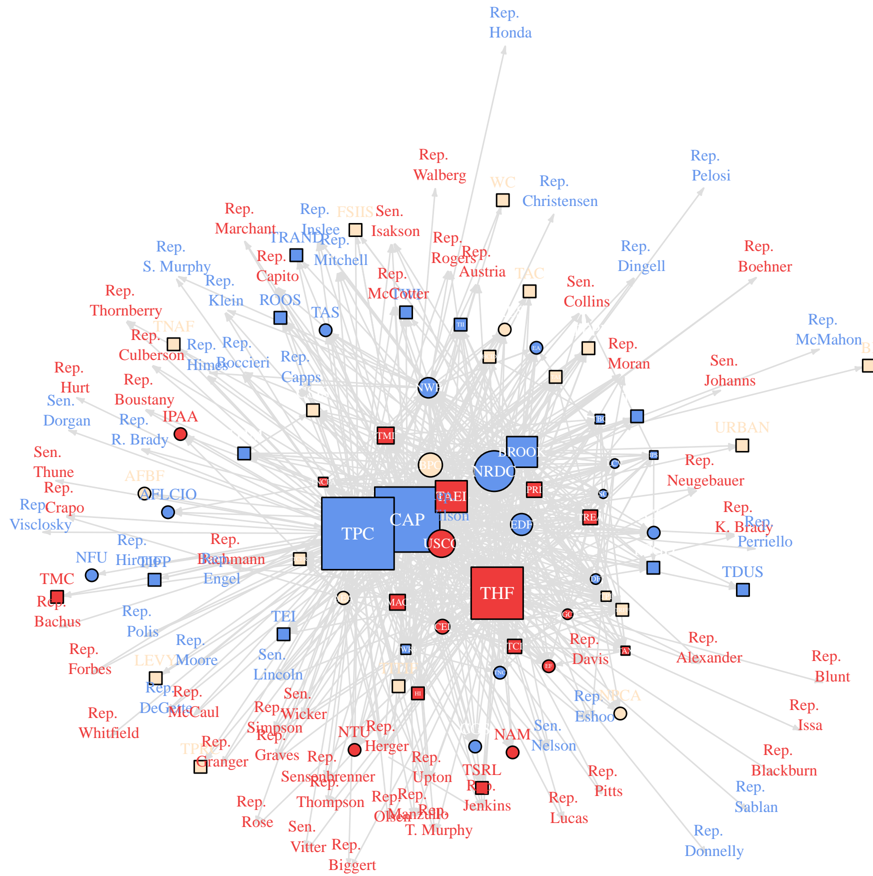

Figure 4.1: Cap-and-trade influence network. Directed edges indicate a diffusion tie from one node to another. The plot is arranged according to the Kamada-Kawai algorithm, which places similarly connected nodes close together and unconnected nodes further apart. Nodes in this graph are shaded according to their partisan classification, where blue indicates a Democratic-affiliated actor, red indicates a Republican-affiliated actor, and tan indicates a centrist group. Circular nodes represent think tanks while square nodes represent interest groups. Members of Congress are represented only by their name. Node size is a function of the number of *outward diffusion ties* associated with that actor (i.e. the actor's out-degree).

the Center for American Progress and Pew Center on Global Climate Change). On the conservative side, one business group (the US Chamber of Commerce) and three generalist think tanks (the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and Pacific Research Institute) initiate the majority of diffusion ties. Centrist groups appear less frequently in the network, with the Bipartisan Policy Center as the most influential group. I explore the role of these influential opinion leaders in more detail in the next sections.

Members of Congress, as noted, are rarely influential in this debate, and they tend to be influenced by a relatively small number of outside groups. This fact is reflected in their peripheral location in the network graph. Instead, they are largely the *recipients* of ideas developed by outside actors. The network also displays some degree of ideological or partisan clustering, though the most densely embedded actors share connections with all types of nodes. Thus, there is evidence of both bipartisanship and partisanship in this debate. While this might suggest that there are relatively nonpartisan patterns to ideational diffusion, it is also possible that this visualization obscures the effect of partisanship on influence tie formation. I investigate this question more rigorously in the next section. Furthermore, the apparent bipartisanship in the network could be driven by terms that were used by actors regardless of ideological commitment, resulting in diffusion ties that connect the most active nodes simply because they are highly active. The next two sections attempt to untangle these alternative diffusion dynamics.

4.3 Partisan Homophily and Policy Influence

In this section, I empirically test three alternative theories of tie formation in this diffusion network. The first predicts that influence ties are formed mutually (i.e. in both directions) regardless of partisanship, while the second suggests that ties form conditional on partisan homophily, or membership within the same EPN. The third theory is a mix of these two, predicting that mutual ties form conditional on partisan homophily. Support for the second and third theoretical mechanisms would suggest that partisan dynamics are an important conditioning factor in the spread and acceptance of policy discourse.

Indeed, a test of these alternative theories of influence tie formation demonstrates that shared partisanship – or membership in the same EPN – is a strong (and sometimes the strongest) predictor of tie formation. This can be seen in Table 4.1, which shows the results of the ERGM model predicting influence tie formation in cap-and-trade debates. In this model, coefficients represent the change in log-odds of a tie forming, and so it is difficult to judge their substantive significance. However, positive and significant coefficients indicate that the observed network contains a greater number of ties between two types of nodes than we would observe in a randomly generated graph.

The baseline probability of a tie forming between two actors (seen in the Edges term) is incredibly low (0.8 percent). The fact that the Edges coefficient is negative indicates that ties are not formed randomly, as most other coefficients have positive values indicating that they increase the baseline probability of a tie forming. Furthermore, the negative Mutual term indicates that ties are more likely to form

hierarchically – with one actor influencing another, but not being influenced in return – rather than reciprocally. This provides some evidence that actors are not mutually influencing one another regardless of partisanship, though hierarchical ties could still be formed in bipartisan or nonpartisan ways.

This does not appear to be the case, however. The two terms that account for partisan homophily – Both Democrats and Both Republicans – are positive and statistically significant at $p<0.01$, indicating that influence ties are more likely to form if the two actors share partisan commitments. This effect is nearly twice as large for two Republicans, suggesting that the Republican EPN was more united – in terms of shared discourse and influence tie formation – than the Democratic EPN. Still, the substantive effect of common EPN membership is fairly small, compared to other terms in the model, for both Democrats and Republicans.

The interaction terms for common EPN membership and mutual tie formation, however, are much more substantively significant. In the case of two Republicans, the probability of reciprocal influence ties forming is 7.8 percent, the highest probability of all the model coefficients. The effect is roughly one-third as large for two Democrats. Aside from substantive significance, there is another key difference in how members from the two parties form ties: the Mutual x Both Democrats term is negative, while the Mutual x Both Republicans term is positive. This means that the effect of partisan homophily is strongest for Democrats when ties are *not* reciprocated, while the opposite is true for Republicans. In practical terms, these coefficients suggest that two Democrats are more likely to form ties in a hierarchical way – with prominent organizations influencing less prominent co-partisans, without being influenced in

	Dependent variable:
	Diffusion Tie Probability
Edges	−4.810***
	(0.046)
Edgewise Shared Partners	−1.665***
	(0.013)
Both Environmental	0.622***
	(0.073)
Both Interest Groups	2.024***
	(0.054)
Both Think Tanks	1.254***
	(0.083)
Cascade Difference	0.001***
	(0.00002)
Mutual	−0.577***
	(0.018)
Both Democrats	0.200***
	(0.044)
Both Republicans	0.479***
	(0.060)
Mutual x Both Democrats	−0.761***
	(0.022)
Mutual x Both Republicans	2.334***
	(0.027)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,311.510
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	4,398.460
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.1: ERGM predicting influence tie formation in cap-and-trade debates.

return – while two Republicans are likely to form mutual influence ties. Thus, there is strong support for *hierarchical homophily* in the case of Democrats and *reciprocal homophily* in the case of Republicans.

Several additional model terms have practical significance as well, and these terms support the findings presented in previous chapters. Most important here is the fact that two interest groups or two think tanks are significantly more likely to form influence ties (5.8 percent and 2.8 probability, respectively). This means that actors in the omitted category – two members of Congress – are very unlikely to form ties. As I show in the next section, formal party members are almost never influential, and they are not influenced as often as other actors. When they are influenced, though, they are almost always using terms developed by *outside groups*, often within their extended party network. Thus, based off qualitative and quantitative analyses, members of Congress are *policy demanders* who draw on ideas and information provided by groups in their extended networks.

4.4 Opinion Leaders and Ideational Imitators

If the cap-and-trade policy subsystem was mostly defined by partisan influence, what underlying dynamics explain these aggregate patterns? Which actors were the most influential and, most importantly for this study, were Partisan-Political groups more influential in cap-and-trade debates than other, more moderate or academic organizations? To gain leverage on these questions, I focus in this section on the most highly influential (in terms of out-degree, or the number of outward influence ties) nodes in the network.

Table 4.2 lists the most influential nodes in the network, or the actors who influenced the highest number of other actors. These are all interest groups or think tanks, though this is a reflection of the data rather than a methodological decision. As noted, the members of Congress in the network rarely influence other actors. In fact, only *one* formal party member, Rep. Wally Herger (D-CA), sent an influence tie. Interest groups and think tanks, on the other hand, sent an average of 9.8 and 12.3 influence ties, respectively. This fact suggests that outside groups, as expected, are almost exclusively the actors (of those examined here) producing the ideas, talking points, and arguments that others draw on. These outside groups are the ones developing the intellectual or argumentative 'infrastructure' that defines policy discourse. Oftentimes these talking points make their way to members of Congress, reflected in the fact that they receive, on average, 2.6 inward influence ties from interest groups and think tanks. These organizations are influencing one another as well: interest groups average 9.3 inward influence ties, while think tanks average 8.3. Thus, this analysis reveals a fairly robust community of outside actors who are engaging with one another and influencing formal party members.

There is, however, a hierarchy amongst these outside organizations. While they average between 9.8 and 12.3 outward ties, the most influential actors in Table 4.2 sent *far more* of these ties than their less influential counterparts. At the high end, the Center for American Progress and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change influenced 115 and 104 other actors, respectively. The Heritage Foundation is nearly as influential, with influence ties to 74 other actors. Importantly, these groups are also more likely to influence others than to be influenced themselves (see the "Influence

Top Network Influencers							
Actor	**Type**	**Party**	**Out Degree**	**In Degree**	**Influence Ratio**	**Ties to Co-Partisans (%)**	**Ties to Opposing Partisans (%)**
Center for American Progress	TT	Democrat	115	10	11.5 to 1	40.0 %	42.6 %
Pew Center on Global Climate Change	TT	Democrat	104	35	3.0 to 1	38.5 %	49.0 %
Heritage Foundation	TT	Republican	74	26	2.8 to 1	56.8 %	31.1 %
National Resources Defense Council	IG	Democrat	55	23	2.4 to 1	52.7 %	30.9 %
Brookings Institution	TT	Democrat	50	9	5.6 to 1	36 %	38 %
American Enterprise Institute	TT	Republican	43	18	2.4 to 1	37.2 %	46.5 %
Bipartisan Policy Center	IG	Centrist	38	8	4.8 to 1	NA	NA
Chamber of Commerce	IG	Republican	35	18	1.9 to 1	42.9 %	40.0 %
Environmental Defense Fund	IG	Democrat	26	16	1.6 to 1	42.3 %	42.3 %
National Wildlife Federation	IG	Democrat	23	16	1.4 to 1	69.69 %	21.7 %
Pacific Research Institute	TT	Republican	23	6	3.8 to 1	47.8 %	39.1 %

Table 4.2: Most influential actors in the cap-and-trade network. Displays the top network influencers – defined as the actors with the highest number of outward influence ties (Out-Degree) – as well as data on the number of inward influence ties (In-Degree), the ratio of outward to inward influence ties (Influence Ratio), and the percentage of ties sent to actors from the same party network (Ties to Co-Partisans) or the opposing party network (Ties to Opposing Partisans).

Ratio" in Table 4.2). At the low end, the Chamber of Commerce sends two ties for every one tie it receives, while at the high end the Center for American Progress influences 11.5 actors for every time it is influenced itself. Thus, these groups appear to be "opinion leaders" or "policy entrepreneurs" on this issue. These opinion leaders are a mix of interest groups and think tanks, and they tend to either be concerned with specific, relevant issue areas (i.e. the environment or the economy) or broadly ideological in their approach.

Importantly, Partisan-Political groups are over-represented in this sample of influential leaders. To show this, I again focus on the most highly influential groups (rather than the full sample) because it is quite difficult to systematically classify organizations into the typology from Chapter 2. Rather, in-depth study of an organization is required to classify groups into the four ideal types I outline. Still, some fairly strong patterns emerge from this data. The Center for American Progress, Heritage Foundation, and National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) – all Partisan-Political in their approach – are three of the five most influential actors. They are joined by three other (somewhat less influential) Partisan-Political interest groups: the Chamber of Commerce, Environmental Defense Fund, and National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Thus, more than half of the most influential groups examined here can be considered Partisan-Political. And, while I do not classify these organizations, all but two of the next ten most influential groups have partisan preferences, and three of these actors – because they are interest groups – are by definition Partisan-Political.

The remaining influential groups are mainly Partisan-Academic, including the Pew Center on Global Climate Change and the American Enterprise and Pacific Research

Institutes. These groups have ideological or partisan preferences but remain fairly academic in their approach to public policy. It seems, then, that influence accrues to organizations with partisan preferences – of the eleven most influential groups, all but two have ideological viewpoints or revealed preferences that align with a single political party. Only the Brookings Institution (Moderate-Academic) and the Bipartisan Policy Center (Moderate-Political) are highly influential without having *strong* partisan preferences (though, as noted, the Brookings Institution is viewed by many as left of center).

Furthermore, these groups are behaving in somewhat partisan ways, though there is important variation. On average, these top groups sent 44.1 percent of their influence ties to co-partisans and 34.7 percent to members of the opposing party's EPN, with the remainder sent to centrist groups. (The full sample of interest groups and think tanks is even more partisan in their influence, sending 47.4 percent of their ties to co-partisans and 24.2 percent to opposing partisans.) Thus, there is some degree of bipartisanship in how influence ties are formed, though more ties are formed on a partisan basis. Groups do not appear to be entirely isolated in partisan or ideological bubbles, though they are biased towards their preferred party. I investigate these partisan and bipartisan patterns in greater detail in the next section.

Similar results emerge when we examine the influence patterns of various types of organizations. Many Partisan-Political groups, unsurprisingly, are very partisan in their influence. The Heritage Foundation, NRDC, NWF, and Pacific Research Institute, for example, all send more ties to co-partisans than to members of the opposing party. In the most extreme case, the NWF sends 69.6 percent of its ties

to Democrats and only 21.7 percent to Republicans. The Heritage Foundation and NRDC send 56.8 and 52.7 percent of their ties to co-partisans and only 31.1 and 31.9 percent to opposing partisans, respectively. Certain other Partisan-Political groups, however, are surprisingly even-handed in their influence. This is the case for the Center for American Progress (40 percent to Democrats and 42 percent to Republicans), the Chamber of Commerce (42.9 percent to Republicans, 40 percent to Democrats) and the Environmental Defense Fund (42.3 percent to both parties). Furthermore, two Partisan-Academic groups – the Pew Center on Global Climate Change and the American Enterprise Institute – send *more* ties to members of the opposing party than to actors within their own EPN.

Members of Congress, on the other hand, are more consistently partisan in terms of which ideas they are accepting (i.e. who influences them). On average, members of Congress receive 53 percent of their ties from members of their extended party network, with many of the other ties coming from centrist organizations. In fact, 33 percent of formal party members receive all their ties (which is sometimes just one tie) from *only* members of their EPN.

Thus, the results so far suggest that members of Congress do rely on outside groups for information, ideas, and talking points, and they are fairly biased in how they do so. They tend to imitate the ideas provided by outside groups within their extended party network. Within these networks, Partisan-Political groups do appear to have more power than other ideal types, especially moderate groups. This fits with the theory advanced here, which says that groups that consistently invest in a single party develop strong connections to and reputations within that party. The

influence ties in this network, representing stable informational diffusion pathways, help to operationalize these connections. These ties and reputations – in combination with direct advocacy efforts – make Partisan-Political groups the dominant "go-to" organizations when members need policy information. For this reason, we see that these types of organizations are highly influential in cap-and-trade debates.

The power of partisan groups is not unchallenged, though. While only two moderate groups are amongst the most influential in the network, these two – the Brookings Institution and the Bipartisan Policy Center – send a high number of influence ties. In the case of Brookings, this is likely a reflection of the organization's long-term reputation as an important player in politics. Despite increased partisan polarization, this reputation seems to still carry weight in policy debates, allowing Brookings to influence both Republicans and Democrats at roughly equal rates. In the case of the Bipartisan Policy Center, on the other hand, their broad influence is likely due to the fact that the organization was founded to bring the two parties together. As a result, they are able to influence both Democrats and Republicans. The BPC model, then, might be one that other groups who wish to incentivize bipartisan compromise could follow (though as I show below, influencing members from both parties is not the same as getting these members to speak to one another, or even speak the same 'language').

As a final note, it is important to not overstate the extent of partisanship in the results presented thus far. While it is true that common partisan commitments are predictive of tie formation – and that the most influential groups, on average, influence members of their preferred party at higher rates – there are also some bipartisan

patterns. This could, however, be an artifact of the data and methods used here. It could be, for instance, that bipartisan influence ties tend to represent the spread of shared language used by members of both parties, while influence ties formed in a partisan fashion represent the spread of meaningful discourse and arguments. To parse these alternative explanations, in the next section I turn to a qualitative analysis of the overarching *narratives* that result from these influence ties.

4.5 Partisan Cap-and-Trade Narratives

While the analysis thus far relies on the overall spread of bigrams, what we are really interested in here are the narratives that resulted from these two-word phrases. Do the influence ties and patterns outlined above result in cohesive party narratives? Were these narratives different, or even contradictory, across the two parties? And does the apparent bipartisanship noted above represent meaningful dialogue or less meaningful textual similarities?

To answer these questions, I qualitatively investigate the most important bigrams – and the broader arguments they comprise – and identify the most salient talking points in the discussion of cap-and-trade. Specifically, I focus on the most substantively meaningful discourse in the corpus, investigating if opposing partisans employed this similar language in divergent ways, if co-partisans utilized common arguments, and if formal party members adopted the discourse of highly influential groups in their networks.

To begin, Table 4.3 depicts the ten most frequent bigrams used by all actors within the sample. The results again reveal both partisan and bipartisan patterns. Certain

Bigram	**Total (%)**	**Centrists (%)**	**Democrats (%)**	**Republicans (%)**
climat chang	61.8	85.7	69.6	47.8
clean energi	48.6	61.9	73.2	23.9
greenhous gas	48.6	57.1	55.4	40.3
gas emiss	47.2	57.1	51.8	40.3
renew energi	46.5	52.4	60.7	32.8
environment protect	45.1	57.1	44.6	41.8
carbon emiss	44.4	71.4	42.9	37.3
global warm	43.1	52.4	48.2	35.8
protect agenc	42.4	57.1	39.3	40.3
energi effici	40.3	61.9	57.1	19.4

Table 4.3: Ten most common bigrams in the cap-and-trade influence network. Totals represent the percentage of all actors who used the phrase, while centrist, Democrat, and Republican statistics indicate the percentage of actors within each partisan category that used the bigram.

phrases – like “climat[e] chang[e],” “clean” or “renew[able] energ[y],” and “energ[y] effici[ency]” – were employed at much higher rates by centrist and Democratic actors than by Republican actors. Others – like “greenhous[e] gas emiss[ions]” and “environment[al] protect[ion] agenc[y]” – were used fairly consensually by all actors.

Were these actors employing these terms in similar ways? To gain leverage on this question, Table 4.4 lists the ten terms most frequently used by centrists and by members of the two party networks. Bolded terms in this table indicate that the partisan grouping used the bigram at the highest rate. Again, we see that certain phrases were used fairly regularly by all three groupings. These terms – which include “climat[e] chang[e],” “greenhous[e] gas emiss[ions],” and the “environment[al] protect[ion] agenc[y]” – seem to represent the common language that is required to discuss cap-and-trade regulations. Without broader context, it appears that these terms were used – and spread – in fairly bipartisan ways, though the qualitative analysis below suggests this was not the case.

To this point, we also see some stark differences between the phrases used by the Democratic and Republican EPNs. In the Democratic network, the top terms referenced the effects of “climat[e] chang[e],” “global warm[ing],” and “greenhous[e] gas emiss[ions]” while also discussing, presumably favorably, the goals of “clean” or “renew[able] energ[y]” and the “green job[s]” that would accompany them. Thus, the Democratic network seemed to emphasize the *environmental and economic benefits* of cap-and-trade regulations. Republican actors, on the other hand, also discussed consensual topics like climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, but they were far more likely than Democrats or centrists to discuss “nation[al] energ[y] tax[es],”

Top Centrist Terms (%)	**Top Democratic Terms (%)**	**Top Republican Terms (%)**
climat chang (85.7%)	**clean energi (73.2%)**	**energi tax (52.2%)**
carbon emiss (71.4%)	climat chang (69.6%)	climat chang (47.8%)
clean energi (61.9%)	**renew energi (60.7%)**	**energi cost (44.8%)**
energi effici (61.9%)	energi effici (57.1%)	environment protect (41.8%)
fossil fuel (61.9%)	greenhous gas (55.4%)	greenhous gas (40.3%)
carbon tax (61.9%)	gas emiss (51.8%)	gas emiss (40.3%)
greenhous gas (57.1%)	global warm (48.2%)	protect agenc (40.3%)
gas emiss (57.1%)	fossil fuel (46.4%)	**energi price (40.3%)**
environment protect (57.1%)	environment protect (44.6%)	**nation energi (38.8%)**
protect agenc (57.1%)	**green job (44.6%)**	carbon emiss (37.3%)

Table 4.4: Ten most utilized bigrams in each partisan category. Bolded phrases indicate that actors in that partisan grouping used the bigram at the highest rate, compared to the two other categories.

"cost[s]," and "price[s]." Top Republican bigrams, then, were predominantly oriented around a narrative of increased *economic costs* that would result from cap-and-trade legislation.

Centrist groups mostly utilized bigrams that were employed by both Democrats and Republicans, and they often employed these terms at the highest rates. The phrases they employed also appear to be more technical and less political than concepts like green jobs and increased prices. For example, they discuss both "clean energ[y]" and "fossil fuel." Furthermore, their most used bigrams are not as consistently favorable or critical – in terms of the overarching narratives they might comprise – as the top phrases employed by the two partisan networks. In general, the bigrams employed by centrist groups appear to fall into three categories: those that reference the problem of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions; those that

discuss the impact of cap-and-trade regulations on energy production; and those that discuss policy implementation through the Environmental Protection Agency.

While these findings provide some evidence that the two parties adopted contradictory policy narratives on this issue, the quantitative and qualitative evidence so far is fairly abstract. In order to better understand the arguments employed in this debate (and how they diffused across actors), I now move from a bigram-level analysis to an analysis of the underlying policy texts they are embedded within. Specifically, I investigate the narratives built around the most substantively meaningful bigrams in Table 4.4, focusing first on early and influential group adopters of these bigrams and then on formal party members' later usage. This analysis reveals that influence ties across party coalitions are most often representative of inter-group disagreements that nevertheless employ common terms, while influence ties within each EPN tend to represent the development and deployment of common *narratives* about the impact of cap-and-trade regulations. In particular, three salient narratives emerge from the data and neatly divide Democratic and Republican actors.

4.5.1 Policy Efficacy

The first narrative that emerges from the data concerns the efficacy of the proposed regulations. These narratives discussed the potential impacts of cap-and-trade policy, and they were built around bigrams like "greenhous[e] gas" and "green job[s]," in the case of Democrats, and energy "tax[es]," "price[s]," and "cost[s]" in the case of Republicans. Specifically, the Democratic narrative pointed almost exclusively to the environmental benefits of cap-and-trade (as well as other advantages), while

Republicans referenced the tremendous and unfair burdens of such regulations and the notion that they would not achieve the desired environmental benefits.

Democratic talking points in particular tied together three related benefits – environmental, economic, and foreign policy – that were repeated by many actors over time. For example, in 2007 the NRDC wrote that cap-and-trade regulations will "simultaneously put the nation on the emission reduction pathway needed to prevent the worst global warming impacts, meet other objectives such as reducing our oil dependence, and promote continued strong economic growth." Strands of this narrative emerged in other publications and statements made by members of Congress. In 2009, the Center for American Progress provided a list of the benefits of the proposed legislation that suggested it would "create jobs," reduce global warming effects that are "harming our health and the physical environment," and "provide a host of economic benefits."

Importantly, this narrative found its way from liberal interest groups and think tanks to Democratic Party members. For example, when the bill was being debated, Democratic Representative Jay Inslee similarly stated that cap-and-trade would "jolt our nascent economic recovery" and "forestall climate change." Many legislators discussed a similar list of benefits with their consistuents, frequently using the same exact language as outside organizations. To give just one more example, in 2010 Representative Lois Capps wrote that the bill "will create clean energy jobs here in America, protect consumers, reduce pollution and help free us from our dangerous dependence on dirty fossil fuels." Oftentimes, these legislators tailored the talking points developed at outside organizations to their particular districts. For example,

Ohio Representative John Boccieri argued that the bill would create "thousands of jobs in Ohio that cannot be outsourced; producing clean, green energy; protecting our national security; and moving away from our dependence on foreign energy, especially oil."

Thus, the Democratic EPN was largely unified on the positive effects of the cap-and-trade legislation – they argued it would forestall climate change, spur economic growth, and reduce dependence on fossil fuels provided by foreign nations. The Republican narrative, on the other hand, refuted every aspect of this Democratic story. First, Republican groups argued that regulations would increase the prices of energy and other consumer goods without appreciably addressing the problem of global warming pollutants. The Heritage Foundation was especially prominent in driving this narrative, with 74 percent of their documents discussing the prospect of increased "energ[y] price[s]" (interestingly, several Democratic groups argued *directly against* Heritage Foundation authors, suggesting instead that technological innovation and behavioral change would limit price increases). Other groups adopted the cause of energy prices in their later documents – the Chamber of Commerce, for instance, wrote in 2009 that cap-and-trade policies in other nations resulted in "energy shortages and high energy prices, which in turn means higher prices for just about everything else... [T]o add insult to injury, by itself ACES will not affect global greenhouse gas concentrations in any meaningful way."

Other Republican groups, like the Manhattan Institute and the Reason Foundation, employed nearly identical narratives. In fact, the narrative of higher costs for consumers was so prevalent within the Republican EPN that the Pacific Research

Institute wrote, in 2009, that "nobody is defending Waxman-Markey on the basis of cost/benefit analysis, because it can't be done." This statement is demonstrably false – the Democratic narrative outlined above relies heavily on the notion of economic benefits – but perhaps reflects the fact that the Pacific Research Institute was hearing mainly from other conservative organizations that agreed with this sentiment.

Many Republican formal party members similarly adopted this narrative of economic costs and limited results, tailoring the message to their specific state economy. For example, in 2010 Missouri Congressman Roy Blunt wrote to his constituents that a "national energy tax, or cap and trade, would raise energy prices for every single person I work for and cost more than 32,000 jobs in Missouri in its first year." In much the same way, Kentucky Congressman Geoff Davis wrote that "This legislation could cause more than 4,000 jobs to be lost in Kentucky's Fourth District alone and nearly 22,000 jobs throughout the Commonwealth." Texas Congressman Mac Thornberry wrote that the bill would "severely damage Texas's energy industry and energy-related jobs." And in 2009, Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann sent an e-mail with the simple subject line: "Cap and trade is Bad for Minnesota's Agriculture Economy."

Much like the Democratic narrative, the Republican narrative also had a foreign policy component to it, with groups suggesting that these economic costs would be disproportionately borne by people in the US. Whereas Democratic actors often looked to European nations as exemplars in fighting climate change, Republican actors were more likely to point to developing nations like China and India and suggest that these countries would gain unfair economic advantages should the US voluntar-

ily regulate its energy production. This narrative was especially prominent amongst industry representatives like the Chamber, which argued against cap-and-trade regulations because they would not be adhered to by America's economic competitors. Think tanks were also prominent drivers of this narrative, with the Cato Institute describing efforts to reduce emissions as "futile unless China and India also act." In direct refutation of this argument, Democratic groups like the Environmental Defense Fund proposed that the US must act as a leader because "China and India will not cap their greenhouse gas emissions unless the U.S. moves first."

In fact, this type of cross-referencing was fairly common within EPNs and even across them. In general, then, these narratives help to ground the quantitative analysis presented previously. The groups within the network were developing robust ties to one another as they utilized common terms developed by other actors. What the current analysis shows, however, is that these common terms (and cross-references to the work of opposing partisans), in most cases, did not represent meaningful dialogue amongst various actors. Instead, they led to two distinct and cohesive narratives, with Democrats arguing that cap-and-trade would lead to environmental and economic recovery and Republicans highlighting the economic costs and inefficiency of the plan.

4.5.2 Policy Implementation

Second, the two party coalitions developed competing narratives about the appropriate institutions to implement environmental protection reforms. This fact can be seen clearly in the distinct ways that actors employed the "clean air" bigram –

which most often referred to the Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1990 – and their references to the Environmental Protection Agency. Much of this discussion happened following the failure of the ACES Act, when many Democrats – including President Obama – sought to tackle environmental problems through regulations rather than legislation.

This was not an entirely new idea, though. Outside groups in the Democratic network had brought up the possibility of using the CAA and/or the EPA – rather than legislation – to institute cap-and-trade policies. While this possibility was widely recognized by Democratic groups, even before the failed legislation, there was some disagreement within the EPN regarding the efficacy of using the EPA to implement cap-and-trade. One Center for American Progress researcher, for instance, acknowledged after the ACES failure that EPA regulations were an imperfect answer. Nevertheless, CAP argued that "if Congress cannot muster the votes to pass a decent energy and climate bill, then the EPA can and indeed must act to regulate carbon dioxide emissions under the Clean Air Act" despite the fact that "it would face legal assaults that would significantly delay implementation of any such reduction rules."

The National Resources Defense Council, on the other hand, was one of the earliest Democratic actors to forcefully advocate expanding the reach of the Clean Air Act (and thus the Environmental Protection Agency) to cover emissions associated with global warming. In 2007, they wrote that working through existing institutions "will simplify the legislative task, because it takes advantage of many tried-and-true underlying components of the current Clean Air Act that do not have to be recreated in a new statute... The EPA also has the most experience administering market-based emissions regulation and emissions performance requirements."

Following the legislative failures of cap-and-trade measures, other Democratic groups subsequently adopted similar arguments about the efficacy of regulating greenhouse gases through the EPA. In 2010, the Pew Center on Global Climate Change used very similar language when it argued that "Climate legislation could be vastly simplified by leaving more of the implementation decisions to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency." Some Democatic members of Congress similarly praised the EPA – many, for example, sent e-mails on Earth Day extolling the benefits of the agency – but were less likely to discuss the actual implementation of the policy with their constituents.

Both Republican groups and members of Congress, on the other hand, were quick to characterize the EPA as an expansive bureaucracy that must be stopped. They also refuted the Democratic argument that the Clean Air Act would be an appropriate vehicle for cap-and-trade regulations. It is worth noting that Republican opposition to these particular implementation strategies is likely a reflection of their opposition to the policy itself, not the agency that would be in charge of it. Still, in this case we see Republicans confronting a Democratic narrative and arguing directly against it. In April 2008, for instance, the Chamber of Commerce wrote directly to the Energy and Commerce Committee and implored Congress to "acknowledge that the [Clean Air Act] is simply not compatible with the regulation of greenhouse gases, and that it should enact a legislative fix removing greenhouse gases from the purview of the CAA." The next year, the American Enterprise Institute wrote that "There has been little notice of how an approach that is supposed to be an alternative to command-and-control regulation will involve a massive interagency bureaucracy to execute it,

with undoubtedly substantial compliance costs for the private sector... [T]he bill requires the EPA's administrator to perform over six hundred tasks in connection with the operation of the law. One wonders whether the EPA administrator will have time for any other environmental issues."

As noted, Republican members of Congress were far more likely than Democrats to discuss the actual implementation of the cap-and-trade policies, most likely to appeal to the low opinion of the EPA among Republican voters. Congressman Wally Herger, for instance, reacted to President Obama's attempt to include carbon dioxide under the Clean Air Act by writing that regulating carbon dioxide – "a gas we emit with each breath" – would represent "an unprecedented expansion of the Clean Air Act far beyond anything intended by Congress." Like the Chamber of Commerce, then, Herger tied environmental regulations to government overreach by referencing the Clean Air Act. Other Republican party members followed, with Kevin Brady vowing, "I won't stand by while unelected bureaucrats try to circumvent the will of the people who strongly oppose this job-killing cap and trade scheme." Using incredibly similar language, Geoff Davis wrote that "Despite the absence of a final decision from Congress, unelected bureaucrats have already finalized regulations that represent a generational shift in environmental policy." Indeed, most Republican members who discussed the EPA referenced power grabs by "unelected bureaucrats" and "backdoor attempts" to imeplement cap-and-trade. These same Republicans framed the issue as a matter of Congressional prerogative and the EPA regulations as an assault on representative democracy.

Instead of top-down environmental regulations, most Republican actors preferred a *free* (i.e. unregulated) market approach build around technological advancement which, according to the Heritage Foundation, "offers the market to opportunity to find the winners and losers in future alternative energy sources." Heritage's focus on market-driven innovation was echoed by other groups within the Republican EPN, most notably the Chamber of Commerce.

4.5.3 Policy Goals

Finally, the two EPNs developed contradictory narratives about the appropriate goals for environmental regulations. Democrats, unsurprisingly, argued that any regulations should incentivize renewable energy production (and allocate significant funds to do so), which they said would not only limit global warming effects but also have a positive economic impact. This messaging became salient several years before Congressional action. The National Wildlife Federation, for instance, wrote in 2008 that the "current dependency on oil and other fossil fuels is putting the squeeze on American families" and that the "jobs that benefit from the clean energy industry touch every aspect of America's economy." In 2009, the Center for American Progress suggested that cap-and-trade regulations would "create thousands of jobs manufacturing steel for wind turbines and building energy-efficient buildings." And, again in 2009, the Environmental Defense Fund wrote that "Shifting America's *entire* energy market toward clean, renewable energy" sources is necessary "to solve the climate crisis" (emphasis added).

Once the issue reached the governmental agenda, Democratic members of Congress seemed to tailor this economic and environmental message to their constituents. To give just one example, Representative Anna Eshoo wrote in 2010 that "The American Clean Energy and Security Act guarantees an investment of $190 billion in new, clean energy technologies and energy efficiency which will create jobs and spur new industries." Many others wrote about the specific investments that would be made in their district should some form of cap-and-trade be passed. Lois Capps, for instance, wrote that the legislation would "have the added benefit of creating quality local jobs and stimulating local economic growth." She continued by listing several examples of local clean energy investments, including investments in "Ecomerit Technologies, a local renewable-energy business" and "a local advanced-lighting company, Soraa, [which] was awarded federal funds to develop high-efficiency lighting projects." Even one Democrat who opposed the ACES bill – Arizona Congressman Harry Mitchell – said he did so because "instead of investing in carbon-neutral energies like solar, the measure would have doubled down Americas reliance on coal," revealing the importance of incentivizing renewable energy production within the Democratic EPN.

Republicans, on the other hand, typically argued that incentivizing clean energy production at the expense of traditional energy sectors would be economically disastrous and technological unfeasible. The Republican EPN developed a fairly unified narrative about the economic *costs* of switching to renewable energy sources at a time when the American economy was weak and the technological infrastructure needed for large-scale renewable energy production was lacking. In 2009 the Manhattan Institute challenged the Democratic notion of green jobs resulting from renewable energy,

writing, "Only in Congress could legislators propose to raise energy prices..., require firms to use nonexistent technology, mandate greenhouse gas emissions back to 19th century levels – and then describe the bill as an economic rescue package."

Instead, these groups advocated for traditional energy sources, namely oil and natural gas. The American Enterprise Institute embodied this view when it wrote, in 2008, that "When people are hurting, and struggling to afford gasoline, food, and other necessities, common sense requires that we draw upon America's own vast reserves of oil and natural gas." When arguing this point, Republican affiliates consistently pointed to the same empirical evidence – the fact that roughly 85 percent of the nation's energy production comes from traditional energy sources – when arguing that the shift to renewables would be costly and impractical. In this talking point we see a clear instance of co-partisans drawing on the same information: after early adopters like the American Enterprise Institute published this figure, others like the Heritage Foundation and several members of Congress subsequently referenced the same research. (Interestingly, Democratic groups like the National Resource Defense Council also invoked this figure, framing it in terms of the negative impact of traditional energy dominance on global warming pollution and foreign affairs.)

Republican politicians had slightly more variation in their views on clean vs. renewable energy, though they still largely adopted talking points and narrative structures that imitated their extended party network. Some, like Representative Glenn Thompson, largely agreed with outside Republican groups, writing that "The purpose of the cap and trade legislation is to increase the cost of coal, oil and natural gas to the point of forcing us to use renewables. The problem is that there are no

renewables available that to any meaningful extent can take the place of coal, oil and natural gas, which produce 85 percent of our energy. The result: Americans will pay a penalty for their use of needed carbon-based fuels."

Others, however, acknowledged increased renewable energy production as a legitimate goal but criticized the mechanisms for accomplishing this goal found in the Democratic bills. For instance, Ohio Representative Steve Austria stated, "I support an alternative plan that would promote new, clean and reliable sources of energy by having less reliance on foreign oil and begin using domestic alternative energy such as solar, wind and nuclear energy and continuing to expand new technologies such as clean coal." At the same time, he justified his opposition to the Democratic bills by discussing their impact on his district and state, and he used a very similar argumentative structure as other Republicans. He wrote, "States, like Ohio, that produce and use more carbon-based energy, such as coal, will be hit hardest with cap and trade, while states such as California and New Jersey will receive more favorable treatment under this bill. Nearly 90 percent of Ohio's energy comes from coal... That is too much to ask of our families during these difficult economic times with unemployment at its highest level in years."

4.5.4 Common Terms, Different Languages

In sum, the two major party networks developed contradictory narratives about the efficacy of cap-and-trade regulations, the appropriate policy tools for regulating the environment, and the relative value of switching from traditional to renewable energy sources. These are frames and counter-frames that have been identified in

other studies of cap-and-trade regulations (Aklin and Urpelainen, 2013), but this study has highlighted the fact that these narratives are *developed* by outside actors and *disseminated* along predictable party lines. In other words, these narratives were not only internally cohesive within each party coalition, but also flowed from prominent actors to other groups and party members. Members of Congress often tailored messages developed and disseminated by party groups to fit the particular characteristics of their districts. These findings bolster the external validity of the previous quantitative analysis and suggest that those within the same EPN drew on the same broad *narratives* – developed by trusted and prominent co-partisan groups – when discussing the issue of cap-and-trade regulations. Thus, even when members utilized common terms in this policy debate, they were mostly speaking different languages. In short, they were *talking past* one another, and often directly to the outside groups that support them.

4.6 Cap-and-Trade Discourses: Boon or Boondoggle?

On the issue of cap-and-trade regulations, partisan dynamics provided structure to the research and advocacy efforts of outside research institutions. As demonstrated by discursive similarity and diffusion patterns, ideas and information predictably flowed along mainly partisan channels. In nearly every instance, these informational ties diffused *from* outside groups *to* formal party members or other organizations. Thus, the influence of ideas developed by outside groups appears to be contingent on long-term reputations and thick ties with other actors within the same extended party network.

Indeed, the types of groups most likely to develop partisan ties and reputations – Partisan-Political and, to a lesser extent, Partisan-Academic organizations – were especially prominent influencers on this topic. They were often the first groups (within the timeframe) to advance salient talking points and ideas. In the aggregate, these ideas comprised three related narratives regarding the efficacy, implementation, and goals of cap-and-trade legislation. Importantly, the Democratic and Republican narratives were almost entirely contradictory, even when they relied on the same underlying terms.

Though I focus here on bigrams and relatively simple arguments, it is worth noting that these narratives often emerged from very detailed and empirical policy reports. Most often, the details of these reports did not filter down to formal party members' narratives, but there are cases where members of Congress referenced specific, empirical evidence found in group publications. In either case, actors are selectively interpreting information in light of their partisan preferences (and the partisan commitments of the group providing it).

These results, then, provide further empirical evidence for partisan policymaking. Across the two extended party networks, actors are largely receiving different information and, as a result, talking past one another rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue. The methods employed here help to operationalize these networks and map out the relevant actors within them. There are limits to this analysis, however. First, these findings rely on a single case study, and so the generalizability of the results is limited. Still, the case is one that previous theories are ill-equipped to explain, and one that the theory of extended party policymaking explains quite well. Future

research will aim to apply these methods and this theory to additional cases, including other salient and politicized issues (like the Affordable Care Act and efforts to repeal it) as well as less salient and partisan topics (like, for example, federal flood insurance reform). These additional cases will not only improve the generalizability of these findings, but also highlight more nuanced dynamics of when, how, and why influence ties form in these networks.

A second limitation concerns the methodology and data utilized here. I operationalize influence in terms of discursive similarity and the diffusion of these discourses within a network, and I use quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure that these influence ties represent real-world effects. As I note, this is one important form of influence over the policy process (and specifically the discourse used in policy debates), but it is not the only type of influence worth studying. Future research will attempt to assess the degree to which outside groups are able to institutionalize their preferences not only in party discourses and agendas, but also in actual *policy designs*. In this analysis I have shown that groups are able to influence the arguments and ideas used in policy debates – and thus impact policy outcomes in Congress – but have not studied whether or not groups directly impact the provisions and structures of legislation. If they are able to do so, this would represent a form of "hard power" that outside groups wield, in addition to the "soft power" of ideas and information.

CHAPTER 5

POLARIZED POLICYMAKING: IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The results presented in this dissertation point to one clear conclusion: partisan polarization provides structure throughout the policymaking process, from the conduct of policy research at interest groups and think tanks to the spread of this information across policy actors to the use of discourses and talking points in policy debates. And we know, based on extensive research, that these processes often culminate in polarized roll call voting in Congress (e.g. Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Theriault, 2008; Lee, 2009). In other words, partisan dynamics provide structure to the entire process of research production and policy advocacy. This realization moves us from relatively unstructured policy process theories and pluralistic theories of competition to a *partisan coalitional* model that fits better with modern policy dynamics.

When it comes to the policy process, formal party members in Congress are largely responsible for the incentives and constraints placed on their extended party network. Outside research producing organizations exist within a marketplace for ideas, information, and talking points, and the current market incentivizes resources that are *useful* to partisan actors. This means that, in essence, the demand for policy research has shifted towards information that furthers partisan goals and narratives.

The downstream effect of this altered demand has been a shift in the supply curve – more (and more influential) organizations now consistently provide information that supports the goals of a single political party (which themselves overlap with the goals of the organizations producing this research).

In the most extreme case, Partisan-Political groups tend to produce partisan research and engage in direct advocacy efforts to further their goals. They are, for all intents and purposes, members of the *extended party network* in the policy process. These organizations are more than just traditional think tanks – they are more likely interest groups, with multifaceted and long-lasting campaigns to influence political outcomes and move policy in a particular ideological or partisan direction. They play the game of partisan politics because their goals are fairly partisan (or ideological) and because they rightly perceive that influence is contingent on engagement with the political system. And, even more academic or nonpartisan organizations have changed, to a lesser degree, in response to increased partisan polarization. These groups increasingly recognize that partisan reputations matter when it comes to the willingness of formal party members to accept ideas. While they have not embraced this fact as readily as Partisan-Political organizations, some have become better sorted into a single party as the two parties drift apart. Others have maintained a nonpartisan approach but nevertheless are increasingly public-facing, or attentive to how their research and ideas are received by the broader public.

Problematically, the groups that most consistently operate within a single partisan network seem to have significant influence over policy debates, measured here in the spread of discourse and ideas to members of Congress. These groups have invested in

strategies that enhance their ties with and reputations within partisan networks, and as such they enhance their influence over policy discourse within their preferred party. Certain moderate and/or academic organizations are still influential, but to the degree that they have fewer ties with those in positions of power – and to the degree that institutional credibility, in partisan battles, becomes increasingly irrelevant – these types of organizations are likely to be marginalized further as partisan polarization accelerates. In the process, Partisan-Political groups are in a prime position to inject their information and ideas into party policy positions and, therefore, bias policy towards their preferences.

Thus, the overall result of this changing marketplace is that many members of Congress are now enmeshed in entirely different informational environments. They receive different inputs and signals, and it is therefore unsurprising that bipartisan agreement is increasingly rare. As formal party members are exposed to very different (and often contradictory) talking points, they are increasingly likely to "talk past" one another in policy debates. The groups providing these ideas, on the other hand, are in a privileged position to influence party policy positions and, potentially, public policy outcomes.

5.1 The Political Effects of Polarized Policymaking

These facts have important implications for key topics in American politics, including political polarization, governance, and democratic representation. I elaborate on these implications in the following sections, highlighting the largely negative effects of extended party policy networks on American democracy. However, the continued

presence (and, in some cases, influence) of groups that are not strongly embedded within these networks provides some hope. I end this chapter with a discussion of realistic reform options that might enhance the influence of more moderate and academic organizations and, as a result, limit some of the most detrimental effects of partisan policymaking.

5.1.1 Partisan Polarization

Increased partisan polarization is, first and foremost, a *cause* of the dynamics outlined here. The fact that modern members of Congress are highly divided along party lines means that the demand for policy research is similarly polarized. Democrats demand information that supports their particularistic and ideological goals, and Republicans do the same. Recent research has suggested that some of the same groups investigated here are responsible for helping to elect such polarized candidates (e.g. Bawn et al., 2012; Desmarais, La Raja and Kowal, 2015) but, when it comes to policymaking, the research activities of groups do not appear to be the original cause of increased polarization. These groups are, to varying degrees, responding to changes in the demand for particular types of research. They have, however, enabled polarization to continue and perhaps accelerate. This is less a case of linear causality, then, and more a case of spiraling causality, where increased polarization incentivizes partisan research and this research, in turn, sustains and potentially furthers this polarization. This is a feedback loop that is inherently difficult to break out of.

Indeed, certain outside groups have engaged with and advanced polarization through their research products and partisan advocacy strategies. The Heritage Foundation

is perhaps the best example of this fact: the organization edits research products for their fit with overall messaging and political goals, establishes strong connections to other groups and formal party members, and engages in direct advocacy efforts through their 501(c)4 to promote their ideas. The aggregate effect of these strategies, across organizations, is the creation of two partisan networks of researchers, advocates, and policymakers. There are relatively few meaningful, cross-cutting ties connecting these networks, and as a result members are able (and even encouraged) to "talk past" one another in policy debates. In such an environment, opportunities for bipartisan compromise or even dialogue are limited.

Thus, to reiterate, it is not merely Congressional voting that is polarized; it is also the actual *process* of policymaking. This seems a more difficult problem to tackle. But we know that, in both voting and policy development, members of Congress are the main cause of polarization. In fact, these problems are intricately related – as bipartisan compromise has become increasingly rare, demand for moderate research has decreased, foreclosing the possibility for compromise on salient issues in the future. Thus, efforts to reduce polarization and reform the policy process might focus on the same root cause: polarized party members. As I outline below, simply electing more moderate and experienced legislators would help, but this solution requires confronting long-term socio-economic and political trends. A more immediate solution might seek to alter or augment the decision-making calculus of sitting members so that the relative incentives for polarized research are reduced. This would be an uphill battle given the institutionalization of groups that produce such research within

partisan networks, but it is worthwhile to consider in an effort to reduce polarization and improve governance and representation.

5.1.2 Governance

Polarized policymaking also has implications for governance, namely legislative productivity and the design and long-term viability of public policies. There is some evidence that polarization leads to legislative gridlock (Binder, 1999; McCarty, 2007), fewer opportunities for new legislation and a severe status-quo bias (Barber and McCarty, 2013). The underlying logic behind these trends has been explained by theories of "partisan teamsmanship" (Lee, 2016) and "pivotal-politics" (Krehbiel, 1998), but this project highlights one of the main factors prohibiting compromise: polarized policy information. As members of Congress receive very different policy information from their extended networks, opportunities for bargaining and compromise – which require at least some common ground amongst participants – are undermined. The fact that party leaders exercise considerable control over the flow of information in Congress (Curry, 2015) further erodes the possibility for legislators to "meet in the middle" and pass consensus policy. In a pluralistic system with many veto points, such compromise is frequently necessary to overcome gridlock.

Furthermore, if we assume that academic organizations produce more accurate policy information – and we should assume this – then it follows that modern day policymaking is less informed than it once was. The exercise of developing public policy in the modern era does not seem to meet the ideal of moderate minds and independent experts meeting to design legislation. Rather, it seems to be a process

defined by party leaders (and, to a lesser extent, rank-and-file) in conversation with a select set of outside actors who share with them particular partisan or ideological goals. As noted above, there are few influential organizations that bridge the gap between the two parties, and even if they are able to do so, the two parties translate their research into contradictory and distorted narratives that serve to further polarization.

The long-term impact of these developments on governance has likely been 'leapfrog legislating'[1], or the pursuit of one party's distinct policies when they control government and another distinct partisan agenda when control of government switches. The Affordable Care Act, for example, was a relatively moderate proposal but also an entirely partisan one passed by unified Democratic government and without buy-in from Republicans. Once these Republicans took partial control of government they immediately set about undermining the policy, and when they gained unified control of government they attempted to overturn the ACA completely. Presumably, if Democrats gain unified control again, they will work to either shore up the ACA or replace it with a more liberal alternative. Many outside groups are more than willing to take advantage of these opportunities to interject their own ideas about which type of policy should be passed. And again, with fewer bridging organizations between

[1] I borrow the concept of "leapfrogging" from Bafumi and Herron (2010), who show that, when extremists from one party are replaced, they are not replaced by moderates but instead by extremists from the opposite party. This means that the median voter is "leapfrogged" and never well represented. In much the same way, policies under partisan polarization tend to jump from one extreme to the next when control of government changes, with few opportunities for moderate lawmaking.

the two parties, the "jumps" from one party's policies to the other's are likely to be large and, potentially, poorly informed.

In the process of leapfrog legislating, it is the average voter who loses. When there are real problems with existing legislation, leapfrog legislating means that the two parties are not seriously considering moderate adjustments or fixes. They are, quite simply, receiving few informational inputs that favor such an approach. Instead, they are pursuing a partisan and ideological agenda that is not reflective of the average voter, but increasingly reflective of the preferences of their extended networks. The recent and unpopular Republican tax reforms are an example of this fact, and many Democratic presidential hopefuls have similarly advanced policy ideas that are relatively extreme compared to the preferences of the median voter.

5.1.3 Representation

The problems of polarization, gridlock, and leapfrog representation suggest that the activities of outside research producing organizations have implications for democratic representation. Polarization itself leads to poorer representation, as relatively extreme members pursue policies that are not representative of their average constituent (Bafumi and Herron, 2010). Instead, EPN theory suggests that members pursue policies reflective of their extended support coalition – the interest groups, media outlets, and activists that helped elect them (Bawn et al., 2012). This dissertation highlights one of the mechanisms, other than elections, through which these actors can institutionalize their preferences: the provision of policy resources. By susidizing information that furthers their shared goals, outside groups aid party allies

in the legislating process. Aside from contributing to an interest group or think tank, average citizens have no comparable way to influence the informational environment of party members. And, because these groups tend to have unrepresentative material or ideological preferences – and because average citizens have a "policy blind spot" where they cannot distinguish between alternative proposals (Bawn et al., 2012) – the result is typically a partisan agenda that best reflects the preferences of the most active and extreme partisans.

Thus, outside groups are often able to end run the preferences of the average citizen. By frequently collaborating and aligning with a single party, they are able to institutionalize their particular preferences and ideas. By playing on the biases and cognitive limitations of politicians, they are granted power, in the long run, in the policymaking process. They have become, to quote Matt Grossmann (2012), the "go-to" representatives of their preferred party. To the degree that these groups are not representative of the average party voter, systematic bias is the result.

5.2 Some Hope for Reformers?

These implications are fairly pessimistic – they add a modern twist to decades of research that has identified profound biases in the American political system. I remain more hopeful than I would have imagined, however, when I began this project. As noted throughout, academic research institutions are alive and, for the most part, well. They do not appear to be thriving in the same way that more partisan organizations have, but they have mostly retained a place for themselves in the modern policymaking world. This is in spite of a change in the balance of power, deriving

from natural responses to the marketplace for ideas, that favors groups that play the game of partisan politics.

As a market response, potential reforms should take aim at the marketplace for ideas, the decision-making calculus of actors therein, and the incentives and constraints placed on market actors. This is easier said than done, as the dominant force in this marketplace – partisan polarization – is the result of long-term socio-demographic (e.g. Polsby, 2005), economic (e.g. McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2006), and political trends (e.g. Lee, 2016). The best solution to these problems, then, would be to simply elect more moderate and experienced legislators who value academic research and have the skills to sort through informational inputs. Scholars have posited a variety of means to accomplish this goal, and I defer to them on this topic. Instead, I present here several solutions that would address more proximate problems, namely Congressional capacity and the pluralistic institutions that have allowed for coalitional warfare.

The overall goal of reform should be to enhance the role of nonpartisan and nuanced research in the policy process (and therefore reduce the importance of partisan and political ideas). This measn that reforms should seek to adjust the relative influence of various actors in the policy process and the decision-making calculus of members of Congress. First, reforms that increase Congress' capacity to address policy problems and craft responsible legislation could reduce the importance of partisan groups. Their current influence derives, in part, from decades of disinvestment in Congressional and committee staff (e.g. Lewallen, Theriault and Jones, 2016). If funds were devoted to attract and hire *qualified staffers* in the legislature, these staffers

could act as an alternative source of information for time-strapped legislators. They could help sort through informational inputs and – if they have been selected for their policy expertise rather than political experience – weed out suspect research.

Of course, members have significant latitude over hiring decisions, and even if they were somehow incentivized to hire policy experts on their staff, this is no guarantee that politicians would be able to overcome their cognitive limitations and biases (e.g. confirmation bias) when processing information. Perhaps a better solution would be to develop robust formal institutions that provide generally accepted information and, therefore, some common ground – or at least a common language – for members to agree on. One major problem with the current state of affairs is that members increasingly view information in light of the partisan background of the group producing it, so that philosophical and policy disputes often devolve into disputes over sources and evidence. Augmenting the resources of nonpartisan research organizations – like the CRS or CBO – could help mitigate this fact. As the legitimacy of outside research producing organizations is increasingly questioned, along party lines, these Congressional institutions might have wider buy-in amongst members and be able to gain bipartisan credibility in a way that few outside groups can.

Still, it seems unlikely that Congress would be willing to devote the resources necessary to allow internal institutions to challenge the power of outside organizations. Furthermore, these outside groups add real value to policy debates – they are often closer to the actors and interests affected by policy change and represent an important avenue for citizens to influence government. Perhaps what is needed, then, is a system that integrates outside research institutions but prioritizes well-respected, academic

groups. This would be politically difficult – the parties would certainly disagree over what constitutes a "well-respected" or "academic" organization, and accusations of bias would probably abound.

Still, there are examples in European democracies that suggest some sort of institutionalized or "corporatist" system – where a stable set of actors have access to the process of policy development – could be successful. These arrangements could occur within parties or within legislatures. The National Democratic Institute (2011) finds that many European parties, for example, are moving towards stable and inclusive decision-making processes. The actual designs of these arrangements differ, with some parties designating the actors that can be involved in discussions, others establishing a general sequence for this process, and some even assigning specific roles to each actor. These internal procedures, the NDI finds, "make stronger political parties, more capable of dealing with negotiation, debate, and coalition-building" (9). Importantly, they also find that "Stronger policy development structures mean that a party is more likely to deliver better policy" (10).

In the United States, party-led participatory systems would almost certainly result in the same type of biased policy inputs we observe in this study. Instead, the US might develop formal legislative forums where agreed-upon actors have input over policy designs. These institutionalized policymaking arrangements are often called "corporatist" systems, where key stakeholders from capital, labor, and government are invited to bargain over policy outcomes (see, e.g., Cawson, 1986). The benefit of such a system in the US would be that formal party members are actually exposed to alternative ideas, have a forum for discussing and interpreting common information,

and generally are in conversation with one another and members of the opposing party's extended network. This type of conversation is severely lacking in the current system.

Regardless of the particular solution, the goal for reformers should be to get policymakers to speak the same language, so that real and informed policy debates can take place. In short, we need to break up the strictures on dialogue, bargaining, and compromise that result from partisan polarization.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX: SAMPLE OF POLICY ACTORS

Identifying a representative sample of relevant interest groups, think tanks, and members of Congress is a difficult task. This problem is compounded by the fact that the universe of American think tanks and interest groups has grown substantially in recent years (Rich, 2004; Berry and Wilcox, 2018). For these reasons, I rely on two respected and comprehensive sources to identify the sample.

First, Project Vote Smart's *National Special Interest Groups* database lists all organizations that publish issue positions or endorse candidates during elections. I use this list to identify interest groups categorized as liberal or conservative by Project Vote Smart. I also include groups that operate in an issue area (or areas) related to cap-ad-trade (see Chapter 4). Specifically, I include groups operating in the sectors of Agriculture and Food, Animals and Wildlife, Business and Consumers, Economy and Fiscal, Energy, Environment, Food Processing and Sales, Government Budget and Spending, Infrastructure, Labor Unions, National Resources and Energy, Oil and Gas, Science, Taxes, Technology and Communication, Trade, and Transportation. Each of these issue areas is theoretically related to the topic of environmental regulations. Many interest groups are listed under multiple issue areas. Many others are now inactive, do not have websites that can be searched for policy texts, or did not publish any relevant texts in this issue area. These groups are excluded from the analysis

and are not listed below. Table A.1 lists this sample of interest groups along with information on their ideologies. Altogether, 32 interest groups were analyzed in this study.

To identify the sample of think tanks, I turned to the University of Pennsylvania Think Tank and Civil Societies Program's annual *Think Tank Index Reports* from 2008 to 2014. These reports list influential think tanks based on rankings from scholars, public and private donors, policymakers, and journalists. The sample includes all think tanks listed amongst the most influential American think tanks in at least one of these reports, excluding think tanks whose primary focus is on international or foreign policy issues. The final sample of think tanks includes 47 organizations, which can be seen in Table A.2. Finally, the sample of formal party members – operationalized here as member of Congress – was defined inductively from the universe of e-mails containing issue-specific keywords. In total, 82 unique members of Congress are included (72 from the House of Representatives and 10 from the Senate). All members of Congress are listed in Table A.3.

Group	**Ideology**
60 Plus Association	Republican
American Conservative Union	Republican
American Energy Alliance	Centrist
American Farm Bureau Federation	Centrist
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations	Democrat
American Forest and Paper Association	Republican
Americans for Democratic Action	Democrat
Americans For Prosperity	Republican
Associated General Contractors of America	Republican
Audubon Society	Democrat
Bipartisan Policy Center	Centrist
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	Democrat
Chamber of Commerce	Republican
Citizens for Global Solutions	Democrat
Clean Water Action	Democrat
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Republican
Consumer Alliance for Energy Security	Centrist
Defenders of Wildlife	Democrat
Eagle Forum	Republican
Environment America	Democrat
Environmental Defense Fund	Democrat
Independent Petroleum Association of America	Republican
League of Conservation Voters	Democrat
National Association of Manufacturers	Republican
National Farmers Union	Democrat
National Parks Conservation Association	Centrist
National Taxpayer Union	Republican
National Wildlife Federation	Democrat
Natural Resources Defense Council	Democrat
Nature Conservancy	Democrat
People for the American Way	Democrat
Sierra Club	Democrat

Table A.1: Interest group sample.

Group	Ideology
Acton Institute	Republican
American Enterprise Institute	Republican
Aspen Institute	Centrist
Atlantic Council of the United States	Centrist
Baker Institute	Centrist
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs	Democrat
Brookings Institute	Democrat
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Centrist
Cato Institute	Republican
Center for American Progress	Democrat
Center for Global Development	Democrat
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Centrist
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Democrat
Council on Foreign Relations	Centrist
Demos US	Democrat
Earth Institute	Democrat
Economic Policy Institute	Centrist
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies	Centrist
Harvard Center for International Development	Centrist
Heritage Foundation	Republican
Hoover Institute	Republican
Independent Institute	Democrat
Information Technology and Innovation Foundation	Centrist
Institute for Policy Studies	Democrat
International Food Policy Research Institute	Democrat
Levy Institute	Centrist
Mackinac Center	Republican
Manhattan Institute	Republican
Mercatus Center	Republican
National Center for Policy Analysis	Republican
New America Foundation	Centrist
Pacific Research Institute	Republican
Peterson Institute for International Economics	Centrist
Pew Center on Global Climate Change	Democrat
Pew Research Center	Centrist
RAND Corporation	Democrat
Reason Foundation	Republican
Resources for the Future	Centrist
Roosevelt Institute	Democrat
Stimson Center	Democrat
Tax Foundation	Republican
Technology, Entertainment, and Design	Centrist
Urban Institute	Centrist
Wilson Center	Centrist
World Resources Institute	Democrat
Worldwatch Institute	Democrat

Table A.2: Think tank sample.

Member of Congress	Party
Rep. Alexander	Republican
Rep. Austria	Republican
Rep. Bachmann	Republican
Rep. Bachus	Republican
Rep. Biggert	Republican
Rep. Blackburn	Republican
Rep. Blunt	Republican
Rep. Boccieri	Democrat
Rep. Boehner	Republican
Rep. Boustany	Republican
Rep. K. Brady	Republican
Rep. R. Brady	Democrat
Rep. Cantor	Republican
Rep. Capito	Republican
Rep. Capps	Democrat
Rep. Christensen	Democrat
Rep. Crapo	Republican
Rep. Culberson	Republican
Rep. Davis	Republican
Rep. DeGette	Democrat
Rep. Dingell	Democrat
Rep. Donnelly	Democrat
Rep. Engel	Democrat
Rep. Eshoo	Democrat
Rep. Flores	Republican
Rep. Forbes	Republican
Rep. Granger	Republican
Rep. Graves	Republican
Rep. Griffith	Republican
Rep. Hall	Republican
Rep. Herger	Republican
Rep. Himes	Democrat
Rep. Hirono	Democrat
Rep. Honda	Democrat
Rep. Hurt	Republican
Rep. Inslee	Democrat
Rep. Issa	Republican
Rep. Jenkins	Republican
Rep. Klein	Democrat
Rep. Lucas	Republican
Rep. Manzullo	Republican
Rep. Marchant	Republican
Rep. McCaul	Republican
Rep. McCotter	Republican
Rep. McMahon	Democrat
Rep. Mitchell	Democrat
Rep. Moore	Democrat
Rep. Moran	Republican
Rep. S. Murphy	Democrat
Rep. T. Murphy	Republican
Rep. Myrick	Republican
Rep. Neugebauer	Republican
Rep. Olsen	Republican

Rep. Pelosi	Democrat
Rep. Perriello	Democrat
Rep. Petri	Republican
Rep. Pitts	Republican
Rep. Polis	Democrat
Rep. Rehberg	Republican
Rep. Rogers	Republican
Rep. Rose	Republican
Rep. Sablan	Democrat
Rep. Sensenbrenner	Republican
Rep. Simpson	Republican
Rep. Thompson	Republican
Rep. Thornberry	Republican
Rep. Upton	Republican
Rep. Visclosky	Democrat
Rep. Walberg	Republican
Rep. Westmoreland	Republican
Rep. Whitfield	Republican
Rep. Wilson	Democrat
Sen. Collins	Republican
Sen. Dorgan	Democrat
Sen. Isakson	Republican
Sen. Johanns	Republican
Sen. Lincoln	Democrat
Sen. Nelson	Democrat
Sen. Roberts	Republican
Sen. Thune	Republican
Sen. Vitter	Republican
Sen. Wicker	Republican

Table A.3: Formal party member sample.

A.1 Notes on Partisan Classifications

To operationalize membership in an EPN, I use ideological classifications, campaign finance data, and mission statements to identify the ideology and policy positions of interest groups and think tanks. First, when possible, I utilize Project Vote Smart's ideological classification of interest groups. The organization classifies many groups as either Liberal, Conservative, Socially Liberal (or Conservative), and Fiscally Liberal (or Conservative). I consider liberal groups of all kinds to be members of

the Democratic EPN and conservative groups to be members of the Republican EPN. For groups that have not been ideologically classified by Project Vote Smart, I examine campaign contributions since 2010 to assess partisan preference. I consider any group that contributes at least 60 percent of their funds, in each year since 2010, to be a member of that party's EPN, and all other groups to be political moderates and ideological centrists. For the small number of remaining unclassified interest groups, research assistants looked at their mission statements and identified their "ideological content."

I similarly had research assistants examine the ideological content of all think tank mission statements to operationalize their ideology and partisanship. For both types of organizations, students adopted Andrew Rich's (2004) coding scheme. Liberal groups are those that have mission statements that express a desire to use government programs to overcome economic, social, or gender inequalities; express concerns for group-based social justice; seek environmental protections and sustainability; and/or advocate for lower defense spending and limited military intervention. Conservative groups' missions statements advocate for free market solutions; promote limited government; express concern for individual liberties; seek to protect traditional family values or religious freedom; and/or aim to protect national interests through a strong military. Finally, centrist think tanks are those groups without a discernible ideological approach and whose mission statement does not fit either the liberal or conservative coding scheme.

As noted in the main text, I categorize groups with with Democratic or liberal preferences as Democratic affiliates, those with Republican preferences or conservative

ideologies as Republican affiliates, and all others as non-partisan organizations. This decision approximates the concept of partisanship postulated in EPN theory, which says that actors are part of the extended party network if they have overlapping or orthogonal goals with that party and typically work with and through them to accomplish these objectives.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX: NOTES ON DATA AND METHODS

B.1 Interviews

One important source of data in this study were elite interviews with fourteen policy practitioners, group executives, and issue advocates in Washington, D.C. These interviews took place between June and July of 2018, mostly in person. (While in D.C. I also attended several think tank events, which I reference in Chapter 3.) Four of these interviews were conducted virtually, either via phone or video-chat software. In compliance with the UMass Institutional Review Board, I do not reveal the names of these subjects. Some general descriptive data on this sample, however, suggests that it is fairly representative of large, prominent research producing organizations and has variation across relevant variables. Specifically, the sample included:

- 7 think tank and 5 interest group employees or executives, 1 industry lobbyist, and 1 employee at the Congressional Research Service
- 7 representatives from conservative groups, 4 representatives from liberal groups, and 3 representatives from moderate organizations
- 5 subjects who had previously worked at another interest group or think tank, and 1 who worked at both a liberal and conservative think tank
- 4 think tank or interest group employees who previously worked as Congressional staffers

These subjects were employed, when they were interviewed, at the American Association of Retired Persons, Bipartisan Policy Center, Brookings Institution, Cato

Institute, Chamber of Commerce, Congressional Research Service, Heritage Foundation, National Rifle Association, New Democrat Network, and the New York Life Insurance Company.

B.2 Text Cleaning and Processing

The corpus of documents collected for the cap-and-trade case study initially contained a great deal of "noise," or words and symbols lacking substantive content. In order to trace the flow of *meaningful* discourse across actors, I employed several common text cleaning techniques. First, I removed from the corpus all numbers and punctuation, general "stop words" (or words that are substantively insignificant, like "a" and "please"), and corpus-specific stop words (or words – like "American Clean Energy" – that all actors are likely to use). Second, I "stemmed" words to their base or root form (e.g. "debate," "debating," and "debated" are all transformed to their root, "debat*"), ensuring that words that differ in tense but not in substance are comparable. Third, in the analysis of these documents I focus on bigrams (two-word phrases), rather than single words, as the unit of analysis. This decision focuses attention on more substantively meaningful *concepts* and helps further eliminate noise in the documents.

Finally, I weighted the remaining bigrams in the corpus to focus attention on the most substantively significant terms, or those terms that are relatively rare but still appear in an analytically significant number of publications. Specifically, I rely on the *term frequency-inverse document frequency* (TF-IDF) statistic to weight bigrams according to their relative importance in the overall corpus (see Rajaraman and Ull-

man (2011) for more on this type of weighting). Practically, this means that each bigram in the corpus is weighted so that extremely common and extremely rare words are both discounted, giving greater weight instead to those terms that substantively distinguish different documents from similar documents.

The result of this text processing is a *document-term matrix* with rows corresponding to each bigram, columns corresponding to each actor in the corpus, and cells containing the first date on which the actor used that term. Because the average actor did not use most terms, the matrix is quite sparse. To account for this sparsity – and to further focus on analytically meaningful discourse in this study – the weights for each bigram were averaged across all actors and only those bigrams in the top 5 percent of the distribution were retained. Robustness checks using the top 10 percent and top 20 percent of the bigrams indicate that the ERGM results are not sensitive to this decision. In these two additional models, the direction of coefficients and their statistical significance are the same as the coefficients in the model used in this analysis, with the exception of the Mutual x Both Democrats term (which is statistically significant at $p<0.05$ in the 10 percent and 20 percent models) and the Both Republicans term (which is not statistically significant in the 20 percent model). These models are not shown but are available upon request.

B.3 Network Analysis and Exponential Random Graph Models

Exponential random graph models are powerful statistical tools when there is reason to believe that the probability of a tie forming between two actors in a network is dependent upon both the structure of the overall network and actor or dyadic

attributes (Cranmer and Desmarais, 2016). Theory leads us to expect that both of these conditions are met in the case of inter-actor discursive influence. However, ERGMs are only useful if they are not degenerative (i.e. if they converge). Degeneracy in these models arises from a lack of fit due to both poor model specification as well the nature of the observed data (Morris and Li, 2015).

There are several ways to test for model convergence and to ensure that the model is a good representation of the observed network. One is to compare the sample statistics used by the MCMC sampler to the statistics in the observed network. With a good model, the sample statistics should be roughly normal and vary randomly around the observed values. In the figures presented below, the lefthand image for each term is a trace plot of the observed statistics (black line) and the simulated sample statistics at each step in the MCMC sampler (blue lines). For each network statistic, the simulated values should fluctuate evenly around the observed value, indicating that the model has converged and is not degenerate. The righthand image for each coefficient presents this information in a slightly different way, plotting the distribution of the difference between the observed statistic and the simulated values. This distribution should be roughly normally distributed for each term and in each model. Figure B.1 shows that the cap-and-trade ERGM model did in fact converge. For each statistic in the network, the simulated values fluctuate evenly and randomly around the observed value (left-hand images) and the distribution of the differences between the observed and simulated values is normal and centered near 0 (right-hand images). Together, these diagnostic plots suggest that the model converged (or is not degenerate) around the observed network values.

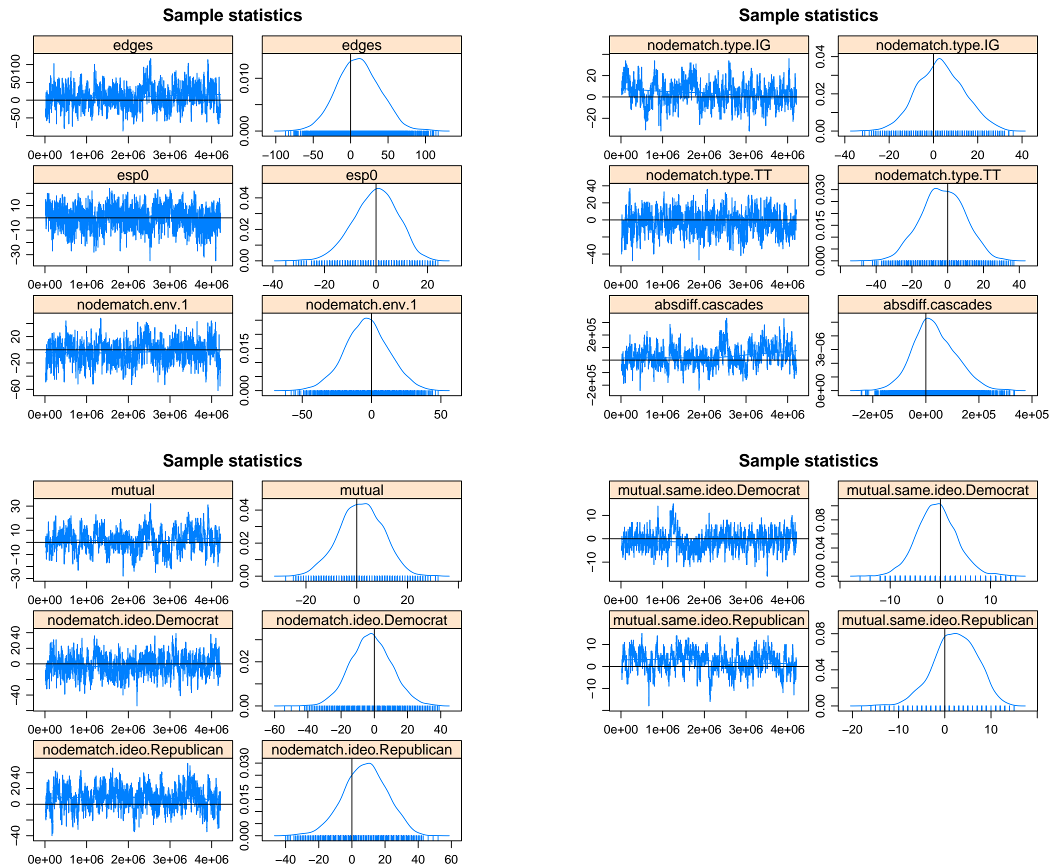

Figure B.1: MCMC diagnostic statistics for ERGM terms in the cap-and-trade model. For each coefficient, the left-hand figure is a trace plot with the solid black line representing the observed statistic for the term and the blue data points representing the MCMC simulated sample statistics at each step.The right-hand figures depict the distribution of the difference between the observed and simulated values.

A second test is used to assess the "fit" of the model, or whether the distributions of statistics simulated by the model match the means of the observed network terms. This information is presented in Figure B.2, with the observed means for network statistics plotted as data points on the black line and the distributions of simulated model statistics represented by boxplots. If a model has good fit with the observed data, the black line should roughly track the median simulated value for each statistic, represented by the horizontal black line in each boxplot. Indeed, this is the case, to varying degrees. The distributions for simulated statistics are perfectly distributed around the observed median for the Both Environmental, Both Think Tanks, and Mutual x Both Republican terms. The medians for other terms (e.g. Edges, Both Interest Groups) are slightly off from the observed value. The distributions for the Edgewise Shared Partners and Mutual x Both Democratic terms are somewhat more skewed, but even for these statistics the true value falls well within the interquartile range (or between the 2nd and 3rd quartiles) of the simulated values. Taken together, Figure B.2 suggests that the model is, overall, a good fit for the data.

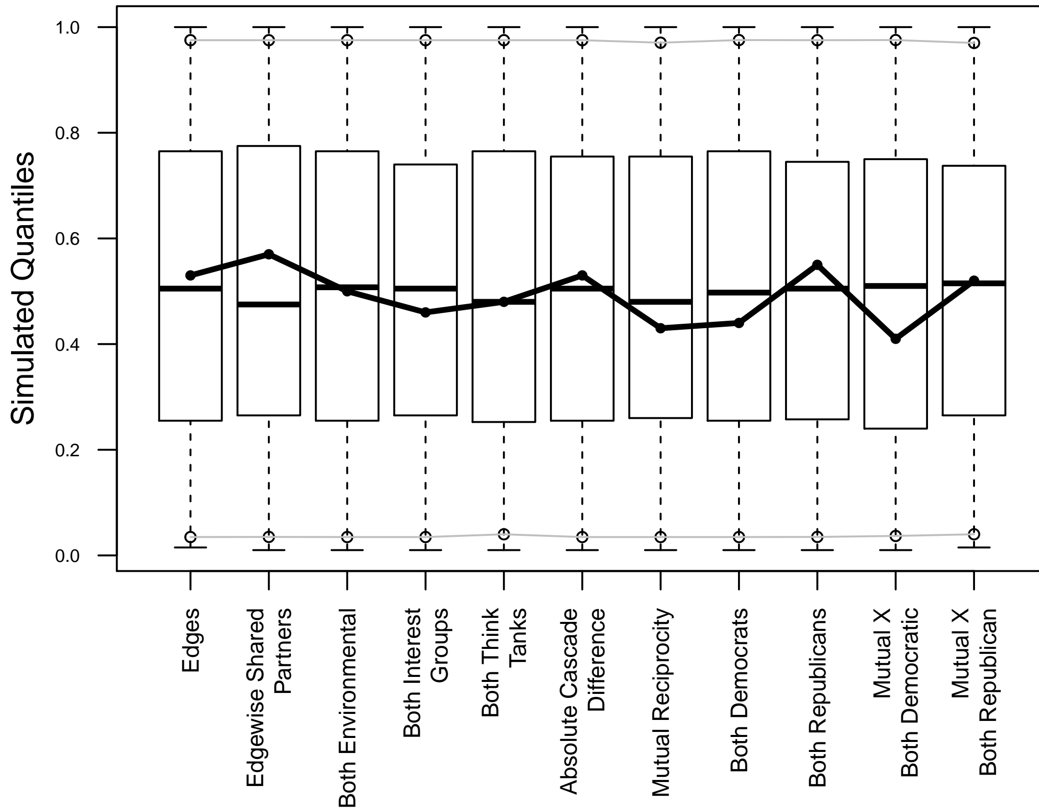

Figure B.2: ERGM goodness-of-fit for cap-and-trade model statistics. Data points on the black line represent the observed means for each statistic, while the boxplots depict the distribution of simulated statistics from the model. Models with good fit have observed statistics close to the simulated median (the horizontal black line in each boxplot).

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