

Project Title: Interest Group Member and Non-Member Perceptions of Government Survey

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for a CHIP50 Large Sample Survey. My project examines the ways that interest groups influence how people think about the U.S. government and political system. Given that large majorities of Americans are affiliated with at least one interest group and that most non-voting political behavior comes as a result of interest group mobilization (Kollman 1998; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), investigating this link can help political scientists understand political behavior more broadly and will help political practitioners understand the impact their strategies have on interest group members.

In this project, I argue that as a result of interest group organizational goals, a significant number of interest groups train their members to think pragmatically about political issues and work with policymakers from both political parties to accomplish legislative goals. In a political environment marked by affective polarization and negative partisanship, understanding the effects of groups that focus on responsive government can help scholars understand the ways these efforts contribute to democratic resilience.

I plan to test these expectations by conducting a survey of people eligible to join a professional association. I chose this population because professional associations are especially likely to maintain nonpartisan status (Meli 2023). In qualitative research I conducted in another part of this larger project, I find that these associations communicate with members in ways that promote bipartisan cooperation and a better understanding of how decisions are made by political leaders. Given that samples of people eligible to join interest groups are notoriously difficult and expensive to access, I believe that the CHIP50 Large Sample Survey is an excellent way to conduct this research. If my proposal is accepted, I would like to run a 10-item survey on a large sample to capture as many interest group-eligible respondents as possible. The survey instrument is available in Appendix A, and a power analysis of this methodology is available in Appendix B.

This survey is part of a larger dissertation project, which explores how an interest group's organizational goals influence the group's public policy strategy, which in turn influences the way the interest group communicates with its members. These goals vary depending upon interest group type. Issue advocacy groups tend to maintain their organizations by focusing on the issues that motivated their members to join the group (Clark and Wilson 1961). Most of these issues - like abortion, environmental policy, and gun rights/gun safety - have been incorporated by the political parties (Karol 2009). Trade and professional organizations, on the other hand, tend to maintain their membership by focusing on the ways the organization helps its members achieve their professional or business goals (Clark and Wilson 1961). I find that associations link their activities to member goals by teaching members about how the organization advocates to policymakers for the profession's priorities, how policies impact group members, and how the group's public policy work links to member goals. I also find that associations tend to use bipartisan strategies, which helps them push their policy priorities forward regardless of which party is in power and avoids alienating their politically non-homogenous memberships. These strategies lead associations to use instrumental language when communicating with members and to focus their member education programs on pragmatic and bipartisan approaches to policymaking.

The goal of the current survey is to determine whether these pragmatic and bipartisan strategies have an effect on the political attitudes of interest group members. I plan to test several related hypotheses. First, I expect individuals who choose to get involved in an association, and those who are more involved in their associations, to be more supportive of bipartisan cooperation compared to those who choose not to join their association or who are less involved. Second, I expect members, and especially those who are more involved, to have higher levels of political efficacy compared to those who are not members or who are less involved. Third, I plan to test

whether interest group members and more involved members display lower levels of affective polarization compared to non-members and those who are less involved¹.

I focus on people who are eligible to join a professional association for these tests because I expect there to be a significant number of respondents in key professions, including teachers, real estate agents, medical professionals, attorneys, engineers, and accountants, in the CHIP50 sample. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 16.5% of people over the age of 16 in the workforce fall into one of these professions (Gumber and Sullivan 2022). Further, I expect to see significant variation within these populations of people who choose to join or not join their professional associations, which will allow me to compare members and nonmembers in hypothesis tests. Specifics on the sample size needed to find expected effects are available on Appendix B.

The implications of this study are of interest to academics and practitioners alike. Given that the current political environment is marked by high levels of political polarization (Hetherington 2001; Mason 2018), scholars are seeking ways to alleviate affective polarization, which is seen by some academics as a threat to democracy. Further, scholars have found that the most politically active individuals tend to be the most polarized (Zaller 1992), which means that we would assume that people active in interest groups should display higher polarization levels compared to those who are not active. Other scholars focus on legislative gridlock, finding that legislators avoid compromise in order to avoid upsetting primary voters (Anderson, Butler, and Harbridge-Yong 2020). The current study addresses all of these questions, which means that this survey has an opportunity to make progress in several areas of political science research, including interest groups, polarization, and legislative gridlock. In addition, given the time and resources interest groups expend on member training and communication, interest group leaders are interested in

¹ In a separate survey that is not part of this proposal, I will test these strategies using a survey experiment on a random sample of the public. The intention of this separate survey is to better understand whether these outcomes can be attributed to interest group strategies, or if people who are less polarized, support bipartisanship, and have higher efficacy are more likely to join interest groups in the first place.

the effect that these strategies have on their members. There is keen interest in the practitioner community in ways that interest groups can alleviate gridlock and polarization, and this study has the potential to contribute here as well.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Survey Instrument for Interest Group Member and Non-Member Perceptions of Government Project

Q#	Question	Response Options	Items
Q1	What is your profession?	Dentist Dietitian Doctor/Physician/Surgeon Occupational Therapist Pharmacist Physical Therapist Physician's Assistant Psychologist Registered Nurse Social Worker/Therapist Veterinarian Teacher Attorney/Lawyer Engineer Architect Accountant Real Estate Agent	1
Q2	Please indicate any of the professional societies of which you are a member. (Survey form will provide only the organization that matches with the profession selected in Q1)	[Insert Associations from supplemental table] Other (please specify)	1
Q4	(If yes to Q2) How often do you participate in activities hosted by [INSERT ASSOCIATION HERE]? For the purpose of this question, activities include any in-person or remote activities hosted by the organization. These activities can include, but are not limited to, in-person events like conferences or trainings, remote events like webinars or online trainings, and remote or in person casual member meetups.	I participate in this organization's activities... Never Less than once per year About once per year A few times per year About once per month A few times per month Weekly Daily	1
Q11	I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people and organizations who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like for you to rate that person or	0-100 grid for the following items: - The Democratic Party - The Republican Party	1

	<p>organization using something we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward that person and you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move to the next one. (American National Election Studies 2020)</p>		
Q12	<p>Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if they married a support of the [Republican/Democratic] Party? Would you be pleased, would you be displeased or would it make no difference? (Almond and Verba)</p>	<p>Select one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pleased - Displeased - It would make no difference 	1
Q17	<p>How often can you trust your legislators in Congress to do what is right?</p>	<p>Select one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always - Most of the time - About half the time - Some of the time - Never 	1
Q18	<p>Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Public officials care about what people like me think.</p>	<p>Select one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strongly agree - Mostly agree - Undecided - Mostly disagree - Strongly disagree 	1
Q19	<p>Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: People like me have a say in what the federal government does.</p>	<p>Select one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strongly agree - Mostly agree - Undecided - Mostly disagree - Strongly disagree 	1
Q20	<p>Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: What people call compromise is really just selling out one's principles. (ANES)</p>	<p>Select one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strongly agree - Mostly agree - Undecided 	1

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly disagree - Strongly disagree 	
Q21	How important is it that Democrats and Republicans work together to solve our nation's problems?	Select one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very important - Somewhat important - Not very important - Not at all important 	1

Profession	Related Organization(s)
Dietitian	Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Physicians Assistant	American Academy of Physicians Assistants
Dentist	American Dental Association
Physician	American Medical Association
Psychologist/Social Worker/Therapist	American Mental Health Counselors Association National Association of Social Workers American Psychological Association
Nurse	American Nurses Association
Advanced Practice Nurse	American Association of Nurse Practitioners American College of Nurse Midwives American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Occupational Therapist	American Occupational Therapy Association
Pharmacist	American Pharmacists Association
Physical Therapist	American Physical Therapy Association
Veterinarian	American Veterinary Medical Association
Teacher	American Federation of Teachers National Education Association
Attorney/Lawyer	American Bar Association
Engineer	National Society of Professional Engineers
Architect	American Institute of Architects
Accountant	American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
Real Estate Agent	National Association of Realtors

Appendix B: Power Analysis

In a pilot survey on a sample of 89 interest group members, I find a mean efficacy score² of 3.34 (CI = 0.21). I compare this to the mean score of 1.13 (CI = 0.10) from the American National Election Study (American National Election Studies 2020), which included the same question in its 2016 time series survey.

I expect the differences in the current survey to be smaller for several reasons. First, the pilot survey data was from a convenience sample. The survey was distributed via email by eight national interest groups to their members. Response rates were extraordinarily low, which leads me to believe that those who answered the survey were those who pay the most attention to interest group emails, are more involved than the typical interest group member, and are likely to have higher external efficacy compared to the average interest group member. Secondly, the comparison group is a random sample of the public, while my comparison group in the current study consists of professionals, most of whom have college degrees and are likely to have higher efficacy scores than the average survey respondent. For this reason, I expect the difference to be closer to 1.0, compared to the observed difference of around 2.0 in the above study.

A power analysis with a minimum difference of 1.0 estimates that the treatment group – in this case, the group of people who are in an interest group – needs to have at least 177 respondents. The table below provides an estimate of the treatment group size at different cut points for the CHIP50 large sample, assuming 16.5% of the CHIP50 sample is in one of the professions identified in this application (Gumber and Sullivan 2022).

² Scores for both the pilot survey and the ANES survey was calculated based on responses to the following question: I don't think public officials care what people like me think.

	25,000 sample	15,000 sample	7,500 sample
Sample Size	25,000	15,000	7,500
Number of Respondents in Target Professions	4,125	2,475	1,238
Number of Respondents in Target Interest Groups	1,031	619	309

In previous iterations of this project, reputable survey organizations like YouGov suggested that their samples would contain fewer than expected in high-income professions like physicians, attorneys, and engineers. Therefore, I request a minimum sample size of 7,500 to account for differences between the population proportion and the sample proportion.

Works Cited

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