

Taking Sides

Chapter 6

"The Who and How of Group Polarization"

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Why do some interests become partisan and others do not? Previous chapters have demonstrated that the trend of increasing interest group polarization is most acute among groups whose primary issue area become especially tied to party brands. Such groups signal their partisan allegiance by taking positions in *other* issue areas, focusing in particular on bills that are especially likely to separate the parties. As a result, they find themselves in a disadvantageous dynamic of both “mission creep” and access to only one party. In a sense, this depicts interest groups as bludgeoned by outside forces—namely, parties and broader electoral trends in American politics. But do groups themselves have agency in how much or little pressure they feel to diversify?

In this chapter, we consider whether various types of group resources allow some groups to resist the pull of partisanship. We begin with campaign contributions, which have long been argued to *either* support ideological allies or seek access to members of relevant committees or other institutionally-important incumbents. As Barber and Eatough (2020) demonstrate, however, the *politicization* of an industry makes PAC contribution behavior resemble that of individual donors, namely, giving less to incumbents, to committee chairs, and majority party members and more to candidates in close races. This suggests that industry politicization encourages ideological giving over access-oriented giving, even among traditionally access-oriented interests. Building on this work, we investigate the extent to which the hyperpartisan era we study has generated conditions under which “access” and “ideological” contribution strategies have become more and more similar over time—or the extent to which political resources can insulate an interest group from partisan pressures.

For the past several decades, a large body of literature has underscored that one of the primary functions of campaign donations, particularly from interest groups, is to secure access to a large number of offices (e.g., Grier and Munger 1993; Hall and Wayman 1990; Kalla and Broockman 2016). That is, PACs are generally seen as giving for pragmatic reasons and *not* simply ideological ones (but see Ansolabehere, De Figueiredo and Snyder Jr 2003). If this holds true in today’s partisan climate, campaign finance may well represent a counterbalance to our account of interest group teammanship. That is, while many groups may wish to use their funds to maintain lines of communications between the par-

ties, our account calls into question whether such behavior remains a viable option. In short, must groups signal allegiance across all behaviors? If so, under what conditions?

We consider a series of answers to these questions that produce distinct empirical expectations. First, campaign spending may serve as a *substitute* for increasing issue diversification in position-taking, allowing groups to make monetary contributions to partisan without suffering the mission creep that attends off-core position-taking. Thus, under this logic, groups with higher campaign contributions—and those with more partisan alignment in their contributions—may be less inclined toward off-core position taking. Second, and by contrast, partisan contributions and position-taking could function as *complements*. Indeed, if partisan lawmakers prefer heterogeneous signals of party alignment, or simply desire that groups demonstrate loyalty in all facets of their behaviors, we might expect groups today to *both* contribute to co-partisans *and* take party-consistent positions on off-core issues. Finally, following a similar logic to that proposed by Barber and Eatough, groups may have differential incentives to align their position-taking signals and campaign contributions, based on the politicization of their core issue area. In particular, we expect a heterogeneous signal of party alignment—and thus a positive association between contributions and issue diversification—to be more likely for groups whose main issue area is more politicized. Under conditions of low politicization, groups may be able to use their donations for “substitution” purposes.

We test these expectations by examining the relationship between campaign contributions from group-affiliated Political Action Committees (PACs) and issue diversification. Analyzing tens of thousands of campaign finance records connected to approximately 1,000 organizations that have taken public positions on congressional legislation, we find evidence that is largely consistent with the “conditional” account of campaign finance and position-taking behavior. That is, while low levels of politicization enable groups to trade partisan giving for more focused position-taking, high levels of politicization appear to tether giving position-taking diversity. In specific, we find that:

- 1) having a PAC insulates groups from diversification at low levels of politicization, while positively correlating with diversification at higher levels of politicization;

- 2) groups who donate the most exhibit less position-taking diversity when politicization is low, but diversify their position-taking more when politicization increases; and
- 3) giving primarily to one party or the other may allow for less diversification at lower levels of politicization, but that high levels of politicization sees strong partisan signaling in both giving and position-taking.

Taken together, our findings suggest that contributions and off-core position-taking *can* act as substitute signals of party alignment; and, even when they don't, groups may be expected to signal partisanship in *both* giving and position-taking. In some ways, then, this means that contribution strategies may no longer force trade-offs between access and ideology, particularly as politicization grows. In fact, being ideological may increasingly be what gets groups access.

Does Money Substitute or Complement Partisan Position-taking?

To theorize the role of campaign contributions for potentially partisan pressured organized interests, we start from the assumption (repeated many times throughout this book) that lawmakers are increasingly concerned with maintaining their party brand (and seeking majority status) in an era of intense party competition (Lee, 2016) and thereby preferentially grant access to interest groups that signal party loyalty. Previous chapters focus on off-core position-taking—that is, taking consistent partisan positions on issues where the parties most try to differentiate from each other but that are not within the group's main issue of interest. Off-core position-taking comprises a costly signal of partisan alignment, because it constrains a group's appeal to similarly aligned partisans in the mass public (thus limiting potential members and donors) and, in signalling alignment to gain access to legislators of one party, precludes alignment with (and thus access to) legislators in the other. These costs imply, critically for this chapter, that groups whose policy interests do not otherwise incentivize them to adopt issue-diverse, party-consistent position portfolios will not do so. Put simply, groups prefer to avoid mission creep (Fagan, McGee and Thomas, 2021). The question we ask here, then, is whether groups can *pay* to avoid off-core position-taking.

In theory, campaign contributions can provide costly signals of support to candidates for office. The traditional depiction of ideological contribution strategies, contrasted with access-oriented strategies, is that contributions present a means to support ideologically aligned candidates and make it more likely that a given election is won by the candidate most aligned with a group (c.f., Bawn, Cohen, Karol, Masker, Noel and Zaller 2012). An unresolved issue for such a model, however, is that few groups would expect that, at the margin, their contributions would uniquely make the difference between a candidate's success or failure. Thus, there remains an opportunity to free-ride, discouraging purely ideological campaign giving on the part of policy-motivated interest groups. And yet, as Barber (2016) and Barber and Eatough (2020) demonstrate quite vividly, contribution patterns of some groups *do* resemble those of more ideologically motivated individual donors, particularly for groups operating in more politicized industries.

We posit that one underlying reason for such giving patterns lies less with the motivations of organizations *giving* campaign contributions and more with the perceptions of the candidates *receiving* them. To demonstrate why, we revisit the basic logic underlying our general theory of lobbying in the hyper-partisan era. In that account, we assume that groups need access to congressional offices in order to pursue their policy. Before granting such access, legislators seek to ensure that a given group is aligned with the legislator's interests. Typically, then, groups will provide policy information—or even campaign contributions (Hall and Wayman, 1990; Hall, Van Houweling and Furnas, N.d.)—to indicate such alignment. In the partisan era, however, we argue that such dyadic signals aren't enough, and that legislators desire also a signal of *partisan* alignment.

As we argue in theory and provide evidence for in practice, taking partisan-consistent positions on off-core policy issues provides exactly this sort of signal. However, in light of the above discussion, position-taking needn't be the *only* such signal available to groups. Indeed, *both* contributions and off-core position-taking may signal such alignment. However, not all groups can send both signals equally. In the extreme case, groups that cannot or do not give campaign contributions may only (in the confines of this discussion) use off-core position-taking to signal alignment. As legislators only grant access to

groups signalling alignment, then we would expect groups with more limited access to campaign contributions to engage in more off-core position-taking. Furthermore, to the extent that off-core position-taking represents costly “mission creep,” then groups who have campaign contributions as an option will increasingly prefer that option, all else equal. Thus, though all groups can engage in off-core position-taking, groups able to give campaign contributions will be less incentivized to do so, particularly given that groups are policy-motivated at their core, as Anzia (2019,0) forcefully argues.

According to such a logic, we should expect the following:

H6.1: Contributions as Substitutes for Off-Core Position-taking

H6.1.A: Compared to groups without an active PAC, groups with an active PAC will exhibit less issue diversity in the positions they take.

H6.1.B: Groups giving higher levels of campaign contributions will exhibit less issue diversity in the positions they take.

While signaling alignment through means other than policy positions appears to make logical sense in the abstract, it is also difficult to overstate the extent to which party competition envelops modern congressional behavior. That is, as party leaders seek electoral power through party brand differentiation, and as use their institutional powers to push rank-and-file caucus members to contribute to such differentiation, access-granting members of Congress may prefer to grant access to groups that have shown consistent partisan alignment across all facets of their behavior. Were this to be the case, then, groups may face pressure to bring their donation patterns *and* their policy positioning in line with each other—and with the party.

Should this type of logic obtain, we should expect to observe the following:

H6.2: Resources as Complements to Off-Core Position-taking

H6.2.A: Compared to groups without an active PAC, groups with an active PAC will exhibit more issue diversity in the positions they take.

H6.2.B: Groups giving higher levels of campaign contributions will exhibit more issue diversity in the positions they take.

The key distinction between the Complements and Substitutes arguments, then, is the extent party leaders compel access-granting legislators them to focus on collective partisan objectives. To the extent legislators have leeway to pursue personal objectives, it may be the case that just one signal of partisan alignment is “enough” to grant access. As such, contributions and off-core position-taking may serve as substitutes. However, to the extent that collective partisan objectives are salient, then complementary, heterogeneous signals of party alignment may be preferred by both party leaders and the rank-and-file. As a result, the question remains: what determines which of these pressures will dominate?

We believe that the answer lies in party brand differentiation. As we have underscored in Chapter 5, chapters, particular issue areas wax and wane in both their salience and the extent to which they are tied to party branding. If party-differentiated issues provide the highest branding “returns,” then party leaders encourage especially strong party “discipline” for legislators and groups operating in such issues areas. As a result, groups whose primary issue area—that is, the issue area for which which they most often seek access to legislators—is highly party-differentiated thus have incentives to provide such heterogeneous signals. Thus, we expect such groups to be more likely to *combine* campaign contributions with off-core position-taking. Meanwhile, groups whose primary issue interest is less party-differentiated are less likely to combine these signals.

Under this sort of conditional logic, we expect:

H6.3: Issue Politicization Moderation

As groups’ primary issue area exhibits more partisan differentiation, the association between their campaign contributions and issue diversity will become more positive.

Data and Measurement: PAC Donations among Position-Taking Interest Groups

In order to test the above hypotheses, we join together our measures of position-taking diversification and issue politicization with data on campaign contributions by interest groups. As we and others have underscored in previous work (LaPira and Thomas, 2017; Crosson, Furnas and Lorenz, 2020), the overlap between lobbying and contributing groups (as well as the overlap between position-taking and contributing groups) is quite scant—as low as 14 percent, depending upon the sample. However, given that our sample of interest groups must achieve a certain level of activity in order to measure position-taking diversity, we find that a considerably larger number of our organizations do have affiliated PACs.

In order to merge our measures with contributions data, we followed a procedure identical to that in our earlier work (Crosson, Furnas and Lorenz, 2020). That is, we began by searching for direct matches between Center for Responsive Politics’s (www.opensecrets.org) “ultorg” names and the various versions of our groups’ names encountered over the course of our data collection. Thereafter, we employed a fuzzy-match procedure in OpenRefine, in order to capture abbreviations and potential misspellings that would preclude a direct string match. After hand-checking the fuzzy matches to extract true matches, we then turned to the set of non-matches from the first two steps of the matching procedure. Within this group, we hand-checked and merged non-matching entries with our list of groups.

In total, we were able to find matches for 1,141 of the 4,847 groups in our sample (2,413 of which span the 1990 to 2018 time period). However, given that ultorg titles are assigned to groups that *either* lobby or contribute via PACs, not all of these 1,141 organizations make campaign contributions. Instead, in merging these data to CRP’s PAC tables, we ultimately find PAC matches for 953 of our 1,141 matched organizations. In total, these 953 organizations represent 19.7 percent of our full sample of interest groups and nearly 40 percent of our over-time sample. Clearly, then, the groups in our sample are higher-activity overall than those captured in previous research. However, given that we examine here the influence of money in *relation* to position-taking diversification, this overlap provides additional power with which to examine our hypotheses.

Primary Covariates

As we underscore both in this and the previous chapter, Barber and Eatough's (2020) innovative work provides a useful theoretical and empirical foundation on which we seek to build. However, given that we are primarily interested in assessing how groups may *trade off* different means for signalling partisan allegiance, we employ giving patterns as independent variables rather than outcome variables. Moreover, given our interest in money as a potential substitute for mission creep, we incorporate several of our own independent variables.

First, we examine whether *having a PAC at all* may insulate interest groups from pressure to expand position-taking (versus providing another tool for signalling allegiance). Here, if the substitution logic holds, organizations with PACs should exhibit systematically lower levels of diversification, relative to those lacking a PAC—with the opposite holding true under the “complementary” logic. However, if the conditional logic obtains, the effect of having a PAC should depend upon on the politicization of a group's core issue area. That is, at relatively low levels of politicization, policy-motivated groups are likely to use any means possible to avoid mission creep / diversification. However, as their issues become increasingly tied to party brands, substitutionary tactics are unlikely to overcome the overall need to signal party allegiance.

Similar patterns for each of these three accounts should apply to a continuous version of this resource variable: logged donation amounts and logged number of donations.¹ In this case, groups with the largest amounts of resources may, under a substitution-type logic, have the most opportunity—literally, the most money to “burn”—to avoid mission creep. By contrast, a complementary logic suggests that parties will want the most well-resourced groups to reinforce their position-taking signalling by aiding the party through electoral funding. Finally, a conditional account would suggest a mix of these expectations: namely, that resources may substitute for diversification when politicization of one's core issue is low, but that such dynamics do not apply at higher levels of politicization. We measure such resources both by

¹Given the considerable overdispersion of these variables, we follow Barber and Eatough (2020) and others in logging these independent variables

totaling each group’s PAC donations for each cycle in our time period (1990-2020), as well as by counting the total number of donations within each group-cycle, logging both numbers in our final models.

Finally, beyond *having* resources, these competing accounts carry with them different predictions for how the partisan balance of groups’ giving should correlate with their observed position-taking diversity. That is, if the substitutionary logic holds, partisan giving should preclude the need for position-taking diversification. Conversely, if the two channels act as complements, a partisan tilt in giving should positively correspond with diversification in position-taking. Finally, if a conditional logic applies, groups may use partisan tilt in giving to avoid mission creep under relative low levels of issue politicization, but then succumb to partisan pressures as their core issue politicizes. Thus, at the highest levels of politicization, groups would exhibit both a partisan tilt in giving and issue-diverse position-taking.

We capture this “partisan tilt” variable simply by measuring the proportion of giving that goes to a single party. The more evenly a group allocates its funds, the lower they score in this variable, while higher values of the variable indicate an especially partisan giving strategy.² Together, these measures provide the information necessary to put each of the hypotheses in this chapter to the test.

Methods and Findings

Generally speaking, our aim here is to examine the association between position-taking diversification and a series of measures of campaign-finance resources. As a result, our empirical tests take the following general form:

$$D_{gt} \sim \mu + \alpha_g + \gamma_t + \beta_1 R_{gt} + \beta_2 \mathcal{P}_{gt} + \beta_3 R_{gt} \mathcal{P}_{gt} + \mathbf{X}\beta + \epsilon_{gt}$$

where D_{gt} refers to the position-taking diversity of group g during Congress t , R_{gt} captures the resources group g ’s resources commit to the upcoming election during Congress t , and \mathcal{P}_{gt} equals the politicization of group g ’s core issue during Congress t (as measured in Chapter 5). X refers to a vector of control variables, including the number of positions group g registered during Congress t , as well as

²In future iterations of the paper, our hope is to join this information with majority/minority status variables, in order to adjust these measurements for the propensity of access-seeking interests to give to members of the majority party.

its total amount and number of donations (in the models where R is measured as “partisan tilt”).

For all three of our resource measures, including “overall resources” measures (having a PAC, total donations and number of donations) as well as our strategic partisan tilt measure, the substitutionary account predicts a negative value for β_1 . By contrast, a complementary type of logic suggests a positive coefficient. Neither of these accounts predict a significant coefficient on the interaction term (β_3), whereas a conditional effect of resources on propensity to diversify suggests a positive such value.

In line with our model specifications in previous chapters, we include group- and Congress-level fixed effects in our models. In doing so, we aim to address changes in the volume of money in politics over time, while still leveraging within-group variation. Given the well-documented difficulty in capturing group-level covariates in the study of interest groups, such group-level fixed effects, we believe, are especially useful. However, given that we control for the volume of donations in the partisan-tilt models—and given that the independent variable in these models is a ratio and not a total—we drop the congressional fixed effects from those models.

Results: What value may resources provide to partisan-pressured groups?

To summarize, we estimate models of position-taking diversity as a function of whether or not groups have a PAC, their total levels of resources, and the partisan tilt of their giving. Given that the specification of each of these models is similar, we present our results in a single regression table, Table ??.

As the table indicates, we find generally consistent support for the *conditional* relationship between campaign-finance resources and partisan signalling through position-taking. According to our findings, money may insulate interest groups from partisan pressures in position-taking under some conditions, but it is no longer able to do so when a group’s core issue politicizes. In fact, more than just attenuating the relationship between money and position-taking, we find evidence consistent with the notion that, after a group’s core issue reaches a certain level of politicization, the substitutionary logic is actually *replaced* by a complementary dynamic. That is, if a group’s core issue becomes sufficiently politicized, groups may well feel pressure to use *all* their resources to provide a heterogeneous signal of allegiance to the party.

Table 1: Resources and Issue Diversity in Position-Taking Activity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Group Has PAC</i>	-1.731*** (0.524)	-0.042 (0.128)				
<i>Log Donations</i>			-0.087* (0.036)	-0.009 (0.021)	0.401*** (0.100)	0.285*** (0.082)
<i>Log Number of Donations</i>			0.007 (0.044)	0.016 (0.036)	-0.419** (0.129)	-0.329** (0.123)
<i>Partisan Tilt</i>					-3.292* (1.482)	-0.038 (0.380)
<i>Core-Issue Politicization</i>	0.484* (0.243)		0.457+ (0.252)		5.723*** (0.964)	
<i>Core-Issue Politicization (Roll Call Unity)</i>		0.202** (0.062)		0.205** (0.064)		1.543*** (0.292)
<i>Group Has PAC × Politicization</i>	2.743*** (0.802)					
<i>Group Has PAC × Core-Issue Politicization (RC)</i>		0.411+ (0.249)				
<i>Donations × Politicization</i>			0.131* (0.057)			
<i>Donations × Politicization (RC)</i>				0.021 (0.018)		
<i>Partisan Tilt × Politicization</i>					4.423* (2.173)	
<i>Partisan Tilt × Politicization (RC)</i>						0.000 03 (0.831)
<i>Number of Positions</i>	0.030** (0.009)	0.034*** (0.010)	0.040*** (0.009)	0.021*** (0.011)	0.012** (0.004)	0.026*** (0.006)
Num.Obs.	18 046	22 478	2434	2779	2434	2776
R2 Adj.	0.538	0.550	0.626	0.631	0.549	0.521
R2 Within Adj.	0.129	0.149	0.038	0.035	0.273	0.227
RMSE	0.85	0.87	0.91	0.95	0.99	1.09
Org. FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Congress FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓		

The presence of resources

Consider first Models 1 and 2, which capture simply whether an interest group has an associated PAC. As the results indicate, having PAC resources is, at base, negatively associated with position-taking diversification (though these results only reach statistical significance for one of our measures of politicization, while the other reaches significance at $p < 0.1$). Consistent with our findings in Chapter 5, however, issue politicization encourages diversification outside of a group's core area of interest. Thus, when considered in tandem with group resources, our results suggest that any "insulating" influence of group resources is washed out by issue politicization.

More than simply "cancelling out" such dynamics, though, Figure 1 depicts exactly sort of reversal suggested by Hypothesis 6.3. At low levels of issue politicization, having a PAC is indeed associated with lower levels of position-taking diversity. However, higher levels of politicization reverse the association between PACs and diversity entirely. Indeed, at the highest levels of politicization, groups with PACs exhibit considerably *more* position-taking diversity than their non-moneyed counterparts. Thus, while the substitutionary logic appears to hold merit at certain levels of politicization, the complementary logic does as well.

A similar dynamic emerges with respect to the volume of donations. In Models 3 and 4, the logged cycle-level donation totals are negatively associated with position-taking diversity (here again in models using our primary measure of issue politicization). As with the binary PAC variable, the interaction between politicization and campaign donations is positive (and significant in the aforementioned set of models). But here again, as Figure 2 illustrates, the main effect of donations is not only attenuated by the politicization of a group's core issue, but it eventually reverses the association entirely. Thus, as a group faces stronger incentives to tie into a single party brand, donations appear to become more of a tool of complementary partisan signaling than they do a tool to avoid mission creep altogether.

Figure 1: Marginal effects of having a PAC, at various levels of core-issue polarization

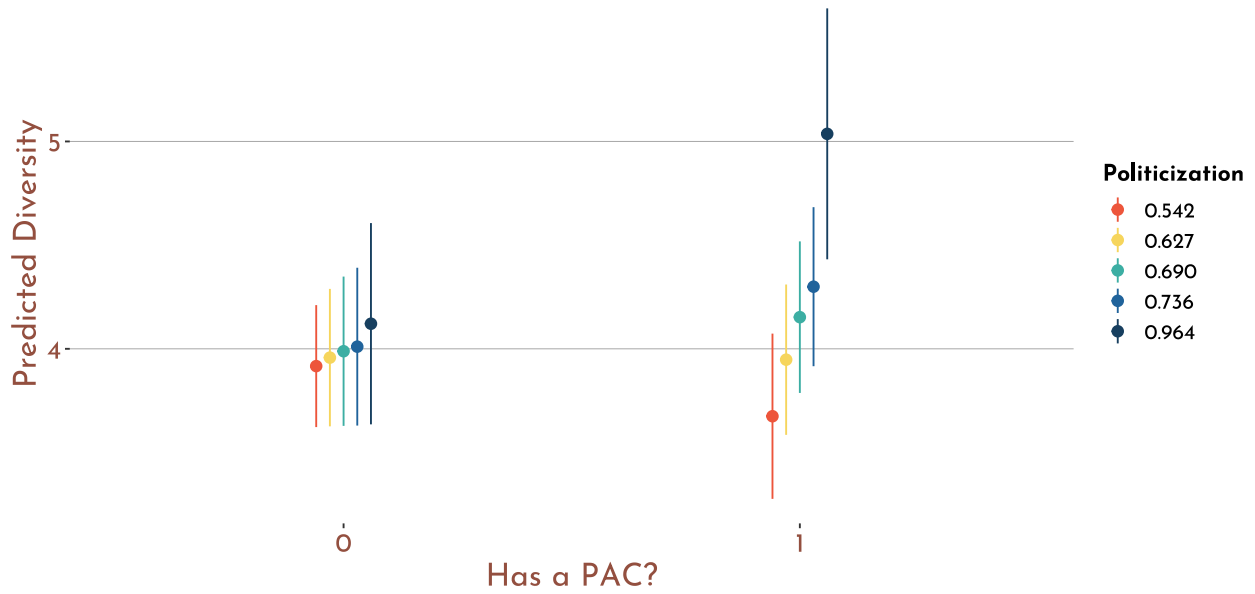
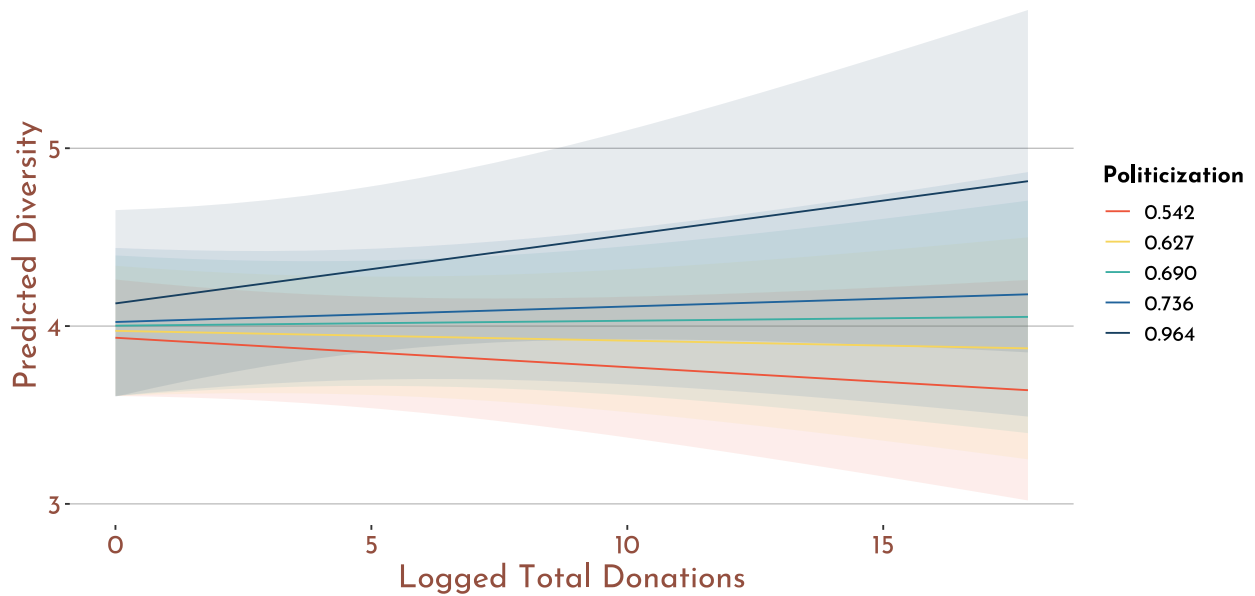


Figure 2: Marginal effects of donations, at various levels of core-issue polarization



Giving strategy and diversification

Taken together, the findings from this first set of analysis are consistent with the conditional account of resources and interest group partisanship summarized in H6.3. At relatively low levels of core-issue politicization, well-resourced groups appear less likely to diversify their position-taking across issues. However, at higher levels of politicization, we find evidence that resources are actually associated with greater diversification.

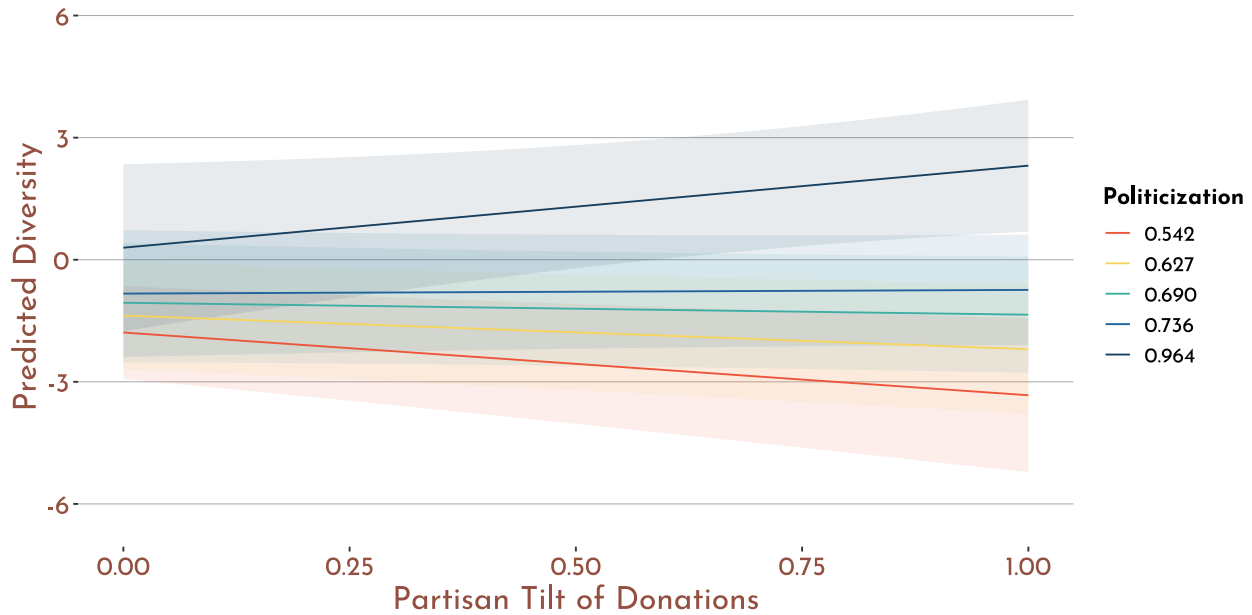
These results provide useful information in helping to understand how resource differences may generate different distinct incentives for special interests in the era of insecure majorities. However, such results do not necessarily test the *core* of each competing logic. That is, given that we are ultimately interested in assessing whether partisan signalling is required across *multiple* behaviors, a more direct test involves an examination of donation *strategies*. We turn to this investigation next.³

Given the partisan focus of our theory, we investigate here the extent to which groups' PAC giving *favors* one party or the other. To do so, as noted above, we measure the ratio of giving to each party relative to a group's overall giving. If a group gives mostly or exclusively to a single party, they will register a higher value on this variable—and vice versa for bipartisan givers. If resource-based signals can replace the need for mission creep, then partisan giving strategies should be negatively associated with position-taking diversity—and vice versa if resources only complement other forms of partisan signalling.

We present results from regressions of diversity on partisan tilt in Models 5 and 6 of Table ???. Much as with the “overall resources” measures, we find that partisan tilt is negatively associated with position-taking diversity. However, we also find suggestive evidence consistent with the conditional relationship present in the other analyses. As Figure 3 shows, higher levels of politicization see a flip in the relationship between partisan tilt and diversity. Indeed, when a group faces high levels of issue politicization, partisan tilt appears to correspond positively with position-taking diversity.

³We note here that, in future iterations of this chapter, we hope to incorporate additional measures of partisan and non-partisan donation strategies—after merging our data with additional, candidate-specific data sources.

Figure 3: Marginal effects of partisan tilt on position-taking diversity



Discussion and Conclusions

Previous chapters confirmed that a substantial portion of interest groups have responded to recent decades' growing competitiveness over control of the federal government by adopting more of what we term "off core" position-taking: the taking of more consistently partisan position-taking in issue areas outside of their core interests. This chapter has considered a potential means by which groups might insulate themselves from such pressures, by maintaining campaign contributions as another way to signal interest alignment with individual legislators. In such a scenario, off-core position-taking would be not a key behavioral implication of group partisanship, but one option for cash-strapped groups to still gain access to at least some legislators. Here, we considered a logic in which legislators seek both individual reelection and collective partisan power, but not to the same degree in all circumstances. To the extent that politicization of an issue area is low and party leaders provide relatively less pressure to condition access on heterogeneous signaling, we expect interest groups to substitute campaign contributions for costly off-core position-taking as signals of dyadic alignment. However, when legislators' party competition goals dominate, as they frequently do within highly politicized issue areas, demands for party brand dif-

ferentiation encourage them to prefer groups willing and able to send complementary, heterogeneous signals of partisan alignment. Thus, we develop the party differentiation logic of previous chapters to argue that a transition from the substitution logic to the complementary logic should be more likely for interest groups whose primary interests are in issue areas where the parties are especially competitive and differentiated.

To test these expectations, we link approximately 20 percent of the interest groups active in our position-taking data to over 100,000 campaign contributions records. This allows us to see which of the groups in our data that are sufficiently active to estimate their position-taking diversity have PACs, give campaign contributions, and to whom. Across a series of statistical analyses, we find evidence consistent with, and often substantially aligned with, our conditional complementarity account. For groups whose primary issue area is less party-differentiated, contributions and partisan off-core position-taking are both options by which groups may signal interest alignment with the legislators to whom they seek access. As the partisan differentiation of groups' core issue areas increases, this association moderates and then reverses; for the increasing number of groups that find themselves in politically partisan issue areas in recent years, they are pressured to engage in both mission creep and in partisanship in any contributions they make.

We believe these findings have several implications for our larger argument, as well as ongoing debates about donor motivations. First, the increasing expectation that groups' campaign contributions signal partisan rather than individual alignment may offer an explanation (in addition to resource availability) for why relatively few lobbying groups bother to give contributions in the first place. That is, if donations are complementary to other signals of alignment rather than one option among many, groups may find themselves pressured to give in races and contexts that do not necessarily meet their immediate access and policymaking goals. Second, we believe that our findings underscore how, in the partisan era, access and ideological giving strategies may grow to mimic one another. Indeed, for many groups responding to partisan pressures, the perception of partisan alignment is a necessary if not sufficient condition for access.

If the implications of party competition for interest group partisanship ended with merely a more partisan set of groups, perhaps they would only matter to partisans who found themselves “out of step” with the groups they once supported or groups who would rather focus on their issues than satisfy the parties’ larger demands. However, interest groups are not passive recipients of political outcomes. Indeed, their organizational bases and campaign support are critical inputs to electoral campaigns, and the information they provide to policymakers injects into the legislative process critical, if biased, expertise on both the policy problems that need to be solved as well the likely outcomes of policy alternatives. When both of these roles are subordinated to partisan goals, groups may become mere partisan watchdogs in elections and uninformative demanders of (or objectors to) critical policy change.

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