

**Action and Reaction in Interest Group Advocacy:  
The Trump Administration's First Hundred Days**

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ABSTRACT

Much of the interest group literature focuses on the actions of the groups themselves, attempting to measure their assumed influence over public officials. More properly viewing interest groups in their political context, however, demonstrates how often those groups are *reacting* to the activities of parties and officials, rather than *causing* the actions of those entities. In this first public paper from the Agendas and Interest Groups research project, a four-country analysis involving hundreds of policy issues, we use data from the US case to document what happened to the agenda status of nearly 500 issues during the first 100 days of the Trump administration. For most issues, we find no change in agenda status under President Trump. But for some, we find dramatic change influenced by partisan preferences, group type, and issue area.

Keywords: Lobbying, Interest Groups, Agendas, US Policymaking, Trump Administration

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Concerns about the potential power of "pressure groups" in politics is as old as the empirical study of policymaking itself, dating back to Pendleton Herring's path-breaking fieldwork in Washington, DC (Herring 1929). Dozens of studies of campaign finance contributions throughout the 1980s and 1990s set out to measure the degree to which those donations were buying congressional votes and policy outcomes. Gilens and Page (2014) looked to interest group influence as one of the signs of an American slide into oligarchy.

And yet, there is ample evidence that interest groups are far from omnipotent. Baumgartner and Leech (1998) and Burstein and Linton (2002) analyzed these studies of campaign contributions and found interest groups losing as often as winning in their attempts to influence votes. Baumgartner et al. (2009) found that level of interest group resources did not help predict which groups won and which lost. The most common outcome for all issues was the preservation of the status quo. This is not to suggest that interest groups are never influential, but only that such influence is much more constrained than media pundits would lead us to believe. On the other hand, the independent variable in Baumgartner et al.'s study that had the greatest impact on an interest group's level of success was whether the president actively supported or opposed a group's position.

In this paper we flip the tables on the usual study of interest group influence of government officials and investigate the ability of a president to advance or impede the policy preferences of interest groups. Making use of interviews with lobbyists representing 70 randomly selected interest groups, we trace what happened to more than 400 issues of interest to the groups during the first 100 days of Trump's presidency. The president's power to legislate through executive orders and memoranda, and to set the agenda by providing the first draft of the nation's next budget to Congress opens the possibility of affecting the fortunes of many interest

groups. The groups were interviewed in the months just before the 2016 US presidential election and so we investigate how the switch from the Obama administration to the Trump administration affected the fortunes of our sample of groups and their issues.

This paper is the first from a multi-year, four-country project that examines the policy agenda preferences of interest groups and the public and the ways in which those agendas are reflected (or not reflected) in government action.<sup>1</sup> The Agendas and Interest Groups project includes interviews with interest group lobbyists about thousands of different issues as well as surveys of the general public that investigate their views on policymaking.

### **Literature Review**

There is a too-easy tendency in interest group research to focus solely on the actions of the groups themselves, attempting to measure their assumed influence over public officials. Viewing advocacy in its political context, however, demonstrates how often those groups are *reacting* to the activities of parties and officials, rather than *causing* the actions of those entities. In their extensive study of organized interests and policymaking Heinz et al. (1993) decried the tendency of studies of lobbying and campaign contributions to model groups as omnipotent:

“Much of the literature virtually ignores officials and appears to assume that, like billiard balls, they will go wherever the groups send them.”

(Heinz et al. 1993, 12; also quoted in Ainsworth 1997, 518).

There are, of course, substantial exceptions to their critique, both old and new. In their classic work, Bauer, Pool, and Dexter (1963) were struck by how *little* influence the interest groups had, and how they acted as “service bureaus,” providing information and assistance to government officials but failing to twist any arms. Ainsworth (1997) and Hall and Deardorff (2006) provide theoretical analysis (and in Hall and Deardorff’s case, a formal model) that helps explain why government officials and interest groups might work together. Baumgartner et al.

(2009) and Baumgartner and Mahoney (2015) analyzed group-government interactions on 98 US policy issues to document the ways that interest groups work with governmental allies and the importance of those governmental allies to advantageous outcomes for the groups. And, as mentioned above, the single most important ally (and most dangerous opponent) is the president.

### *Presidential Policymaking*

The US president exists within a tri-partite system of government, designed so that each of the three branches could check the power of the others. Under the Constitution, legislating is the prerogative of Congress. How then does the president come to wield policymaking power? Presidential scholar Richard Neustadt (1990) has argued that because of the president's lack of express policymaking powers itemized in the Constitution, the most effective presidential tool is the "power to persuade" the Congress. Other scholars have considered the efficacy of the presidential veto and the threat of veto in order to produce a desired policy outcome (Cameron 2000; Krehbiel 1998; Kiewit and McCubbins 1991), and "going public" in order to mobilize popular support for policies, especially when Congress is not cooperating (Kernell 1997).

Presidents have both inherent powers and implied powers, the first mentioned directly in the Constitution and the second the result of ever-broadening interpretations of powers suggested by that document. The main inherent policymaking tool available to the president is the ability to veto laws (as long as Congress doesn't override that veto with a 2/3 vote). Presidents also make policy through executive orders and memoranda. Risen (2004) notes that although not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, such orders have been used throughout US history because of the constitutional requirement that the president "shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed." Although some have argued that orders and memoranda are usually limited in scope (Petersen 1992), Mayers (2002) argues that presidents in the modern era have used them to make

significant policy decisions not only in the realm of regulatory affairs but also social policy, national security, and foreign policy. The use of such orders has expanded in recent decades, both in number and in scope (although Franklin Roosevelt issued the most of any president), leading scholars to begin citing the orders as the basis for the "unilateral presidency." (Moe 1999, Krent 2008, Major 2014). Risen writes: "The president can order an executive branch agency to do anything he wants, as long as he can cite a law or the Constitution to support his action" (Risen 2004). And as the scope of government grows and as Congress delegates more and more of the details of policy to the bureaucracy, the powers of the president grow apace. Although Congress technically has the power to legislate so as to undo an executive order, it has done so only three times in recent decades. It is somewhat more frequent for the courts to act as a check on such orders -- ruling either that the president has exceeded his legal authority or (as is the case with Trump's travel "ban," discussed later in this paper) that the order or memo itself is unconstitutional.

Another important, and less well-understood, power of the president is to help set the federal policy agenda. This can be accomplished in two ways: First, by drafting policy proposals and advocating these proposals to members of Congress and the public. Although these proposals still must be formally introduced by a member of Congress, Edwards and Barrett (2000) show that congressional leaders tend to follow the lead of the president as they structure their legislative efforts. Further, Edwards and Barrett (2000) find that when government is unified, as it is now, presidential initiatives are adopted at a significantly higher rate than purely congressional initiatives. Even under divided government, their analysis concludes that presidential initiatives make up a significant portion of the congressional agenda and, on average, have the same chance of passing as purely congressional initiatives. Secondly, since

1921 the president has proposed a budget to Congress at the start of each budget approval cycle. Although much will change before the final budget is approved, the president's budget provides the first draft, meaning that it sets the base from which members of Congress must act to change, granting the presidency a strong agenda-setting role.

While the president has some influence over the ultimate outcome of a proposed policy, the extent and direction of this influence is a matter of debate. Some find that voiced presidential support for a measure tends to increase public support for it (Kernell 1997; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Rivers and Rose 1985; Rohde and Simon 1985; Brace and Hinckley 1992) or that administration opposition to a measure reduces its chances of success (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Others find that presidential support does little to help a proposal's chances (Edwards 1989; Bond and Fleisher 2000; Collier and Sullivan 1995; Neustadt 1990). Wood and Lee (2009) provide evidence that, at least recently, when the president voices support of a bill, opponents of the bill rise to challenge it, actually reducing the chances of its success.

Still others argue that the effect of presidential support on policy outcomes is conditioned on such factors as presidential approval (Bond and Fleischer 1990), the salience and complexity of a bill (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002), the partisanship and ideology of Members of Congress (Cohen et al. 2000; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards and Barrett 2000), the policy preferences of the congressional membership (Krehbiel 1998; Brady and Volden 1998), the current presidential regime (Skowronek 1993), or the presidential honeymoon period (Beckmann and Godfrey 2007; Light 1999; Brody 1991).

Finally, Beckmann (2010) and others argue that in addition to helping to set the agenda and negotiating votes with Members of Congress, presidents routinely engage in direct lobbying of leaders in Congress to help shape the legislative agenda. The president works with leaders to

determine the options rank-and-file members of Congress may vote upon. This ability to shape congressional votes gives the president a powerful tool with which to influence policy outcomes. Several scholars argue that legislation that is lobbied on by the White House is significantly more likely to pass than is legislation that is not lobbied on by the president (Beckmann 2010; McKay and Webb 2017; Baumgartner et al. 2009). Thus, even a weak president facing a divided Congress will still have influence in federal policymaking through the powers to persuade, to set the agenda, to engage the public and interest groups, and to lobby policymakers directly.

### *Hypotheses*

We argue, first, that most issues most of the time do not change their agenda status. Second, when issues do enter or exit the governmental agenda, they do so in predictable ways: Certain groups will find greater ability to influence the agenda than other groups. Specifically, under the new Trump administration, we expect that business groups and others mostly supported by Republicans will find greater agenda success relative to nonprofit groups and groups mostly supported by Democrats.

### **Research Design**

This paper draws on data from Agendas and Interest Groups, a comparative project that addresses concerns about the role of interest group influence by focusing attention on policy agendas and analyzing the circumstances under which specific types of groups and citizens find their issues represented before government. The broader project examines policymaking in four countries (Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and the United States) and includes two large surveys of the general public in each country. Here we focus on the US case and the data from our "agenda mapping" interviews with interest groups.

We interviewed a stratified random sample of 70 interest groups active in Washington, DC,<sup>2</sup> oversampling to ensure that half of the interests represented non-business interests (e.g.

citizen groups, non-occupational issue advocacy groups, unions, charities, or religious organizations). See Table 1 for a breakdown of our interviews by group type. Our universe of groups from which we draw the sample will rely on the population data collected previously by the Dutch principal investigator (Berkhout 2014), except in the US, where we will use sources maintained by Columbia Books in a manner that parallels the work of Berkhout et al. (2015). The sampling frame was a directory of Washington interest organizations, *Washington Representatives* directory (and its online companion, Lobbyists.Info), which includes all organizations from the federal Lobbying Registration Reports, as well as numerous other organizations that are active but exempt from registering because of spending levels, type of lobbying conducted, or some other exclusion in the law.

In August 2016 we conducted semi-structured interviews (Leech 2002) with a representative from each of the 70 interest organizations, most in the organization's own office, but occasionally in another Washington location or by phone. Whenever possible, the person being interviewed was the head of government relations for the organization, or at least someone who works on governmental policy. We inquired about (1) what issues they were working on, (2) what policy proposals they favored, opposed, or wished to modify regarding the issue, (3) whether the issue was something they had initiated or were reacting to, and (4) how important the issue was to their organization (see Appendix A for a copy of the interview protocol and close-ended survey questions). We then asked about issues they were interested in, but not acting upon, especially those issues that they were actively monitoring. Finally, we elicited a "wish list" or "dream list" of issues that they would like to be working on but did not see as politically feasible at the moment, as well as a "nightmare list" of issues their organizations hoped to keep off the agenda. We asked them to rank the top seven of all of these issues in terms of their long-



term importance to the organization. On each of a group's top seven issues, the subjects answered a series of closed-ended questions about the issue, including how partisan the issue was, which party supported the issue, and what activities they had undertaken so far on the issue, if any, and their expected level of success.

Previous researchers have used a variety of definitions of "issue." Grossman (2014) considers successful and significant policy changes, Baumgartner et al. (2009) consider a random sample of topics on which interest groups report being active, and Burstein (2014) uses a random sample of policy topics that Congress has considered. Our definition of an issue is closest to that of Baumgartner et al., but different in the sense that we make a special point of eliciting issues that are not on the agenda.

Responding first to a question about what their organizations are currently working on makes it easier for the respondent to answer the question, "What else, in an ideal world or in another administration or another Congress, would you *wish* to be working on?" Repeated prompts inquiring about "is there anything else?" help elicit the most complete list (Leech et al. 2013, 217), which the respondent can then rank by importance. These interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, generated a list of 493 different issues that were of most importance to the sampled interest groups. These issues were then coded into policy areas, using the standard topic codes from the Comparative Agendas Project (<http://www.comparativeagendas.net>).

When interviews from all countries are complete, these will have generated up to 500 different issues of most importance to the sampled interest groups per country. From this list we are building a data set that includes coded information from the interviews as well as secondary-source information as available. In the US case, we gather information about the number of organizations involved in the issue (from searches of the federal Lobbying Disclosure Reports),

salience (from media coverage), and government activity (from Congress.gov). For any of the issues that have public opinion data available, we collect that information as well.

To assess whether the issues in question were affected by Trump's actions and policies, we keyword searched all 24 executive orders and all 24 presidential memoranda issued in the first 100 days of Trump's administration, as well as Trump's national budget proposal of March 2017. The texts of these documents are available at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov). We compared the actions described in the presidential documents to the status quo that existed at the time of our interviews and to the desired outcomes that the lobbyists described in our interviews. We then coded whether Trump's action or proposal worked in favor of or in opposition to each organization's preferences. If the mention by the Trump administration was in the opposite direction of the interest group's position, the variable was coded -1. For example, if a group supports greater funding for something and the budget proposed a reduced budget, it received a -1 code. If the action or proposal by the Trump administration moved the issue in a way that aligned with the interest group's preferred policy position, the variable was coded as 1. The variable was coded 0 if the issue was not mentioned. We coded one variable for mentions in either executive orders or memoranda (which have the force of law) and one variable for a mention in the proposed budget (which does not). (Please see appendix for further information on our coding procedures.)<sup>3</sup>

## **Results**

The first 100 days is a popular way for media pundits to assess a new presidency. It is, however, an exceptionally short time for the accomplishment of much in the way of policymaking. So it is no surprise that in Figures 1 and 2 we see that the majority of our 493 issues were not mentioned in Trump's orders, memos, or budget. Still, executive orders and memoranda provide a fast track to policy change, and the budget proposal is just a proposal.

More than a quarter of our issues did see a shift in the first 100 days of the Trump administration.

In Figure 1 we can see that slightly fewer issues saw a positive change thanks to Trump's orders and memos than saw a negative effect (36 vs. 43). Interest groups that were hoping for more spending on their issues were less fortunate, with 54 of their issues affected negatively by the Trump budget proposal compared with 34 that saw a positive change (Figure 2).

Considering the issues by policy type, we see in Figures 9 and 10 that those issues on which the president did take a position, there was a slightly higher number of losers than winners. This is further evidence that interest groups have not had a significant influence over President Trump.

*Figure 1. Interest Group Issues Affected by Executive Orders and Memos*

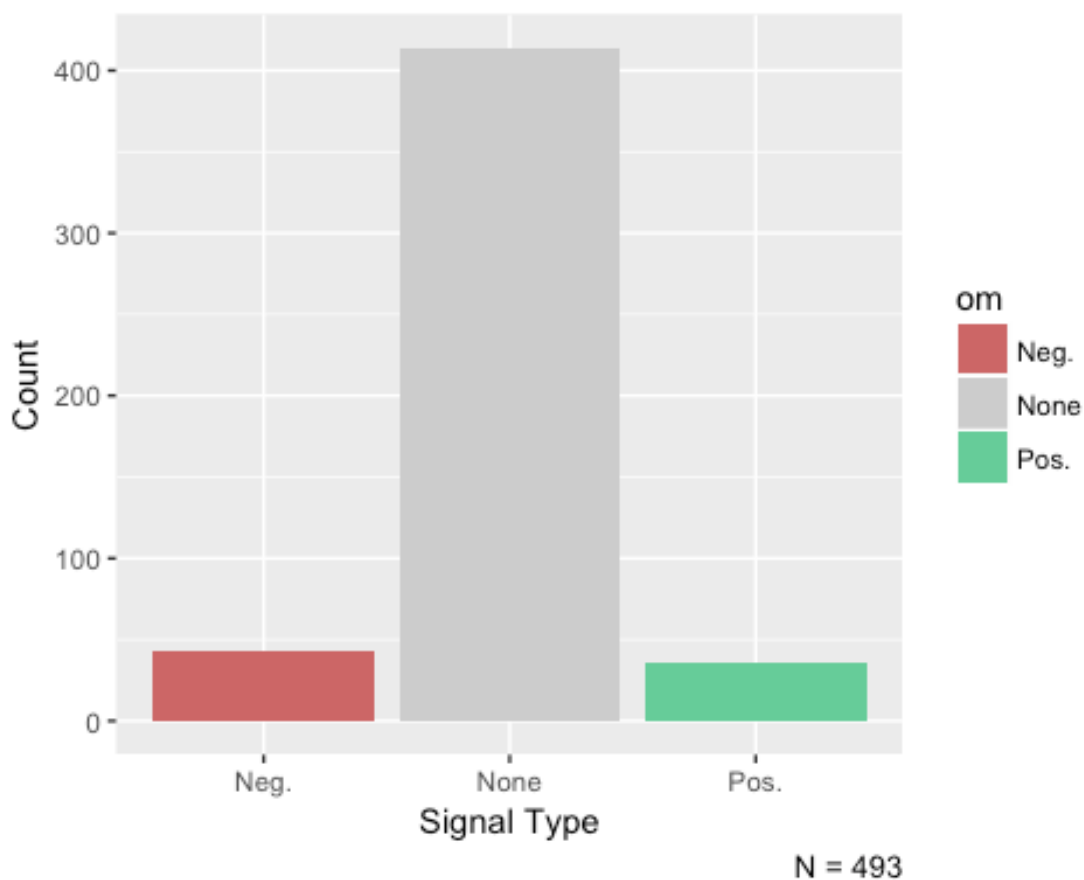
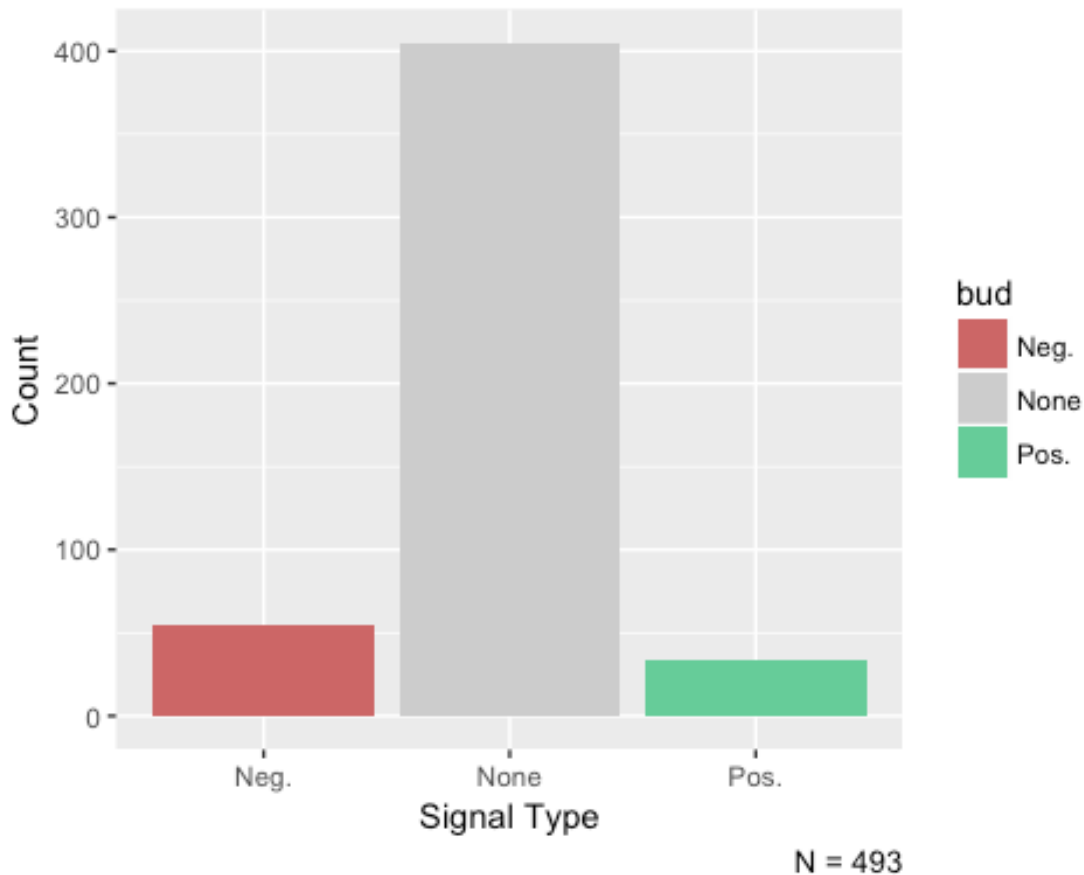


Figure 2. Interest Group Issues Affected by Proposed US Budget



### Party support

The data become more interesting as we focus on just those issues on which the president did take a position. Figures 3 and 4 show the degree to which Trump's actions favored Republican issues over Democratic issues. Interest group lobbyists were asked whether each issue was mostly supported by Democrats, mostly by Republicans, or whether the issue had mixed support. Democratic issues were much more likely to face negative executive actions, and Republicans were somewhat more likely to see positive executive actions, and those issues with mixed support saw mixed results. It is noteworthy that the negative actions exceed the positive actions overall, at least as far as these interest group issues are concerned. The proposed budget shows a similar but even

more extreme result. Democrat issues almost always faced budget cuts, while Republican issues never did.

Figure 3. Effect of Executive Actions on Interest Group Issues, by Party Support

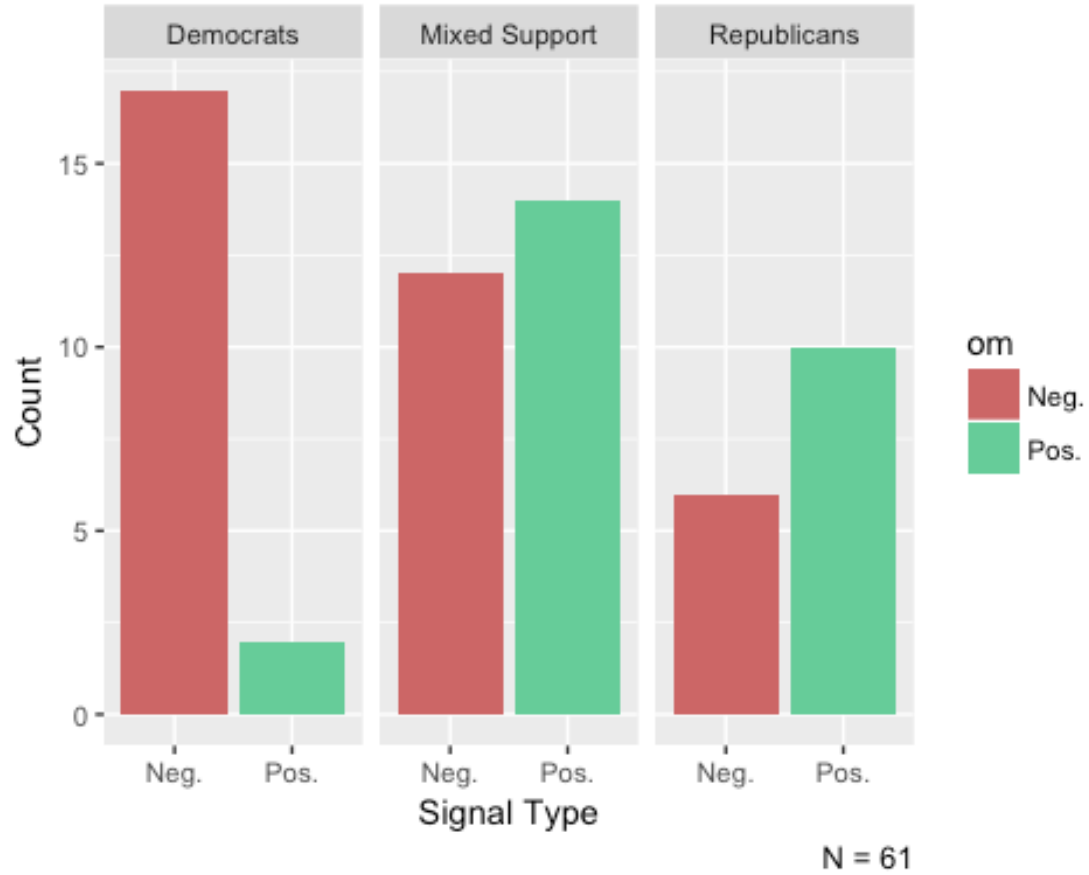
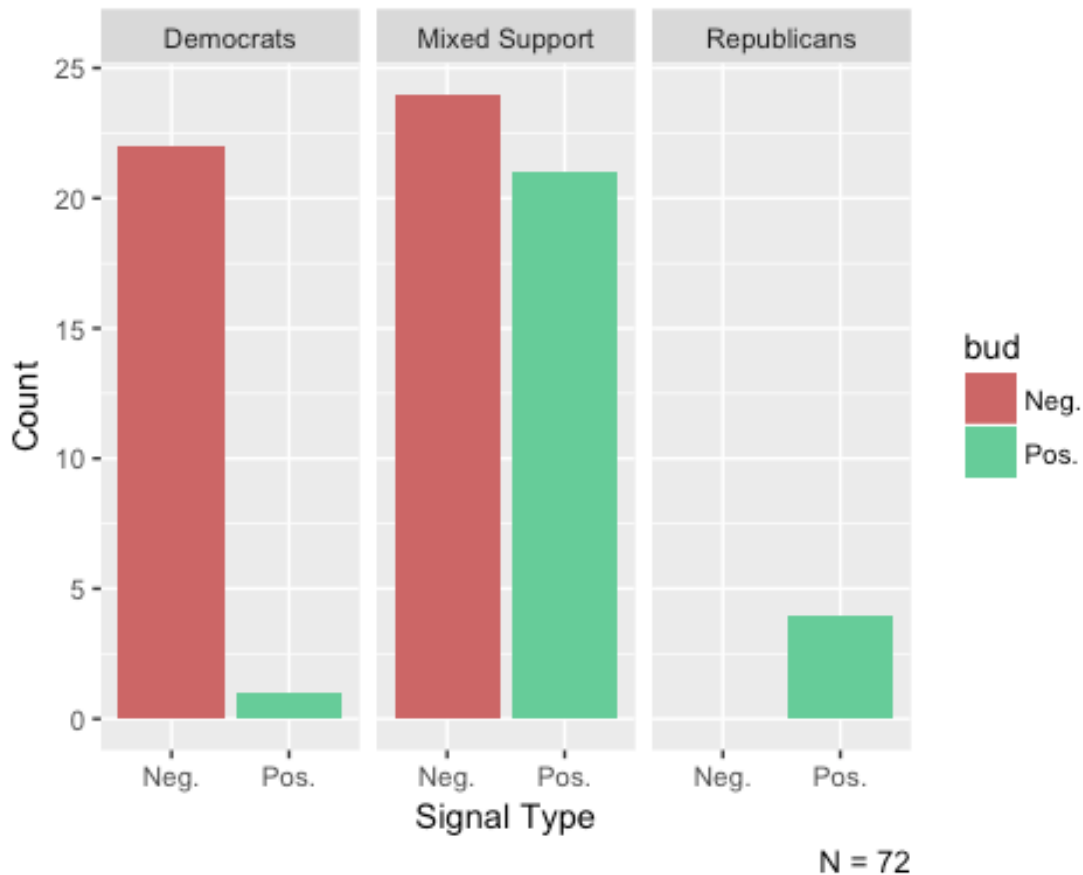


Figure 4. Effect of Proposed Budget on Interest Group Issues, by Party Support



### Partisanship

Highly partisan issues, as indicated by the groups we interviewed, received significant attention in these early days of the administration. The greatest number of executive action signals were negative signals for highly partisan issues. It seems Trump went after the contentious issues early on, and in ways that our interest groups did not want. Meanwhile, issues indicated to be somewhat or not partisan saw much less action in executive orders and memos.

The trend is not the same for partisanship in the budget, where the signals were somewhat mixed. The partisanship of an issue seemed to have little significance for whether or not there was budgetary signaling.

Figures 5 and 6 examine how partisan the interest groups thought each issue was,

that is, was the issue a nexus of party conflict, and then whether recent presidential actions had a negative or positive effect on their issues. Figure 5 illustrates that executive orders and memos were much more likely to have a negative tone, vis a vis the interest groups, when the issue was a partisan one. There were the fewest of these executive actions taken on non-partisan issues and the few there were turned out positively for the interest groups more often than negatively. Perhaps it is most telling to see that Trump spent most of his executive action energy on partisan issues. While 70 percent of our interest group's issues were reportedly not partisan or only somewhat partisan, Trumps ignored most of those issues; if the issue was described as not partisan, there was a 7 percent chance that Trump would act on that issue. Issues described as somewhat partisan had a 13 percent chance of executive action, and very partisan issues had a 28 percent chance. Very partisan issues were therefore four times more likely to experience some kind of formal executive action than none partisan issues were. Trump's proposed budget does not show the same pattern, as illustrated by Figure 6. Non-partisan and partisan issues both faced budget cuts -- nonpartisan issues faired the best in terms of getting good news in the budget.

Figure 5. Effect of Executive Actions on Interest Group Issues, by Level of Partisanship

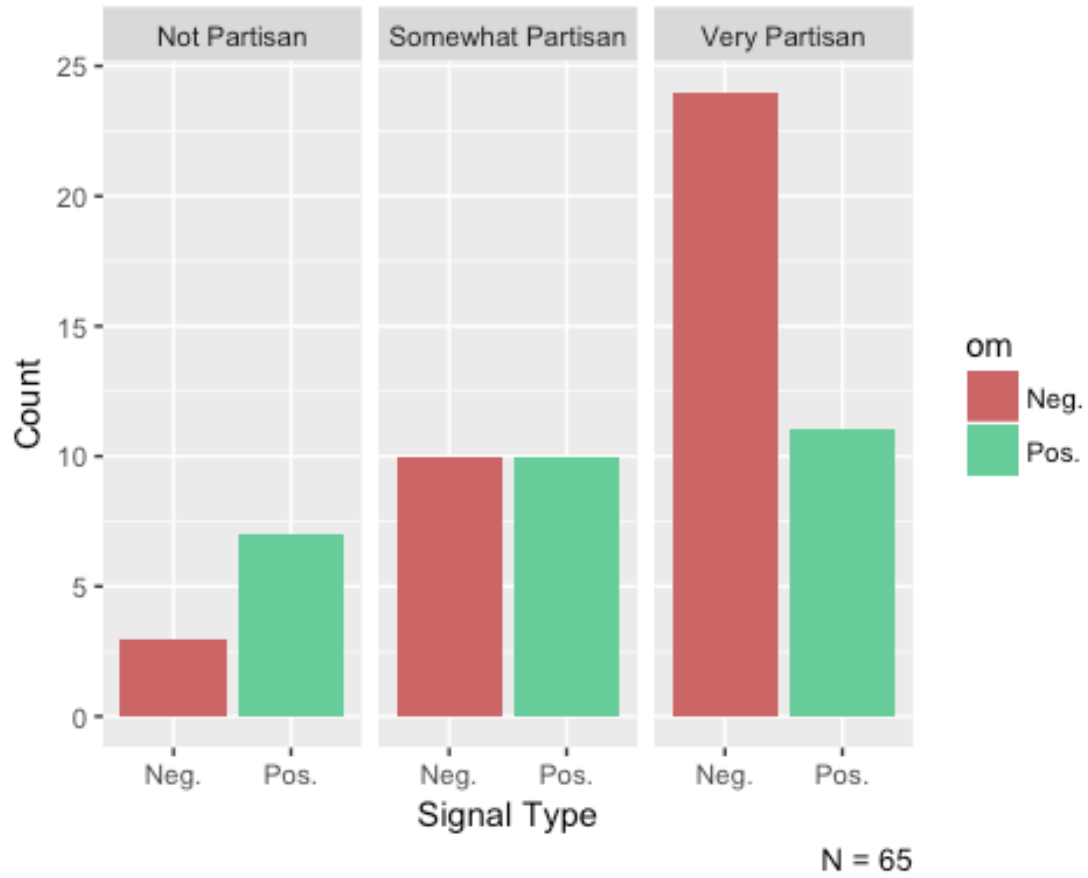
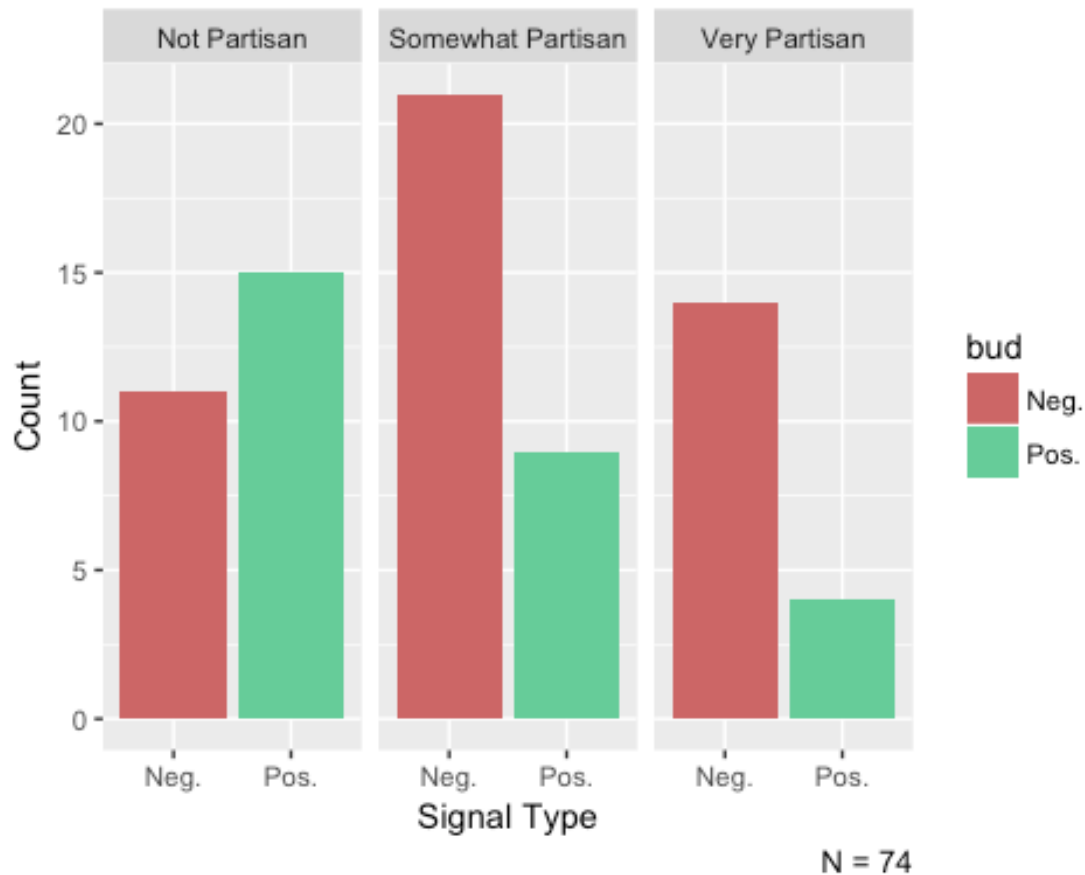




Figure 6. Effect of Proposed Budget on Interest Group Issues, by Level of Partisanship



### Group Type

Executive action by group type paints somewhat unsurprising pictures, as shown in Figures 7 and 8. The high number of negative signals for business is driven largely by Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an issue of great importance to many businesses that supported the trade deal.

The budget, which contained cuts to nearly all of the broad areas of government except defense, yielded negative signals for all types of groups. Citizen groups, charities, and unions in particular saw lots of their issues get negative signals due to steep cuts across the board. Business had more positive signals but still had its share of negative signals. With regard to executive orders and memoranda, businesses won in the

executive orders but lost in the memoranda because Trump pulled out of negotiations of both TPP and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TIPP) using memoranda.

Quite a few of our corporate interest groups put corporate tax reform high up on their "dream lists." While Trump has tweeted and talked quite a bit about corporate tax reform, it does not show up in any of our three measures. Still, we consider this an agenda "win" for business.

Finally, trade associations were clear winners, while other group types had mixed results.

*Figure 7. Effect of Executive Actions on Interest Group Issues, by Type of Group*



N = 79

Figure 8. Effect of Proposed Budget on Interest Group Issues, by Type of Group



*Issue area*

Figures 9 and 10 show the distribution of signals received by groups working in different issue areas. Issue areas are defined by the ongoing Comparative Agendas Project coding scheme. Among these, issues related to the environment, foreign trade, and immigration received the bulk of negative signals. Domestic commerce, health, and technology saw boosts in executive actions. A number of groups were opposed to a single-payer system of health care and Trump's actions aligned with this view.

In the budget, the environment, international affairs, labor, and education issues all fared poorly. This is unsurprising as there were cuts across the board, save defense.

Technology-related issues received mostly positive signals, as Trump issued executive orders to strengthen cybersecurity.

Figure 9. Effect of Executive Actions on Interest Group Issues, by Policy Type

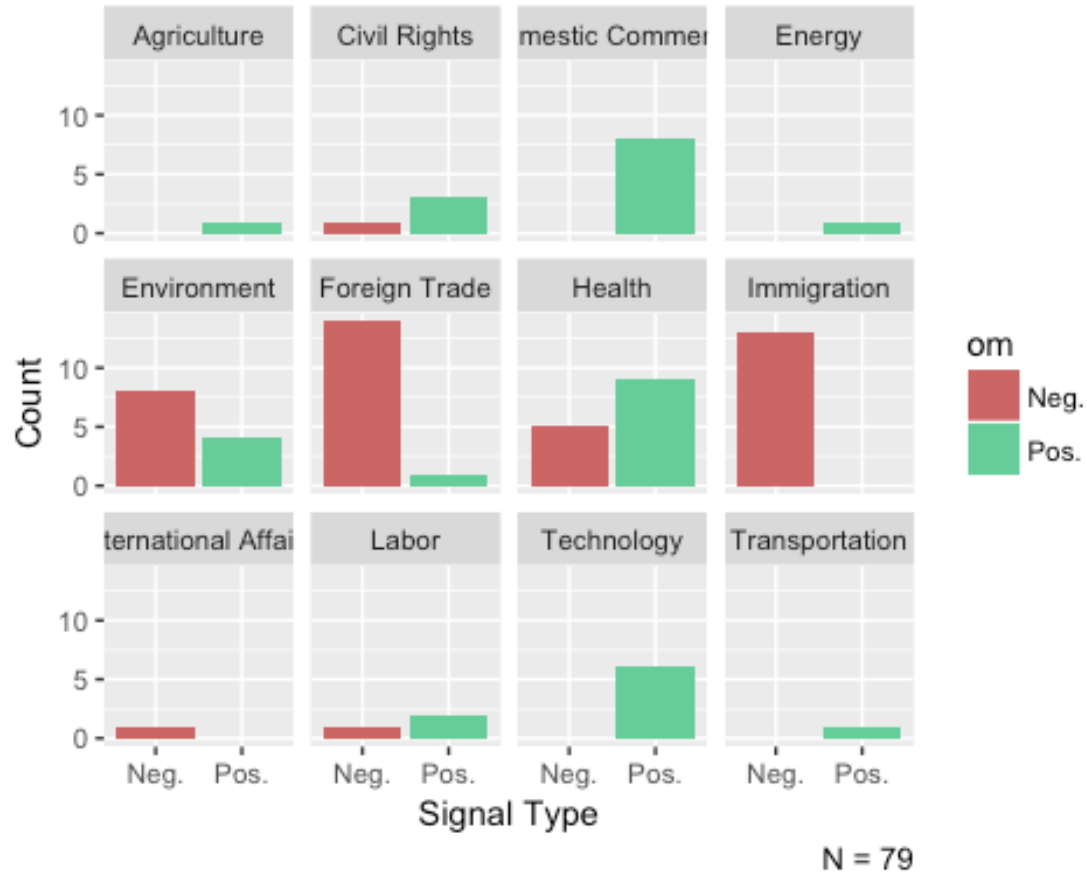


Figure 10. Effect of Proposed Budget on Interest Group Issues, by Policy Type



### Examples and Discussion

In this section we provide some examples of the issues our groups expressed an interest in and how they might have been affected by the change in presidential administration.

#### *Transportation and Infrastructure*

Support for increased spending on infrastructure and transportation was mentioned by six of the 70 groups in our sample. Support ranged from labor unions to businesses, including a large hotel chain and a multinational car company. Despite the unanimity of interest groups in favor of increased infrastructure spending, the issue has been the subject of conflicting signals from the Trump administration.

During the campaign and election period, much was made of Trump's plan to put forth a significant infrastructure stimulus plan to rebuild antiquated bridges, roads, and rail lines throughout the United States and reinvigorate job growth. Yet despite the informal signals from Trump on the campaign trail and elsewhere, along with support from a handful of significant groups, our data highlight the relatively poor signals the Trump administration has offered for transportation issues.

As seen in the graphs grouped by the Comparative Agendas Project coding scheme (Figures 9 and 10), transportation-related issues received several negative signals in the budget, but little action in the executive orders or memos. Specifically, the budget proposes significantly reducing support for Amtrak, a public-private federal US train service; eliminating support for a federal program that ensures rural areas have access to air service, known as Essential Air Surface; ending TIGER grants, which provide funding for interstate federal transit across the US; and cutting the Department of Transportation's budget by 13 percent, or \$2.4 billion (pp. 35-6).

To the extent that groups still see a path forward for increased transportation and infrastructure spending, the signs offered by the administration indicate this may be a more difficult issue to get on the formal policy agenda than Trump's occasional—and often informal—remarks would suggest.

### *Immigration*

Another issue important to multiple of our groups was immigration. Groups as diverse as a charity, a union, two businesses, a non-profit, and two universities deemed immigration reform an important issue in their list of priorities. All hoped to ease entry to the United States. The graphs grouped by Comparative Agendas Project issue codes highlight the well-known negative signals that immigration has received under the Trump

Administration.

Specifically, two executive orders in the early days of Trump's presidency represented substantial shifts in executive policy toward immigration. Executive Order 13767 and Executive Order 13768, both issued on January 25, 2017, directed executive departments and agencies to augment immigration enforcement.

Executive Order 13769, promulgated on January 27, 2017, suspended visas for visitors from seven majority-Muslim countries—Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and Libya—for 90 days and ceased refugee resettlement for 120 days. The order also banned Syrian refugees indefinitely. The order was challenged in federal court on constitutional grounds. The administration then released another Executive Order, number 13780, on March 6, 2017, that revised the earlier order, removed Iraq from the list, lifted the Syrian refugee ban, and detailed the reasons for issuing the first order. The constitutionality of the directives is still pending as courts have largely blocked the order. Most recently, on May 25, the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit blocked it and declared that the order was issued with animus and discrimination. As of the time of this writing, the Department of Justice has petitioned to have the Supreme Court to hear the case.

How the groups in our sample react to these changes and fluctuations on an increasingly important issue such as immigration looks to be a useful proxy to tease out the various sources of influence on the political agenda and how they may, or may not, see their preferences realized.

### *Trade policy*

Finally, trade policy is an issue in which many of our respondents expressed an interest. The TPP and the TIPP are somewhat unusual in that the president's position is at odds with the preferences of many businesses. On most other issues, the president is

an agreement with business entities, if he takes a position at all. The president's ideological commitment to putting America First has outweighed the preferences of large companies who benefit from the free trade policies sought by previous presidents. Meanwhile, several labor organizations were in agreement with the president on this issue, resulting in labor organizations' receiving more positive signals than negative signals.

The TPP was the result of seven years of negotiation, culminating in 12 nations agreeing to relatively open borders. President Obama confirmed his support of the final draft of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement in early 2016. It has been controversial in the US, creating winners, losers, and uncertainty. While companies that import or export goods would stand to benefit from reduced tariffs, companies that manufacture goods in the US objected that the deal would export jobs and reduce wages. The pharmaceutical industry, for example, wanted all countries to agree to a 12-year patent for US-made drugs, while other partners, such as Australia, preferred a 5-year patent.

President Trump came down on the side of domestic manufacturers. Three days after he was inaugurated, the president fulfilled a campaign promise by issuing a memorandum curtailing further American involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The still-developing TIPP agreement will also not be pursued under President Trump. The president's Constitutional power to negotiate treaties expects presidents to be able to make or not make trade deals, and no checks on this power exist. Since large businesses and labor unions both object to the two trade agreements, it is unlikely they will be revisited before a new president takes office.

## **Conclusions**



This paper has used the Trump administration's first 100 days as a forum for evaluating some of the questions posed by the larger Agendas and Interest Groups project. Our interviews with 70 representatives of lobbying groups in Washington, DC—about half representing business and half representing nonprofit organizations—provides us with nearly 500 issues about which interest groups cared in the last few months of the Obama Administration (most of the interviews occurred in August of 2016.) The election of President Trump took the Washington lobbying community by surprise. While most issues—about 85 percent—saw no change in agenda status as Trump settled in to the White House, those issues that the president did attend to stand out for the sharp change in their agenda status. Further, there are some clear trends in which issues and groups tended to win or lose under President Trump. The data suggest that issues supported by Republicans or by businesses and trade associations were more likely to receive positive signals from the new president, while issues supported by Democrats and charities or citizen groups received negative signals. Issue area was also found to predict the level of attention the president gave and the direction of the signal. Foreign trade, immigration, and the environment all receive quite negative signals, while cybersecurity and defense issues receive positive signals.

This paper is a very early cut at a rich data set that promises to provide insights into the agenda wishes of interest groups; going beyond using what is currently on the agenda to assess success and instead looking at which groups get to work on the issues that are at the top of their own policy wish lists. There is much left to do, but for now we can provide a few immediate conclusions from this initial analysis.

One important point worthy of future analysis is the extent to which the Trump administration is using both formal and informal signals. In this analysis, we have coded formal signals that are transmitted through official political institutions and executive powers. While this has been an important vehicle of executive power and signaling for past presidents, the extensive use of alternative mediums such as social media renders the Trump administration somewhat unorthodox. For instance, Trump's tax reform proposal that included significant reductions in corporate tax rates was an important issue to many of the groups in our sample, yet the issue of corporate tax reduction is found nowhere in any of the documents we coded. Trump has lifted the issue via social media posts and a hastily released three page document that outlines the plan.

Our next step is to develop an understanding of why certain issues have attracted President Trump's attention. We will gather information from our 70 respondents, whom we intend to re-interview to query directly how the new administration in Washington has affected their policy agendas and tactics. We will also expand our coding of the agenda to include legislative and bureaucratic agendas in addition to the chief executive's. And by simultaneously doing the same research in three European countries, we hope to realize an understanding of the why and how of governmental agenda setting.

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**Table 1. Types of groups interviewed**

Group type	#	%
Trade	9	14 %
Business	16	25 %
Professional Association	5	8 %
Union	4	6 %
Citizen & other non-occupational	26	40 %
Other	5	8 %
Total	65	100 %

## Appendix A

### Protocol: Agenda-Mapping Interviews

*Explain/remind the respondent about the purpose of the interview: We told them that the goal of the research was to create a virtual map of all of the issues that organizations and companies in Washington were interested in. We warned them that we would ask about seven or more issues, so we couldn't spend too long on any given issue.*

At any given time, there are many policy issues and potential policy issues that might affect an [organization/business] such as yours. Today I would like us to try to map out the various policy issues that [your organization] is concerned with.

The issues and policies do not have to be associated with a particular bill, rule, or regulation, and it doesn't matter whether or not they are receiving media coverage. The issues or policies just need to be something that are, *or that potentially could be*, acted on by the **national government**.

(1) First I'd like to know a little bit about you and your office. How long have you been working here, and in what capacity? How are you organized here in terms of people and units that are involved in public affairs and advocacy?

- *Probe for the different units within the organization that play a role. Separate media staff? Research staff? Regulatory staff?*
- *Probe for the **number** of people in these units (differentiate between lobbyists and professional staff)*
- *If relevant, probe for # and type of members (unless this is available from their website)*

(2) Let's begin by talking about the issues that your organization is working on right now. What are the most important issues that you and others in this office have spent most of your time working during the past six months?

[Interviewer makes a list of each issue mentioned – try to get three.]

- *Probe for enough background about the issue that we can track it later*
- *Probe for how government is currently involved/which venues*
- *Probe for the organization's position on each issue*
- *Probe for what government activity is taking place on the issue (venue(s)/progress)*

- (3) Organizations are not always able to work on their top priority at any given time. Are there issues that you haven't yet mentioned that are a major priority for [your organization/ business], even if you have not been able to spend much time on recently?

[Interviewer makes a list of each issue mentioned – try to get two or three.]

- *Probe for enough background about the issue that we can track it later*
- *Probe for how government is currently involved/which venues*
- *Probe for the organization's position on each issue*
- *Probe for what government activity is taking place on the issue (venue(s)/progress)*

- (4) Now I'd like to ask you about your dream issue. Sometimes political realities mean that some policy issues may not be seen as practical or feasible. Are there issues on [your organization's/business'] wish list that you would work on if the political climate were different than it is? If you could wave a magic wand, what would be your policy dream?

- *Make sure that this relates to a policy and is not just an outcome. "End Poverty" is an outcome. "Require that everyone is paid a living wage" is a potential policy.*
- *Probe for the organization's position on the issue*
- *Probe for enough background about the issue that we can track it later*
- *Probe for how government is currently involved/which venues*

- (5) What about political nightmares? Are there policy issues that [your organization/business] would like to have stay off the agenda?

- *Probe for the organization's position on the issue*
- *Probe for enough background about the issue that we can track it later*
- *Probe for how government is currently involved/which venues*

- (6) Have them order the 7+ sheets by "their intrinsic importance to the **mission** (long-term goals) of the organization." Write the rankings on the sheet.

- (7) Have them fill out the sheets for the top seven issues.

- (8) Does [organization/business] have a formal way of assessing policy priorities each year? If so, could you describe that process for me? (If not, how do you decide what to work on?)

[Ask for a copy of the policy priorities for that year, or ask whether there were any policies decided on through that process that haven't yet been mentioned.]



- *Probe for decision-makers*
- *Probe for role of lobbyist him/herself*
- *Probe for role of public opinion*
- *Probe for role of membership*
- *Probe for percentage of time spent reacting to government actions and the percentage of time spent proactively trying to change what government is doing*

Those are all the questions I have for you but I do have a favor to ask. I wonder if I could call you in about a year or so to follow up with you on these issues. I'll be back in [city] so it would be over the phone. I'd just like to see how things have progressed -- since I have all this background, the follow-up should only take about 15 minutes.

*Leave them a card.*

### Self-Administered Questionnaire

Issue \_\_\_\_\_

**How many years has your organization been involved in this issue?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many other organizations are currently active on this issue?**

- |                               |                                 |  |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-20   | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-5  | <input type="checkbox"/> 21-100 |  |

% of those organizations that **favor** your position? \_\_\_\_\_

% of those organizations that **oppose** your position? \_\_\_\_\_

**How partisan is this issue?**

- Not partisan
- Somewhat partisan
- Very partisan

**Who supports your position on this issue?**

- Mostly Democrats
- Mostly Republicans
- Mixed

**How aware is the public of this issue?**

- Not at all
- A little aware
- Moderately aware
- Very aware

**How much public opposition exists?**

- None
- A little opposition
- A moderate amount of opposition
- A great deal of opposition

**Venues of Advocacy**  
***(In the past 6 months)***

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Monthly or less</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Daily</i>
Agency officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legislative officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media (& Social Media)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grassroots	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coalitions/other orgs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which of these venues was most important to your efforts? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Coding Procedures**

- Sources of data: Original data from AIG interviews, Executive Orders, Presidential Memos, and March 2017 Trump Administration. Budget.
- Review of all Executive Orders and Presidential Memos issued as of 5/26/17.
- Review of 2018 Budget released by Trump administration in March 2017.
- Data drawn from whitehouse.gov website.
- Hand-coded signal type contained in the three sources for 493 issues from 2016-2017 US-AIG interviews
- Each issue coded three times for each source.

- Coded -1 (Negative Signal) if issue was mentioned signal or action was in the opposite direction of the interest group's position. For example, if a group support greater funding for something and the budget proposed a reduced budget, it received a -1 code.
- Coded 0 if the issue was not mentioned.
- Coded 1 if issue was mentioned and aligned with the interest group's preferred position.
- Executive Order and Presidential Memo variables then combined to form Executive Action (i.e., if the issue was mentioned in either an Executive Order, Presidential Memo, or both).
- Numerical totals can be found in the tables.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/politics/research/projects/details/index.php?id=497>

<sup>2</sup> The current paper considers only 65 of those cases; the others will be added in future revisions.

<sup>3</sup> While these formal signals, transmitted through official political institutions and executive powers, have been an important vehicle of executive power and signaling for past presidents, the extensive use of alternative mediums such as social media, renders the Trump administration somewhat unorthodox. For instance, Trump's tax reform proposal that included significant reductions in corporate tax rates was an important issue to many of the groups in our sample, yet the issue of corporate tax reduction is found nowhere in any of the documents we coded. Trump has lifted the issue via social media posts and a hastily released three page document that outlines the plan.