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Advocacy in Nonprofit Organizations: A Leadership Perspective

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Abstract: The influence of nonprofit leaders in organizational advocacy strategies and outcomes has not been fully explored in the literature, despite the recognition that political or policy entrepreneurs are crucial to the American policy process. These leaders are placed squarely in the political arena with other political elites, including elected officials, and this study uses a common agency framework to describe the ways in which leaders should be expected to leverage their own personal preferences in guiding their organization's behavior. Using data from a unique survey of nonprofit leaders in California, I measure the ways that a leader's personal values and characteristics – specifically their political ideology on a left-right spectrum – have an effect on the organization's advocacy efforts. Results indicate that political ideology is related to whether or not a leader identifies their group as one that engages in political or policy issues, and what types of tactics they use.

Keywords: nonprofit, advocacy, leadership, policy, strategy

Nonprofit organizations often engage in advocacy. One subset of nonprofit groups are those that are heavily engaged in policy processes to the near exclusion of other activities, sometimes called nonprofit advocacy organizations or social movement groups. Unfortunately, understanding the role of nonprofit advocacy organizations in the policymaking process, and more specifically, the role that leaders have in shaping organizational advocacy strategy and tactics is not well understood (Campbell 2005). The leaders of these groups, often called policy and political entrepreneurs, have been considered important to group formation and the success of various legislative and social movement campaigns (Chong 1991; Moe 1988; Kingdon 2003; Wilson 1995; Young 2011). Kingdon (2003), specifically, singles out policy entrepreneurs as instrumental to policy efforts.

Unfortunately, the existing literature has not attempted to peer inside nonprofit advocacy organizations and empirically study the effect of leadership on organizational behavior. This study seeks to fill that gap by knitting

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together the interest group and nonprofit literatures on organizations and advocacy. Developing a common agency framework (Bernheim and Whinston 1986), this study describes ways that the leaders of nonprofit organizations leverage their own preferences in shaping the advocacy activities of the group. An extension of agency theory (Jensen and Meckling 1976; Eisenhardt 1989), common agency can be characterized as a “multilateral relationship in which several principals simultaneously try to influence the actions of an agent” (Dixit, Grossman, and Helpman 1997, 25). Although Stakeholder Theory (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Freeman 1984) and common agency both recognize that organizations have multiple stakeholders, each of which has an interest in the organization’s activities, common agency alone recognizes that agents are not only concerned with their internal and external partners, but are also interested in maximizing their own self-interest. This environment should be a familiar one to nonprofit managers as they contend with a wide range of diverse stakeholders in managing the day-to-day operations of their organizations, including funders, policymakers, their board of directors, the media and members. Common agency therefore suggests that the ways in which organizations act has as much to do with the leader of these groups than internal or external factors.

This study places the leaders of nonprofit advocacy organizations – sometimes paid executives, sometimes volunteers – squarely in the political arena with other political actors, including elected officials, voters, and other interest groups. It also asks whether and how a leader’s personal characteristics, specifically their personally held political ideology, may influence group behavior. Using a unique survey of leaders in charge of nonprofit “social welfare” 501(c)(4) organizations in California, a measure of revealed political ideology is developed for both policymakers and nonprofit leaders, and is used to estimate the effect of leader ideology on the organization’s identification as one that engages in policy or political issues and the advocacy tactics selected by the group. Findings suggest that leadership does, in fact, matter, as there is evidence of a leader’s political ideology having an effect on their organization’s identity and outcomes.

Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations

Nonprofit advocacy organizations are defined as those organizations that are concerned about policy change as their primary mission. Sometimes called social movement or civic engagement organizations, they differ from other types of nonprofit organizations in “that they represent the collective interests

of the general public and underrepresented groups as opposed to the interests of well-organized powerful groups, especially business, mainstream social institutions, and the elite professions” (Jenkins 2006, 307). In this way, they play a crucial role in providing information and opportunities for political action to individuals (Andrews and Edwards 2004; Boris and Mosher-Williams 1998; Boris and Krehely 2002; Child and Grønbjerg 2007; Young 2011; Berry 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). However, like other “interest groups” they are also heavily engaged in the formation, passage and implementation of policy by providing costly information to policymakers about specific issues, voter support and public opinion (Ainsworth and Sened 1993). Sometimes, these groups endorse candidates for office and get involved in electoral campaigns on behalf of individual candidates or ballot measures. They also provide information to their members about key policy issues and their implications, and assist in mobilizing public participation (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Young 2011; Berry 1993).

Many nonprofit organizations that are heavily engaged in advocacy seek a 501(c)(4) IRS determination – the sample universe for this study. The distinction of a 501(c)(4) determination allows organizations to use unlimited resources in advocacy, unlike charitable organizations which can only lobby as long as they do not use a “substantial” proportion of their operating budget. Recently, this category of nonprofit organizations have been at the center of the debate on the *Citizens United* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, which allows 501(c)(4) organizations to make unlimited contributions to SuperPACs engaged in electoral campaigns (Aronsen 2012) – arguably increasing their presence in electoral and policy matters. These groups have also recently been the focus of the recent Congressional inquiry into favoritism and punitive actions by the IRS in delaying tax-exempt status to many of these groups if they self-identified as conservative (Bade 2014). The other primary distinction between 501(c)(4) organizations and the rest of the nonprofit sector is that contributions to them are not tax deductible by donors. They are also much less likely to be eligible for grants from private foundations, or government contracts. This significantly increases their dependence on individual donations of time and money to support their operations, including their advocacy.

The determinants of advocacy in nonprofit organizations has been previously studied by evaluating both the internal capacity and structure, or the external environment of the organization, although these studies generally apply to organizations that engage in other activities as well – such as service provision – over groups that identify with a core advocacy mission. Thus far the results have been mixed. Smith and Pekkanen (2012) find that nonprofits are more likely to participate in advocacy if they receive government funding, which disputes Child and Grønbjerg’s (2007) finding which suggests that government

funding may be a constraint to advocacy. They are also more likely to engage in advocacy if they have mission statements that are consistent with advocacy, and have adequate resources and capacity. Guo and Saxton (2010) find that advocacy is more likely if an organization's board of directors consists of served constituents, particularly if those members are involved in the organization's strategic planning. Suarez and Hwang (2008) suggest that when organizations define themselves as "mission-driven" organizations, they are more likely to engage in advocacy. Nicholson-Crotty (2011) finds that organizations may select an advocacy forum that is appropriate based on the political environment in which the organization resides. That is, organizations will tend to choose bureaucratic advocacy (over legislative advocacy) when they lack the necessary allies in the legislature.

However, the leaders of these groups are often overlooked. This is surprising since nonprofit leaders – particularly those leaders who run organizations that are engaged in advocacy – have long been considered a linchpin of political action, civic engagement and public participation in American policymaking processes. Yet, the literature on social movement organizations, or interest groups more generally, only briefly touches on the role of the leaders that run these groups – which are usually defined as political or policy entrepreneurs (Moe 1988; Kingdon 2003; Anheier, Ben-Ner, and Young 2003; Mintrom and Norman 2009). Some have considered how leaders direct their organizations through a collective action lens, focusing on the incentives they can offer potential members (Olson 1965; Chong 1991; Moe 1988; Salisbury 1969; Clark and Wilson 1961). For example, leaders are considered important for mobilizing an organization's resources for action (Moe 1988; Mintrom and Norman 2009) and recruiting and retaining supporters (Chong 1991; Moe 1988; Clark and Wilson 1961; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). However, to date there has been few attempts to empirically measure the influence of leaders in guiding the advocacy choices of nonprofit organizations. This is despite that fact that "one can nearly always pinpoint a particular person, or at most a few persons, who were central in moving a [policy] subject up on the agenda and into position for enactment" (Kingdon 2003, 180). In the 23 cases studied by Kingdon (2003), only three had an entrepreneur deemed "unimportant" to a policy's debate or passage – suggesting that these individuals alone have a very unique and important role to play in public policy.

Common Agency and Nonprofit Leaders

How does a nonprofit leader make choices guiding the organization's behavior? What incentives does he or she have to make decisions leading a group in one

direction, over another direction? Kingdon (2003, 123) states that the “defining characteristic” of policy entrepreneurs is “their willingness to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in the hope of future return”, which might be to see that the policies they support are successful, satisfaction from their work, job security or promotion through increased credibility and legitimacy.

A *common agency* framework is developed to answer this question. While agency theory (Eisenhardt 1989; Jensen and Meckling 1976) generally seeks to explain the relationship between two actors, a principal and their agent, in any given contractual arrangement, a common agency framework (Bernheim and Whinston 1986) models the relationship between multiple principals (which can be seen as an organization’s multiple stakeholders), each trying to control a single agent (their “common agent”). For nonprofit organizations engaged in advocacy, the leader (whether that’s paid executive director, or a volunteer board president) should be considered the agent, while the organization’s various stakeholders are the principals – including donors, volunteers, board members, and policymakers. Each principal is assumed to have their own expectations for organizational outcomes and creates its own “contract” with their agent. This contract can either be informal and implicit, such as offering political support, or explicit, such as an employment contract between the board and an executive. What differentiates a traditional principal-agent problem with a common agency framework is that the principals are uncoordinated in their efforts to manage their common agent, and may often be in conflict, leaving the agent to manage the diverse demands of his or her various principals. This study argues that, all things equal, when managing the demands of interested parties, the leader’s personal preferences will greatly influence the decisions made in the organization (Gailmard 2009; Bertelli and Grose 2009). Thus, as a nonprofit leader seeks to manage the demands of the organization’s stakeholders, if their personal preferences are included, it stands to reason that they will prefer some groups over others in their decision-making process. The incentives to maximize their own self-interest exist in everything a leader does.

How leaders leverage these personal preferences may be either subtle or explicit. For example, their preferences may lead them to elevate the role of some stakeholders over others, or help decide which advocacy tactics they use. For example, the executive director of a nonprofit organization may opt to listen more seriously to the board of directors than donors in deciding whether to engage in advocacy, or which advocacy tactics to use. And in order to prevent a loss of utility, a leader will choose options that are more closely aligned with their own personal preferences – including political ideology – than those that

are too distant from their own values and beliefs. In this way, then, a leader's personally held values and beliefs will have outcomes for organizational behavior, and in the context of advocacy groups, their influence over public policy formation, passage and implementation.

Common agency can be seen as consistent with, and building on, the theoretical approaches used in Stakeholder Theory (Freeman 1984; Donaldson and Preston 1995; Krashinsky 1997; LeRoux 2009), which argues that, in dealing with a set of stakeholders, managers must develop tools to manage these relationships, and must choose between the demands of their various stakeholders in making decisions on behalf of their organizations. However, common agency adds to this approach, by arguing that leaders' own preferences have an influence in organizational outcomes than theory would otherwise suggest. Indeed, Rose-Ackerman (1987) proposes (in the context of charitable nonprofit organizations, not advocacy groups *per se*) that the preferences of the executive would affect not only the services offered by the group, but the organization's relationship with various other stakeholders to the group. She argues that as funding from government grants increases, the leader will feel less accountable to individual supporters, and will engage less in interactions with those that aren't aligned them. Since nonprofit leaders have a very large and dynamic set of stakeholders that they must pay close attention to, the groups that the leader will feel accountable to are as much shaped by the leader's own values and preferences (including political ideology), as anything else.

Considering the large number of stakeholders nonprofit organizations have (see, for example, Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991; Puyvelde et al. 2012; Abzug and Webb 1999), and the diffused lines of ownership and control (Fama and Jensen 1983; Ostrower and Stone 2006; Oster 1995; Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen 1991), it's surprising the common agency framework has rarely been used in this context. Romano (2013) does apply the common agency framework to the nonprofit sector, but identifies the board of directors as the agent. Prakash and Gugerty (2011) also study the effect of multiple principals, but they, too, use the collective organization of both board and staff as the unit of analysis.

Political Ideology, Advocacy and Policy

In a policymaking context, it can be assumed that political ideology is a crucial determinant in the strategic policy choices of any organization. Since the common agency framework suggests a leader's personal preferences will have

implications for organizational behavior, this study explores the effect of a leader's *revealed political ideology* on the decision-making of the organization (the primary unit of analysis) – specifically as it pertains to the organization's advocacy efforts. Jost, Federico and Napier (Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009, 309) define political ideology as a latent construct that "... helps to interpret the social world ... Specific ideologies crystallize and communicate the widely (but not unanimously) shared beliefs, opinions, and values of an identifiable group, class constituency or society." Lane (1962, 11) argues that political ideology is formed by "the nature of life in a society, by the generalizations made from everyday experience, by the cultural premises, the widely shared personal qualities of the population, and by society's current and historic social conflicts." Jost et al. (2003a, 2003b) have argued that those on the liberal end of the political spectrum tend to embrace social change and reject inequality, while conservatives tend to be more attuned to protecting the status quo and even be accepting of inequality. The normative view of partisan, left-right, politics also embraces the assumption that liberal and conservative decision-makers prefer very different policies from each other – a view that is supported empirically by the literature (Krehbiel 1996; Cox and McCubbins 1986; Levitt and Snyder 1995; Shor, Berry, and McCarty 2010). Liberal-conservative partisan behavior by voters, too, has been consistently demonstrated through empirical research (Pildes 2011; Bartels 2000).

Recognizing the implications on both organizational behavior and public policy, scholars have sought to uncover the ways in which individual political ideology can affect organizational and policy outcomes. Looking to bureaucratic agencies, Bertelli and Grose (2009) found that the political ideology of agencies and their executives does have an effect on the distribution of grants from their agencies to constituents. In the for-profit sector, a leader's personal characteristics, including political ideology, have also been found to have broad implications for an organization's strategic behavior. Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella (1996, 3) argue that "the small group of people at the top of an organization can dramatically affect organizational outcomes. Executives make big and small decisions. They shape the frameworks by which their organizations hire, mobilize, and inspire others to make decisions." Executive characteristics, including a leader's experiences, personalities, values or beliefs, can act as motives and filters shaping the decision making of management (Hambrick and Mason 1984; Hambrick 2007; Hemingway 2005). For example, narcissistic CEOs have been found to embrace more aggressive, risky projects (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007), and politically liberal CEOs are more likely to participate in corporate social responsibility efforts than conservative CEO's (Chin, Hambrick, and Treviño 2013).

In addition, previous literature on interest groups has found that an *organization's* ideology –measured by the organization's stated positions on various issues (such as website statements or voter "scorecards") – is a determinant of organization behavior. For example, McKay (2010) found that nonprofit organizations that are more ideologically extreme are more likely to make campaign contributions than lobby, while those more closely aligned with Congress ideologically had higher lobbying expenditures. On the other hand, using data on campaign contributions, Bonica (2013) argues that Political Action Committees (nonprofit organizations, themselves, with a mission to focus on electoral activities) tend to be ideologically more moderate, and centered between the political parties. This finding contradicts earlier work by Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 2007), which argued that interest groups tend to be on the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum, forcing politicians to therefore be more extreme themselves in order to receive support from these groups. Since nonprofit leaders can be seen as the decision makers inside their organizations, it's useful to consider the ways in which their own revealed political ideology may have important implications for organizational behavior in advocacy efforts.

Hypotheses

Although the literature strongly suggests a relationship between the revealed political ideology of political elites and organizational behavior, there has been less work done to determine the expected direction of that relationship. Thus, two hypotheses are:

H1: The political ideology of leaders in nonprofit advocacy organizations will have an effect on whether or not the organization engages in political or policy issues.

H2: The political ideology of leaders in nonprofit advocacy organizations will have an effect on the types of advocacy tactics chosen by the organization.

Data and Methods

This study surveyed leaders of nonprofit 501(c)(4) organizations across the state of California. With its 38 million residents (as of 2013), California is extremely diverse – both ethnically and politically. It also tends to be at the forefront of public policy making, and has a history of being a leader in policy innovation – including tax reform, government reform (such as term limits),

and environmental protections, just to name a few (van Vechten 2014). It is also controlled by a strong majority of Democrats, who during the time of this study, controlled both houses of the legislature and the Governor's office. Following the 2012 elections, Democrats held a super-majority in the state Senate, with the state Assembly not too far behind. Despite strong Democratic control of state government, politics in California policymaking has become ever more polarized, with few Republican members of either house willing to cross the aisle to vote with Democrats – particularly to obtain the necessary 2/3 majority to override a gubernatorial veto, pass the annual budget (until 2010) (Marois 2010) or pass tax increases (Masket 2007).

With its history of policy innovation, dynamic and challenging politics, and diverse communities (in 2014, Latino voters became the largest single ethnic group in the state with 39% of the population (Gutierrez 2014)), California itself offers a unique laboratory for a study of advocacy and the impact of nonprofit organizations on the policymaking process. Indeed, with stakes so high, it's not uncommon for national organizations to get involved to a significant degree in statewide efforts, including both corporate and social movement organizations. For example, over a five year period, from 2009–2014, the oil industry spent \$63 million in their lobbying efforts in California, or \$1 million a month (Bacher 2014). On the other side of the political spectrum, in 2014, organized labor groups weren't far behind the oil industry, spending \$7.7 million lobbying in Sacramento, the state's capital (Raden 2015).

In 2013, the National Center for Charitable Statistics provided a list of 501(c)(4) organizations across the state of California, totaling 3,138 organizations. Nearly a third of the registered organizations (924) were chapters of either Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs. Considering that these groups have a mostly social and service mission (not advocacy), and not the focus of this study, they were removed from the sample. In addition, groups that had “festival” or “parade” in their name were removed (24 organizations). Mail addresses that were not able to be validated by a professional mail shop were also removed, leaving a final sample size of 1,829. Groups then received a postcard in the mail inviting the executive director or any other person acting in that capacity (President, Board Chair, etc.), to complete an online survey. Organization phone numbers and email addresses were obtained either through a data shop, or manually by reviewing their most recent Form 990 or website. Following several rounds of phone calls and emails to organizations over a six month period, an additional 27 groups were determined to be defunct, 54 were considered to be no longer active by the IRS and an additional number were removed from the sample due to a language barrier (primarily Chinese benevolent associations), resulting in a final sampling frame of 1753.

Ultimately, 259 surveys by eligible respondents were completed, for a 14.8% response rate. Although lower than the recognized “gold standard” of 50% response rate to help support generalizability, the response rate is not inconsistent with other recent efforts. For example, Gazely (2013) saw a 14% response rate in a national survey of association volunteers. It has also been documented that the sensitive nature of survey questions can reduce response rate (Groves et al. 2004). Indeed, many of the questions at the start of the survey (when their ideological preferences and individual characteristics were identified), may have discouraged many respondents to complete the survey. This was supported by anecdotal evidence received during phone calls and email correspondence with potential respondents; several leaders opted not to participate in the survey because the questions were too political and made them feel otherwise uncomfortable. Respondents were also able to move back and forth on the screens, allowing them to preview questions and decide whether or not they wanted to proceed with the survey. Other leaders perceived the questions to be irrelevant based on their organization’s mission and activities. Finally, despite every effort to ease fears regarding confidentiality of the survey results, one group leader was quite suspicious on the phone and claimed that the results would be used for partisan purposes, while another verbally declined an invitation to participate because of perceived IRS scrutiny of “conservative” groups.¹ These limitations in obtaining survey responses should be considered when evaluating the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, respondents were more likely to be male (58%) than female (41%), which is not consistent with previous findings on the gender distribution of leadership in the nonprofit sector, which tends to be majority female. Respondents were also highly educated, with 21% reporting a four-year college degree, 13% reporting some graduate education and 44% reporting having received a graduate or professional degree. The mean tenure in their positions was 6.43 years, with 12 years average time with their organization. The full descriptive statistics of both respondents and their organizations can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

¹ Since selection bias was likely, a selection analysis was conducted to determine how representative the respondents were of the larger sample. Results suggest that the organization’s represented by the respondents were roughly equivalent to the overall sample, although groups that reside in urban areas were more likely to respond than ones in rural areas. A descriptive analysis of the respondents determined that some categories of organizations (i.e. religious groups) did not respond at the same level as they were represented in the overall sample. However, a group’s issue field (or NTEE code), as determined by the IRS, was not found to be a statistically significant determinant of responding to the survey. Also, women were more likely to choose to remain anonymous than men.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of respondents.

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	
Gender				
Male	130	57.52	58	
Female	93	41.15	99	
Decline to state	3	1.33	100	
Education				
Less than High School	1	0.44	0	
High School Graduate	4	1.77	2	
Some College	28	12.39	15	
Two year college (AA)	16	7.08	22	
Four year college	48	21.24	43	
Some graduate or professional school	30	13.27	56	
Graduate or professional degree	99	43.81	100	
Tenure at Organization	Mean	St. Dev	Min	Max
With organization	12.09	10.19	0	51
In Job	6.42	7.65	0	40

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of organizations.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Full Sample					
Revenue	1,557	4,319,930	115,000,000	−163,662	4,500,000,000
Assets	1,557	5,333,330	71,700,000	−21,654	2,200,000,000
Organization Age	1,546	29	18	2	88
Responding Groups					
Revenue	203	577,392	2,276,729	−12,087	28,000,000
Assets	196	6,482,153	52,600,000	0	700,000,000
Organization Age	194	28.706	18.517	2	79

Dependent Variable

This study evaluates the relationship between a leader’s revealed political ideology and the organization’s engagement in advocacy, and on the choice of advocacy activities. The first dependent variable for this study is whether or not the leader responded that their organization engaged in policy efforts by

answering “yes” on the survey question “Does your organization promote certain positions on policy or political issues?” According to the respondents, 40% of the organizations engaged with policy or political issues, while 60% did not. It’s important to note, however, that this is a self-reported answer, and may be affected by the way that the respondent interpreted the meaning of the question. The question may have also caused discomfort with those who hesitate to consider their organization as overtly political – based on either partisan concerns, or the possibility of political retribution. However, although a majority of the respondents answered “no” to this question, most organizations did still engage in different types of advocacy tactics. For example, an additional 26 of the “non-policy” organizations answered that they testified before agencies occasionally.

The second dependent variable is whether or not the organization uses “inside” or “outside” lobbying tactics, adapted from Kollman’s (1998) typology of 25 advocacy activities. Kollman’s (1998) categorization suggests that advocacy tactics fall into three categories, “inside”, “outside” and “organizational maintenance” activities. This study makes use of only the “inside” and “outside” advocacy measures. As he writes, groups can “try through inside lobbying to convince policymakers that voters care about an issue ... or [through outside lobbying make a] costly, public demonstration that, one, the issue is in fact salient to voters and, two, the interest group can make the issue even more salient” (Kollman 1998, 9). Inside efforts are considered to be those supporting face-to-face lobbying efforts, such as having a paid lobbyist, a staff lobbyist, or testifying before Congress. Outside lobbying includes many different types of grassroots activities, including petition drives, boycotts, media campaigns or direct action (rallies, or “sit-ins”). A few of Kollman’s tactics were removed due to being dated (use of fax machines, for example), and a few were added, including the use of social media. Thus respondents were asked if they “regularly” “occasionally” or “never” use 31 distinct advocacy tactics, from gathering petitions, to hiring a lobbyist, to testifying before legislative committees, to organizing rallies or press conferences.

To measure inside and outside advocacy tactics, an index value was created for each. The index value for organization was developed using polychoric component analysis (Kolenikov and Angeles 2004), similar to factor analysis, which has been found to provide robust estimation results when there are moderate levels of non-normality in the underlying response variables (Flora and Curran 2004). The mean value of inside lobbying (with 11 items) was -1.85 , with a range of -3.07 to 2.96 (st. dev. 1.30). Outside lobbying tactics (15 items) had a mean value of -2.24 , with a range of -3.33 to 3.59 (1.33). A reliability test was also conducted to determine the Cronbach alpha score for each category.

The inside lobbying index was correlated with a reliability values of 0.88, while outside lobbying had a reliability score of 0.917. This suggests that each category, or component, “hangs together” well as separate constructs.²

Independent Variables

The primary explanatory variable is the leader’s revealed political ideology, developed through Item Response Theory (IRT). IRT provides a value for a leader’s ideology, or ideal point, on a unidimensional scale from left (liberal) to right (conservative). Unlike factor analysis, IRT does not require that each item used contribute equally to the final estimate of ideology. IRT also allows for a nearly infinite number of discreet points along the ideological spectrum from left to right, allowing us to uncover much more subtle differences between members than the three or seven-point ideological scale commonly used in surveys. In studying politics and policy, a single dimension of ideology is often used as it allows political elites (including our nonprofit leaders) to simplify their message, coordinate the information costs associated with political activities with their stakeholders, and helps to differentiate competing political interests (Jost et al. 2009).

In addition, this estimation technique has been used by scholars to measure the political ideology of members of Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 2007; Bertelli and Grose 2006; Clinton et al. 2012), state legislatures (Shor, Berry, and McCarty 2010; Shor and McCarty 2011), local city council members (Connolly and Mason n.d.), bureaucratic agents (Bertelli and Grose 2009), and voters (Bafumi and Herron 2010). This technique has also been used to estimate the ideology of organizations, both public agencies (Bertelli and Grose 2009) and nonprofit organizations (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 2007; McKay 2008, 2010; Bonica 2013).

A leader’s ideology was estimated by asking nonprofit leaders a set of survey questions related to roll call votes taken on the floor of both houses in the California legislature.³ Using a Bayesian framework developed by Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers (2004), it is possible to develop an ideal point estimate for each individual, comparing them directly to members of the state legislature. Roll call data was selected from votes on the floor of both houses of the California legislature in 2012, and eleven key votes were selected based on their salience to legislators, as well as the general public, and those that

² An index for organizational maintenance was also created and validated along with inside and outside lobbying, but it was not relevant for the posed research questions.

³ More on the technique used to measure political ideology can be seen in Mason (2014).

would clearly distinguish (or discriminate) a liberal voter from a conservative voter. For example, roll call votes on high-speed rail funding, same-day voter registration, extending welfare benefits to pregnant teenagers, and extending the Coastal Commission's authority in climate change mitigation projects were included. The survey question, including the corresponding bill number, can be seen in Appendix 1. While all eleven bills might not seem to be either "liberal" or "conservative" legislation based on its description, each of these bills strongly discriminated among liberals and conservative voters in both houses of the legislature.

Each bill was voted on in both chambers, and the vote on the third (substantive) reading in each chamber was used. Using a scale of -1 (most liberal) to 1 (most conservative), the models were constrained using two Democrats (one in the Senate and Assembly, set at -1) and two Republicans (at 1). Ideal points for each member of the legislature were thus estimated with MCMCPack using R statistical software package (Martin and Quinn 2002). The mean value for the California Senate is -0.207 while the median is -0.94 , and for the Assembly is -0.167 and -1.04 , respectively, indicating a strong left (liberal) pull in both chambers – consistent with the fact that both chambers have strong Democratic majorities in control.

To determine the ideal point for each nonprofit leader, their answers to the 11 survey questions corresponding to the legislative votes were appended to the officials' roll call votes. In this way, survey responses are treated as "yea" or "nay" votes on the floor of the legislature. By overlaying the survey responses from leaders with the roll call votes for legislators, it provides a bridge between legislator and leader ideology, allowing for a direct comparison of nonprofit leaders with the policymakers they are ostensibly trying to influence. Results indicate that the mean ideology value for nonprofit leaders is 0.12 , and the median is 0.11 ($SD = 0.60$). Respondents had a unimodal distribution, unlike the polarized and bimodal nature of the California legislature, where distinctions between party members can be clearly identified. In other words, compared with members of the California legislature, the leaders of nonprofit organizations are much more moderate and normally distributed. This can be seen graphically in Figure 1, where the distribution of the California legislature and the leaders can be seen, including the plot points of a few of the responding groups by their issue area. This is surprising. For one, the normative view of interest groups suggest that these organizations are more extreme than policymakers, and that they have the effect of persuading or pressuring elected officials to take policy positions more extreme than they otherwise would. This view of interest groups' influence on public policy was supported by findings from Poole and Rosenthal (1997; 2007) based on organizational scorecards, but

Figure 1: The distribution of the ideology of California Senate and Assembly members compared to nonprofit leaders. A few leaders of responding nonprofit organizations, by the organization's primary issue field, are identified on the graph, as well.

has been recently contradicted by (Bonica 2013) who found that the ideology of Political Action Committees (PACs) is also unimodal rather than polarized and bimodal like elected officials, and indicates that some groups (at least) attempt to straddle the center in an ideological arena.

To control for the mission of the organization and organizational capacity, which have been found to be determinants of advocacy, additional control variables were included. First, the general mission of each organization by broad issue field was included, determined by the NTEE code (assigned by the IRS based on the organization's stated mission and activities, and obtained from the NCCS data). Suárez (2009), for example, finds that environmental and rights groups were more likely to discuss advocacy on their websites than other types of nonprofit organizations. The organization's age as reported by NCCS was also included. The effect of organization age as a determinant of advocacy has been mixed. While Salamon (1995) found a nonlinear relationship with age and advocacy, with older groups engaging in more advocacy, others including Donaldson (2007) or Child and Grønberg (2007) found no relationship between age and advocacy. An organization's capacity has also been a determinant of advocacy, with a positive relationship between capacity measures and advocacy (Berry and Arons 2005; Donaldson 2007; Child and Grønberg 2007; Vita and Mosher-Williams 2001; Suárez 2009). U.S. Census data allowed to consider whether the organization was based in a rural or urban community (a dummy variable with urban = 1). Previous research has suggested that nonprofits in

rural communities may struggle to find adequate resources (and the resulting capacity) compared to their urban counterparts (Besel, Williams, and Klak 2011), suggesting a positive relationship between being located in an urban community and advocacy. In addition, the natural log of the organization's gross revenues and assets in the last year reported (from Form 990 data) were also included, which has been found to have a positive relationship with advocacy (Donaldson 2007; McCarthy and Castelli 1996; Suárez 2009). The natural log of the population in the organization's home city was also included, as similar to the urban and rural distinction, population may affect the resources available to an organization, and thus is also expected to have a positive relationship. Professionalization as a determinant of advocacy has also had mixed results. Nicholson-Crotty (2007) finds a relationship between professionalization and an intent to engage in advocacy, while Leroux and Goerdel (2009) find no relationship. Regardless of expected relationship with advocacy, additional leadership characteristics were obtained through responses to the survey, including the leader's tenure in their position, whether or not their position was a paid position (also a dummy variable, where paid = 1 and volunteer = 0), along with their educational attainment (measured on a seven point scale from "less than a high school graduate" to "graduate or professional degree (MBA, MPA, PhD)").

Results

The probability of engaging policy or political issues was estimated using a probit model (model 1) for the whole sample, and then clustered on issue field (model 2) to adjust for standard errors and provides robust results.⁴ Probit models were also selected over logistic regression due to more conservative standard errors and better fit. In models 1 and 2, the dependent variable was a binary response based on how the respondent answered the question "Does your organization promote certain positions on policy or political issues?" (yes = 1). Results can be seen in Table 3. Importantly, the executive's ideology is significant in both models, with the clustered specification significant at the

⁴ Due to missing data for some variables on some surveys, and the model specifications chosen, the sample size for the various analyses undertaken ranged from 123 to 259. Thus, there is the potential for nonresponse bias to affect the final results. This should be taken into consideration when evaluating the generalizability of the findings.

Table 3: Probability of engaging in political or policy issues, probit models.

	(1)	(2)
	Clustered by Issue Field	
DV: Advocacy = 1		
Ideology	−0.372* (0.202)	−0.368*** (0.139)
Revenue (ln)	0.083 (0.127)	0.090 (0.166)
Assets (ln)	−0.112 (0.070)	−0.119* (0.071)
Issue Field	0.023 (0.019)	
Organization Age	0.000 (0.006)	0.000 (0.009)
Paid Executive	−0.196* (0.104)	−0.188 (0.125)
Tenure in Position	−0.019 (0.018)	−0.019** (0.009)
Educational Attainment	−0.010 (0.076)	0.009 (0.075)
Urban = 1	−0.011 (0.303)	0.015 (0.345)
Population (ln)	0.141** (0.066)	0.144*** (0.054)
Distance from Sacramento (ln)	−0.064 (0.095)	−0.054 (0.115)
Constant	−0.859 (1.692)	−0.771 (2.176)
LL	−84.583	−85.514
N	144	144
AIC	192.480	191.980
BIC	227.950	224.494
Pseudo R-Squared	0.107	0.099
Percent Correctly Predicted	69.72	69.72

White (1982) standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

0.01 level, showing a negative relationship with the probability of engaging in policy or political issues. In other words, as an executive moves to the right on the scale, or is more conservative, the less likely they are is to identify the organization as one that engages in policy or political issues. This can also be

Figure 2: Predicted Probability Engaging in Policy or Political Issues by Executive Ideology, Shaded area represents 95% confidence interval.

seen graphically in Figure 2 (with the shaded area representing 95% confidence intervals) with the predicted probabilities of identifying their organization as one that engages in policy or political issues.

This finding provides evidence in support of the common agency framework, and Hypothesis 1 is supported. As leaders become more conservative they are less likely to self-report that they engage in policy or political issues, but perhaps not surprising considering the makeup of the California legislature. As discussed earlier, both houses of the California legislature are held by strong majorities of Democrats. It's possible that more conservative leaders simply do not choose to work for organizations that engage in political or policy issues because of the diminished chances of seeing any positive legislative outcomes (and therefore, experience a loss of utility). They might also be guiding their organization in ways that they don't consider overtly political. It should also be considered that more conservative members may not be comfortable perceiving their organizations as engaging in political or policy issues because they want to avoid additional scrutiny by internal or external stakeholders. While this research design doesn't allow a test of these alternative explanations, it does provide additional opportunities for future research on leaders and advocacy in the nonprofit context.

In addition, tenure in position is negatively related to engaging in advocacy in the clustered specification at the 0.05 level of significance. Being a paid executive (rather than a volunteer) was also significant and negative at

the 0.10 level (in model 1). There was no relationship between educational attainment and policy or political issues. These findings further support the mixed results previously found in other studies on professionalization. Among the capacity measures, an organization's assets were significant at the 0.10 level, but only in the clustered specification (model 2), while the population of their home city was significant in both specifications ($p < 0.05$ for model 1 and $p < 0.01$ for model 2), suggesting some, but not definitive, support for the argument that capacity is a determinant of advocacy. Whether the organization was located in an urban or rural community was not a significant determinant.

In addition, it is possible to measure the effect of leader ideology on whether or not the organization uses “inside” or “outside” advocacy tactics, as suggested by Kollman (1998). Using index scores for inside and outside lobbying, the relationship between a leader's ideology and using inside or outside tactics was estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS). The results can be found in Table 4, which shows that the ideology of leaders is significant, and positive, for use of both inside and outside lobbying techniques. In other words, the more conservative the leader is, the more likely the organization is to use both types of advocacy tactics. This finding also supports Hypothesis 2, but the direction of the relationship is an interesting finding. Since Democrats have strong control over both houses of the legislature, the findings seem to suggest that the more to the right of the Democratic majority a leader is the more likely the organization was to engage in all forms of advocacy. Kollman (1998) finds that both liberal and conservative groups were more likely to use insider and outsider tactics at different stages of the policy process, with both groups jumping “into the fray” at the crucial third stage of the policy process, which he defines as the debating and voting stage (the same state utilized in this study). It's also possible that as leaders become more conservative, or more extreme, compared to legislators, they bring additional tools into their advocacy toolbox. As they step up pressure on elected officials they seek to both grow the political support for their cause (through outsider tactics) and letting representatives know their position (through insider tactics). Conservative leaders may find it necessary to increase these activities more than, say, liberal leaders who may have closer relationships and more access with legislators more aligned with their own personal political ideology. More research should be done in this regard to consider different political environments, such as liberal leaders leading organizations in communities or states with conservative legislature. It would also be interesting to evaluate the ways in which other personal beliefs and values (not just political ideology) may affect the choice of to untangle the effect of individual

Table 4: Regression coefficients for inside and outside lobbying (ordinary least squares).

DV: Inside or Outside Tactics Index	Inside	Outside
	(1)	(2)
Ideology	0.316*** (0.109)	0.314** (0.116)
Engages in Policy/Political Issues	1.813*** (0.177)	1.816*** (0.180)
Revenue (ln)	-0.186* (0.105)	-0.095 (0.143)
Assets (ln)	0.125*** (0.038)	0.025 (0.057)
Organization Age	0.001 (0.004)	-0.010 (0.007)
Paid Executive	-0.139 (0.118)	-0.090 (0.164)
Tenure in Position	0.026* (0.013)	0.021* (0.012)
Educational Attainment	0.009 (0.045)	-0.018 (0.042)
Urban = 1	0.338** (0.158)	0.161 (0.237)
Population (ln)	0.104* (0.052)	0.124** (0.049)
Distance from Sacramento (ln)	0.011 (0.091)	0.046 (0.080)
Constant	-3.209** (1.280)	-3.412** (1.488)
LL	-149.860	-162.442
N	123	123
AIC	323.721	348.884
BIC	357.467	382.630
R-Squared	0.60	0.545

White (1982) standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

leader characteristics on the selection of advocacy tactics the organization uses in supporting their advocacy efforts.

Among other variables, whether or not the leader identified their organization as one that engages in advocacy was positively related to their use of both inside and outside tactics at the 0.01 level. Among the capacity measures, assets

were significant at the 0.01 level for inside activities. Some of these activities require the presence of additional assets, such as hiring a lobbyist, so this finding is not surprising. Revenue, however, was negatively related with inside tactics at the 0.10 level for inside tactics, and population was significant and positive at the 0.10 level for both inside and outside tactics. Being located in an urban community was significant for inside lobbying at the 0.10 level. This provides more support for the suggestion that capacity is related to insider tactics. For professionalization, tenure was significant and positive for both outside and inside lobbying at the 0.10 level. However, neither being a paid director or educational attainment was significant, again providing mixed results of the impact of professionalization on organization behavior.

These findings provide strong evidence of the effect of a leader's political ideology on organizational behavior. Identifying as working for an organization that engages in policy or political issues was seen to be significant, as well as the choice of tactics that the organization selects. Interestingly, while there is some limited evidence to support organizational capacity as a determinant of advocacy, there is mixed evidence here to that affect. Professionalization, too, shows some suggestive, but inconclusive results.

Conclusion

This study provides one of the first attempts to measure the influence of the leaders of nonprofit advocacy organizations inside their organizations, and study the ways in which their personal preferences may have implications for the organization's strategies and tactics. It was argued that the political ideology of nonprofit leaders are important to organizational behavior when it pertains to advocacy. Framed with a common agency approach, nonprofit leaders can be seen as bringing their preferences to bear in making decisions on behalf of their organizations, something that was seen in the findings from an empirical test of nonprofit leaders in California.

However, this study is not without its limitations. For one, the low response rate and possibility of selection and response bias, may limit the generalizability of the study. Particularly, the distaste by respondents in answering political questions may have systematically encouraged some groups of individuals to answer more than others. While a selection analysis was conducted to evaluate potential selection bias, these results should be read with caution. Second, like all studies that take place at one point in time (2013) in one place (California), there may be unique characteristics of that time or place which may not be

relevant elsewhere. Replication of this study by using a cross-state sample, or surveying groups engaged at the national level, would be an opportunity for future research. For example, studying nonprofit organizations (of all types), their leaders and the choices they make in varying political environments would be one possible next step. So, too, would be studying the board-executive relationship in more detail, and see how that relationship may mediate organizational behavior from a common agency perspective.

Ultimately, this study suggests that much more can, and should, be done to study the role of leaders inside their organizations. As those individuals who oversee the day-to-day operations of their organization, who marshal the resources of the group, and guide internal and external decision-making, the way they see their job and how they leverage their own preferences can have broad implications for public policy. Whether they consider themselves policy entrepreneurs, or are just volunteers heading up a small group, their influence over their organization, and thus the organization's role in policy formulation or implementation can't be understated and calls for further scholarship. While this study provides some initial evidence that leadership matters to organizational behavior, additional studies can, and should, be conducted to see whether and how leaders of nonprofit advocacy organizations help their groups meet their policy objectives.

Appendix A: Survey Question and Corresponding Legislation

Survey Question: "If you were a legislator, would you have supported the following measures?....." (Answer choices Yes/No)

- Authorize same-day voter registration in California. (AB 1436)
- Approve funds to begin construction of high-speed rail in California. (SB 1029)
- Authorize the state to transfer money from internal accounts to the general fund of the Treasury. (SB 95)
- Expand cash assistance programs for pregnant teenagers through CalWorks program. (AB 1640)
- Expand the authority of the State Coastal Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within its jurisdiction, giving priority to projects that maximize public benefits. (SB 1066)
- Extend existing fees on smog inspections and sales of vehicle tires that fund alternative fuel and air quality programs until 2023, and extend grants to

owners of polluting trucks, buses and heavy equipment to help replace or retrofit those vehicles. (SB 1455)

- Require that injured workers are provided information on next step options if their claims are modified, delayed or denied, and authorize the Worker's Compensation Appeals Board to award reasonable attorney's fees to workers that have future medical treatment that will require legal services. (AB 1687)
- Increase disclosures to students by private post-secondary schools, including the salaries and wages of graduates, the most recent official 3-year cohort default rate for federal student loans, and whether a program is accredited. (AB 2296)
- Prohibit mental health providers from engaging in sexual orientation change efforts with patients under 18 years of age. (SB 1172)
- Request a Constitutional Amendment by Congress to overturn *Citizens United*, which allows unrestricted independent campaign expenditures from corporations, labor unions and individuals. (AJR 22)
- Establish a state-run Retirement Savings Trust, which requires employers to offer a payroll deposit retirement savings arrangement, and requires employees to participate unless they opt out of the program. (SB 1234)

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Note: Bill numbers (i.e. SB 95) were not seen by respondents. All bill numbers were from the 2012 California legislative session, and passed in both houses. The wording of the survey questions was identical to, or closely approximated, the legislative language. Roll call votes were rotated for survey respondents to mitigate order bias (Schuman and Presser 1996).

Please contact the author if you are interested in Appendix 1.