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Nonprofit Advocacy in the Era of Trump

Abstract: The election of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential race was said to result in an unprecedented surge in public support for nonprofit advocacy organizations. Given the cyclical nature of public attention to hard-to-solve social problems and the challenges associated with free-riding in collective action, a question arises as to the extent to which such elevated public support sustains itself over time. The purpose of this study is to examine whether local nonprofit advocacy groups experienced a post-election boost for public support and to what extent the increase, if any, sustained itself 18 months or longer after the election. Our study also explores various organizational incentives advocacy groups use to maintain support. We gather data from structured interviews of advocacy organizations in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Our findings suggest that many local advocacy groups did receive enhanced public support in the forms of volunteer requests, donations, and membership immediately after the election and the majority of them were able to retain the support over time. Normative organizational incentives were predominantly used to recruit and retain supporters, while utilitarian incentives, similar to Olson's selective private benefits, were not commonly adopted.

Keywords: nonprofit advocacy, issue-attention cycle, collective action, organizational incentives, Trump era

1 Introduction

The election of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential race jolted the nonprofit advocacy world in the United States. The Women's March in Washington D.C. and other cities, held a day after the inauguration of the new administration, saw record-breaking attendance from citizens. Large-scale protests and marches were not the only way through which the public have expressed their dissatisfaction and

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frustration over the outcome of the last election. Numerous public and societal benefit organizations, including women's rights and other citizen advocacy groups, reported unprecedented levels of donations and volunteers pouring into their organizations in the early days of the Trump era (Conklin 2019; Killough 2017; Sanders 2017). The dramatic surge in public support for nonprofit advocacy organizations observed after the election of Trump, however, is not a unique phenomenon. Similar public reactions to major focusing events have taken place before – after 9/11 (Penner et al. 2005), the bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City (St. John and Fuchs 2002), Haiti earthquake in 2010 (Reiersgord 2011), and so on. Strolovitch (2014) examined public reactions to the aftermath of both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. National security as well as poverty related nonprofit advocacy organizations experienced significant increases in donations and membership after the occurrence of these two historical events and the intensive public attention and media coverage that followed (Strolovitch 2014; see also Eisinger 1973; Meyer 1993; Meyer and Minkoff 2004 for more general discussions on political opportunities created by external focusing events).

Several questions arise from this type of sudden eruption in public enthusiasm over nonprofit advocacy organizations. Most fundamentally, does such elevated support sustain itself over time? If so, to what extent and under what circumstances? Penner et al.'s (2005) observation that the surge of volunteer inquires after 9/11 lasted about three weeks is telling. Conklin's (2019) study, on the other hand, hints at the exceptional nature of public reactions to the election of Trump. According to his findings, while nonprofits that are politically aligned with the losing party usually gain more public support (in the form of giving) than those aligned with the winning party after presidential elections, the increases in donations liberal nonprofit organizations saw after the 2016 election was truly extraordinary. The purpose of this study is to empirically and systematically examine whether and to what extent this unprecedented public reaction to the Trump presidency has sustained itself over time.

Several theoretical arguments are relevant to our examination. One is Downs's (1972) issue-attention-cycle where the author predicts a surge in public attention to a systemic societal problem immediately after a crisis, followed by gradual decline in interest upon the realization of the difficulties concerned with solving the problem (see Petersen 2009; Reyes 2010; Shih, Wijaya, and Brossard 2008 for more recent applications of the issue-attention cycle theory). The other theory concerns Olson's (1965) collective action dilemma that highlights the challenges associated with mobilizing resources for public interest advocacy organizations whose missions are to produce nonexcludable public goods (see Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2005; Esteban and Ray 2001; Klandermans and Stekelenburg 2013; Kuhnert 2001 for critical applications of the collective action theory across disciplines). We also

explore Clark and Wilson's (1961) concept of organizational incentives and related empirical findings in recent studies (e.g. Knoke 1988) to see how advocacy organizations utilize them to address free-riding and maintain public support.

We interviewed 18 nonprofit advocacy organizations in Oklahoma for our analysis. The data were collected from August to October of 2018 and April to July of 2019. While we contacted a wide-ranging list of public interest advocacy groups located in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, women's organizations were prominently represented in our sample (44%). Considering the conservative tendencies of the state[1] as well as theoretical expectations, any increases in support advocacy organizations might have received from the public right after the election were predicted to have subsided over time. Our findings suggest that, somewhat deviating from what was anticipated, the majority of the organizations we studied not only experienced increased levels of public support immediately after the election, but also sustained the elevated support in the post-election period. Our analysis also sheds light on the role of focusing events and organizational incentives by finding that certain focusing events were more influential than others and normative incentives dominated over other types of organizational incentives in motivating members and supporters.

In the Sections 2–4, we examine the theories, propose hypotheses, and discuss the methodology and analysis. We conclude our study with a discussion of the implications.

2 Theory and Hypotheses Development

In examining the question regarding sustainability of elevated public support for nonprofit advocacy organizations, Downs's (1972) theory of "issue-attention cycle" is worth noting. His "cycle" starts with sudden increases in public attention to problems and conditions that are hard to solve or change and that are normally hard to mobilize resources for. A surge of public interest is usually triggered by dramatic events or crises that highlight underlying issues and the media frenzy

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1 For example, according to the Oklahoma State Election Board (https://www.ok.gov/elections/ Voter_Info/Voter_Registration_Statistics/index.html), as of January, 2019, Oklahoma had 1,008, 775 registered Republicans and only 777,770 registered Democrats. Washington Post columnist Aaron Blake (2012) pointed out that the state voted 66–34% for Sen. John McCain (Republican nominee) in the 2008 presidential election. Obama did not win a single county in that election. The results of the 2012 presidential election were no different as Mitt Romney captured all 77 counties in Oklahoma (Casteel 2012). The 2016 presidential election was the same as the previous ones as all 77 counties once again voted for Donald Trump (Associated Press 2016). Oklahoma was only one of the two states (West Virginia was the other) where every county was captured by Trump.

that ensues. The key point of Downs's theory has to do with the ephemeral nature of such heightened public attention to societal problems. There is a period of public enthusiasm for solving hard-to-tackle issues, which often translates into increased support for advocacy organizations that push for policy change. However, the passion for finding solutions fades away gradually as the public learns about the potential costs and realizes the prospects for disruption of the socio-economic order. Downs (1972, 40) predicts the last stage of his issue-attention-cycle to be movement of an issue to a "prolonged limbo – twilight realm of lesser attention or spasmodic recurrences of interest." It is possible that a single issue may go through multiple issue attention cycles facilitated by recurring crises. Constant reiteration of crises, however, could result in fatigue effects as people start normalizing dramatic events and thus the shock effects wear off (Downs 1972).

Downs's Issue-Attention Cycle theory has widely been adopted by public policy and mass communication scholars to explain changes in the media and policy agendas. For example, Petersen (2009) observes foreign policy related issues, especially international terrorism, often follow Downs's issue-attention cycle. Despite the tendency that foreign policy is typically an alien concept to most of the general public, the scale of September 11th was sufficiently large enough to generate a high level of public awareness regarding international terrorism and zeal to find solutions followed. The realization of the costs and other challenges associated with the war on terrorism, however, contributed to a gradual decline in media and public attention to the issue. There have been some occasional spikes in public interest when additional focusing events such as attacks in Madrid and London took place (Petersen 2009). Reyes (2010) also finds a similar pattern of issue-attention cycle regarding immigration policies as she observes immigration to be a recurring issue that surfaces on the policy agenda during election times. Mass communication scholars apply Downs's Issue-Attention Cycle theory to explore media coverage. Shih, Wijaya, and Brossard (2008), for instance, use Downs's theory to investigate how the intensity of news coverage for public health epidemics, such as mad cow disease, West Nile virus, and avian flu, has fluctuated over time, based on the nature of different focusing events.

While Downs's theory and the studies adopting it are mostly concerned with investigating media and policy agenda changes rather than changes in nonprofit advocacy organizations, there is certainly a parallel that can be drawn between the cyclical patterns of public attention and the search for solutions noted in the theory and what might have taken place with regards to nonprofit advocacy organizations after the 2016 election. For example, it is reasonable to assume that the unexpected election outcome was a dramatic focusing event that triggered an alarmed discovery by some members of the public about the state of their nation and prompted them to attempt to correct the course by directing an outpouring of support toward

the types of nonprofit advocacy organizations that they believe represent the country's core values. Over time, however, public zealousness for these organizations may subside, given that many of these advocacy groups work toward highly challenging, system-wide issues such as immigration reform, social and racial justice, gender equality, etc. that are fairly intractable and tangible progress is challenging to demonstrate. The first three years of the Trump presidency were marked by many additional focusing events that might have sparked some renewed public enthusiasm for advocacy groups, although fatigue effects could have occurred in the presence of recurring crises.

It is important to note that the cyclical nature of public attention to societal problems has been observed and theorized by other scholars as well, particularly, within the field of sociology. Unlike Downs's theory that focuses on the lifecycle of a single issue, the scope of inquiry by sociologists expands to the level of the entire society. For example, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) explain the rise and fall of social problems in terms of various institutions, interest groups, or activists competing for the presentation of "their" versions of social problems in the public arena. Since public attention is a finite resource, only a limited number of problems can occupy public discourse at a given time. How long any particular issue can maintain its "problem" status and be taken seriously enough to trigger collective action depends on a complex array of institutional, political, and cultural dynamics as well as how different factions and their coalitions and networks define and frame the problem.

Tarrow's (1993) concept of "cycles of contention" captures the cyclical nature of collective actions, especially mass protests. One of the main arguments made by Tarrow (1993) is the interconnectedness of social movements as the emergence of one type of contention triggers institutional reactions and countermovements by other contenders, expanding the scope of contentions. In this case, cyclical patterns are not limited to the rise and fall of individual movements, but can be observed through "waves" of movements and countermovements. Absent in all these notions of cyclicality is the role of resource mobilization. Triggering events, which are explicitly mentioned or at least implied in these theories, might be a crucial concept in understanding the emergence of a movement or the beginning of an attention cycle. However, resource mobilization is one of the key factors in maintaining protests or advocacy organizations (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

In this context, Olson's (1965) free-riding is another theoretical concept that is relevant to our discussion. According to Olson, free riding is expected to be prominent in nonprofit advocacy organizations because people can enjoy the benefits of the public goods achieved as a result of advocacy (e.g. more ethical government) without personally bearing the costs (such as participating in protests). Olson's collective action theory has been widely adopted to explain the

challenges involving resource mobilization for nonprofit advocacy groups. While not directly predicted by Olson, it is easy to deduce from his theory that any temporarily elevated public engagement in nonprofit advocacy immediately after the election will regress back to previous levels over time as rationally-calculating people are incentivized to shirk from on-going commitment to their organizations.

As with Downs's issue-attention cycle, Olson's theory of collective action has been influential in theory development across multiple fields of study such as social movements, interest group membership, voting behavior, and mass communication. Many of these studies, however, take critical approaches to his theory. Klandermans and Stekelenburg (2013), for example, focus on explaining why and how some people overcome free-riding and participate in social movements by proposing a political psychology theory of collective action. Economists, Esteban and Ray (2001), challenge Olson's small group proposition (i.e. small groups are more effective than large groups are in maintaining members and engaging them in organizational activities) by arguing that larger groups increase success probabilities (i.e. likelihood of achieving missions) and thus attract members more effectively. Olson's small group proposition is also challenged by communication scholars, Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005), who analyze how large collective action organizations effectively mobilize members and supporters through rapid formation of networks, meet-ups, and email lists by using advanced communication and information technologies. Lastly, Kuhnert (2001) acknowledges the profound impacts of Olson's collective action theory in economics (see also Ostrom 1998 for an assessment) but contends that Olson does not clearly or explicitly address how a collective action organization comes into being in the first place. "Public entrepreneurship" (Kuhnert 2001, 13) is the central concept in his argument. Kuhnert's (2001) public entrepreneur theory is in line with the supply-side theory of the formation of nonprofit organizations (see Steinberg 2006 for in-depth discussions on this topic). It should be noted that many of the studies critical of Olson's theory, especially the ones advanced by economists, still share Olson's underlying assumptions regarding calculative, rational decision-makers.

Scholars who study social movements and organizational incentives fundamentally challenge Olson's cost-benefit calculating individuals. For example, as a strategy to overcome free-riding, Olson (1965) recommends the use of selective material incentives that are private to attract and retain members. The effectiveness of material incentives as a means to garner support for nonprofit advocacy organizations was fundamentally questioned, however, by scholars who have very different assumptions about what motivates human behavior (Jenkins 1983). By and large, these scholars emphasize the role that normative and social, rather than rational and calculative, incentives play in inspiring people to join or support collective action organizations. For them, social and normative incentives, such as

moral commitment and satisfaction, respect for social norms, and collective solidarity, can be as powerful as, or more formidable than, material benefits as motivators (Fireman and Gamson 1979; Moe 1980). Knoke's (1988) study supports this assertion by finding that nonprofit associations with purely selective material benefits attract apathetic members, while voluntary advocacy groups utilizing normative inducements (such as lobbying for good governance) tend to entice highly motivated contributors (see also Knoke and Wood 1981; Tillock and Morrison 1979 for empirical studies refuting Olson).

Clark and Wilson's (1961) work more comprehensively addresses various types of incentives and organizations in its theorization. They identify three major types of incentives organizations adopt to sustain themselves: material, solidary, and purposive. Material incentives render private benefits to individual users and typically include money, power, position, or any other non-monetary rewards such as information. Utilitarian organizations such as businesses and trade groups mainly rely on material incentives to attract participants. People joining utilitarian organizations are primarily motivated by material gains, so the stated goal (that is, mission) of the organization and its activities are less important to them than the actual benefits they receive. On the other hand, colleges and universities, social clubs and fraternities, and many service-oriented voluntary organizations are considered solidary organizations. What draw people into solidary organizations is not monetary benefits, but solidary incentives such as good fellowship, solidarity, organizational prestige and publicity. The very act of associating is a valuable incentive for these people. Stated missions are important to these organizations and their members as long as they promote the status and desired image of their groups.

The public and societal benefit advocacy groups that we study fall under what Clark and Wilson (1961) call purposive organizations. Purposive organizations largely rely on normative incentives that do not directly benefit members. The stated missions are often vague and intangible, but inherently valuable to people who join or support the organization. One of the significant challenges facing purposive organizations is converting core, but abstract, values into specific actions without causing conflicts among members as strategic choices often serve as sources of tension in these groups (Clark and Wilson 1961). Another built-in risk for purposive organizations is the difficulty associated with mission accomplishment, which could facilitate free-riding. To address this, purposive organizations tend to emphasize moral victories over actual achievements and provide a mixture of utilitarian and social incentives to entice supporters along with the normative incentives (Wilson 1995). We expect to see similar patterns from the advocacy organizations we study.

In sum, based on the theories discussed above, we predict that public support for advocacy organizations in Oklahoma will increase in the immediate post-election period, but will subside after the initial boost, except for occasional spikes in public interest over sporadic occurrences of additional focusing events. We also anticipate that advocacy organizations adopt a mixture of utilitarian, social, and normative incentives to retain supporters.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data

Directors and program managers from 18 advocacy organizations in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area were interviewed for this study between August and October of 2018 and April and July of 2019. Forty-seven advocacy organizations were initially identified and contacted (response rate is 38%). The contact list was obtained by employing a wide variety of search methods such as the use of one of the authors' personal connections to Oklahoma advocacy group networks, snowball sampling, and internet search. Internet search involved not only using a Google search term, "advocacy organizations Oklahoma" and related search terms suggested by Google (such as women and disability organizations), but also by obtaining names of organizations from known advocacy groups' Facebook pages[2] and partner organizations listed on their websites. These extensive search techniques were used to maximize identification of nonprofit advocacy groups that were current and active in the area, given the difficulties in obtaining a comprehensive list from any formal search websites such as GuideStar.[3] The average length of the interviews was about 40 min. The interviews were most commonly carried out by in-person meetings (10 interviews), although phone interviews were also frequently used (six interviews). Two interviews had to be completed through email exchanges due to various challenging circumstances.

In terms of missions, programs, and other organizational characteristics, the sample covered a wide variety of organizations, ranging from very small, volunteer-led civic engagement organizations to more professional advocacy organizations with several paid staff. Women's organizations were prominently

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2 For example, we obtained names of advocacy organizations "liked" by the known organizations' Facebook pages.
3 The search for advocacy organizations in GuideStar by using the NTEE code for civil rights and advocacy group ("R") and its subgroups (for example, minority rights, women's rights, race relations, civil liberties, etc.), for instance, yielded less than 20 organizations as potential contacts.

represented (eight out of 18), although their program areas varied from service delivery to civic engagement to leadership training and political networking. Organizational age varied as well, with the oldest organization founded in 1920 and the newest just in the last election year (2016). The majority of the organizations were, however, established either between the 1970s and 1990s or after 2007. Table 1 provides more detailed descriptions about these organizations and the interviewees.

Table 1: Descriptions of the organizations interviewed.

Organization type	Founding year	Revenues[a]	Number of paid employees	Background of the interviewees
Civil liberty	1976	$1,012,266	9	Director of development (paid)
Muslim advocacy	2007	$331,440	3	Executive director (ED) (paid)
Environmental advocacy	1972	n/a	0	Director (paid)[b]
Environmental education	2012	$50,580	0	ED/Founder (unpaid)
LGBTQ advocacy	1995	n/a	0	Board member (unpaid)
Immigration advocacy	2009	n/a	0	ED(unpaid)
Child advocacy	1983	$686,122	13	CEO (paid)
Services for homeless teens	1997	$555,560	6	Case worker (paid)
Women's civic engagement	1965	n/a	0	President (unpaid)
Women's civic engagement	2015	$83,357	1	Director of program (paid)
Women's civic engagement	1969	n/a	0	Co-chair (unpaid)
Women's civic engagement	1920	$57,662	0	President (unpaid)
Women's political organization	2009	$89,889	1	ED/Founder (paid)
Women's political organization	2010	$145,362	2	ED/Founder (unpaid)
Shelter for domestic violence	1975	$1,026,553	35	ED and director of development (both paid)
Abortion rights	2010	n/a	0	ED (unpaid)
Civic engagement	2016	$8383	0	ED/Founder (unpaid)
International advocacy	1970s[c]	n/a	0	President (unpaid)

[a]Most revenue figures are from 2016 to 2017. We were unable to obtain the revenue information from some of the small, volunteer-led organizations. We indicated them as "n/a."
[b]This environmental advocacy group is a local chapter of a national nonprofit organization. The local chapter, in and of itself, does not have paid employees, but its director is compensated by the source that is not clearly known to us.
[c]This organization was founded in the 1970s, but we do not know the exact year.

3.2 Measurement

To test the theoretical expectations laid out in the Section 2, we conducted structured interviews. The format of the interview questions was open-ended in order to allow interviewees to elaborate detailed aspects of their observations and experiences (see Appendix for the interview instrument).[4] The interview largely consisted of two theory-based sets of questions. The first part of the interview explored if there were changes in the level of public support for advocacy organizations shortly after the 2016 election and whether those changes sustained themselves over time – months and years after the election. Public support is defined as volunteer requests, donations, and membership (if the organization has a membership option). We relied on the interviewees' descriptive characterizations on these aspects (for example, moderate increase in donations and volunteers rather than exact dollar amounts raised and the number of volunteer requests received) since many advocacy organizations we interviewed were small and did not have a system in place to formally track these types of records on a regular basis. Sustainability was measured in a similar fashion. We depended on the respondents' subjective judgment concerning whether the increase in public support had been maintained and if so, to what extent.

Owing to the vague nature of most interviewees' responses regarding the "degree" of changes, coding was simplified into only three categories for the changes in public support (increase, same, decrease) after the election and four categories for sustainability (sustained, somewhat waned, fluctuated, and not sustained). Since a "structured" interview was used, the interviewees' responses were largely treated as if they were data points obtained from "self-administered, quantitative questionnaire" (Alshenqeeti 2014). Lengthy, descriptive responses to the public support changes and sustainability questions from some of the interviewees were transcribed and examined through a content analysis. We included these highly qualitative pieces of information in our study as anecdotal stories in order to highlight some of the interesting aspects discovered during our research rather than using them as the foundation to develop additional theories. We consider this approach to be appropriate, given that the depth of the information the interviewees provided varied considerably and thus lacked consistency.

The interviewees were also asked to identify any post-election focusing events, national and/or local, that they thought influenced public support levels for their organization. This question was designed to examine scholarly assertions

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4 This interview instrument was created by the authors and its adoption by future researchers is permitted only with proper citation.

regarding the potential impacts of focusing events on advocacy organizations in general (Kingdon 1995) and their effects on the repeated cycles of issue-attention mentioned by Downs (1972), in particular. We also intended to assess the relative salience and impacts of national versus local focusing events on advocacy organizations. While we kept a tally of all the focusing events mentioned by our interviewees (some are discussed in the Section 4), we felt that a formal analysis was not necessary since there was only one local event (i.e. Oklahoma teacher walkout) that was prominently and consistently featured in their responses as a significant focusing event that affected the extent of public engagement.

The second part of the interview was based on Clark and Wilson's (1961) and other scholars' work on organizational incentives (Knoke 1988) and examined the types of incentives advocacy organizations use for the recruitment and maintenance of members and supporters. Three types of organizational incentives were explored: utilitarian, social, and normative. Utilitarian incentives are defined as small and large material benefits that are directly given to members, volunteers, or general supporters. The examples include small token gifts (such as bumper stickers, t-shirts, or shopping bags), information offerings (such as a free subscription to newsletters and magazines), or opportunities for office and leadership positions. Social incentives are measured as organizational initiatives that focus on network building, social interactions, and solidarity among members and volunteers. Monthly lunches or potluck dinners, happy hours, or annual retreats and banquets are typical examples of social incentives offered by the organizations we interviewed. Normative incentives are defined as mission-related programs and activities that are geared toward pursuing the public interest and collective goals. Typical examples of normative incentives we mentioned to the interviewees included rallies, protests, and lobbying. Additionally, we asked the organizations to compare the typical incentive packages they offered before and after the election to see whether they made any significant changes between these two periods.

Most incentive-related questions were dichotomously coded (i.e. yes or no) for analysis since the interviewees were simply asked to indicate whether their organizations offered or did not offer certain types of incentives (specific examples for each type of incentive mentioned by the interviewees are simply summarized in the Section 4). Regarding the nature of changes in incentive offerings before and after the election, the responses were reasonably straightforward in case of decrease or no meaningful changes in incentive packages. These cases were coded "decrease" and "same" accordingly. The cases coded "increase" in social incentives were primarily measured by the increased frequencies in social events. As for the normative incentives, the interviewees provided various descriptions to indicate the changes that took place in post-election periods. They include: 1) increased frequencies in organized events (most commonly mentioned); 2)

increased efforts to raise public awareness; 3) increased intensity in advocacy messages (using more aggressive and urgent tones, for example). All of these descriptions were coded "increase" in the analysis.

3.3 Analytical techniques

Given the very small size of the sample (n = 18), we mainly rely on descriptive analysis for our study.

4 Findings

4.1 Changes in Public Support

The first question we examined in our study was whether the 2016 presidential election outcome led to an increase in support for public and societal benefit advocacy organizations. Our findings suggest it did, to an extent. Among the 15 organizations where volunteer information was available,[5] 67% (n = 10) experienced increased volunteer requests immediately after the election. Donation information was available also from 15 organizations. Among these, 53% (n = 8) received an increased level of contributions after the election. Volunteering in two organizations (13%) and donations in seven (47%) only maintained the same level of public support as before. Three of the organizations (20%) that provided volunteer data reported a decrease after the election, while none of the organizations interviewed experienced reduction in contributions (Table 2). As for the membership changes, usable information was available only in nine organizations because membership was either not an option or was too new to determine variations in the other nine organizations. Among the nine that had available membership information, five organizations (56%) increased their membership, sometimes dramatically, after the election. Two organizations (22%) maintained the same level of membership and two other organizations (22%) experienced a decrease (Table 2).

Besides the descriptive statistics, there are many qualitative findings that are interesting and should be noted. First, while we formally measured the concept of public support only in terms of volunteers, donations, and membership, many

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[5] Public support (volunteers, donations, and membership) related data were unavailable for analysis in three organizations we interviewed mainly because their answers were not sufficiently clear to determine the changes.

Table 2: Changes in public support.

Volunteer requests (n = 15)			Donations (n = 15)			Membership (n = 9)		
Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease
67%	13%	20%	53%	47%	0%	56%	22%	22%

organizations also reported notable changes (increases) that occurred in the level of public interest toward their organizations' advocacy activities. These changes were captured in Facebook likes, traffic on their social media sites, open rates for their emails, or attendance at events and workshops. Some of these elevated public engagements came from atypical populations. For example, a Muslim advocacy organization attracted a significant number of volunteer requests broadly across the non-Muslim public, which was described by the organization as unusual. One women's political coalition group reported a large turnout of young professionals under 35 at their fundraisers events. Many of these new attendees had never been engaged in politics before. By and large, women's civic engagement and political groups received substantial public support, whether the support was in the form of membership or participation in events.

There were two exceptions. One such case was a women's group whose mission is to protect reproductive rights. Given that Oklahoma is a very conservative state, this advocacy organization has largely been shunned by peer advocacy groups including other women's organizations in the past. The 2016 election led to a very brief spike in public interest for the organization (measured by open rates for action alert emails and Facebook page likes), but such increases did not translate into donations, volunteers, or membership. What was interesting, however, was the changes that occurred in its relationships with peer advocacy groups after the election. The following statement from this organization effectively captures the essence of those changes.

> "I think the most impactful sustained change has been [this organization's] improved relationships with allied organizations. We have absolutely noticed other organizations becoming more open in talking about abortion rights, which was a major barrier to [our] participation in collaborative work. Ahead of the 2016 election it was a very normal occurrence that [we were] asked to "tone it down" or not mention abortion at all in order to be allowed to participate with allied organizations, or to be invited to events, which we were (and remain) unwilling to do. We run into that barrier much less frequently now, and I believe it's thanks to the 2016 election influencing NGO missions to become more bold."

Another women's organization that did not get an election boost had entirely different reasons. As a civic engagement group that generally focuses on voter

registration and education, this organization is run by leadership and members who are mostly retired and have been slow in adopting social media and interactive websites. Its lack of adaptation to the internet environment is well captured in the statement made by one of the co-chairs of the organization whom we interviewed.

> "I've been told that we better get on Twitter, and we have not because no one knows how to use it … we still have members who can't do it [i.e. pay dues online] somehow, so we still send out a few renewal memberships by mail."

We suspect this lack of an online presence to be one of the potential barriers for this group to expanding its support base. The interviewee from this organization also suspected that after the election, people shifted their attention more towards advocacy organizations with bolder and more specific causes such as Planned Parenthood or the ACLU. After about two years of declining support since the election, their membership has recently started climbing again as they participated in other advocacy groups' events more frequently and people began to notice their existence and activities. It should be noted that this organization's experience is unique and unrepresentative of the typical trend observed in the peer organizations (i.e. other local chapters for the same national organization) and its statewide counterpart.

Lastly, it is interesting to note the tale of two environmental advocacy organizations. The first organization is a local chapter of a nationally known environmental advocacy group with aggressive stances on environmental protection. The Trump administration's early assault on the EPA and its policies, especially through Scott Pruitt's cabinet appointment, resulted in an outpouring of public support for the national organization as well as its local chapter in Oklahoma. In keeping up with the elevated support, this organization also started expanding its advocacy messages from green issues into other areas such as equity and justice. The second environmental organization is a local group based in Oklahoma and focuses on small, everyday issues such as clean water and food rather than big policy issues. This organization did not gain additional public support from the election and even experienced a slight decrease in volunteers, partly because people shifted their attention to human rights and other issues that they thought more urgently needed attention, according to the director of the organization.

4.2 Sustainability and Focusing Events

The second question we explored in our study was whether elevated public support, if any, sustained itself over time. We also attempted to identify additional

focusing events other than the election itself that might have been influential in changing the level of public support for nonprofit advocacy organizations. The sustainability question was applicable to 13 organizations that experienced varying degrees and kinds of post-election bumps in public support. Eight (62%) of these organizations sustained their support, while for three organizations (23%), support has waned somewhat since the election. Public support for two other organizations has fluctuated over time as they gained increased support immediately following focusing events relevant to their missions but experienced decreases after (Table 3). None of the organizations that experienced an initial surge completely lost their increased support during the post-election periods.

Specifically, all women's organizations that saw increased public support right after the election (six out of eight interviewed) were able to sustain the levels of public enthusiasm for their organizations and activities. Except for one women's organization serving victims of domestic and sexual violence, the commonality among these groups is that they focus their mission on civic engagement and political empowerment by women. Workshops and classes for civic and policy discussions, training, fundraising and networking for professional women with political aspirations and political engagement are among their typical activities. The Women's March was a focusing event that was impactful to these organizations and so was the #MeToo movement after the election. However, the single most influential focusing event that affected these women's groups, significantly for some, was the statewide teacher walkout in 2018. More generally, the interviewees highlighted the relative importance of local events over national ones in assessing the impacts of focusing events (for example, one interview noted, "[w]e are kind of a microcosm and it's easy to see what we are doing and understand what we are doing and see the results").

Five (out of 13) advocacy organizations that initially received a post-election boost in public support sustained their increase in an uneven manner over time. A local chapter of a nationally-known civil liberty advocacy organization and a local chapter of a national Muslim organization received a significant amount of public interest and other types of support early on after the election, especially around the Muslim ban. The level of support has somewhat waned since. For the other two

Table 3: Sustainability (n = 13).

Sustained support	Support somewhat waned	Support unevenly fluctuated	Support did not sustain
62%	23%	15%	0%

local advocacy organizations whose missions are child advocacy and serving homeless people, respectively, public support sporadically re-surged around focusing events that were relevant to their causes such as the border crisis relating to immigrant children, renewal of CHIP, and federal funding cuts (HUD). The government shutdown turned out to be an important focusing event for these two organizations.

One of the environmental organizations that experienced some reduction in membership and volunteers after an initial surge is worth noting, owing to its unique circumstances. As clearly observed by the director whom we interviewed (see below), the decline in these public support indicators has more to do with the lack of the organizational capacity than the dissipation of public enthusiasm.

> "It [i.e. support] has waned somewhat, and I will take this on our own chin. There was such an influx, and this happens to a lot of chapters and a lot of organizations. There was such a massive influx of volunteers, they were not set up with the capacity and we were not set up with the capacity to put all of them to work. So, the membership has dropped some and volunteering has dropped some. Financially we are in a much better place and we are actively, both locally, at the state and nationally, putting infrastructure in place to try and recapture the volunteers."

4.3 Organizational Incentives and Changes in Incentive Packages

The third and last question we explored has to do with the types of organizational incentives advocacy groups use in order to recruit and maintain members and supporters. Scholars disagree on the relative importance and use of utilitarian, social, and normative incentives in dealing with collective action problems. They also debate whether advocacy organizations would enhance utilitarian and social incentives over normative ones in order to maintain supporters when public attention wanes and achieving normative goals becomes challenging.

Regarding the first aspect (i.e. relative importance of incentive types), our findings soundly reject the Olsonian notion of material selective incentives being the primary motivator for people to join advocacy groups and their activities. On the contrary, by every indication, people sought out advocacy organizations for immigrants, Muslim populations, women's rights, and so on, to show moral support for these groups and contribute to the greater good. In other words, people were not motivated by the prospect of gaining selective private benefits, but by their desire to achieve normative goals. To illustrate this point effectively, one of the women's organizations told us that they tried handing out t-shirts in the past

but stopped doing so because "people don't want stuff." So, it is not surprising to see that nearly half of the 18 advocacy groups we studied (44%) did not offer any utilitarian incentives to their supporters. For the other nine organizations that did offer them, the types of utilitarian incentives they provided were very limited, such as small token gifts to honored volunteers at annual banquets and informational materials (e.g. free newsletters). Only one environmental organization offered a variety of utilitarian incentives (e.g. discounts on garden services and film festivals, free compost, college credit for student volunteering, etc.) to attract and maintain membership (see Table 4 for the specific utilitarian incentives as well as social and normative incentives offered by the organizations interviewed). Not surprisingly, there seemed to be little change in utility incentive offerings before and after the election.

Table 4: Examples of the incentives adopted.

Utilitarian incentives	Social incentives	Normative incentives
Token gifts at the annual banquet (coffee mugs, coasters); donor appreciation dinners; stuffed animals for children; t-shirts with logos and advocacy messages; tote bags; desktop calendar; token gifts at art festivals (inspiration rocks and stickers); discounts on tickets to events; discounts on garden services; free compost; free newsletter; free training and workshops; internship for students.	Banquets for awards and networking; monthly happy hours and other informal gatherings (e.g. "It's just coffee"); weekly luncheon (often accompanied by free workshops); annual retreat; young women's monthly meeting; trailblazer series; fundraising banquets.	Rallies and protests at the capitol (Capitol day; mental health day, etc.); civil rights litigation and legal services; lobbying; bystander intervention training (to help victims of harassment); policy and advocacy guidebooks for policymakers and the public; summits, forums, and conferences on legislative agendas and policies; drive to call representatives; women in blue day at the capitol; initiative to write letters to the editor/op-ed; lobbying and advocacy training; voter education; hosting debates for local candidates; postcard campaigns; action alerts and weekly radio programs.

As compared to utilitarian incentives, social incentives were much more widely used by the advocacy organizations we analyzed (89% – 16 out of 18 organizations). While it is difficult to generalize any findings from our small sample, there certainly seems to be a recognizable pattern in how individual advocacy groups deploy their social incentives. Specifically, service delivery organizations that also engage in advocacy appear to utilize them very infrequently, merely providing a formal annual banquet for donors and volunteers. Patterns are not significantly different for advocacy organizations that focus on substantive policy areas such as child advocacy or immigration, as the priority for these advocacy groups is to advance policy on behalf of their beneficiary groups rather than motivating members and supporters. For general civic engagement and political empowerment organizations, social events were more frequently promoted as avenues for fellowship, networking, and educational activities. Social events further increased after the election for these organizations, not necessarily because they replaced normative incentives as theory suggests, but because they were often accompanied by normative activities (for example, social gatherings after legislative events or rallies).

Across the board, normative incentives were the most dominant and frequently used motivator by the advocacy organizations (94%). Typical normative incentives offered include public meetings, rallies (e.g. Capitol day), vigils, legislative lobbying, advocacy training, and postcard campaigns. Only one organization (out of 18) did not utilize the types of normative incentives described here (6%). For all other organizations, except for one that focuses on utilitarian incentives, normative incentives were the major organizational incentives employed prior to the election, so there was no change in the types of incentive packages

Table 5: Types of incentives used and post-election changes.

					Type of incentives used (n = 18)
Utilitarian incentives		**Social incentives**		**Normative incentives**	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
56%	44%	89%	11%	94%	6%

Post-election changes[a]

Utilitarian incentives (n = 10)			**Social incentives (n = 16)**			**Normative incentives (n = 17)**		
Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease	Increase	Same	Decrease
0%	100%	0%	19%	69%	12%	65%	29%	6%

[a]The sample size in the percentage calculation for the post-election changes varies, given that some organizations do not offer certain incentives and thus are excluded from estimation.

before and after the election. What substantively changed between these two periods, however, was the increased intensity of these normative activities in terms of the frequency of the events and the tone of the messages they conveyed (bolder and more aggressive). Table 5 quantitatively summarizes these findings (see the Section 3.2 for the quantitative operationalization of the changes).

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether the last presidential election outcome resulted in the mobilization of citizens through their support for nonprofit advocacy organizations and if so, whether the election boost received by these organizations has sustained itself over time. We also explored the types of organizational incentives advocacy groups use to attract and maintain members and supporters. The theory-guided prediction was for advocacy organizations to experience a short-lived surge in public support following the election. These organizations were also expected to rely on utilitarian and social incentives as well as normative incentives in order to recruit and retain supporters. Our findings only partly supported these theoretical propositions. That is, the majority of the organizations did get an immediate election bump (as clearly captured by the statement made by one of the interviewees – "We received calls in the days and weeks immediately following the election that specifically mentioned the reason they were donating to [the organization] was the result of the election"), but many managed to maintain elevated levels of support months and years after the election, partially rejecting Downs's predictions concerning the short-term nature of the public support. Additionally, normative incentives were predominantly employed across the organizations both before and after the election, firmly rejecting the Olsonian notion of the importance of selective material incentives for motivating people and sustaining their support. On the other hand, social incentives were frequently promoted. Unlike theoretical expectations, however, social incentives were not used as a replacement for the normative incentives, but rather to complement to them as enhanced normative activities also brought more opportunities to socialize.

In addition to the somewhat unexpected findings, there are a few interesting observations that can be made from our interviews regarding the current state of advocacy organizations. First, the role of social media appears to be absolutely critical in everything they do, from conveying advocacy messages to the public, to advertising various incentives, to organizing rallies and other advocacy activities. As previously discussed, lack of an online presence could directly affect the organization's ability to recruit members, garner support or mobilize resources.

Social media serves as the main public space where the public engages in advocacy, so its effective use seems to be vital to advocacy organizations' success. Social media also allows two-way communications between advocacy organizations and their supporters. It provides advocacy groups with the cheapest and fastest means to spread messages to their supporters. It also serves as a conduit for the public to convey their messages and sentiments back to the advocacy organizations through comments, likes, and retweets. The cost-effectiveness of social media and its potential power to mobilize the public were captured by many of the interviewees. We list just a few of their statements below.

> "Social media allows a larger reach for little cost."
>
> "[Social media] is just the most affordable [method of advertising] and gets the most traction."
>
> "Last year our social media grew a tremendous amount between March and April in the lead up to the [teacher] walkout … from January through April [2018] we gained about 1000 followers, which is roughly a 30% growth for us."
>
> "I saw on our Facebook analytics we're [the] 4th or 5th biggest following in Oklahoma [for a political nonprofit]."
>
> "Our social media presence is really active. [We are] posting opportunities to get engaged."

Another almost universally observed trend has to do with advocacy organizations' reliance on collaborations, alliances, and coalitions in mobilizing resources for their advocacy. Especially, rallies and protests always involve multiple organizations mobilizing their supporters together to amplify impacts. Workshops, classes, and training sessions are sometimes co-hosted by more than one advocacy group. The distribution of informational and advertising materials about allied organizations and their programs is a typical feature at these events. People learn about the existence of various advocacy groups and their activities through this process.

Lastly, we asked the advocacy groups about potential mission drift caused by external focusing events. Intensive media coverage and the concomitant surge of public attention towards the issues they advocate could sweep these organizations in unexpected directions that deviate from their original missions. Such concerns were raised by at least one environmental organization as it tried to expand its focus into not only "green issues" but also "equity" and "justice" and started participating in the Women's March and DACA rallies. This has caused some tension between older, established members and younger members. For most other organizations we interviewed, however, the changes were less to do with mission drift, but more to do with sharpening their messages (bolder, more aggressive, and more urgent) as they tried to respond to increasing demands for advocacy.

There are many limitations to this study that need to be addressed in future research. First and foremost, given the fact that the number of cases for analysis was small (n = 18) and became even smaller for certain questions we explored, caution needs to be taken when generalizing our findings. Moreover, future studies should expand to include a larger sample beyond Oklahoma to see whether the patterns observed here hold up in other places. A longer-term follow-up study would also be worthwhile to further explore the impacts of significant focusing events and their sustainability in advocacy organizations. Lastly, there should be more, in-depth data collection and analyses regarding organizational incentives advocacy organizations use to retain supporters. While we find material incentives to not be useful, additional research should be conducted to establish more generalized patterns in this regard.

We conclude this paper by discussing a few theoretical implications from our findings and some directions for future research. To start, it is important to note that the focus of our inquiry was on nonprofit advocacy organizations (meso-level analysis) rather than citizen volunteers and members in them (micro-level) or protests and movements, such as the Resistance (Meyer and Tarrow 2018), in a larger societal setting (macro-level). This distinction guided the direction of our theorization, specifically, by incorporating the policy agenda setting literature to capture the impacts of environmental changes external to nonprofit advocacy organizations, borrowing from the interest group literature to understand the challenges associated with group-based collective actions, and adopting organization theories to apply the concepts of material, social, and normative incentives as key organizational strategies for member recruitment and maintenance.

Some of our findings, however, offer insights as to how the different levels of analysis can be integrated to provide a more holistic picture regarding what might have taken place within nonprofit advocacy organizations after the 2016 election. For example, we found the patterns of public support for our sample organizations from Oklahoma to closely mirror what happened at the national level with the Resistance movement (Meyer and Tarrow 2018). Fisher (2019) argues that the Resistance movement was born out of the fierce opposition to Trump and everything he stood for (see also Berry and Chenoweth 2018) and thus united a broad swath of progressive groups and citizens who rejected his rhetoric and policies. This resulted in a surge of public support for a wide variety of rights-based advocacy organizations, especially focusing on women, Muslims, and immigrants. It also energized civic engagement groups for electoral mobilization. The patterns of public support we found from our study were strikingly similar. Recognizing the characteristics of the movement taking place in a larger societal setting, in this case, helps us better understand the nature and extent of the phenomenon we observe at the organizational level.

Likewise, knowledge about the behavioral patterns and motivations of citizen participants in the Resistance movement could be useful when analyzing tactical and operational aspects of advocacy organizations. Fisher (2019), for example, notes that many people attending rallies and protests were not tied to any particular organizations, but turned up at various events sponsored by advocacy organizations, often motivated by moral outrage towards Trump's policies. This pattern of civic engagement may partly explain why advocacy organizations heavily invested in social media for events announcements, advocacy messaging, and various other types of communications, in an effort to reach a wide range of viewers and followers who might be reluctant to commit to individual organizations, but still want to be involved in advocacy activities organized by them. Fisher (2019) characterizes this pattern of citizen engagement as "fluid membership" where membership is determined by the level of interest in issues and events rather than particular organizations. Understanding citizen behaviors at the micro level (fluid membership), in this case, helps us recognize and explain emerging operational strategies of advocacy organizations such as the use of social media, digital fundraising, and digital joint event planning. As such, future research could build theory and gather data based on an integrated framework so as to systematically discover the connectivity between different levels of analysis in studying advocacy organizations.

Appendix

Interview Instrument

Changes in the Level of Support

The first set of questions that we would like to ask is about the level of support your organization received in recent years. The types of support we are inquiring about include: donations, membership, and volunteers for organizational activities. The main purpose for these questions is to learn about, first, whether the election of Trump affected the level of support your organization receives, and if it did, in what direction and to what extent. We also want to know whether the support your organization has received since the election has been steady or has fluctuated. Keeping this in mind, I will ask two broad questions.

Question 1: Did the level of support (in terms of donations, membership, and volunteering for the organization's activities) increase, decrease, or stay about the same after the election of Trump?

Question 2: In the first question, I asked you to compare the average levels of support the organization received before and after the election of Trump. The second question focuses on the patterns of support your organization experienced since the election.

- **Question 2.1**: If the level of support increased after the 2016 election, has that elevated support sustained itself for the last 18 months steadily or waned somewhat over time? If the latter, what do you think caused the decline in support?

- **Question 2.2**: There have been many notable events (such as the Muslim travel ban, the #MeToo movement, immigrant family separation, etc.) since the election. Have you noticed any changes in the level of support for your organization, corresponding to these major events?

Organizational Incentive Systems

The second set of questions I am going to ask you has to do with the types of incentives your organization provides to its supporters so as to keep their commitment as well as to attract new donors and volunteers. Here, incentives are broadly defined and include three major types: utilitarian, social, and normative.

Question 3: First, I want to talk about utilitarian incentives. These are the type of incentives that directly benefit members. Typical examples may include small token gifts (such as bumper stickers, t-shirts, or shopping bags), information offerings (such as free subscriptions to newsletters and magazines, free workshops and training sessions, etc.), and opportunities for office and leadership positions.

- **Question 3.1**: Does your organization offer these utilitarian types of incentives to its members? If so, what specific utilitarian incentives does your organization offer?

- **Question 3.2**: (If the interviewee says yes to Q3.1) Does your organization advertise these incentives as a way to solicit donations and recruit members/ volunteers?

- **Question 3.3**: (Again, if the interviewee says yes to Q3.1) Have there been any changes made (in terms of the quantity and content) in offering these types of incentives after the election of Trump? If so, how? Why?

Question 4: Now, I want to talk about social incentives. Social incentives focus on relationship building, social interactions, and solidarity among members. A typical example you can think of is fundraising and other organizational events where members and volunteers socially interact and develop friendships and networks. I will ask similar questions to the ones for the utilitarian incentives.

- **Question 4.1**: Does your organization offer social incentives to its members? If so, what specific social incentives does your organization offer?
- **Question 4.2**: (If the interviewee says yes to Q4.1) Does your organization advertise these incentives as a way to solicit donations and recruit members/ volunteers?
- **Question 4.3**: (Again, if the interviewee says yes to Q4.1) Has your organization made any changes (in terms of frequency, magnitude, venues, etc.) in offering these types of incentives after the election of Trump? If so, how? Why?

Question 5: Lastly, I would like to discuss normative incentives that your organization offers. Unlike utilitarian incentives, normative incentives mostly have to do with mission-related activities that are *not* designed to benefit the members directly, but rather are geared toward pursuing the public interest and collective goals (such as protecting women's rights, improving the welfare of disadvantaged youth, etc.). Typical examples of normative incentives include a variety of political and advocacy activities such as rallies, protests, and lobbying. I will ask you questions that are similar to the ones for the previous two types of incentives.

- **Question 5.1**: Does your organization offer normative incentives to its members? If so, what specific normative incentives does your organization offer?
- **Question 5.2**: (If the interviewee says yes to Q5.1) Does your organization advertise these incentives as a way to solicit donations and recruit members/ volunteers?
- **Question 5.3**: (Again, if the interviewee says yes to Q5.1) Has your organization made any changes (in terms of frequency, magnitude and/or intensity, venues, etc.) in offering these types of incentives after the election of Trump? If so, how? Why?

Now that I have completed the questions regarding each of the three types of incentives, I will ask you to compare these incentives with one another.

Question 6: Among the three types of incentives we discussed (utilitarian, social, and normative), which types of incentives did your organization use more than others to maintain support from your existing members and to attract new members and volunteers/donations *prior to the election of Trump* (why)?

Question 7: Since the election, if your organization has changed the types of incentives it offers, which types of incentives has your organization enhanced more than others and why?

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