INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

Seventh Edition

Edited by
Allan J. Cigler
Burdett A. Loomis
University of Kansas

CQ PRESS
A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc.
Washington, D.C.

20. Interested readers also can search on the Internet for "FSC/ETI" and find numerous policy alerts from trade associations urging their members to support or oppose particular provisions of the bills.
21. A logical question is "Why not include all corporations in the bill?" The Republican Party had pledged that all tax cuts would be "revenue neutral." This meant that a tax cut in one place had to be paid for by a tax increase elsewhere. Although Congress definitely can increase the size of a tax cut by employing various accounting gimmicks to maintain the appearance of revenue neutrality, it cannot increase the size of the cuts indefinitely. A tax cut that included all corporations would have reduced substantially the tax cut to manufacturing companies.
22. The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within OMB reviews all proposed regulatory rules that have an impact on the U.S. economy of more than $100 million, and OIRA conducts a benefit-cost analysis of the proposed rule. A proposed rule can become law even if its costs to society exceed the benefits, but the process puts tremendous pressure on agencies to propose regulations that have a net social benefit.

12

Identity Crisis

How Interest Groups Struggle to Define Themselves in Washington

Michael T. Heaney

Interest groups face identity crises when citizens, members, staff, or legislators have a significantly different idea of what the group is about than does its leadership or membership. Issue niche theory asserts that groups modify their identities in response to these crises by narrowing their issue portfolios until they monopolize a specific area of public policy.

Michael T. Heaney argues here that forming narrow issue niches is one, but not the only, strategy available to interest groups as they seek to manipulate their identities. For example, a group can instead attempt to create a broad issue niche in which it claims expertise over an entire domain of public policy like the environment, energy, health care, or transportation. Alternatively, a group can stress its role as the authentic representative of a constituency that is especially important to politicians. Or groups can attempt to modify their brand by changing their name, logo, or appearance. Heaney makes the case for a multidimensional theory of identity in which interest groups combine strategies pertaining to issue niches, representation, and branding to shape how they are understood. This approach broadens our understanding of how organizations act to become effective within the highly competitive context of interest group politics. Effective self-definition is often a recurring challenge on the long road to policy-making success.

> AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization for people age 50 and over. AARP is dedicated to enhancing quality of life for all as we age. We lead positive social change and deliver value to members through information, advocacy and service.
>
> *AARP mission statement*

> The AARP basically is an insurance company that offers attractive travel discounts in exchange for payment of a small annual fee. It does not seek opinion from its members. It does not submit its leadership to vote by members. Members have no mechanism for making their views known to spokesmen, other than writing letters to the organization's house organ.
>
> *Jayne L. Greene in a 2003 letter to the* Washington Post

> AARP—formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons—has become the older American's 800-pound gorilla, known for its sheer size and political muscle.
>
> *Steven A. Holmes in a 2001 article in the* New York Times

What is the AARP? According to the above statements, AARP is, alternatively, a broadly representative membership organization, a business entity cloaked in nonprofit clothing, or a politically savvy player in Washington. While these perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they each frame AARP's core identity according to a different motivation: member service, economic self-interest, and political power. Many politicians and policy advocates working in Washington form their own opinions of what AARP is and is not. These opinions affect AARP's ability to forge alliances with other interest groups and to advance its policy agenda on Capitol Hill. AARP can work to change the way others think about it, but the power to do so is not entirely in its own hands. For example, AARP faced an identity crisis in the fall of 2003 when it encountered widespread condemnation for its decision to support a Republican-sponsored Medicare reform bill.[1] Although AARP replied immediately and forcefully to its critics, the implications for its identity may be long lasting.

When the term *identity crisis* is discussed, an interest group like AARP is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. Rather, one might imagine a 40-year-old man who suddenly becomes uncomfortable with the evidence that he has reached middle age or a teenage girl who has lost confidence that she fits in with her friends at school.[2] Nonetheless, organizations do have identities and do experience identity crises, albeit different from those of individuals.[3] An interest group's identity is a complex product of the views of its leadership, employees, members, legislators, lobbyists, media elites, and other influential people who hold an opinion of what the group is about. An interest group faces an identity crisis when public perceptions about what it stands for diverge significantly from how its leadership or membership wants the organization to be viewed.

A group's identity emerges and changes over time, as political actors inside and outside the organization debate its nature and reflect on its role in politics. Sometimes a consensus emerges about who or what a group is. Other times, substantial disagreements pop up, which may trigger an identity crisis. Disagreements often result from a group's visible, but controversial, decisions. For example, when the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) teamed with right-to-life groups to try to stop the importation of Canadian drugs (by arguing that the bill in question would allow the morning-after pill to be imported), even the pharmaceutical industry's strongest congressional supporters became highly critical of its decision to link abortion to a business issue.[4]

For other groups, lack of a clear identity stems from invisibility: they have yet to find a way to stand out in a crowded policy environment.[5] For example, the Council for Government Reform is a group that focuses on a range of conservative causes, with a special emphasis on issues that affect the elderly, but it has trouble communicating its identity to key audiences because other actors in the policy community are not familiar with it.[6] This is a common problem, as witnessed by a recent survey of interest group representatives, roughly half of whom feared that their identities are not well understood on Capitol Hill.[7]

If interest group leaders attempt to achieve their goals in part by manipulating their organization's identity, then understanding this process is necessary to make sense of interest group strategies. Political scientist William P. Browne argues that groups form unique identities by creating narrow, issue-oriented reputations for expertise.[8] According to this *issue niche theory*, a group faced with an identity crisis could solve this problem by narrowing its focus until no other group had an overlapping issue concern. While Browne is surely correct that owning an issue is one way for a group to solidify its identity, this strategy is only one of the available possibilities. *Representation* is one alternative, in which interest groups ground their identities in their ability to facilitate a connection between legislators and a broad constituency. *Branding* is another strategy, in which interest groups manipulate visual and textual elements (such as their names, logos, or Web pages) to modify their images among attentive audiences.

This chapter advances a *multidimensional theory* that recognizes interest group reliance on issue niches, representation, and branding as strategies for building identity and resolving identity crises. Examination of various data suggests that identity is a mechanism that connects interest group behavior from grassroots membership to elite lobbying activities.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Issue niche theory assumes that interest groups "cultivate specific and recognizable identities" through "accommodat[ing] one another by concentrating on very narrow issues."[9] According to this view, each group aspires to own an issue—and respects every other group's desire to do the same—to assure stable access to the resources associated with that issue. Groups

want policy makers to know that they are the ones that have the necessary expertise on the issue in question. Thus, as the number of interest groups grows over time, issue niches become progressively narrower and policy communities become increasingly fragmented.

Achieving dominant control over an issue is one effective way to establish a clear identity. The long-standing position of the American Civil Liberties Union as the leading defender of First Amendment freedoms is an excellent example of this strategy at work.[10] Still, focusing on a narrow issue may not be the best way to create a desirable identity. First, the era of neutral policy expertise seems to have passed, with virtually all issue analysis presumed to emanate from a biased ideological or partisan point of view.[11] A group must have not only an issue but also a predetermined position on that issue to be recognized and respected. For example, Common Cause is known not only for its expertise on the issue of campaign finance but also for its longtime position favoring more federal regulation of campaign contributions. If issue position, rather than issue narrowness, sets groups apart, then there may be room for several interest groups to work on the same issue, thus diminishing the incentives for groups to specialize too narrowly.

A second problem with groups developing narrow issue expertise is that drawing upon this knowledge may be inconvenient for policy makers. An interest group with a narrow issue niche resembles a boutique in a downtown business district. On occasion, shoppers are willing to make a special trip to find the perfect item they desire, like the diamond ring that will last a lifetime. More often, shoppers demand a wide range of items to fill their market baskets and find that their time is better spent by going to the local Wal-Mart. Similarly, a policy maker may prefer to establish close, trusting relationships with one (or a few) interest groups that provide useful information on many issues; this is more efficient than forming a large number of weaker relationships with many separate groups.[12] The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for example, is available to comment on virtually any issue—from immigration to telecommunications to tariffs—that matters to business. Communicating regularly with the chamber will likely be more convenient for legislators than consulting with independent issue experts every time a new business concern hits the agenda. If interest group lobbying is a service to members of Congress, legislators will often demand full service and one-stop shopping.[13]

A third problem with the strategy of working on only a narrow issue (or a small number of issues) is that it may be not be the most efficient use of group resources. Advocating on any single issue requires that an interest group set up an office, hire staff to monitor the Washington scene, and acquire experts who are able to analyze and discuss the collected information. All of this requires money. After the necessary infrastructure is in place and the group is working on its niche issue, it may make sense to add a few more issues. A group like the National Right to Life Committee

which ostensibly occupies an issue niche on abortion—can easily expand its operations to take on stem cell research, euthanasia, Medicare, and the free speech issues of campaign finance reform.

Hiring experts on related issues may make the whole policy team more productive by expanding access to social networks, stimulating intraoffice discussions, and boosting capacity during periods of peak demand on any one issue. Thus, once an interest group has paid the fixed cost of operating on a single issue, it possesses incentives to expand, rather than contract, its issue involvement. This pressure, which economists refer to as *economies of scope*, makes it likely that interest groups will behave in the exact opposite manner from what issue niche theory predicts.[14]

If creating a monopoly over a narrow issue niche is not a good strategy for all interest groups to forge their identities, what are the alternatives? The most important are representation and branding. In a strategy of representation, an interest group asserts that it is the legitimate voice of an important political constituency and that it holds an effective monopoly over connecting its members to legislators.[15] This strategy is conceptually similar to forming an issue niche in its emphasis on exclusive control over something important to legislators. The representation strategy differs from the issue niche approach in that it does not ordinarily make sense to argue that a constituency is narrow. As a rule, the larger and more mobilized the constituency, the more vital it is to reelection-minded politicians.[16]

Achieving status as the authentic representative of a particular constituency must be cultivated deliberately over time, as with issue expertise. Legislators are too wise to recognize just anyone as the voice of their constituents. In his seminal study of how the farm lobby gained and lost influence in Congress during the middle of the twentieth century, John Mark Hansen demonstrates that would-be representatives must establish that they have a competitive advantage over other sources of information and that this advantage recurs over time.[17] Convincing legislators that these conditions are met has become increasingly difficult in recent years because the strong member-participation tradition of associations has largely been replaced by sterile methods of corporate management.[18] Thus, to project a representation-based identity, groups must facilitate direct personal connections between legislators and their organization's grassroots membership. Brokering these connections is likely to increase a group's recognition and influence in the policy process.[19]

Both the issue niche and representation strategies envision identity formation as a process of securing autonomy in an environment where multiple groups compete for scarce resources. From this point of view, the fundamental identity crisis is obscurity: relevant audiences lack information about who or what a group is. The appropriate solution is to offer added information about the group—about its issues or its members—throughout

An interest group may also confront an identity crisis if key audiences know a group exists but have the wrong idea (from the standpoint of the group's leadership or membership) about what the group is and does. In this case, the external image of a group—whom it represents, what it works on, what it stands for—is out of alignment with the internal image of the group.

A carefully orchestrated branding strategy may be a solution to an identity crisis rooted in a problematic image.[20] The objective of branding is to either establish an information shortcut between the group and the key elements of its identity or eliminate existing shortcuts that may pose a problem for the group. For example, the Health Industry Manufacturers Association (HIMA) found that it confronted misinformation about who it was and what it did. The words "industry" and "manufacturers" in the organization's name conjured images of heavy equipment and large warehouses. Yet HIMA's member companies manufactured some of the word's most advanced medical equipment, including pacemakers, defibrillators, and magnetic resonance imaging machines. An obvious solution to the problem was to rebrand the organization to highlight these advanced technologies. In line with this strategy, the organization changed its name in 2000 to the Advanced Medical Technology Association, or AdvaMed.[21] Effective branding—such as the change from HIMA to AdvaMed—has the potential to transform the way relevant audiences perceive and react to an organization's identity.

The struggle to define its identity in Washington is one that each interest group undertakes on its own terms. Groups face myriad constraints and opportunities, based on their unique histories, members, budgets, and goals. Thus, it is a mistake to conclude that all groups build their identities uniformly using one strategic approach. The flaw in issue niche theory is not that groups never form issue niches; instead, it is the theory's failure to recognize other paths to establishing a strong identity. Similarly, Virginia Gray and David Lowery are too restrictive in their argument that "exclusive access to members and finances ... may be more critical than securing ... viable issue niches."[22] While Gray and Lowery are no doubt correct when they claim that access to either members or finances is critical to survival, their assertions that this access must be "exclusive" and that survival is the dominant motivation behind identity formation go too far. Identity formation is driven not just by the minimal impulse for survival but also by the desire to climb in the Washington status hierarchy through gaining more recognition, influence, and prestige. Members and finances constitute a part of that equation, but just a part.

The three strategies presented here—issue niche creation, representation, and branding—establish the foundation for multiple dimensions of identity. Interest groups not only possess various options for establishing identities, but they also may elect to build their identities in tandem across multiple dimensions. A group may choose to emphasize both its member

base and its issue expertise as, for example, when the Consumer Federation of America simultaneously claims to represent all consumers and to possess expertise on issues like credit card debt, cable regulation, and home ownership. The complex nature of many groups compels them to articulate their identities across multiple dimensions and allows them to reach out broadly to the diverse audiences attentive to what they do.

Which Identities Prevail?

Beyond these scholarly debates over establishing and employing identities, how are we to know which identities actually prevail in the course of practical politics? No study has ever investigated the identities articulated by the full range of Washington interest groups. Browne's research focuses entirely on the agricultural policy domain, and other research on the question is limited to the health policy domain.[23] Gray and Lowery do not examine Washington interest groups at all but instead survey groups operating in six states. To know how interest groups actually create their identities, we need to look at a wide range of groups and how they explain who they are to the public at large.

The research here investigates the identities of all interest groups that maintained their own lobbying operations in Washington between 1998 and 2003. By focusing on interest groups with in-house lobbyists, I exclude the thousands of interest groups that rely only on contract lobbyists to represent their interests. I do not dispute that groups represented exclusively by contract lobbyists are an important part of public policy making, but the focus here is on how groups assert their presence in Washington.[24] Addressing only groups that speak for themselves is a reasonable limitation, which still allows for analyzing a sample representing the major interest groups that influence national policy making. Included here are 1,076 groups across all domains of public policy, from the AARP to the Zionist Organization of America.[25] The majority of these groups hire contract lobbyists to supplement their in-house activities although each is represented by at least one of its own employees.[26]

The identity of these interest groups was ascertained by looking at their public statements about who they are. Public statements provide considerable insight into identity because they are vetted intensively within the organization. Although it is unlikely that these statements are arrived at through a genuinely democratic process, their public posting invites comment and criticism, making it likely that they at least reflect the views of the organization's dominant faction.[27] Because public statements are, by their nature, accessible to diverse audiences, they implicitly reflect groups' efforts to speak simultaneously to different constituencies. Groups may be able to hide their private statements from many audiences (although private statements harbor the risk of eventually becoming public), but statements made on-the-record are certain to follow them for years to come. Groups thus weigh their

public statements carefully, which strengthens their validity as a source of data on identity.

For each of the 1,076 groups, concise public statements were sought to convey the nature of the group's identity as presented by the group's leadership.[28] Almost all these groups maintained a Web page (94 percent), which contained a mission statement (52 percent), a mission-like statement (21 percent), or another organizational description (59 percent) that provided basic information about organizational identity.[29] For 1,010 groups (94 percent of the sample), at least one of the three types of public statements of identity was available.

Each public statement was analyzed for the use of any of nine dimensions of identification:

- **Representation** is the claim by an organization that it speaks on behalf of a set of individuals or institutions, whether or not they are official members of the organization. An interest group may represent groups such as the poor, small businesses, or people who want smaller government.
- **Member services** are particular benefits supplied exclusively to members, such as information or educational opportunities.
- An **issue** is a specific policy concern, like food safety or antitrust policy.
- An **issue position** is an explicitly stated policy preference on an issue, like strengthening federal government assurances of food safety or the elimination of antitrust lawsuits.
- **Values** encompass a wide range of socially desirable qualities, like excellence or openness.
- **Ideology** is a consistent and all-encompassing political worldview, like progressivism or conservatism.[30]
- **Organizational tools** are routine operational activities, like advocacy, education, and research.
- **Modes of organization** reflect the different structures of participation and decision making—federations, associations, and grassroots networks—within interest groups.
- **Superlative statements** indicate that a group is the oldest, largest, or most prestigious of a class of organizations.

Group statements could be coded into all, some, or none of these dimensions. Both the mean and the mode number of dimensions are exactly 4.00. The overwhelming majority of group statements (73 percent) have between three and five dimensions. At the minimum, seventeen groups fall into only one of these categories and, at the maximum, four groups fall into eight categories. Table 12.1 reports the percentage of groups using each dimension, an example of the group using it, and the reason the group was assigned to that category.

Table 12.1. Dimensions of Identification

Dimension	Percentage of groups	Exemplar group	Reason
Representation	75.94	American Electronics Association	Represents "all segments of the technology industry."
Member services	20.89	American Institute of Certified Public Accountants	Serves to "provide its members with resources, information, and leadership."
Issue	24.45	American Life League	Works on the issue of abortion.
Issue position	19.51	Americans for Computer Privacy	Advances the right "to encode information without fear of government intrusion."
Values	92.18	United Services Automobile Association	Stands for service, loyalty, honesty, integrity, and financial security.
Ideology	4.46	60-Plus Association	The "conservative" alternative to the AARP.
Organizational tools	86.53	American Phytopathological Society	Performs its work through publications, meetings, symposia, and workshops.
Mode of organization	47.52	National Association of Industrial and Office Properties	Operates through a "grassroots network."
Superlative statement	29.21	National Corn Growers Association	"NCGA is the largest trade organization in the United States representing corn growers."

Source: Public statements by 1,010 interest groups.

Note: Although the total number of groups examined was 1,076, only 94 percent of the sample (1,010 groups) made publicly available at least one of the three types of public statements of identity.

The summary of public statements reveals which dimensions are most and least frequently a part of interest group identities. Fewer than one group in twenty links its identity to an ideological or partisan orientation, largely because of concerns about nonprofit status.[31] Conversely, more than nine of ten groups (92 percent) include some expression of values when explaining who they are, which makes this dimension not very useful in separating groups from each other. Representation is a component of identity for three-fourths of the groups (76 percent), while about one in five (21 percent) stresses particular member services. Issues help define identity for about one-fourth (24 percent) of the groups, with about 20 percent taking an explicit stand on a specific position. Further, most groups (87 percent) enumerated the tools they use to do their work, and almost half (48 percent) noted their organizational modes. Less than 30 percent of groups (29.21 percent) compared themselves favorably with other organized interests.

Dimensions of interest group identity are closely related. For example, a group that does not claim to have members or to represent anyone will not stress member services. Similarly, a group needs to pick an issue before it defines itself on the basis of an issue position. Thus, relationships among these dimensions should illuminate aspects of the strategies behind their use, as illustrated in the matrix of correlations among the identity dimensions (Table 12.2). Each number in this table represents the correlation of the dimension listed in a row with the one listed in the column. A positive number indicates that the dimensions tend to go together, and a negative number implies that the dimensions oppose one another. The presence of an asterisk to the right of the number denotes that the correlation is strong enough to be statistically significant: the relationship between the two dimensions is due to something more than just mere chance.

The correlation matrix reveals a clear division between interest groups that emphasize representation in their identities and those that emphasize issues. Representation correlates positively with member services and mode of organization, which often stresses relations with members; but representation correlates negatively with issues, issue positions, values, and ideology. In contrast, issues correlate positively with issue position, values, and ideology.[32] This pattern strongly suggests that many interest groups strategically choose between an issue-identity orientation and a representation-identity orientation, although some groups do attempt to combine the two. Although the representation-identity orientation is summoned more frequently, the issue-identity orientation is still invoked consistently and coherently. These two strategies dominate the interest group articulation of identity. Some space for branding resides in the use of organizational tools, models, and superlative statements. Indeed, branding is often a way for a group to highlight the representational or issue-oriented aspects of identity

Table 12.2. Correlation Matrix of Dimensions of Identification

Dimension	Representation	Member services	Issue	Issue position	Values	Ideology	Organizational tools	Mode of organization
Member services	0.2836*							
Issue	–0.2133*	–0.1337*						
Issue position	–0.2023*	–0.1423*	0.8594*					
Values	–0.1036*	–0.0771	0.0285	0.0969*				
Ideology	–0.1703*	–0.0638	0.0893*	0.0996*	0.0450			
Organizational tools	0.0630	0.0672	0.0085	0.0039	0.1011*	0.0008		
Mode of organization	0.1147*	0.0220	0.0017	0.0209	–0.1283*	0.1496*	–0.0072	
Superlative statement	0.0712	0.0288	0.0601	0.0575	–0.0318	0.0513	0.0875*	0.1897*

Source: Public statements by 1,010 interest groups.

Notes: Although the total number of groups examined was 1,076, only 94 percent of the sample (1,010 groups) made publicly available at least one of the three types of public statements of identity.

*Statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

How Groups Use Broad Issue Niches and Multidimensional Strategies

Analysis of public statements by interest groups provides convincing evidence that many of them use issues in defining their identities, but groups rarely construct the narrow niches predicted by issue niche theory.[33] Instead, their issue foci are usually broad, sometimes encompassing entire policy domains (or more). Beyond addressing whether an interest group asserted an issue-based identity, the research examined which issues were emphasized, including education (five groups), environment (six), health care (thirteen), intellectual property (four), public health (three), reproductive health (five), taxation (five), trade (four), and transportation (four). Occasionally, as predicted by issue niche theory, a group mentions an extremely specific issue—such as the environmental performance of cement kilns—but this is not the norm. When groups define their identities on the basis of issues, they often use position, rather than narrowness, as a means of differentiation from competing groups.

Understanding how issues affect groups' identities can be gleaned by examining the reactions of a key audience: congressional staff members. Congressional staff are the gatekeepers for members of Congress, so what they know (or do not know) about a group may determine whether it gains meaningful access to the member. Eighty-eight congressional staff members (forty-six Republicans and forty-two Democrats) were presented with a series of policy issues and were asked to name the interest groups they associated with the issue. This question directly taps the degree to which congressional staff identify interest groups with specific issues, and their responses to the abortion issue (see Table 12.3) nicely illustrate the opportunities and difficulties posed by issue-based strategies of identification.

In addition to listing whether or not a group was mentioned, Table 12.3 notes whether the group was mentioned first, which indicates the respondent's strength of belief.[34] The responses are divided by party, with Democratic staff members being usually, but not always, proabortion, and Republican staff members being usually, but not always, antiabortion. Interest groups are listed by the frequency with which staff members mention them without prompting.

The results indicate that only a few interest groups have gained wide recognition on the issue of abortion. Three are on the proabortion side—NARAL Pro-Choice America, Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), and the National Organization for Women (NOW); and three are on the antiabortion side of the issue—the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), the Christian Coalition of America, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. First mentions are common for only three groups: NARAL, NRLC, and PPFA. These results should be distressing to a number of groups that have attempted to build identities exclusively on the abortion issue. Groups like the American Life League and the National

Table 12.3. Interest Groups with Positions on Abortion, as Identified by Congressional Staff in 2003

	Democrats		Republicans		All
Interest group	First mentions	Total mentions	First mentions	Total mentions	Total mentions
NARAL Pro-Choice America	29	36	15	28	64
National Right to Life Committee	5	26	18	32	58
Planned Parenthood Federation of America	5	27	5	17	44
Christian Coalition of America	1	11	1	10	21
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	0	7	1	8	15
National Organization for Women	0	1	4	6	7
Concerned Women for America	0	0	0	3	3
National Partnership for Women and Families	0	3	0	0	3
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists	0	0	0	2	2

Source: Author interviews with eighty-eight congressional staff members, spring and summer, 2003.

Notes: The question asked was: "In the next part of the interview, I will name an issue, and I would like for you to tell me which interest groups you think of when you think of that issue. The first issue is abortion. Which interest groups do you associate with abortion?"
The following interest groups were mentioned only once: Alan Guttmacher Institute, American Civil Liberties Union, American Life League, Catholics for Free Choice, Democrats for Life, Eagle Forum, EMILY's List, Family Research Council, Georgia Right to Life, National Abortion Federation, Operation Rescue, and the Republican Pro-Choice Coalition.

Abortion Federation are classic issue-niche-based groups, but they receive almost no recognition. Thus, it is possible for groups to sustain identities linked principally to an issue, but only a limited number can do so on any particular issue.

The responses of congressional aides hint at how interest groups build their identities in multiple dimensions. Differences between Democrats and Republicans unpack the role of issue position in shaping identity. Democrats

are more likely to think of "their" group, NARAL, and to think of it first when prompted to list groups that address the issue of abortion. Likewise, Republicans are more likely to list "their" group, NRLC, before listing proabortion groups. It is not that each side does not recognize the existence of groups on the other side—Republicans know that NARAL exists and Democrats are aware of NRLC—but the issue position increases familiarity and strengthens identification.

A multidimensional strategy is one way for interest groups to amplify their identities when they are unable to attract attention on the basis of their issues alone. For example, the Republican Pro-Choice Coalition, Catholics for Free Choice, and Democrats for Life are all memorable because they assume positions that are at odds with the social groups they claim to represent (Republicans and Catholics tend to oppose abortion, while Democrats usually support it). The Alan Guttmacher Institute is best known for specializing in the use of an organizational tool: high-quality empirical research (on reproductive health). Concerned Women for America (CWA) and NOW gain recognition for representing women on alternative sides of the political spectrum (CWA is conservative, while NOW is liberal). Thus, although these groups fail in securing identities on the basis of issues alone, they succeed by combining issues with other dimensions. In the case of NOW, for example, a mix of issues, representation, and ideology defines the group in the minds of many observers.

Strengthening Representation

If issues-based identities are usually broad, leaving interest groups with the option of narrowing them in some way, then representation-based identities are the exact opposite. Interest groups start by representing some narrow interest and then try to broaden their representational claims over time. AARP, for example, had its origin in representing retired teachers when the National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA) was founded in 1947. NRTA expanded its mission to represent all the retired by forming American Association of Retired Persons in 1958. Over time, the mission stretched still further, by representing anyone over age fifty willing to pay dues, and this expansion culminated in the organization formally changing its name to just AARP in 1998.[35]

If AARP's leadership had its way, it would claim to represent all older Americans, present and future—in short, almost everyone. Other groups make similar expansive claims to the extent that they can get away with it. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce represents all American businesses, the AFL-CIO fights for all working people, the American Medical Association (AMA) speaks for all doctors, and so on. Legislators and other policy makers are wise enough to be skeptical of these assertions. Many doctors are not members of the AMA, for instance. The presence of such understandable skepticism raises dilemmas for both groups and policy makers. If an

interest group did genuinely represent a broad constituency, how would it communicate that fact persuasively? How would policy makers know whether to accept the representational identity, as asserted?

Interviews with congressional aides (described above) generated comments from them on a list of 171 interest groups active on health policy issues.[36] In particular, they were asked to note which groups actively represented constituencies within their district (for House staff) or state (for Senate staff). Table 12.4 reports the top fifteen groups that firmly established these representational connections. The American Hospital Association (AHA) tops the list, followed by AMA, AARP, and the American Cancer Society. Other interests on the list include disease patients and their families, health professionals, unions, insurance companies, and community health centers.

It is tempting to imagine that the ranking reported in Table 12.4 corresponds to a natural ordering of constituencies in health care. We might reason that it makes sense that hospitals are the most widely representative interest because there are hospitals in every district and state. Still, some health constituencies not on the list may be more common than hospitals. Chain drug stores are everywhere, so why is the National

Table 12.4. Health Groups Identified for Local-Level Representation

Rank	Total mentions	Interest group
1	64	American Hospital Association
2	55	American Medical Association
3	52	AARP
4	49	American Cancer Society
5	44	Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association
5	44	National Breast Cancer Coalition
7	38	Alzheimer's Association
7	38	Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International
9	36	American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
9	36	American Heart Association
11	34	American Diabetes Association
11	34	National Association of Community Health Centers
13	33	AFL-CIO
14	31	American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
14	31	American Nurses Association

Source: Author interviews with seventy-seven congressional staff members, spring and summer, 2003.

Note: The question asked was: "Please look at the following list of interest groups that work on health policy issues. Who is especially well organized in your district (or state)?" This question was not asked of aides serving primarily as staff to congressional committees, which is why there are eleven fewer data points available in this table than in Table 12.3.

Association of Chain Drug Stores not listed? Similarly, why is the breast cancer lobby recognized, but not organizations for equally devastating cancers of the lung and the prostate? Why obstetricians and not pediatricians? The answer is that an identity for representation depends on the ability of a group's leaders to make themselves intermediaries between members of Congress and their constituents. To better understand how some groups are able to make this connection, lobbyists were interviewed at each of these fifteen interest groups and the national grassroots directors at ten of them.

Every organization with a strong representation-based identity achieves legitimacy according to its own unique style. At the same time, one common element in each of the leading organizations is that they systematically use their organizational structures and tools directly to represent their members. Strong representation demands effective organization. First and foremost, this means coordinating action through a multilayered communication network of e-mail, conference calls, miniconferences, and in-person meetings. Second, organizational members are channeled through a well-structured hierarchy of volunteers. In the National Breast Cancer Coalition, for example, this imperative translates into six levels: (1) board members, (2) field coordinators, (3) team leaders, (4) national action network members, (5) conference participants, and (6) regular members.[37] At the American Heart Association, a similar volunteer hierarchy is complemented by a parallel structure of thirteen scientific councils that address topics like cardiovascular nursing, clinical cardiology, and strokes.[38]

Interest groups with strong representation-based identities stress the importance of making quality contacts with legislators, as opposed to simply making any contact. As Frank J. Purcell, director of federal government affairs at the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists put it: "Technology makes grassroots organization both more capable and more capable to do poorly."[39] To address the issue of representation through quality electronic communications, the American Cancer Society created a formal e-advocacy program and hired a full-time manager of e-advocacy and technology.[40] The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International holds a "children's congress" in Washington every two years, to introduce juvenile diabetes patients to members of Congress, along with its Promise to Remember Me Campaign to facilitate in-district contacts.[41] All these groups strive to maximize the impact of member interactions with legislators by coupling well-trained member-advocates with appropriate lobbyist follow-through with legislative aides.

The struggle to forge a clear representational identity is inextricably bound to other identity elements in the organization. Member services, modes of organization, and organizational tools are all part of projecting an identity as representatives of a politically relevant constituency. The next section examines the final component in the strategic identity formation process: branding.

Marketing Identity

The previous two sections depict the struggle for identity as grounded in substantive polices and actual political concerns. Which issues is the group working on? How is the group connecting legislators and constituents? But groups need not work directly on issues or develop representational ties in order to be perceived as doing so. Conversely, people may think that a group is not doing these things when, in fact, it is. In short, image matters; and organizations shape their images in the modern media age through branding.

Everything that an organization does reflects on its brand. The Web page, logo, stationery, and even the attire and conduct of staff members are all part of the brand. For simplicity, I focus here on the crudest element of a brand: the organization's name. Leaders of interest groups commonly believe that changing an organization's name can have a significant effect on how its identity is perceived. One recent study on the identities of health care interest groups reports:

> Twenty-three percent of the organizations participating in the study indicated that they had made some change in their name in the past 10 years. An additional 5 percent revealed that there was some active consideration of changing their name. About a third (32 percent) of the time, name changes are considered or undertaken because organizational names are confusing. Organizations also change (or consider changing) their names because they have added new issues to their portfolios (33 percent of the time) or because they have added new categories of members (9 percent of the time).[42]

The analysis of public statements by 1,010 interest groups reported in this chapter is roughly consistent with the earlier study. At least 7.03 percent of these groups made a significant change in the organizational name during the six-year period covered by the data (1998–2003). Many of these name changes were the direct result of mergers, but others were the product of a straightforward rebranding strategy. Some changes were subtle, such as the shift of the Metals Service Center Institute into the Steel Service Center Institute in 2002 (originally it was the American Iron, Steel, and Heavy Hardware Association). Perhaps the replacement of "metals" with "steel" conveys greater strength and clarity.

In a slightly more radical change, Zero Population Growth became Population Connection in 2002—an especially interesting modification from the point of view of the theory presented in this chapter. The original name of the group invoked two dimensions of identification: the issue (population) and the issue position (reducing population growth to zero). The new name, in contrast, retains the invocation of issue identification (population) but eliminates the statement of an issue position in favor of an ostensibly neutral point of view. Population Connection still fights to reduce population growth, but the new branding potentially alters the organizational appeal.

Table 12.5. Examples of Name Changes by Interest Groups

Former name	New name
American Association of Health Plans	America's Health Insurance Plans
American School Food Service Association	School Nutrition Association
American Society for Personnel Administration	Society for Human Resource Management
American Trade Association Executives	American Society of Association Executives
Association of Independent Television Stations	Association of Local Television Stations
Environmental Defense Fund	Environmental Defense
Independent Insurance Agents of America	Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America
Industrial Telecommunications Association	Enterprise Wireless Alliance
NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund	Legal Momentum
Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund	Earthjustice
Women's Legal Defense Fund	National Partnership for Women and Families

Source: Public statements by 1,010 interest groups.

Note: Although the total number of groups examined was 1,076, only 94 percent of the sample (1,010 groups) made publicly available at least one of the three types of public statements of identity.

Population Connection sounds less radical and more flexible in its approach to population management problems. Of course, Population Connection's pro-growth opponents can always point to the group's history in disputing the authenticity of its new orientation. Rebranding is a strategic attempt to alter identity, but there is no guarantee that it will achieve that goal.

Examples of recent name changes by interest groups not mentioned elsewhere in this chapter are listed in Table 12.5. In each case, the logic of strategic identity manipulation through branding is apparent. Several of these modifications endeavor to communicate new values, as "nutrition" replaces "food service" and "human resource management" replaces "personnel administration." Some groups attempt to abandon old affiliations, as Legal Momentum breaks from NOW and Earthjustice breaks from the Sierra Club. Although there are many intricate reasons for these varied alterations, the overwhelming evidence indicates that they are rooted in carefully designed branding strategies. These changes illustrate how interest groups turn to branding as a mechanism for amplifying or muting dimensions of group identity.

Conclusion

Where does the multidimensional theory of identity leave AARP in the midst of its identity crisis? How ought AARP appease the enraged seniors

burning their hotel discount cards on its doorstep? What should AARP tell Democratic politicians who feel betrayed by its endorsement of the Republican-sponsored Medicare bill? Will AARP be able to woo Republican politicians into the negotiating room when major legislation is on the table? Can AARP depend on brand loyalty from a new generation of fifty-somethings who are more affluent and conservative than the previous cohort?

The easy answer for AARP is to amplify its desired identity using all three strategies: issue niches, representation, and branding. AARP's first major policy endeavor after the Medicare debate was to oppose President George W. Bush's proposal for Social Security reform.[43] This move emphasized AARP's broad niche on seniors' issues and, by opposing the president, highlighted its independence from the political establishment.[44] AARP thus asserted its identity on the dimensions of issue and issue position. On the dimension of representation, AARP attempted to placate members through damage control operations begun immediately after its Medicare announcement as it dispatched its chief executive officer, William D. Novelli, to seniors' forums throughout the country. It continued to rely on its award-winning grassroots advocacy program to connect its members with legislators.[45] With respect to branding, AARP is the KFC of interest group politics. A few million dollars of television advertising were well within AARP's means.

Although AARP was able to quell the Medicare controversy (temporarily, at least), its opponents continue to challenge its identity for assorted reasons. AARP came under fire in 2005, for example, from cultural conservatives who attacked its stance on same-sex partnerships.[46] For groups like AARP, crisis may be inextricably bound to identity.

The more indeterminate crises of identity are confronted every day by thousands of smaller interest groups that seek to increase their influence vis-à-vis policy-making institutions. All groups cannot dedicate millions of dollars to advertising every time they make a controversial decision, and they must make careful strategic choices about how to use their time and resources. Nevertheless, they can choose from various strategies, either alone or, more likely, in a combination. Their choices in their identity struggles are limited neither by issues (as Browne has argued) nor by members and resources (as Gray and Lowery contend). Instead, interest groups craft their identities in a multidimensional space in which they blend elements from several alternatives. At the same time, their choices are necessarily limited: groups' abilities to craft their identities are restrained by the need to appeal to attentive audiences—legislators, the media, and the public, for example—who have a say in how their identities are understood.

Identity serves as a flexible mechanism to pull together myriad aspects of interest group activities, from grassroots organizing to elite lobbying to coalition building. A group's identity affects its ability to win sympathy from the public, dues from members, loyalty from staff, and favors from legislators. Thus, anything a group does to affect how it is viewed by one of these

audiences also matters to the others. If a group's membership grows or shrinks considerably, for example, legislators have incentives to give it more or fewer favors. Likewise, if legislators regard the group with higher or lower esteem, members have greater or lesser incentives to contribute to the work of the organization. These responses from varied audiences do not operate seamlessly or automatically, and from time to time they will be significantly out of alignment with each other. When these identity crises surface, interest groups can and do turn to issue niches, representation, and branding as strategies to affect a realignment consistent with their goals.

Notes

The idea for this chapter was originally proposed by William P. Browne, who invited me to write it with him. Bill's untimely death in 2005 sadly made our collaboration impossible. This chapter is dedicated to his memory. Also, I am indebted to Elizabeth Rubenstein of Yale University for outstanding research assistance. Jonathan Ellzey, Cassandra Farley, David Paul, and Daniel A. Smith provided helpful suggestions. This research received generous financial support from the Center for the Study of American Politics at Yale University and the Santa Fe Institute.

1. David Cook, "AARP Chief Admits Losing up to 10,000 members: Senior Group Came under Fire for Backing GOP on Medicare," *Chicago Sun-Times,* December 12, 2003.
2. For the classic discussion of identity from this perspective, see Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).
3. Harrison C. White, *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
4. Bob Cusack, "Drug Industry Does Battle with an Image Problem: Policymakers Say Drug Makers Must Improve Standing," *The Hill,* September 17, 2003.
5. Robert H. Salisbury, "The Paradox of Interest Groups in Washington: More Groups, Less Clout," in *The New American Political System,* rev. ed., ed. Anthony King (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), 203–229. For a recent analysis of why the Washington policy community has become so crowded, see Beth L. Leech et al., "Drawing Lobbyists to Washington: Government Activity and the Demand for Advocacy," *Political Research Quarterly* 58 (March 2005): 19–30.
6. For more information about the Council for Government Reform, see http://www.govreform.org/.
7. Michael T. Heaney, "Outside the Issue Niche: The Multidimensionality of Interest Group Identity," *American Politics Research* 32 (November 2004): 611–651.
8. William P. Browne, "Organized Interests and Their Issue Niches: A Search for Pluralism in a Policy Domain," *Journal of Politics* 52 (May 1990): 477–509.
9. Ibid., 477.
10. Samuel Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties: A History of the ACLU,* 2d ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).
11. Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Just because policy expertise is biased does not mean that it cannot be informative. See Kevin M. Esterling, *The Political Economy of Expertise* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
12. Daniel P. Carpenter, Kevin M. Esterling, and David M. J. Lazer, "The Strength of Strong Ties: A Model of Contact-Making in Policy Networks with Evidence from U.S. Health Politics," *Rationality and Society* 15 (October 2003): 411–440.

13. On the concept of interest groups as service bureaus, see Raymond E. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963). A more recent perspective on this topic is presented in Richard L. Hall and Alan V. Deardorff, "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy," *American Political Science Review* 100 (February 2006): 69–84.
14. John C. Panzar and Robert D. Willig, "Economies of Scope," *American Economic Review* 71 (May 1981): 268–272.
15. This perspective on representation is consistent with the definition advanced by Andrew Rehfeld, "Towards a General Theory of Political Representation," *Journal of Politics* 68 (February 2006): 1–21, in that it explains representation "simply by reference to a relevant audience accepting a person as such" (p. 1).
16. David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
17. John Mark Hansen, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919–1981* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
18. Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).
19. Michael T. Heaney, "Brokering Health Policy: Coalitions, Parties, and Interest Group Influence," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 31 (October 2006): 887–944.
20. Helmut Schneider, "Branding in Politics—Manifestations, Relevance and Identity-Oriented Management," *Journal of Political Marketing* 3 (October 2004): 41–67.
21. See AdvaMed's Web site at http://www.advamed.org/.
22. Virginia Gray and David Lowery, "A Niche Theory of Interest Representation," *Journal of Politics* 58 (February 1996): 91–111.
23. Heaney, "Outside the Issue Niche."
24. For an excellent discussion of how interest groups choose between in-house and contract representation, see John M. de Figueiredo and James J. Kim, "When Do Firms Hire Lobbyists? The Organization of Lobbying at the Federal Communications Commission," *Industrial and Corporate Change* 13 (December 2004): 883–900.
25. U.S. Senate Office of Public Records, http://sopr.senate.gov/, January–February 2005.
26. For comparisons of in-house and contract lobbying behavior by corporations, see Holly Brasher and David Lowery, "Corporate Context of Lobbying Activity," *Business and Politics* 8 (April 2006): 1–25.
27. For the seminal analysis of intraorganizational decision making, see David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Knopf, 1951), chs. 5–7.
28. The searches were conducted under my supervision by my research assistant, Elizabeth Rubenstein, who collected and coded all the information described below.
29. If a Web page was not available, we checked the 2004 print edition of the *Encyclopedia of Associations* for information, although there were only ten cases in which this yielded information not otherwise available on the Web. See Kimberly N. Hunt, *Encyclopedia of Associations: National Organizations of the U.S.* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 2004).
30. A group that explicitly asserted a position as "nonpartisan" was coded using the ideological dimension. Although these groups claim that they are not affiliated with any specific party, they nonetheless define themselves with reference to an ideological system.
31. Jeffrey M. Berry and David F. Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003). The strong aversion to ideology and partisanship may be a result of the fact that I analyzed public statements. In private, interest groups may be more willing to identify themselves according to an ideology, though only slightly more so. See Heaney, "Outside the Issue Niche."

32. I considered the possibility that dimensions of identification used by an interest group depend on the type of public statement in question. For example, formal mission statements might tend to contain different dimensions than other kinds of organizational descriptions. To check for this possibility, when the correlations are estimated with mission statements only, the conclusions hold pertaining to representation, member services, issues, and issue positions. However, statistically significant correlations on ideology and values disappear.
33. While many interest group scholars have come to think of niches as inherently narrow, owing largely to Browne's theory, there is nothing in the underlying theory of organizational niches that implies that they must be narrow. A niche is simply a space in which an organizational population experiences favorable conditions under which it can grow. See Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, *Organizational Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 95–97.
34. In this case, the group mentioned first is mentioned more swiftly than the groups mentioned second, third, and so on, although this is not a precise measure of response time. An important recent study on this topic is Martin Johnson, "Timepieces: Components of Survey Question Response Latencies," *Political Psychology* 25 (October 2004): 679–702.
35. AARP, *AARP History,* http://www.aarp.org/about_aarp/aarp_overview/a2003-01-13-aarphistory.html, April 28, 2006.
36. Although focusing on health groups may be limiting when attempting to ascertain the broad scope of identities employed by interest groups, evidence from this domain deepens our knowledge of how identity strategies are put into practice. Further, health groups represent the general interest group community well because virtually every sector of society has an interest in health, including employers, labor unions, veterans, manufacturers, the professions, and citizens' groups.
37. Kimberly Love and Sharon Ford Watkins, staff members of the National Breast Cancer Coalition, interview by the author, December 3, 2003.
38. Diane Canova, vice president of advocacy for the American Heart Association, interview by the author, December 10, 2003.
39. Frank J. Purcell, interview by the author, December 3, 2003.
40. Barry Jackson, manager of e-advocacy and technology for the American Cancer Society, interview by the author, December 5, 2003.
41. Lawrence A. Soler, vice president of government relations for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International, interview by the author, February 24, 2004.
42. Heaney, "Outside the Issue Niche," 626.
43. Merrill Goozner, "Don't Mess With Success: There's Nothing Wrong with Social Security That a Few Changes Can't Fix," *AARP Bulletin,* January 2005.
44. Ben Pershing, "AARP Faces Heat," *Roll Call,* February 16, 2004.
45. Kevin J. Donnellan, "Reaching for the Gold: AARP Seeks to Set the Standard for Grassroots Advocacy," *Public Affairs Review,* 2002, 12–15.
46. Deborah Solomon, "AARP's Antagonist," *New York Times,* March 13, 2005.

13

American Interests in the Balance?
Do Ethnic Groups Dominate Foreign Policy Making?

Eric M. Uslaner

When we think about interest groups in American politics, we ordinarily focus on corporations, trade associations (software manufacturers, for example), professional associations (like lawyers' organizations), or groups that represent particular segments of the population (such as the National Organization for Women). Indeed, most lobbying does address domestic issues ranging from tax policies to Social Security to interstate highways. But many Americans have strong links to countries or interests outside the United States. Cuban expatriates, for example, have long exercised disproportionate influence over Florida politics. Historically, pro-Israel interests have proved especially powerful because of their ability to raise funds for and gain access to elected officials from both parties.

In this chapter, Eric M. Uslaner examines the strength—both absolute and relative—of the Israeli lobby in the context of increasing interest group activity that links American ethnic groups and, on occasion, religious groups to both global interests and to U.S. decision making. Over time, the Israel lobby has faced various challenges, yet it has managed through its lead organization (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) to retain its position as an extraordinarily powerful lobby. Still, as Uslaner notes, growing population groups in the United States, such as Latinos, will likely change the face of ethnic-based lobbying in the United States as will the long-term policies of operating in a global environment, albeit one that requires national vigilance as well as new economic connections.