

MAKING CHANGE: WHAT DRIVES NONPROFITS' POLITICAL INFLUENCE?

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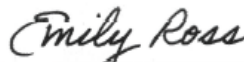
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BY



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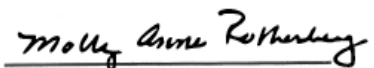
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Emily Ross. Making Change: What Drives Nonprofits' Political Influence?

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The goal of my thesis is to examine the factors that make a nonprofit organization more or less successful at influencing public policy. My project uses six nonprofit organizations as case studies, each one representing a different cross section of the level of government at which the organization operates and how politically controversial their sector is: local, state/regional, or national government and apolitical or politicized topic area. This work investigates how entities which are not legally allowed to take part in politics can, in fact, influence politics. Political success in this paper is defined by the nonprofit organization's ability to lead the issues they advocate for to achieving political priority. In my project, I find that the apolitical, national nonprofit organization is the most individually successful case. At the same time, the results exemplify that apolitical, *state/regional* nonprofit organizations are the most reliably influential on policy making. Ultimately, my thesis explores the efforts of domestic nonprofit organizations with the United States' political arena, setting the groundwork for further investigation into how organizations that are legally restricted from acting politically can, in fact, influence politics.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In recent years there has been a revolution in efforts to publicly support social and institutional change. Advocacy in 2021 takes new forms and exists on platforms never previously imagined. This shift in advocacy work is a marker of the current generation and along with it comes a new discourse on what it means to successfully advocate for change. The individual call for change, whether splashed across an Instagram story or a protest sign, is integral to any movement or message but it is collective advocacy efforts that have historically driven political change. Therefore, policymaking is a useful measure for advocacy success. Throughout history, examples of this include the Women's Suffrage Movement, with the 19th Amendment marking success in the movement's advocacy. LGBTQ+ advocacy efforts can also mark a success through the legalization of same-sex marriages in 2015. Among these advocacy efforts, nonprofit organizations function as collective efforts for advocacy. Thus, tracing their political success is a part of augmenting the understanding of the advocacy moment we are living in today.

The nonprofit sector is one of the most important, but least understood, sectors in the United States. As a "conflicting multitudes sector" (Salamon), the US nonprofit sector consists of not-for-profit organizations operating in a for-profit system, an inherent contradiction at the core of the sector's existence (Ibid). As inextricable from the US capitalist system, US nonprofits face distinct challenges in their systemic infrastructure. These challenges include meeting professional standards while surviving primarily on volunteer contributions and marketing to consumer values with a generally non-physical "product" (Ibid). Throughout history advocacy-oriented nonprofits also have had a symbiotic relationship with government aid in achieving their missions, a partnership that has been both boon and bane to their success. These challenges are

compounded with the general business challenges currently facing organizations across sectors in the US such as changing demographics, technological developments, and globalization.

Over time, nonprofit America has responded creatively to many of these challenges, but that has caused “corrosion to the sector's unique role and characteristics” (Salamon). It is the variety of composition of nonprofit organizations within the US that I explore in this thesis. Specifically, I examine the level of government at which the organization operates and how politically controversial their sector is to see how each of these factors impacts the advocacy-based nonprofit’s ability to influence policy. Here, politically controversial refers to the level of politicization of their mission- in other words, if a subject area is politicized and controversial. For example, the right to abortion is a highly politicized topic while social security programs would be a relatively less politicized topic area. The level of government at which the organization operates refers to the scope of influence its advocacy work strives for, whether that is work with local governments, state/regional governments, or the federal government.

At their core, nonprofit organizations differ from for-profit organizations in that their mission is to work towards an altruistic goal rather than to make money. It follows that nonprofits should not be judged by the amount of money they bring in. Instead, for advocacy-oriented nonprofits, it is their political influence that functions as the measure of their achievements. I investigate the political influence of US-based organizations that are not legally allowed to be directly “political.” Instead, nonprofit organizations are politicized to different degrees and may or may not use this politicization to pursue their goals, something that I explore in this thesis.

The United States nonprofit sector is inextricably linked to public policymaking but because direct lobbying is prohibited, the influence of nonprofits on politics can be vague and



difficult to measure. Despite the above-mentioned restrictions, many nonprofit organizations are inherently political and exploring how and which nonprofit organizations engage in politics adds depth to the findings of this work. I work to clarify the relationship between nonprofits and policymaking in the United States, and decipher how it can be strengthened. I analyze the composition of the relationship between nonprofits and government, engaging in this analysis by exploring how a nonprofit organization can be more or less successful in influencing public policy. My project is operating under the concept that politicization and level of influence of a nonprofit organization may be crucial factors to success regardless of other structural characteristics. With this as a guiding principle, my thesis works to answer the question: how does the level of government at which they operate and the politicization of their mission affect an advocacy-oriented nonprofit's ability to influence policy in the United States?

### **Importance of Topic**

Overall, my thesis explores how entities that are legally restricted from acting politically *can* actually influence politics. In the COVID-19 era, issue domains are coming forward into the public consciousness that have never before had the same salience. My research is useful in understanding the efforts of domestic nonprofit organizations in the United States' new footing in a post-pandemic era.

My study examines nonprofits working in two sectors which represent different levels of politicization. These sectors are the environment and mental health advocacy, both of which have faced an unprecedented increase in demand in the past year. After months of quarantine and a shift in US culture from the pandemic, mental health crises soar from isolation, fear, and economic downfall. At the same time, single use plastic resurges in the name of sanitation. The

current global trauma will undoubtedly call for nonprofit support in the recovery and reshaping of the US for years to come. The seeds of understanding from this work will augment nonprofit efficiency and effectiveness.

My research focuses on the nonprofit sector as distinctive within United States society, but it does share characteristics with interest groups that will give the results of this project a larger scope of application. The key distinction between nonprofit organizations and interest groups is the difference between advocating and lobbying. Advocacy shares information on the organization's purpose or mission, while lobbying shares and spreads a stance on a specific piece of legislation, regulation, or candidate (Fritz 4). Nonprofit organizations are legally restricted from lobbying, while interest groups both advocate and lobby heavily. Interest groups and nonprofit organizations are similar in their goals to advocate for political action in their specific issue areas, but the ways they go about doing so are held to different standards by law. Due to the legal limitations of nonprofit organizations, their interaction with politicians and candidates is also strictly monitored as to not be labeled as lobbying, while interest groups frequently partner closely with politicians. Nonprofit organizations, rather than interest groups, are the focus of this project because of their distinct limitations to policy making. My research explores how groups that are legally limited from politics, especially through lobbying, can influence policy nonetheless. My project discusses why nonprofit organizations can face these unique limitations and still influence policy just as interest groups, who do not face them, do.

## **Literature Review**

Numerous political and social science scholars have analyzed the role of the nonprofit sector as a component of American life, policy, and economy. Recent literature in these

disciplines focuses largely on the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), primarily internationally reaching nonprofit organizations. This literature is helpful for conceptualizing policy influence as it provides a global perspective to advocacy efforts. The scope of analysis used in these works lacks the nuances of the barriers of policy-making specific to the composition of each country and population. These barriers include cultural norms/preferences specific to those constituencies, that country's government structure, increased partisanship and divide in their government, etc. These factors make the role of nonprofits and advocacy variable in each country. Previous literature covering NGOs also focuses primarily on a policy domain's overall success at achieving their goals, and not the success of individual organizations (Zhang). The lack of acknowledgement of the success of the individual organizations and the specific barriers by country will be addressed through my research on United States based nonprofit organizations. The thesis will provide new information to build on this previous discussion and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A central goal of my thesis is to analyze the success of a nonprofit organization, but "success" is an extremely broad term that must be defined in terms of politics and US policy specifically. Salamon (2012) defines the success of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in terms of their ability to help them achieve and push the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are a set of eight socioeconomic and health goals that all members of the UN member states agreed to achieve by 2015. The understanding of the MDGs as a measure of success is helpful in creating a comprehensive perspective on the history of advocacy organizations and how they were judged. How the success of these organizations was historically measured gives context on the genesis of the sector's place in US society. Despite this, these

goals identified issues the governments of the member states were tasked to address so the MDGs are a measure of the success of a government to address these issues, and not of the nonprofits directly. Therefore, nonprofits cannot be comprehensively judged by their ability to achieve the MDGs because they were not considered as a key component in their conception. Salamon also addresses the politicization of many policy domains within the nonprofit sector-issues which become partisan and controversial. Two of these are the environment and mental health domains, therefore my project work to help fill a gap in discourse around these domains that exists historically in the US system.

Beyond the MDGs, and especially in the United States, there is a tendency to evaluate the success of any organization or group based on financials. Brooks (2004) addresses this in a political science framework, exploring how nonprofit organizations are evaluated economically in terms of fundraising. Brooks (2004) compares two practices: financial ratios and adjusted performance measures, exploring the effect of government funding on nonprofits and how each of the two performance measures analyze the fundraising abilities of social welfare nonprofits differently. Brooks' project is useful because the framework of adjusted performance measures provides a blueprint for a scientific way to neutralize the external forces that the nonprofit sector faces due to their unique positionality and limitations in US society. These same forces are standardized in my research by extreme care to choose case study organizations that are very similar except for the key variables, and using the same framework as Brooks in acknowledging and accounting for recognized confounding variables on the nonprofit sector.

In turn, the need for guidance in organizational reform to increase political influence is also evident in previous discourse surrounding issues in aid effectiveness. For example, Shiffman examines NGO effectiveness in the context of the High Level Forum, an annual event hosted by

the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and attended by ministers, heads of development agencies and civil society organizations from more than 100 countries. This forum addresses the manners at which aid is both slowed down and sped up and works to marry developed and developing countries' understanding of aid success for more effective efforts (*Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness*). Attendees worked to solidify methods for speeding up progress for addressing issues in groups giving aid to developing countries (Shiffman). One major concern discussed was the inability to succeed in aid work due to the competition for policy attention and imperatives. This translates directly to the similar struggle of nonprofits to gain political attention and the need for a nonprofit organization to gain and hold this attention to be effective. With the understanding of the shortcoming of the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the need for the correct composition of a nonprofit to address their effectiveness internally, in order to succeed externally, is clear but no method for actually doing so is given. I aim to provide this guidance for more effective advocacy through the seeds of understanding from my thesis work.

Similar discussion has surrounded organizational structures' effect on nonprofit success in the US, but only through the organizational structure of board demographics (Dula) or the lens of financial success (Mitchell & Berlan). I intend to focus on the core aspects (level of government and level of politicization surrounding the nonprofit's core issue domain) and their effects on political success, a niche not yet analyzed to guide nonprofits in their political work. In doing so, this research will fill a void in discourse around aid effectiveness by analyzing how nonprofits themselves can be best geared for political influence, and therefore add depth to guidelines for success. I aim to create a blueprint to address the challenges and decipher what works and what doesn't in achieving political priority in order to influence public policy.

Political priority has been outlined and defined frequently in previous literature, sources which will be used as a framework of analysis in this project. According to Shiffman and Smith, political priority is set when national political leaders publicly and privately express sustained concern for the issue, the government enacts policies that offer widely embraced strategies to address the problem, and the government allocates and releases public budgets commensurate with the problem's gravity. With this discussion, political priority and agenda setting function as the qualifier of successful NGOs and policy domains, but the current literature fails to address how domestic nonprofits achieved political priority through their internal organizational structures. In the empirical chapters of this project, I operationalize Shiffman and Smith's qualifiers of political priority as they relate to the case studies in this research (how long an organization's issue remains on an agenda, what portion of the budget is given to the issue, etc.). This project will add an understanding of how the government level locus of advocacy and topic area of a specific nonprofit organization determines its success, measured in terms of political priority as defined in these previous works.

Agenda setting in my project will focus on the influence of the two key independent variables- government level locus of advocacy of organization and politicization of their topic area. Previous literature provides an understanding of external factors influencing the ability to agenda set, specifically the effects of media coverage. In a longitudinal study across six Western European countries, outlying factors influencing an issues success in agenda setting reflected the indirect effect of media coverage of protests on parliamentary agenda setting (Vliegthart et al.), exhibiting the effect of press and protests on agenda setting and therefore augmenting the external implications of the understanding this project will gain as they will add onto the complexity of this knowledge. An understanding of the influence of external factors affecting the

agenda setting ability of a campaign/issue is useful because it augments the importance of the dependent variables and how an organization can overall more successfully influence policy through agenda setting.

My project will add to the existing academic discussion on the ability of nonprofits to set the agenda. Much of this existing work surrounds how interest groups do this. For example, Heike Klüver (2020) found that “political parties adjust their policy agendas in response to interest group mobilization and that interest groups are more successful in shaping party policy when their priorities coincide with those of the electorate” (Klüver 3). This gives parameters on how issue groups can most successfully influence party agenda, which will have implications on this project’s analysis on how nonprofits can similarly influence agendas. My research will also go beyond the *party’s* agenda as discussed here, also analyzing agendas from the legislature (congress, gubernatorial work, etc.). This will add to Klüver’s discussion to create a comprehensive understanding of organizational factors, for interest groups, nonprofits, and other institutions, to be most dependably influential through their success at remaining on the agenda.

From a global perspective, there is substantial literature surrounding transnational and national influences on achieving global political priority. For example, Daire, Kloster, and Storeng, explore the factors that led to abortion reform bills rising to political consciousness and passing in Malawi. Their work defines political priority through Schiffman and Smith’s framework, as discussed above. The report uses the Shiffman and Smith framework while modifying slightly to emphasize the effects of transnational influences, domestic advocacy, and the national political environment on political priority. The findings of the study show that all of the influences outlined by Shiffman as important in generating political priority were present in Malawi. The understandings from the work of Daire et al. are specific to Malawi but begin to

shed light on the factors that affect the political priority efforts of advocacy work, and this project will bring this discussion specifically to US nonprofits. My project does not work to prove that political priority exists in nonprofit advocacy work, but instead measures how much it exists in different types of nonprofits, shifting the conversation to political priority as a scale rather than a zero sum quantification.

The findings of Daire et al. exemplify the existing conversation surrounding political priority through the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework. Daire et al. conclude that this framework lacks attention to the implementation of the issue addressed by the priority-making. The authors describe that the uncertainties surrounding the bill's future make clear that beyond the Shiffman and Smith framework, it is important to consider how political priority can be maintained past the agenda-setting and policy-making stage to ensure that policy translates into practice through implementation. Nonprofit organizations inherently act as implementation watchdogs, so this project addresses both of these facets and positions nonprofits to be the key factor in both policy-influencing and policy-implementing.

De Graauw (2015) discusses nonprofits as policy-implementation watchdogs. My study echoes a widely-stated argument across academia that in the comparison between unions and nonprofit organizations in the process of advocacy, nonprofits hold the larger role in policy implementation. Meanwhile, unions outshine nonprofits in the policy-making process as the stronger non-governmental factor affecting the process. This discussion positions unions and nonprofits on either side of the policy process, with unions on the policy-making side and nonprofit organizations on the implementation and enforcement side. This approach fails to recognize the role that nonprofit organizations play in the policy-making process, instead positioning them solely as enforcers once the process is complete.



My thesis will use the Shiffman and Smith framework to refute this characterization asserting that while nonprofits may not have direct policy-making roles due to legal limitations, they do have a role as policy-influencing mechanisms in the advocacy process, and there are factors that make them more or less successful in that role. These legal limitations extend beyond the United States. Nonprofit organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, have equivalent regulations on their activities in terms of political involvement (Rutzen et al.).

Existing literature directly uses, or slightly modifies, the Shiffman and Smith framework for projects on a variety of topics- from sociocultural, to medical, to family planning (Daire et al., Mikulski & Venturini, Walt & Gilson). However, these works fail to explain the policy influencing aspect of nonprofit organizations as a concept, how specific characteristics inherently influence particular aspects of the Shiffman and Smith framework. My thesis will address this by analyzing the relationship between different characteristics of nonprofit organizations and the successful setting of political priority in their respective level of government for their advocacy issue. Similar to other research, this project slightly modifies the framework to better fit the research. Re-shaping this framework for this project, political priority is set when 1) the issue exemplifies sustained concern by political leaders, 2) legislation is passed, and 3) budgets and government outputs address the issue sufficiently. With this modified Shiffman and Smith framework, I will create a comprehensive picture of the role of nonprofit organizations in influencing political policy and measure the level to which they successfully do so.

By focusing on US domestic policy domains, this project will provide specific guidance defining organizational structures that best help nonprofits succeed in the United States and how political influence is qualified and achieved within the US system. An increased understanding

of advocacy work in the US political system can be broadly applicable to any group's ability to advocate politically. This blueprint can also be applied to other countries with democratic governments and through future discussions can allow analysis of their specific government priority-making and nonprofit sector. Ultimately, the understanding gained from my research may be used in the shaping and reshaping of the nonprofit sector as needs continue to grow and new policy domains gain traction, helping nonprofits achieve political priority and grow their base of support in turn. This will be accomplished through analysis of six US-based nonprofit organizations, of varying politicization and level of government that they engage with. Research into their historical policy success (or failures) in the form of their ability to achieve political priority will then convey the contributing factors to successful advocacy.

As noted earlier, I focus on the effects of level of government and politicization of their advocacy area as the moderating variables of the project. My case studies are from two different policy domains: one focused on a more controversial topic area and one focused on a less controversial topic area. In this case, mental health nonprofits are categorized as apolitical (less controversial) and environmental nonprofits are categorized as political (more controversial). This framework is based in part on the frequency with which current US party platforms' mention the domains as well as the larger scoping Manifesto Project's tracing of the topics. The Manifesto Project studies the policy preferences of political parties by analyzing their election manifestos over time (Manifesto Project Database Version 5) across the globe. Tracing this in preliminary research environmental policy is mentioned more in political discourse, existing in 2.3% of partisan language from 2010-2020 per the Manifesto Project's work. The environment is even used as its own indicator on the Project's database. Meanwhile, mental health discourse in this scope falls underneath healthcare and welfare and is less politicized, existing as a portion of

2.97% of “no meaningful code applied” partisan language from 2010-2020 per the database. The discussion of mental health is a portion of that percentage, while the environment is specifically coded and addressed with their percentage. This lack of exact coding points to the environment being more politicized because it is addressed through this project, while mental health is not addressed specifically.

Using the mental health and environmental policy domains will provide a focused scope within a large enough research base to create a full picture of the trends in nonprofit political influence. Using these fields is constructive for this research because they are similar in many ways except their level of politicization; they both work to fight a problem that is often invisible to the general populace and therefore attracts political empathy differently from other, more visible, missions. Regarding the environment, the Democratic National Committee states, “Democrats are committed to curbing the effects of climate change, protecting America’s natural resources, and ensuring the quality of our air, water, and land for current and future generations. From investing in clean energy to protecting our ecosystems, Democrats are working to address our biggest environmental challenges, paving the way to a more sustainable America” (*DNC Environment Statement*). Meanwhile, the GOP platform statement does not address climate change or environmental issues directly. Instead, in discussing the environment rates their interests as ensuring: abundant harvests, a new era in energy, and environmental progress all through the lens of economic gains (*GOP Platform*). This poses environmental advocacy as inherently controversial in government due to party perspective. In contrast, Republicans do not even mention mental health (for or against increased resources and programming) in their party platform statement (*GOP Platform*). Democrats briefly mention mental health resourcing in their

platform in terms of healthcare coverage of these programs (*DNC Platform Statement*). The smaller, or lack of, discussion of the topic area is indicative of its less-political nature.

The effort to identify the level of government and the level of politicization most useful in creating nonprofits that successfully influence policy must also take into account the other material factors that are known to address policymaking in the US. Crane and Finkle (1989) break down the factors that consistently influence public policy in the US through their research of the dynamics of US policy making during the creation and allocation of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United States' policies towards China. Their findings exemplify the influence of human rights norms, relevant policy precedents, global events, and the institutional settings surrounding decision makers (interest groups, etc.). This understanding of the other factors influencing policy making is useful in recognizing what may also be affecting the successes or failures of policy making campaigns alongside the work being done by each nonprofit.

In my project, each organization (case study) is broken down first by their type as previously listed, then correlated to their success, or lack thereof, in agenda setting through the lens of political success (see Figure 1 below). Nonprofit organizations are chosen based on two criteria: the ability to access their records and sufficient data sources and their prevalence in their respective advocacy fields. Campaigns from each organization are identified from their efforts during a ten-year timeframe (2010-2020) to control for variables of different political regimes and other influences.

| <b>Level of Government →</b>                | <b>Local</b>                 | <b>State/Regional</b>        | <b>National</b>              |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Policy Domain Type ↓</b>                 |                              |                              |                              |
| <b>Controversial/Political domain</b>       | NPO 1<br>(environmental NPO) | NPO 3<br>(environmental NPO) | NPO 5<br>(environmental NPO) |
| <b>Less Controversial/Apolitical domain</b> | NPO 2<br>(mental health NPO) | NPO 4<br>(mental health NPO) | NPO 6<br>(mental health NPO) |

Figure 1.

This thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework, hypotheses, and methods guiding this project. Chapter 3 defines success in policy influence and outlines the methods used in this project. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the outcomes of how levels/types affect policy influence and how politicization policy influence, respectively. These analysis chapters will use the archival research and interviews to determine achievement of political priority (therefore, success) by each nonprofit organization, and findings will draw conclusions from the comparisons of these different levels of achievement between nonprofits with each different modifying variable. Finally, Chapter 6 uses these results to draw conclusions on the possible patterns stemming of factors influencing a nonprofit organization’s ability to influence policy. The conclusions from this research will suggest characteristics and organizational factors that correlate with nonprofit success as measured political advocacy and influence.

## **Chapter 2: Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework**

In this project the main outcome of interest is government action on environmental or mental health toward the nonprofit's preferred position. I aim to explore how nonprofits influence why government action did or did not happen, and to what extent. My hypothesized answer to the guiding question of how the government level locus of advocacy and politicization of an advocacy-oriented nonprofit affects its ability to influence policy will be multifaceted. This proposed answer incorporates the understanding of political priorities, efficacy, government efficiency, community support, and resources. Both a nonprofit's locus of government advocacy efforts (size) and controversiality of issue effect policy campaigning. Smaller organizational aspects, such as social media use and board size, are dependent on the government level locus of advocacy and politicization of the nonprofit and are therefore accounted for in this framework. A complete understanding of these facets of policy-making allows the proposal of a hypothesis on the most politically "successful" organization.

Overall, if an advocacy-oriented nonprofit organization is state/regionally-based and focuses on a highly politicized issue area, then it is likely the results will show that they will be more influential over policy-making. Theoretically, this is due to their ability to engage communities in advocacy to remain in public consciousness (therefore, on government agendas) as well as their ability to attach to "empathetic moments" in their communities and advocate passion through their controversiality. Figure 2 exhibits these predictions with a rating scale of achieving political priority for 1-3, 1 being the least successful and 3 being the most. The closer to these parameters, the more successful the nonprofit organization will be at achieving political priority (see Figure 2).

| <b>Level of Government →</b>                | <b>Local</b>                   | <b>State/Regional</b>          | <b>National</b>                |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Policy Domain Type ↓</b>                 |                                |                                |                                |
| <b>Controversial/Political domain</b>       | 2 rating of political priority | 3 rating of political priority | 2 rating of political priority |
| <b>Less Controversial/Apolitical domain</b> | 1 rating of political priority | 2 rating of political priority | 1 rating of political priority |

Figure 2.

Operating at the midsize (state and regional) level gives nonprofits a large enough scope of influence to acquire adequate resources and population to keep their work at the top of the political agenda. At the national level, an organization risks having their work seem impersonal and unrelatable to their audience due to a larger scope of influence. At the local level, their audience is simply not large enough to give their work the strength to propel onto political agendas because this audience is not a compelling enough constituency for politicians to work to satisfy in their policies. With this line of theory, state/regional organizations then have the Goldilocks-esque “just right” balance of audience size as a compelling portion of a politician’s constituency to motivate political agenda setting and priority.

In addition, by addressing a more politicized topic, a nonprofit may be shown to have more passionate advocates within the government who will work alongside the nonprofit to help them agenda set, receive sufficient attention on the budget, and see the legal process through until their efforts become policy. With less controversial topics, politicians may be less likely to include the issue in their campaign platform because it is not as empathetic a point to convince voters. Therefore, more controversial topics may isolate certain constituencies but they will simultaneously embolden support from others. So, politicians are more likely to take a stronger

stance and see through the policy work in controversial topics. They may take longer to see policy passed due to backlash from other, strongly opposed, political opponents but it will stay on the agenda longer in meaningful ways. Meaningful ways consist of legislative action such as congressional committee discussion, revisions, etc. rather than remaining for long periods of time on the congressional agenda due to unproductive filibuster or partisan delays.

The causal argument in this case is that higher politicization of an issue yields more airtime and momentum in advocacy and therefore encourages politicians to create policy in favor of the issue's resolution. Overall, increased politicization of a nonprofit's mission will strengthen support from politicians looking to make a statement on the issue as a political stance. Therefore allowing the nonprofit organization to have a larger influence on policymaking and agenda setting. This would be observed in this project through higher rates of success achieving political priority for organizations with "more controversial" missions, the environmental nonprofit organizations in this project.

The relationship between politicization and successful policymaking can be exhibited in the international advocacy setting of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). For example, an NGO coalition in the 1990s was the prime mover of the Mine Ban Treaty of 1997 (Paul 2). This coalition, called the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, used the politicization of the issue of antipersonnel landmines to mobilize their efforts and strengthen the political arm of their coalition work (*The ICBL*). In this case, the issue became increasingly politicized through the use of a coalition- with politicians and other NGOs strongly supporting or not supporting the efforts. The opportunity for public support increasingly politicized the issue and publicized the stance of every group and every politician. Highly militarized countries strongly opposed the ban, but were pressured by the increased politicization and stronghold of support created by the coalition.



Eventually, the politicization of land mines caused the strengthening and exposure of the coalition to move forward to a treaty. My project will use this blueprint of successful politicized advocacy work in NGOs to attempt to support this same causal relationship, between politicization and policy influence, in United States nonprofits.

The results of my project will support this hypothesis if the data shows more successful political priority in the nonprofit case study at the state/regional level and that has a more politicized issue area. Positive results will also show that all of the “more politicized” nonprofits were more successful at achieving political priority than their “less politicized” counterparts (nonprofits at the same level of government efforts but differing in controversiality of mission). In that same way, results that show that both nonprofits at the state/regional level more successfully achieved political priority will support the hypotheses driving this work. This may be exhibited in the research and data collected through longer periods of successful agenda setting, more sufficient budgetary recognition, and more legislation actually passed. This measure of support for the hypothesis stems from an adaptation of the Shiffman and Smith framework for measuring political priority. Previous use of this framework has been useful and effective, therefore the hypothesized outcome and methods used in this project are theoretically strong.

My hypotheses and the underlying theories that drive them will be tested through the research and analytical work in this thesis. The results will function to support or disprove the hypothesis, and to frame the limitations of the project. As the hypothesis is supported or refuted in the conclusion of this thesis, it will also identify future endeavors to research further in this line of analysis in areas where more questions are uncovered.

## Chapter 3: Empirical Strategy

### Methodology

This chapter outlines the process and research methods of this project, beginning with case selection and ending with the quantification of data analysis to draw my final conclusions.



Figure 3

This chapter also defines the measurement of political success in this project in terms of achieving political priority. Together, these methods create a comprehensive understanding of the effects of nonprofit government level and topic area on political influence.

The comparative case study analysis in my research used an empirical approach to best address how the size and organization of an advocacy-oriented nonprofit affects its ability to influence policy. My work used a ten-year timeframe, analyzing advocacy efforts and political outcomes from 2010-2020 for each nonprofit organization.

This timeframe allowed for a sufficiently large scope of research to provide an adequate picture of the work each NPO did and took into account the red tape that necessitates patience in political work, and it also controlled for the different confounding variables different political climates throughout history have had on the nonprofit sector and the

ability for different issues to achieve political priority. As shown in Figure 3, the timeframe spanned periods with Republican and Democrat presidents, governors, state senates, and

Congresses. The coverage of different government demographics, in terms of party power, within this timeframe strengthened the work as comprehensive and representative of patterns in different political landscapes and structures.

Lester Salamon's (2012) work in tracing the history of the nonprofit sector supports the use of my timeframe for these very reasons. Salamon exemplified the complexity of the nonprofit sector overtime and its extreme variability depending on political regime and corresponding climate. Using the 2010-2020 time frame held the research constant to the Obama and Trump presidencies and corresponding local and state governments over the same period (see Figure 3).

In my thesis, nonprofits were defined in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in that they are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the United States tax code. The tax code states "an organization must be organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes set forth in section 501(c)(3), and none of its earnings may inure to any private shareholder or individual. In addition, it may not be an action organization, i.e., it may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates" (*IRS Exemption Requirements*). Although nonprofit organizations cannot legally lobby directly, their advocacy work does have direct policy impacts by successfully rallying their communities and supporters, drawing attention to issues, and creating empathy for their mission. The IRS continues on to describe that a 501(c)(3) organization may engage in *some* lobbying, but too much lobbying activity risks loss of tax-exempt status under the discretion of the IRS (*IRS- Lobbying*). Nonprofit organizations can also act as experts in their field during the policymaking process and have other ways to influence policy without directly lobbying for the issue in a way that would impact their tax-exempt status.

Their advocacy work functions to bring attention and support to their mission and therefore help it achieve political priority despite their lack of ability to directly lobby.

The selection of the case studies in this project was a multifaceted process. Organizations were identified through topic areas primarily, which involved researching organizations in either environmental advocacy or mental health advocacy/resourcing. Based on the availability of organizations for interviews, I shortened a list of possible organizations into the six case studies for this project. The original list of possible organizations for case selection was compiled through the nonprofit database *Guidestar*. The organizations listed in this database were then added to personal knowledge of organizations based on my experiences as a resident of New Jersey, New York, and Louisiana. Once a comprehensive list of possible case studies was compiled, I organized the possibilities by locus of advocacy (level of government) and type of advocacy (environmental or mental health), creating multiple options for case studies in each category for the project. I then ranked the options for each level/type categorization in terms of which I would prefer to use, simply based on a review of their website and the availability of their records/information. Then, I began reaching out to each individual organization, in that ranked order, to inquire about interview availability. Each case study needed to be available for an interview in order to control equal background understanding within the analysis. This allowed the prospective case studies to be conclusively narrowed down to the three environmental nonprofits and the three mental health nonprofits, with one in each level/size.

Using the mental health and environmental policy domains provided a focused scope within a large enough research base to create a full picture of the trends in nonprofit political influence. Overall, each organization (case study) was broken down first by their “type” as

previously listed, which was then correlated to their success, or lack thereof, in achieving political priority as the quantification of political success.

Once these categorizations of case studies were made, interviews with a staff member from each case study organization were conducted. The purpose of these interviews was to have a stronger grasp on the feelings of political efficacy within each nonprofit organization as a whole. The findings were used to create a stronger background understanding of the organization. The conclusions of the thesis were not based solely on these interviews; rather, these interviews were used to better interpret the findings collected from other sources: agenda minutes, budgets, press coverage, etc. The questions in the interview were held constant for each interviewee, and surrounded the previous political campaigns, major issues or successes seen by their organization, and their tactics for setting goals for their advocacy team (see Appendix A for details).

The results of this project aim to show underlying complexities in the influence of the structure of a nonprofit in terms of level and topic area on their political strength. Complete background information ensured that other factors within the organization are held constant and not drastically affecting the analysis to a full picture of the organization's political "success" (or lack thereof) from within their internal goals/perspective. Compounding the research data with the interviews cultivated a full picture of the organization's political efficacy. Seeing if an organization met its political goals from its own perspective, and comparing that to the results of the research on whether succeeded in achieving political priority, added complexity to the outcomes. On top of this, the interviews allowed for compound variables in the nonprofit to be held constant, as they are discussed and their effects were made clear to then be accounted for. The interview aspect of this project allowed for stronger empirical data and insight into the

political goals and efforts of the organization, also giving insight into the data to yield stronger conclusions.

These interviews were coded using the *Dedoose* coding server, which allowed for the transcript of each interview to be analyzed for key terms, phrases, and topic codes. The codes used for coding analysis included, but were not limited to: barriers to policy and advocacy, coalitions, future policy goals, political efficacy, agenda setting, unique qualities of the organization, and press work. This data from the interview coding process was then used to compound the findings from the direct data analysis of legislations, agenda, and budgets.

The coding process was a comprehensive use of the *Dedoose* program combined with manual analysis of the content from the interviews. Using the codes inputted into the system, matching phrases or paragraphs were highlighted with the coded identifier. For example, the following quote is from my interview with Kristi Trail, executive director of the Pontchartrain Conservancy:

There's been instances where the state has gotten federal money, like they've gotten federal money to evaluate something in schools, like after school programs, they might turn that over and just ask the community, like, we have this money, What do y'all think we should do? And that's a very community driven process, right? Public meetings, and they're gathering the data, and then they're distilling it down, and they're trying to figure out what everybody wants. We don't operate that way. We collect research and data. And based on what we find with our research, we take that, and that's what we decide to go advocate for now, when we want to bring that to the public and the press. But we don't often consult with them and ask them do you like this, because we know we get the science. So we were like, that is what sciences like we're really gonna push this. So again, we use our information to try as an educational tool, you know, say, this is what we found. And look, I just wanna let y'all know, this is what we're really gonna push for in policymaking. And I hope you like it. But this is what like, we're really gonna push for it. And so that's just again, kind of our approach. It's not a community driven approach. It's more of a science approach. But we do a lot of engagement with the public to just educate them on our work.

The entire paragraph was coded as discussing “unique qualities of the organization” because Trail uses anecdotes and advice to emphasize the Pontchartrain Conservancy’s focus on

an educational and science-based approach to their advocacy. The code for “unique qualities of the organization” is represented by the yellow highlighting, which is then overlapped by other coding in the paragraph but covers the entire quote. The green highlighting represents the coding of “press work” and “community attention work”, applied because Trail used the unique qualities of the organization to show how the Pontchartrain Conservancy appeals to the public and the press through their work, using their science-based approach to capture their audience’s attention and therefore help their advocacy gain traction. Lastly, the red highlighting, including the section overlapped with the green, is coded from “tips for agenda setting” in how appealing to the press and community can then transfer to appealing to the political agenda. As an example of a quotation with multiple coding applications, Trail’s commentary here provides a basis of understanding of how each interview was individually coded to provide background information on the case studies.

Following the analysis of interviews, three advocacy campaigns for each nonprofit organization were traced through their ability to influence policy based on Shiffman and Smith’s pillars of political priority as defined in the following section “Defining Political Priority.” These campaigns were each given a score from 1-3 based on their success in achieving political priority. Then, these campaigns were averaged to give each nonprofit organization an overall “score” of their ability to achieve political priority. These scores were compared and analyzed for overall projections, conclusions, and further hypotheses. This quantification of the qualitative data allowed for a strong empirical analysis yielding illustrative conclusions in my project.

## **Operationalization: Measuring and Analyzing Political Priority**

The first step in analyzing the effectiveness of nonprofits on influencing policy was to identify how “success” in influencing policy would be measured. In this project, “successful” influence of policy was equated with achieving political priority. Political priority was the most effective tool for measuring policy success in this framework because it provided a quantification of the topic’s importance in political consciousness. Political priority was a clear measurement of the value placed on an issue by politicians and therefore by citizens influencing these politicians. Nonprofit organizations are a key tool in facilitating this communication of values between politicians and their constituencies. My project used political priority to analyze the role of nonprofits in this chain of influencing politics.

According to Shiffman and Smith (2007), political priority is set when national political leaders publicly and privately express sustained concern for the issue, the government enacts policies that offer widely embraced strategies to address the problem, and the government allocates and releases public budgets commensurate with the problem’s gravity. Shaping this framework for this project, political priority is set when the issue exemplifies 1) sustained concern by political leaders, 2) legislation is passed, and 3) budgets and government outputs address the issue sufficiently.

Sustained concern for an advocacy NPO issue was how long it remains on the agenda, during the set timeframe of 2010-2020, once the NPO has brought it to political attention in their respective government level. To measure the “sustained concern” pillar of political priority in this framework, the research aimed to answer the question: how long does the topic remain on the agenda once the NPO has brought it to political attention? To answer this, this project looked at political meeting agendas and media attention from politicians to measure the amount of time



the topic is held at political consciousness. The campaigns used in this project may have been brought to political attention prior to the timeframe of 2010-2020, but their first introduction in the legislature's agenda was within that timeframe.

To measure the "pass legislation" pillar of priority, my research aimed to answer the question: does the government enact corresponding policy (or policy changes) and how close to the goals of the NPO work is it? For each case study, I analyzed the passing or not passing of legislation at each corresponding government level within the 2010-2020 timeframe through the actual legislative work and lawmaking documents.

Lastly, to measure the "government outputs" pillar, research aimed to answer the question: is the issue allotted space in the budget that commensurates with the problem's gravity? To answer this, I compared released government budgets and projections of NPO project costs. If the advocacy effort was seeking regulatory measures, the sufficient budget allocation included the lack of funding to a project or an equivalent measure that accomplished the financial outcomes sought by the campaign.

The level to which each NPO achieved these three qualifiers of political priority comprised its "success" at influencing policymaking. This measurement of success then was used to analyze what aspects of an NPO lead it to that success (or lack thereof). Each campaign within each case study was given a score from 1-3 based on their success in achieving political priority to quantify the measurement of success for each nonprofit organization. A score of 1 indicated a failed campaign in all three aspects of achieving political priority, a 2 indicated a semi-successful campaign (achieving 1-2 aspects of setting political priority), and a 3 indicated a campaign that was successful in all three pillars of political priority. The scores of each campaign within an organization were averaged together to give each nonprofit organization an

overall “score” of their ability to achieve political priority, therefore of their success in influencing policy. These scores were then compared and analyzed for overall projections, conclusions, and further hypotheses.

Both primary and secondary sources were used to measure each NPOs achievement in the three facets of achieving political priority outlined above. Primary research took the form of archival research through annual reports and government discourse to determine levels of politicization and structural factors. These were then compared with each organization’s success at agenda setting that was deciphered through governmental reports and agenda. Semi-structured interviews with leaders at each organization were also used to analyze their political efficacy as an organization and to identify other confounding factors that may have contributed to their organization’s ability to influence policy. Secondary sources included media reports on the organization’s work and coverage of the corresponding political action (or lack thereof).

In analyzing how organizations did or did not achieve sustained concern by political leaders, the appearance of the topic/issue/bill on legislature agenda was traced from first mentioned to last. In analyzing how the organization succeeded in passing legislation, the bills or lack of bill signage was reported. Lastly, in analyzing if sufficient budgets were allocated to the project/issue/effort within the government, government budgetary reports in the cycles following the legislation were analyzed alongside projection of project costs seen in organizational reports (when applicable).

In analyzing this data, qualitative methods were transferred into quantitative data through a scoring process. Three advocacy campaigns for each nonprofit organization were traced through their ability to influence policy based on the three pillars from Shiffman and Smith’s pillars of political priority. These campaigns were then given a score from 1-3 based on their

success in achieving political priority. The scores of each campaign within an organization were averaged together to give each nonprofit organization an overall “score” of their ability to achieve political priority, therefore of their success in influencing policy. These scores were then compared and analyzed for overall projections, conclusions, and further hypotheses. The following chapters discuss the enactment of this work to measure the achievements in political priority of each NPO and draw conclusions of which NPO composition has led to the greatest, and least, overall influence on political success.

## **Operationalization: Classifications of the Level and Politicization Type of NPOs**

### **Classification of Level of Government Engagement of NPOs**

The specification of nonprofit organizations as their specific type of government engagement and level of politicization was multifaceted. The nonprofit organizations included in each type of government level met specific criteria to fit as the representative for each category. These criteria center largely on the government level that the nonprofit generally advocates or reports to. This section discusses the key indicators of a nonprofit organization’s identification as local, state/regional, or national.

Local nonprofit organizations serve a community within a state (a town, county, state region, etc.) and work with local government in their advocacy. These criteria were shown to be met through recognition on local government agendas, budgets, and policy-making (town councils, mayoral acts, etc.). These organizations also largely work with local media for press during their advocacy efforts. The two local organizations that met this criteria were: The Mental Health Association of Monmouth County and the Pontchartrain Conservancy. The Mental Health

Association of Monmouth County is an affiliate organization of Mental Health America, but works locally in Monmouth County, New Jersey to provide mental health services and advocacy in the county. One of their largest efforts in the last ten years has been the “End the Stigma” campaign on ending the stigma surrounding mental illness, as well as providing post-traumatic resources for their community following the devastation of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The Pontchartrain Conservancy is a Louisiana-based local nonprofit organization based surrounding the Lake Pontchartrain River Basin. Their efforts focus on the areas surrounding the lake and the lake itself. This includes a 10,000 square miles watershed including sixteen Louisiana parishes. Despite this, their efforts and coverage are largely local, meeting the above criteria for a representative of a local nonprofit organization in this project.

The nonprofit organizations categorized as state/regional in their scope for this project had parallel criteria to the local organizations. The state/regional groups are recognized on state government agendas, budgets, and in-state policy-making. These organizations also largely work with state or regional media for press during their advocacy efforts. For this level specifically, these organizations may also partner with surrounding states in their region for their efforts outside of the state their organization is based out of. What distinguishes state/regional groups from national organizations was that state/regional nonprofits only work with states within their region (East Coast, Southern, Mid-Atlantic, etc.). Meanwhile, national nonprofit organizations had efforts in states across the United States and across different regions of the country. In my project, the organizations that met the state/regional criteria are Clean Ocean Action (COA) and NAMI Louisiana.

Clean Ocean Action is a New Jersey-based environmental nonprofit organization that focuses on the New York-New Jersey Bight and advocates primarily to the New Jersey State

legislature. In describing the role of policy making as a goal in their organization, COA Executive Director, Cindy Zipf, presented policy-influencing as central to their work.

“It’s kind of really a part of our extended mission statement, our mission statement is to clean up and protect the waters off the New York, New Jersey coast, by really using research, research, education, citizen action, to convince our elected officials to protect and improve the marine environment. So our very core mission is about driving public policy. Because it's only through those public policies that you get the big, the big leaps of success” (Zipf)

This passion encapsulates the driving forces behind the advocacy work these nonprofits are attempting, and the underlying goal of policy making despite their status as 501(c)3 organizations. The National Alliance on Mental Illness Louisiana is the Louisiana state chapter of the organization that focuses solely on efforts within the state for mental health programs and advocacy.

Finally, the national nonprofit organizations used in this project met the criteria of advocating to the federal government and therefore have been included on federal agendas, budgets, and within the national policy-making processes. They also center their media coverage on national press outlets. The representatives of this level of nonprofit are the Environmental Defense Fund and Mental Health America. The Environmental Defense Fund is based in New York and Washington D.C. but works national on environmental advocacy and focuses on the federal level of policy change. Mental Health America is based outside of Washington D.C. but works nationally of federal mental health policy work and programming as well as larger scale advocacy for mental health work throughout the country.

### **Classification of Politicization Type of NPOs**

In a similar manner to the designation of nonprofits at the different “levels” in this project, the organizations defined as having a politicized or less-politicized issue were

determined by several indicators. Before this, as previously stated, the topic areas or environmental advocacy and mental health advocacy were deemed politicized and less-politicized. According to the Manifesto Project, environmental policy is mentioned more in political discourse- with the domain even used as its own indicator on the Project's database. Meanwhile, mental health discourse falls underneath healthcare and welfare and is significantly less politicized. Through this, mental health was deemed a “less-politicized” (or less controversial) domain while environmental advocacy was deemed more politicized (or more controversial) for this project. Then, to be determined to sufficiently fit into these domains, the nonprofits had to address either the environment or mental health advocacy in their mission statement, and have set goals in those specific topic areas in the last ten years. With this, the “more politicized” nonprofit organizations in this project are: Pontchartrain Conservancy, Clean Ocean Action, and the Environmental Defense Fund. The “less politicized” nonprofit efforts are: The Mental Health Association of Monmouth County, NAMI Louisiana, and Mental Health America. See Figure 4 for full classifications of case studies used.

| <b>Level of Government →</b>                | <b>Local</b>                                 | <b>State/Regional</b> | <b>National</b>                |
|---|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Policy Domain Type ↓</b>                 |  |                       |                                |
| <b>Controversial/Political domain</b>       | Pontchartrain Conservancy                    | Clean Ocean Action    | The Environmental Defense Fund |
| <b>Less Controversial/Apolitical domain</b> | Mental Health Association of Monmouth County | NAMI New York State   | Mental Health America          |

Figure 4.

### Ch. 4: Analysis of How Levels/Size Affect Outcomes

This chapter analyzes data from the perspective of how the results exhibit the influence of the level of government engagement on policy making. Analyzing each individual perspective before analyzing the overall results allowed for more detailed understandings. Beginning with the interviewing coding and ending with the data analysis, this discussion provided a basis for larger conclusions later on.

After conducting interviews with leaders at each nonprofit organization, primary analysis took the form of coding interview transcripts. The most frequently found terms and topics in all of the interviews were: “barriers” to policy making and discussion of “unique qualities of the organization”. In contrast, the overall least common terms/topics that came out during the interviews were: press work and relations, “press”, and their perspective on the politicization of the topic area of their organization (see Figure 5)

| Perspective                | Most Frequently Coded Terms (Prevalence)  | Least Frequently Coded Terms (Prevalence)                                     |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Overall</b>             | Unique qualities of the organization (27), barriers to policy making (23)                                 | Press work and relations (7), press (7), politicization of the topic area (7) |
| <b>Local NPOs</b>          | Unique qualities of the organization (13)   | Political efficacy (2), politicization of the topic area (2)                  |
| <b>State/Regional NPOs</b> | Barriers to policy making (14), previous policy work (14)   | Coalition work (3), future policy goals (3)                                   |
| <b>National NPOs</b>       | coalition work (5) , future policy goals (5), previous policy work (5), and insight on agenda setting (5) | Press work (1), politicization of the topic area (1)                          |

Figure 5.

The data collected through the coding of these interviews initially exhibited what was expected to be the purpose of the interviews- not to act as conclusive evidence toward this thesis's hypotheses, but instead to create a stronger grasp on the political efficacy feeling within each nonprofit organization and in the organization as a whole. This was a clear central function of the interviews as the most prevalent codes were surrounding the composition and tactics of the organization, allowing a comprehensive understanding of the many factors influencing their policy work. This primary data on the prioritization of unique qualities of the organization and lack of mention of "press" and media in terms of policy work was then compounded by analysis of the coded interview terms when grouped by level of the organization- advocating at the local, state/regional, or national level.

Results of the interview analysis showed that at the local level, analyzing the Pontchartrain Conservancy and the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County, the most frequently found code in interviews was once again "unique qualities of the organization". In contrast, state/regional nonprofit organizations (Clean Ocean Action and NAMI New York State) saw the most frequent codes being tied between: previous policy work and barriers to policy making. This strays from the local organizations, but still aligns with the overall most frequently found codes. Lastly, the national organizations (Mental Health America and the Environmental Defense Fund) saw the largest tie between frequency of codes- with more topics covered but in less depth. This is exhibited in the most frequent coding terms in the national level as a four-way tie between: coalition work, future policy goals, previous policy work, and insight on agenda setting. These are all coding terms that were not the most frequent overall nor the most frequent in the individual smaller levels of organization. This analysis is important because it exhibits a unique ability and focuses on these areas as successful and prevalent in the agenda of the larger



organizations. With the largest number of codes tied for highest frequency, the larger scope of work and priority for larger organizations was also clear.

On all three “levels” of organizations, the least frequently found coded terms were more similar than the most frequently coded terms. The least frequently coded terms in the local nonprofit interviews were: “political efficacy” and the politicization of the topic area of their organizations. The least found topics in the state/regional nonprofit interviews were: coalition work and future policy goals. Lastly, the least frequent terms/topics in the national-level organization interviews were: press work and the politicization of the topic area of their organizations. These were very similar to the overall findings of coded terms- with press work and politicization being exactly mirrored in the national and local nonprofits. In this level of analysis, the state/regional nonprofits differed the most in terms of topic frequency in their interviews, both did not discuss coalitions or future policy work with the same frequency as other levels. These seeds of understanding of the function of advocacy and policy work stemming from the analysis of coded terms within the interviews were then augmented by data analysis of the ability for these organizations to set political priority. This is discussed further in the rest of this project through analysis of governmental agenda minutes, annual reports, government budgets, and other data sets tracing policy cases from each nonprofit organization.

Following interview coding, three campaigns from each nonprofit organization were traced to determine their level of achievement of political priority through the three pillars of sustained concern, passing legislation, and sufficient budget allocation. The campaigns were chosen based on their prevalence in the organization’s media presence (newsletters, articles, etc.) throughout that time period. The most mentioned campaigns were chosen and analyzed for achievement of political priority as shown in Figure 6.

| Organization name           | Average Political Priority Score     | Case 1 Political Priority Score | Case 2 Political Priority Score   | Case 3 Political Priority Score   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Pontchartrain Conservancy   | 2                                    | 3                               | 1                                 | 2                                 |
| Clean Ocean Action          | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| Environmental Defense Fund  | 2                                    | 3                               | 1                                 | 2                                 |
| MHAMC                       | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| NAMI NYS                    | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| Mental Health America       | 3                                    | 3                               | 3                                 | 3                                 |
| Average for Local NPOs: 2.3 | Average for State/Regional NPOs: 2.6 | Average for National NPOs: 2.5  | Average for Politicized NPOs: 2.2 | Average for Apolitical NPOs: 2.73 |

Figure 6.

To illustrate the ranking process, in this chapter I will discuss a campaign at each score level (1-3) and the process of assigning that score to the campaign. The Pontchartrain Conservancy received a score of 1 for its case 2. Case 2 for the Pontchartrain Conservancy was Deepwater Horizon restoration following the oil spill on April 20th, 2010. In tracing this campaign, the Pontchartrain Conservancy advocated for restoration projects in the form of the “Louisiana Master Plan”. The “sustained concern” pillar of political priority was not achieved due the large number of projects yet to be followed through with government action as proposed in the *Coastal Project Funding in Louisiana Using Oil Spill Settlement Funds* following the oil spill. According to the settlement, as of 2020, nine restoration projects have been completed, 12 projects are in or near the construction phase, and 26 projects remain in the engineering and design phase (*Pontchartrain Coastal Lines of Defense Program*). The lack of follow-up

government action or discussion of the remaining 26 restoration projects worked as an identifier of failure to sustain concern for the issue.

Alongside this, the campaign did successfully pass legislation for the issue with the passing of the Deepwater Horizon Restore Act so succeeded in the “passing legislation” pillar of political priority. Lastly, the campaign was not fully successful in the “sufficient budgetary recognition of the issue” pillar due to the failure of the Restore Act Trust to allocate sufficient funds to projects actually in Louisiana- as advocated for by the Pontchartrain Conservancy. The council in charge of allocating the reparations funds given by BP following the industrial disaster reserved \$43.6 million of the \$800 million total owed by BP to projects in phase 2 of restoration, none of which take place in Louisiana (*RESTORE Act*). Although this seems like a small portion, the reservation of the funds comes in 2015 after five years worth of the \$800 million total reparation had already been paid. The complex shared distribution of the funds was not commensurable to the goals of the Pontchartrain Conservancy’s campaign, yielding an overall score of 1 for this campaign. The score of 1 represents the failed sustained concern and budgetary allocation alongside the successful passing of legislation.

The Mental Health Association of Monmouth County (MHAMC) received scores of 3 on all of its campaigns except for case 3. Case 3 traced MHAMC’s advocacy for increased virtual mental health services. The campaign succeeded in the “sustained concern” pillar of political priority through the issue’s existence on local government meeting agendas and community platforms (press attention, community forums, etc.) for an extended period of time. The campaign succeeded in the “passing legislation” pillar through the local guidance on virtual mental health services being shifted, and virtual programming for mental health services being put in place. Finally, MHAMC did not succeed in the “budgetary allocation pillar” due to the

lack of recognition of this programming in government budgets, instead being funded by MHAMC itself (*MHA: COVID-19 Help: MHAMC Offering Free Emotional Supportive Counseling*). This culminated in a score of 2 for the overall political priority success of this campaign.

Lastly, the Environmental Defense Fund received a 3 for its case 1. Case 1 followed the organization’s advocacy for the updating and replacing of the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976. The campaign was successful in sustaining concern from political leaders as evident through its existence on the federal government agenda from 2015-2016, until the changes passed completely, as well as the issues’ recognition on party platforms and speeches for over 9 years. The campaign was successful in passing legislation as clear in the replacing the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 with the Lautenberg Act for Chemical Safety on June 22, 2016. EDF’s campaign was also successful in receiving sufficient budgetary allocation for this issue which is exhibited through the inclusion of language in the bill allocating funds from fees associated with the regulations to enforcement and the EPA. The EPA can collect up to \$25 million annually in these funds to continue to address chemical safety issues, making it successful and long lasting financial recognition of the issue (*The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act*). Due to its success in all three pillars of political priority, this campaign received an overall score of 3.

| Organization name          | Average Political Priority Score | Case 1 Political Priority Score | Case 2 Political Priority Score | Case 3 Political Priority Score |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Pontchartrain Conservancy  | 2                                | 3                               | 1                               | 2                               |
| Clean Ocean Action         | 2.6                              | 3                               | 3                               | 2                               |
| Environmental Defense Fund | 2                                | 3                               | 1                               | 2                               |

|                             |                                      |                                |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| MHAMC                       | 2.6                                  | 3                              | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| NAMI NYS                    | 2.6                                  | 3                              | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| Mental Health America       | 3                                    | 3                              | 3                                 | 3                                 |
| Average for Local NPOs: 2.3 | Average for State/Regional NPOs: 2.6 | Average for National NPOs: 2.5 | Average for Politicized NPOs: 2.2 | Average for Apolitical NPOs: 2.73 |

Figure 6.

The score process above was repeated for 3 campaigns for each of the 6 cases studies and these scores were then averaged for comparison. The results for organizations at the local level showed that these organizations had the most variation than any other level, as shown in Figure 6. The Pontchartrain Conservancy had an average political priority score of 2, while the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County had an average political priority score of 2.6. This made the average political priority score for local nonprofit organizations 2.3. See Figure 6 for full data. Both organizations saw relatively higher levels of ability to agenda set- to gain media and politician attention- but in several cases those locally-successful attention achievements did not turn into legislation nor budgetary recognition. This happened more drastically in a successful (3) case, alongside a failed (1) case and a semi-successful (2) case for the Pontchartrain Conservancy. The Mental Health Association of Monmouth County (MHAMC) saw slower progress, but was semi-successful (2) in one case and successful (3) in achieving political priority in the other two.

MHAMC’s successful (3) campaigns included the creation of the mobile response Care Management Organization in the New Jersey, specifically Monmouth County, government. This campaign is an exemplar of a clearly fully “success” case in my project as it achieves all 3 pillars of political priority. The indicator for budgetary allocation was sufficient funding from the state

Division of Child Behavioral Health Services System (DCBHS) (Christie 2015). The indicator for the passing of legislation was the expansion of the New Jersey CSOC program that includes the Care Management Organization. Alongside this indicator, Wendy DePedro, Executive Director of MHAMC, described the organization's role in the legislative process of the campaign when she stated:

[CSOC] incorporates things like the CMO, the care management organization for kids which is the mobile crisis response that they do for kids in the community. It was actually the creation of this mental healthcare department in the state and county that would address the mental health needs of youth, separate from the mental health needs of adults. And we did have a pretty big part in that.

The comprehensive programming, including unique separate programming for youth, now included in government funding and legislation made clear the inclusive success of this campaign and augmented the understanding gained from the scoring of this campaign as indicative of MHAMC's overall policy making success from 2010-2020.

The results when comparing the state/regional organizations were similar. Clean Ocean Action and NAMI New York State both had an average political priority success score of 2.6. Both case studies showed two successful (score of 3) campaigns and one semi-successful campaign (score of 2). This was the highest average score at 2.6. Within this, COA's semi-successful campaign failed in the sustained concern identifier, while NAMI NYS's semi-successful campaign failed in the passing legislation identifier. This marked difference comments on the effect of controversiality on policy success in that both organizations engage with the same level of government, so their main differentiating factor was controversiality and their main differentiating result was the difference in which failed pillar identifies their semi-successful campaign.

Lastly, the national nonprofit organizations had an average priority success score of 2.5. The Environmental Defense Fund and Mental Health America had slightly varying individual average scores, EDF's being 2 and MHA's being 3. These scores were closer in range to each other than between the two local nonprofits, but further than the exactly equal state/regional nonprofits.

Mental Health America's average score of 3 consisted of three campaigns receiving a full score of 3. These campaigns included: the Affordable Care Act's parity and medicaid expansion, Covid-19 expansion on telehealth services, and the creation and implementation of a three-digit federal suicide prevention hotline. Of these cases, the ACA and medicaid expansion campaign told an interesting story as a tool to understanding the complexity of MHA's role in policy work. Debbie Plotnick of MHA described the campaign in her interview when she stated:

[Some] states have laws that put teeth into the fact that there has to be parity, over the last quite a few years and they have been really picking up momentum and have been able to pass laws... The other piece that the Affordable Care Act did that was essential was that it expanded Medicaid, most folks who have either chronic or episodic mental health conditions often are lower income or face periods of unemployment. And so expanding Medicaid made it possible for folks to be able to get treatment, they're about one third of the expansion population, or folks who need mental health services, mental health, behavioral health services, mental health and addiction services. So it was extraordinarily important in that over the past four years, as you know, that administration that shall go on named really tried to undo that we spent an ordinate amount of energy, trying to stop the rollbacks and the things against the Affordable Care Act, we you know, it's still ongoing.

Plotnick's discussion of the role of state legislation in passing federal legislation points again to the possible role of coalition work in policymaking. Plotnick's description of the necessity of states to function as exemplars and precedence for this campaign to achieve its policy goals then points to the possible reasoning behind MHA's success. As a national organization, MHA is organized as a conglomerate of state and local affiliates but headed by a national-level supervising organization. The balance between the local/state level affiliates and

the power from the national level of the organization as well may help it advocate for campaigns that need to rely on precedence at state levels as MHA can easily communicate effectively with their state-level affiliates. This is a possible understanding that stemmed from the intersection of interview and data analysis within this project.

When I organized the results of the data overall by level of the organization, several trends became clear. Primarily, the outcomes showed that state/regional nonprofit organizations had the most similarity in outcomes of their advocacy and policy work. This level also had the highest average level of success in setting political priority. The local nonprofit organizations saw the least homogeneity in policy work influence, the national nonprofit organizations the second largest margin between averages, and the state/regional nonprofits with the smallest margin between the two cases as they had the same average score.

When split and analyzed according to differences in levels of government, the average state/regional score exhibited that categorization as the most success at achieving political priority, while the local level was the least. Overall, NAMI NYS (state/regional, politicized), MHAMC (local, politicized), and COA (state regional, apolitical) were the most individually successful at influencing policy as shown in their case studies in achieving political priority. Meanwhile, the Pontchartrain Conservancy had the overall lowest individual success at achieving political priority. These outcomes were indicative of the state/regional level or size of nonprofits to be the most successful in influencing policy, possibly due to their balance of wider-reaching volunteers and a larger audience still with hands-on, localized work within the organization. The variation in successes between the two different local nonprofit organizations may be indicative of a need for increased differentiation of methods of advocacy depending on the nonprofit's base and area in small nonprofits and therefore smaller constituencies. The results



of the national nonprofits were indicative of the variation and diversity in national organizations, but the slight standardization they faced because they were all advocating to the same constituencies, to the federal government. Meanwhile, local nonprofit organizations are advocating to different governments, varied local governments, and therefore have more diversity of success.

These conclusions on the data will be further analyzed and expanded upon in later chapters. Overall, analysis of the data from the perspective of how the level of government to which the nonprofit organizations advocate suggested several patterns. Primarily, the frequency of coded terms was generally stable throughout all levels of government. Through analysis of the scores of achieving political priority, the outcomes showed that state/regional nonprofit organizations saw the most similarity in outcomes of their advocacy and policy work. State/regional organizations also had the highest average level of success in setting political priority. The local nonprofit organizations had the least homogeneity in policy work influence, the national nonprofit organizations the second largest margin between averages, and the state/regional nonprofits with the smallest margin between the two cases as they had the same average score. In the following chapter, the depth of the understanding gained from this perspective of analysis is augmented by analysis of the data through the perspective of the effect of politicization and the ability to influence policy.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis of How Politicization of Issues Effects Outcomes**

This chapter focuses on the results of my research from the perspective of how the politicization of the mission of a nonprofit organization affects their ability to influence policy. In the final conclusion chapter, these results are combined with the discussion of the previous chapter to analyze the intersection of the two key variables and how an organization can be best suited with both, together, to influence policy making. In this chapter, the analysis begins again with interview coding to provide a preliminary understanding of the findings from each type of mission (political or apolitical) and then continues to the data research and political priority scoring analysis.

When organized by level of government interaction (local, state/regional, or national), the results remained generally similar to the frequency of coded terms overall. Comparing the results of coding analysis in the interviews organized by controversiality of their topic area then tells an interesting story. When separated by politicization of their issue area, politicized nonprofit organizations (environmentally focused in this case- including the Pontchartrain Conservancy, Clean Ocean Action, and the Environment Defense Fund) had the most frequent coded terms as: previous policy work, insight on agenda setting, and barriers to policy making. Meanwhile, the apolitical nonprofit organizations had coalition work, previous policy work, and future policy goals as the most frequent topics. These results vary greatly from the *overall* most frequent terms of all the cases- exemplifying a shift in structural, organizational, and perspective factors of nonprofits based on politicization and size (see Figure 7). Also, the less politicized nonprofits- the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County, NAMI New York State, and Mental Health America- had the most similar frequency of terms than any other grouping during the interview analysis. This may be indicative of more homogeneity on this level due to specific aspects that

succeed in policy work, or an increase in coalition work at this level that leads toward similar mindsets, topic areas, and advocacy plans.

| Perspective                             | Most Frequently Coded Terms (Prevalence)  | Least Frequently Coded Terms (Prevalence)  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Overall</b>                          | Unique qualities of the organization (27), barriers to policy making (23)                 | Press work and relations (7), press (7), politicization of the topic area (7)                    |
| <b>Apolitical (mental health) NPOs</b>  | Coalition work (8), previous policy work (8), future policy goals (8)                     | Press work (4), politicization of topic area (3), political efficacy within the organization (4) |
| <b>Politicized (environmental) NPOs</b> | Previous policy work (11), insight on agenda setting (10), barriers to policy making (10) | Press work (3), political efficacy within the organization (3), future policy goals (3)          |

Figure 7.

The least frequent terms in the interviews organized by level of politicization pointed to a similar pattern. The politicized (environmental) nonprofits' least frequently coded terms/topics were: press work, political efficacy within the organization, and future policy goals. The less political (mental health) nonprofits had a similar outcome with the least frequent coding terms being: press work, politicization of their topic area, and political efficacy within their organization. Both of these outcomes aligned with the overall results of the coding analysis for most frequent and least frequent terms/topics. Similar to the findings of the most frequent terms, the least frequent terms in the less politicized group of nonprofits were much more similar than in other groupings. The analysis of these coding terms allowed preliminary understandings of the links within different groupings to be clear. This then functioned to strengthen the connection between similar nonprofit organizations based on these two characteristics, which in turn

strengthened the conclusions from the data analysis in tracing specific cases and political priority success in each organization individually.

When analyzed in terms of comparing the apolitical nonprofit organizations with the politicized nonprofits, the results of influencing policy exemplified useful trends for the field.

| Organization name           | Average Political Priority Score     | Case 1 Political Priority Score | Case 2 Political Priority Score   | Case 3 Political Priority Score   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Pontchartrain Conservancy   | 2                                    | 3                               | 1                                 | 2                                 |
| Clean Ocean Action          | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| Environmental Defense Fund  | 2                                    | 3                               | 1                                 | 2                                 |
| MHAMC                       | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| NAMI NYS                    | 2.6                                  | 3                               | 3                                 | 2                                 |
| Mental Health America       | 3                                    | 3                               | 3                                 | 3                                 |
| Average for Local NPOs: 2.3 | Average for State/Regional NPOs: 2.6 | Average for National NPOs: 2.5  | Average for Politicized NPOs: 2.2 | Average for Apolitical NPOs: 2.73 |

Figure 6.

The nonprofit organizations with more politicized topics, the environmental nonprofits, had an average political priority score of 2.2. This is the average of the Pontchartrain Conservancy (2), Clean Ocean Action (2.6), and the Environmental Defense Fund (2). Out of these, the Pontchartrain Conservancy cases included the closing of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, which was given a success score of 3 for succeeding in all three qualifiers of achieving political priority (see Figure 6). The MRGO campaign by the Pontchartrain Conservancy received this score of 3 due to success in all 3 pillars of political priority. It was clear that the

Pontchartrain Conservancy succeeded in “sustained concern” for the issue through the continued acknowledgement of the 2012 MRGO Master Plan in government agendas. Specifically, the State of Louisiana 2012 Master Plan recognized the issue and created long term goals of government work to address it that stayed in place and prioritize in the next 8 years (*MRGO – Mississippi River Gulf Outlet*). This Master Plan also leads to the successful achievement of the “passing of legislation” pillar as the plan addresses the issue in the same 2012 work. Also, the government has kept the MRGO closed since the legislation was passed, exhibiting the continuous functioning of the campaign. Finally, the campaign also successfully achieved the “budgetary allocation” pillar of political priority. This is clear in the \$3 billion Army Corps MRGO Restoration plan approved in 2012 (*MRGO – Mississippi River Gulf Outlet*). Together, the successful achievement of all 3 pillars led to this campaign receiving a score of 3 for over success in political priority work.

In her interview, Kristi Trail, executive director of the Pontchartrain Conservancy, also pointed to coalition work in recognizing the success of the MRGO campaign. Trail stated:

And the reason that Katrina was so much worse, was because of this man made waterway, the MRGO. So we launched a huge campaign to close it, and it was closed. We did partner with a lot of other nonprofits for it and still do. That's a huge win. (Trail)

This anecdote of a successful influence on policy is especially interesting because apolitical organizations, rather than politicized organizations like the Pontchartrain Conservancy, had “coalition work” as a frequent term in their interviews. This points to a successful tactic in policy work that the Pontchartrain used in this case that politicized nonprofits at that level may not use frequently. So, organizations that do use coalition work more frequently may see similar success when compared to work without coalitions, as does the Pontchartrain conservancy.

The Environmental Defense Fund saw very similar results with one successful campaign (3), one failed case (1), and one semi-successful case (2). With the EDF's most successful case, achieving a 3 for setting political priority, they used a type of coalition by influencing Walmart to lead the way for larger organizations across the fertilizer supply chain for toxic chemicals.

Vickie Patton of the Environmental Defense Fund describes this strategy in stating:

one of the companies that has the biggest impacts and leverage in the environment is Walmart. And so we opened an office in Bentonville, Arkansas so we could try to convince Walmart to be a leader in protecting human health and environment. This was one of the first steps we took that really made a difference and was catalytic and ultimately securing new national legislation. This is all adopted in like summer of 2016, before the fall of 2016 election, and it was bipartisan. What really was catalytic was a commitment by Walmart to say that he was going to screen for toxic chemicals in a number of major products. And they said, 'we're going to screen for chemicals and we're not going to have in our supply chain products that have these chemicals in them'. When Walmart took that step it had ripple effects across the whole supply chain, and it also brought people to the table to work on national legislation. (Patton)

This was eventually successful in replacing the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 with the Lautenberg Act for chemical safety in June of 2016 (*The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act*). Although not a coalition between nonprofit organizations, by working with organizations outside of themselves, but not directly with the government, the EDF here used a coalition of forces to amplify their power for this campaign and succeed in influencing policy. This tactic for coalitions is now clear in the politicized organizations as well as in the apolitical organizations as a most frequently used term in interviews. The repeated use of coalitions suggests a useful tool for advocacy across the board. The repetition of coalition work in interviews exhibits the tools as a priority for these organizations because they work well at the intersection of power and scope that these size and type of organizations exist in.

The environmental nonprofit that was the most successful in achieving political priority was Clean Ocean Action with an average score of 2.6, made up of two fully successful (3) campaigns and one semi-successful campaign. The campaigns traced were: the ban on offshore

oil and gas drilling in New Jersey, a fertilizer regulation bill, and the halting of the NESE pipeline construction. The NESE pipeline construction was deemed only semi-successful (a score of 2) because of a failure to maintain continuous concern for the issue. This was especially clear in the sparse recognition of the issue in NJ state legislature agendas as well as the reemergence of the construction proposal in new forms following the halting of the permits (*NJ Legislative Calendar*).

In discussing the roadblocks to COA's policy success throughout their long history Cindy Zipf, executive director, stated:

The hard thing is making it [COA's work] a priority enough to get the attention that it needs. And sometimes if it's bad enough, it's pretty obvious. But you know, at other times, you know, you have to create enough momentum through the public, town after town started passing ordinances, which created the momentum for getting the bill. But, you know, if there isn't any reason to move, then it's not likely unless it's something completely wonderful which has no opposition. So, if it's declared a sunny day a law would be passed tomorrow. But if it's something that has challenges or or a fiscal component, it's going to cost you money. It depends on how big the motion to push it is, how big the thing is that you've got to get done as to how much you've got to push.

Zipf's description of the difficulties in gaining and sustaining concern augments the understanding gained from COA's score of 2 for this campaign specifically (the anti-NESE pipeline campaign) because it draws a more descriptive picture of the barriers that the campaign was facing. Therefore, this makes the discussion on COA's policy success in this case more comprehensive and indicative of the larger picture of their overall policy making success from 2010-2020 as they faced the barriers discussed here by Zipf.

In contrast to the 2.2 average for politicized nonprofit organizations, the less politicized nonprofit organizations, the mental health advocacy organizations in this project, had an average achievement of political priority of 2.73. This average is significantly higher than that of the environmental nonprofits, with consistency in higher scores between the individual organizations

analyzed as case studies. Within this grouping, the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County had an average score of 2.6. This consisted of two cases that were fully successful in achieving political priority (3), and one campaign that was semi-successful in achieving political priority. NAMI New York State saw the same results and the same average score of 2.6.

For the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County, the semi-successful campaign, the expansion of virtual mental health resources previously discussed, did not achieve a full score due to a failure in the passing legislation aspect of achieving political priority in that case. Budget was allocated through other means for the issue to stay at the forefront and achieve success, but full, permanent, local legislation was not passed.

Similarly, the semi-successful campaign for NAMI New York State was also successful in all areas except the actual passing of legislation. This campaign traced the humane alternatives to solitary confinement movement, culminating in the HALT Act. While budgetary action toward the project and sustained concern was achieved, the bill was stalled in committee in the state legislature so failed the passing of legislation pillar. The shared failure to fully succeed at setting political priority due to difficulty in passing legislation points to the local level of nonprofits consistent inability to fully influence the *passing* of legislation due to their smaller size, audience, and the unique functions of the local governments they are advocating to.

Mental Health America had the highest average score of the entire project at 3, with all three campaigns analyzed fully succeeding at achieving political priority within the parameters set in this project. The three campaigns traced for Mental Health America were: the Affordable Care Act's parity and medicaid expansion, Covid-19 expansion on telehealth services, and the creation and implementation of a three-digit federal suicide prevention hotline. These 3 campaigns all achieved a full score of 3 by achieving all pillars of political priority as displayed



through their successful passing of legislation, continued appearance of legislature agenda, and sufficient recognition on national budgets. Using these cases yielded comprehensive analysis as it included campaigns ranging in topic area, audience, and time frame to fully exemplify multifaceted successes in influencing political policy across MHA’s work.

When the individual campaign successes and failures were analyzed, a deeper level of understanding of the results was made available. As displayed in Figure 8 below, of the 18 total campaigns 4 campaigns failed in sustaining political priority, 5 failed in passing legislation, and 6 failed in receiving sufficient budgetary allocation. When split by categorization, 2 of the 4 campaigns that failed to sustain concern for their issue were state/regional NPOs and the other 2 were national nonprofits. Within these, 2 were environmental and 2 were mental health based. At the same time 2 of the 5 campaigns that failed to pass legislation were from national nonprofits, 2 were from local nonprofits, and 1 was from a state/regional nonprofit. Analyzing through the other key variable, 2 failed campaigns were from more politicized topic domains and 3 were from less politicized advocacy areas. Lastly, 1 of the 6 campaigns that failed in achieving sufficient budgetary allocation was a local nonprofit, 3 campaigns were state/regional NPOs, and 2 were national nonprofits. Out of those cases, 4 were from environmental nonprofits and 2 were from mental health nonprofits.

| <b>Pillar of Political Priority</b>                | <b>Failed Campaigns in this Pillar Broken Down by Categorization</b> | <b>Total Failed Campaigns in this Pillar (out of 18)</b> |
|--|--|--|
| Sustained Concern (locus of government engagement) | 2 state/regional<br>2 national                                       | 4  |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Sustained Concern (level of politicization)                      | 2 political (environmental)<br>2 apolitical (mental health) | 4 |
| Passing of Legislation (locus of government engagement)          | 1 local<br>2 state/regional<br>2 national                   | 5 |
| Passing of Legislation (level of politicization)                 | 2 political (environmental)<br>3 apolitical (mental health) | 5 |
| Sufficient Budgetary Allocation (locus of government engagement) | 1 local<br>3 state/regional<br>2 national                   | 6 |
| Sufficient Budgetary Allocation (level of politicization)        | 4 political (environmental)<br>2 apolitical (mental health) | 6 |

Figure 8.

Analysis of the compiled data through this lens is interesting in that it complicates the overall results by showing individual campaigns pillars lacking an obvious pattern (see Figure 8). Instead, these more specific successes and failures must be looked more holistically, as the overall success or failure of the campaign, to fully grasp the progress of the campaigns from the perspective of achieving political priority. The lack of patterns existing in individual variable analysis also supports the use of the 3 pillars of achieving political priority as an amalgamated understanding of political success of the campaigns overall.

Ultimately, when the less controversial and more controversial nonprofit organizations are compared, the less controversial (apolitical) nonprofits were significantly more successful than the more controversial organizations. This was suggested through the average ability to achieve political priority for mental health nonprofits being 2.73 and the average score for environmental nonprofits being 2.2. This difference relative to the range of variation was not huge but suggests that on a larger scale, with more cases, a more substantial difference may be

clear and that there was a stable difference in level of success from this perspective. This was contradictory to the expectations of the hypothesis, rejecting the projection that politicized nonprofits will be more successful due to their increased visibility and press. These findings will be expanded upon further in the conclusions of this project.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions**

This thesis used a variety of data analysis measures to cultivate an understanding of the successful influence of nonprofit organizations on policy making across topic area and geographical. The results of my project brought together interviews and quantified data analysis to create a fuller picture of the aspects of a nonprofit organization that make it more or less successful in influencing policy. The results suggest that the aspects analyzed here, level of government and politicization of the topic area, have an effect on an organization's influence over policy advocacy. This is exemplified through thorough analysis of the compiled data.

My thesis aimed to answer the question: how does the level of government at which they operate and the politicization of their mission affect an advocacy-oriented nonprofit's ability to influence policy? In terms of level of government, the data showed that the state/regional size of organization were the most successful at influencing policy. This was clear with this level having the highest average score of achieving political priority at a 2.6, as well as having the most consistency in their results. In both cases of state/regional nonprofits, two campaigns were fully successful and one was semi-successful. This consistency points to stronger support for this size organization as being more reliable when looking to influence policy. Meanwhile, in terms of the controversiality of the advocacy area, the results of this project suggest that "apolitical" nonprofits (mental health organizations in this case) were more successful with an average political priority achievement of 2.73.

These results do not fully support the original hypothesis in that they support the state/regional organizations to be the most influential, but not the more politicized organizations. The results instead suggest that the state/regional, less controversial nonprofit organizations are the most reliably influential on policy making.

With the data analyzed by the perspective of each individual key variable, comprehensive analysis of the results overall is then possible. In Chapter 4, the data suggested that state/regional nonprofit organizations saw the most consistency in outcomes of their advocacy and policy work and also had the highest average level of success in setting political priority. Chapter 5 discusses patterns that suggest that apolitical nonprofits are significantly more successful than the more controversial organizations. Here, these results are compounded as the effect of both key variables- level of government interaction and politicization of mission- are analyzed together. Figure 8 shows the overall findings of achievements of political priority separated both by key variables and individual organization scores.

| Organization name          | Average Political Priority Score | Average Political Priority Scores By Categorizations |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Pontchartrain Conservancy  | 2                                | Average for Local NPOs:<br>2.3                       |
| Clean Ocean Action         | 2.6                              | Average for State/Regional NPOs:<br>2.6              |
| Environmental Defense Fund | 2                                | Average for National NPOs:<br>2.5                    |
| MHAMC                      | 2.6                              | Average for Politicized NPOs:<br>2.2                 |
| NAMI NYS                   | 2.6                              | Average for Apolitical NPOs:<br>2.73                 |
| Mental Health America      | 3                                |  |

Figure 9.

In this thesis, the case study with these “most influential” parameters is the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York State (NAMI NYS). This organization received an average political priority achievement score of 2.6. Meanwhile, the organization that received the

highest score was Mental Health America (with a perfect score of 3) is a national, less politicized nonprofit organization. Although this organization is individually the most successful, the trends in successful influence exemplify stronger theoretical support for the state/regional, less political organizations to be more reliably successful at influencing policy.

This data suggests a possible pattern that the higher level of government central to an organization's advocacy, the greater influence on public policy. Then, a less politicized mission also increases ability to influence policy making. Despite Mental Health America, a national nonprofit, receiving the highest average score the average score for national nonprofit organizations was lower and therefore that result was not strong enough to conclude a trend skewing toward national organizations. Rather, state/regional organizations were relatively more consistently above-average for influencing policy (both with a score of 2.6), and the state/regional, apolitical organization (the ideal as suggested by the data) also received this score of 2.6.

Another interesting outcome of the data analysis was the role of coalition work within organizations of different sizes and levels of politicization. Coalition work was brought up frequently throughout the interviews of all of the organizations. In coded terms "coalition work" and associated terms appeared 13 times across all of the six interviews. Within this, all of the successful cases in the politicized (environmental) nonprofit organizations used some sort of coalition work in their campaigns that eventually achieved all three pillars of political priority. The failed or semi-successful less politicized cases did not. Although apolitical organizations did not use coalition work in every successful case, it was one of their most frequent coded terms, appearing 8 times in the entire apolitical organization grouping. This exemplifies that coalition work is used across topic areas very frequently for influencing policy, so holds constant as a tool

for influencing policy, and also shows that coalitions are used more strongly in successful advocacy because these results point to consistent use of coalition work within the organizations that are the most successfully influential over policy. This represented coalition work as a useful tool for advocacy across the board; a tool which was more successful in state and apolitical nonprofits- aiding in them in more consistent and successful policy making.

I hypothesized that the state/regional level of nonprofit organizations would be the most influential on policymaking due to their ability to engage communities in a large enough scope of influence for adequate resources to keep their work at the top of the political agenda. If too large, an organization risks having their work seem impersonal and unrelatable to their audience. If too small, their audience is simply not large enough to give their work the strength to propel onto political agendas because this audience is not a compelling enough constituency for politicians to work to satisfy in their policies. So, at the state/regional level the organizations are able to have power in pushing advocacy, but remain hands-on and in touch with their audiences. This allows them to attach to the emotional element of their constituencies, to empathetic moments in their topic area, and then to use the more connected supporters to drive politicians in listening to their constituents and successfully pushing policy forward to meet all three criteria of achieving political priority.

I originally thought that more politicized nonprofit organizations would be the most influential, but the data instead suggested that less politicized are more dependably influential. It was correct in that the most successful organization in the entire project in achieving political priority was Mental Health America, a more politicized nonprofit which achieved a perfect average score of 3. Despite this, the overall data suggested that less controversial nonprofits were more consistently influential over policy. This may have occurred due to the less politicized

topic area's ability to reach bipartisanship when in legislature, and therefore its ability to succeed in the "passing legislation" and "budget" aspects of achieving political priority.

These conclusions can provide guidance for both existing and newly forming nonprofits. Especially in the COVID-19 era, where issue domains are coming forward into the public consciousness that have never before had the same salience. The understanding from this work can be expanded to augment nonprofit efficiency and effectiveness in that organizations looking to influence policy can gear towards attributes of a state/regional size and a less politicized topic area. Nonprofit organizations may also use this guidance as a call to attempt to make their issue area less politicized, gearing partisanship away from their organizations as a tool to have more successful policy influence through their work.

The methods in this project included interviews and data analysis of government agendas, bills, and budgets. Within this, the outcome has some inherent limitations that may be explored in future projects and academic discussions, including the inability to control for the position/experience of the interviewee at each organization. Another limitation is that the quantifications for coding were subjective as a heuristic to get at differences. Coding techniques are inherently subjective in some way, but the process did allow for insight into strong base understandings of the organizations and the limitation due to subjectivity was why interviews were not the core data source for the thesis. The number of case studies used is a possible limiting factor that could be easily addressed in future replications of the work with more case studies. Repeating the project with more case studies would strengthen the patterns suggested through this work if shown again on a larger scale.

This project has many implications outside of its direct subject area. The results, especially if expanded upon with a wider scope, may affect the decision making of corporate



PACs trying to lobby for regulatory reform, or other similar groups in their lobbying or advocacy efforts. Further research into this subject area may take many forms. The expansion of the project parameters to include international nonprofit organizations and how their ability to influence policy may differ from that of domestic, US, nonprofits is an interesting subsequent line of questioning. If expanded to international NPOs, or NGOs, the scope of the research would widen. Doing this expanded research would also build on the findings from my thesis to make it applicable to other countries, as the organizations and governments used in my project were only US-based. Exploring NPOs across the globe, as well as international NGOs, would also invite in comparison of which countries most politically responsive to nonprofit groups or their equivalents.

Similarly, further exploration of levels of politicization- creating a scale for how politicized nonprofit advocacy areas are and diving deeper into the intricacies of difference in how each level influences policy, will add depth to the discussion of the effect of political controversy on political efficacy. On top of that, the salience of the conclusions can be expanded upon with further investigation into the political efficacy of nonprofits in the new Biden Administration, the project having been conducted with a timeframe of the Obama and Trump presidencies. A comparison of the ability of nonprofit organizations to influence policy depending on the presidential regime will also add a level of depth to the discussion that this project proposes.

The overall results of my work suggest possible patterns in policy successes between level of government and controversiality of NPOs, exemplifying that these aspects of a nonprofit *do* influence the organization's ability to influence policy. This suggests that the closer to the ideal levels of government interaction and politicization, the more successful the organization is

on influencing policy over time. The results may act as a starting point for tactics on how organizations that are bound legally to avoid politics can, in fact, successfully influence public policy. As the nonprofit sector grows to keep up with the hyper-partisan and post-pandemic nature of contemporary US society, an understanding of the best way to face these changes and still accomplish advocacy goals will lead to political change directly stemming from the nonprofit's audience, directly stemming from citizens.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

Prior to each interview the standardized questions and purpose were sent to each interviewee. Interviews took place over Zoom and all questions were asked to all interviewees. The questions were also supplemented with organization and campaign-specific questions for each individual depending on information gained during the interview. Below is the purpose statement and questions sent to each individual prior to the interview:

*The purpose of these interviews are to have a stronger grasp on the political efficacy feeling within each NPO and in the organization as a whole. The findings will be used to create stronger background and understanding of the organization. The conclusions of the thesis will not be based solely on these interviews. Rather, these interviews will be used to better interpret the findings collected from other sources: agenda minutes, budgets, press coverage, etc.*

### **Questions:**

- Does your organization try to influence legislation?
  - At what level? How do you go about this?
  - Do you have an advocacy team or another specific group for legislative efforts?
  - Is policy work a large focus of your overall organizational efforts and goals?
- Which of these efforts (to influence policy) in the last 10 years has been the most successful?
  - What do you think account for this success?

- How does your organization recognize and oversee the continuance and longevity of this accomplishment?
  - Why do you think this accomplishment is unique? Why do you think this accomplishment happened?
- What do you think are specific political barriers or roadblocks your organization has faced over the years?
  - What do you think accounts for these roadblocks?
  - How does your organization foresee and prepare for these barriers?
- How does your organization work to remain on the public's agenda? What are your "attention maintenance" strategies as an organization?
- What do you think is your organization's feeling of political efficacy? Is policy a main focus or is your work more direct in the community?
- How often does your organization set and reset your advocacy and policy goals?
- Is there anything else about your organization that you think is relevant to understanding their ability to influence policy-work in your field?
- Are there any specific data sets, interviews, reports, press, etc. that I should be aware of?