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# Polarized Networks: The Organizational Affiliations of National Party Convention Delegates

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## Abstract

Previous research has documented that the institutional behaviors (e.g., lobbying, campaign contributions) of political organizations reflect the polarization of these organizations along party lines. However, little is known about how these groups are connected at the level of individual party activists. Using data from a survey of 738 delegates at the 2008 Democratic and Republican national conventions, we use network regression analysis to demonstrate that co-membership networks of national party convention delegates are highly polarized by party, even after controlling for homophily due to ideology, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, income, and religious participation. Among delegates belonging to the same organization, only 1.78% of these co-memberships between delegates crossed party lines, and only 2.74% of the ties between organizations sharing common delegates were bipartisan in nature. We argue that segregation of organizational ties on the basis of party adds to the difficulty of finding common political ground between the parties.

## Keywords

party polarization, party organization, associations, interest groups, social networks, homophily

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American interest groups, party committees, and other political associations are often networked along party lines. They exchange sensitive information in polarized private networks (Koger, Masket, & Noel, 2009), develop closer lobbying ties with members of one party than with members of the other (Schwartz, 1990), and divide their candidate endorsements and campaign contributions on a partisan basis (Grossman & Dominguez, 2009). Lobbyists for these organizations often develop public identities associated with one of the two major parties (Kersh, 2002), and they typically direct their personal campaign contributions almost exclusively to one party as well (Koger & Victor, 2009). In order to gain advantages in these networks, party leaders may pressure political organizations to select their co-partisans for key lobbying positions (Confessore, 2003; Continetti, 2006; Heaney, 2010; Murakami, 2008). Partisan networks factor into the selection of electoral candidates at the state (Masket, 2009) and national (Cohen, Karol, Noel, & Zaller, 2008) levels, which serves to further bifurcate an American political system already highly polarized between Democrats and Republicans (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Fischer & Mattson, 2009; Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006; Levendusky, 2009).

While the institutional links between political parties and political organizations are well understood, less is known about how these groups are connected at the level of individual activists. We know that activists often identify themselves both as members of political organizations and as members of political parties (Heaney, 2012). Furthermore, political organizations may attempt to take advantage of these dual identifications by encouraging their members to become actively involved in party politics, such as by becoming convention delegates (Malbin, 1981; Rozell, Wilcox, & Madland, 2006; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986). However, the extensive body of political science research on national convention delegates and other party activists pays relatively little attention to the organizational memberships of these activists (see, e.g., Dodson, 1990; Herrera, 1993; Jackson, Bigelow, & Green, 2007; Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, & Copperman, 2010; Miller & Schofield, 2008; Munger & Backhurst, 1965; Soule & Clarke, 1970; Stone, 2010; Wolbrecht, 2002). These memberships are important because they help to socialize activists into the political system and might provide common ground for conversations across party lines.

We examine the relationship between party membership and membership in political organizations among a particular kind of political activist—national party convention delegates. To do so, we ask whether or not the chances that two delegates are members of the same political organizations is related to whether they are members of the same political party, taking into account other explanations for common organizational membership, including similarities in ideology, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, income, and religious participation. Using original data from in-person surveys conducted at the 2008 Democratic and Republican national conventions, we estimate network regression models that demonstrate that the likelihood that two individual activists are members of the same political organizations is, in fact, strongly related to whether they are also co-partisans. We show that when these individual memberships are analyzed at the organizational level, there are few

organizations that bridge the gap between the Democratic and Republican parties. The network of political organizational memberships does not serve to mitigate the polarization present in other realms of American political institutions and networks.

We begin below with a discussion of previous research about organizational membership and partisanship. Next, we outline the determinants of organizational co-membership, after which we detail the procedures for collecting data at the 2008 Democratic and Republican national conventions. We then report the results of network analysis of these data, after which we analyze relationships among organizations to determine whether or not they have delegates in common. The article concludes by considering the implications of our analysis for the relationship between the Democratic and Republican parties.

### **Organizational Membership and Party Involvement**

Social scientists have long recognized that political organizations play an important role in orienting and connecting citizens to the political system (Bentley, 1908). While many individuals choose not to participate in political organizations at all, other individuals join multiple political organizations, and those who join more than one organization may find themselves cross-pressured by the different views those organizations espouse (Simmel, 1955). For example, an individual who is a member of the Republican Party and also a member of an interest group, such as the Teamsters, may be forced to choose between loyalties to these organizations when the organizations take conflicting positions on the right to organize labor unions. From these organizational memberships, individuals become linked with others as part of a broader network of overlapping and conflicting affiliations.

In addition to posing conflicts at the individual level, organizational memberships may have implications for political parties. For example, the cohesion of political parties may depend, in part, on the organizational affiliations of their members (Truman, 1971). If a sizable portion of a party's members are also members of organizations that are pursuing policy agendas that conflict with its own, then the party may face internal battles (Truman, 1956). For example, during the 112th Congress, Tea Party organizations, such as FreedomWorks, strongly advocated fiscally conservative positions on entitlement spending and taxes, which conflicted with efforts by Republican leaders to strike a deal with Democrats on raising the federal debt ceiling (Ward, 2011). Since many Republicans were members of the Tea Party, or at least sympathetic to its priorities, challenges from the Tea Party complicated Republicans' efforts to unify their congressional majority (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012).

Lehman (1985) argues that cross-pressures make it more difficult for citizens to make sense of the political system and to make judgments about which political actors best serve their interests. The conflict from such cross-pressures may lead to a loss of votes as formerly loyal partisans switch parties, as well as to a decline in activists willing to serve as foot soldiers or to participate in the work of the party (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Mutz, 2002). In contrast, if the constituents of political

parties are members of organizations that largely agree with the party, then parties may be more cohesive (Archer & Ellis, 1994).

Macrolevel changes in the population of voluntary organizations in the United States suggest that parties may be experiencing changes in the patterns of membership by their constituents. For example, Putnam (2000) and Skocpol (2003) document a long-term decline in cross-class membership associations (such as the American Legion, Knights of Columbus, and the Parent Teacher Association) in the United States since the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Because cross-class associations may be more likely to bring citizens together across party lines than other kinds of associations, their decline suggests that the parties' membership networks may be becoming more homogenous and cohesive. As a result, Democrats and Republicans may be less likely to meet one another through organizations in which they might find that they share common ground on some political issues. As the chance of these contacts is reduced, the potential for political polarization may be increased.

To examine the empirical implications of Putnam's (2000) and Skocpol's (2003) arguments directly would require access to data on individuals' memberships in specific political associations. However, such data are not widely available. The General Social Survey (GSS) contains a question that asks respondents about the *categories* of associations (such as fraternal, service, veterans) that they belong to, but does not ask for the names of specific associations. In a recent study, Baldassarri (2011) analyzes GSS data from 1974 to 2004 to determine whether there was increasing polarization on the basis of party. She does not detect an increase in levels of polarization, but she concludes that more fine-grained data on membership in specific organizations are needed to reach firm conclusions on whether or not polarization is increasing.

This research takes up these questions, exploring the relationship between party polarization and individuals' memberships in specific political organizations. By examining the memberships of national convention delegates, we are able to investigate areas of overlap and polarization in organizational memberships among leading activists in the two major political parties. As such, we examine commonalities and differences among a group of political activists who help to shape the platforms, strategies, and candidates put forward by the two major parties.

## Determinants of Organizational Co-Membership

People who belong to the same political party may share memberships in other political organizations for reasons related to the activities of parties, organizations, and other individuals. First, parties often form—or promote the formation of—organizations that attempt to encourage and regularize individual participation in the party and in elections (Herrnson, 2009). Organizations such as the National Federation of Republican Women and the College Democrats of America attempt to play this role. Second, organizations may actively or passively encourage their members to become active in party politics. Active encouragement may involve explicitly asking their members to participate in the party in order to expand the organization's influence

within the party (Clifton, 2004; Greenstone, 1969; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986). Passive encouragement may occur when organizations' political activities stimulate their members' interest in party politics (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Organizations such as labor unions and conservative Christian advocacy organizations may attempt to play this role. Third, individuals may become acquainted with one another while participating in the activities of political parties or organizations, which may lead them to join other organizations to which their acquaintances belong. For example, someone who meets a Republican Party activist while participating in the event of a pro-life organization may decide to become active in the Republican Party (see Munson, 2008). Each of these factors might increase the likelihood that individual activists share membership in political parties and in one or more political organizations.

While individuals' co-memberships in political organizations may be driven directly by the activities of the political party or political organizations, they may alternatively be driven by personal similarities shared by these individuals. The principle of *homophily* holds that individuals with common social characteristics and backgrounds tend to become linked to one another in social networks (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). These linkages tend to develop because people find it easier to communicate, socialize, and work with other people who are like themselves than with people who differ from them in important respects. Research on social networks finds that "[h]omophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divides in our personal environments, with age, religion, education, occupation, and gender following in roughly that order" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 415). Rolfe's (2012) study of political participation finds that these demographic factors are a critical part of bringing people together in social networks for engagement in politics. Thus, it is necessary to consider these alternative hypotheses for organizational co-memberships.

Our analysis tests a statistical model in which organizational co-membership is a function of both party membership and a function of a series of personal and demographic characteristics. Individuals with similar ideological perspectives on politics may be likely to join the same political organizations because organizations often appeal directly to these ideological sympathies (Berry, 1999). Individuals of the same sex/gender may be likely to join the same organizations because political organizations form on a sex-segregated basis to appeal to activists either *as women* or *as men* (Barakso, 2004; Goss & Heaney, 2010). A wide range of organizations represent particular racial/ethnic constituencies, making it likely that co-memberships depend, in part, on racial/ethnic similarities (Strolovitch, 2006, 2007).

Organizational co-memberships may depend on individuals' proximity in age, in part because organizations may explicitly advocate on behalf of age-based constituencies, such as youth or the elderly (Campbell, 2003; Dalton, 2008) and, in part because organizations that rise up at specific moments in history attract adherents from a particular generation (Klatch, 1999; Mannheim, 1952). As the population of cross-class membership associations declines in the United States, organizational co-membership

on the basis of similarities in income and education becomes more likely (Skocpol, 2003). Finally, the rise of the Christian Right in the United States has promoted greater political organizing on the basis of similarity in religious commitment (Wilcox, 2000). Highly religious activists may be likely to join organizations such as Focus on the Family or the National Right to Life Committee, while more secular or nonfundamentalist activists may steer toward organizations such as Americans United for the Separation of Church and State or the American Civil Liberties Union.

There are myriad individual-level characteristics that may be represented through interest group politics, of course. Our analyses focus on those characteristics that extant research finds are most likely to promote homophily: ideological similarity, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, education, income, and religious attendance. Our network analysis, reported below, seeks to discern whether partisan differences in co-membership are merely a function of the same kinds of individual characteristics that lead people to gravitate toward the two major parties or whether, after taking into account these alternative explanations for co-membership, there is evidence of partisan polarization in organizational co-memberships.

### **National Party Convention Surveys**

We measure the organizational affiliations of Democratic and Republican Party delegates using data from surveys conducted on site at the 2008 Democratic and Republican national conventions. National political conventions provide a unique setting within which to assess partisan behavior (Shafer, 2010). Contemporary political parties are decentralized and divided into a multiplicity of loosely affiliated components, but conventions bring the various elements of the party together in one place. Of course, convention delegates are not a random sample of party activists, but are those who have been selected by candidates and party officials to reflect the political biases that they wish to advance. Furthermore, we know that delegates have become more polarized in recent years on issues such as social welfare, race, and culture (Layman et al., 2010). Nonetheless, almost all leading party officials are in attendance and delegates are invited to participate on a largely representative basis, providing the opportunity to study a wide range of party activists and activities.

To conduct the surveys, we assembled a team of 20 surveyors at the Democratic National Convention in Denver and 20 surveyors at the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis–St. Paul. While obtaining a purely random and representative sample of participants at such an event is impossible, we took aggressive steps to approximate randomness, consistent with similar studies undertaken in recent years (e.g., Fisher, Stanley, Berman, & Neff, 2005; Goss, 2006; Heaney & Rojas, 2007; Walgrave & Verhulst, 2011). We distributed the team members proportionately across locations at which delegates were expected to gather, including hotel lobbies, state delegation breakfasts, caucus meetings, receptions, and the convention halls. The surveyors were instructed to approach people wearing convention credentials and to

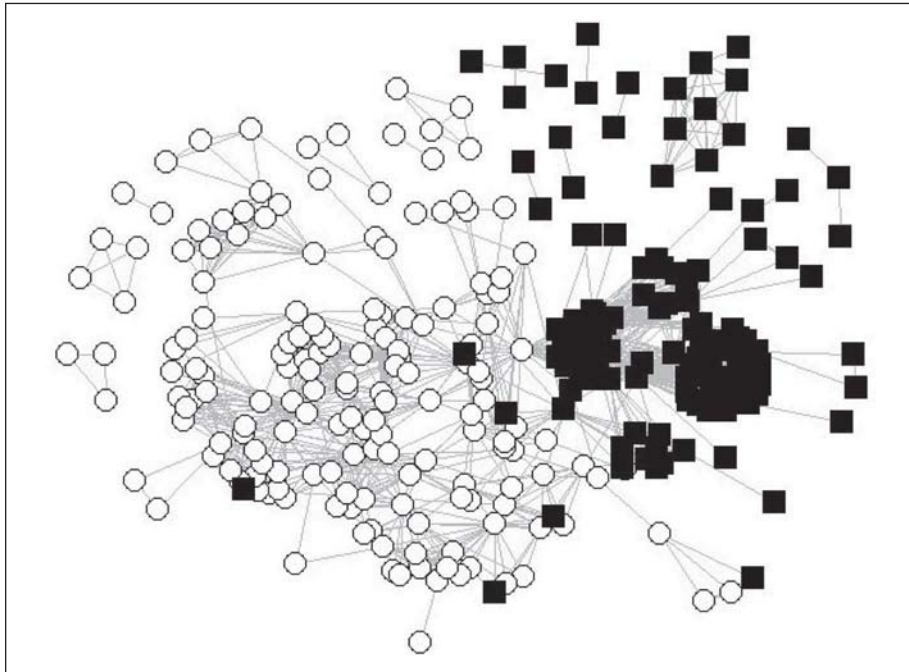
invite them to participate in a 15-minute survey of the participants at the convention. The surveys were six pages in length with a total of 47 questions each.

Of the delegates approached by our survey team, 72% of those attending the Democratic National Convention and 70% of those at the Republican National Convention agreed to participate in the survey. We obtained surveys of 546 delegates (504 with valid data about their organizational membership) at the Democratic National Convention and 407 delegates (369 with valid data about their organizational membership) at the Republican National Convention. These totals yielded samples of 12% of the population of Democratic convention delegates and 17% of the population of Republican convention delegates. Since social network analysis is especially sensitive to differences in the size of networks analyzed (Anderson, Butts, & Carley, 1999), we randomly resampled delegates (from our original sample) at the Democratic National Convention to ensure that both networks contained exactly 369 observations with valid membership data. This approach produces equivalent samples of Democratic and Republican delegates, allowing for a direct comparison between the two networks.<sup>2</sup> The resulting samples are comparable with other surveys of delegates conducted by major news organizations, such as the New York Times/CBS News Poll (2008a, 2008b).<sup>3</sup>

The unit of analysis in this study is pairs of delegates (or dyads). We are interested in whether each possible pair of delegates in the study shares membership in political organizations. Thus, our dependent variable, *co-membership*, is measured using responses to the following open-ended question: "Are you a member of any political organizations, social movement organizations, interest groups, or political advocacy groups? If yes, which ones?" This question reveals which delegates are members of which organizations, which delegates share memberships with one another, and which organizations share delegates with one another. Each delegate was paired with every other delegate in the data (Democrat and Republican) to determine if he or she shared an organizational membership with that other delegate, such that *co-membership* takes the value of one if both delegates in the pair are members of the same organization (and zero otherwise).

Measures of the eight control variables follow the same pattern as the dependent variable. *Same Party* takes the value of 1 if both delegates attended the same party convention and 0 otherwise. *Ideological Similarity* takes the value of 1 if the delegates are within 1 point of each other on a 9-point ideological scale, and 0 otherwise. *Same Sex/Gender* takes the value of 1 if both delegates indicated that they were men or both delegates indicated that they were women; if not, it takes the value of 0. *Same Race/Ethnicity* takes the value of 1 if both delegates indicated that they were members of at least one of the same of five racial/ethnic categories.<sup>4</sup> *Similar Age* takes the value of 1 if the delegates' ages were within 10 years of each other, and 0 otherwise. *Same Educational Attainment* takes the value of 1 if both delegates indicated the same level on a 6-point educational attainment scale, and 0 otherwise. *Same Income Level* takes the value of 1 if both delegates indicated the same level on a 9-point income scale. *Same Religious Attendance* takes the value of 1 if delegates indicated the same level





**Figure 1.** Delegate Co-Membership Network

Note: Black squares represent Republican convention delegates, white circles represent Democratic convention delegates, and gray lines represent organizational co-memberships. Isolates have been deleted for the purpose of visual representation but have not been removed from the underlying data.

on a 5-point religious attendance scale.<sup>5</sup> The exact wording of the corresponding survey question for each variable is reported in the appendix (except *Same Party*, which is based on our direct observation of which convention delegates attended). In the next section, we use these data to examine polarization in the membership networks of Democratic and Republican Party activists.

### Network Analysis

A graph of the network of delegate co-memberships in organizations is reported in Figure 1, in which black squares represent Republican delegates and white circles represent Democratic delegates. Lines between the delegates indicate that they have at least one organizational co-membership. The diagram is drawn using an algorithm that places delegates closer to one another in the network if they tend to be connected to the same delegates and more distant from one other if they tend to be connected to different delegates (Kamada & Kawai, 1989).

The extreme polarization of delegate memberships according to party is immediately apparent by the strong segregation of Republican delegates from Democratic delegates. Only a handful of delegates cross party lines with their memberships. The network contains 1,614 co-membership ties exclusively among Democrats (42.14% of all ties), 2,148 co-membership ties exclusively among Republicans (56.08%), and only 68 co-membership ties that cross party lines (1.78%). This finding suggests not only that co-membership is segregated by party but also that Republicans are more likely to have co-membership ties than are Democrats. It is notable that Republicans have more co-memberships than do Democrats even though Democrats are more likely than Republicans to be members of political organizations. Just under 88% (87.77%) of Democrats indicated membership in at least one political organization, while only 48.10% of Republicans indicated the same. Indeed, Democrats and Republicans exhibited notably different co-membership structures, with the Republican network clustered more tightly and the Democratic network spread more diffusely. These findings reveal that Republican associational participation is more cohesive than Democratic associational participation. Democrats join more organizations than do Republicans, but they are also less likely to coalesce around the same organizations than are Republicans.

To test whether the propensity to share co-memberships on the basis of party holds up after considering other bases for co-membership in political organizations, we estimated three network regression models. The first model is a simple logit model estimated on network data. This method has the advantage of being widely known and familiar. However, logit models assume that observations are drawn independently, which may not be true in a network in which each delegate appears in the data 737 times (because it is paired once with every other delegate in the data). If the independent variables do not fully reflect the dyadic dependence in the data, then the model's standard errors may be underestimated due to network autocorrelation. The second model uses the Double Semi-Partialing Multiple Regression Quadratic Assignment Procedure (MPQAP) (Dekker, Krackhardt, & Snijders, 2007). This estimation procedure systematically permutes the rows and the columns of the data in order to produce estimates that are not sensitive to network autocorrelation. However, this approach does not explicitly model endogenous features of the network that may be important for explaining tie formation. The third model uses an Exponential Random Graph Model (ERGM) (Robins, Snijders, Wang, Handcock, & Pattison, 2007). This model uses the Markov Chain Monte Carlo estimation in order to produce estimates that are not sensitive to network autocorrelation (Snijders, 2002). Furthermore, this approach allows the modeler to incorporate endogenous features of the network structure into the estimation process. By estimating all three models, we consider all of the major alternative approaches to estimating the network regression parameters.

The results of the three network regression models are reported in Table 1. The first column reports the logit results, the second column reports the MRQAP results, the third column reports the ERGM results, and the fourth column reports descriptive statistics. The *Same Party* variable is a positive, statistically significant predictor of

**Table 1.** Network Regression Models

Dependent Variable: <i>Co-membership</i>	Coefficient (SE) [MCMC]			M (SD) [% Imputed]
Independent Variable	(1) Logit	(2) MRQAP	(3) ERGM	
<i>Same party</i>	3.0673*** (0.0899)	1.0655*** (0.0450)	3.1144*** (0.1122) [0.0080]	0.007 (0.084) [0.00%]
<i>Ideological similarity</i>	0.3569*** (0.0354)	0.4316*** (0.0600)	0.3573*** (0.0713) [0.0010]	0.500 (0.500) [5.27%]
<i>Same sex/gender</i>	0.4258*** (0.0337)	0.3010*** (0.0486)	0.5737*** (0.0003) [0.0000]	0.323 (0.468) [7.65%]
<i>Same race/ethnicity</i>	0.5758*** (0.0370)	0.3889** (0.1212)	0.4747*** (0.0004) [0.0000]	0.518 (0.500) [7.96%]
<i>Similar age</i>	0.3125*** (0.0325)	0.2388*** (0.0613)	0.4377*** (0.0005) [0.0000]	0.592 (0.491) [10.44%]
<i>Same educational attainment</i>	-0.1417*** (0.0376)	-0.0631 (0.0663)	-0.0020** (0.0007) [0.0000]	0.380 (0.485) [9.31%]
<i>Same income level</i>	0.3249*** (0.0414)	0.3033*** (0.0549)	0.2186*** (0.0010) [0.0000]	0.264 (0.441) [16.03%]
<i>Same religious attendance</i>	0.2048*** (0.0331)	0.1645** (0.0437)	0.1316*** (0.0005) [0.0000]	0.133 (0.340) [9.62%]
<i>Isolates</i>			5.4212*** (0.0603) [0.0570]	
<i>Edges / intercept</i>	-8.4720*** (0.0946)	-0.5382	-6.6439*** (0.1018) [0.0080]	
Survey respondents	738	738	738	
Dyads (N)	271,953	271,953	271,953	
Permutations		2,000		
MCMC samples			1,000,000	
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	41,214		51,666	
Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	41,315		51,778	

Note: The dependent variable has a mean of 0.007 (which is also the density of the network) and a standard deviation of 0.084. Missing values were imputed using complete case imputation. MCMC stands for Markov Chain Monte Carlo standard errors.

\* $p \leq 0.050$ . \*\* $p \leq 0.001$ . \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ .

co-membership in all three models. This result indicates that delegates are indeed more likely to share memberships with their co-partisans than with delegates in the other major party, after controlling for alternative explanations for co-membership. This result is robust to different methods of estimating the network regression. Moreover, the magnitude of the coefficient on *Same Party* is significantly greater than the magnitude of any other coefficient in each of the three models. Organizational co-membership is firmly polarized on the basis of party.

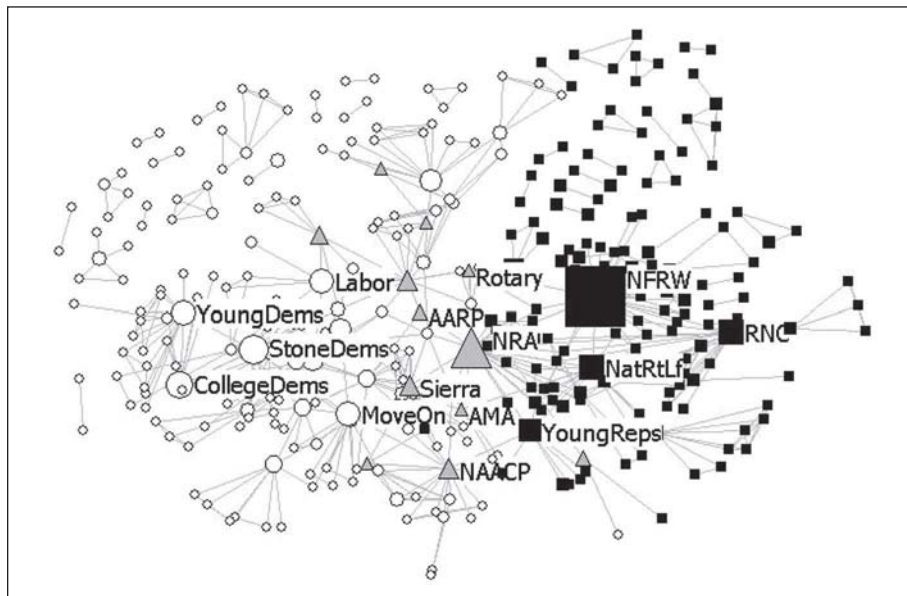
Six of the seven control variables have the expected significant, positive coefficients in all three models. Pairs of delegates are more likely to be co-members of organizations if they are ideologically proximate to one another, if they are of the same sex/gender and race/ethnicity, are close in age, have approximately the same level of income, and attend religious services with approximately the same frequency. Overall, the propensity toward homophily is strong among convention delegates. Estimates of the effect of education, however, are unclear. This coefficient is significant and negative in Model 1 and Model 3 but insignificant in Model 2. Counter to our expectation, the negative coefficient suggests that activists are more likely to be co-members of an organization if they have different levels of education than if they have the same level of educational attainment. Given the inconsistent and unexpected results with respect to this one variable, we caution against drawing firm conclusions about the effect of educational attainment on organizational co-membership.

The Exponential Random Graph Model reported in Model 3 contains an additional parameter for *Isolates*, who are delegates who do not share memberships with any other delegates. Since 450 of the 738 delegates (60.98%) are isolates in the network, this is an important feature of the network which we model explicitly using ERGM. However, while it suggests that participation in party organizations does not lead inevitably to a propensity to associate, adding isolates to the equation does not change the overall pattern of statistical significance in the coefficients in comparison to the baseline logit model.

## Organization-to-Organization Networks

The data analysis in the previous section is based on delegate-to-delegate co-membership networks that were deduced from individual reports of memberships in political organizations. Similarly, it is possible to transform the data on an organization-to-organization basis such that organizations are linked to one another depending on whether they have delegates in common as members (Breiger, 1974). This network transformation allows us to visualize the implications of membership polarization for connections among political organizations.

A graphical representation of the organization-to-organization network is presented in Figure 2.<sup>6</sup> Black squares represent organizations mentioned only by Republican delegates, white circles represent organizations mentioned only by Democratic delegates, gray triangles represent organizations mentioned by both Democratic and Republican delegates, and gray lines indicate that the two organizations have at least



**Figure 2.** Organization-to-Organization Network

Note: Black squares represent organizations mentioned only by Republican delegates, white circles represent organizations mentioned only by Democratic delegates, gray triangles represent organizations mentioned by both Democratic and Republican delegates, and gray lines indicate that the two organizations share at least one delegate. The size of the organizations in the graph is scaled to the total number of delegates that cited it. Isolates have been deleted for the purpose of visual representation but have not been removed from the underlying data.

one delegate as a member in common. The size of the organizations in the graph is scaled to the total number of delegates that cited them. As is the case with the delegate co-membership network presented in Figure 1, the organization-to-organization network presented in Figure 2 is extremely polarized on the basis of party. Only 12 of the 436 organizations (2.74%) were cited by delegates in both parties.

Not only are the parties' networks highly segregated, but they also exhibit notably different structures. The Republican network contains more organizations with a large number of members among delegates, while the Democratic network contains a larger number of organizations with a moderate or small number of members among the delegates. There are more Democratic-only organizations in the network (238 of 436, which is 54.59%) than Republican-only organizations in the network (186 of 436, which is 42.66%). The Republican network thus contains a greater degree of hierarchy than does the Democratic network, which is consistent with long-standing understandings about the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties (Freeman, 1986; Shafer, 1986; Skinner, Masket, & Dulio, 2012). That is, Republicans cluster

their involvement in a relatively small number of organizations, while Democrats spread their involvement more widely throughout the network without favoring any one organization too much. This finding reveals that within the Democratic Party there is no clear center of power but, rather, a few close clusters of actors. This multi-cephalous pattern suggests that Democrats are less likely than Republicans to marshal interest groups successfully on behalf of party-driven causes, in part because informal organizational structures undermine coordination and rapid diffusion of information. In contrast, these networks may allow Republicans to use their allied organizations for a clear political advantage because they have identifiable, leading organizations that can coordinate action and disseminate information.

A list of the organizations with the greatest number of members among Democratic delegates, Republican delegates, and both sets of delegates is provided in Table 2. The far right column of the table lists the abbreviations used in Figure 2. Membership in the Republican network is led by the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW), the National Rifle Association (NRA), and the National Right to Life Committee (NatRtLf). Membership in the Democratic network is led by the Stonewall Democrats (StoneDems) and the College Democrats of America (CollegeDems), followed by a tie for third place among three organizations: AFL-CIO/Change to Win,<sup>7</sup> Young Democrats of America, and MoveOn. Leading organizations cited by delegates in both parties included the NRA (although 95.7% of its member-delegates belonged to the Republican Party), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, although 77.8% of its member-delegates belonged to the Democratic Party), and the Sierra Club (Sierra, although 87.5% of its member-delegates belonged to the Democratic Party). Indeed, the overlapping space between these networks is very small.

In addition to overlapping very little, the two parties exhibit vastly different patterns of dispersion and clustering. As we note above, Republican delegates cluster their involvement in a few “peak” organizations, while Democrats are involved in a wider array of groups. As such, the mean of “leading organization” is different when applied to the Republican Party than when it is applied to the Democrats. In particular, the NFRW and the NRA lead the Republican network to a degree that is unparalleled by any of the organizations in the Democratic network. Democratic organizations participate in the network in a manner that is more co-equal. As a result, the Republican Party may be able to deploy its allied organizations to coordinate its activists and discipline its members more effectively and to a greater degree than is possible in the Democratic Party. This dynamic has the potential to feed back on the parties in ways that increases polarization between the parties.

## **Conclusion**

That delegates attending the Democratic and Republican national conventions do not have closely overlapping networks of membership in political organizations will not surprise even casual observers of American politics. Polarization between political organizations on the basis of party has been observed and documented in numerous

**Table 2.** Organizations Most Frequently Cited by Delegates

Rank	Organization	Democratic Citations	Republican Citations	Abbreviation in Figure 1
<b>Leading organizations cited by Democratic delegates</b>				
1	Stonewall Democrats	16	0	StoneDems
2	College Democrats of America	14	0	CollegeDems
3	Organized Labor (AFL-CIO, Change to Win)	12	0	Labor
3	Young Democrats of America	12	0	YoungDems
3	MoveOn	12	0	MoveOn
<b>Leading organizations cited by Republican delegates</b>				
1	National Federation of Republican Women	0	38	NFRW
2	National Rifle Association	1	22	NRA
3	National Right to Life Committee	0	13	NatRtLf
4	Republican National Committee	0	12	RNC
5	Young Republicans of America	0	10	YoungReps
<b>Organizations cited by both Democratic and Republican delegates</b>				
1	National Rifle Association	1	22	NRA
2	National Association for Advancement of Colored People	7	2	NAACP
3	Sierra Club	7	1	Sierra
4	AARP (formerly American Association for Retired Persons)	3	1	AARP
5	American Medical Association	2	1	AMA
5	Rotary International	1	2	Rotary

other contexts, such as lobbying and campaign finance. Polarization among delegates has been increasing since at least the late 1980s (Layman et al., 2010). Some degree of difference between the organizational memberships of party activists is likely a good thing, as too much similarity between the parties may leave citizens' interests poorly represented (Committee on Political Parties, 1950). In many ways, it is important for the parties to form some exclusive organizations that allow them to build solidarity and coordinate their plans for elections and government.

At the same time, the nature and degree of polarization between the parties in their delegates' organizational memberships revealed in our analyses is somewhat

startling. This polarization cannot be explained away as a function of homophily based on demographics, political ideology, or other factors that lead individuals to join the same organizations. Party membership is a stronger predictor of organizational co-membership than any other factor that we examined. Our open-ended question about organizational membership allowed respondents to list any organizations that they thought to be appropriate, yet Democrats and Republicans systematically listed different organizations. While there was substantial commonality within parties, we found that only 1.78% of co-membership ties and 2.74% of organizations crossed party lines. This finding reveals that party activists rarely find themselves in political settings where they are on common ground with activists from the other major party. Associations such as Rotary International, which once might have provided such ground, no longer play a prominent role in the socialization of party activists (Skocpol, 2003).

Not only do Democrats and Republicans belong to almost entirely different sets of political organizations, but they also encounter significantly different network structures in their organizational environments. The Democratic environment is relatively pluralistic, while the Republican environment is relatively hierarchical. This difference ensures that not only are Democrats and Republicans exposed to different organizations, they are also exposed to different approaches to organizing politics. Thus, new generations of activists are socialized into a system with systematic party-based differences in the content and structure of organizational networks.

No single explanation accounts for the membership divide between the parties. Our findings do not demonstrate that polarization is “caused” by the parties or that it is “caused” by political organizations. Drawing such conclusions from network data is always problematic (Fowler, Heaney, Nickerson, Padgett, & Sinclair, 2011). Any of a variety of different causal mechanisms may be at work. First, individuals may systematically abandon organizations when they encounter conflicting views because the presence of political conflict makes them uncomfortable (Mutz, 2002). Second, organizational leaders may choose to align with one party and then try to steer their members’ party loyalties in the direction of the chosen party. Third, activists may choose to join organizations that favor their political party. Fourth, as political issues which genuinely cross-cut party alliances evaporate, there are fewer opportunities for individuals to join cross-cutting organizations. However, much more detailed data on activist memberships in political organizations are needed to evaluate the relative merit of each of these arguments. Future research using longitudinal data on delegate membership could provide a helpful start to understand the roots of causality in this relationship, as well as helping us understand whether it has changed over time.

Regardless of the causes of polarized membership networks, our findings yield one more significant conclusion in the debate on party polarization. Democrats and Republicans live in different organizational worlds. Given that the organizational memberships of leading party activists are polarized, party leaders have one less reason to try to bridge the partisan divide. This finding suggests a worthy cause for political entrepreneurs that seek to bridge the divide between parties. Previous efforts



seeking bipartisan unity, such as Unity08, have focused on electing middle-ground, third-party candidates (Heaney, Newman, & Sylvester, 2011). However, given the enormous practical political obstacles surrounding third-party electoral efforts (Masket & Noel, 2011), building political organizations that can transcend partisanship may be a better (though longer-term) place to start. If American politics have been broken by polarization, restructuring civil society—one organization at a time if necessary—may be an important part of repairing them.

## Appendix

### *Survey Questions Used in the Network Analysis*

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1. Are you a member of any political organizations, social movement organizations, interest groups, or policy advocacy groups? [Yes / No]. If yes, which ones?
2. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as: (Please circle one)
  - To the “left” of strong liberal
  - A strong liberal
  - A not very strong liberal
  - A moderate who leans liberal
  - A moderate
  - A moderate who leans conservative
  - A not very strong conservative
  - A strong conservative
  - To the “right” of strong conservative
  - Other (please specify)
3. What is your sex/gender?
4. What is your race/ethnicity? Circle as many as apply:
  - Native American/American-Indian
  - White / Caucasian
  - Black/African American
  - Latino / Hispanic
  - Asian /Asian American/ Pacific Islander
  - Other
5. How old are you?
6. Could you please tell us the highest level of formal education you have completed? Circle only one:
  - Less than high school diploma
  - High school diploma
  - Some college / associate’s or technical degree
  - College degree
  - Some graduate education
  - Graduate or professional degree

7. Could you please tell us your level of annual income in 2007? Please circle only one:
- less than \$15,000
  - \$15,001 to \$25,000
  - \$25,001 to \$50,000
  - \$51,001 to \$75,000
  - \$75,001 to \$100,000
  - \$100,001 to \$125,000
  - \$125,001 to \$150,000
  - \$150,000 to \$350,000
  - More than \$350,000
8. How often do you attend religious services? Please circle one.
- Every week
  - Almost every week
  - Once or twice a month
  - A few times a year
  - Never

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## Notes

1. The decline of cross-class membership organizations has not meant the decline of membership organizations more generally. Membership advocacy organizations have not declined relative to nonmember advocacy organizations in recent years (Walker, McCarthy, & Baumgartner, 2011).
2. If we were to include all 504 delegates from the Democratic convention, while including only 369 delegates from the Republican convention, the result would be to exaggerate the size of the Democratic network relative to the Republican network, simply due to differences in sample size. Our approach ensures that any differences in network size are due to variations in the propensity to associate rather than to features of the research design.
3. For example, on the dimensions of sex/gender and race/ethnicity, our survey yields similar results to the New York Times/CBS News Poll of delegates (2008a, 2008b):

Demographic Category	Democratic National Convention		Republican National Convention	
	Our Sample	NYT / CBS	Our Sample	NYT / CBS
Sex/gender is female	49.86%	49%	30.62%	32%
Race/ethnicity is White	65.53%	65%	86.18%	93%
Race/ethnicity is Black	15.71%	23%	4.07%	2%
Race/ethnicity is Latino	13.28%	12%	4.61%	9%
Race/ethnicity is Asian	4.34%	3%	1.90%	2%

4. For example, if one respondent indicated that he or she is Black/African American and Latino, while the other respondent indicated that he or she is Latino only, then we coded this case as a one for *Same Race/Ethnicity*, since both respondents indicated a Latino ethnicity.
5. In each of the four statistical models discussed in this section, we used complete case imputation to estimate the values of missing observations (Wood, White, Hillsdon, & Carpenter, 2005). This method uses the nonmissing data from other independent variables in a model to predict the missing values in a linear probability model. The use of complete-case imputation is appropriate given the relatively low percentage of missing data (King, Honaker, Joseph, & Scheve, 2001). *Same Income Level* had 16.03% missing data, *Similar Age* had 10.44% missing data, and all other variables had less than 10.00% missing data (see Table 1 below).
6. As is the case with Figure 1, Figure 2 is drawn using an algorithm that places organizations closer together if they tend to be connected with the same organization and further away from one another if they are to be connected to different organizations.
7. We coded AFL-CIO/Change to Win as a single organization because some respondents wrote only "organized labor" on the survey without specifying to which labor federation they belonged.

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