

Homophily or Heterophily: Ideology and Trustee Selection in the Policy-Planning Network

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INTRODUCTION

There is extensive literature by elite theorists on the relationship between policy-planning organizations (PPOs) and the political behavior of corporate elites. Elite theorists have argued that PPOs play an important role in the policy formation process in the United States by facilitating discussion and consensus among the corporate elites (Burris 2008; Domhoff 2014). The policy-planning network also serves as the mechanism by which general policy preferences of the corporate community make their way into the two major political parties, the White House, and Congress (Domhoff 2014). In relation to the corporate community, it has been argued that policy-planning organizations facilitate corporate unity through cross-industry connections, increasing the cognitive range of the corporate elite to identify with problems of diverse corporate interests and generate policies that reflect a broad class interest (Murray 2017). In turn, interlocks, i.e. sharing of board directors, between firms and PPOs may also shape the political behavior of firms (Banerjee and Burroway 2015). The literature on PPOs commonly distinguishes PPOs based on their ideological orientation and their varying approaches to advancing corporate interests (Domhoff 2014; Burris 2008). If interlocks with PPOs influence the political behavior of firms, they may do so in ideologically identifiable ways (Banerjee and Burroway 2015). The extent to which these claims hold true depends on how PPOs select their trustees from the pool of corporate directors - a process that remains largely unknown. If policy-planning networks are found to shape firm behavior in ideologically identifiable ways (Banerjee and Burroway 2015), it may be that PPOs select their trustees in an ideologically homophilous way that creates spurious associations between interlocks and political behavior of firms. In addition, ideological homophily in the formation of interlocks between firms and PPOs may have important implications to the corporate unity thesis that sees PPOs as places where diverse corporate interests find common grounds and coordinate collective actions. Our study seeks to shed light on the process of trustee selection by PPOs by testing the relationship between corporate directors' ideological orientation and the probability that they become a trustee of PPOs of similar ideological orientation.

BACKGROUND

Policy-Planning Organizations and Ideology

While PPOs tend to identify themselves as fact-based institutions, devoid from ideological allegiances, their objectives nevertheless gravitate towards an array of locations on the political spectrum (Burris 2008; Panagopoulos 1984; Weaver 1989). This is critical to our analysis. We are interested in the nature of the relationship between the trustees of PPOs and the ideological identities of the organizations themselves. We use Burris (2008) to draw both our sample of

organizations as well as their ideological identifications. The ideological classifications of these organizations are outlined in Table 1. While these are generally broad classifications and a relatively small sample, they are empirically supported (Burris 2008) and have precedent in existing literature (Banerjee and Burroway 2015). Through Capital Research Center (CRC) scoring data, Burris (2008, 13-14) constructs a spectrum of ideological distances between these 12 organizations. The CRC itself is a conservative organization, whose mission is to expose corporations with a donation bias towards ‘left-leaning’ policy-planning organizations. Burris (2008, 14) claims that despite this, the relative rankings of CRC data are consistent with “informed opinion” on the subject.

Table 1. Ideological Orientations of Policy Planning Organizations*

<i>Moderate-liberal</i>	<i>Moderate-conservative</i>	<i>Ultraconservative</i>
Brookings Institution	Business Council	American Enterprise Institute
Council on Foreign Relations	Business Roundtable	Chamber of Commerce
Committee for Economic Dev.	Conference Board	Heritage Foundation
Trilateral Commission		Hoover Institution
		National Association of Manufacturers

*This table is borrowed directly from Banerjee and Burroway (2015)

Literature thus far has demonstrated that trustees interact with PPOs in ideologically identifiable ways. Burris (2008), for example, demonstrates that PPOs who share ideological categorizations are more likely to experience interlocking trustees than those who don’t. This finding points to the fact that ideological criteria are operative in predicting trustee affiliation with certain PPOs, given that ideologically similar PPOs are interested in a shared pool of trustees. Banerjee and

Burroway (2015) find that firms whose boards interlock with PPOs respond to social movements in patterns that are affiliated with the given PPO's ideological classification. This signifies a shared ideological relationship between a PPO, its trustees, and their external affiliations. There is thus empirical evidence for the claim that PPOs are ideologically charged institutions, and that their trustees interact with these ideologies in meaningful ways.

The Trustee Selection Process: The Organizational Perspective

PPOs may have their own organizational incentives to select their trustees in a certain way to maintain their continued existence and influence. For example, given their common sources of funding and common goals, we may expect "ideologically similar organizations to draw from a common pool of potential directors"(Burris 2008, 12), and, therefore, choose ideologically similar corporate directors to be their trustees. Ideologically similar PPOs may rely on shared funding sources, which would result in the appointment of trustees who can best connect them to these sources, or whose appointments were contingencies of the organizations receiving funding. Like corporations and other nonprofit organizations, PPOs that fill similar niches are competing against each other for resources and recognition (Burris 2008, 12). Rather than being concerned with profit, PPOs are competing for visibility, staff, influence, and funds (Weidenbaum 2009, 106). American Enterprise Institute president Arthur Brooks is quoted to have said his job involves delivering "150 speeches a year, which is what modern think tank presidents need to do, because we spend 75 percent of our time raising funds" (Overby 2017). This preoccupation with securing funding as a means of expanding may influence a PPO's selection of trustees, in which case we would expect the trustee's ability to secure their PPO funding to be a large determinant of their nomination. Funds donated to PPOs may be contingent upon a board that shares the funders' ideology, which would lead PPOs to choose such corporate directors to be their trustees. This may not necessarily be the case if the competition between ideologically similar PPOs for common resources "result in a desire to steer clear of board entanglements with ideologically similar rivals" (Burris 2008, 12) and an interest in board diversity. In addition, some PPOs may seek to legitimize its members as "serious and expert persons capable of government service"(Domhoff 2014). The extent to which PPOs' legitimacy relies upon a portrayal as nonpartisan policy experts may determine whether or not they select their trustees more widely across the ideological spectrum.

The Trustee Selection Process: The Corporate Director Perspective

The trustee selection process involves a joint decision between the PPOs and the corporate directors, for the individuals who are nominated to trustee positions must also seek out and accept these nominations. Understanding the motivation of why a corporate director might view a trustee position with a PPO as desirable is therefore relevant to understanding how their ideology may relate to the trustee selection process.

The first and most intuitive mechanism that may motivate a corporate director to sit on a PPO's board is to influence policy. Many PPOs are successful in shaping the policy-making process through conducting research, amassing knowledge, and disseminating their recommendations to key decision-makers in policy spaces (Abelson 2018; Dye, 1978). Corporate directors may view a leadership role within a PPO as a vessel for advancing their personal policy interests. If this is the case, we would expect to observe a pattern of corporate directors seeking out trusteeships with PPOs who share their personal ideologies.

Directors may also view PPOs as spaces in which they can expand their network connections, share information, and generate broad consensus among other elites in the corporate community to facilitate class-wide unity in policy advocacy (Murray 2017). If this were true, corporate directors would be less concerned with trusteeships within ideologically similar PPOs. They would be more interested in positions that enable them in connecting more broadly to the corporate community. This process is captured by Useem's (1986, 46) concept of "business scan," by which external directors learn about the "practices and experiences of another large company, and [hear] about the policies of other companies from other outside directors" through sitting on the boards of multiple firms. By facilitating the socialization of corporate elites from an array of professional backgrounds, PPOs serve a similar function through providing trustees with the means to communicate and coordinate shared class interests, and channel these class interests into the policy-influence process of PPOs.

A director's preferences with regard to selecting a trustee position may also be determined by her scope of concern. In his modern reevaluation of Mills's 1963 thesis, Mizruchi (2017, 102), identifies two classifications of the corporate elite, what Mills called "practical" and "sophisticated" conservatives. The former are driven by obstinately advocating a narrow set of ultraconservative policy viewpoints. The latter are a more flexible and adaptive group that view meeting the broader interests of society as necessary to maintaining their elite status. Mizruchi (2017, 102) cites the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers - both of which fall under Burris's (2008) *ultraconservative* classification - as organizations reflective of practical conservative paradigms. The Council for Economic Development - classified by Burris (2008) as *moderate-liberal* - is what Mizruchi (2017, 104) claims to be the "prototypical example of the group to whom Mills referred as sophisticated conservatives." Whether a director falls into each category may determine their motivation for selecting a trustee position. Practical conservatives are unwavering in their advocacy of conservative principles, and therefore may view trustee positions as beneficial only to the extent that the position enables trustees to directly influence policy. Sophisticated conservatives, however, hold a broader interest of making decisions in line with corporate class-protectionism. This may lead them to value trustee positions that provide them access to a network of other corporate elites. These boards would allow sophisticated conservatives to generate unified policy preferences - not always in line with the preferences of practical conservatives - that are in the interest of protecting the corporate class.

DATA AND METHODS

For our analysis, we use ideological scores constructed by Bonica (2014) for corporate directors and executives of Fortune 500 firms combined with PPO affiliation data collected by authors for years 2012 and 2020. The Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections compiled by Adam Bonica draws from several databases to develop a quantitative spatial model of giving, including “the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the Center for Responsive Politics, the National Institute for Money in State Politics (NIMSP), various state reporting agencies, and the Singlight foundation”. The database contains, in total, more than 103 million records of donations from 1979 to 2012 by 13.4 million unique individuals to various organizations, candidates, and political committees. For robustness, the data is filtered to only include contributors who gave to at least two recipients and candidates who received donations from at least two contributors. The final data include “3.93 million individuals, 13,189 federal candidates, 55,737 state candidates, and 9,436 campaign committees.” The data are then filtered to contain only directors and CEOs of Fortune 500 firms for the year 2012.

Due to the extensive amount of data available, Bonica measures ideology scores for both candidates and donors. A score of “0” represents no bias towards Republican nor Democrat candidates. Positive scores indicate a bias in favor of Republicans, and negative scores indicate a bias in favor of Democrats. The magnitude of these scores indicate how far to the right or left a donor is in the ideological marketplace, relative to all other donors in the data set (a score of 0.2 would indicate milder conservatism than a score of 1, and a score of -0.2 would indicate milder liberalism than a score of -1). Most scores fall within the range of -2 to 2.

Board affiliation data were collected using annual reports and the internet archives of organization websites via the “Wayback Machine.” Our main outcome variables are binary indicators of affiliation with each category of policy-planning organizations by ideological orientation in 2020. Our main explanatory variable is the individual’s 2012 ideology score. To control for potential confounders that may simultaneously influence an individual’s ideological orientation and PPO affiliation, our control variables include: a binary indicator for CEO status, a binary indicator for chairman status, age, the number of director/executive positions held among fortune 500 firms, and PPO affiliation in 2012.

To test whether ideological orientation predicts an individual’s affiliation through trusteeship to an ideologically similar PPO, we first examine the correlation between the ideology scores of directors and executives and their affiliations with PPOs of each type in a series of box-and-whisker plots. We then estimated three separate logit regression models with affiliations with each of the three types of PPOs - ultraconservative, moderate-conservative, and moderate-liberal

- in 2020 as the dependent variables and ideology score as the independent variable. By controlling for affiliation in 2012, we are testing for both whether an individual's ideology predicts that she *stays* affiliated with ideologically similar PPOs and whether it predicts *new* affiliation in 2020. Finally, we conduct the same analyses with restricted samples of directors and executives that were not affiliated with each type of PPOs in 2012 to focus only on “new” affiliations established by 2020.

Table 2. Summary Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Ultraconservative PPO Affiliation in 2020	4771	0.0062880	0.0790554	0.000000	1.000000
Moderate-Conservative PPO Affiliation in 2020	4771	0.0044016	0.0662053	0.000000	1.000000
Moderate-Liberal PPO Affiliation in 2020	4771	0.0115280	0.1067590	0.000000	1.000000
Ideology Score	3751	0.1164006	0.7255960	-1.735147	2.394525
CEO	4771	0.0874031	0.2824544	0.000000	1.000000
Chairman	4771	0.0844687	0.2781185	0.000000	1.000000
Age	4274	62.0940571	8.1651023	28.000000	95.000000
Number of Director/Executive Positions	4771	1.1347726	0.3891455	1.000000	4.000000

RESULTS

Table 2 reports the summary statistics. Figure 1 shows that our list of 12 PPOs as a whole draws a somewhat representative sample (in terms of ideology) of corporate directors to be their board members. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show that while Fortune 500 executives and directors that are trustees of ultraconservative PPOs tend to have higher ideology scores and, thus, tend to be more conservative, those that are trustees of moderate conservative and moderate liberal PPOs range widely in their ideology scores. Ranking the three types of PPOs by the ideology scores of their corporate trustees in 2012 and 2020, ultraconservative PPOs always have the most conservative trustees from Fortune 500 executives and directors. On the other hand, directors that are trustees of moderate-liberal PPOs are virtually indistinguishable in terms of their ideology orientation from the trustees of moderate-conservative PPOs. The median ideology score of the trustees of moderate-liberal PPOs is slightly lower than that of the trustees of moderate-conservative PPOs in 2012, but the order is reversed as the median ideology score of the former becomes higher in

2020, surpassing the latter.

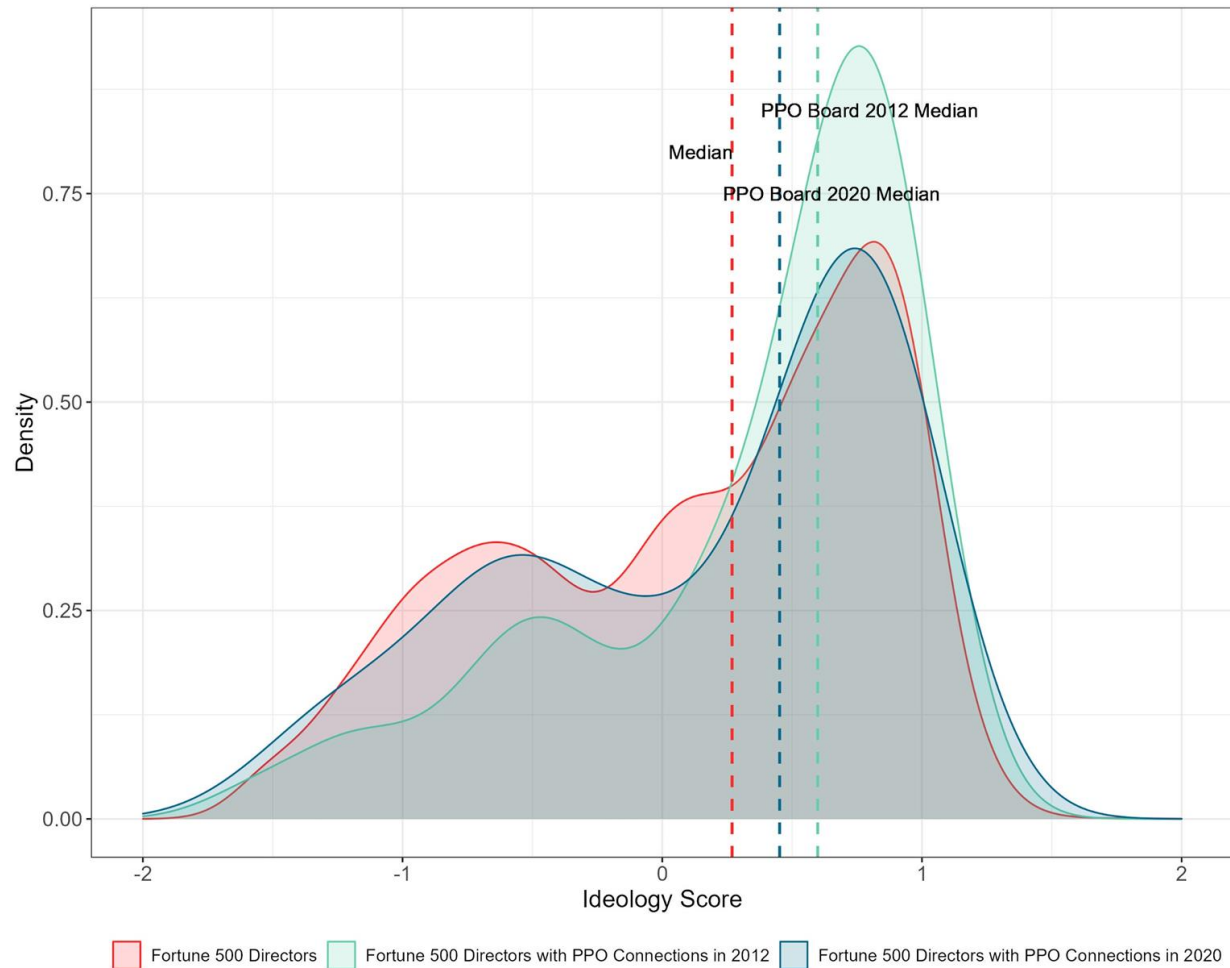


Figure 1. Distributions of Ideology Score

In Table 3, we report the results from estimating the logit regression models. Being a trustee of a given type of PPOs in 2012 predicts being a trustee of a PPO with the same ideological classification in 2020. Ideology score is predictive of affiliation with ultraconservative PPOs - the higher the ideology score (and therefore, the more conservative the individual), the higher probability of being a trustee of ultraconservative PPOs - but not of affiliation with other types of PPOs, which is consistent with what we see in the box-and-whisker plots. Older age is associated with lower probability of sitting on the boards of moderate liberal and moderate conservative PPOs. Being a chairman of a firm is associated with a higher probability of sitting on boards of ultraconservative PPO.

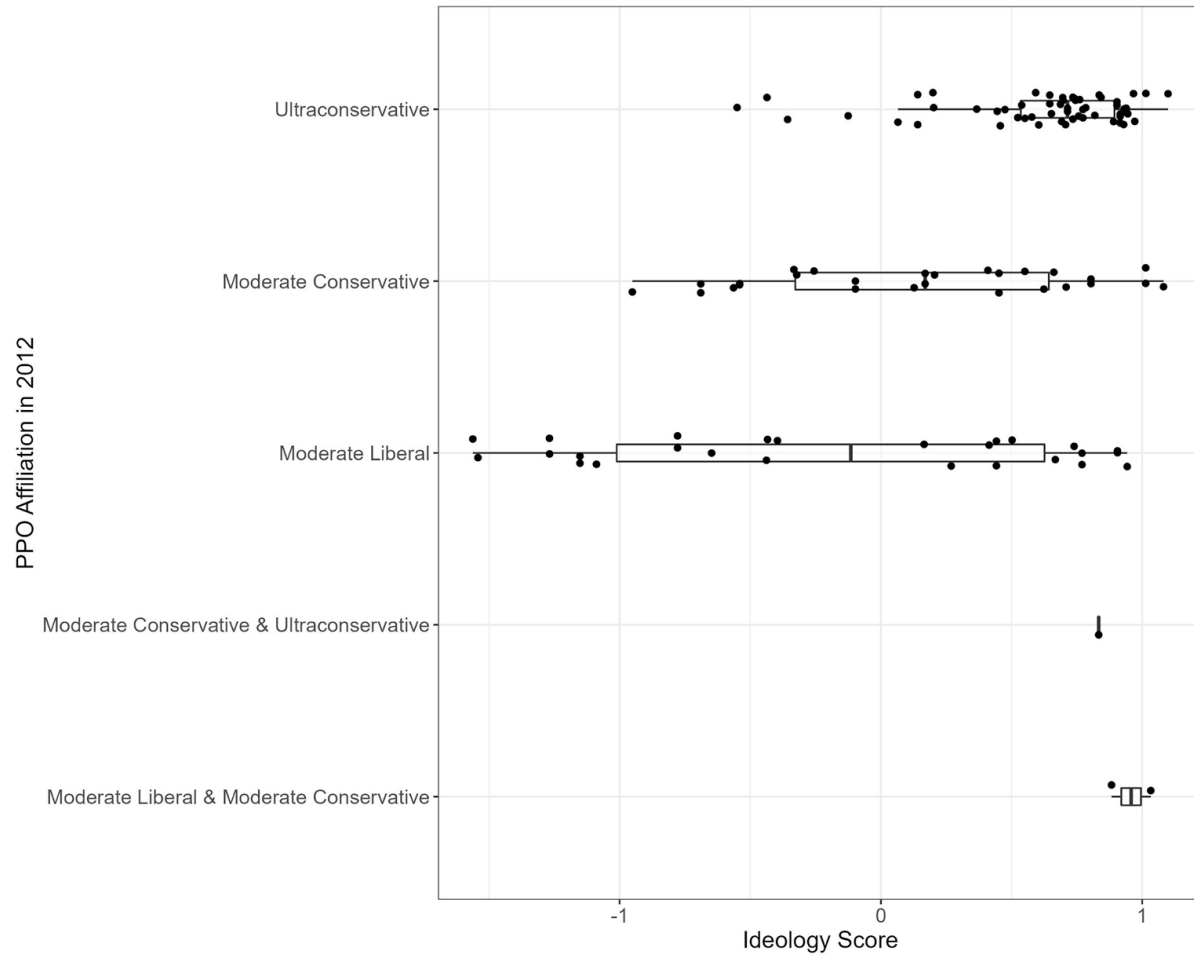


Figure 2. Ideology Scores of Fortune 500 Directors With PPO Affiliations in 2012

Notes: The midpoint of each box indicates the median ideology score of individuals in each group. The boundaries of each box indicate the 25th and the 75th percentile ideology score of each group. The whiskers indicate the maximum and minimum ideology scores, excluding outliers.

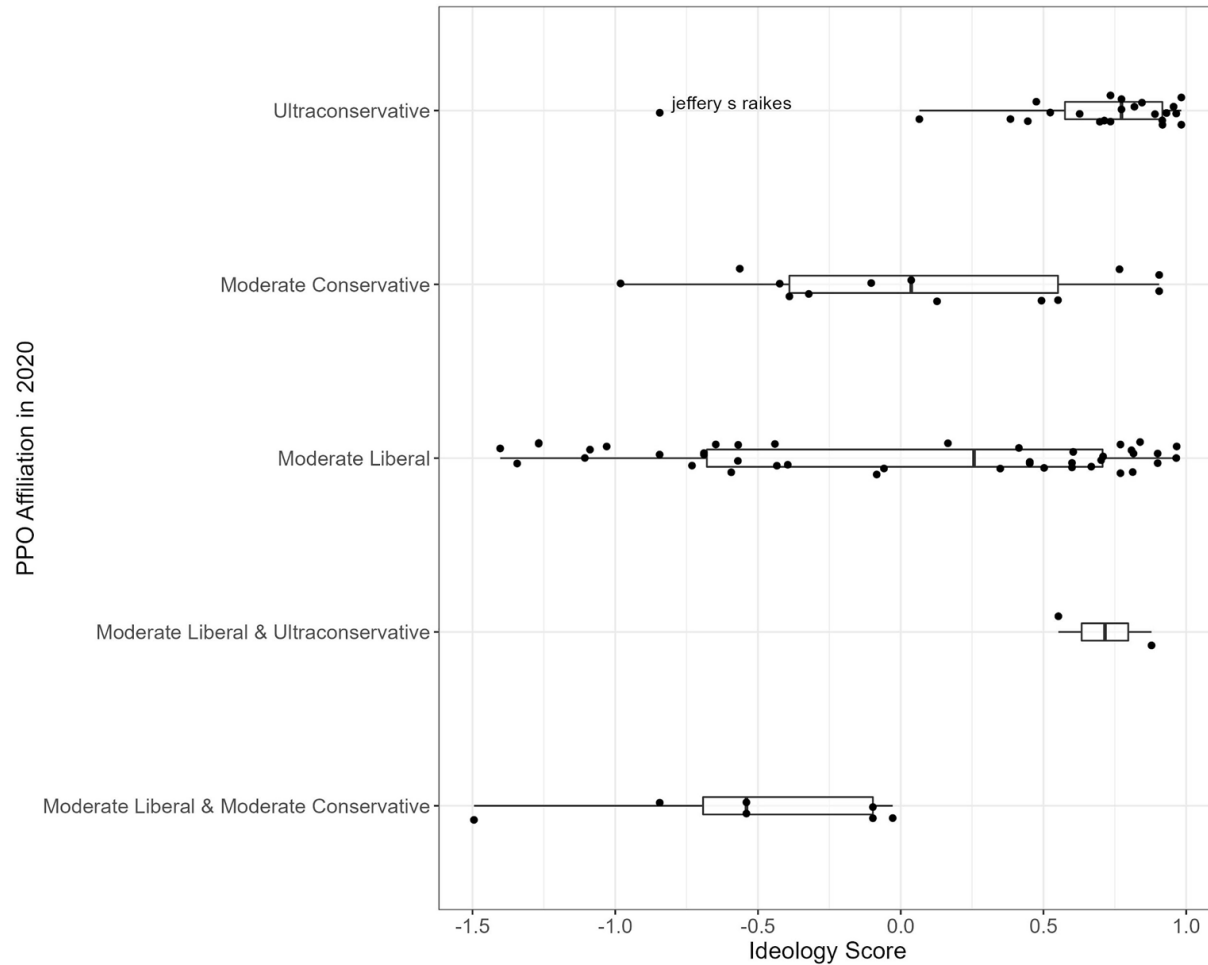


Figure 3. Ideology Scores of Fortune 500 Directors with PPO Affiliations in 2020

Notes: The midpoint of each box indicates the median ideology score of individuals in each group. The boundaries of each box indicate the 25th and the 75th percentile ideology score of each group. The whiskers indicate the maximum and minimum ideology scores, excluding outliers.

The same pattern persists when we restrict the sample to individuals that were not trustees of each type of PPOs in 2012 to test whether their ideology scores predict “new affiliations” with PPOs in 2020. Table 4 shows that ideology scores only predict new trusteeship of ultraconservative PPOs - the more conservative one is, the more likely it is for her to sit on boards of ultraconservative PPOs. In Figure 4, new trustees of moderate liberal and moderate conservative PPOs in 2020 have a wide range of political orientation.

Table 3. Logit Regressions

	UC 2020 (1)	MC 2020 (2)	ML 2020 (3)
Ideology score	1.210* (0.529)	-0.560 (0.322)	-0.242 (0.212)
CEO	-0.235 (0.532)	1.358 (0.785)	0.429 (0.509)
Chairman	0.818* (0.412)	-0.951 (1.001)	0.460 (0.494)
Age	0.007 (0.036)	-0.092*** (0.019)	-0.042* (0.019)
Number of Positions	-0.209 (0.536)	0.253 (0.487)	0.127 (0.316)
UC 2012	3.960*** (0.550)		
MC 2012		4.519*** (0.763)	
ML 2012			4.114*** (0.469)
Constant	-6.431** (2.350)	-0.898 (1.270)	-2.218 (1.183)
<i>N</i>	3,383	3,383	3,383
Log Likelihood	-95.433	-76.932	-216.508
Akaike Inf. Crit.	204.867	167.864	447.016

Notes:

***Significant at the 0.1 percent level.

**Significant at the 1 percent level.

*Significant at the 5 percent level.

UC: Ultraconservative. MC: Moderate-conservative. ML: Moderate-liberal.

UC 2012 is an indicator of the persons affiliation with ultraconservative PPOs in 2012.

Number of Positions refers to the number of executive/director positions the person holds among fortune 500 firms.

Column labels show which binary indicator is used as the outcome variable in the logit regression.

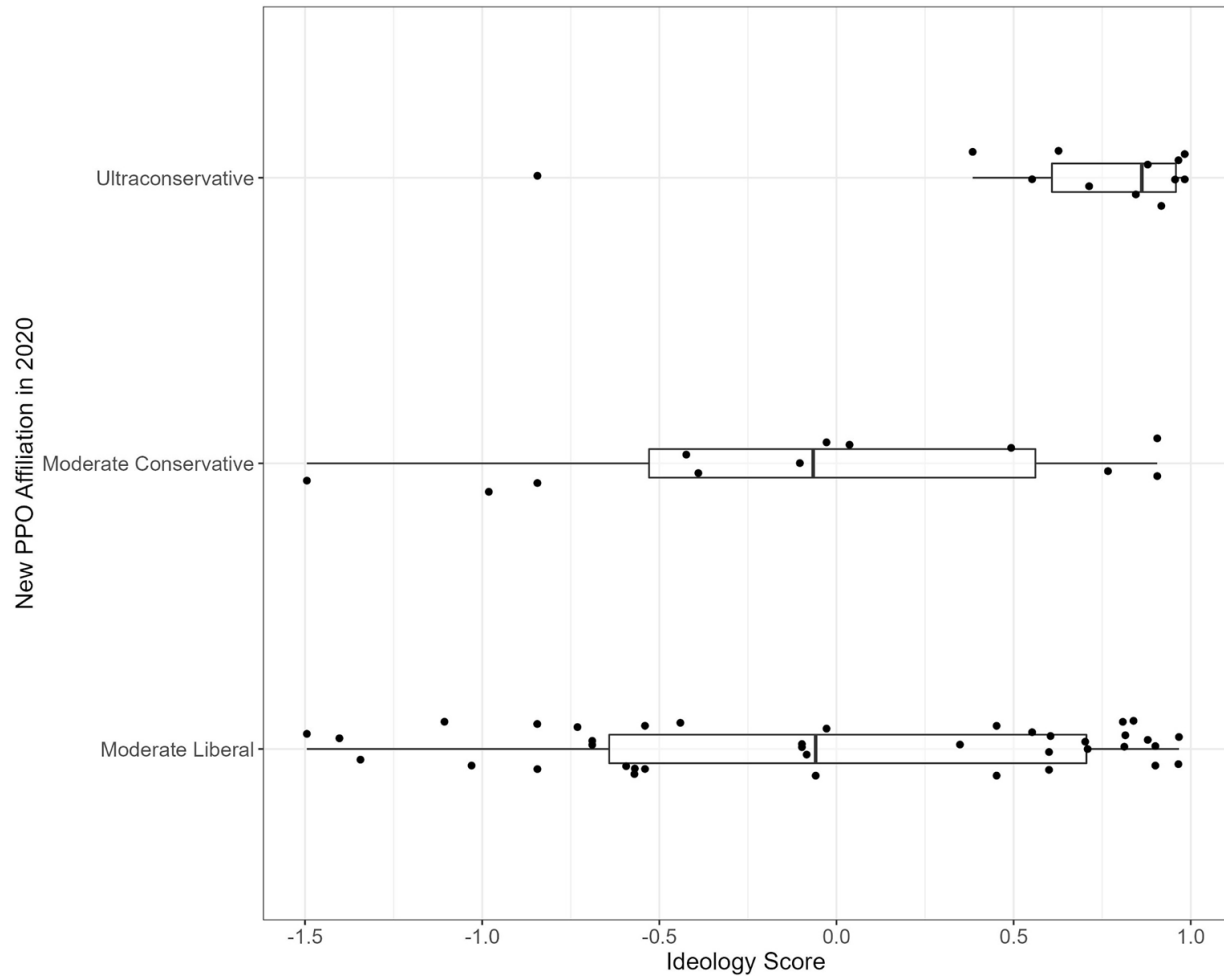


Figure 4. Ideology Scores of Fortune 500 Directors with “New” PPO Affiliations in 2020

Notes: The midpoint of each box indicates the median ideology score of individuals in each group. The boundaries of each box indicate the 25th and the 75th percentile ideology score of each group. The whiskers indicate the maximum and minimum ideology scores, excluding outliers.

Table 4. Logit Regressions with Restricted Samples

	UC 2020 (1)	MC 2020 (2)	ML 2020 (3)
Ideology score	1.422* (0.667)	-0.219 (0.380)	-0.249 (0.232)
CEO	0.416 (0.419)	1.354 (0.803)	0.646 (0.475)
Chairman	0.876 (0.464)	-0.779 (1.152)	0.214 (0.540)
Age	-0.040 (0.040)	-0.102*** (0.017)	-0.052** (0.019)
Number of Positions	0.542 (0.472)	0.695 (0.472)	0.383 (0.271)
Constant	-4.745 (2.628)	-0.845 (1.163)	-1.937 (1.185)
<i>N</i>	3,330	3,355	3,356
Log Likelihood	-67.799	-61.988	-196.822
Akaike Inf. Crit.	147.598	135.977	405.644

Notes:

*** Significant at the 0.1 percent level.

** Significant at the 1 percent level.

* Significant at the 5 percent level.

UC: Ultraconservative. MC: Moderate-conservative. ML: Moderate-liberal.

UC 2012 is an indicator of the persons affiliation with ultraconservative PPOs in 2012.

Number of Positions refers to the number of executive/director positions the person holds among fortune 500 firms.

Column labels show which binary indicator is used as the outcome variable in the logit regression.

Each column uses a different sample that includes only the individuals that were not affiliated with PPOs of that type in 2012.

DISCUSSION

Ideological Homophily in Ultraconservative Organizations

Why does ideology predict trustee affiliation for ultraconservative organizations? From the perspective of ultraconservative PPOs, it may be that they share analogous policy objectives, and it is in their best interest to select from a pool of ideologically similar directors. Doing so would facilitate communication and collective action on their shared goals. It could also be the case that each ultraconservative PPO relies on similar, or even overlapping, sources of funding. Appointing conservative trustees may act as a form of signaling to funders that the PPO's leadership is prepared to engage in conservative policy advocacy. It may also be that the appointment of specific trustees who hold conservative ideological backgrounds is a contingency of the PPO receiving funding.

In terms of the trustee selection process from the perspective of the corporate director, this phenomenon may fall into the aforementioned divide between “practical” and “sophisticated” conservatives in the corporate world (Mizruchi 2017, 102). Practical conservatives within our sample are those with the highest ideology scores, indicating a pattern of personal donations to

the rightmost candidates in political campaigns. These individuals are staunchly conservative, and have a history of advocating impenitently for “free markets, minimal government intervention in the economy, low taxes, and strong opposition to the right of workers to organize into independent unions” (Mizruchi, 2017 102). Practical conservatives would likely view PPOs as an effective channel through which they can influence policy in accordance with these principles, and thus would likely only select trusteeships with PPOs dedicated to doing so.

Trustee Selection in Moderate Organizations

If there are no discernible ideological patterns in the trustee selection process of moderate PPOs, it may be the case that moderate PPOs place a greater emphasis on other characteristics of corporate directors such as their political and social connections, their centrality within the corporate network, and the information they possess. On the other hand, corporate directors that become trustees of moderate PPOs may have been “sophisticated conservatives” who “understood that they were members of a privileged group, but they also believed that these privileges would be best maintained by ensuring that the society as a whole rested on a strong foundation” (Mizruchi 2017, 104). These directors therefore may be more interested in trusteeships that provide a space for the formation of unified interests, rather than the narrow advocacy of conservative principles. Such trusteeships would allow for a “business scan” (Useem 1986, 46) of corporate directors from diverse backgrounds, which would consequently facilitate the formation of policy recommendations aimed at protecting class-wide interests of the corporate community.

Moderate-Liberal and Moderate Conservative PPOs

In our findings, moderate-liberal and moderate conservative PPOs are virtually indistinguishable from one another in terms of the distribution of ideology scores of their trustees. This suggests that the distinction between the moderate-conservatives and the moderate-liberals made in Burris (2008) may have been unnecessary. Our findings lend more support to the classification scheme used by Domhoff (2014) that distinguishes only between two broad ideological groupings - the “moderate-conservative” bloc and the “ultraconservative” bloc - compared to the classification of three types suggested by Burris (2008). The moderate-conservative bloc consists of the Brookings Institution, Committee for Economic Development, Conference Board, Council of Foreign Relations, Trilateral Commission, Business Council, and Business Roundtable. The ultraconservative bloc consists of the American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institution, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and National Association of Manufacturers.

This classification is also consistent with the Mills (1963) and Mizruchi (2017)’s dichotomous classification of corporate elites between “sophisticated” and “practical” conservatives. The sophisticated conservatives would be consistent with the moderate-conservative bloc, and practical conservatives with the ultraconservative bloc.

Limitations of Findings

Our results are limited in many facets. The first being that the directors and consequently trustees within our population are limited to only directors of Fortune 500 companies in 2012. This has two implications. The first is that our results cannot be generalized to the greater population of trustees who are *not* directors of large corporations. It is possible that the mechanisms affecting the board selection process from the perspective of PPOs and individuals are entirely different for those trustees who operate outside of the corporate world. The second implication is that even *within* the corporate world, there may be differentiation between how directors of large Fortune 500 companies interact with the selection process and directors of companies outside of this classification. As smaller businesses are typically more sensitive to policy changes than larger firms, they may gravitate more strongly towards pro-business, ultraconservative PPOs such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or National Association of Manufacturers. Ideology may also play an increasingly important role in the trustee selection process for directors of smaller firms, as they are typically less equipped to offer PPOs connections to funders or policy-makers.

Our study is also limited in that we only have ideology scores for individuals who donated to candidates in American elections. Our results cannot be generalized to explain the behavior of corporate directors who are on the boards of PPOs but did not contribute to any American political campaigns between 1979-2012. This largely excludes observations of any director-trustees who are not American.

In addition, there are possibly false negative matches between our list of Fortune 500 directors and executives in 2012 and the list of PPO trustees in 2012 and 2020 due to inaccuracies in name-matching during the data-processing stage of this study.

Future Research

We plan on addressing these limitations and expanding the results in a future project. The first limitation is the small sample size of PPOs and corporate directors we are observing. This can be addressed in two ways. The first would be expanding the sample of PPOs in our data, and devising a method of ideological classification of these organizations that extends beyond the work of Burris (2008). The second expansion could be through the application of ideology scores to all trustees of the PPOs in our sample, not just directors of Fortune 500 companies. The Bonica (2014) data set extends to anyone who has contributed to two or more political campaigns between 1979-2012, the names of all trustees - regardless of whether they are Fortune 500 directors and CEOs or not - could be assigned ideology scores so long as they meet these criteria.

We also plan on calculating the centrality of the directors/trustees in our population within a larger network of corporations, PPOs, charities, and foundations. These scores would be a useful

alternative explanatory variable for determining which characteristics play a role in the trustee selection process. Furthermore, given that the sources of funding may shape a PPOs' trustee selection process, another potentially fruitful extension would be to examine the relationship between a PPO's source of funding and its selection of trustees.

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