

## **Preaching to the Choir or Yelling at the Deaf?**

### **Discovering the True Role of Party Platforms and how Interest Groups Influence Them**

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#### **Overview**

We use a game theoretic model to explain the conditions under which political parties will incorporate interest group positions onto the party platform. We test the formal model using content analysis of 1996, 2000, and 2004 DNC party platforms and platform hearing testimony.

#### **Abstract**

Two common views of party platforms exist—they are either considered to be empty rhetoric, intended only for party activists, or broad statements of beliefs to which no one listens. In this paper, we test these competing views about the intended audience for platforms and challenge the idea that platforms are only symbolic. We argue that parties view interest groups as important components of their extended network and test whether parties use their platforms to shore up support from organized activists or seek to convince rank-and-file voters to join the cause. A formal theoretical model shows the conditions under which parties would choose to articulate an interest group's position in its platform, and an empirical test of the model further shows that parties seek to enhance their base strength, rather than expand their network. Both models account for group attributes of mobilization potential, party loyalty, and ideology. Data are derived from content analysis of Democratic Party platforms and platform hearing testimony from interest groups in 1996, 2000, and 2004. Results show that parties use platforms to maintain their critical base of activists and that interest groups can affect platform planks by demonstrating party loyalty and ideological compatibility.

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This paper explores the conditions under which political parties articulate interest group demands in their manifestos, or party platforms. While some debate may exist about the role and worth of party platforms in the United States' electoral system because its candidates are not beholden to adhere to or adopt its policy positions, US parties have incentives to carefully consider the content of their platforms because it signals the importance of party interests to interest groups and segments of the electorate. Platforms are not important in the U.S. because of what they say, they are important because they indicate which populations are most significant for the strength and expansion of the party network.

Conventional wisdom about platforms is that they are used to excite and entice party activists, but that they are filled with symbolic gestures that have little substantive consequence for policy or elections. We both test and challenge this wisdom by assuming that parties use platforms either to excite the party base or to entice rank-and-file voters. Using an empirical test of a formal model, we establish that parties use platforms to energize loyal activists, and argue that doing so has important consequences for electoral politics. The contributions of this piece are three-fold. First, the formal model explains the conditions under which parties should be persuaded by interest group demand—an interaction not previously explained in literature on the relationship between parties and groups. Second, by conceptualizing interest groups as extensions of parties' networks, rather than competing interests, we offer a theoretical and empirical contribution to existing new literature that suggests that interest groups and parties are not competing political interests, but rather extensions of the same complex political network in which actors and organizations seek to create more and stronger connections to other like-minded political actors (Koger, *et al.* 2008). Third, we take advantage of rare data, transcripts from platform-drafting hearings, and new content analysis technology to engage in an empirical test of a formal model. Our paper thus takes unique theoretical and empirical steps toward a rigorous quantitative study of the “influence” that groups have over platforms, which has not existed to date.

In Section 1, we classify two opposing approaches to the conceptualization of platform utility based on insights from extant platform, interest group, and electoral literature. In Section 2 we use these insights to develop a formal model that describes an interaction between two parties and two interest groups, where groups offer to align with parties and parties offer

platform concessions to groups. In what we call the *Network Expansion* view, parties use platforms to mobilize rank-and-file voters. The model predicts that platform concessions will be given to interest groups closer to the median, those that pose the greatest threat of exiting to another party, and those that can mobilize the greatest amount of voters. In the *Network Maintenance* view, parties use platforms to mobilize party activists. The model predicts that platforms will reward loyal groups that are closer to the party ideologically and offer a credible voter mobilization effort.

To determine which view is a more accurate depiction of party-group interaction, we empirically test implications of this model in Sections 3 and 4. We use content analysis of interest groups' testimonies to parties at platform-drafting hearings to develop a continuous dependent variable that measures the extent to which groups received what they asked for in the final party platform. Estimating the effect of groups' ideology, mobilization, and loyalty on the extent to which parties gave them what they asked for, we find that loyalty and ideology are positively related to these requests, while mobilization is less important.

Our exploration thus formally and empirically demonstrates the value that platforms serve. The model shows that parties prioritizing network maintenance over network expansion will craft their platforms to incorporate the policy preferences of those groups that are ideologically close to the party, those that have greater mobilization potential, and those that are most loyal to the party. The empirical investigation confirms that parties' primary objective is to maintain their base-membership (activists). Through strategic incorporation of interest groups' policy preferences and priorities, parties can maintain and enhance their critical core membership.

### **1. Interest Groups, Party Platforms, and Electoral Outcomes**

Considerable debate exists over the relevance of party platforms. Critics have been quick to note that in the American electoral system, candidates are not bound to their party's platform. Ostrogorski writes, "The platform, which is supposed to be the party's profession of faith and its programme of action is only a farce—the biggest farce of all the acts of this great parliament of the party" (1964, 138-39). David Truman famously writes that "the platform is generally regarded as a document that says little, binds no one, and is forgotten by politicians as quickly as

possible after it is adopted” (Truman 1951, 282-83). Rozell, Wilcox, and Madland (2006) argue that interest Groups "struggle to influence the party platforms--which, in practice, often embody nothing more than the momentary sentiments of a majority of party activists" (34).

Yet interest groups display profound interest in the development of platforms, and many go to great lengths to influence the content of one or both parties' platforms. So the paradox exists—if platforms do not matter, why do groups exert so much energy to affect their make-up? Either groups unwisely expend valuable resources trying to influence platforms, or platforms are valuable for groups and political parties. The question is, what is that value? Exactly what are platforms supposed to do?

### *Network Expansion v. Network Maintenance*

Electorally speaking, there is little doubt that parties want to mobilize voters. We argue that there are two main ways in which platforms can represent a tool for that mobilization. The first is the means that Truman (1951) and Ostrogorski (1964) observed, in which parties seem to intend platforms to be a grand argument about why they should win elections, but ones that voters and candidates both ignore. We will call this the *Network Expansion* alternative. In this view, parties use platforms to expand their network of followers, by including the interests of rank-and-file members on the platform in the hopes of using that platform to get their votes, and then by implementing those interests when elected to office in return. If platforms are used primarily for expanding the network of voters in this way, then these previous authors may be correct to lament the lack of congruence between platforms and legislative behavior, the inability of platforms today to bind the actions of elected officials in the future.

But what if platforms are not intended to be used as network expanders? What if, instead, parties use platforms to reinforce and maintain the already-existing base of party activists? In what we call the *Network Maintenance* view, platforms are used to invigorate and reward loyal followers. The platform is used not to promise future legislative behavior, but rather to offer those loyal followers the opportunity to express their own interests on a national scale. In that case, what Truman and others berate as the inefficacy of platforms may in fact be not only platforms' saving grace, but their main function. Platforms offer scholars a picture of

the sentiments of party activists, while they offer activists a forum to articulate their interests, and they offer parties a means to maintain this expanded network of core followers.

We argue that interest groups are important to parties because groups help parties mobilize voters, win elections, coordinate campaign donations, communicate message, and essentially act as an extended network of the party organizations themselves. To this end, parties are stronger and more successful if this network of interest groups is larger and more powerful. Parties use their platforms to either maintain or expand this network by incorporating groups' policy priorities into the platforms.

Interest groups, in turn, try to have their interests articulated on party platforms that they believe provide legitimacy, authority, and publicity. Before platforms are adopted, both the Democrats and the Republicans traditionally give interest groups the opportunity to testify or formally file opinions. Interest groups have the chance to participate in the drafting process, thereby to influence the final placement of the platform itself. So the question becomes not whether platforms are meant to mobilize groups of voters, but rather *which* groups platforms are meant to mobilize. What group characteristics will make one group more likely to have its interests included on a campaign platform?

**Mobilization potential.** Regardless of whether a party is interested in network maintenance or network expansion, it will want to mobilize voters, and interest groups can help serve that function. Harvey (1998) argues that an efficient electoral system requires intermediate organizations that coordinate individual votes, insignificant alone, into groups. In order for these groups to be able to bargain effectively with parties, they must be able to credibly offer the support of a block of voters (ibid.). Truman states that interest groups are ineffective in campaigns when they cannot guarantee the mobilization of voters, in terms of electoral turnout, in favor of a particular party (1962: 300, 304-305). Interest groups' ability to potentially mobilize large populations of voters is not only valuable to parties, but essential to a parties' success in elections. Interest groups that can promise to register and turn-out new and existing voters are essentially mirror campaigns that supplement, or subsidize, existing parties (Esterling 2007).

**Loyalty and Exit.** Albert O. Hirschman once famously coined the terms “exit, voice, and loyalty” (1970) to describe political participation and organization, and his insights can help unpack the mechanisms underlying the party/group interaction regarding platforms. When group members are dissatisfied with their party’s ability or willingness to articulate group interests, they should *exit* to another party that will articulate those interests more fully. Supporting an opposing party, then, would be a threat of exit offered by a particular group to a particular party. Parties concerned with network expansion will be concerned about groups that threaten exit, and will be more likely to include their interests on campaign platforms. The more *loyal* that group is to the party, however, the less likely the group is to exit. More loyal groups are more likely to have their cause supported by parties that view platforms as network maintainers, by making such gestures as incorporating platform planks friendly to the group.

**Ideology.** Parties also care about how similar groups are to parties themselves. In the classic spatial model, Downs (1957) shows that parties articulate the preference of the median voter. With respect to platforms, this prediction would fall in line with the network expansion view – the best way to mobilize and expand the network of supportive voters would be to place the platform as close as possible to the median. If parties use platforms as a tool of network maintenance, however, platforms are more likely to incorporate the interests of groups that are ideologically closer to it, even if those groups are farther from the median.

## 2. Modeling Party/Group Interaction During Platform Creation

Cox (1990) has extended the Downs (1957) model to parties within a multiparty system, and Austin-Smith and Banks (1988) model how individual voter preferences are translated into legislative platforms, governing coalitions, and policy. Yet these models do not address how parties deal with *group* preferences or the bargaining that can take place between parties and groups. More importantly to our work, these previous formal models do not consider whether or not a collection of voters in a group wields the same influence in party platform writing as individual voters who are not formally aligned, and they do not allow for an assessment of the value of platforms as either maintainers or expanders of networks.

How can we conceptualize the party/group interaction during platform creation in one model that allows platforms to be used for either network maintenance or network expansion?

We create a game between two interest groups and two political parties that occurs during the platform-writing process outlined above. The two parties compete with each other for votes, and thus may also compete to gain the vote shares of large blocks of voters aligned in interest groups. The two groups, meanwhile, compete with each other to have their interests articulated by parties, through inclusion in party platforms.

Each entity has preferences over a set of outcomes. These preferences factor into an ideal point on a one-dimensional ideological spectrum. Each entity also has basic beliefs about the relative ideal points of all other entities, the potential vote share of parties, and the potential of a given group to mobilize voters.

Finally, each party has an underlying goal for its platform, either as a tool to maintain the existing party network (that includes party activists), or as a tool to expand the network to include voters beyond the party base. Note that, based on our juxtaposition of the network maintenance and network expansion views, above, we are assuming that parties cannot use their platforms to excite their base *and simultaneously* attract rank-and-file voters. The tension between these goals is conceptualized as a trade-off. Using the platform to appease party loyalists will make the platform less likely to attract ideologically moderate voters, or rank-and-file voters. Using the platform to attract rank-and-file voters will make the platform less useful for bolstering party loyalists. This interplay will be key to solving the game and generating implications, below.

Consistent with the literature (Laver and Shepsle 1998; Cox and McCubbins 1986; Cox 1990), we assume parties to be unitary actors. We also assume that groups are *not* unitary actors, an assumption supported by several branches of group theory (see Sabatier and McLaughlin 1990).<sup>2</sup> When a group's leadership aligns with a party, the party's estimation of the value of that alignment depends on its estimation of the group's ability to mobilize members as voters behind the leaders' commitments. Parties that emphasize network maintenance over network expansion will estimate higher values to alignment from groups that are loyal to the party, ideologically congruent with the party, and able to mobilize their loyal members to vote according to group

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<sup>2</sup> These writings argue that leaders and members may have congruent interests and actions (exchange theory), that leaders tend to have more extreme views and commitments (commitment theory), and that leaders are less extreme than their members in what they are willing to do (moderating elite theory). In each, it is accepted that a group leader's commitment does not necessarily guarantee the behavior of all current or potential group members.

leader commitments. Parties that emphasize network expansion, on the other hand, will place higher values on alignment from groups that pose a threat of exiting to another party, that are less congruent ideologically, and that can mobilize their members to vote based on a call to exit, if necessary.

We thus place loyalty and exit on opposite ends of a one-dimensional spectrum. As a group's loyalty to a given party increases, it is less likely to exit that party to vote for another. As a group's loyalty decreases, it is more likely to exit to another party. Parties that place high value on network maintenance will be more responsive to loyal groups and less responsive to groups that threaten exit.

### *The Game*

The game of complete and perfect information consists of four players: Group F, Group G, Party A, and Party B:  $N = [F, G, A, B]$ . In the first stage, only the two groups play (see Figure 1). Each group simultaneously has three options:  $S_{f,g} = [A, B, D]$  where  $A$  indicates supporting Party A,  $B$  indicates supporting Party B, and  $D$  indicates dispersing support between Parties A and B. If Group  $i$  supports Party  $p$  only, it is expressing loyalty to that party. If Group  $i$  disperses its support between the two parties, it is threatening to exit from either party to the other in the eventual election.

In the second stage, only the two parties play. Each party simultaneously has the options of Including ( $I_i$ ) or Not including ( $N_i$ ) either Group in its platform:  $S_{a,b} = [I_F I_G, I_F N_G, N_F I_G, N_F N_G]$ . If Party  $p$  includes only one group in its platform, it announces its platform at the ideal point of that group in a one-dimensional spectrum. If Party  $p$  includes both groups in its platform, it announces its platform at the ideological median between the two groups. If Party  $p$  includes neither group, it announces its platform at the true ideal point for that party.

**Figure 1**





Parties are vote-maximizers. Group utility is based on: first, having as many party platforms as possible positioned as closely as possible to the group's ideal point; and second, getting the most closely positioned party elected. The weight each group puts on these two components varies by group. Payoff notation will be observed as follows:

$s_i$	the action chosen by Group $i$ : A, B, or D
$r_i$	the action chosen by Party $p$ : $I_F I_G$ , $I_F N_G$ , $N_F I_G$ , or $N_F N_G$
$P_{i,j}$	the groups included by Party $p$ : F, G, FG, or N (neither)
$i(p: A_{i,j}, B_{i,j}, s_i)$	the amount of voters from Group $i$ that will vote for Party $p$ given the groups included by Party A, the groups included by Party B, and the action taken by Group $i$
$\lambda_i$	the value Group $i$ places on policy implementation
$1 - \lambda_i$	the value Group $i$ places on interest articulation at the platform level
$\alpha$	the percentage of votes Party A receives
$\beta$	the percentage of votes Party B receives
$X_p$	the ideal point of Party $p$
$X_i$	the ideal point of Group $i$
$P_p(r_p)$	the payoff to Party $p$ given the strategy $(r_p)$
$P_i(s_i)$	the payoff to Group $i$ given the strategy $(s_i)$

Each Group  $i$  is assumed to place some value  $\lambda_i$  on the chances of actually getting its agenda implemented by both having its agenda taken as platform by a party or parties, and by that party or parties getting elected. Each Group  $i$  then places the value  $1 - \lambda_i$  on simply having its interests articulated in a campaign when its ideal point is advocated in the platform of one or both parties. Each payoff is measured according to the distance between Group  $i$ 's ideal point and the points each party adopts for its platform, as well as the percentage of votes each party receives:

$$P_f(s_f) = \lambda_f [-\alpha |X_a - X_f| - \beta |X_b - X_f|] + (1 - \lambda_f) [-|X_a - X_f| - |X_b - X_f|]$$

$$P_g(s_g) = \lambda_g [-\alpha |X_a - X_g| - \beta |X_b - X_g|] + (1 - \lambda_g) [-|X_a - X_g| - |X_b - X_g|]$$

Payoffs for Parties depend on the quantity of votes received, which is determined by its group alliance as well as the mobilization potential and the placement on the loyalty/exit spectrum of one or both groups. The amount of votes Party  $p$  gets from Group  $i$  depends on which groups Party  $p$  included, which groups Party  $\sim p$  included, and what action Group  $i$  originally chose:

$$P_a(r_a) = F(a: A_{i,j}, B_{i,j}, s_f) + G(a: A_{i,j}, B_{i,j}, s_g)$$

$$P_b(r_b) = F(b: A_{i,j}, B_{i,j}, s_f) + G(b: A_{i,j}, B_{i,j}, s_g)$$

Solving for a Pure Bayesian Equilibrium shows that Downs' (1957) and Black's (1958) predictions that parties cluster around the median voter position hold true under specific conditions. Both groups will disperse, both parties will include both groups, and both parties will set their platforms on the ideological median, provided that Group F and Group G are on opposite sides of the ideological median and roughly the same size in terms of voting potential, and that there are comparable levels of loyalty for both groups (see Appendix for proof), regardless of whether parties view platforms as network maintainers or network expanders. Parties will place themselves at the ideological median, and although both groups are officially included in each party's campaign, neither group will have its ideal point articulated.

Relaxing these restrictions, and comparatively altering various group attributes while holding other characteristics static, we now move to consider a few variations on group attributes (please consult the authors for proofs of the following equilibria, which follow the logic of the proof in the Appendix). Rather than elaborate on all possible variations, we focus on the few that generate the most interesting predictions for our debate on platform utility.

**Vary mobilization potential.** Imagine the two groups do not represent comparable electoral weights. Parties A and B believe that Group F can mobilize enough voters to be able to affect the outcome of the election, and that Group G does not. Holding all other variables constant, both parties will include Group F on their platforms, thus assuming the ideal point of Group F, which will have its interests articulated. This outcome occurs regardless of whether parties use platforms as network maintainers or network expanders.

**Vary loyalty.** Suppose Group G has a high degree of loyalty to Party A, while Group F has a credible threat of exit to either party. The outcome of this variation will depend on how parties use platforms. If parties use platforms to get votes from groups that might otherwise exit to their opponent, both Group G and Group F will disperse, but only the threat of Group F will be a concern. Both Parties A and B will place themselves on the ideal point of Group F, which will have its interests articulated.

If parties use platforms to strengthen the party base, however, then Group G will be rewarded for its loyalty. Group G will support Party A, while Group F will disperse between the two groups, having no loyalty to either party. Party A will reward Group G's loyalty by positioning itself at Group G's ideal point and articulating Group G's interests. Party B will assume the ideal point of Group F in the hopes of reducing exit of Group F's voters. Each group will have its interests articulated by one party, and the Group that mobilizes the most voters will elect the winning party.

**Vary ideological placement.** This variation proceeds similarly to the variation of loyalty. Suppose Group G is ideologically closer to Party A than to Party B, while Group F is ideologically positioned roughly at the median between the two parties. The outcome of this variation will also depend on how parties use platforms. If parties use platforms to expand the network and attract votes from groups that might be captured ideologically by their opponent, both Group G and Group F will disperse. Since Group G is assumed to be nearly locked ideologically to Party A, both Parties A and B will place themselves on the ideal point of Group F, which will have its interests articulated.

Alternatively, if parties use platforms to maintain and strengthen the party base, Group G will benefit from its ideological proximity to Party A. Group G will support Party A, while Group F will disperse between the two groups, having no explicit ideological connection to either party. Party A will seek to bolster its connections to Group G by positioning itself at Group G's ideal point and articulating Group G's interests. Party B will assume the ideal point of Group F in the hopes of attracting Group F's voters, and consider Group G's voters difficult to attract from Party A. Each group will have its interests articulated by one party, and the Group that mobilizes the most voters will elect the winning party.

### ***Implications***

In the Downs model of a two-party system with a single dimension of ideology, both parties will cluster around the ideological median, positioning their platforms so as to capture the person whose vote will ensure greater than 50% of the electorate. For the study of interest articulation, Downs' model issues one main implication. The only voters whose interests are articulated at the campaign level are those with positions ideologically similar to the median.

By allowing voters to coalesce into groups based on similar interests, our model establishes the theoretical possibility that voters without median positions can have their interests articulated by credibly promising groups of votes, and by either demonstrating loyalty and ideological homogeneity with parties, or by threatening exit to other parties and being ideologically closer to the median. Voters can thus have their interests articulated at the party platform level at times beyond those when group and median interests already coincide. When those interests are articulated will depend on whether parties see platforms as network maintainers or network expanders.

If parties use platforms to expand political networks and attract rank-and-file voters, the model predicts that we will see platform concessions given to groups that pose credible threats of exit to other parties, and that are ideologically distant from the party in the direction of the median voter. Empirically, we would expect to see platforms approach the ideal points of groups that approach the median and/or support both parties. If parties use platforms to bolster existing networks and maintain a pre-existing party base, however, the model predicts that platform concessions will be given to groups that offer high levels of loyalty to one party, and that are ideologically close to that party. In this case, we would expect platforms to approach groups that support only one party, and that are already close to the party ideologically.

The model has clear implications for credible mobilization potential, regardless of the use of platforms for building networks. The more disparate is the credible mobilization of voters between two groups, the more likely we are to see interest articulation of those groups that can credibly mobilize. Empirically, we should expect interest groups to distinguish themselves based on the number of voters they can credibly promise to a given party or candidate.

Ultimately, we expect the distinction of these attributes to inform our understanding of platform utility. We thus turn to our empirical investigation to help determine how platforms have been used by the Democratic Party in the past three presidential campaign cycles.

### 3. Data and Methods

We seek to explain the conditions under which interest groups are able to influence the development of political party platforms. Our theoretical model dictates that in order to do so, we must operationalize the group attributes of mobilization potential, ideological similarity, and loyalty. We must also estimate the spatial positions of groups and parties before and after groups have a chance to influence platform creation. Specifically, we require both a spatial measurement of party platforms as well as an equivalent spatial measurement of interest groups' policy positions. If the Network Maintenance view of platform utility is correct, we will see mobilization potential, ideological similarity, and loyalty vary positively with interest articulation at the platform level. If the Network Expansion view of platforms is more accurate, we will see mobilization potential vary positively, while ideological similarity and loyalty vary negatively, with interest articulation.

As platform hearings provide a venue for groups to offer testimony, evidence, speech, and/or written comments on their views of the party platform, testimony from those hearings provide the source data from which to estimate the spatial positions of groups trying to influence platform creation. Our unit of analysis is a group-year, which accounts for each group that testified at a DNC platform hearing in 1996, 2000, or 2004 (N=82). Our dependent variable, as guided by the model, is the ideological distance between the group's testimony and the DNC platform in a given year. We make this comparison by analyzing the content of the testimonies and platform using the Wordfish software (Proksch and Slapin 2008, more on this below).

#### *Using Text as Data*

Recent technological advances in content analysis make using text as data much more accessible, less time intensive, and significantly less error prone than previously. New software eliminates the problems associated with human coding error and automates the analysis process. These software, such as "Readme," "Wordscores," and "Wordfish" require little or no human coding and treat individual words as data points (see Slapin and Proksch 2008; Proksch and Slapin 2008; Quinn, et al. 2006; Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003; Laver and Garry 2000; Hopkins and King 2007).

Using R software code developed by Proksch and Slapin (2008) known as Wordfish, we analyze the party platforms and hearing transcripts, estimating policy positions in the texts based

on word frequencies. This method produces spatial estimates of policy positions, including standard errors and confidence intervals. The output allows us to make judgments about whether the differences between the platforms and the hearing transcripts are due to error (measurement or random) or due to substantive significance.

The Proksch and Slapin technology works by employing a scaling algorithm to estimate parties' positions on a uni-dimensional ideological spectrum using words as data. Like other content analysis software that was developed primarily to discern the comparative ideological positions of political parties using manifestos, Wordfish assumes that the "relative word usage of parties provides information about their placement in a policy space" (Slapin and Proksch 2008, 708). Wordfish has three primary advantages over other content analysis software—it can account for changes in parties over time and produce estimates that are sensitive to temporal changes; it does not require any *a priori* reference texts or independently developed scores on a reference text because it assumes that word counts follow an underlying statistical distribution (this means it also does not require any human coding of texts); and, it can use *all* words in every document provided and estimate the importance of these words individually. Wordfish assumes that the frequency of words appearing in a document follows a Poisson distribution. The estimation procedure is "essentially a Poisson naïve Bayes model" that has also been used by other scholars (see also Monroe and Maeda 2004) (Slapin and Proksch 2008, 709). We have chosen to use the Wordfish software because of its ingenuity and significant advantages in efficiency and statistical robustness.

Employing Wordfish involves a 4 step process. First, we obtained the full texts (in hardcopy form) of the party platform hearings held by the Democratic Party in 1996, 2000, and 2004.<sup>3</sup> A team of diligent undergraduates scanned the documents, cleaned them into plain text, and removed unnecessary information. The testimony and question responses (if any) were extracted for each interest group that participated in these hearings. We were easily able to obtain the full text of both parties' platforms from the parties' websites. We also obtained mission statements (or "about us," or "what we do" statements) for each interest group, which we used to estimate the ideological position of the group, outside of the platform drafting process.

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<sup>3</sup> Initially, we intended to estimate this process for both Democratic and Republican Parties, but the RNC has denied us access to their hearing testimony.

Once the texts were ready to be analyzed, we created a wordcount matrix using the JFREQ software made available by Will Lowe (Lowe 2007). This software simultaneously reads each text and creates a large matrix in which each word in the texts is a row and each text is a column. The JFREQ software also allowed us to use word stems as opposed to whole words.<sup>4</sup> We also chose to eliminate words that appear only once across all texts. This has several practical advantages including significantly reducing the size of the matrix (and therefore the computational demands of the analysis), making it less likely that the results will hinge on infrequently used words, and reduce the likelihood that spelling errors will impact the results. Wordfish can read the word matrix into R and then generate estimates that indicate word weights and document parameters.

### *Dependent Variable*

Graph 1 shows the document parameters for groups' testimonies and the DNC platforms across the three time periods. Notice that the three platforms (labeled DNC 1996, DNC 2000, and DNC 2004) are at the far left of the distribution for each year. Groups that appear at the left, near the platforms, include ethnic groups (*e.g.*, Armenian National Committee, Italian-American Democratic Leadership Council, American Jewish Committee, Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services), abortion groups (*e.g.*, Planned Parenthood and NARAL), the Democratic Leadership Council, and a gay rights group (Human Rights Campaign). Groups that appear at the right side of the distribution include professional associations and labor unions (*e.g.*, International Association of Fire Fighters, American Osteopathic Association, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Industrial Union Counsel, AFL-CIO). Also near the right end of the distribution are the ACLU and Families USA. Since all organizations that presented at the Democratic Platform Hearings tend to be liberally oriented groups, the ideological dimension that Wordfish finds does not perfectly match to a traditional left-right ideological scale; however, we think it can primarily be interpreted as such. In future iterations of this project we will include the RNC platforms in this analysis for comparison

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<sup>4</sup> Stems allow one to consider, for example, the words "democracy," "democratic," and "democratically" as variants of the same word. Choosing to use stems involves making a trade-off between capturing similar words as one word and losing some information from the loss of compound words. Using stems has become widely accepted among those doing content analysis and is also practical given the size of our datasets.

purposes. It is interesting to note, however, that the DNC platforms consistently align in the tail of the distribution—a relatively extreme position—as opposed to a median position.

The dependent variable for the empirical model below is the absolute value of the distance, measured by these omega values, between each group's testimony and the platform for the year in which the group testified. In this way, we capture how close each group's testimony is to the final platform document, which we assume groups are ultimately trying to influence. Graphs 2, 3, and 4 illustrate these differences. In these radar charts, the omega score for each of the three platforms is represented at the center of the graph. As you move clockwise around the graph, the omega value of groups' relative distance to the platform becomes greater. In 1996 and 2004, the platform has an extreme (left) value. In 2000, there are three groups that have scores more extreme than the score given to the platform. Graph 5 displays a histogram of the dependent variable.

### ***Independent Variables***

To measure group attributes, we collect data on the groups that testified during one or more of the hearings that preceded platform drafting.<sup>5</sup> *Mobilization* is measured as a count of all registered members in a group.<sup>6</sup> There is some missingness in this variable because some groups are not membership groups, or membership information is unavailable. There are 27 (of 82) groups for which we have no membership information. Moreover, there is great variance in these data. The largest group, the National Coalition on Health Care, is a coalition of groups that claims more than 100 million individual members. The smallest group, the American Iron and Steel Institute, represents those who work in the steel industry and is therefore not a traditional membership organization as it primarily represents employees of corporations, has 35 members. To account for the great variance in these data we have taken the natural log of the rawest available data on individual memberships. Graph 6 displays a histogram of this measure.

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<sup>5</sup> We compiled data on interest group attributes from a variety of sources: Galenet's (2008) Encyclopedia of Associations, GuideStar (2008), Foundation Center (2008), Associations Unlimited (2008), OpenSecrets.org (2008), Campaign Money (2008), the Federal Elections Commission (2008), and the groups' individual web pages. At this point, our data is limited in that we can only find the most current information on group attributes. Further research will involve collecting information on group attributes at the time the group gave testimony.

<sup>6</sup> We also tried estimating the model with other measures of mobilization potential, such as staff size, budget, revenue, and number of branches; however, the membership variable has the least number of missing values, provides the most consistent results across various model specifications, and in our view is the best available representation of actual voter mobilization.



*Interest group ideology* is operationalized using content analysis. The empirical test of our formal model requires that we have a measure of each group's ideological position that is independent of our dependent variable and the texts used to create it. To develop such a measure we perform an additional Wordfish content analysis on groups' mission statements from their websites.<sup>7</sup> We estimated an omega value for each group's mission statement with respect to the DNC platform of the *previous* year. For example, the word matrix was generated with the mission statements of 77 groups and the DNC platforms from 1992, 1996, and 2000. The ideological distance measure is therefore the absolute value of the distance between the omega score for the mission statement and that of the DNC platform from the presidential campaign cycle prior to when the group testified. This method makes the ideology measure completely independent from the texts used to create the dependent variable. In addition, we assume that groups' primary missions do not vary considerably over time, but do vary in comparison to the Democratic Party's goals over time. By using the lagged platform as a comparison text, we reduce endogeneity while revealing ideological variance. Graph 7 displays a histogram of this measure.

*Loyalty* is measured as the percentage of PAC contributions an interest group made to the Democratic Party during the two-year campaign cycle of the testimony.<sup>8</sup> Since we conceptualize loyalty and threat-of-exit as a continuum, we operationalize this idea by measuring the financial support provided by interest groups' PACs to both parties. Groups that give a high proportion of their PAC funds can be interpreted as Democratic loyalists. Groups that give to both parties, or those who give a majority of their funds to Republican candidates, are seen as groups that have the potential to "exit" the party and vote for the other side. This variable has a mean of .77 and a standard deviation of .25. Most groups in the sample give heavily to Democrats. There is considerable missingness in these data, in part because many groups do not have PACs.<sup>9</sup> Of the 38 groups for whom we have PAC data, about one-third (11 groups) give half or less to the

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<sup>7</sup> We were unable to obtain mission statements for groups in the past, so the mission statements were collected from the web in summer of 2008, which introduces some measurement error into the model. In addition to official "mission statements" we used "about us" or other similar brief descriptions of groups' purposes. There were 5 groups for whom no such statement was available.

<sup>8</sup> For example, if a group testified in 2000, the loyalty variable measures the percentage of PAC contributions given to the Democratic Party in 1999-2000.

<sup>9</sup> PAC contribution data for 1996 is not readily available and we have therefore substituted data for 1998 for those groups with PACs that testified in 1996. Also, where applicable we used PAC contribution data from an interest group's national parent organization and associated PAC (*e.g.*, we substitute the American Nurses Association PAC where the Oregon Nurses Association provided testimony).

Democrats. Of the 27 groups who give more than half of their PAC money to Democrats, the lowest percentage given to Democratic candidates is 83 percent. Graph 8 displays a histogram of this measure.

The data are estimated using a linear ordinary least squares regression (regression parameters are displayed in Table 1). We have included dummy variables for party platform-year to account for any potential contemporaneous autocorrelation. We have also accounted for potential heteroskedasticity by using robust standard errors. Our model is somewhat compromised by significant missingness in the data. Our model is estimated with 33 observations even though we have testimony from 82 group-years. In the future, we believe we can purchase some data that will help us to find membership information that is more complete and that varies over time (for the mobilization measure) and campaign contribution data at the individual level that will allow us to use not only PAC contributions from these organizations, but other contributions made by individuals affiliated with these groups. Such improvements would significantly decrease the measurement error that surely exists in this first-cut analysis.

#### **4. Results and Analysis**

##### ***Mobilization***

Recall that regardless of whether the primary utility of platforms is to maintain or expand the network, increased mobilization is expected to increase interest articulation. Because our dependent variable is measured as a distance, we thus expect the coefficient on mobilization to be negative. Instead, results show that mobilization is positive and statistically insignificant. We had expected that groups with greater mobilization potential, or more members, would be closer to the Democratic Party's platforms because parties would be more likely to want to appease groups with a larger voter-base. Since the coefficient is statistically insignificant from zero we are not particularly bothered by the unexpected sign, but see the large standard error as evidence that contradicts our expectation. This result suggests that parties are not particularly swayed by groups with large memberships alone. We surmise that since we have no way of counting unique members, these membership counts are likely double-counting people who belong to both NARAL and the ACLU, for example. If the DNC anticipates this double-count, it may place less importance on the number of overall members in any one organization.

In addition, we assume there may be further measurement error in this variable because the empirical model assumes that groups have the ability to turn out all their members and to ensure that they would vote Democratic. Recall that the formal model explicitly assumes this not to be the case, but rather that a group's ability to turn out all its members is crucial to its bargaining power. Therefore, while the formal model shows that we should expect mobilization to affect parties' probability of incorporating interest group preferences into their platforms, the empirical model does not bear this out. Given the potential measurement error in the empirical model, we do not take this result to be a refutation or contradiction to the formal model. Rather, we think further analysis and improved data might provide an improved test of this hypothesized relationship.

### *Network Expansion v. Network Maintenance*

Loyalty and ideology are the tests of the expansion v. maintenance views of platform utility. The coefficients for these variables show solid support for the network maintenance view.

**Loyalty.** The coefficient for loyalty is negative and statistically significant. This shows that interest groups that demonstrate more loyalty to the Party by donating an increasing percentage of their PAC funds to Democratic candidates are more likely to see their policy preferences expressed in the Democratic Party's platform. Loyalty appears to be a highly important component of this relationship. Hedging one's bets, and putting roughly equal amounts of money toward each party, does not successfully bargain for concessions on the DNC platform. If loyalty to Democrats can indeed be captured through the proportion of PAC contributions going to the Democratic Party—and threat of exit as the proportion going to Republicans—then this evidence shows that the party responds to loyalty, not threat of exit. In conjunction with the formal model, this result suggests that platforms are more about maintaining and shoring up the base of a party, not about expanding the network or mobilizing moderate voters.

One cynical way to interpret the result that we call "loyalty," would be to suggest that groups are simply "buying" their way into the party platform. We doubted this was the case because the literature on PAC contributions shows that most groups with PACs give in very small amounts and these contributions are not likely to have measurable and widespread impact

on behavior (see Rozell, Wilcox and Madland 2006; Grenzke 1989; Kau and Rubin 1982; Rothenberg 1992; Wayman 1985; Wright 1985, 1990 and Baumgartner and Leech 1998). However we tested this idea by estimating a model (not reported) in which we control for groups' total PAC contributions and an interaction term between total PAC contributions and the percent of contributions to Democrats. Results indicate no statistically significant effects on the dependent variable. We therefore conclude that PAC contributions are a decent measure of loyalty and that we are not capturing groups' attempts to buy the platform.

**Ideology.** Finally, ideological distance is positive and statistically significant, thus also consistent with the Network Maintenance view. The positive coefficient shows that as a group's original ideological position from the party increases, the distance from its testimony to the party platform increases as well. The Democratic Party is therefore rewarding both loyalty and ideological similarity more than voter mobilization potential via its platform.

## 5. Conclusions

Despite reasonable arguments that American party platforms are empty signals of cheap talk only of interest to party activists, this paper outlines a view of the role party platforms play in electoral politics that suggests they are *valuable* signals, primarily of interest to party activists. As interest groups expend significant resources to influence the text of platforms, scholars have been at a loss to offer reasonable explanations as to why this expenditure is worthwhile. In this paper we offer a view of the relationship between interest groups and political parties that suggests they are actors in the same broad network. In doing so, we are able to test two competing views of the ways parties use platforms. Are platforms meant to excite a party's base of activists, as the conventional wisdom suggests, or are they meant to ultimately invigorate wide swaths of the voting population? Our formal and empirical models shows that the conventional wisdom is more or less correct—platforms are meant to appeal to party activists; however, we also offer that in doing so they play an *important and active* role, rather than a passive role, in maintaining a broad network of party support.

We envision interest groups as members of a broad party network. Parties have strong incentives to keep these valuable assets happy and motivated. Parties rely on interest groups and activists to help mobilize electorates, raise money, communicate campaign messages, and

effectively keep the party alive, relevant, and invigorated so they can win elections. Meanwhile interest groups, which typically face their own collective action problems of participation, also find the opportunity to influence national political documents to be a valuable exercise. Groups find great value in seeing their interests articulated in a platform because it allows them to point to a plank of a national document as a way to indicate a group's success, relevance, importance, and place on the national scene, which can help a group maintain and grow in strength. Parties and interest groups are symbiotic actors in the same political network, not adversaries competing for policy outcomes. Party platforms are an important way these networks overlap, communicate, and relate to one another.

We developed a theoretical model formalizing this vision of interest groups as players in an expanded party network. Given that parties and interest groups find platforms to be important documents, our model explains the relationship between group interests and the platform text that parties can deliver to those groups. Our theoretical model showed that if the Network Maintenance view is correct, groups with greater mobilization potential, increased party loyalty, and ideological homogeneity with the party will be more likely to see their preferences in the platform than groups without such characteristics.

Recent technological advances in content analysis helped us perform an empirical test of the model. Using texts of interest group testimony from platform hearings before the Democratic National Committee, DNC platforms, and interest group attributes, we estimate the conditions under which group testimonies will be closer to the party platform. Our findings show that loyalty and ideological similarity are important components that help explain why parties may listen to and incorporate interest group demands into their platforms. Mobilization potential, however, appears to be an unimportant factor in this calculus.

Substantively, our paper offers an interesting first step toward a greater understanding of party platforms, often thought to be useless and neglected in the greater academic agenda. If parties use platforms to build their core network, the study of those platforms and the groups that participate in their construction has implications for the analysis of networks and party-building. Further work could explore these networks by expanding the coverage of platform hearings to earlier and later dates.

Theoretically, our work has implications for the modeling of party-group interaction. We present one of the first attempts to explicitly model the interaction between two parties and two groups prior to the electoral process. In so doing, we take another important step, this time allowing voters to pull parties from the median by coalescing into groups that bargain with parties before elections. Further extensions of these implications would empirically explore the pull from the median to determine the conditions under which we observe that pull in practice.

Our analysis shows that the Democratic Party responds much more to group loyalty than to the threat of exit. Groups are rewarded for their consistent and unrelenting support of Democratic candidates. We thereby suggest that parties and groups are motivated by their need for long-term survival, and that platforms matter, at least to parties and interest groups, in more ways than many of us previously thought.

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## Appendix

**PROPOSITION 1.** *A Perfect Bayesian equilibrium exists at [(D, D, I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>, I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>)].*

**PROOF.** For Party A's decision on whether to include one or more groups on the platform, first suppose Party A expects Party B to play strategy (I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>). The possible payoffs to Party A are:

$$P_a(I_F I_G): F(a: FG, FG, D) + G(a: FG, FG, D) \quad P_a(I_F N_G): F(a: F, FG, D) + G(a: F, FG, D)$$

$$P_a(N_F I_G): F(a: G, FG, D) + G(a: G, FG, D) \quad P_a(N_F N_G): F(a: N, FG, D) + G(a: N, FG, D)$$

1.  $P_a(N_F I_G) > P_a(N_F N_G)$  Party A will get more voters from Including Group G than from including neither party
2.  $P_a(I_F N_G) > P_a(N_F N_G)$  Party A will get more voters from Including Group F than from including neither party
3.  $P_a(I_F I_G) > P_a(N_F I_G)$  Party A will get more voters from Including both groups than from Including only Group G, provided there is no threat of exit from Group G and both groups have equal mobilization potential.
4.  $P_a(I_F I_G) > P_a(I_F N_G)$  Party A will get more voters from Including both groups than from Including only Group F, provided there is no threat of exit from Group F and both groups have equal mobilization potential.
5.  $P_a(I_F I_G) > P_a(N_F N_G)$  from Step 1 and Step 2 (transitivity)

Party A's utility of playing (I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>) is greater than that from all other possible strategies, given the expectation of Party B's strategy. With Party B picking up voters from both groups, Party A's best response is to do the same, by including both groups. Using similar reasoning to steps 1-5, (I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>) is a strictly dominant strategy for Party A because it is the best response to any possible strategy played by Party B. In this symmetric game, the same is true for Party B. Strategy (I<sub>F</sub>I<sub>G</sub>) is a strictly dominant strategy for both parties. Examining each terminal node in a similar manner, each possible outcome set yields a unique equilibrium in which each party plays the strategy of including whichever group(s) has/have chosen to support it.

For the groups, assume the parties are going to include whichever group(s) has/have chosen to support it. Suppose Group G expects that Group F will choose to support Party A only. The possible payoffs for Group G are:

$$P_g(A) = \lambda_g [-\alpha | X_a - X_g | - \beta | X_b - X_g |] + (1 - \lambda_g) [-| X_a - X_g | - | X_b - X_g |]$$

$$P_g(B) = \lambda_g [-\alpha | X_a - X_g |] + (1 - \lambda_g) [-| X_a - X_g |]$$

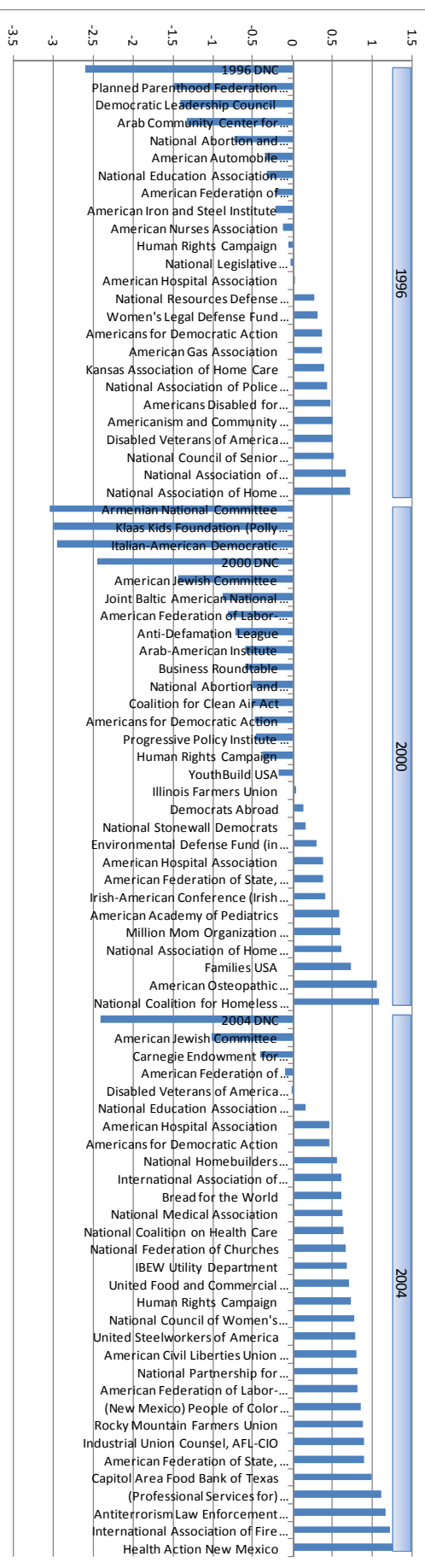
$$P_g(D) = \lambda_g [-\alpha | X_a - X_g |] + (1 - \lambda_g) [-| X_a - X_g |]$$

Since Group F is choosing to support only Party A, Party A will include it, and Party B will not. If Group G supports Party A as well, it will pull Party A's platform closer to Group G's own ideal point. Further, by supporting Party B, Group G will be included by Party B, and Party B will place its platform on Group G's ideal point. To minimize these distances, it is Group G's best response to Disperse between the two parties. If Group F is supporting Party B, Dispersing is again the best response, by similar reasoning. And if Group F is Dispersing, Dispersing is the best response. D is thus a strictly dominant strategy for Group G, and because the game is symmetric, it is a strictly dominant strategy for Group F as well.

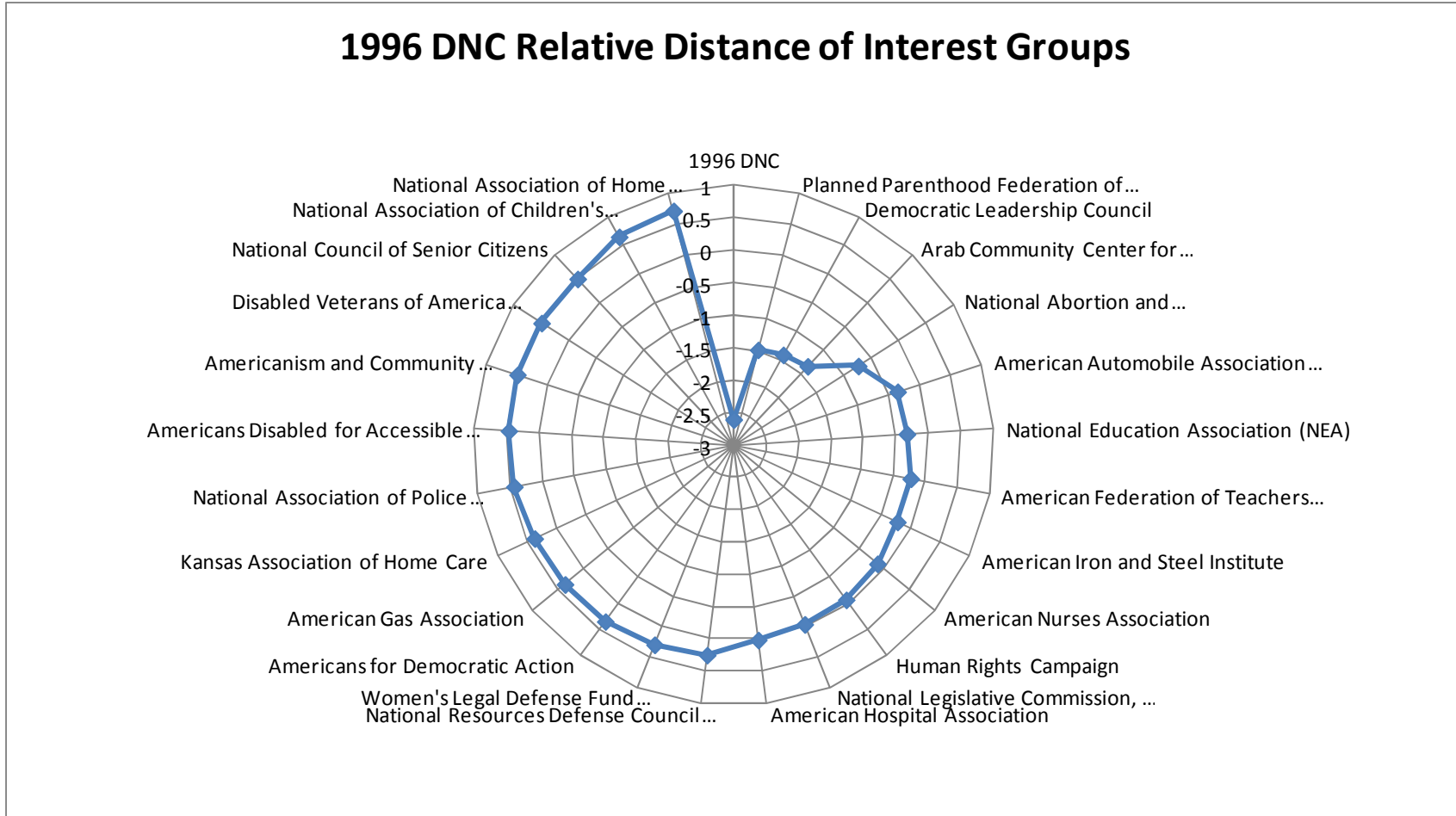
Hence, both groups will disperse, and both parties will include both groups. They will place their platforms at the ideological median between the two groups. QED.

Graph 1

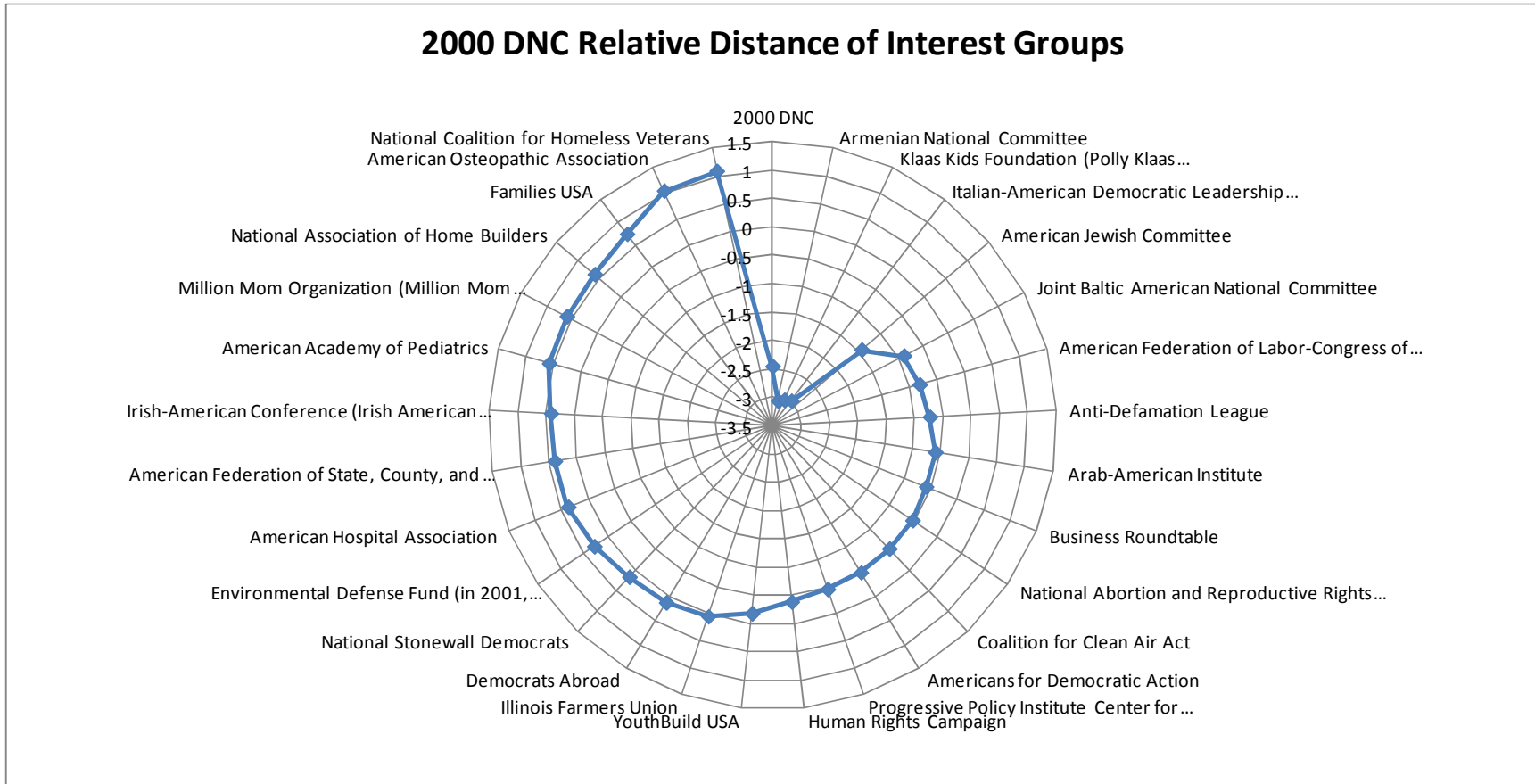
Wordfish Omega Values for 82 Interest Groups and DNC Platforms in 1996, 2000, and 2004



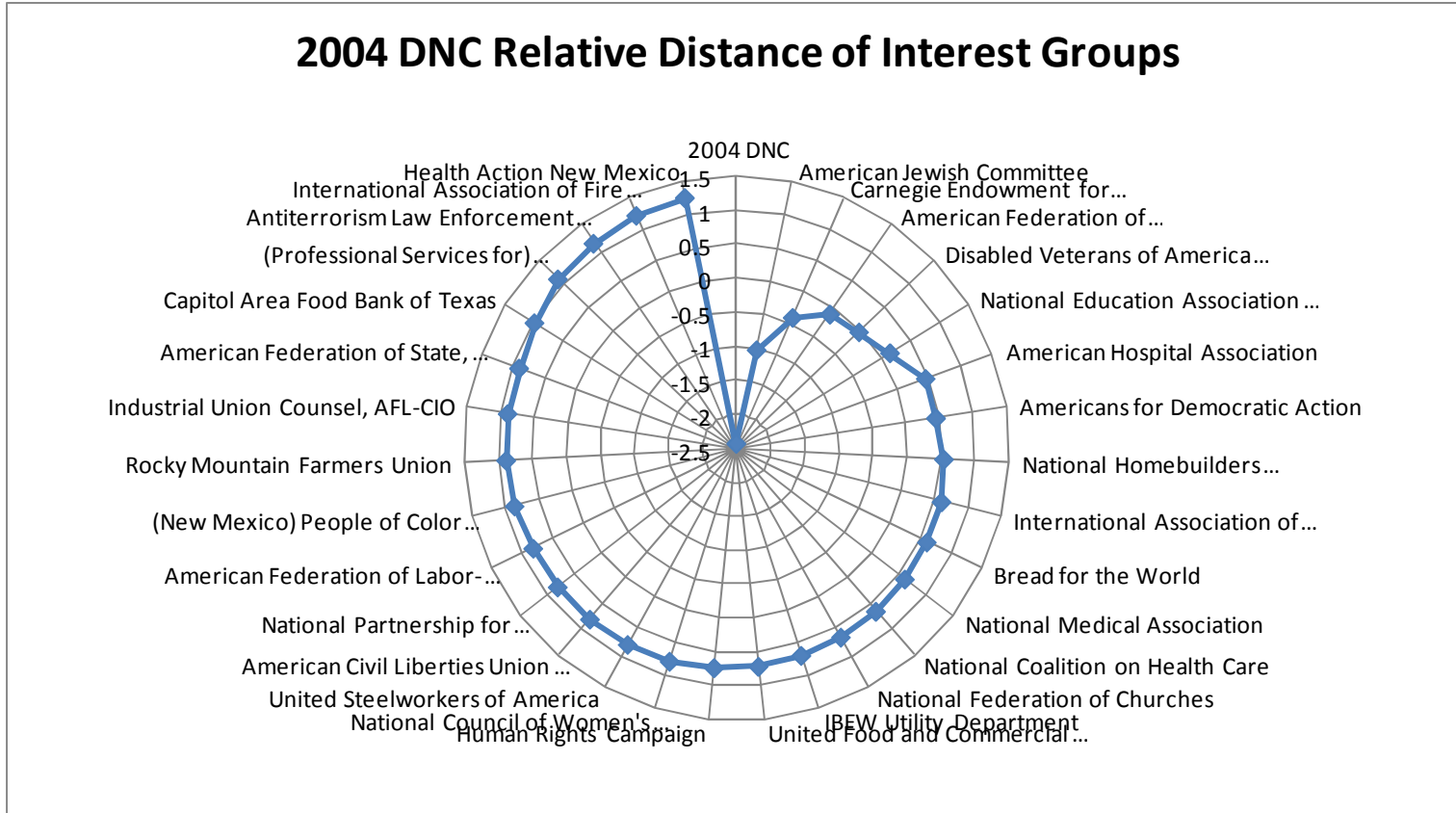
Graph 2



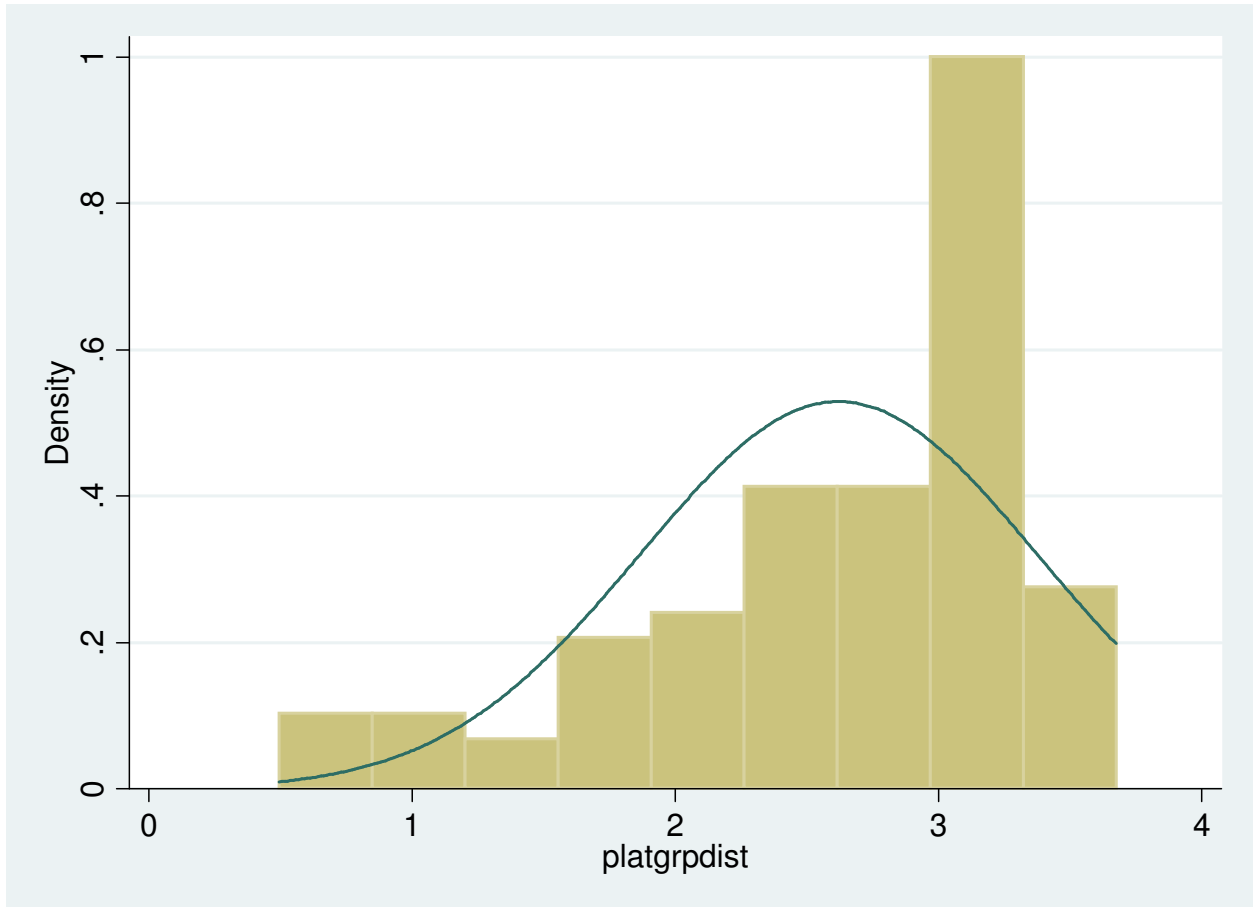
Graph 3

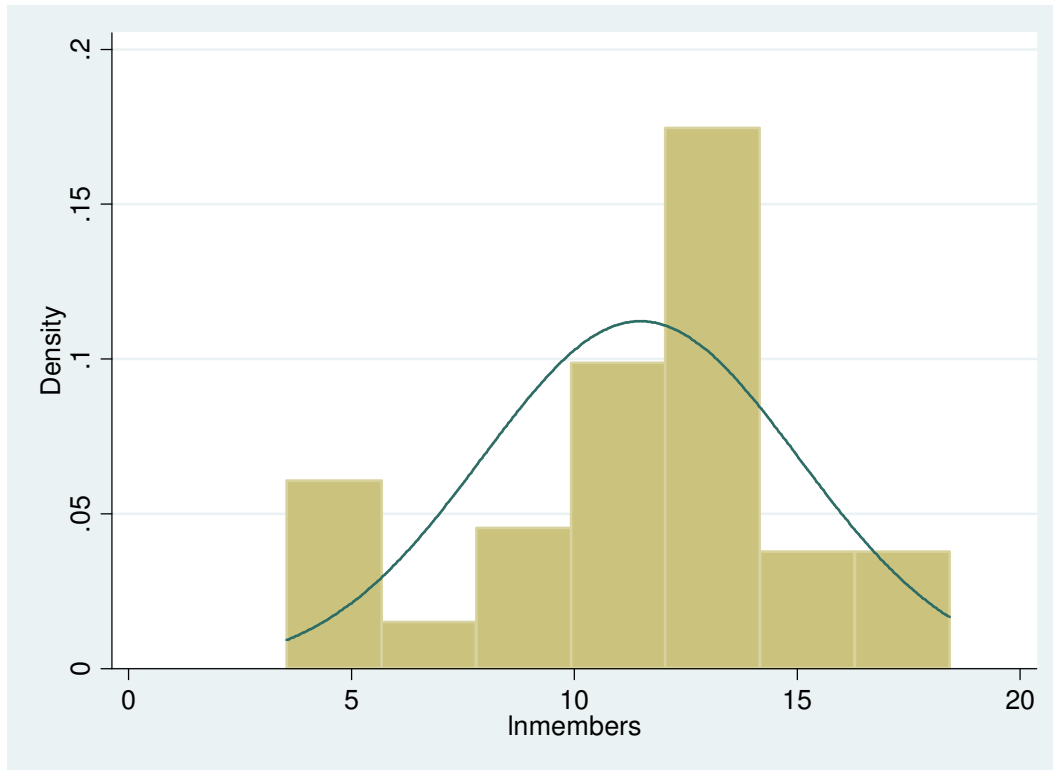


Graph 4

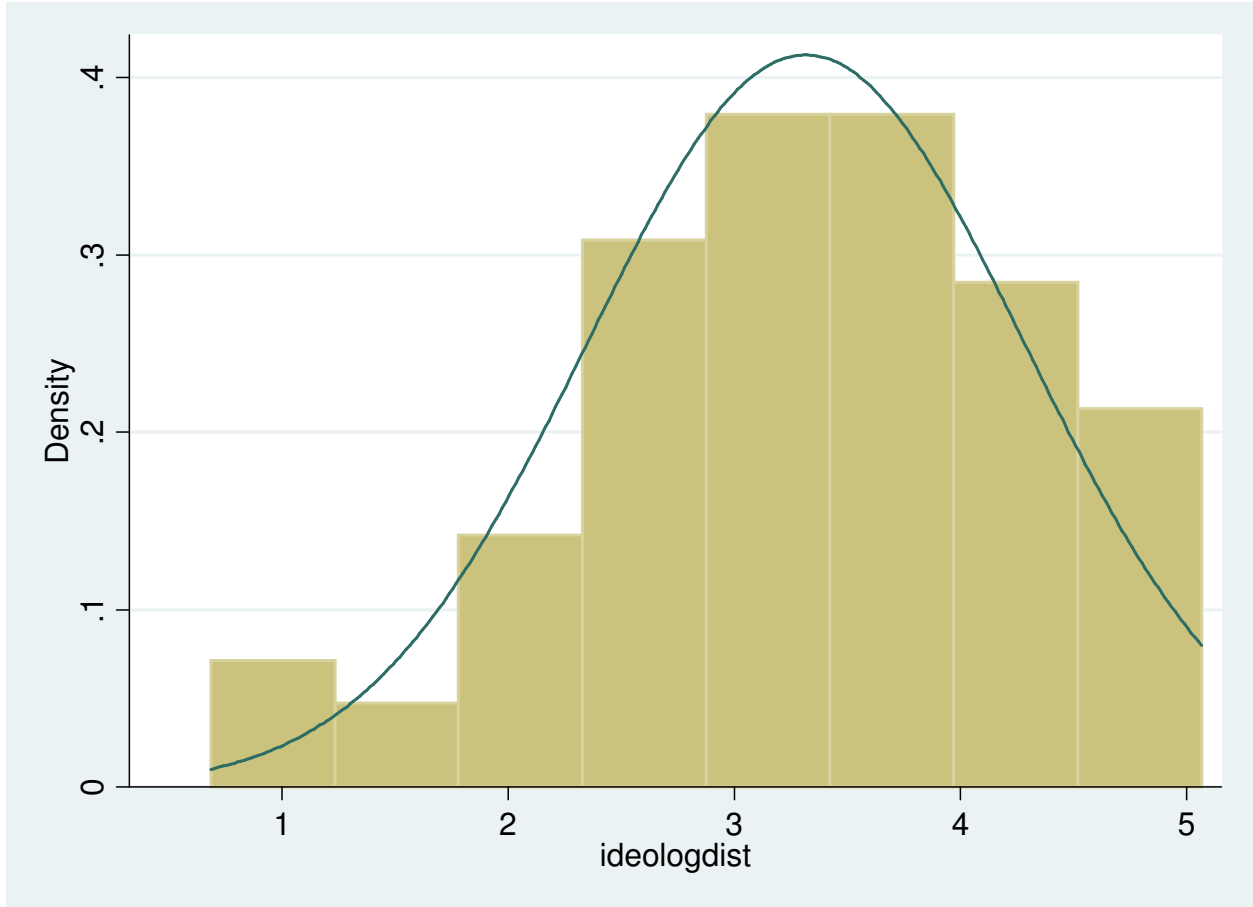


**Graph 5 Histogram of the Dependent Variable—distance between interest group testimony and party platform**



**Graph 6 Mobilization (Natural Log of Individual Membership)**



**Graph 7 Ideology of Groups as measured using Mission Statements**

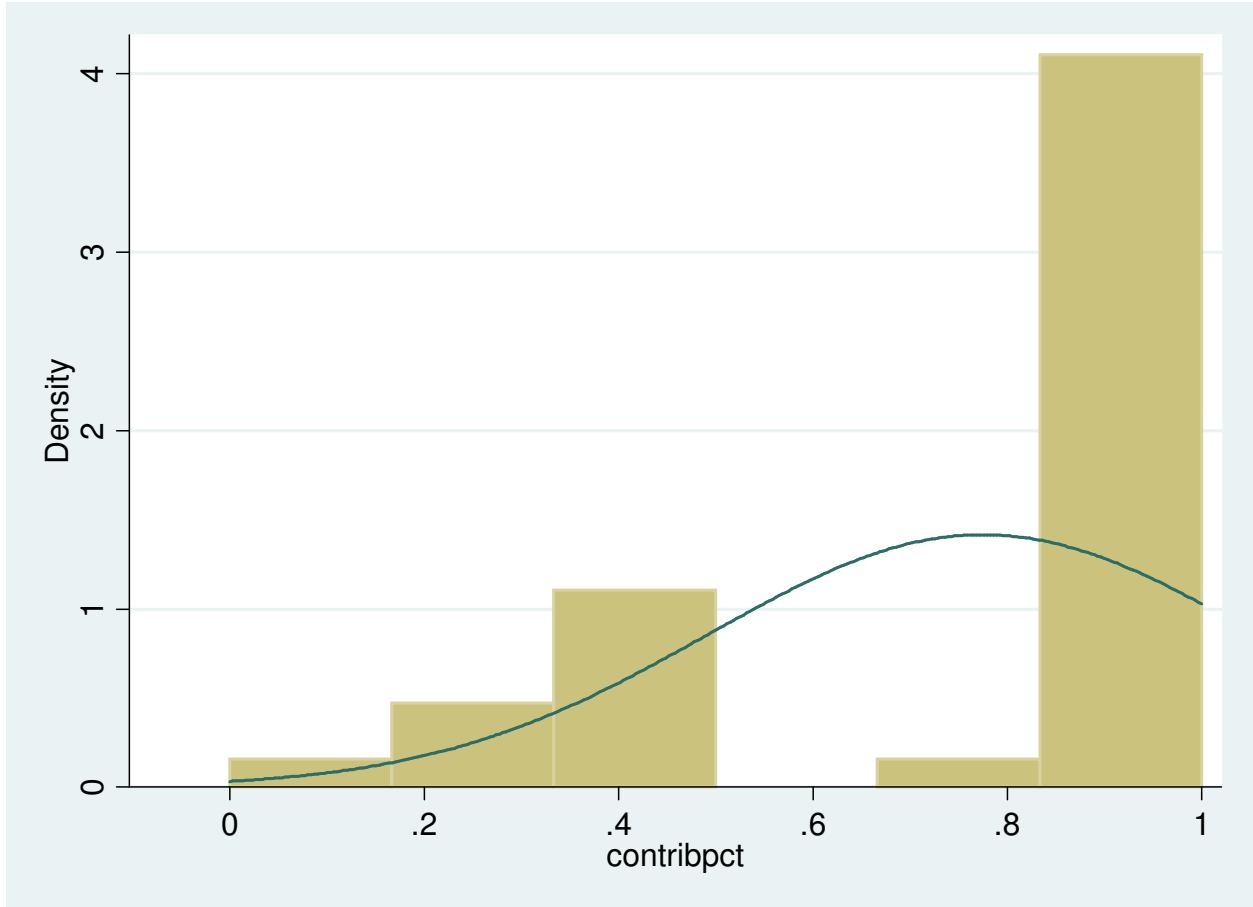
**Graph 8 Loyalty—Percent of PAC contributions given to Democratic candidates**

Table 1: OLS Regression on Interest Groups' Distance from DNC Platforms in 1996, 2000, and 2004

	<b>Hypoth. Sign</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>Robust SE</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Pr(T)</b>
Mobilization	-	0.063	0.040	1.610	0.120
Loyalty	-	-0.964	0.368	-2.620	0.014
Ideological Distance	+	0.326	0.132	2.470	0.020
DNC2000		-0.871	0.331	-2.630	0.014
DNC2004		0.241	0.254	0.950	0.350
constant		1.636	0.644	2.540	0.017
N		33			
R-squared		0.5738			
Root MSE		0.46609			