



Research Highlights: Survey of National Advocacy Groups

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<http://interestgroupsaustralia.com/>

<http://policyadvocacylab.com/>

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We would like to thank all participating groups for their contribution to this study

1. Introduction

We present highlights from the results of a survey conducted between September 2015 – November 2015.

- Survey sent to all 1,313 groups in National Interest Group Dataset (see our article on the [“Composition and Diversity of the Australian Interest Group System”](#) for more background)
 - This dataset includes business groups, citizen groups, trade unions and professional groups
- Response rate of 28% (N=370)
- Survey forms part of a larger research project on [“The Organised Interest System in Australian Public Policy”](#), funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC)

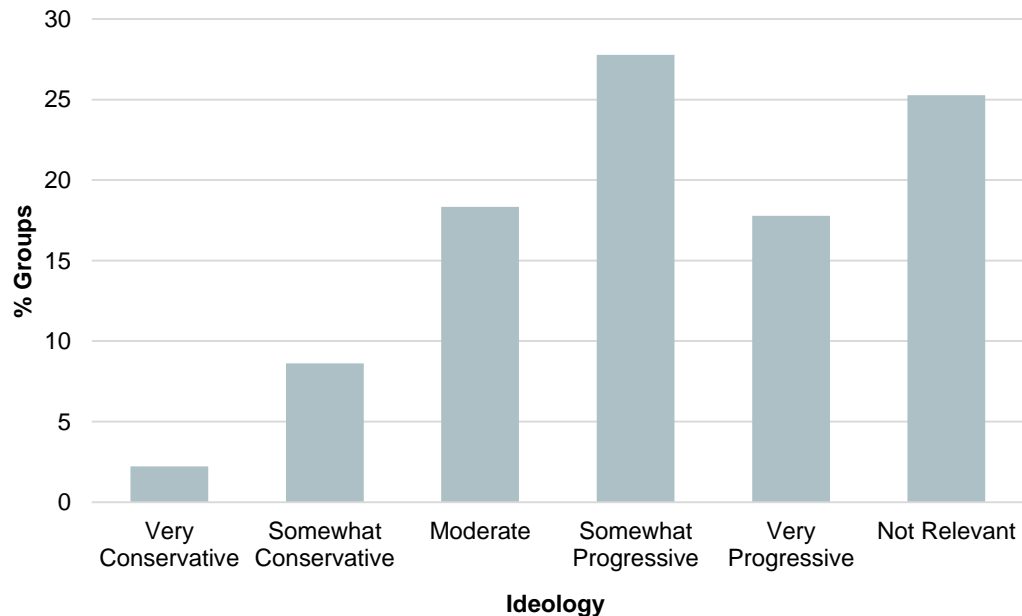
2. Background: The Respondents (1)

While there are relatively few trade unions in our survey (and the overall group system), they have a high organisational capacity compared to business, professional and citizen groups. Nevertheless, other group types have a higher proportion of staff focused on policy work.

Group type	% Respondents	Age (mean)	Personnel (FTE-median)	Policy staff (FTE-median)
Business group	38.4 %	37	2.5	1
Citizen group	30 %	37	2	1
Trade union	1.6 %	80	20.5	2.5
Professional group	30 %	45	2	1

2. Background: The Respondents (2)

While there is an expectation that most groups adopt a bi-partisan position, the ideological orientation of the groups in the survey is actually quite diverse. At the same time, about a quarter of groups clearly do not think of themselves in ideological terms.

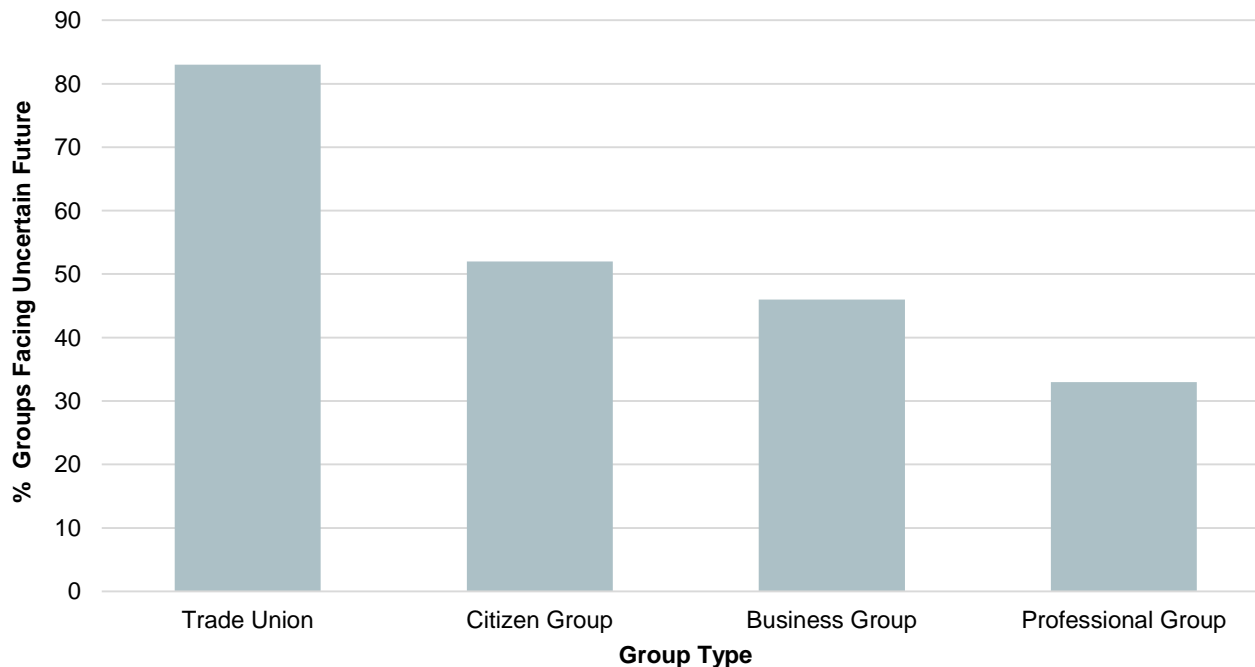


3. Key Findings

- Group survival is highly uncertain
- Advocacy groups are policy specialists
- Reputation and representation crucial for effective policy advocacy
- Groups adopt a long-term policy horizon
- Twitter is used primarily to reach members and general public
- Internal democracy still matters
- Organisational change mostly implies expansion of constituency and policy agenda

Group Survival Is Highly Uncertain

On average, **50% of groups** expect a **serious challenge** to their existence in the next five years. This uncertainty is most clear for trade unions. Rather than a lack of resources, this probably relates to the high level of political contestation over their governance and advocacy work.

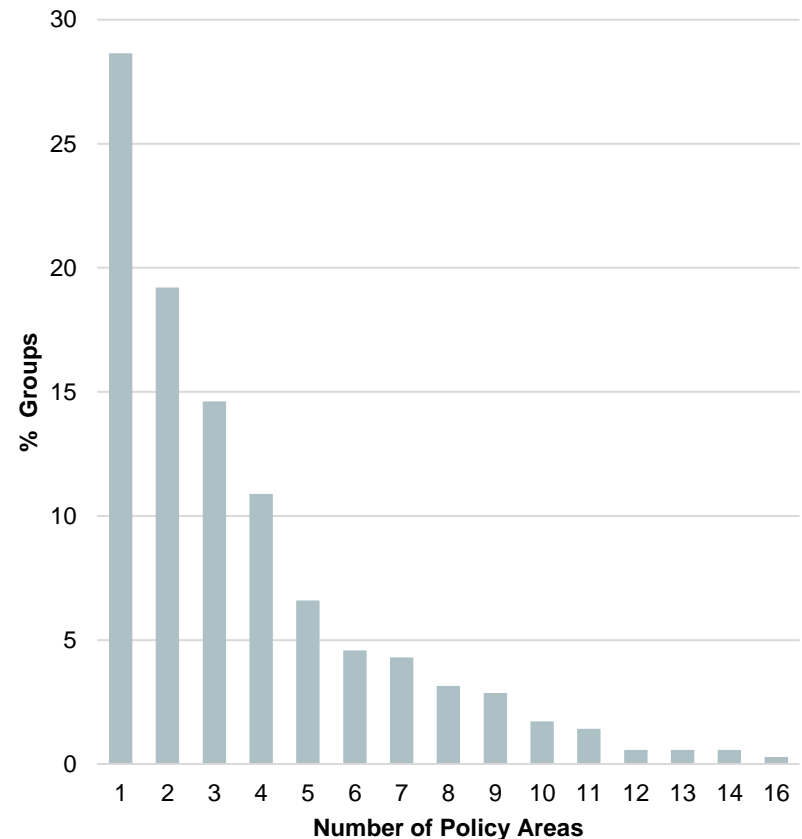


Groups Are Policy Specialists

We asked groups to indicate how many policy areas (e.g. education, health) they are active in.

About 50 % of groups focus their attention on **1 to 2 policy areas**.

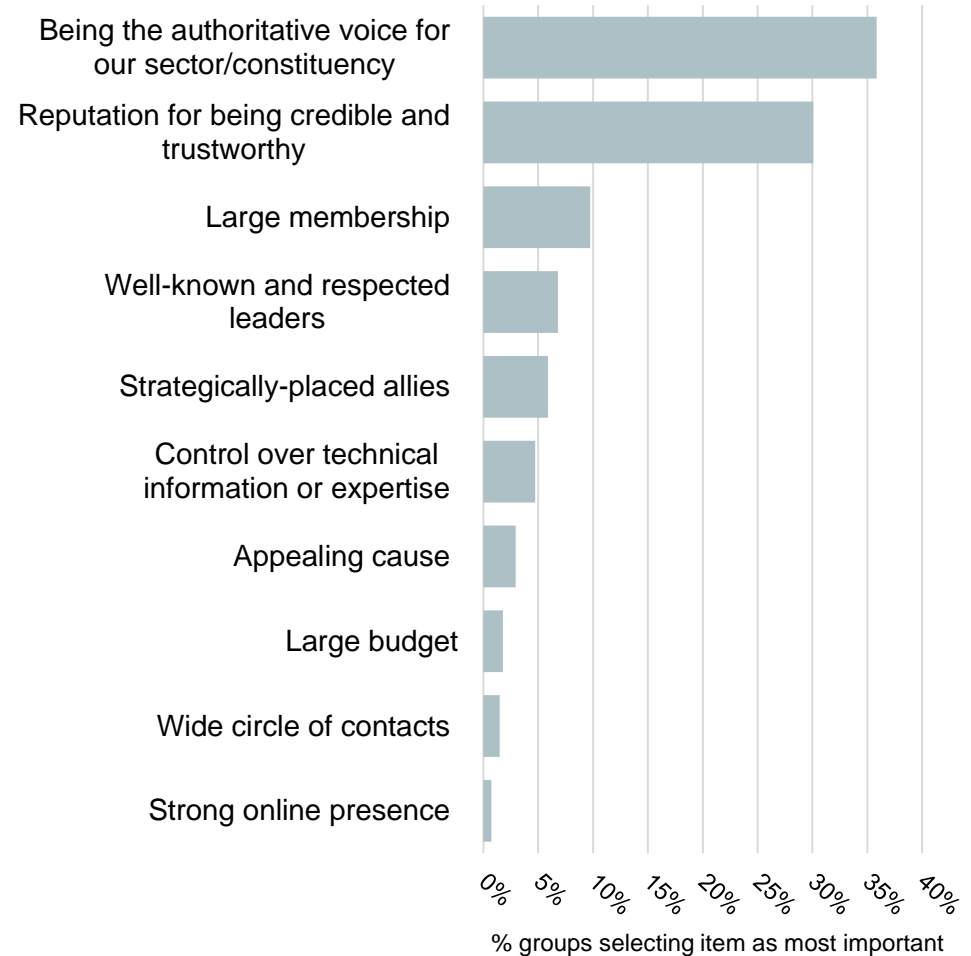
Only a minority of groups spread their activities across multiple policy areas, enabling them to bridge policy silos and act as brokers.



Which Resources Matter?

To be effective in politics, groups consider **representation** (*authorative voice*) and **reputation** (*credible and trustworthy*) to be most important.

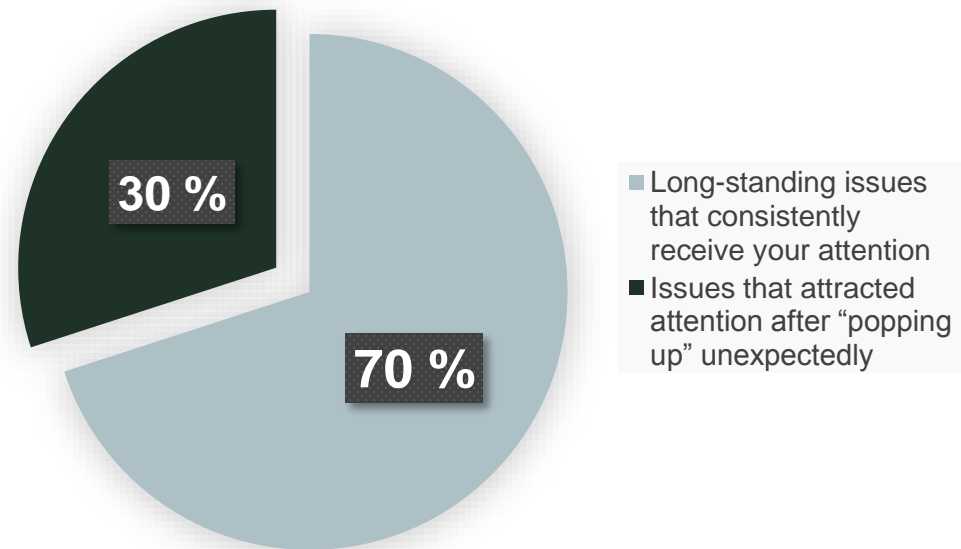
Surprisingly, financial resources and online prominence were items deemed least important.



Groups Adopt A Long-Term Policy Horizon

Groups can't be attentive to every issue. During a typical 12 month period, groups on average monitor about 18 issues, allocate serious attention to about 9 issues, and take a public position on 7 issues.

Furthermore, on average, **70% of policy issues** that groups focus on are **long-standing**. This suggests a forward-looking and strategic orientation among groups.



How Groups Use Twitter

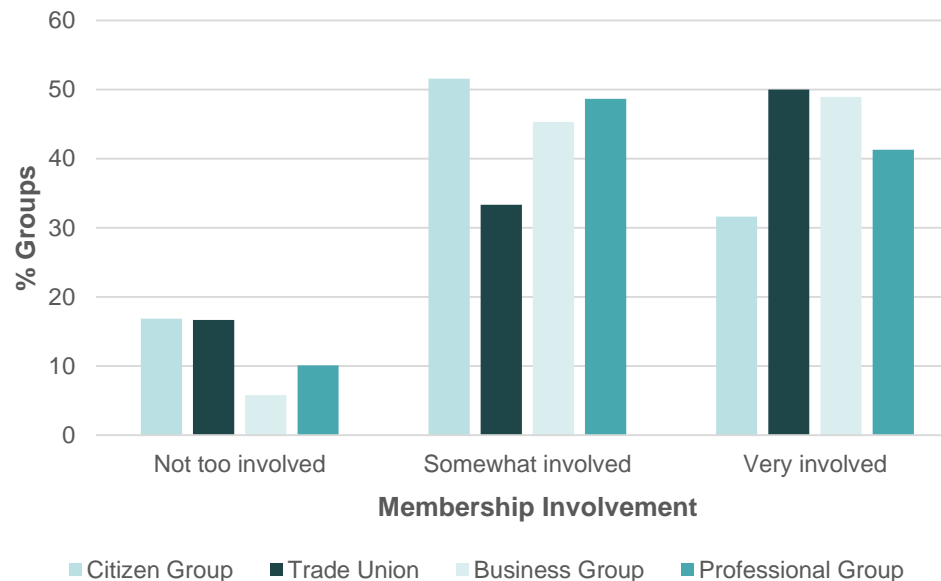
55% of surveyed groups has a member of staff that is specifically dedicated to managing their Twitter account.

On average, groups aim to reach their **members** and the **general public** through Twitter.

Audiences	% of groups aiming to reach this audience very often to always
Members	54%
General public	49%
Other advocacy groups	36%
Journalist	33%
Members of parliament	19%
Public servants	13%

Internal Democracy Still Matters

In most groups, members are at least somewhat involved in decision-making and activities. Moreover, **77 % of groups** indicated they had **enhanced the opportunities for their members to participate** in their work over the last 5 years.

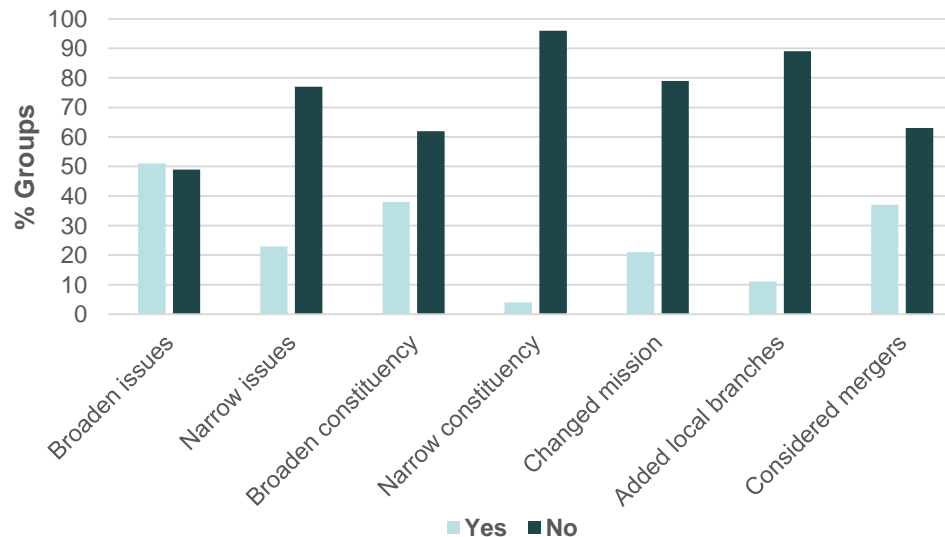


Organisational Change

We asked groups which strategies/changes they had undertaken to enhance the survival of their organisation during the last 5 years.

While there is considerable variation among groups, there is a tendency towards an **expansion of their policy agenda and a broadening of their constituency.**

Furthermore, a considerable number of groups have changed their mission or even considered mergers.



4. Ongoing and Future Work

- How do groups set their internal policy agenda?
- Which groups are most prominent in parliament, newspapers and on Twitter?
- In what ways do groups become involved in national elections?
- How do groups develop internal policy capacities?
- Australia in comparative perspective

5. Background Authors

- **Professor Darren Halpin**
 - Professor of Policy Studies at the Research School of Social Sciences, the Australian National University.
 - Co-editor of the journal [Interest Groups and Advocacy](#) and the Foundation Series Editor for the book series [Interest Groups, Advocacy and Democracy](#) (Palgrave, UK).
 - His research agenda examines interest groups in the policy process. He has undertaken research in several country contexts, including Australia, the UK, Denmark and the US, and also has an interest in group advocacy at the international level. These themes are explored in two recent books, [Groups, Representation and Democracy](#) (Manchester University Press) and [The Organization of Political Interest Groups](#) (Routledge).
- **Dr Bert Fraussen**
 - Postdoctoral Fellow at the Research School of the Social Sciences. His research focuses on interest groups and lobbying, in particular the organisational development of interest groups as well as the interaction between organised interests and policymakers.
 - In his PhD dissertation, which he completed at the Department of Political Science of the University of Antwerp, he examined why some groups are able to professionalize, become involved in policymaking and manage to shape policy outcomes. In addition to his PhD research, he was involved in projects that focused on lobbying at the EU and international level (WTO, UN). He holds degrees in Global Management (Antwerp Management School), Public Administration (KULeuven) and Political Science (University of Antwerp).

For More Information and Updates

- Follow us on Twitter ([@AdvocacyLabANU](https://twitter.com/AdvocacyLabANU))
- Keep an eye on our [project website!](https://policyadvocacylab.com)
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Organising Interests in Australia
The organised interest system in Australian public policy: Size, focus, impact and transformation

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Organised interest systems that seek to influence public policy-making are undergoing rapid transformation. Some researchers focus on the post-war professionalisation of advocacy, others suggest that the internet is positively (re)shaping the structure of such systems and their democratic capacities. This project adjudicates on such accounts through exploring the size and composition, through time, of the Australian system of organised interests.

