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Patterns of tolerance: how interaction culture and community relations explain political tolerance (and intolerance) in the American libertarian movement

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Abstract
Existing explanations of political intolerance and partisanship highlight how individuals' ideological commitments and the homogeneity of their political environments foster intolerance toward other political groups. This article argues that cultural, interactional conditions play a crucial role in how personal and environmental factors work – or do not work – in local groups. Based on a four-year ethnographic study and 12 focus group discussions with two culturally distinct civic associations of American libertarians, I show how groups' varying patterns of interaction, or "styles," establish distinct cultural settings, in which different attitudes and behaviors seem sensible and appropriate, particularly regarding other political groups. Thus, when libertarian groups established a "community style" of interaction, viewing the relationship among members in terms of friendship and community bonds, they also opened their social activities to non-libertarians, collaborated with them in political projects, and viewed politics as a matter of advancing shared interests with people from other political groups. Comparisons across and within field sites show how this relationship between style and political tolerance works in different libertarian groups and different social environments. These findings highlight the role of local factors in explaining variations in groups' levels of political tolerance and present a key mechanism—centered on interaction patterns—to supplement existing analyses of the relationship between political intolerance and changing forms of civic organizing in the US.

Keywords Civic action · Community · Culture · Group style · Libertarians · Political intolerance

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In July 2001, a short essay appeared in a libertarian publication. Titled "Announcement: The Free State Project," the essay lamented that, being so geographically dispersed, American libertarians are unable to form a substantial mass movement to challenge the dominant two-party system. Indeed, to this day, much of the American libertarian movement seemingly exists within various think tanks, intellectual societies, and book clubs, wherein a selected group of liberty-minded individuals meets occasionally to exchange ideas and grieve the alleged expansion of the welfare state and government power. Libertarians, the essay suggested, need a different approach: moving enough Libertarian Party members to one of the union's smaller states would allow them, with efficient organizing, to consolidate enough political power to take that state over, and, if needed, secede from the union (Sorens, 2001).

Against all odds, the idea caught on. After deliberating the proposal in online forums for two years, inspired libertarians chose New Hampshire as their destination state and began to move en masse. Today, more than twenty years later, the Free State Project (FSP) includes approximately 5,000 libertarians who live and work together in several tight communities in New Hampshire and organize to instill their political vision in the state.

In this paper, I will argue that the FSP presents a curious case study for some of the undergirding mechanisms of political intolerance and partisanship in America, one that opens itself to multiple, at times contradictory, interpretations. For some (Bishop & Cushing, 2009; Klar, 2014; Mason, 2018; Mutz, 2006; Sinclair, 2012), the FSP could represent a clear example of a politically sorted, homogeneous community. Its geographical congregation of like-minded, highly committed ideologues creates *ideal conditions for a political echo chamber*, wherein people become increasingly entrenched in their political views and less tolerant toward those who may disagree with them. In contrast, for others (Pacewicz, 2016; Putnam, 2000, 2020), the fact that the FSP's political organization is rooted in local, community relationships may actually facilitate political tolerance, as it ties civic participation to *the contrasting needs of people's everyday lives*, forcing collaboration and compromise with others who may not agree with them on many political issues. If anything, ideological tenacity should be expected to flourish in the more traditional libertarian intellectual societies and book clubs, where it is unencumbered by the needs of actual people facing real-life problems.[1]

All these interpretations work very well *after the fact*: After learning whether the FSP is more or less tolerant toward other political groups, or that its members show more or less willingness to compromise their ideals, we could point to either of these explanations to rationalize why. But beforehand, when we do not yet know, the availability of multiple explanations makes it difficult to say which way the group may go.

In this paper, I argue that to fully understand how political tolerance and intolerance are formed in civic groups, we should pay attention to how groups' ongoing interaction cultures provide the everyday settings in which people interpret and make

[1] This classical political theory argument dates back to Edmund Burke (1790/2016). It is also supported by sociological research of past ideological communities that showed how external circumstances required members to draw on their ideology more selectively and mold it according to the practical demands of everyday life (Berger, 1981).

decisions about the world. Drawing on a four-year ethnography and 12 focus group discussions with two civic associations of American libertarians, this article shows how political tolerance and intolerance are formed in libertarian groups through their everyday patterns of behavior and interaction. Whereas previous explanations have focused on people's individual ideological commitments or the political composition of their social environments, I argue that groups' cultures of interaction provide the social settings in which members find certain interpretations, behaviors, and choices more sensible or appropriate than others. Thus, to explain how groups become politically intolerant, we must also consider the cultural, interactional settings in which political intolerance makes sense and the exclusion of other political groups seems appropriate.

As I will show, a similar social mechanism operated in different libertarian groups and different social environments to tie local interaction culture, or "group style" (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014), to varying levels of political tolerance. In this mechanism, members' shared conception of the nature of relationships in the group renders certain interpretations and choices appropriate while constraining others. This is a cumulative process whereby interpretations and choices actors make in one sphere of life render behaviors made in another sensible and appropriate, and vice versa. In this way, group members' behaviors in different spheres work together to create a shared and fairly coherent system of meanings.

Thus, in the FSP, members' desire to establish a libertarian community translated into a *community style* of interaction, whereby members interpreted their mutual bonds as rooted in community relationships and friendship. This had meaningful implications for how members related to other political groups. First, social activities in the FSP were consistently framed as "community events," rather than political events, even when these activities were publicly minded and served a political purpose. Correspondingly, participation in such activities was open to everyone, regardless of their political affiliation, and Free-Staters regularly socialized and collaborated with non-libertarians. Second, political organizers, who relied on such community events to establish ties with potential recruits, imagined the bonds they formed with them at these events as rooted in interpersonal friendships and community ties. Accordingly, when recruiting people for political projects, organizers relied on intimate acquaintance with prospective volunteers to recruit them to projects that were particularly relevant to their lives and personal interests. This recruitment tactic resulted in politically diverse activist groups, where people of various ideological and partisan commitments worked together to advance issues that they all cared about. Finally, this recruitment tactic corresponded with the way FSP activists themselves related to politics. Viewing politics as the advancing of shared goals with people of other political camps, Free-Staters were ready to support, collaborate with, and even identify as members of various political parties.

Contrastingly, I will show how things worked very differently in another group of American libertarians, one that resembled the more traditional "intellectual society" model of libertarian organizing. In this group, composed of Southern California libertarians who come together in various settings to exchange ideas and discuss current affairs, members saw their relationships as rooted in their shared political and ideological interests, not community bonds. As I will show, the same social mechanism

worked in this group to connect members' *intellectual society style* with very different – indeed intolerant – behaviors and attitudes towards other political groups. The group's distinct style corresponded with differences in the framing and participation criteria for its social events, in its organizers' recruitment tactics, and in its members' relations to politics. Rather than creating an arena of collaboration and compromise, these libertarians created a politically exclusive social environment where people imagined politics as a zero-sum game of "us versus them," where their wins could come only at the expense of other political groups' losses, and vice versa. Finally, I will show how when some Southern California libertarians adopted a community style, similar to the FSP's, they also adopted a similar attitude toward politics and a tolerant approach toward non-libertarians.

These findings show how local cultural variations can explain differences in political outcomes that cannot be fully explained by personal factors such as ideological extremism, or structural factors such as political sorting. The findings also offer further support to long-standing claims about the relationship between declining community-based civic participation and rising political intolerance in the US (Pacewicz, 2016; Putnam, 2000, 2020). Next, I briefly review some of this literature and how it has been used in recent studies about political animosity and partisanship. I argue that this line of study leaves unexplained the *cultural relations* between waning community organizations and rising political intolerance, and that a closer examination of differences in groups' interaction styles may help us bridge this gap.

Political intolerance in a changing civic landscape

For some time, social scientists have warned about a decline in Americans' tolerance towards people who do not share their political views or identify with their political party.[2] Most Americans find little common ground with those with whom they disagree politically, and many report harboring negative feelings towards supporters of the other political camp (Doherty & Kiley 2016; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Correspondingly, increasing numbers of partisans do not want their political representatives to compromise with the other side, even at the expense of getting things done (Wolf, Strachan, and Shea 2012).

This trend has been attributed, at least in part, to ongoing changes in how Americans become involved in public life and in the organizational frameworks through which they do so. As historical research has shown, civic and political organizing in the US has become increasingly detached from local communities. Instead, people have found themselves partaking in more individualistic or professional forms of civic engagement (Pacewicz, 2016; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). As Putnam (2000) famously argued, for several decades now, Americans have been opting out of various communal forms of civic activity such as attending public meetings about

[2] In this paper I use the term "political intolerance" to describe the hostility and suspicion people express toward members of other political groups. I find it more useful than terms like "affective polarization" (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) or "social polarization" (Mason, 2018), which have been used to describe this phenomenon, because it expands the discussion beyond the two "poles" of liberal-conservative or Democrat-Republican.

town and school affairs, serving on committees and in office for local organizations or clubs, or joining groups interested in "better government." Most notably, Putnam claims that the sharpest decline is in forms of civic activity that require cooperating and resolving differences with others, compared to expressive forms of civic engagements, such as writing letters or articles to newspapers, which are more individualistic and concern the articulation of narrowly defined interests and grievances. As he argues in his later work, this change reflects a cultural shift in America from a "we" society that values solidarity and collaboration, to an "I" society that values individualism and self-expression (Putnam, 2020).

Along similar lines, scholars such as Bill Bishop (2009) and Lilliana Mason (2018) have argued that the trend towards individuality and self-expression has led Americans to reorder their lives around their personal values, tastes, and interests, clustering themselves in like-minded social groups. These social settings function as "echo chambers" where people are less exposed to opposing viewpoints and instead hear their own political positions reverberated to them, making them more and more entrenched in their views. Mason argues that this has a psychological effect. As social groups became more homogeneous and sorted across overlapping aspects of life, people's politics turned into a matter of group identity and they became motivated by a desire for victory over other political groups, rather than by a collaborative search for the greater good.

These explanations rely on some well-established claims about the inverse relationship between group homogeneity and political tolerance. Most notably, Mutz (2006) showed how cross-cutting interactions between people with different political convictions improve their ability to see issues from the perspective of others and reduce prejudice. This does not mean that people come to agree with one another. Rather, as people develop relationships with those they politically disagree with, they learn that members of the other group are not necessarily bad people, and they are more willing to extend civil liberties even to groups whose political ideals they strongly dislike. However, Mutz also finds that voluntary associations vary in the degree that they generate such cross-cutting conversations. As she argues, exposure to opposing political views is a function of two factors, namely individual political preferences and environmental constraints. First, the more people are committed to their political views, the more likely they are to associate with likeminded others. And second, people whose social environment is more politically homogeneous are also less likely to encounter people with opposing views. In other words, Mutz's model predicts that associations that are politically homogeneous and whose members are strongly committed to their political views will also generate fewer cross-cutting conversations that could facilitate political tolerance.

Moreover, Mutz's model suggests that these two factors do not vary independently. People are not simply passively constrained by the political composition of their environment, but their political preferences also shape their choices about who they want to associate with. And as people choose to associate more exclusively with like-minded others, they also become more committed to their existing political views. Similarly, political scientists such as Sinclair (2012) and Klar (2014) have shown how people's social networks shape their politics by exposing them to reaffirming information and exerting social pressure to conform with the group's predominant

political behavior. As a result, people are not only influenced by the homogeneity of their social groups, but social groups also become more homogeneous with time, as their members are persuaded by and conform to the common political attitudes around them.

This line of research shows how people's political commitments and social environment work in tandem to reduce cross-cutting political interaction and tolerance. It invites us to think about political tolerance as a factor of the interaction between individual agency and structural constraints. However, if we trust Putnam's historical argument, such an explanation misses an important part of the picture. For Putnam, the rise of political intolerance and partisan animosity in the US correlates with a deeper change in how we relate to each other and become involved in civic life. The decline of compromise in the public square cannot be separated from the decline in communal relationships and the sense of sociability and neighborliness that civic organizing used to cultivate (Putnam, 2020). And still, as Putnam also admits, the exact nature of the relationship between these two things is hard to define.

In this article, I argue that we may better understand this relationship by drawing on Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman's (2003) concept of "group style" (see also Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). "Style" refers to the ongoing interaction patterns through which group members establish a shared conception of their mutual bonds and obligations, their relations to other groups, and their assumptions about what constitutes appropriate speech in the group's context. A focus on style invites us to examine the way groups "typify" (Berger & Luckman, 1967) their varying social scenes, guiding actors how to better answer the unspoken questions of "What is it that's going on here?" and "How do I act in accordance?" (Goffman, 1974). In this way, style defines certain behaviors and interpretations as fitting while rejecting others (Eliasoph and Cefaï 2021).

Style thus works as an interpretive filter through which group members make sense of new situations and weigh their possibilities for action. A civic group's style stabilizes what its members consider appropriate practices for "groups like them" or what they find to be sensible and worthy political goals, crystalizing their shared understanding of good citizenship (Baiocchi et al., 2014; Braunstein, 2017; Perrin, 2006). Past studies showed that civic actors' varying perceptions of the bonds within their group correspond to different understandings of their commitments to the public (Lichterman, 2021) or even what constitutes a legitimate political argument (Marom, 2024).

Thinking about style invites us to examine the cultural, interactional mechanisms that allow people to coordinate action successfully by establishing local working agreements about proper behaviors in their group settings. Individual agency and structural constraints undoubtedly shape civic groups' tendencies for political tolerance and intolerance. But these factors are also instantiated in local groups with local systems of meaning and codes of conduct that allow people to work together toward shared goals (Fine, 2021). As I will show, these interactional mechanisms can explain how groups that are politically homogeneous, or whose members demonstrate strong ideological commitments, may still find it sensible and appropriate to tolerate, socialize, and even collaborate with people with different political commitments. In this

way, these mechanisms show how community-based organizing and political tolerance not only covary but are also meaningfully connected.

Comparative cases and methodology

This paper draws on a four-year ethnographic study and 12 focus group discussions with two civic associations of American libertarians in New Hampshire (NH) and Southern California, working to advance libertarian candidates and causes in their local political spheres.

In NH, the Free State Project (FSP) is a political migration movement seeking to establish a libertarian community that can transform the state's politics to raise the plausibility of secession. Today, the FSP has roughly 5,000 members, including both immigrants and supporting natives. In NH, Free-Staters organize mostly through personal networks in their local communities, and their relationships are sustained through work ties, personal friendships, and regularly held social events. Thus, though ties between Free-Staters may have stemmed from shared ideological convictions, they are predominantly sustained through interpersonal relationships.

In Southern California, libertarians congregate around a medley of discussion groups, "Meetups," and civic institutes in the Los Angeles (LA) area, focused on varying libertarian ideals and political goals. Some meetings are endorsed in some manner by the Libertarian Party of LA County (LPLAC), and their organizers volunteer and hold positions in its regional branches. Others represent libertarian "social clubs" that meet semi-regularly to discuss politics or simply "hang out" with like-minded individuals. Most people participate in no more than one or two meetings, but others – particularly political organizers – frequent several meetings each month. While these libertarians live in the same area and tend to meet, socialize, and carry out political acts together, they do not attempt to establish a "libertarian community," forming a common life with other libertarians. Instead, their mutual ties are mostly sustained by formally designated libertarian-themed events.

These groups, therefore, represent two distinct forms of associations with different associational styles. Rather than looking to explain the causes of these differences, I chose these groups because these differences serve as a comparative optic through which I could trace how style establishes paths for political tolerance in starkly different contexts. Such a "comparison of edges" (Luhtakallio and Tavory 2018) allowed me to examine how different interaction patterns establish different dynamics of coordinating action while simultaneously identifying converging features of the two cases.

Comparing LA, a sprawling, ethnically diverse metropolis, with NH, a predominantly white state whose largest city numbers just over 100,000 people, is particularly useful for such purpose. Other than regional differences, the two locations also differed in their class composition: although both associations included many educated middle-class professionals, the FSP also had a significant group of artisan or unskilled working-class members. These difference allow me to show that the same theoretical optic can be used in two distinct settings to develop an explanation about the "meaningful mechanisms" (Lichterman and Reed 2015) that link style to political

tolerance. These mechanisms uncover the chains of signification and interpretation that structure people's daily lives, linking structural conditions and individual preferences to local processes.

I studied the FSP from winter 2016 to fall 2019. I first presented myself on one of its Facebook pages, explaining my interest in its unique political project and, after gradually establishing relationships with several members, I began traveling to NH regularly to live with the community for two- to six-week periods. During my visits, I joined members' political events, accompanied them to protests, attended their annual camping festivals, socialized with them at their community clubhouses and other social events, and met them for lunches and drinks, both individually and in groups. In total, I conducted over 600 h of participant observation, producing over 800 pages of field notes and 36 h of audio-recorded conversations.

I began attending Southern California libertarians' meetings in 2016, joining public meetups and other publicly advertised meetings, establishing rapport with members, and positioning myself as a sociologist interested in the American libertarian movement. By the time I concluded data collection in early 2020, I was regularly participating in six monthly meetings of several social clubs and discussion groups all over LA County. I also joined subjects at occasional social and political events, activist trainings, planning meetings for political campaigns, and other civic actions. In total, I conducted over 300 h of participant observation, producing over 400 pages of field notes and 27 h of audio-recorded conversations.

To complement my observations, I also conducted a total of 12 focus groups with participants at both sites. I presented groups with scenarios that revolved around observed dilemmas and conflicts in both locations and asked them to discuss and try to resolve them together. Each discussion included five to ten participants, lasted one and a half to two hours, and was videotaped. The focus groups' data enabled me to corroborate and test hypotheses and interpretations that emerged when analyzing ethnographic data for each site and to ratify between-site comparisons.

All field notes, transcriptions, and recordings were uploaded to NVivo12 software and analyzed following grounded theory method, constantly comparing incidents according to emerging categories to generate their theoretical properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data were coded in a two-cycle process, starting with topic coding (Saldaña, 2013), noting each passage's subject matter, and then line-by-line coding within categories that emerged during the first cycle. Findings from both field sites were then compared across the emerging categories, charting patterned differences between how groups in each site organized and the meanings members attribute to their political actions.

Finally, to explore alternative interpretations of the data, I also conducted internal comparisons within the LA libertarian group, contrasting general findings in the field with findings from one subgroup that was unique in its adoption of a community style of organizing. This enabled me to test whether the chains of significance in each site are merely a product of structural differences between NH and LA, or if they also result from variations in style.

Studying American libertarians: caveats and advantages

Focusing on American libertarians raises important caveats. As some (Fiorina et al. 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2018) contend, popular political division in the US is, at least in part, a response to increasing partisan conflict among the Washington political elite and its amplification by national news media. The Libertarian Party (LP), however, has never had any representation in Washington[3] and, consequently, has received sparse attention from major news media. Libertarians also do not fit nicely into the ongoing sorting of ideological positions between the two major parties (Fiorina, 2016). Many libertarian views about economic issues (e.g., business deregulation, reduced government welfare spending) are shared with Republicans, and many of their views about social issues (e.g., open immigration, decriminalization of drug use) are shared with Democrats. This seems to suggest that, compared to Republicans and Democrats, libertarians are less structurally disposed to partisanship and more ideologically inclined toward collaboration with members of other political parties.

Still, the focus on libertarians also offers several advantages. First, while libertarians occupy an unusual position in the US two party system, they are not unique. The American political system includes many "third parties" and civic groups that do not fully sympathize with either the Democrat or Republican party. Studying libertarians offers an interesting case study for how such groups form different understandings of their position in the American political system, and different attitudes towards coalition building and ideological compromise.

Second, studying a "third party" with no meaningful representation in Washington or the national media also allows us to eliminate some of the "outside noise" of national politics and see more clearly how *local variables* help explain people's political attitudes and behavior. While libertarians may be less structurally and ideologically prone to partisanship and political intolerance than Democrats and Republicans, libertarian groups still vary in their levels of political tolerance and commitment to the Libertarian Party. Understanding how certain libertarian groups become more partisan and intolerant than others, even without the strong structural and ideological influences seen in more institutionalized groups, may teach us a lot about how political intolerance also arises through local processes of interaction. In this sense, libertarians offer a "cleaner" case for studying local cultural mechanisms of partisanship and political intolerance that are harder to see in other, more institutionalized civic organizations, mechanisms that we may later expand and adjust as we explore how they work with other social forces and in other types of political groups.

In what follows, I first illustrate the FSP's and the LA libertarians' distinct associational styles, and their distinct conceptions of the bonds among their group members. As I will show, these differences are expressed in the different meanings members ascribe to social activities and their correspondingly distinct criteria for participation. Next, I will show how the groups' style differences corresponded with distinct tactics political organizers adopted for recruiting volunteers for political projects, and how these resulted in different compositions of activist groups at each field site.

[3] This was true at the time of the study, but has changed now, after Representative Justin Amash joined the Libertarian Party in April 2020, making him the first Libertarian representative in US history.

I then demonstrate how the resulting differences in activist groups correspond with the adoption of distinct forms of political engagement, reflecting distinct conceptions of political tactics and goals among activists, particularly regarding their propensity for bipartisan collaboration and political compromise. Finally, I present a third case of a sub-group within the LA libertarians that followed a *community style*, like the FSP, and show how its members also adopted attitudes and behaviors toward other political groups that were similar to the FSP.

Findings

Criteria for participation: community vs. intellectual-society style

Free-Staters hold a different perception of their mutual bonds than LA libertarians do. Being an "intellectual society," LA libertarians see their ties as directly related to their common political and ideological commitments. In contrast, as a community, Free-Staters see their ties as rooted in interpersonal relationships. These differences represent two distinct styles of association that correspond with different understandings of the criteria for participation in collective activities in each group.

Such differences are particularly expressed in the meanings and purposes members in each association attribute to social gatherings. Thus, LA libertarians meet quite regularly in various venues and for various purposes; however, these gatherings almost always include some libertarian theme. A typical month may offer a meeting of the Santa Monica Liberty Meetup, the Central LA Libertarian Supper Club, and maybe a gathering of Liberty on the Rocks, a nonprofit organization that aims to "educate, connect, and activate liberty enthusiasts around the world." For the most part, participants in the meetings come together to discuss political issues, listen to libertarian speakers, or even host local, liberty-minded politicians. Some meetings are organized by low-level LP officials, and they use them to make occasional announcements. However, it is rare for any party business to occur there.

Hence, social gatherings in LA usually have a rather narrow appeal. While participants naturally socialize and develop personal relationships during those meetings, the meetings are presented, first and foremost, as an opportunity to learn about, debate, and engage with libertarian philosophy and politics. The bonds between participants, therefore, are understood as predominantly a byproduct of their shared political interests and commitments.

Free-Staters, conversely, perceive their gatherings differently. Like the LA libertarians, Free-Staters hold regular libertarian-themed meetings such as the Weekend Libertarian Meetup or the Manchester Libertarian Meetup, which appeal directly to libertarians and are, at times, directly associated with the LP. However, these events are a glaring exception. Most often, Free-Staters describe their gatherings in strictly social terms. The group holds monthly potlucks, weekly Friday lunches, or regular after-hour meetings at local bars. But mainly Free-Staters gather regularly in their local community "clubhouses," member-owned buildings where they can "drop by" whenever they wish to listen to music, drink, play video and bar games, and chat.

Hence, gatherings in NH are rarely framed as “libertarian events.” Instead, social activities are mostly framed as “community-building” activities or “hangouts,” and participants explain their motivations for attending predominantly in these terms. Not being centered around formal libertarian themes, such activities are not exclusive to people with libertarian interests, and members often bring friends, family, partners, and so on, regardless of political creeds. Political and philosophical conversations are not absent from these gatherings; however, they are rarely the center of the event or the reason for meeting. More commonly, conversations revolve around friendly banter, work, and, most of all, community gossip. Thus, even though the FSP sees itself as a libertarian community, participants in its gatherings see their bonds as based on friendship and communality and not on their political convictions.

Correspondingly, the two groups are distinct in the political meanings they attribute to their shared activities. Whereas Free-Staters often actively rejected descriptions of their shared activities that suggested a political purpose, LA libertarians tended to endorse such descriptions. This pattern was nicely illustrated in how members of each group treated an ostensibly similar activity of public cleanup. Thus, in response to the federal government shutdown of January 2019, LA libertarians decided to clean up a nearby national park. During the shutdown, national parks were allegedly left unkempt, and libertarians saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate that parks’ maintenance can be performed by volunteers, rendering such government services expendable. And so, during the cleanup, as the group was picking up trash, Rachel, one of the cleanup organizers, avidly offered purposeful commentary, arguing that the group was doing a better job than the government, and took pictures to be later uploaded to Facebook libertarian pages to propagate the efforts. Another member diligently informed other hikers in the park that “we are libertarians” and explained the nature and purpose of the group’s efforts. For the LA group, the park cleanup was not just “community service”; it was a means to prove a political point and to generate publicity for themselves and the libertarian movement in general.

This behavior stood in stark contrast to the way Free-Staters treated their public cleanup efforts. In the summer of 2019, two Free-Staters, Clark and Jane, began organizing regular neighborhood cleanups in Manchester. Their plan was to carry out cleanups every three weeks, particularly focusing on neighborhoods that had recently experienced violent crime. Making these neighborhoods look better kempt, they reasoned, would make residents feel a little better and perhaps reduce future crime.

During one cleanup, as we were collecting cigarette buds from the floor, Andy, a Free-Stater and longtime officer of the Manchester LP, suggested I should write about this activity in my research papers. Surprisingly, when I confirmed that I was interested in such political actions, Andy protested. What they were doing, he asserted, was not political. Echoing the message of the LA cleaners, I suggested that our actions have political value, as we were providing a public service that renders the government obsolete. But Andy was reluctant to agree. For him, it was hard to imagine, or at least admit, that our efforts were anything other than community service.

Similarly, when asked about advertising their work, Clark explained that they only do so to recruit volunteers, not to generate public relations. And these volunteers were recruited regardless of political affiliation. Whereas the LA cleanup was framed as a libertarian activity, with members diligently introducing us to passersby as “lib-

ertarians," the politics of the participants in the Manchester cleanup remained undisclosed. New volunteers were never asked about their political affiliation, and the activity was never presented to them, or to bystanders, as a libertarian one.

It is not that Free-Staters had no political interest in their cleanup efforts. Indeed, the activity's cleaning supply was provided by Will, a Free-Stater leading an ambitious initiative to draw liberty-minded renters to property he manages in West Manchester to consolidate political power in the neighborhood and eventually apply for municipal independence. Making the neighborhoods cleaner and more appealing to prospective residents worked well to advance his political interests. Yet, although Will was at the park, handing out supplies from his van, his project was never mentioned, and the activity was framed entirely as a community-building endeavor.

Having distinct associational styles meant that members in each site typified their social scenes differently, offering distinct answers (implicitly or explicitly) to the question "What is it that's going on here?" and creating different social scenes. In LA, intellectual-society associational style meant that members interpreted their social gatherings as "libertarian events." In such events, it made sense for participation to be limited to people interested in libertarianism, either as a political goal or an intellectual pursuit. Accordingly, it seemed appropriate to present participants in these activities as members of a distinct political group, and to describe their activities as a form of libertarian political action. On the other hand, in the FSP, community associational style meant that members thought about their social gatherings as "community events." In such community events, attributing a political purpose to social activities seemed inappropriate and it made sense to open participation to anyone, regardless of political views. Accordingly, gatherings in the FSP were not politically marked and did not serve to distinguish their participants from other political groups. Thus, the groups' distinct styles rendered different interpretations and choices sensible and appropriate, and this translated into meaningful differences in the partisan composition and political meanings of the social scenes in each site.

Next, I will illustrate how these differences were particularly meaningful for the choices made by political organizers, and how these choices created very different compositions of activist groups in each field site.

Recruitment strategies: wide net or spearfishing

Political organizers in both NH and LA depended on their local social scenes to find and recruit volunteers for political projects. Because organizers in each site worked within different associational styles and, accordingly, different social scenes, they also formed different types of relationships with prospective volunteers and imagined their volunteer pools differently. As a result, organizers in NH and LA found different recruitment strategies appropriate. In NH, organizers imagined their relationship with prospective volunteers in terms of friendship and community bonds. Accordingly, they adopted a "wide net" strategy, recruiting a broad and politically diverse cadre of volunteers that could be cajoled based on their varying personal interests. Conversely, In LA, organizers imagined their relationship with prospective volunteers as a product of their shared politics. Thus, they adopted a strategy I call "spearfishing," recruiting a relatively limited group of partisan and ideologically committed

volunteers that could be drafted for various projects according to their skills and the organizer's needs. As a result, while NH activist groups were composed of people of varying political camps who worked together to advance goals in which they had a common personal interest, in LA, activist groups were composed of a narrow pool of highly committed libertarians who worked exclusively with each other on varying projects.

Wide net recruitment in the FSP

Free-Staters see their bonds as rooted in community ties and personal relationships, and their gatherings are framed in social rather than political terms. At such gatherings, political organizers also meet and establish personal relationships with other participants, and these relationships serve as the basis for recruitment. Through these relationships, organizers learn about people's personal and political interests and later try to excite them about prospective or existing projects that match these interests. Because they think about recruitments as a matter of personal relationships and matching people with their interests, organizers cast a wide recruitment net, recruiting different cadres of people of diverse political affiliations, based on the interests they have in common.

Meg, a major political organizer in the school choice campaign, offers a fine illustration of how NH organizers reason and apply this wide net strategy. Meg traces her role in the school choice campaign back to 2007, when she started hosting friendly gatherings in her house for new FSP immigrants. "When people would move here," she recalls, "I would invite them to my house. I used to have these parties at my porch. […] wanting to be hospitable to new people coming here." Like most FSP gatherings, the criteria for participation in such parties were lax. Meg published open invitations on the community's online message board, and people just started to arrive. Her goal was not political but social – wanting to be hospitable; however, through these meetings, Meg assembled a group of friends and learned about each person's personal interests.

In 2012, a friend who worked at a local think tank approached her to help with phone banking for the prospective tax credit law in the state. She recalled how she started calling people she knew cared about education and recruited them for the effort. "You find [volunteers] anywhere – everywhere," she explained. "It's matching people with their interests and then having something tangible for them to do, a goal to reach that's attainable, and then making sure they get that full-circle feedback after the fact." Besides those she knew from the social gatherings at her house, Meg also recruited others she knew from volunteering for the Ron Paul presidential campaign. The latter, she admits, were "Republican types." However, since they cared about education and freedom, she figured she could recruit them too.

Meg's story is typical of the FSP. Political organizers repeatedly described how they rely on their personal network of friends and acquaintances to recruit volunteers. For Meg, these people, whom she knew from both political and nonpolitical settings, were not all interested in education or even politics. However, by having a wide network of friends and acquaintances, she found enough people whose interests already aligned with her cause and then gave them "something tangible" to do.

This recruitment strategy meant that even non-libertarians, like the volunteers she recruited from Ron Paul's (Republican presidential candidate) campaign, could be approached. Rather than political affiliations, Meg and other FSP organizers imagined their volunteer pool to be drawn around shared issue interests.

In fact, FSP organizers often described political collaborations and personal relationships as reflections of each other. Thus, one local organizer struggled to distinguish between the two when he tried to outline, in a conversation, whom he sees as part of the FSP "community":

> [T]here's the label conservative, right? And a Conservative is a lot like a libertarian except when it comes to social issues [...] So the libertarians in New Hampshire make a common cause with the Conservatives on a lot of issues, right? When it comes to taxes or regulation, we agree. [...] But then, when it comes to things like marijuana, right? The libertarians say, "Yeah, why shouldn't you be able to make choices about what you put in your body?" And the conservatives say, "No, [...] we have to take care of you for your own good. We have to tell you, 'No, you can't do that.'" [...] So these conservatives, are they part of our community? Uh, sometimes. Mostly. Partially (laughs).
>
> OM: "So when they agree with you politically, they are part of your community, and when they don't, they're not?
>
> Well, except that we don't change, and they don't change. So yeah, they're part of our community. They're part of the outer community, right? Of people who are in our midst, and we work together sometimes.

For FSP organizers, political collaboration and community relations are two sides of the same coin. Having some political interests in common was enough to include someone in the community, and being part of the same community (being "in our midst") was ground enough for occasional collaboration.

Rather than a deliberate calculation of maximizing recruitment success, FSP organizers' wide net strategy corresponded to how they understood the relationships within their civic association. Because FSP organizers imagined their bonds with their fellow citizens in terms of communal, interpersonal relationships, it made sense to them to build a volunteer pool that reflected their social network and it seemed appropriate to approach volunteers based on intimate acquaintance with what they personally care about. And because organizers' social network expanded beyond their libertarian group, so too did their political collaboration. The result was that activist groups in NH were composed of politically diverse cadres of volunteers, working together on issues they all personally cared about.

Spearfishing recruitment in LA

LA organizers work within a far different social environment. For them, the settings for association and recruitment are clearly defined as libertarian gatherings wherein the relationships among participants are a product of their political and ideological

commitments. In such settings, organizers were not focused on forming personal relationships and, instead, understood their role as alternating between event planners and talent scouts. First, they worked to organize or identify attractive meetings that draw local libertarian enthusiasts. Then, LA political organizers scouted these meetings for exceptionally talented or committed libertarians they could recruit and steer into whatever cause was in the offing. Rather than casting a wide net to catch many different potential volunteers, LA organizers – as in spearfishing – focused their hunt on high-quality targets, thereby cultivating a smaller pool of devoted, qualified volunteers they could, in turn, recruit for various projects.

This strategy was clearly articulated by Rachel, who organized one of the largest regular meetings in LA County, as she explained her success as an organizer:

> It's about maintaining an infrastructure and having good speakers, […] and making it a worthwhile investment. […] If you have a nice product, people are gonna come. When people come, they respect the nice product; they're inclined to listen to you. If you put in a lot of work, but you still generate a shitty product, they're not gonna respect you as a leader. […] That's how we get people involved. People come to these local meetings; they have a good time. They become part of a community, part of the in-crowd, and they're like, "How can I get involved? I wanna do this too."

Rachel understood the meetings as a tool to secure people's commitments. Rather than identifying people's personal issue interests, like NH organizers, she tried to excite people about being part of the local libertarian "in-crowd." This way she hoped to spark their interest to become more involved, which she could then steer according to her emerging needs. This became clear as she explained her technique for soliciting volunteers for an activism event:

> I call them about something else, and then I bring up the event (chuckles). You have to call them and talk about whatever you know they want to talk about; then you bring up the event later. Everything has to be worked in.

While entertaining her volunteers' own interests, Rachel admits she only does so as a step toward steering the conversation toward her own goals. While she was exceptionally forthright about the small manipulations of recruitment conversations, her approach was far from exceptional. John, another political organizer, explained his recruitment approach for local campaigns this way:

> Usually, it is knowing which volunteers exist out there and like to work on campaigns, and connecting them with the campaign that we feel either needs their skill set the most or campaigns that we feel have the best chance of promoting the message of liberty for one reason or another. So trying to get those campaigns more assistance.
>
> OM: "How do you know which people are prospective volunteers?

> People that have worked on campaigns in the past, other people that we meet through going to meetups, and they say, "Oh, you know, that sounds like a great thing. Give me a call if you have a candidate in my area, or something like that.

Unlike NH organizers, LA organizers were less concerned about volunteers' particular issue interests. Instead, they responded to volunteers' expressed interest in libertarian political activism and then directed them wherever the organizers judged they would be most helpful. This pool of prospective volunteers tended to be smaller but also more committed ("People that have worked on campaigns in the past") and versatile.

Such "targeted activation" is common in professionally organized civic organizations, where technologies such as professionally prepared mailing lists are used to lower mobilization costs and increase success rates by targeting individuals with proven activism records (Levitsky, 2014). Yet, LA organizers recruited people they met face-to-face at libertarian events. Their focus on people with proven activism records or high ideological commitments was not a matter of technological affordances, but of what seemed appropriate and sensible in such social settings. Working in a social scenes that was defined in political terms, where participation was understood to be a factor of people's commitment to libertarianism, organizers found it appropriate to search for the most committed libertarians in the group and appeal to their political commitment when trying to recruit them. While such a recruitment approach would have seemed inappropriate or "out of place" at a porch party, it made perfect sense in a libertarian political event. The result was that activist groups in LA were composed of a rather narrow group of highly committed libertarians, who worked together on multiple projects, without ever collaborating with people of other political groups.

As I will now show, these differences corresponded with how activists themselves understood what counts as worthwhile political participation and how they imagined political success.

Boundary making, coalition building, and the measures of political success

Different associational styles corresponded with distinct social scenes and distinct compositions of activist groups in NH and LA. These differences went hand-in-hand with different ways activists themselves imagined the boundaries of their political collaboration and the forms of political participation they adopted, accordingly. Most notably, these different forms corresponded with distinct – indeed oppositional – understandings of what constitutes a political success in each group.

Free-Staters were disinclined to exclude non-libertarians from common activities and their political organizers recruited politically diverse cadres of volunteers. As a result, political activism in the FSP came to be based on politically diverse activist groups wherein participants came together based on their shared personal interests. Correspondingly, most Free-Staters tended to think about politics in terms of common issues they could advance together with non-libertarians. Conversely, in LA, the exclusive nature of group activities and organizers' corresponding spearfishing

recruitment strategy meant that political activism was based on politically narrow groups of highly committed libertarians. Similarly, LA libertarians tended to think about politics in partisan terms and regarded other political groups as competitors and political rivals.

These differences were most obviously expressed in how members and organizers in each group strategized and engaged with electoral politics. Naturally, both LA and NH political organizers were concerned about the scarcity of libertarian representatives in local political offices, and organizers in both groups tried to recruit and assist candidates in local races. However, their understanding of who appropriate candidates are and what constituents they can partner with to elect them was starkly different.

In LA, such a concerted effort was made in winter of 2019, with a project titled "Operation First Step" (OFS), to locate and run libertarian candidates for local, low-level political offices. The OFS team, a small group of committed activists, developed a data-driven strategy to rank the neighborhoods in LA County according to their number of registered Libertarian voters and then approach LP members in top neighborhoods and persuade them to run. This strategy, therefore, relied on a strictly partisan understanding of both the pool of available candidates and their potential voters. As the team understood it, the project's prospects of success were closely tied to the quality and availability of people who formally identified with the Libertarian Party.

This approach was markedly different from that of Free-Staters as they carried out their own project for running libertarians for local offices. The NH initiative was conceived of and led by Tamar and Tom, two politically savvy organizers in the FSP. Relying on their extended network of friends and acquaintances, they located and met potential candidates to assess their motivation and electoral prospects. Thus, at one such meeting in Tamar's kitchen in summer of 2017, Tamar and Tom tried to convince Ann, a potential candidate who was suggested by another Free-Stater, to run for a low-level local office. Interestingly, only toward the end of the meeting did Tom turn to Ann and ask, "Do you consider yourself a libertarian?" Hesitantly, Ann explained that she considered herself a "compassionate libertarian," and that she did not think the free market was necessarily the best way to manage everything. Instead, Ann said she wanted to focus on "compassionate issues" like the opioid crisis. In response, Tom agreed this is a good focus for her ward, which was leaning liberal, and Tamar approved, adding that "We actually need more people to run as Democrats."

Such leniency toward formal political affiliations was common among Free-Staters. Tamar and Tom often advised prospective candidates to choose their party affiliations based on how their ward was leaning. Similarly, when publicly assessing current political candidates to determine whether it was worthwhile to run against them, the two highlighted their voting records rather than their political affiliation. The goal was not so much to have a "big L" Libertarian elected for local office but rather to elect someone with *libertarian views* on various issues. In a meeting with activists and prospective candidates, Tamar explained that they must learn to compromise on some candidates and advised against running against a strong candidate from another party so as not to alienate them. In her view, maintaining good rela-

tionships with state and local representatives from other parties could often be more beneficial than trying to push Libertarian ones into office.

Hence, NH libertarians understood their prospects for political success in ideological but not partisan terms. Nonpartisans were commonly referred to as potential collaborators, and even voters, and many Free-Staters themselves, were members of either the Republican or the Democratic Party. In fact, when running for office, Free-Staters seldom ran as Libertarians. Of the eighteen Free-Staters elected for the NH House of Representatives, sixteen ran as Republicans and two as Democrats, and other Free-Staters volunteered and contributed to their political campaigns.

This behavior was practically unimaginable in LA. Although not all local libertarian candidates ran under the Libertarian ticket, the furthest they were willing to go was to run as independents or "undeclared." In fact, the notion of running and supporting another party's candidates was baffling to many of them. During focus groups, LA discussants were presented with the interaction between Tamar, Tom, and Ann. Many discussants, especially early in the conversation, found the entire situation confusing, asking the moderator to explain why the LP would run a Democrat for office. Explaining that Tamar and Tom were not acting on behalf of the LP and that both actually registered as Republicans did not make things clearer. As one participant remarked, "I can't picture any scenario where two registered Republicans would convince a libertarian-leaning Democrat to run as a Democrat."

As the conversation unfolded, LA discussants rejected Tamar and Tom's actions unequivocally. Some expressed doubt about the chances of a libertarian-leaning candidate to even get the support of the Democratic Party and predicted that Ann would probably be labeled a "Russian" or "Republican asset." Others argued that even having Ann run as a Libertarian was ill-advised because she was clearly not fully committed to that philosophy and might only complicate the already confused image most Americans have of libertarians. Either way, LA discussants contended that supporting a Democrat contravenes their fundamental political cause. As one discussant argued:

> This is a partisan effort. We're trying to dismantle the two-party system. By necessity, that means we don't borrow candidates running as Democrats or Republicans […] So no, I don't think let her run as a Democrat. I don't think *encourage* her to run as a Democrat. […] How many young libertarians who intend to run for office someday do we lose to groups like YAL[4]? […] We should not encourage people to run under the mainstream umbrella because they have a better chance of winning. If anything, we should encourage them to fight the hard fight: to stand on their principles and to say, "I reject this system, and I'm not gonna work within it to weasel my way to the top. No, I oppose everything you stand for, and I won't give my face and my credibility and my philosophy to you and your corrupt party."

[4] "Young Americans for Liberty" – a political student organization, born out of the "Students for Ron Paul" organization that formed in the aftermath of the Republican candidate's 2008 failed presidential campaign.

For LA libertarians, the notion of supporting another party's candidates seemed odd or even harmful. For them, politics is a competitive field occupied by opposing factions. Whereas Free-Staters could support a Democratic candidate based on her adherence to "compassionate libertarian issues," LA libertarians found it hard to imagine the Democratic Party would ever endorse anyone who truly agrees with them and believed that supporting nonpartisans could mar the clarity of the libertarian message and risk losing young libertarians to other parties and their affiliated organizations. They saw the lines between their and other political camps as clearly marked and perceived any overlap between the camps not only as a sign of ideological inconsistency but also as a clear danger to their cause.

Hence, the different styles in each group went hand-in-hand with different understandings of what constitutes a political success. Whereas Free-Staters understood political success as the advancement of libertarian ideals, regardless of the tie color of the politician who does so, LA libertarians understood political success as the advancement of Libertarian partisans. Within their distinct systems of meaning, what one group interpreted as a win, the other saw as a failure, or even a threat, to the libertarian cause.

Style as an explaining factor: community style in LA

As these findings suggest, variations in associational style help explain differences in libertarian groups' attitudes toward non-libertarians and their tendencies for bipartisan collaboration. However, some may argue that the differences between NH and LA libertarians could be equally attributed to broader differences between the two regions. For example, historical partisan tensions between coastal liberals and interior conservatives may have made Southern Californian Democrats and Republicans themselves more partisan, forcing local libertarians to organize exclusively with their own lot. In that case, NH libertarians' willingness to cross partisan lines is best explained not by their groups' community style, but simply by the fact that NH Republicans and Democrats are easier to work with. In other words, what if the FSP's political tolerance is simply a product of NH, and has nothing to do with community relationships?

To examine this possibility, I conducted a focused analysis of one unique group of libertarians in LA. This group, whom I refer to as the "Freefolk," was unorthodox in that, unlike the rest of the LA libertarians, its members followed a community associational style, much like the FSP. Freefolk members did not meet predominantly at libertarian-themed events and did not imagine their bonds to be rooted in their shared libertarian commitments. Instead, the Freefolk saw themselves as a friends' group, and they met weekly to have dinners, play board and video games, watch movies, and just socialize. Some members worked together, and some older Freefolk members had developed a close mentor-mentee relationship with younger ones. The group was also very politically active, volunteering regularly in local political campaigns, and some members served as officers in the LP's local branches.

Freefolk activism was usually directed by Robert, a core member whose house was the group's primary venue for social gatherings. Like FSP organizers, Robert also relied on these social gatherings to meet and befriend potential volunteers, and as

in the FSP, these social events were not limited to people with an expressed interest in libertarian politics. Accordingly, Robert also came to rely on these personal relationships to recruit volunteers, yet his strategy was somewhat different from that of his NH counterparts. Rather than appealing to people's personal issue interests, Robert customarily framed his political projects as an opportunity to "help out a friend," be it himself or a local politician requesting campaign help. This allowed him to recruit volunteers based on their personal commitments to him and to each other, regardless of their political affiliations. In a conversation, Robert recalled explaining his strategy to a prospective activist:

> When I started talking to Steve about political action and that sort of thing, I told him that building bridges- politics is about people, and the number one skill is making friends. And if he was going to get involved in politics, he needed to make that his mantra. That, as a libertarian, he could then network with Democrats and not be a threat; he could network with Republicans and not be a threat. Because we can just be useful to them moving issues forward, which is what we wanted to anyway.

For Robert and the other Freefolk, political participation was based on personal relationships and hence not limited to collaborating with libertarians alone. That way, the group could and did collaborate with both Tea Party activists protesting Medicare and progressive activists supporting marijuana legalization and immigrant rights. Freefolk organizers, much like their FSP counterparts, saw political collaboration as intertwined with friendship and worked to broaden and diversify their networks ("building bridges") to increase the number of coalitions they could form to advance significant issues.

This form of political participation corresponded with Freefolk's perception of political success. Unlike the other focus groups in LA, the Freefolk's focus group found no real issue with Tamar, Tom, and Ann's scenario above. While suggesting it would have been better if Ann ran as a Libertarian, the Freefolk discussants agreed that having her elected, even as a Democrat, is still "a win" for the libertarian cause. Robert thus concluded that part of the discussion, contending that: "[Tamar and Tom] making a friend of [Ann] was good for the party, regardless of the outcome of their meeting. Them having gone creating a connection with a person who is positive and willing to do things together, that was a win in and as of itself." As the Freefolk interpreted the scenario, supporting Ann now may convince her to run as a Libertarian in the next elections, but even if she does not, making a friend out of her and building a bridge to a potential government official would increase libertarians' overall political cachet. In their view, supporting another party's candidate could prove beneficial not only to the libertarian cause but also indeed to the LP itself.

Thus, as they adopted a different associational style than other LA libertarians, the Freefolk also adopted distinct political behaviors, attitudes, and measures of political success. Like in the FSP, the Freefolk's community style corresponded with certain interpretations and choices that fostered a politically diverse social environment in which personal and political bonds were conflated, and members saw value in forming diverse coalitions to advance their political causes.

Conclusion

Existing models of political intolerance and partisanship highlight the complementary effects of people's political commitments and the composition of their social environment. These models suggest that political homogeneity and personal political commitments reinforce one another to make civic groups disinclined to interact, compromise, and collaborate with members of other political camps. Yet, as the findings in this article show, when civic groups adopt a community style of interaction, imagining the relationships among their members as rooted in friendship and community bonds, members also find such cross-cutting interactions and collaborations more sensible and appropriate. And this is true even when they are highly ideologically committed, and their groups are very politically homogeneous.

Thus, although Free-Staters were so ideologically committed as to uproot and reshape their lives according to their libertarian ideals, and although they lived in a homogenous community with others who held similar ideological commitments, the communal nature of their ongoing interactions made reaching out and collaborating with non-libertarians seem proper and even politically effective. Contrastingly, the distinct interaction patterns of LA libertarians, which were based on their perception of their bonds as rooted in shared intellectual interests, made the exclusion of non-libertarians seem appropriate and collaboration with them seem unreasonable and even detrimental to the libertarian political cause.

As these findings suggest, local interactional culture can play an important role in explaining how structural forces and individual commitments shape civic groups' attitudes and political behavior. While people may be motivated by their political ideals and constrained by their environment, they also act within specific groups where established patterns of interaction render certain interpretations more reasonable and certain choices more appropriate. These interpretations and choices are not made independently, but rather reinforce each other, creating a sense of coherence that binds members' behaviors into a consistent system of meaning.

In this way, style can help us think about the possible relationship between rising political intolerance in the US and deeper cultural changes like the declining role of local communities as the basis for civic life. As this article shows, insofar as people understand their bonds to be grounded in community relationships, they also attribute specific meanings to their social gatherings, adopt certain tactics for recruiting volunteers to political action, and form a specific type of activist groups, all of which correspond with a model of civic participation that relies on political tolerance and collaboration across political camps. It is this model of civic participation that dissipates as people stop thinking about their civic bonds as grounded in a shared community of neighbors and friends, and start thinking about it in other, more personalized terms of shared ideological commitments or intellectual interests.

Additionally, in this article, studying how style worked in libertarian groups made it possible to focus more clearly on local processes, putting aside the external effects of national political institutions and media discourse. A next step would be studying how this mechanism interacts with structural forces such as elite political discourse and the long-established political machines and institutional power of the Democratic and Republican parties. Furthermore, future studies should also examine the relations

between groups' style and their broader cultural environment. As the distinct cases of the LA libertarians and the Freefolk suggest, a large cosmopolitan city like Los Angeles presents a diverse enough cultural setting for different groups to adopt varying styles of interaction. Further study is needed to determine whether the same is true for a rural, small-town environment such as New Hampshire. Would an intellectual-society associational style be sustainable in such settings, or does a small-town culture and spatially compact environment unavoidably foster intimate, community relationships among members?

Studying libertarians also offers a unique insight into how American third parties, and other civic groups that do not affiliate with the two major parties, position themselves in relation to the broader political system. These findings suggest that ostensibly similar groups may imagine their positions in American politics very differently, depending on their associational culture. Still, it remains to be explored whether the attitudes and behaviors different associational styles cultivate result from selection or nurture. That is, do people who are more politically tolerant to begin with tend to join associations that follow a community style, or does the participation in such associational culture foster their members' tolerance? The same can be asked about political organizers: do organizers learn and adopt recruitment strategies to fit their groups' associational style? Or do individuals have personal inclinations toward distinct recruitment approaches, and only those whose approach fits their association's style end up becoming successful political organizers?

Either way, future explorations of political intolerance will benefit from paying proper attention to the cultural, interactional contexts in which Americans become involved in politics. It is within these contexts that people find different political interpretations and choices not only sensible and appropriate, but also relevant to them and their everyday lives.

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