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An Examination of Small and Midsize Defense Business Corporate Lobbying

Gene Moran
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Gene Moran

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Review Committee

Dr. William Benet, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Elish Lane, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Glenn Starks, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

An Examination of Small and Midsize Defense Business Corporate Lobbying

by

Gene Moran

MS, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, 1988

BS, Florida State University, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Large companies lobby U.S. Congress in more significant numbers than small companies and gain a clear advantage in funding acquisitions. But little is known about what conditions influence or disincentivize small and midsize businesses, those with revenues of \$5 million to \$1 billion, from participating in congressional lobbying. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the gap in the research literature by focusing on small and midsize defense company executives who address the conditions surrounding congressional lobbying. The study's theoretical framework was Benet's polarities of democracy, emphasizing polarity relationships of participation and representation and diversity and equality. The research question focused on facilitators to or inhibitors of lobbying that affect or influence small and midsize business participation in congressional lobbying. A generic qualitative design, with semistructured interviews of 10 small and midsize defense company executive leaders generated themes through multi-cycle coding. Themes included (a) awareness, with the subthemes of processes, and communications and connections; (b) outcomes; (c) investment; (d) experience; and (e) size and type of business. Congress can use these findings to inform policies supportive of improved training to raise executives' congressional knowledge and awareness. Such policies could better support effective management of the polarity pairs considered. Implications for positive social change include informing Congress of potential systemic issues that either hinder or democratize executive communications with Congress, and will support both equal opportunity and fair competition in federal contracting.

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Dedication

This academic work is dedicated to my family. I embraced lifelong learning later in life. While my career offered recurring opportunities for training, I was slow to discipline myself to more actively read and learn. As I complete this dissertation, I am turning 60 years of age; it is truly never too late for any of us to continue growing. My wife, Julie, has been a steadfast source of love, support, and encouragement throughout our lives, and has been a first-hand witness to the time and energy required of this undertaking. Without Julie's support this research would not have happened.

Acknowledgments

When Dr. Bill Benet and I first discussed the concept of conducting research focused on defense lobbying, Dr. Benet immediately embraced the idea and saw the potential. It was important to me that the research clearly rise above the sometimes-toxic perception of lobbying borne of a steady flow of charged misinformation in the public square. Dr. Benet's polarities of democracy theory offered the perfect framework in which to consider this research topic with an eye toward moving us all closer to the promise of democracy. Working directly with the theory's author was a tremendous experience and Dr. Benet's deft counsel was essential in bringing this research to life.

Dr. Elish Lane, my second chair and methodologist, similarly recognized the unique perspective I sought to bring forward. I was fortunate to have met many great Walden University faculty members along the way. Dr. Lane stood apart in her engagement of students and material while teaching advanced qualitative research. I am grateful for the fresh perspectives and deep experience Dr. Lane brought into this research.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Question	6
Theoretical Framework	6
Nature of the Study.....	7
Definitions	8
Assumptions	9
Scope and Delimitations.....	11
Limitations.....	12
Significance	13
Summary.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Literature Search Strategy	17
Theoretical Foundation.....	18
Conceptual Framework: Johnson’s Polarity Management Theory	19
Theoretical Framework: Benet’s Polarities of Democracy Theory.....	20
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts	23

The Budget Cycle	24
Evolution of Corporate Lobbying	25
Advocacy and Legislation: How Lobbying Achieves an Effect	30
Following Money in Lobbying.....	33
Acquisition and Contracting—The Execution Phase in the Executive Branch.....	34
Small and Midsize Business	36
The Process in Context	40
Summary.....	41
Chapter 3: Research Method	43
Research Design and Rationale	43
Role of the Researcher.....	45
Methodology.....	47
Participant Selection Logic.....	47
Instrumentation.....	49
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	50
Data Analysis Plan	52
Issues of Trustworthiness	53
Credibility.....	54
Transferability	54
Dependability	55
Confirmability	55

Ethical Concerns and Procedures	56
Summary.....	57
Chapter 4: Results.....	58
Setting	58
Demographics.....	59
Data Collection	62
Interviews	62
Processing of Interviews and Coding Preparation.....	63
Data Analysis.....	66
Transition to Coding.....	66
Manual Coding in Excel.....	67
Coding in NVivo	69
Evidence of Trustworthiness	72
Credibility.....	72
Transferability	72
Dependability	73
Confirmability	73
Results	74
Theme 1: Awareness	76
Subtheme: Process.....	77
Subtheme: Communications and Connections.....	82
Theme 2: Outcomes.....	86

Theme 3: Investment	89
Theme 4: Experience	94
Theme 5: Size and Type of Business	98
Theme 6: Compliance.....	102
Summary.....	106
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	107
Interpretation of Findings	108
Theme 1: Awareness	109
Theme 2: Outcomes.....	111
Theme 3: Investment	112
Theme 4: Experience	113
Theme 5: Size and Type of Business	114
Theme 6: Compliance.....	115
Applying the Theoretical Framework	116
Diversity and Equality	119
Participation and Representation.....	121
Interpreting the Themes in Context.....	123
Moving Forward From Theory.....	124
Limitations of the Study	125
Participant Knowledge	125
Researcher Bias	126
Transferability of Results	126

Recommendations	127
Interview Questions.....	127
Measuring and Developing Expertise Over Experience.....	128
Understanding Access to Participants in Government	128
Applying the Theoretical Framework	129
Implications	130
Implications for Practice.....	131
Conclusions	132
References	133
Appendix A: Interview Guide	147
Appendix B: Recruitment Email	150
Appendix C: Approval Letter	151

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics60

Table 2. Themes75

List of Figures

Figure 1. Polarity Map Template.....	118
Figure 2. Polarity Map of Diversity and Equality Polarity Pair	120
Figure 3. Polarity Map of Participation and Representation Polarity Pair	123

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The act of lobbying is a “rent-seeking” (Papaioannou et al., 2016, p. 1) behavior with an intent to influence a public outcome. Lobbying takes place in democracies around the world and manifests in similar ways despite structural differences of governments. In the United States, lobbying has been present since the government’s founding days, yet its scope and sophistication have increased since World War II (Hojnacki et al., 2015). Along with the increase in lobbying activity, various and obvious acts of corruption came to light (Feinstein, 2017; Leys, 2021; White, 2015). Legislative reforms designed to instill a regulatory regime on lobbying draw on the high profile misdeeds of the few, yet leave the impression that a corrupt relationship lingers between business and political decision-makers (Kuvvet, 2016; McCrain, 2018; Nan, 2018; Thurber, 2011).

The largest defense companies, and those that garner the most federal contract dollars, participate in Congressional lobbying (BGOV, 2020; U.S. Senate, n.d.-a). A far greater number of defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion do not participate in lobbying. This research examined the decision-making of executives of defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion who face the decision to participate in Congressional lobbying. This research addressed a fundamental social problem analyzing actions that can hinder citizens’ beliefs in the integrity of a democratic institution—Congressional funding of government procurement. The actions of a democratic government must be seen as both fair and approachable by all citizens if democracy is to achieve its potential.

Background

Research surrounding Congressional lobbying has not distinguished all participants adequately and relies on secondary data to substantiate findings. But some companies choose between lobbyists who are corporate employees versus lobbyists who are subcontractors (Brady et al., 2007). Further, corporations and associations sometimes pursue broader interests that impact the choice of “firm-level” lobbying (Brady et al., 2007; Kim, 2017) versus lobbying done in coordination with others sharing common interests. Careful analysis of lobbyist pedigrees by corporations and associations can influence the selection of what are known as “revolving door lobbyists” to improve legislative outcomes (Chausow, 2015).

Political giving, individually and through political action committees (Ferris et al., 2019), can improve connectedness (Ridge et al., 2017) as a means of enhancing returns (Borisov, 2016). Lobbying by associations as part of a coalition can help associations or groups with common legislative interests achieve desirable ends for the betterment of many (Edwards, 2019). Political campaign contributions by individuals or political action committees can influence what are known as “sweetheart deals” (Ferris et al., 2019, p. 2). This linkage of campaign contributions to tangible business outcomes is significant enough to warrant inclusion in Security Exchange Commission filings (Scott, 2015), which have been used in lobbying research (Leys, 2021; Scott, 2015).

Small businesses can gain a particular advantage working together to oppose the interests of big business or can ride along and participate in a coalition led by big business. Coalition efforts traditionally address policy outcomes as opposed to specific

contract outcomes (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Lobbying activity benefits contract outcomes (Dusso et al., 2019), but there can be improvements in specific contract terms derived from lobbying (Ferris et al., 2019).

Further, despite numerous efforts within the executive branch, less than 25% of federal dollars are awarded to small businesses (Williams, 2016). Bloomberg Government's 2020 list of top 200 federal contractors by cumulative contract value is made up of large companies, all with registered federal lobbying activity as defined in the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) database (U.S. Senate, n.d.-a). Small businesses face barriers to contracting within the executive branch (Shilling et al., 2017). Significant funding decisions take place in Congress before the executive branch's "controlling of expenditures" (p. 262), presumably via contracts, begins (Heniff, 2001). In effect, small business competes for contract opportunities in the executive branch well after others have framed funding for those same contract opportunities in Congress.

Lobbyists, political giving, and grassroots coalition lobbying dominate the primarily quantitative research of congressional lobbying (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Drutman, 2015). The lack of qualitative responsive interviews with business executives specific to the lobbying decision reflects a gap in the extant literature. Relying on secondary data—LDA database (U.S. Senate, n.d.-a) and the Federal Election Commission (FEC) campaign finance database (FEC, n.d.), the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) (Leys, 2021; Scott, 2015), and to a lesser extent, the defense System for Award Management (SAM) database (Krusemark, 2019)—does not capture the essence of the underlying rationale and considerations to lobby. For reasons beyond the

scope of this research, numerous programs exist within the executive branch to help small businesses succeed in the complex federal acquisition system (Esper, 2019; SBA, n.d.-a). But there are no such programs within the legislative branch to help level Congressional access between large companies and small companies. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of small business executives facing the decision to lobby Congress or not to lobby Congress could inform policymakers of ways to make the entire funding process is more accessible.

Problem Statement

There is a problem in the interpretation of rules and policies governing congressional communications specific to corporate lobbying. The problem is that researchers do not know what conditions influence small and midsize defense company executives when defense executives are evaluating participation in congressional decisions that shape subsequent contracts. This problem inhibits fair competition by favoring contract awardees who lobby and separating winners who participate in lobbying from non-winners who do not (McCrain, 2018; Schilling et al., 2017). Acquisition workarounds such as contract bundling through indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity (IDIQ) contracts and use of Other Transaction Authorities (OTAs) exacerbate the concentration and contribute to DoD choosing winners and losers (Blank, 2019). Bloomberg's top 200 federal contractors (BGOV, 2020) virtually all participate in lobbying (U.S. Senate, n.d.-a).

A doubling of acquisition policy provisions between 2016 and 2018 has not changed the lobbying versus non-lobbying dynamic (Schwartz & Peters, 2018). Those

companies that lobby fare better than those that do not (McCrain, 2018). Legislation and regulation govern congressional lobbying (Thomas & LaPira, 2017); however, the disparities in ultimate contract outcomes persist (McCrain, 2018; Ferris et al., 2019). Lobbying reporting indicates only a fraction of all defense companies choose to lobby Congress actively (Nan, 2018). The imbalance, also evident in other democracies, has yet to be thoroughly examined in the United States (Edwards 2019).

Possible factors contributing to this problem include knowledge of corporate executives, lobbying oversight policies, and false perceptions of system integrity shortcomings. None of the literature reviewed examined congressional lobbying from the perspective of defense executives of companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. Further, none of the literature examined the perceived barriers to congressional lobbying specific to those defense contractors and what could improve their access to Congress. My study filled this gap by contributing new knowledge to policymakers' literature when developing and revising corporate congressional lobbying policies and lobbying reforms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the experiences of defense executives of companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion when facing the decision to consider congressional lobbying. The central phenomenon addressed disparate participation levels in congressional lobbying among these small and midsize companies and the competitive disadvantage of those companies.

Interviews with executives explored the experience and conditions and generated data to fill the present gap in understanding corporate congressional lobbying.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of small and midsize defense business executives with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion regarding the barriers to or facilitators of their participation in congressional lobbying?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy. Benet's work draws on the conceptual framework of Johnson's (1996) polarity management theory. Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) research of systemic and structural factors within democracies was helpful as the issues surrounding congressional lobbying in the United States involve the performance of democracy. Benet's work confirms there can be multiple explanations for the underperformance of a democracy and that democracy can be "a solution to the problem of oppression" (p. 31). The disparity of access to Congress, a right derived from the Constitution's First Amendment, is an element of underperformance that manifests in the lobbying decision (National Archives, n.d.). The research will explore whether the condition describing the problem above is oppression. Benet's polarities apply in multiple studies wherein the tensions of the identified poles allowed me to examine democratic phenomena and consider appropriate policies (Hayes, 2019; McDaniel, 2019; Strouble, 2015).

Nature of the Study

The generic qualitative methodology is practical when deriving data from the experiences of multiple individuals who participate in researcher interviews.

Semistructured interviews allowed me to follow an interview guide for general consistency while also allowing flexibility for appropriate probes and follow-up questions. The voices and perspectives of business executives of small defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion informed this research.

As is presented in more detail in Chapter 2, attempts to evaluate lobbying experiences historically relied extensively on secondary data from just a few public databases. Such secondary data only exists for companies with a history of lobbying activity or are presently engaged in lobbying activity. Available secondary data in this research scenario fails to capture those companies that do not lobby. In qualitative or mixed-methods research examples using surveys or case studies, the responses of registered lobbyists most often inform these analyses.

The research relied on elements of the generic qualitative methodology (Caelli et al., 2003). Specifically, the research sought to understand “a phenomenon, process or perspectives” (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 3) while conforming to requirements of generic evaluation: “theoretical positioning, congruence between methodology and methods, establishing rigor, and acknowledgment of my analytic lens” (p. 9). The research sought to identify a basic understanding of a process with which small and midsize business executives attempt to conform or comply. Responsive semistructured interviews with executives of small defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion

allowed me to ask open-ended questions and apply specific interviewing techniques to gather data from my interview subjects regarding their perspectives on the lobbying process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Subsequent thematic coding (Saldaña, 2016) allowed data analysis that led to recommendations for lobbying policy and law changes.

Definitions

It is helpful for the reader to appreciate the lexicon of the federal budget process and some key terms specific to the research. The meaning of terms is critical in appreciating the nuance and implications associated with various interrelationships and processes.

Acquisition: The process of obligating appropriations to obtain federal goods and services.

Appropriation: “Legislation that provides budget authority to allow federal agencies to incur obligations and to make payments out of the Treasury for specified purposes, usually during a specified period of time” (Saturno, 2020, p. 23).

Authorization: “A statutory provision that establishes or continues a federal agency, activity, or program” (Saturno, 2020, p. 23).

Budget request: The consolidated executive branch input to Congress requests funding for a given fiscal year (Agca & Igan, 2017).

Lobbyist: “any individual who is employed or retained by a client for financial or other compensation for services that include more than one lobbying contact, other than an individual whose lobbying activities constitute less than 20 percent of the time

engaged in the services provided by such individual to that client over a 3-month period” (U.S. Senate, n.d.-b, p. 4).

Lobbying Activities: “lobbying contacts and efforts in support of such contacts, including preparation and planning activities, research and other background work that is intended, at the time it is performed, for use in contacts, and coordination with the lobbying activities of others” (U.S. Senate, n.d.-b, p. 4).

Midsized business: A business with revenue between \$41.5 million and \$1 billion.

Set-aside: Programs intended explicitly for award to specific categories of small business owners for which formal criteria are established (Krusemark, 2019).

Small business: The Small Business Administration (SBA) defines a small defense business by revenue below \$41.5 million or employee headcount below 500 and will be explained in more detail below (SBA, n.d.-b.)

Socioeconomic categories: Factors used in determining eligibility for small business set-asides, to include 8(a) business development, HUB zone, women-owned small business, and service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SBA, n.d.-a, p. 1).

Assumptions

All research is subject to underlying assumptions inherent in the research. The researcher can identify, examine, and consider how those assumptions might influence the research process and findings. Three characteristics of assumptions are that they are critical to the research, identifiable by the researcher, and not within the researcher’s control (Burkholder et al., 2016). My qualitative research paradigm conformed to assumptions most often associated with qualitative research. They were ontology,

epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontology refers to our being as humans, what our existence means, and how we experience reality. My research assumed that individuals experience different realities. The polarities of democracy assume that humans must achieve sustainability to survive as a species; democracy can be a means to such ends (Benet, 2013).

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge; how one knows what they observe is reality. I assumed that interview subjects would share observed variations of realities based on their rational understanding, their ability to justify responses, and their established beliefs. Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy accept that knowing is a function of perception and that achieving sustainability requires overcoming oppression. Further, Benet recognized that democracy requires that man must understand the positives we associate with our "egoistic and altruistic" selves (p. 59).

Axiology deals with values evident in the research. My positionality as the researcher forced me to acknowledge that I bring potential bias of my values into the research. I followed Benet's (2013) lead by incorporating specific values of democracy into the research that work together as polarities and discuss them further in later chapters. I looked for evidence of value statements in responses of interview subjects as they could bias perceptions or align with polarities of democracy.

An overarching assumption that underlies the philosophical construct of the research is an expectation that interview subjects will be of an executive-level of business sophistication. Specifically, that interview subjects' business objectives should support their company's competitive positioning in the federal defense marketplace and that they

appreciated where they fit in that marketplace. My qualitative methodology allowed interview responses from multiple vantage points to explore emergent themes for a common truth.

Scope and Delimitations

The results of lobbying efforts unfold through a complex federal funding process that includes budgeting, funding through legislation, acquisition, and contracting (Saturno, 2020). Taken together, this would be an enormous landscape to assess, and each phase presents multiple research opportunities. For this reason, I reduced the scope of the research through three delimitations.

This research focused on congressional lobbying, where larger companies appear to gain purchase positioning for eventual outcomes that ultimately manifest in the executive branch (Open Secrets, n.d.; U.S. Senate, n.d-a.). One delimitation included not addressing the specifics of the acquisition and contracting phases of the underlying funding process. Acquisition and acquisition reform research is rich, dating back to the post-World War II era, and it remains ongoing. Thus, it was beyond the scope of this research.

Additionally, political giving and campaign finance laws are regularly intertwined and sometimes conflated with lobbying activity. The delimitation of political giving allowed the research to focus on the act of lobbying as opposed to the calculation of expressing financial support associated with political giving. Though political giving may ultimately be a factor in the lobbying decision, the details of that activity were beyond the scope of this research.

Lobbying at the firm level, where a lobbyist resides within a corporation, is the third delimitation. If a lobbyist is on staff within a corporation, that company has decided to lobby and is participating. Delimiting ongoing firm-level lobbying allowed the research to focus on the executive decision on whether to lobby Congress and why. Of note, this delimitation applied only to firm-level lobbying and not to contract lobbying. In Chapter 2, I describe the significance of this subtlety.

Limitations

This qualitative research relied on responses to semistructured interviews drawn from a purposive sample of a target population of executives. Some interview subjects had insufficient knowledge of the underlying and complex federal funding processes where lobbying takes place. Two limitations surfaced from this single lack of expertise. First, some interview subjects did not know enough about the process to provide an informed response. Second, some interview subjects may not have provided truthful answers in order to hide their lack of knowledge. I addressed this concern by offering a brief tutorial of the more extensive funding process to help the interview subject focus on the specific area of congressional lobbying.

A second limitation, not uncommon in qualitative research, was my familiarity with the subject matter. As a registered lobbyist with over two decades in the defense lobbying industry, I risked allowing my inherent bias into the research. I mitigated this bias to the maximum extent possible using qualitative research techniques such as member checking, use of a reflexive journal, and peer review of data.

Some scholars might consider my use of the generic qualitative approach less rigorous than other research designs, even to the point of it being a limitation. My research design settled those concerns. Chapter 3 compares alternative designs and confirms why the generic qualitative approach was the best fit for this research.

A final limitation is the inability to generalize the findings of this form of qualitative research, although I describe steps to improve trustworthiness in Chapter 3. The research incorporated an appropriate size target set of interview subjects consistent with Moustakas (1990), Guest et al. (2006), and Patton (2015) from a potentially large pool (Esper, 2019) of eligible subjects. I discuss data saturation (Laverty, 2003) in more detail in Chapter 3; however, confirmation that the target sample reached saturation improved the utility of the findings in other similar groupings of defense executives.

Significance

The research addressed a significant gap in the existing literature specific to the experiences of defense executives of companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion when evaluating the lobbying decision. Lobbying and public perceptions surrounding lobbying continually perplex policymakers. The Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1996, the Honest Leadership in Open Government Act of 2007, the 2011 earmark moratorium, the 2019 Justice Against Corruption on K Street (JACK) Act, and the 2021 Community Funded Projects rebranding of earmarks suggest that Congress will continue to address future lobbying reforms. This research can inform future lobbying policy. Lobbying policy that strengthens citizens' faith and trust in the process of federal funding decisions supports the underlying social problem.

Numerous research studies examine the competitiveness of a defense industrial base serving a monopsonist buyer (Blank, 2019; Quiñones Jr., 2018; Ryu, 2017). Many more studies analyze the effectiveness of programs focused on small business competitiveness in the U.S. defense marketplace (Ryu, 2017; Schilling, 2017; Schilling et al., 2017). No research to date has addressed the executive decision by a business with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion to participate in congressional lobbying. This research may yield data suitable for use by congressional decision-makers evaluating policies that might help small and midsize businesses participate more competitively in the legislative formulation phase of congressional funding.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 1, I have described a problem wherein defense companies' disparate access to the congressional funding process ultimately distorts the competitive landscape and subsequent contract outcomes. This problem originates in the legislative branch yet continues through the executive branch. Further, the social implication is that the activity can negatively influence citizens' trust in their government.

I connected the problem to Benet's (2013) theoretical framework that relies, in part, on Johnson's (1996) conceptual framework. The theoretical linkage set the stage to examine tactical activities (lobbying) through a lens with a higher purpose. This higher purpose may indeed support both good government and further illuminate a connection to a "structural force of oppression" (Benet, 2013, p. 27).

In this chapter I also defined which part of the federal funding process the research addressed. I did so by clarifying assumptions, identifying responsible

delimitations, and highlighting known limitations. By establishing entering assumptions at the outset, I reduced the scope of my research with appropriate delimitations. I defined three delimitations as well as limitations.

Finally, Chapter 1 reinforced the significance of the research. I highlighted the significance of the research by connecting it to democracy's higher purpose of allowing society to reach sustainment and support conditions for citizens' trust in government. The significance of this research gap suggested the research can inform congressional policymakers and help strengthen an essential aspect of democracy's performance, perceived fairness. Chapter 2 describes the extant literature and confirm the gap this research filled.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine perceptions and conditions associated with congressional lobbying as experienced by executives of small defense businesses with revenues between \$5 million and \$ 1 billion. Chapter 2 frames the prior research so the reader can better appreciate what lobbying is, where it takes place, and the advantage a company might recognize through lobbying Congress. Congress and the executive branch have established goals for federal awards to small businesses (Krusemark, 2019). I work the reader backward from the contracting phase, where an opportunity is awarded, to critical preliminary steps that include the movement of a budget request through Congress. Before a contract award, several interrelated functions must unfold in sequence: federal budget preparation, funding recommendations, legislation will authorize and appropriate funding, and finally, an acquisition process culminates in a contract. The research focused specifically on the legislative phase wherein congressional lobbying takes place.

Lobbying research to date relies on secondary quantitative data from a variety of sources, including LDA and FEC databases, SEC filings, defense contract award databases, and surveys of participants in the contracting process. The qualitative research of congressional lobbying addresses registered lobbyists and, to a lesser extent, members of Congress. A detailed literature review of the pre-cursors to a contract award confirmed that, while each procedural aspect is rich in prior research, no literature to date specifically linked contract outcomes to the decisions of small and midsize business executives associated with the choice of congressional lobbying. A close examination of

secondary data supporting the extant research revealed an absence of the defined defense executives' perspectives and perceptions related to congressional lobbying. This research attempted to fill this literature gap by understanding the perceptions of those executives faced with the lobbying decision.

A summary of the literature search strategy will precede descriptions of Johnson's (1996) polarity management theory and Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theory as the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin the research. The literature review explored existing research of the interrelated budgeting, funding, legislation, and contract phases mentioned above to confirm how lobbying appears in the research. Chapter 2 concludes having identified the literature gap this research filled.

Literature Search Strategy

The keyword searches included *lobbying, advocacy, coalition advocacy, political action committee, campaign finance, political communications, political giving, acquisition, acquisition reform, budgeting, legislation, defense appropriations, small business, contracting, and Congress*. Reference materials were sourced from peer-reviewed source documents, federal government websites, or recognized reputable online resources such as the Center for Responsive Politics or Dunn and Bradstreet online databases. I searched the following scholarly databases: Thoreau, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Political Science Complete & Business Source Complete Combined, and Public Administration Abstracts. Though my literature search attempted to remain confined to the prior 5 years (2016–2021), several legislative initiatives specific to congressional

lobbying preceded the 5-year window. They were the subject of relevant research that contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, multiple relevant seminal works pre-date the 5-year window.

Theoretical Foundation

The research relied on Johnson's (1996) polarity management theory as a conceptual framework and Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theory as a theoretical framework. Johnson's polarity management theory identified specific tests of a problem to ascertain the degree to which the problem is ongoing, manageable, or solvable. In particular, unsolvable problems contain poles in varying states of tension. When recognizing the problem's chronic nature, managing the poles allows one to leverage the positive attributes, achieving the best outcomes instead of final solutions (Johnson, 1996).

Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theory uses the scaffolding of Johnson's (1996) polarity management to form a unifying theory of democracy that expands on recognizing the characteristics of polarities. Benet understood democracy as a solution to oppression (Hayes, 2019). Oppression can take multiple forms, and Benet's theoretical model has been inherently flexible in examining oppression across government institutions as diverse as immigration policy (McDaniel, 2019), homogeneity of social capital (Strouble, 2015), and care of military adolescent children (Hayes, 2019). Similar to one of Benet's stated beliefs of oppression, this research focused on whether "structural oppression" (p. 27) is evident in the perceptions of defense executives.

Benet (2013) identified 10 specific poles that are present and must be addressed if democracy is to fulfill its promise. Benet's five polarity pairs include freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. In recognizing the inherent tensions of the interactions of the opposing poles, Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) adaptation of Johnson's (1996) concept was a valuable tool in examining the ongoing challenges of implementing democracy's promise. Such is the case with businesses fully participating in opportunities to shape and seek funding in the federal marketplace. Specifically, Benet's pairs of diversity and equality, and participation and representation, manifest throughout the lobbying dynamic identified in this research.

Conceptual Framework: Johnson's Polarity Management Theory

Polarities are evident when one determines that a problem is unsolvable by resources or a problem has more than one correct answer, each of which is independent of the other (Johnson, 1996). The unsolvable problem is, by definition, ongoing, and therefore is best managed since it does not have a solution (Johnson, 1996). Polarities have two interrelated poles and each pole has both positive and negative attributes associated with the respective pole (Johnson, 1996). The interdependent nature of the two poles allows for the perpetual movement between the positive and negative attributes of each pole (Johnson, 1996). By leveraging the positives, sustainment of the best attributes of each polarity is possible (Benet, 2013).

Johnson's (1996) tests to establish the existence of polarities set the stage for closer examination of forces acting on the poles. Within polarities exist "crusading and

tradition-bearing forces” (p. 53) that seek change or preservation of the status-quo, respectively. Applying Johnson’s conceptual theory to democracy brought into focus two polarities that I explore more fully in the following sections. Benet’s (2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework, described next, was constructed using Johnson’s polarity management as the conceptual framework. As will I will discuss, one cannot use Benet’s polarities of democracy as a theoretical framework without incorporating and using Johnson’s polarity management as the conceptual framework.

Theoretical Framework: Benet’s Polarities of Democracy Theory

Benet (2013) recognized the application of Johnson’s (1996) work by establishing 10 polarities expressed as five pairs in a cohesive theory as a tool that supports “advancing democracy or democratization” (p. 31). Benet distinguished that “while democracy is a solution to oppression” (p. 31), it satisfies Johnson’s (1996) fundamental test for polarity. It is both ongoing and allows for multiple independent solutions (Johnson, 1996).

Oppression can take multiple forms in society, the workplace, and government performance for its citizens. The existence of oppression and the desire to limit its influence is a force that drives the pursuit of democracy (Benet, 2013). By extension, the performance of government institutions directly influences the speed at which democratization can take place (Benet, 2013). Democracy remains an unfinished pursuit, and the “positive and negative attributes” (Benet, 2013, p. 31) of its polarity elements can be managed to sustain the “best of both opposites” (Johnson, 1996, p. xviii) of the respective pairs (Benet, 2013).

Benet's (2013) theoretical framework allows scholars to examine corporate lobbying on a higher plane and in the context of the very performance of democracy, above the influence peddling (Hartung, 2019), political giving (Scott, 2015), campaign finance (Leys, 2021), dark money (Leys, 2021), and acquisition reform (Quiñones Jr., 2018; Schwartz & Peters, 2018). Consistent with Johnson (1996), the actors of government (officeholders and agency or government decision-makers) and corporate defense executives associated with lobbying can assume those roles to varying degrees. Firm-level lobbyists (Kim, 2017), association and coalition advocates (Hojnacki et al., 2015), and revolving door lobbyists (Chausow, 2015; Strickland, 2020) each assume either role depending on the policy or programmatic condition under legislative consideration. Incumbent officeholders and incumbent contract holders of defense industry suppliers qualify as tradition bearers with limited interest in pursuing change from the status quo. Retaining power, influence, or competitive advantage motivates negative polarities in the context of democracy as incumbents preserve their position.

Researchers have applied Benet's theory to support the effective management of polarities for positive outcomes. McDaniel (2019) explored attributes of participatory democracy using both the participation-and-representation and equality-and-diversity polarities. Applying Benet's (2013) theory, McDaniel demonstrated conditions where management of a polarities' positives while minimizing their negatives could allow the best conditions supportive of "just, healthy, and sustainable communities" (p. 103). Strouble (2015) applied polarities of democracy to a study of social capital in homogenous Black communities in the United States. Strouble similarly concluded that

management of identifiable positives and negatives of the participation-and-representation and equality-and-diversity polarities were possible.

In the performance of the democratic institutions, the current study linked what might otherwise appear uncommon connections, the defense industry, and government through lobbying. The act of lobbying demonstrates one method of the movement of ideas and energy through the instruments of government. I explored two of Benet's (2013) five polarity pairs in this research: equality-and-diversity and participation-and-representation.

Equality and Diversity

The polarity of equality and diversity reflects both upside positives and downside negatives associated with Johnson's (1996) test for polarity. Benet (2006) concluded that polarity helps balance individuals' "altruistic side" and our "selfish side" (p. 197). Framers of the U.S. Constitution (National Archives, n.d.), drawing from the Magna Carta (Porter, 2015), foresaw the need for an equal balance of individual liberty and equality. Benet (2013) contended that failure to manage this polarity leads to "severe discrimination" (p. 181). Applying Johnson's polarity tests, Benet concluded that the test often suggests rather than proves this particular polarity. However, the polarity is helpful when exploring equality among government constituencies, the people that government serves.

Though Benet's (2013) contention highlights the negatives of race and gender discrimination, he further invoked Hartman (2002) when identifying that "corporate personhood results in a diversity of power that destroys equality" (p. 188). There are

equally corrosive implications of corporate personhood ascribed in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010; Borisov et al., 2016). Although the case evaluated campaign finance issues, its lobbying implications will become apparent in the following discussion (Borisov et al., 2016).

Participation and Representation

Benet (2012) highlighted the participation and representation polarity as unique among the pairs as it reflects both “meaning and function” (p. 241). The function of the pair is the positive attribute reflected through the act of representation; however, the choice inherent in a constituent’s chosen degree of participation invokes a regenerative quality that portends unique meaning (Benet, 2012). The degree of participation within the context of the distance of federal representation lends Benet’s theory’s particular utility in the examination of lobbying. The act of lobbying is a conscious choice, and the degree to which one participates can vary considerably based on the decisions at hand.

The framers of the constitution intended that citizens not merely participate in a vote but also participate in determining the issues and policies that would be subject to vote (Christiano, 2006). The regenerative attribute Benet (2012) highlighted recognizes that not all problems are equal in the eyes of citizens, and some may generate considerable interest while others, very little interest. The ability to choose to participate is particularly relevant to democracy.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The literature review identifies how the evolution of lobbying capitalized on the flexibility inherent in the constitution (Heniff, 2001). The First Amendment of the U.S.

Constitution affords citizens the “right of redress of grievance” (National Archives, n.d.). The amendment sets no specific standard as to what might qualify as a grievance, yet the courts have upheld recognition of lobbying as constitutionally-protected communication. The *United States v. Rumley* (1953) and the *United States v. Harriss* (1954) reflect landmark jurisprudence affirming the First Amendment protection of lobbying activities (Capps, 2005; Myers, 2018).

The Budget Cycle

Contrary to some public perception, congressional lobbying does not equate to a Member of Congress directing funds to a company. In the Lobbying Reform section, I discuss the impact of the 2010 earmark moratorium. First, to fully comprehend the potential value of congressional lobbying to businesses, an understanding of several interrelated processes of the budget cycle is explained. The budget cycle is grounded in the 1990 Budget Enforcement Act (Heniff, 2001). It aligns with budgeting, funding, acquisition, and contracting activities that all precede the actual outlay of federal defense spending (Saturno, 2020). The budget cycle can move in fits and starts and is often subject to political drama, as Meyers (2014) described, through various “triggers, commissions, and cliffs” (p. 1) that ultimately string short-term outcomes together to reflect an overall sequence. A budget request is formulated by the executive before arriving in Congress (Saturno, 2020) for review and legislative “markup” (p. 17). Upon passage, the marked-up budget request takes the form of law as an authorization (policy) or appropriations (spending) bill that the executive branch agencies then execute.

The sequential relationship of each phase forms a “process” that is subject to “procedural and contextual factors” (Heniff, 2001, p. 3). While Congressional lobbying takes place in Congress, the impact of lobbying is realized in the executive branch when legislative outcomes govern agency-level policy and spending for a given fiscal year (Nelson, 2013). In the next section I describe ways lobbying takes place as an overview of the acquisition and contracting processes that obligate federal dollars. A common understanding of corporate lobbying’s evolution is helpful before clarifying details of this process.

Evolution of Corporate Lobbying

Federal lobbying has evolved since the earliest framing of the Constitution of the United States. In Federalist 10, Madison identified factions with “a common interest” (LOC, n.d.) and could comprise minorities or majorities. Factions manifest as interests in the context of government. Corporate lobbying in the United States traces to the 1920s bromide of President Coolidge that “the business of America is business”, and trade associations emerged as entities to look after the common interests of industries (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Eisenhower’s concern for the emergence of a military-industrial complex and the associated “iron triangle” foreshadowed the evolving inter-relationships of industry interests, committees of Congress, and the agencies of the executive branch (Adams et al., 1981; Baumgartner et al., 2009; Hartung, 2019; Walter, 2019). The phenomenon of the military-industrial complex is not unique to the United States and exists in other industrialized democracies and the European Union (Rufanges, 2016).

The lobbying dynamic includes communication among participants in the legislative process in support of people's interests (Milbrath, 1963; McGrath, 2018). Milbrath drew data from interviews and surveys with lobbyists and members of Congress; this concept was groundbreaking in its day. Yet over 50 years later, the findings that lobbying allows a necessary form of communication to take place during the legislative process remains relevant (Baumgartner et al., 2014; McGrath, 2018). The strength and breadth of surveys and findings in Milbrath's work as a seminal effort have been subsequently confirmed (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; McGrath, 2018).

A tripling of the size of the Federal Register (where regulations would be available to the public) in the 1970s coincided with a more than doubling growth in federal agency budgets reflecting a new era of government regulation that now directly and negatively impacted business (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Previously satellite outposts from headquarters, corporate offices in Washington, DC, began shifting focus to offensive and defensive policy positioning. Through the 1970s, the number of corporate lobbyists grew over 10-fold from hundreds to thousands. The 1981 Economic Tax Recovery Act and 1986 Tax Reform Act proved watershed moments in corporate lobbying as corporate interests conveyed considerable influence in shaping the final legislation (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Birnbaum & Murray, 1988).

During a simultaneous economic expansion and 1994 Republican assumption of control of the House of Representatives, the corporate expansion into politics exploded after 40 years of Democratic control. Relationships between politicians and lobbyists solidified with House Speaker Tom Delay's K Street Project that formalized the

revolving door as one departed government and moved into the industry (Baumgartner et al., 2009). The potential conflicts of interest were evident, and the 1995 LDA would require lobbyists to register and reveal the existence of representational relationships identifying who was representing what interests (Chausow, 2015). The number of lobbyists in Washington, DC, grew to over 10,000 by 1998 (Open Secrets, n.d.-b.). Lobbying policy would become a target of legislative reform.

The growth of registered lobbyists, as tracked by the Secretary of the Senate and Clerk of the House, is publicly identifiable in the LDA database and reported by the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), recently merged with Open Secrets (Open Secrets, n.d.-a). Data from the LDA database appears in most quantitative and mixed-methods research of lobbying. The LDA database reflects an underreport in large part due to its reliance on self-reporting of lobbying activity by registered lobbyists (Lapira, 2014; Thomas and LaPira, 2017). “Unregistered policy advocates” those who lobby yet fail to report, are “shadow lobbyists” (Thomas and LaPira, 2017, p. 201). Unregistered lobbyists can manifest alongside registered lobbyists as “firm-level” corporate executives or lobbyists for hire (Kim, 2017; McCrain, 2018). Hojnacki et al. (2005), Baumgartner et al. (2009), Kim (2017), Thomas and Lapira (2017) and LaPira (2014) are among the more informative, comprehensive, and often-cited lobbying research and examples that all rely on the self-reported LDA data. Researchers acknowledge the flaws of the LDA database and the risks of its influence on quantitative findings, yet it is the best available repository of lobbying activity.

The increase in the overall number of registered lobbyists can skew perceptions of what is happening. Specific to the defense industry, the CRP identifies that in 2020, there were just 200 defense companies to report lobbying activity (Open Secrets, n.d.-c.). Of the 200, the top 5 lobbying spenders spent 50% of the defense lobbying dollars and the top 15 accounted for 75% of the defense lobbying dollars (Open Secrets, n.d.-c.). The existence of a disconnect between the 200 that do lobby and the potentially million-plus that do not lobby presents what an attorney might describe as *prima facie* evidence of an issue (Esper, 2019). The numbers alone suggest that something is going on within the lobbying decision regime. There was no scholarly research that examines perceptions that influence decision-making by defense executives of the million-plus companies that do not participate in Congressional lobbying.

Legislative Reforms of Lobbying

The 1995 LDA proved inadequate to curb corruption at the intersection of lobbying and campaign finance. Between 1996 and 2007, several members of Congress fell victim to investigations conducted by the US Justice Department, Congressional ethics committees, and watchdog groups such as Citizens for Responsible Ethics in Washington. High-profile lobbyist Jack Abramoff drew unwanted attention to lobbying by charging exorbitant fees and directly linking political policy and appropriations outcomes associated with lobbying to campaign contributions that preceded the outcome. Bribes, gifts, and “earmarks” (Thurber, 2011, p. 358) reached a public crescendo and would be subject to the 2007 Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, known as

HLOGA (Ban et al., 2019; Chausow, 2015; Degnan, 2006; Kuvvet, 2016; Thurber, 2011; White, 2015).

HLOGA attempted to slow the revolving door of government officials of both the legislative and executive branches from leaving office to move directly into lucrative positions to lobby (Chausow, 2015). Further, HLOGA closed the “Daschle Loophole” whereby former members of Congress would effectively lobby but fail to register the relationships and associated remuneration (Thomas and Lapira, 2017).

President Obama rode to reelection in 2008, in part, on a platform of stemming lobbying (Thurber, 2011). By January 2009, CRP reported over 14,000 registered federal lobbyists (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Open Secrets, n.d-c.). President Obama implemented multiple executive reforms and executive orders between 2009-2010 with the express purpose to strengthen lobbying disclosure, slow or stop the revolving door at senior levels, and reinvigorate trust and confidence in government (Thurber, 2011).

An earmark moratorium was a further response to a changing political landscape in 2011 as fiscal conservatives reclaimed control of the House (Strand and Lang, 2018). This action removed Congress’ ability to direct appropriations to state-and district-level projects of for-profit entities expressly. Lobbyists who specialized in earmarks and appropriations issues would feel the moratorium’s effect, as would members of Congress who could no longer exchange votes and favors so readily.

The Justice Against Corruption on K Street Act of 2018, the JACK Act, became law in 2019 and specifically requires registered lobbyists to disclose any prior convictions for various criminal acts (Jack Act, 2019). The JACK Act responds to

notorious lobbyist Jack Abramoff's attempts to return to lobbying after completion of a six-year jail term for prior criminal lobbying offenses. The two-page bill fuels a public perception of widespread corruption in lobbying. The U.S. Government Accountability Office annually examines lobbying reporting compliance and consistently reports high levels of conformance to the lobbying reporting regime (GAO, 2021).

A threat of budget sequestration, amounting to dramatic cuts to federal spending after a failed budget negotiation, coupled with the earmark moratorium, resulted in a reduction in federal lobbyists from 2009-2020. However, total lobbying spending has steadily held above \$3 billion for all but one of those same years. (Open Secrets, n.d.-b.). In 2021, with a unified government controlled by Democrats, Congress restored community project funding with strict restrictions but sustained the ban on earmarks intended for for-profit entities (HAC, 2021).

Advocacy and Legislation: How Lobbying Achieves an Effect

The decisions leading to federal contract opportunities align with the budget cycle: budget formulation by the executive; authorization and appropriation by Congress; and, acquisition and contracting within the executive branch (Saturno, 2020). Acquisition and contracting together are known colloquially as the execution phase of the budget cycle (Saturno, 2020). Congressional lobbying generally occurs as funding levels are first authorized and then appropriated by Congress (Drutman, 2015). Ehrlich's (2011) theory of access points identifies that the number of points of access to procedural decision-makers correlates with the degree of lobbying success an entity might attain. Actions that occur during Congressional committee review can shape and "influence final outcomes"

of programmatic decisions (Saturno, 2020). The programmatic decisions affirmed in legislation are subject to the acquisition rules governing contracts within government agencies such as DoD (Cox et al., 2014).

The influence of Congressional decisions during the authorizations and appropriations phase of the budget cycle was the focus of this study. The return on lobbying investment exceeds 200% for participating companies (Agca and Igan, 2015). Specific to defense, companies that lobby experience larger contract sizes than companies that do not lobby (Agca and Igan, 2015). Within this part of the budget cycle, three specific forms of lobbying may influence outcomes: firm-level; contracted support; and, coalition (Chausow, 2015; Kim, 2017; Ridge et al. 2017; Weible et al., 2011). The decision of which method is most appropriate will typically depend on how general or specific the issue at hand, company size and resources, and sensitivity of the issue (Chausow, 2015; de Figueiredo & Kim, 2004; Kerr et al., 2011). Each of these decision drivers presumes sufficient awareness of the lobbying opportunity by corporate executives and a willingness to participate.

“Access, policy expertise, and procedural knowledge” contribute directly to lobbying success when resourced and aligned to a legislative outcome (Chausow, 2015, p. 3). Despite the proliferation of lobbyists over the past five decades, “few firms lobby,” yet, those engaged in lobbying have a more than 90% likelihood of continuing to lobby in the next year (Kerr et al., 2011).

Across government, coalitions with shared interests may benefit from working together to support a legislative outcome (Kim 2017). Coalition lobbying occurs across

all government sectors and takes place in other democratic systems worldwide, including the European Union, Australia, India, and South Africa (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Edwards, 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016). Government levels of attention often outweigh budget expenditures in motivating coalition lobbying (Hojnacki et al., 2005).

Associations, working in coordination as a coalition between 2009 and 2011 budget negotiations, effectively deferred and mitigated the fullest impact of sequestration in the defense industry (Li, 2020).

The defense industry is among “the more wealthy and sophisticated interests” to seek the expertise of lobbyists (McGuire, 2000, p.3). Because the defense budget reflects the largest portion of the discretionary federal budget subject to the review and deliberation of an annual authorization and appropriations process, it represents a set of conditions wherein lobbying can thrive. Despite the defense budget representing the largest portion of the discretionary federal budget, the defense industry does not rank among the ten most active industries that lobby (Open Secrets, n.d.-b.).

The fundamental shortcoming of the lobbying relationships’ transparency is the LDA law’s burden of “self-report” placed on lobbyists (Thomas & Lapira, 2017, p.212). Lobbying reform efforts fail to embrace the aforementioned iron triangle’s differing allegiances fully (Parker, 2008). Congress is accountable to the public, corporations to shareholders, advocacy groups to their membership; and, lobbyists to their clients. The secondary data of the LDA database only captures a portion of these conflicted responsibilities, the relationship of lobbyists to a company’s issue, and vice versa. The

objectives of lobbying are clear, to influence legislative outcomes of policy and funding. Identifying the direct beneficiaries of lobbying requires additional understanding.

Following Money in Lobbying

Lobbying to generate influence is inextricably intertwined with the act of political giving, the contribution of money to campaigns of candidates running for elected office (Leys, 2021). Considerable quantitative research of political giving activity, and by extension its association with lobbying outcomes, draws primarily on secondary data maintained by the FEC (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Hojnacki et al., 2005; Leys, 2021; Scott, 2015). The FEC records all contributions to federal campaigns above \$200, along with all transfers of funds between various political action committees (FEC, n.d.). A political action committee is a legal construct that allows specific financial contributions to be pooled and centrally managed by an entity other than a corporation or labor organization (FEC, n.d.).

“Political spending is a form of protected free speech” as affirmed in *Citizens United vs. FEC* (2010; Fishman, 2012, p. 141). Recognizing the connection of political giving to lobbying, a secondary outcome beyond the initial legislative victory is the ensuing contract (Hartung, 2019). Li (2020), relying on secondary data aggregated by industry to examine the effect of the sequestration on defense lobbying activity, confirmed a linkage and “interdependence” (p. 143) between lobbying and contract outcomes.

Leys (2021) used campaign contributions from the defense industry, derived from the secondary SEC filing data to document the dependence of some politicians on

defense industry contributions. This finding suggested that the degree of dependence should inform lobbying transparency laws, not the dollar amount. Scott (2015) used SEC filings to trace otherwise unreported political expenses not captured by the LDA or FEC filing protocols in documenting influence in federal prison policies and contract outcomes. Researchers acknowledge the imperfection of the data.

Dusso et al. (2019) cross-reference secondary data from LDA and FEC databases when comparing congressional lobbying with executive branch lobbying, identify notable contract outcomes associated with each form of lobbying, and confirm a relationship to political giving. Rufanges (2016) and Edwards (2019) confirm that political contributions' influence on legislative outcomes is not limited to the United States and may be found in the European Union and Australia, respectively. Ferris et al. (2019) use secondary FEC and DoD contract data to confirm linkages of political connectedness with contract outcomes, specifically identifying benefits of political giving to members before and after the members' assumption of an influential committee position.

Acquisition and Contracting—The Execution Phase in the Executive Branch

The DoD oversees defense acquisitions through a highly complex system of programs and milestones funded due to the budget and legislative decisions that preceded the acquisition phase (GAO, 2020). Extensive research documents decades of amendments and reforms to this complex process (Quiñones, 2018; Schwartz and Peters, 2018). In these executive branch acquisition activities, many of the benefits of Congressional lobbying are ultimately realized (Dusso et al., 2019). A program funded through authorization and appropriation is subject to various acquisition and contract

mechanisms (U.S. GAO, 2020; Johnson, 2015). The contract reflects the final step in the execution phase of the budget cycle first described at the beginning of Chapter 2. Porter's (2008) five-force confirms the defense industry is "moderately attractive" when evaluating growth and profitability (Quiñones, 2018, p.141).

In the fiscal year 2021, the defense budget appropriated by Congress exceeded \$700 billion (Consolidated Appropriations Act PL 116-260, 2020). Over one-third of defense acquisition dollars flow to ten contractors, and over half are awarded to just 40 contractors (Cox et al., 2014). Annually, lists of top-performing contractors reflect a similar concentration of discretionary dollars. There is little movement in the top 10, and the top 5 have been mostly static for the past five years (2016-2021) (Open Secrets, n.d.-b.; BGOV 2020).

Contractions of the industrial base following events such as sequestration in 2011 contribute to industrial consolidation (Walter, 2019). The post-sequester consolidation aligned with a downturn in defense spending, perceptions of a repeat of the defense consolidation of the 1990s, and an increased emphasis on contract costs with the introduction of Better Buying Power (BBP) (Krusemark, 2019; Pennock, 2017; Schilling et al., 2017). BBP has evolved through multiple iterations, 1.0 through 3.0, within DoD from 2010 through 2015 (Krusemark, 2019). Some of BBP's unintended consequences have been the negative influence of bundled contract mechanisms such as indefinite delivery indefinite quantity (IDIQ) that bundle multiple smaller contracts into one contract (Johnson, 2015). Further, the use of other transaction authorities (OTAs), a means of streamlining a cumbersome acquisition process, grew to nearly \$8 billion in

value in 2019 (BGOV, 2020). Research of IDIQs and OTAs, intended to improve contracting efficiency, is limited, in part, due to their relatively new usage.

Layden (2012) explored the implementation of BBP initiatives deriving a quantitative data set from surveys of acquisition executives leading Army program offices. The research confirmed the complexity of implementing acquisition process improvements across various programs and that “guidance, training, and tools” (p.61) must evolve for BBP to achieve its potential. The focus on the executive branch precluded this research from considering lobbying factors impinging on the success of BBP.

Each iteration of BBP has involved extensive legislative, agency-level policy initiatives, and substantial reorganization within DoD. Research to date has focused on BBP’s implementation, an executive branch function. It used qualitative methods focused on either acquisition professionals within DoD or companies that contract with DoD (Layden, 2012; Quiñones, 2018; Schwartz and Peters, 2018).

Quiñones (2018) used a mixed-methods design to examine the impact of BBP in the context of a “monopsonist buyer” (p.2). As a sole buyer and user of goods and services, the federal government qualifies the buying environment as a monopsony. Interviews with business executives of large and small companies evaluated perceptions of BBP implementation again focused on executive branch activities (Quiñones, 2018).

Small and Midsize Business

The SBA defines a small business in two primary ways in its table of size standards most notably by the size of a company’s revenue and workforce. According to

their North American Industry Classification System (NAICS, pronounced “nakes”), companies are further categorized. It is possible to classify as a small business in one sector of industry and not another. There are multiple NAICS codes associated with defense procurement. The highest revenue qualifying as a small business for NAICS codes associated with aerospace and defense is \$41.5 million. The employee ceiling to still qualify as a small business is 500 employees. (SBA, n.d.-b.)

Small businesses are further identifiable by “socio-economic” factors, including service-disabled veteran-owned, woman-owned, HUB Zone, and disadvantaged 8(a) (SBA, n.d.-a.). A percentage of contracts flow specifically to companies with socio-economic credentialing in the form of small business set-asides (Taft, 2019). The number of small businesses at this lowest end of the size scale is uncertain, primarily because there is no easy way to identify companies not included in the System of Award Management (SAM) database that might hope to bring a new capability into the defense marketplace.

Large defense companies are followed and reported through national security press, defense media outlets, and public financial reporting. The top 200 winners of federal contracts across all of government (not just defense) are tracked annually by Bloomberg Government (BGOV, 2020). Number 200 on the list, with \$6.7 billion in total revenues, McDermott International was awarded \$314 million in federal contracts in 2019, with all but \$25 million of that from DoD. All companies in the Bloomberg Government 200 Federal Industry Leaders of 2019 are large businesses with revenues above \$1 billion, and nearly all engage in lobbying (BGOV, 2020; U.S. Senate, n.d.-a.)

Between the very large companies and the small businesses, as defined by the SBA, sit the midsized companies with revenues between \$41.5 million and \$1 billion. In the defense industry, these midsize companies are both prime and sub-prime contractors, and the exact number in this category is unclear (Esper, 2019). The defense industry vernacular identifies mid-tier to identify those in the middle (Blank, 2018).

While many businesses contracting with the federal government rely solely on government work, not all do. In the McDermott case above, the \$314 million reflects less than 5% of their annual revenues for 2019. The top defense contract winners report annual revenues above \$27 billion (Open Secrets, n.d.-c). The 10th top winner reports revenues above \$6 billion (Open Secrets n.d.-c.). Except for corporations established in support of national laboratories and legal entities associated with a few universities, all companies in the top 40 report revenues above \$1.6 billion. They are large businesses (BGOV, 2020).

The concentration of contract awards is mitigated to a degree by efforts to distribute contracts to small businesses (Cox et al., 2014). Congress legislating that 23% of all federal contracts go to small business set-asides offers one means of mitigating the consolidation of winners among large businesses (Richwine, 2017). It took years to reach the congressionally-established goal, and DoD now tracks and reports this statistic throughout its many agencies (DoD, n.d.).

The literature is rich with examples examining the challenges and barriers small businesses must overcome and support for myriad incentive programs intended to level the competition. The most comprehensive examination of small business barriers specific

to DoD is offered by Schilling et al. (2017). Using quantitative analysis of a survey sampling of over 681 small businesses selling to DoD, Schilling et al. confirmed the presence of barriers to entry evident in the execution phase (acquisition and contracting). Congress values small businesses by recognizing its value in innovation, technology development, and economic expansion, yet contracting goals intended to foster fair competition and access to federal opportunities only address the last part of the entire budget cycle (U.S. House, n.d.; Saturno, 2020).

Taft (2019) used a qualitative case study to examine the small business competitive landscape within the research and development domain by interviewing small business executives. Taft confirmed effective strategies employed by some small businesses in targeted situations that assured competition with large companies. Programs such as set-asides and small business innovation and research contracts made a positive impact on the competitive landscape however, as described earlier in this section only impact the smallest of companies (below \$41.5 million in revenue or below 500 employees) (Quiñones, 2018; Taft, 2019).

Over 50% of small businesses surveyed perceive at least 19 barriers manifest in the acquisition and contracting environment (Schilling et al., (2017). Some barriers were surmountable with a combination of size and experience, yet the negative perceptions suggested an opportunity to expand research. Schilling et al. (2017) suggested the inclusion of midsize businesses in future research to confirm similar perceptions.

Johnson (2015) used semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling to examine perceptions of 20 women-owned small business owners. Johnson's research

confirmed multiple barriers to small businesses despite the high-visibility set-aside programs, confirming prior research that nearly 80% of DoD contracts flow to large companies. As previously described, women-owned small businesses are one of four socio-economic categories eligible for a percentage of set-asides.

The common thread in the small business and acquisition literature is its focus on the executive branch, specifically the acquisition and contracting portions of the execution phase. While many of the acquisition reforms have come about through legislative policy, the research limits its connection to Congress to those acquisition policies or hearings and debates about those policies (Blank, 2019; Layden, 2012; U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2020). As identified earlier in Chapter 2, this execution phase follows an extensive congressional review process where lobbying influenced the markup of the authorizations and appropriations bills that fund execution. It is the decision by defense companies to pursue these tactical actions of congressional lobbying that merited further discovery.

The Process in Context

Dusso et al. (2019), in drawing on secondary data from FEC, LDA, and SAM databases, confirm the difficulty in proving influence and contract outcomes with secondary data alone. When comparing traditional congressional lobbying to lobbying of agency officials within the executive branch, the linkage of corporations to individual decision-makers is even more difficult to connect in the executive branch (Dusso et al., 2019). This difficulty is partly because FEC data connects a political contribution from a donor to a candidate, while LDA data connects lobbyists to an issue. In the current

reporting regimes of FEC, LDA, and contract award data, the only way to fully understand the connections is to speak directly with the business decision-makers involved.

The most comprehensive review of lobbying activity that included interviews with lobbyists pre-dates significant lobbying reforms described in the lobbying reforms section that manifest as the 2007 HLOGA, Presidential executive orders, and earmark reforms (Leech et al, 2005). Further, the lobbyists sampled were professionally resident in Washington, DC, as either in-house or contract lobbyists of companies with an established presence. Presumably, the companies for whom those lobbyists worked had already committed to participate in lobbying. (Baumgartner et al., 2014; Hojnacki et al., 2015; Leech et al., 2005). There was a gap in the research specific to defense executives' perceptions of congressional lobbying by defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. This research supplemented the literature and address this critical gap.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 2, I explored prior research in lobbying and took measures to examine lobbying across the spectrum of the budget cycle. In so doing, I associated lobbying with aspects of democracy's performance and the interrelationships of Congress and industry. Identifying the theoretical scaffolding of Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy set the stage to consider how lobbying impacted government performance and the competitive landscape. My literature review exposed a gap in the research specific to

the perceptions of defense business executives who faced the decision to lobby. In

Chapter 3, I outline a research methodology and plan that potentially addressed this gap.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the perspectives and perceptions of executives of defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion who face the decision to lobby Congress. Chapter 2 confirmed the need to move beyond secondary data and the need for generating primary data from defense executives facing the lobbying choice. My research used a generic qualitative design (Caelli et al., 2003) that I outline throughout Chapter 3. I explain my choice of research design, my role as the researcher, and details of the methodology. All qualitative research faces issues of trustworthiness and I address trustworthiness in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Burkholder, 2016). Chapter 3 concludes with a review of ethical considerations, a summary of the research method, and set the stage for data analysis in Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The design of the study centered on responsive interviews with executives of small defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. The research design supported my pursuit of answers to the research question: What are the perceptions of small defense business executives with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion regarding the barriers to or facilitators of their participation in congressional lobbying? The generic qualitative methodology allowed the research to focus on the study topic without a theoretical or ontological tradition (Patton, 2015). The generic qualitative methodology was especially useful to discover perspectives (Merriam, 1997) and understand participants' experience (Caelli et al., 2003).

The design allowed for collecting rich data and unique perspectives from individuals who personally experienced the decision to lobby Congress, addressing a gap in previous research relying on secondary data. Responsive interviews included open-ended questions and applied specific interviewing techniques to elicit data from my interview subjects. Touring, probing, and follow-up are practical interview techniques for researchers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Though surveys might have allowed canvassing a broader sample of executives, surveys would not allow follow up responses in the moment.

A case study approach could have worked as a qualitative method to address defense executives and yield some data specific to the research question. But the bounding required of a case study would have limited my research data collection. I rejected the case study approach as too narrow in scope to achieve the breadth of findings I believed available from this population. I believed the population of defense executives within the parameters of defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion would allow a more robust examination of the lobbying phenomenon. Because the generic qualitative approach could have appeared less rigorous than other qualitative methods, I addressed four specific issues of credibility (Caelli et al., 2004), which I address as I discuss the role of the researcher and methodology. Specifically, “the theoretical positioning of the researcher; the congruence between methodology and methods; the strategies to establish rigor; and the analytic lens through which the data are examined” allow the consumer of the research to evaluate the scholarly nature of the research (Caelli et al., 2004, p. 9).

Role of the Researcher

In this research I was an observer–participant. I used an interview guide in Appendix A in which thoughtful interview questions focused on the participants’ experiences while allowing a “dialogue” (Groeneweld, 2004, p. 47) to evolve (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Though the interview guide assured a general consistency of interview structure across multiple interview subjects, my lobbying expertise further guided follow-up questions based on individual responses. The key to the research was allowing for responses that described conditions the participants experience, letting their individual realities contribute to my eventual understanding of a common truth.

As a defense lobbyist myself, I brought perspectives and bias to the research that could contaminate my findings if not properly addressed. I have worked for over two decades in several positions associated with federal budget outcomes. Previously, while an active-duty Naval officer, I served as a congressional fellow in the office of the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I subsequently worked as a liaison of the U.S. Navy to the House and Senate Appropriations and Armed Services Committees. Upon retiring from the U.S. Navy, I worked as a corporate lobbyist for 5 years guiding legislative strategy for a major international defense company. More recently, I ran my own lobbying company supporting companies of all sizes with their Washington, DC representational needs. It is my broad exposure to companies that vary in annual revenues, from zero at start-up through multi-billions of dollars at maturity, from where my underlying interest in the research stemmed. Thus, I acknowledge my theoretical

positioning and consider the implications of this bias (see Caelli et al., 2003). Data drawn from the interview responses of defense executives focused this research on perceptions and perspectives, acknowledged my positioning as the researcher, and demonstrated congruence of methodology and method (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 11).

Maintaining a reflexivity journal also allowed me to periodically examine how I was experiencing the research. Descriptive field notes of observations and reflections complemented the audio transcripts that documented the actual responses of interview subjects (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview guide, prepared in advance with the express purpose of generating data supportive of the research question, provided a baseline to which I aligned my research experiences.

Despite potential bias, my professional background complemented the use of a purposive and snowball sampling strategy where I applied judgment of potential interviews subjects' suitability to participate. I had a prior personal relationship with three interview subjects, owing to the challenges of recruitment described in Chapter 4. But I clearly articulated these few relationships in the Data Analysis section. Interview subjects were assigned a code such as P-1, P-2, etc., and were not identifiable by name after the initial interview. I used peer review and debriefing, as well as member checking of data, to address any concerns of researcher-interview subject familiarity. I also followed recommendations to look at the data in total before breaking it down for further analysis (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Industry executives of small defense companies, identified as having annual revenues between \$5 and \$1 billion, are typically well positioned to provide the desired research data. Specifically, executives with oversight of the company's government sales relationship had some level of understanding of the federal sales environment, such as budgeting and funding. I knew from experience that some defense executives in such positions did not have adequate understanding, and I expected that shortcoming to substantially inform certain perceptions and perspectives. In short, these executives were living the experience of research interest and may or may not be fully aware of the federal sales environment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Often, defense industry executives were identifiable through public means and accessible through their membership in multiple industry associations with public memberships, LinkedIn group networks, and prime vendor supply chains.

The target population for my research was a subset of defense executives who are in a position to evaluate the merits of congressional lobbying for their companies. Revenue size was confirmable via the Dunn and Bradstreet Number database (Dunn and Bradstreet, n.d.) that identifies relevant characteristics of all companies, as well as through the SAM database that tracks and reports defense contractors and contracts. Confirmation of a company's lobbying participation was possible through the LDA report database (U.S. Senate, n.d.-a).

Though the SAM database was an excellent starting point for recruitment, cross-referencing company names with executive profiles helped me further identify executives with appropriate responsibility for the lobbying decision in their company. Such cross-referencing was done via LinkedIn before communicating by email. The effort to cross-reference before extending an email solicitation should have improved the response rate of solicitations, but this was not the case, which I describe more in Chapter 4. I used IRB-approved participant solicitation emails after confirming a defense executives' corporate position. Appendix B contains a sample draft email solicitation.

When the participant recruitment effort using SAM database failed to produce sufficient recruits, I was prepared to extend the recruitment effort using LinkedIn. Although the potential target population numbered in the millions per Esper (2019), the identifiable population via associations and social media channels I could access was likely in the thousands. Due to the sheer volume of potential participants, I targeted my population and applied a sampling strategy to both recruitment options that I further discuss.

Purposeful sampling allowed me to apply my subject matter experience to assure a mix of participants while also adding credibility to the research (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purposive nature of the sample ensured a combination of small and midsize businesses that both participate and do not participate in congressional lobbying. The use of snowball sampling helped keep the data collection phase to a reasonable schedule of no more than a few months. Snowball sampling allowed me to ask participants to suggest additional recruits and thereby eliminate cold outreach for

subsequent recruits. I mitigated selection bias by using a peer-review strategy and regular consultation with my committee chair (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Qualitative researchers recognize there comes the point of diminishing returns of data collection via interviews. Saturation is the point at which new findings cease to emerge (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). Saturation is somewhat elastic, but that for non-probabilistic qualitative sampling, 12 interviews are a reliable number wherein I should reach saturation in the interview responses (Guest et al.; 2006). If I had not achieved saturation at 12 interviews, I was prepared to expand the interviews using the same target population narrowing technique until saturation. I describe the forms in which saturation is recognized in the data analysis (Caelli et al., 2003).

Instrumentation

Responsive interviews were the data collection instrument for this research. The conversational style of a responsive interview was built on main questions that allowed follow up questions, while probes were interspersed by the researcher to guide the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The complete interview guide is in Appendix A and includes my researcher prompts and a scripted beginning and end. The script demonstrated my preparation, professionalism, and respect for the interviewee. Elements of the script included general housekeeping such as allotted time, offering water, assuring interviewee comfort, and confirming general agreement on how the interview would proceed. Further, the script confirmed the signature of the IRB-approved consent form, my intent to record, and that the interview subject had the opportunity to review and edit the transcript. The questions with potential prompts kept my focus on the interviewees

consistently across interviews yet prepared for eventualities and opportunities to probe (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interview questions were designed with an intent to gauge subjects' level of process knowledge, derive specific perspectives and perceptions, and solicit thoughts on where the process was seen as working or not working well.

During my underlying coursework, I strengthened my interview skills and potentially improved my internal validity by reducing common errors of a first-time interviewer (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I rehearsed the interview protocol with my interview guide and was prepared to refocus the interview subjects should the responses have strayed too far from the research question. I did not formally pilot the interview guide prior to the commencement of data collection.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

My outreach to potential interview subjects conformed to IRB protocols, and did not commence prior to IRB approval. Interviews took place via Zoom video conferencing after review and confirmation of a consent form. A sample recruitment email is at Appendix B. Defense executives were generally comfortable with the Zoom communications medium, its security, and its ability to capture video and audio files. Zoom also allowed for maximum flexibility in scheduling. An interviewee could access the Zoom application from a desktop, tablet, or mobile phone, meaning there was no need for the interviewee to commit to being at a specific location for the interview. The features of flexibility and program reliability contributed to success in scheduling and completing the interviews in a timely fashion.

Technical error was a potential source of risk to content validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The reliability of Zoom, confirmed extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic, instilled confidence in the interviewee and me. With high-caliber video and audio files, I simultaneously generated two data files for professional transcription. Rev.com was a superb resource for quality transcription of either audio or video files. Transcripts arrived in Word format within hours of making the online request of Rev.com, and were very modest in price. The Word file was easily redacted using a search and replace feature to convert the interviewee's name to a number and used thereafter in the subsequent analysis. Protection of data files was done with use of two-factor authentication of files stored on a hard drive. A back-up copy of data files was stored in a password protected cloud storage, Dropbox.

During the roughly 30-minute interviews, I kept notes and focused on the interviewees' perspectives and perceptions. Sticking to the script assured me that I would remain consistent across interviews and would not miss a step, such as reminding of the consent form and the voluntary nature of the interview. I generated contemporaneous field notes during the interviews, and immediately post-interview, for reference during the subsequent data analysis phase of the research. At the conclusion of the interview, I used my script at Appendix A to thank the interviewee, remind them that they had the opportunity to review and edit their responses in the transcript, and that they would ultimately have the opportunity to see the final research product. If at any point in the interview process, an interview subject expressed reservations or wished to withdraw from the research, their participation would have ended.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify and better understand the perceptions and perspectives of defense executives of companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion facing the decision to consider congressional lobbying. The central phenomenon addressed disparate participation levels in congressional lobbying among small companies and the competitive disadvantage of those companies. Interviews with executives explored their experiences and conditions, and generated data to fill the present gap in understanding the corporate congressional lobbying decision.

Thematic coding was my primary means of analyzing data. Relying on descriptive and concept coding explanations and examples from Saldaña (2016) I initially used hand-coding with Excel general-purpose software to analyze the interviews. Thematic coding allowed me to immerse in the data and examine it from multiple perspectives. Allowing the data to reveal organizational dimension, I observed patterns, similarities, and exceptions to induce meaning from the interview responses (Burkholder et al., 2016; Saldaña, 2016). The literature review suggested themes associated with regulations, legislative reforms, or campaign finance could emerge. However, as described in Chapter 2, those themes would emerge in the context of a review of secondary data or interviews with principals other than defense executives facing the lobbying decision.

The coding process began with formatting the Excel spreadsheet to display interview questions and responses in an orderly summary, grouping responses logically by question. Such a presentation allowed me to see the responses more clearly and to see

multiple answers to the same question in one place. This reordering enabled me to proceed with combing the responses for descriptive, then conceptual, keywords and phrases.

This manual process set the stage for use of NVivo 12 coding software, a widely used method of coding interview responses in qualitative research (Blank, 2019; Krusemark, 2019; Quiñones Jr., 2018; Strouble, 2015; Taft, 2019). Use of automated coding software allowed a more comprehensive and timely review of the data while searching for codes, themes, key words, and patterns. Automated software also allowed for easier comparison of responses across multiple respondents. Between the manual and automated analysis, I had plenty of opportunity to immerse myself in the data and bring meaning to the varied interview responses.

This methodology section sufficiently addressed concerns of rigor and the analytic lens (Caelli et al., 2003). While remaining true to traditional qualitative assumptions described earlier in Chapter 2, I also highlighted how this research was more appropriately bounded by the generic qualitative method. In the data analysis section, I described the close proximity with which I ultimately examined the data via inductive means, thereby allowing it to reveal a collective common truth (Patton, 2015). No qualitative research can completely remove researcher bias; however, my design acknowledged its presence, capitalized on its strengths, and mitigated its weakness.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity, so well established in quantitative research, are replaced in qualitative research by trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba;1989). Trustworthiness

more directly assesses that the work was “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln and Guba, 1989, p.290). The four specific elements of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2016). My design accounted for each, with some elements stronger than others. It was my responsibility as the researcher to satisfy the four elements of trustworthiness to give the user of the research confidence in my findings.

Credibility

Credibility refers to how the data relates to the research question and produced a result free of “predispositions and biases” (Patton, 2015). The data stands on its own and reflects the “original views of the subjects” (Benet, 2014). The data and research, were strengthened by my use of member checking of final transcripts, use of thick description in my analysis and summations, reflexivity, and triangulation (Benet, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Triangulation did not require the use of three data sources; rather it required comparison of multiple data sources. Comparing data derived by defense executives of companies of various sizes, and whose product or services supported different executive agencies within the Department of Defense e.g., Army, Navy or Air Force, strengthened credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which a study’s findings may be “generalizable to the population of interest” (Burkholder et al. 2016). My design relied on an appropriate sample size Guest et al. (2006). This does not suggest the results could apply to another sample of defense executives; however, the manner in which I fully described contextual

factors, emotional intensity, and non-verbal cues of the interview subjects allowed consumers of the research the ability to form their own assessment of the findings. Such measures allowed a reader to “assess the extent to which the findings apply outside the research” (Benet, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Dependability

In qualitative research dependability refers to the consistency in data collection across the research (Burkholder et al., 2006). Applying a common interview method, using a scripted opening, middle, and closing assured consistency in how the questions were initially asked. The interview guide at Appendix A increased the likelihood of consistency of responses to given questions. Further, the opening script and conditions of the interview via Zoom assured that the interview experience for each interview subject was as close to identical as practical. Member checking of transcripts and my detailed descriptions of my coding process also increased the likelihood of a researcher of similar experience recognizing the consistency of the data collection and analysis (Burkholder et al., 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of researchers of a similar knowledge base to identify similar findings from the research data (Burkholder et al., 2006). Qualitative findings must stem from the data and not from a researcher’s presuppositions or bias (Benet, 2014; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). An accountability audit is a method of increasing confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I satisfied the audit trail through my detailed descriptions of the research steps and data analysis. Further, I acknowledged my bias by

ensuring interview subjects conveyed their own perspectives and perceptions by extemporaneously periodically reading back interview responses during the interviews.

Ethical Concerns and Procedures

No research took place without prior approval confirming my compliance with Walden University's IRB. The IRB is guided by concerns for protection of human subjects, as well as adherence to high ethical standards. My interview subjects were not considered an at-risk population and were not likely to suffer stress or harm as a direct result of interview participation. However, sound ethical practice required that I establish trust, demonstrating the confidentiality of the participants, the security of the data collected, and the integrity of the overall research process.

Research subjects completed and signed the informed consent form written in English that clarified the voluntary nature of the research and the scholarly purpose of the interviews. No partner organizations were used and identities of research subjects were protected by substituting their names with a participant code after the initial interview. No identifiable details were portrayed in the research analysis beyond the subjects' qualification as a defense executive. Data collected was in the form of audio and video recordings protected by two-factor passwords in two locations accessible only by me. Additionally, field notes and working papers were maintained by me in a secure office. Walden University's informed consent form was used as a guide I used to reassure interview subjects before any interview began.

Participant recruitment was not coercive and relied on public data to identify qualified interview subjects. Use of email, social media platforms, my personal

professional network, and purposive and snowball sampling yielded a diverse and qualified sample pool from what was understood to be a large population of defense executives. Appendix B reflected a fair representation of how I messaged the recruitment effort. Each specific recruitment message was pre-approved by the IRB.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and better understand the perspectives and perceptions of executives of defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion who faced the decision to lobby Congress. Throughout Chapter 3, I presented an overview of how I conducted the research using a qualitative methodology that incorporated accepted scholarly practices and acknowledged my unique position within the research. Relying on experts in qualitative evaluation such as Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Burkholder et al. (2006) to formulate my research, I carefully described a data collection analysis plan that ultimately yielded results that satisfy issues of trustworthiness.

In any qualitative research that relies on participation of human subjects, concerns for the human subjects must be addressed. In complying with Walden University's IRB protocols, I outlined multiple ways in which I protected the individual participants, conformed to established qualitative research practices, and strived to attain the highest ethical standards. In Chapter 4, I will present findings of my data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the gap in the research literature by focusing on small and midsize defense company executives with company revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion who address the decision to lobby Congress. The research question focused on defense executives' perceptions of the barriers to or facilitators of their participation in Congressional lobbying. Answers to the research question may inform policymakers and decision-makers of considerations for future reforms associated with Congressional lobbying.

Recognizing that democracy is an ongoing condition or problem for which there is more than one acceptable solution that includes positive and negative attributes (Johnson, 2006), the research lent itself to applying two of Benet's (2013) polarity pairs for examination: equality-and-diversity, and participation-and-representation. I used semistructured interviews (Appendix A) to draw out participant perceptions relevant to the research question and develop themes from the data. Throughout Chapter 4, I outline the results of the study and describe the relevant demographic characteristics of the research participants, the research setting, and the development of themes that resulted from thematic coding. Finally, I summarize the results before proceeding to conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Setting

10 participants were interviewed via Zoom video conferencing. In all but one interview, video recordings accompanied the audio recording. The 10th interview, participant P-10, was limited to audio-only due to a last-minute scheduling issue of the

executive. The lack of video did not diminish the quality of the data collection as, in all cases, it was the audio file used for transcription and subsequent analysis. All participants agreed to the IRB-approved consent form and were afforded an opportunity to review transcripts before the data analysis took place.

The use of Zoom allowed for an interview format in which all participants were comfortable with the technology and could choose their own surroundings, such as work office or home office. Such confidence in the setting assured the participant that the interview would be both private and efficient in its execution. The Zoom format also allowed me to take extemporaneous notes without disruption and capture immediate reflections at the interview's conclusion. Since I was in my home office, I was free to immediately record observations without any concerns about transitions associated with post-interview transportation or office shutdown. These reflections would become part of my overall use of reflexivity for triangulation, discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Demographics

Interview participants were recruited using an IRB-approved recruitment methodology. Recruit candidates were defense executives of small and midsize defense companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion, with reasonable oversight of their company's federal sales process and the decision to lobby or not to lobby Congress. Efforts to recruit via direct outreach via LinkedIn were unsuccessful after 4 weeks. After consultation with my committee chair, I adjusted to an IRB-approved purposive sampling method using targeted emails to executive referrals within my professional network. After initial introductions, snowball sampling allowed the recruiting process to expand.

Three of the 10 participants were known to me before conducting the interviews through association memberships or professional relationships during my career, and seven of 10 participants were referred to me by participants as fitting the desired profile. None of the participants are clients nor do they have any financial relationship with me.

Demographic information was collated from public sources such as LinkedIn profiles and executive biographies on public websites. Public databases such as Dunn and Bradstreet and SAM confirm corporate information relevant to each participant as described further. A summary of demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years in Present Role	Prior Military	Years in Industry	Use of Lobbyist	Size of Company
P-1	6.5	Yes	<10	No	Midsize
P-2	14	No	20+	No	Midsize
P-3	2	Yes	<10	Yes	Small
P-4	3.5	Yes	>10	Yes	Midsize
P-5	4	Yes	<10	Yes	Midsize
P-6	4	Yes	20+	No	Midsize
P-7	9.5	No	>10	No	Small
P-8	4	Yes	>10	Yes	Small
P-9	5.5	No	<10	No	Small
P-10	10	Yes	10	Yes	Midsize
Average	6.3				

The job positions of participants were verified via LinkedIn and company websites. Though job titles varied, based partly on company size, all participants shared the common role of oversight of the full spectrum of their company's federal sales process in the U.S. defense industry. Company identification, size, and revenues were confirmed before the interview and validated by me using publicly available data such as

Dunn and Bradstreet, the SAM database, and financial reports of the publicly traded companies.

The company's lobbying status was confirmed using the LDA database. No companies represented used in-house lobbyists, and four of the 10 companies use, or have previously used, contract lobbyists. Participants all shared the ability to select or interact with contract lobbyists under contract or lobbyists who might be considered for placement on contract.

Nine of the 10 participants were men. Attempts to include more women in the participant pool were challenging. One female candidate, the president of a small business, rescheduled multiple times, canceling at the last minute twice before admitting she would not be able to sit for an interview at a mutually agreeable time. Men dominate the defense industry, though several of the largest prime defense contractors are led by women.

Nine of 10 participants were not in their first position as a defense executive. The exception, P-10, has held one position as a vice president of business development for 10 years. The average time in their current role in the defense industry for all participants is 6.3 years. If military service were included, eight of 10 participants had over 20 years of exposure to the defense industry. The participants' experience levels suggest decisions affecting federal sales that might include interaction with Congress are made by executives with sufficient background to understand the defense industry environment.

Seven of the 10 participants had prior military service, either full careers in uniform serving to retirement or significant time in military and acquisition positions in

Washington, DC. The experience factor that accompanied prior service will be discussed in the subsequent data analysis. All but one participant was in their second career, having come from either a military or commercial career in their formative executive years.

Data Collection

IRB approval to recruit participants and conduct the study was received on February 9, 2022, and recruiting began in early March 2022. After 5 weeks, coordination with participants allowed interview scheduling to begin in early April 2022, with the conduct of a first interview on April 22, 2022. The 10th interview was conducted on May 18, 2022, marking the end of data collection. The determination of saturation confirming a lack of new data from the interviews will be discussed further.

Interviews

Interviews were scheduled via email at mutually agreed times. A one-hour time block was used with Zoom conferencing information provided in a calendar invitation. A confirmation email to each participant clarified the mandatory nature of the IRB-approved consent form. All participants consented to all aspects of the consent form. I confirmed that each participant understood the voluntary nature of the interview and that their name and that of their company would remain masked.

The semistructured interview questions in Appendix A served as a script to assure consistency of the data collection across multiple interviews while allowing me the freedom to probe as required for clarification of responses. A semistructured interview can allow the researcher the flexibility to probe for clarification during an interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes, including brief

introductions before the commencement of recording. After each interview, participants appeared satisfied that they demonstrated an appropriate knowledge of a complex subject matter and were genuinely interested in the subject of the study. All interviews were recorded with a start and stop of the recording phase, clearly reported and acknowledged by each participant.

During the interviews, I was able to take extemporaneous field notes, labeled by date and participant code. After each interview and after the recording was stopped, I spent a few minutes reviewing the responses to the questions and made minor field notes. After that review, I shared the purpose of the study in more detail with each participant, reminded them that they would have an opportunity to review the transcripts and subsequent research findings, and thanked them for their support of the research.

After each interview, I reflected on capturing additional field notes of my immediate impressions. As will be described, most participants could answer nearly all questions. However, some participants demonstrated an overarching mastery of the subject matter, whereas some had limited knowledge of certain aspects. This reflexivity following each interview allowed me to capture such dynamics. Field notes are a means of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Processing of Interviews and Coding Preparation

Zoom audio files were transcribed using Rev. Upon return from Rev, usually within 12 hours or less, transcripts were reviewed by me to ensure any identifiable names were redacted. Once redaction was complete, transcripts were provided to participants for

their review and an opportunity to make any edits or corrections. No participants requested any edits to their transcript.

Transcripts were prepared for coding using both Excel and NVivo 12. The redacted Word files were named to correspond directly to the participant (e.g., “P-1 Interview”) in preparation for these two coding methods described in more detail in the Data Analysis section. The following two sections describe the preparations required for coding, though not the actual coding process.

Preparation for Manual Coding in Excel

Responses to interview questions were cut and pasted from the Word transcript file into Excel to allow examination and direct comparison of responses. The first step was to prepare a separate Excel sheet for each participant where the question would appear above each response. Sheets for this phase were named P-1, P-2, etc.

The second step was to prepare a separate Excel sheet for each of the 12 questions and subquestions of the semistructured interview. These sheets were each named Q-1, Q-2, etc. Responses from sheets P-1 through P-10 were then cut and pasted into each question sheet so that all participants’ responses to individual questions could be reviewed vertically in one column. Subsequent columns for each question were added to allow for manual coding to begin.

The manual coding process in Excel served two purposes. By beginning manual coding in Excel early, I reviewed the transcripts more closely to remain aware of repetitive responses that might indicate saturation. Data saturation is said to occur when responses to questions cease to generate new data (Guest et al., 2006). I recognized

saturation by the completion of the interview with participant P-7 but continued to conduct already scheduled interviews. By the completion of the interview with participant P-10, I was confident that new data were no longer being generated. Although research has identified 12 as the minimum number of participants in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006), the responses and initial coding of those responses confirmed new concept codes were no longer appearing after the interview with participant P-8. In consultation with my chair, I concluded my recognition of saturation was accurate.

The second reason for manual coding with Excel was to facilitate the creation of the start of a coding table to use within NVivo 12. Early parent codes such as “size,” “communication,” “relationships,” and “process” were compelling enough to serve deep into the data analysis, as will be described further. At this early phase of coding, soon after completion of interviews, the conditions for coding in NVivo 12 were being set.

Preparation for Coding in NVivo 12

Certain data preparation steps were required to maximize the capabilities of NVivo 12. The Word files of interviews P-1 through P-10 were imported to the NVivo 12 Files domain. The P-1 through P-10 nomenclature was continued for file names in NVivo 12. To allow automated analysis features like word searches and word frequency visualizations, without capturing the words of the interviewer questions, the auto coding feature was used to code each interview by the speaker. Coding by speaker allowed for a specific case to be created based on each participant. Cases were similarly named P-1 through P-10 in NVivo 12.

Before beginning to code in NVivo 12, a coding table with some parent and child nodes needed to be prepared as a starting point. Initial codes from the manual coding done in Excel allowed such a starting point. Coding is described in more detail in the following section.

Data Analysis

As described briefly in Chapter 3, the thematic coding of data underpinned the research. Nowell et al. (2017) outlined a six-phase process for thematic analysis in qualitative research that allows for ongoing considerations of trustworthiness. An adaptation of Nowell et al.'s phases was used:

- I: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data
- II: Generating Initial Codes
- III: Searching for Themes
- IV: Reviewing Themes
- V: Identifying and Naming Themes
- VI: Producing the Report

Phase VI will be discussed in the Results section. Each of the six phases includes suggestions for demonstrating trustworthiness that will be addressed further in the Evidence of Trustworthiness section.

Transition to Coding

With data prepared for both manual and NVivo coding, I was able to begin analyzing data in search of themes. The manual coding done using Excel was descriptive and concept coding that allowed early identification of possible themes (Saldana, 2016).

It offered my first opportunity to interact with and immerse in the data. While conducting manual coding, I knew this was a preparatory phase for shifting to NVivo. Each method of analysis is described in the following sections, followed by an introduction of themes.

Manual Coding in Excel

Using my prepared Excel spreadsheets labeled by the question, I added columns next to the participant responses column. Three columns were each labeled descriptive, concept, and theme. An additional column for quick memos was also added. Manual coding is a deliberate and sometimes tedious task. An inductive process allowed the data to speak, instead of attempting to make the data fit a particular framework.

I worked on one column at a time, carefully reading the responses and identifying phrases or words as initial descriptive codes. Descriptive coding helps capture “the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” Saldana (2016). In response to question 4, which focused on advantages a company may gain by working with Congress, examples of descriptive codes included “short term win” (P-2), “outside D.C.” (P-6), “small business” (P-7), “depth of knowledge” (P-10), and, “limited bandwidth” (P-10). Descriptive codes are “identifications of the topic; not abbreviations of the content” (Saldaña, 2016; Tesch 1990). Text of descriptive phrases or words were colored red within the response column to allow for more straightforward subsequent review. The ability to shade individual words could have been much more helpful; however, current versions of Excel no longer support this feature.

In this earliest coding phase, I looked for patterns across participant responses. Descriptive coding continued with a review of the responses for each question of the

semistructured interview. The field notes for each participant were available for extemporaneous review during the descriptive coding effort.

Manual coding continued to the next column, where I identified concepts that emerged from the responses and descriptive codes. Concept coding assigns a “broader meaning” to the descriptive word or phrase (Saldana, 2016). My professional background detailed in Chapter 3 served me well in recognizing how participants used particular words and phrases.

In response to question 8, focused on whether a company had considered lobbying Congress as a part of their federal strategy, examples of identifiable concepts included “shaping policy” (P-3), “onshoring jobs” (P-5), “strategy” (P-8), and “outcomes” (P-8). In some cases, descriptive codes did not lend well to the generation of concept codes. As expected, there were fewer concept codes after coding the Excel sheets for each of the 12 questions than there were descriptive codes.

The final coding column for each question was labeled Patterns/Themes. Themes are “recurrent [patterned] experience” to which the researcher may apply meaning (Saldana, 2016). Themes allowed concepts and responses to be categorized. At this early stage of analysis, the number of themes and the names of themes remain a starting point and would eventually be reduced or combined with others later in the research.

Examples of themes to emerge in response to question 7(a) about one’s definition of lobbying included “communications” and “connection.” Question 9 focused on company policies regarding political giving and generated themes of “policy,” “compliance,” and “ethics.” The subsequent analysis would bring such similar themes

together. However, at this early coding stage, it was too soon to fully appreciate some of the subtleties, and I expected NVivo to be a more reliable tool for rich data analysis.

The manual coding process was an effective way to begin the coding process. I had planned to use NVivo for my primary analytic coding but recognized that given my limited research experience to date and my familiarity with the subject matter, I needed an unbiased starting point before moving directly to NVivo. With codes, concepts, and themes in hand, I could now confidently begin working with NVivo with an objective initial coding table in place.

Coding in NVivo

NVivo 12 allows for the coding of files by simply highlighting, dragging and dropping a selected word or passage into the coding table. Although there are other methods of cutting and pasting data, the drag-and-drop method was efficient and allowed me to stay in the moment of reading the data. Selecting the code striping feature provided visual confirmation of the association of the passage to the correct code.

I initially test-coded three interview files, P-1 through P-3, to validate my familiarity with the software and my coding table. NVivo coding of interview files automatically carries over to the previously prepared case files. I was able to test the accuracy of my early coding effort to see that coded passages were properly referenced in the software. Using coding stripes in NVivo 12 allowed me to confirm coding to multiple nodes was unfolding according to my interpretation of the data. Satisfied with my transition to NVivo, I was ready to pursue both inductive and deductive coding techniques described in the following sections.

Inductive Coding in NVivo

Although the early NVivo coding table based on the manual coding in Excel supported deductive coding where I fit passages to a framework, my initial NVivo coding effort was inductive. Letting the details of the data emerge through the coding process is inductive (Saldana, 2016). By reviewing the interview transcript files individually, I saw the data in its raw form and allowed the participants' voices to support early descriptive codes. I simply added additional codes when my initial coding table did not have an appropriate code. "Experience" was a parent node that continued to lend itself to multiple child nodes such as "trial and error," "formal school," "networks," and "military."

When speaking of the type of business in question 1, for example, all participants readily distinguished whether their company was a "service provider," "product manufacturer," or "product and services" company. When speaking of budgets and funding legislation, some participants used traditional budgeting terms like appropriations and budget interchangeably. The early codes of "funding" would evolve to a parent node with child nodes of "appropriations," "authorization," and "Congress" to allow more granular analysis.

The NVivo coding process continued with my coding of interviews P-1 through P-10 over several days. The focus required to balance reading the participant's words with identifying appropriate codes caused me to limit my coding effort to no more than two interviews in one sitting. While coding each interview, I also reviewed my field notes to ensure appropriate codes were captured from either the interview file or the field note source.

Development of Themes in NVivo

Upon completion of coding all 10 interviews came the task of identifying themes. Examination of the coding by looking for patterns or different interpretations of recurring codes is a somewhat subjective process. I initially conducted various aggregations of child nodes to their respective parent. While qualitative research does not rely on quantity as a measure of analysis, the frequency of codes derived from the responses of multiple participants is one form of evaluating the codes' significance.

The research question helped separate the codes into candidate themes that more directly served the research. I separated codes by assessing them as "barriers to" or "facilitators of" lobbying Congress. It was apparent that some codes fit both categories; they were both a "barrier to" or "facilitator of" when I reviewed the referenced passage from which the code was assigned. The examination of themes will be explored further in the Results section.

Deductive Coding in NVivo

When I examined how the codes might best associate with the polarities of democracy theoretical framework, I categorized codes by the two polarity pairs of interest: equality and diversity and participation and representation. This coding is deductive because I attempted to fit the codes to defined terms (Saldaña, 2016). This realization forced me to consider that I had not specifically defined a facilitator or barrier to this point in the research. However, it had remained clear: a facilitator allows something to happen while a barrier inhibits something from happening. The research question emphasizes the perceptions of defense executives of small and midsize

companies and acknowledges that some may perceive a facilitator as a barrier. I explore this reality in the Results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The elements of trustworthiness demonstrate to the consumer of the research a degree of rigor commensurate with reliability and validity found in quantitative research. As described in Chapter 3, trustworthiness presents specific challenges to qualitative research. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the recognized elements of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was able to satisfy the criterion of each element throughout the research by applying Nowell et al.'s (2017) "phases of thematic analysis" and "means of establishing trustworthiness." I describe each in the following sections.

Credibility

My research conformed to the highest standards of Walden University's IRB using a research plan approved on February 9, 2022. I used proven methods to ensure my identified potential for bias was addressed. Those methods included member checking, maintaining a reflexivity journal, and triangulation of data with field notes and the results of my literature review from Chapter 2 (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Transferability

Transferability refers to how the research findings are "generalizable to the population of interest" (Burkholder et al., 2016). Thick description supports transferability and required that I provide sufficient detail of "setting, participants, and evidence in support of findings" (Burkholder et al., p. 135). I address the setting and

participants in Chapter 4. I begin to address the evidence in Chapter 4 and will further it in Chapter 5. Saturation occurs when new data ceases to emerge (Laverty, 2003). I describe my recognition of saturation in the Data Collection section, and how I concluded that my sample size of 10 participants is consistent with Guest et al. (2006).

Dependability

Dependability is focused on the consistency of the data (Burkholder, 2016). My research used consistent methods of data collection and handling. I relied on a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A), a consistent recording and transcription methodology, member checking of responses, and persistent coordination with my committee chair. An IRB-approved recruitment process allowed for necessary variations of both purposive and snowball sampling, which I previously described in Chapter 3 (Patton, 2015). The categorization of thematic codes followed a logical construct that could reasonably be derived by other independent researchers of similar backgrounds.

Confirmability

The findings of the research must stem from the data without the influence of researcher bias. I took steps to describe my potential for bias in detail in Chapter 3 and used specific research tools to assure my objectivity. Confirmability suggests that similar findings could be drawn from the same data by other similarly qualified researchers (Burkholder et al., 2006). I provided extensive examples of participant voices, often citing significant passages for context and associating the data with the question from which it was derived. Further, I provided detailed explanations regarding how data was prepared for coding and how coding decisions resulted in the final themes. The full

transcripts reflect that, when called for, I asked for participant clarification of responses during the recording and subsequent member checking.

Results

Upon completing the NVivo coding process, I had identified 54 codes, some with only one reference and one with 35 references across all 10 participant interviews. Identifying which were most relevant to the research required confirmation of the reference passages associated with each code. For example, participant P-1 was the only participant to identify risk. It would have been a mistake to eliminate the code of “risk” before identifying its association to the research question in the analysis. I did not eliminate codes until I had a better appreciation of themes.

As a table of codes, the data now represented a challenge for me to interpret its relevance. Some codes like “networks,” “communications,” and “mentors” appeared duplicative. However, careful review allowed for some logical grouping and merging of child and parent nodes, making the coding table more manageable.

I returned to the research question to support the process of searching for patterns, grouping, merging, and aggregating codes while protecting against researcher bias. The research question and theoretical framework guided the identification of themes by allowing me to group codes by categories of relevance to the research instead of relying solely on my initial interpretations of the coding. By categorizing codes under the five categories of “barriers,” “facilitators,” “both barriers and facilitators,” “diversity and equality,” and “participation and representation,” the data could be aligned more appropriately to the research.

Through categorization and subsequent analysis, I identified six themes associated with the research question and the two polarity pairs of the theoretical framework. The themes are presented in Table 1 with examples of relevant codes associated with the respective theme. I provide excerpts of the participants' voices for the additional texture of the themes' specific meanings. Two themes, "size and type of business" and "awareness," are associated with three of the five coding analysis categories relevant to the research question. The subtleties of each theme are described with each theme in subsequent sections.

Table 2

Themes

Theme / SubTheme	Associated Codes	Frequency of Reference	Category
Awareness	Lobbying knowledge, experience, connections, appropriations & authorizations, networks, working w/Congress, strategy, colors of money	184	Facilitator, diversity and equality, participation and representation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process • Communications and Connections 			
Outcomes	Funding of a contract, sales, and revenue, shaping, policy, success factors	67	Facilitator
Investment	Return on investment, service & product capability, time & resources, relationships with Members of Congress, communications	57	Facilitator, participation and representation
Experience	On-the-job training, trial and error, formal training, military service	45	Both facilitator and barrier
Size and Type of Business	Size, manufacturing, product and services, services provider	22	Both facilitator and barrier, diversity and equality, participation and representation
Compliance	Compliance, ethics	18	Barrier

Theme 1: Awareness

The awareness theme captured the participants' abilities to synthesize a wide swath of executive-level and environmental information relevant to their complex federal sales landscape. In Chapter 2, I identified the complexity of the environment where the decision to lobby takes place. Piecing together disparate information relevant to business success requires assimilation and alignment of various business and legislative processes, relationships with networks, rules of lobbying Congress, and details of the development and execution of the federal budget.

Within the awareness theme are two subthemes: process, and communications and connections. This theme is the only one of the six themes where subthemes so clearly emerged, yet the sub-themes don't stand alone without losing their association to awareness and relevance to the research question. The analysis process using NVivo 12 coding software helped bring this realization to life. A careful review of reference passages with researcher field notes and my reflexivity log confirmed the decision to present this theme with its two sub-themes.

The awareness theme is evident in the responses of all 10 participants and overshadows other relevant themes by a factor of ten in its sheer dominance of the data. As participant voices described, some participants demonstrated sophisticated levels of awareness, while others demonstrate a lack of awareness. Such characterizations will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5. In the following sections I provide examples of participant voices by subtheme.

Subtheme: Process

This subtheme identifies multiple processes the defense executive encounters in federal sales. First, I identify funding and budget process terms. I follow with examples relating to legislation and lobbying processes.

Funding Process

Five of 10 participants could correctly identify the budget accounts that fund their contracts when responding to question Q-3. Participant P-3 identified, “appropriated dollars, RDT&E [Research, Development, Test & Evaluation].” Participant P-4 reported “SCN [Shipbuilding Conversion, Navy].” Participant P-5 identified, “We’ve utilized RDT&E, research and development money, for sure. We’re also in OPN [Other Procurement, Navy] money, Other Programming Navy, common Navy money.” Participant P-6 responded, “it’s almost all RDT&E and O&M [Operations & Maintenance], probably, and some procurement funding. Yeah, I guess we get all three.” Participant P-10 responded, “one-year operations and maintenance.” The remaining participants did not identify a budget account. Participant P-8, for example, replied, “not with a lot of certainty.”

Legislative Process

Some participants could speak about the legislative process in great detail, distinguishing correctly among terms such as budget, authorizations, and appropriations. As described in Chapter 2, these terms have specific meanings through various phases of the federal budget process. Responding to question Q-10 about thoughts on participating more fully in the legislative phase of the funding process, participant P-3 noted that his

best point of influence with Congress was through authorizations. He said, “The question is what is Congress from the authorizer side, not so much appropriator side but from the authorizer side, how do they kind of pressure that within [those] million priorities, which ones are higher than others.” Participant P-3 continued:

So, I think a lot of what kind of leads it is understanding what the strategy and what the shifting landscape is, the priorities. And ensuring that stuff that we think is important is kind of brought to the forefront of the attention of the services. And again, a lot of that’s done on the authorizer side, through the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] versus the appropriator side.

Participant P-10 understood similar legislative opportunities with authorizations when responding to the same question, Q-10, “We were probably more inclined to be involved on the authorization act side, because that’s where the market space and the business conditions get tweaked. That’s where they get adjusted.”

Lobbying Process

Responding to question Q-6 requesting thoughts on how working with Congress might help or hurt a competitive position, participant P-10 said:

There have been times we’ve been able to get the Congress to write some language, or request some GAO studies that have caused...Now they haven’t always corrected the problem, but we’ve at least been able to stem some of the bleeding.

Responding to the same question, Q-6, participant P-3 replied:

I think working with Congress would help and it's less about the appropriated dollars. Again, appropriated dollars are always interesting and it could help, but I don't think in long term it's useful. I think it's actually for us in our business, is working with Congress for changes in policy around cybersecurity. Because what happens is as a company like ours tries to bring an innovative new capability to the market, we're often limited by poorly written policies that are usually based off of poorly written laws, which are snapshots in time of capability. So, you kind of write a law saying here's how you do cybersecurity, but then the cybersecurity ecosystem changes, but the law is still in place. So, government organizations are forced to buy out of date products. And so, changing the laws and the policies to enable more creative solutions rather than a compliance driven solution, I think is the right way to go.

Again, responding to the same question, Q-6, participant P-9 described broad contours of an executive policy example that Congress and agencies might deal with but that could impact business:

So, I think a mandate came from President Biden around Zero Trust, I don't remember the timelines, but essentially the executive order signed by him mentioned that all federal agencies must implement zero trust security by a certain timeline. That helps. Knowing that helps a lot, because then you know that agencies: (a) will start initiatives around it; (b) will find funding for it; and, (c) it gives you a conversation topic with them when the sales person is going and

talking to them. This will help you fulfill the initiative mandate coming from here, right? So, in that sense, it helps.

Questions 8(a) focused on one's knowledge of developing a lobbying strategy, and question 8(b) followed up to probe where one might go to learn more on the topic if they needed to. Participant P-10 offered, "We would turn it over to the lobbyist. They would figure out the communication plan, the engagement plan, the donation plan. All those kinds of things. They would go figure all that stuff out." Participant P-3 described the value of a lobbying strategy first:

you really do have to lobby to get the condition set to even be able to sell in and obviously the lobbying for appropriated dollars, it's kind of another different business there, but I think it ends up, for a lot of companies I think they find that beneficial.

Participant P-3 elaborated suggesting the use of outside firms:

I think honestly, it's going through the lobbying firms. In terms of the best technique, finding the appropriate lobbying firm that has the appropriate connections, with the political party on the appropriate committee that you're hoping to influence. So, I think there's a little bit of an upfront work by the company that wants to lobby, to understand who their real target is and find a lobbying firm that has connections in those targets, because not all lobbying firms are the same. They all have their expertise.

Participant P-3 introduced the concept of seeking advisory support in considering the development of a lobbying strategy:

Interestingly, learning about how to work with the lobbying industry requires you to then learn how to work with the advisory industry. Which is an entire other set of people who don't do lobbying for you, but they're strategic business advisors, corporate advisors who help you with business strategy. They often know the appropriate lobbying strategy and can put you in contact with the lobbying firms. I don't think lobbying is one of those skill sets you learn from watching YouTube videos and go to courses. It is so personal and it is so opaque that it's one of the things you kind of have to get on the inside and start doing it to understand how it really works.

Participant P-4 saw, "lobbying is information gathering," and relies on "my weekly exchange with my lobbying firm, I make sure they absolutely understand what I'm trying to do with this company and where I need funding."

Participant P-5 also draws on outside lobbying support to develop strategy: the lobbying strategy for me is to raise awareness. So, you kind of go in with that as being the goal. Sit down, work with your lobbyist, work with your senior management as well about shaping the message a little bit.

Emphasizing the quality of the message, participant P-5 continued:

Shaping a message that's going to resonate with the representatives you want to talk to certainly. Working with the lobbyist to craft that strategy, such that it's going to resonate...Developing that resonance, I think is really important.

Participant P-6 acknowledged a company approach to initially start with contract support for a strategic initiative:

We would hire someone who knows how to do that. We're not a big enough company to have a full-time employee, at least initially. That's how we typically do things when we get into something new is we'll hire a consultant to advise us on the best way to make an approach.

Participant P-7 identified an identical conceptual approach:

Yes, there are firms in D.C. that will help you with that. So, we would, if we wanted to do that, contact one of them and ask for a plan to do so. And then, if we agree to that, we would engage them accordingly.

Asked the same questions, 8(a) and 8 (b), participant P-9 stated, "No. Don't even know how to do that. I mean, we are a technology people at heart, so we don't really know how to play that game." Participant P-8 responded, "we know how to pursue issues. I don't know how to pursue a strategy at this time."

Subtheme: Communications and Connections

Synthesizing communications among network contacts, agencies, Congress, and mentors emerged as an essential element of demonstrating or failing to demonstrate awareness in the perceptions of defense executives. The ability to draw on experience, relationships, and communication methods within the context of the decision to lobby became apparent through the coding analysis. The subtheme integrates how an executive may draw on distributed networks to communicate effectively throughout the federal sales cycle in support of the lobbying decision.

Mentors

The use of mentors came up several times in participant responses. Participant P-5 identified, “mentors along the way” helped him become successful in federal sales. Participant P-6 demonstrated knowing to “hire someone who knows how to do that” in response to question Q-8 (b) about how to learn more about lobbying. Participant P-8 mentioned “a long-term relationship that has helped me in the past.” Participant P-9 expressed no reservation to “go ask some people” when responding to the same question. Alluding to mentors, participant P-8 shared the philosophy that “building relationships in anything in life is the most important thing,” confirming a level of networking activity supporting success in federal sales asked of question Q-5. Participant P-7 credits a company owner, “the owner of the company, he really taught me the ins and outs of it early on,” also referring to success factors asked of question Q-5. Participant P-10 acknowledged a mentor in describing success factors in contracting, “So I had a mentor, a president of the company.”

Who to talk to

Knowing with whom to communicate was expressed in multiple responses. Participant P-1 acknowledged, “My experience with the other branches of the federal government is answering to them, providing them information, providing even as a part of the budget dialogue from a DOD standpoint.” Participant P-2 described the challenge of knowing with whom to speak, “finding the right person in the system to get to talk to because it’s such a mammoth structure, drilling down and finding that right person is half the battle.” In response to question Q-2 about succeeding in federal sales participant P-3

said, “So, 23 years in the military including the last few years working acquisitions. I’ve worked at Defense Innovation Unit out in Silicon Valley, and I ran a program office in the Air Force.” Participant P-5 shared the experience of learning how to lobby:

My first few trips to the Hill were, tag along and shut up. Watch how this goes.

Which for me personally is pretty difficult, but I tagged along and shut up, to see how it works. There’s a little bit of being odd or intimidated by walking down the big halls in some of the federal buildings. You’ve got to get over that, and get that behind you. Then in my words, watch and learn.

Congress and Agencies

Understanding the organizations within Congress and agencies proved valuable to some participants. Participant P-1 referred to prior military service, “as a resource officer on the Navy headquarters staff.” Participant P-3 “ran a program office in the Air Force.” Participant P-5 understood “program managers have very constrained budgets” when referring to how working with Congress might affect competitive position in question Q-6.

Participant P-4 demonstrated a degree of sophistication coupling the lobbying action of communicating through testimony with influencing a requirement, a required element of funding an item in the budget. Participant P-4 said:

If you’re lobbying more in testimony, these things could come out more between, the HASC [House Armed Services Committee] and the SASC [Senate Armed Services Committee] and those type of venues where hopefully...if I’m lobbying and articulating what I think is a requirement, if that does become [a]

requirement, then I'm in a good shape to win a contract that comes out based on that requirement.

Participant P-3 also revealed an ability to link the concepts of connections and communications, stating the significance of "finding the appropriate lobbying firm that has the appropriate connections with the political party on the appropriate committee that you're hoping to influence."

Participant P-2 understood the value of constituency with a Representative when mentioning working with others to "talk and get their name in front of the different Congressmen and the amount of employment they generate in those regions. I think it does have an impact." Similarly, Participant P-1 recognized, "a lot of folks start with and stay closely aligned with the members [of Congress] that can help them from a constituent standpoint, a district standpoint. So that's what members want to do. They need to and want to be able to support companies and people in their district."

Participant P-1, speaking of success factors of question Q-5, linked the coordination of communications:

If they can articulate that to the right folks, both Congress, and then in the acquisition shops of particular clients, I think they could be very successful in getting that product or that service sold to the federal government. I would say others, it's a good close relationship with a broad spectrum of Congress and a broad spectrum of whichever department they're aligned with, and it's brand recognition, name recognition.

Awareness is categorized as a facilitator of the decision to lobby Congress or not. The degree of awareness required to facilitate the lobbying decision is fungible and perhaps unknowable, given the countless variables the executive considers in the decision.

Theme 2: Outcomes

Outcomes include winning contracts, generating sales, and earning revenue. When awareness (Theme 1) is coupled to investment decisions, potential outcomes are more easily recognized. Outcomes were universally identified by all participants for their relevance to business success. The executives considered whether lobbying investment would lead to the desired business outcome.

Participant P-5 described how Congress could help new products or capabilities survive the critical transition from development to regular funding. Support of such a transition represents an outcome that can last beyond the immediate fiscal year for a company. P-5 identified:

As you're bringing a nascent program through the R&D [research and development] process, in my lingo there's what's referred to as the valley of death. It's the gap in between, let's call it a prototype and a fielded system, if you're trying to field a system...You're not going to get a whole lot of help getting through that transition from a prototype or a concept into full-on production...At times, without a little bit of congressional help, they wouldn't take the risk of seeing whether this program is truly going to work out or not. So that's a big one, is getting across that valley of death.

Participant P-5 carried the research and development challenge further, stating, “those research and development dollars are very precious. If we’ve got something that we believe is for the good of the nation, raising some awareness and capturing funding for that is important.”

Responding to question Q-10 about what would encourage a company to participate more fully during the legislative phase of the funding process, participant P-6 replied, “I mean, I suppose if there was something that we could tie direct revenue or direct sales to, if a program passed or got funded or continued funding, then I think there might be something there.” Participant P-9 responded to the same question, “I mean, it has to be something very large, very strategic for us to even pay attention at that phase.” Again, to the same question, participant P-4 stated, “Everything we do is based on a business strategy, so I think we’re already fully engaged.”

Question Q-6 asked for thoughts on how congressional engagement could hurt or help a company’s competitive position. Participant P-6 said, “The more I know about what’s going on inside the halls of Congress, based on the intelligence I’m getting with my lobbying firm, then I can probably translate those into business strategies. And that’s a competitive advantage.” Participant P-10 identified that congressional efforts “weakly correlated to our sales outcomes, [and] revenue outcomes.”

Acknowledging the business discipline required to support the best business outcomes, participant P-10 noted in response to question Q-5 that the companies that seem to do best in federal sales, “...they’re lean, they have low capitalization requirements. They [have] low infrastructure cost. They have pretty streamlined

overheads. They have very low indirect cost structure, and they're able to win a lot of work.”

Responding to question Q-8 asking whether a company had considered a lobbying strategy, participant P-4 identified a clear desired outcome from a lobbying effort:

All of our manufacturing is outside of the United States. So, we are trying, we have a plan to bring some of that manufacturing to the United States, and there's all kinds of good reasons to do that. The industrial base jobs, it's all good and Congress wants to hear that, so they start the process of supplier development funds and how that money gets distributed, we've asked for it and I think we're going to get some of that. So that's another big line of effort that we see Congress playing a big role in.

Participant P-6 expressed a level of frustration responding to question Q-12 asking for suggestions on how the playing field might be leveled with policies on congressional engagement:

I mean, you could [redacted] the whole acquisition process is, I don't want to say it's flawed, but shall we say, not the most efficient. You could fix the whole acquisition—but then they've been trying to fix that for the last 50 years. I'm not sure that's even possible. Yeah, I mean, I guess that would be it, if they could fix the system, whether I would argue it would help us, but I'm not sure at the end, it would really affect it one way or another.

Responding to the same question (Q-12) above, participant P-4 opined:

I think if you have any smaller company that is serious about growing, they should be encouraged to lobby and engage. They may not be doing that because they may not know enough about it. And certainly, the government is seeking to do business with small businesses. So, if you could bring small businesses in, that's just probably better for the industry.

Outcomes serve as a facilitator to the decision to lobby Congress. All participants addressed the ability to foresee outcomes lobbying activity might or might not support in revenue, sales, or contracts, as meaningful to them.

Theme 3: Investment

All participants acknowledged that spending time on one aspect of business affects other aspects. Throughout the coding process, the investment theme emerged as I recognized participants were explaining that several activities such as communications, relationships with Congress, research and development, and training all cause an internal competition for limited resources. Their careful balance is a task of the successful defense executive. Dedicating resources such as time and funding to lobbying Congress requires an executive to assess the tradeoff and likelihood of its positive impact on relevant policy, sales, or revenue—the outcome of Theme 2 above.

The return on investment (ROI) was identified by nine of 10 participants as a factor of investment. Some participants saw the value of the investment in lobbying more clearly and have incorporated it into their work routine. Participants P-1, P-4, P-5, and P-10 have lobbyists under contract. Participants P-7 and P-9 expressed they could not see the value in making the investment decision an easy calculation. Others remained open to

the possibility. All 10 participants raised the theme of investment. Their participant voices follow.

Participant P-10 was unequivocal that the contract lobbyist supporting his company was delivering value. Participant P-10's praise bordered on being effusive:

Well, I know what we paid for our lobbyist every year. Did that pay for itself? I would say in our specific instance at [redacted for masking], I think it was very, very helpful. He's a very good lobbyist. He had a lot of credibility with the staffs. He could get in and to see a lot of the Congressmen. He spoke with a lot of authority.

Participant P-10 tempered his overall perception of the ability to gauge return. When responding to question Q-10 about what would encourage further participation in the legislative phase of funding contracts, participant P-10 replied:

I think we would be encouraged if we saw a more favorable business environment that we could affect through legislation. If we could affect a more favorable business environment. If we thought there was a chance to get that kind of outcome or effect, that would definitely motivate us to get more actively involved in the legislative process.

Participant P-4, with 3.5 years in the present role and less than ten years working in the defense industry, responding to question Q-7(a) if he had observations of cost versus benefit of lobbying claimed:

No. I wish I did. I don't think I've been here long enough in this company, in this role to really have that ROI. Although I have thought about it and how do I

measure that? This is an investment in a lobbying firm and what's the payoff? I don't know yet, but I'm going to find out at some point.

Participant P-8 responded to question Q-7(a) about the cost versus benefit of lobbying with an example of a prior lobbying effort undertaken by his company:

The issue that we were trying to lobby to get some exposure to was more of whether there were dollars behind it or not. I'm sure me and my partner that were doing it would've done it anyway because we thought really more it was a values issue that needed to be discussed and to be made aware of, and maybe it allowed us to sleep at night as something that we've seen that we didn't think was right. Would I use it again? Yes. I've considered using it again, so I do believe there's value there.

Communicating with Congress and developing relationships with Members of Congress and their staff requires time. Responding to question Q-4 about whether working with Congress offers an advantage, participant P-1 replied:

I think niche companies that have a capability that they could deliver to the federal government, but the federal government might not know about them, or know how that capability can solve problems. There's probably a lot of value in having that conversation, a persistent conversation with Congress about it.

Recognizing the value of coalition lobbying described in Chapter 2, participant P-2 responded to the same question Q-7(a) immediately above, stating:

Only from the fact that seeing the shipyards that we work with go up and lobby and talk and get their name in front of the different Congressmen and the amount

of employment that they generate in those regions. They, I think it does have an impact.

Participant P-2 went further by identifying the return on the coalition lobbying investment for others in the industry. Using an example that an individual company, working with other companies to communicate, could make the case to Congress to support design changes if viewed more broadly across those multiple companies:

I think it would help us in the sense that there's a lot of savings that could be made on some of these programs and don't know [how] we put them forward, but they, they had to get traction, because we say, oh, we can save \$200,000, but it doesn't seem to get a lot of traction with anybody, because it's not enough to start changing drawings. But if you get 20 or 30 subcontractors, they could save \$200,000. Then you talking [a] few million, it would grow from that. And so, the Navy and the Congress talking about make cheaper, cheaper, cheaper, but then nobody wants to approve a change.

Participant P-6 described the value of investing in congressional communications as follows:

I think it's a matter as I look at its ensuring that your elected representatives, understand what you do as a company and the value that you provide that community, whether it's in revenue that's brought in to the community and in community service that you do as a company.

Participant P-8, describing how companies can bring emerging issues forward for Congress to consider, identified:

We need Congress to look at making sure that we have a strong manufacturing basis, specifically in key items, as you think about E.V. [electric vehicle] battery making in the future and where those resources are going to be coming from. I believe that Congress can push a lot of those initiatives that allow people to be willing to invest in the opportunities there.

The return on investment of research and development dollars was referred to by both participants P-5 and P-10. Expressing the significance of the return required of that investment, P-10 stated:

The amount of research and development and money, you've actually got to spend to get something that's, capable is quite a, quite an investment. And, there's, there's only a few of those companies that can do it. And as you come down the tiers to a level of our level, we still have a little bit of that advantage. And we're not talking a lot of money that we have to spend by comparison. But when you look at our counterparts in our space, it's a lot of money for them to spend hoping they're going to get a program.

Participant P-5, responding to question Q-7(a) about the cost versus benefit of lobbying, acknowledged awareness of compliance in referring to the "unallowable" nature of lobbying costs. Lobbying costs are unallowable because they cannot be charged back to the government as an expense. When describing the tradeoff calculation of lobbying for a relatively small outcome, P-5 said:

If you would ask for a million dollars, and that comes in, but the amount of unallowable that that particular million dollar add might spin off doesn't cover

your lobbying costs, then you need to think real hard about, that's basically a loss leader at that point.

Investment was categorized as a facilitator of the decision to lobby as well as relevant to participation and representation.

Theme 4: Experience

Experience contributes to developing the awareness of Theme 1 and, as indicated by multiple participants, requires a combination of education, time in the industry, mentorship, and practical on-the-job training. All participants identified experience issues required to function well in their roles and on behalf of their companies. Where and how each gained such experience varied.

Experience was categorized as both a barrier to and facilitator of lobbying during coding. In Chapter 5, I will further explore any linkage of experience an executive has developed as a prerequisite of awareness (Theme 1) that may or may not facilitate the decision to lobby. Conversely, inadequate experience effectively presents a barrier to the decision to lobby.

The most common experience attribute across all participants was the length of time in the defense industry. As indicated in Table 1, 7 of 10 participants had 10 or more years in the defense industry beyond any prior military service, and the average time in their current role was 6.3 years. Excerpts of participant voices provide texture and context to how experience factors and how it is acquired.

Few participants acknowledged formal training as their path to professional experience in the defense industry after their military service. Participant P-1 summarized

where the basics of the job were learned as a combination of classroom training opportunities from “kind of the how Washington works and resourcing 101 kind of courses...week long, in-house training on federal budgets and how the money flows and things like that.” Further, participant P-1 confirmed learning along the way, “So [I] probably learned most of what I apply in my daily routine now from working with some of those other companies post active duty.”

Participant P-6 also took short courses following active duty:

I took one or two formal education, Shipley courses. I can't remember the name of the other company, but like Shipley, biz capture, business development 101 and captures and proposal writing, those type courses, little one-week course or a three-day course kind of thing.

Learning through on-the-job training was the most often referred means of gaining experience—nine of 10 participants related to on-the-job training in some form.

Participant P-10 acknowledged the challenges of learning on the job, “I guess I learned, through some very, very painful experiences.” Participant P-4 confirmed, “no, I have had no formal training,” and went on:

Well, for me really just an intense sense of curiosity and also on the job, asking a lot of questions and it's really not rocket science. Once you learn how to read government contracts and understand them and the different types of contracts that are out there, there's a lot of common sense that'll get you there.

Participant P-7, “let's see...trial and error.” Participant P-5 introduced the combination of on-the-job with mentorship, “25 years of watching other people ahead of

me in the chain. Truly the school of hard knocks, and being brought along by a variety of mentors along the way.”

Some participants have self-selected episodic opportunities for continuing education as they developed their executive skills in the defense industry. Participant P-8 used the example of learning idiosyncrasies of technical requirements:

We’re learning through colleagues, going to NDIA [National Defense Industrial Association] conferences, going to FSIA [Foreign Services Intelligence Advisory] conferences, where they are bringing in government procurement folks and DoD folks to help us understand how do you approach it? What type of certifications do you need, like CMMC [Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification], around cybersecurity, around processes with CMMI [Capability Maturity Model Integration] level three or level five, or whichever level you’re going after?

Participant P-9 described a similar method of identifying organizations that could help with the understanding of the process:

We heard about through our SBIR [Small Business Innovation Research] startup network that that’s the way the government encourages innovative startups to be also able to sell to the federal government. So, we went and studied that process. We learned about it. We applied through the civil program, was quite an onerous forms and documentation to go through, lot of stuff to fill. But fortunately, it was a rewarding process.

Mentorship was another form of learning on-the-job described by participants.

Participant P-8 recalled:

I have a long-term acquaintance who helped educate me in the past because I had a need, so I would reach out to that person. There's a lot of things written on it out there, but really the best way for me is to learn by talking with somebody and asking the questions and doing it, so that's how I'd learn.

Participant P-9 described how a new problem under his cognizance might be tackled:

Gosh, I would go ask some of the people who have either sold to a lot of federal agencies. I would probably go ask them or go ask some of the agencies themselves where we have sold. Like, if you want to do it, what is the way? I have no idea. Or we would hire some federal sales guy who knows how to do it.

When discussing development of lobbying strategy, Participant P-10 acknowledged how he supplements his experience:

Well, I mean I wouldn't know how to put together the strategic communication plan, the exact doors to knock on, the exact palms to shake hands with. That is not something I would personally know about, but our lobbying group would know how to do that. So, the way it works with us is, the business unit would frame up here are the objectives that we want to come out of this lobbying effort. And these would be the high-level operational business objectives, or market objectives. We would turn it over to the lobbyist.

Participant P-4 acknowledged a similar means of filling gaps in experience, "We get help through consultants and tapping into their experience in government, in their former service, and we actually use a lobbying company."

Theme 5: Size and Type of Business

All participants perceived the size and type of business as relevant to business success and to the consideration of lobbying Congress. The data indicated that it was not always simply a matter of small vs. large companies, though most acknowledged that large companies have advantages attributable to their size. Participant P-10, however, perceived the opposite, that “the agility of small business” was a valuable asset. However, additional evidence did not suggest small business agility was a factor in the lobbying decision.

The resources attributed to a company’s larger size, particularly “manpower,” as mentioned by participant P-8, and “bandwidth,” as identified by participant P-5, offered a perceived edge in whether one lobbies Congress. The capacity and ability to distribute a larger workforce across required business tasks, with larger companies assigning more individuals to tasks, as opposed to many tasks being assigned to fewer individuals in smaller companies.

Executives working in services businesses, such as participants P-6 and P-7, did not see the same opportunity of lobbying Congress as did an executive of a manufacturer or product provider, such as participants P-1 through P-5 or P-8 through P-10. The analysis of Chapter 5 will consider the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. Participant excerpts further identify some of the perceptions of the likelihood of lobbying outcomes (Theme 3) achievable for companies such as a services company, manufacturer, or product and services provider.

Participant P-1, stated directly in response to question 4 about advantages companies might gain by working with Congress, “I think, first of all, size is one issue.”

Participant P-8 described requirements to conform to required security protocols that precede participation in the federal defense market:

And so, for a smaller business to get that CMMC [Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification] level certification or CMMI [Capability Maturity Model Integration], it is a significant investment, which a larger company can use. Really, it becomes a barrier of entry for the smaller guys, but [I] understood why they need it.

Participant P-8 further identified how size allows certain executives to spend the necessary time interacting with the government customer:

These big folks have lots of dollars, and if you look at their rate cards compared to others, they demand a premium. A lot of that premium is built on relationships. In the commercial world, obviously there’s a lot of things that restrict government employees from spending a lot of time or accepting any gifts, but it is that time that’s spent at that executive level with the senior folks, and I’m not just talking to SES [Senior Executive Service] folks, but it’s those senior folks, they make sure they’re walking. It’s the same in the commercial world. Walking the hallways, being visible, having a conversation over coffee with somebody in the technical area and talk about capabilities in the marketplace or capabilities that could be brought to their agency.

In response to question Q-4 about advantages a company might gain working with Congress, participant P-7 summarized the company's position, "We don't operate in that arena. We can't compete in the arena with \$25 billion companies." Responding to question Q-5 about what companies that win contracts do that leads to success, participant P-7 said:

So, I think the larger companies have a very large B.D. [business development] and capture staff. And so, they're able to put the resources, then, into pursuing many opportunities. I think that they spend a lot of time, probably, in D.C., then, talking with those various customers. Or if those customers are not in D.C., they spend a lot of time with them. Generally, they will hire people who have come from those particular commands.

Participant P-6 responded to question Q-4 about perceived advantages in federal sales by working with Congress:

I do know that they were, especially the companies that were located maybe outside of the D.C. area or the great big ones, the Lockheed Martins, Raytheons and stuff, did spend a lot of time talking with their congressional representatives because the amount of revenue that those companies brought back to that town, or that community, or that city was substantial for us.

Participant P-6 continued with a more parochial view balancing congressional constituency with size considerations upon further reflection of question Q-4:

I don't think it would hurt as we are now as a company growing and now have a[n] office in Utah, for example, not a huge office, but a decent size office and

starting to get offices in other places. I think it would help if we engage those elected representatives in those states. I don't think if we were to engage the Virginia congressional delegation or... D.C. really didn't have one... but Virginia, I mean, they wouldn't even come pay any attention to us. They're worried about Huntington [Ingalls] down in Norfolk and the great big guys, GDIT [General Dynamics Information Technologies] and those kind of companies, Lockheed Martin who has a 3,000-foot person footprint out in Manassas, [Virginia] stuff like that. I'm not sure it would help us at all in D.C. It might in Utah.

Participant P-6 further associated the manpower cost of dedicating resources to congressional engagement, attributing company size as a differentiator:

I mean, the cost is the time that you spend doing it. I mean, some companies have a person who lives up on Capitol Hill or spends time up on Capitol Hill. I'm sure Lockheed Martin, places like that, have a whole department focused on it.

Participant P-5, a product and services provider in a company that uses contract lobbyists, described his company: "The company I work with provides research and development, and services to the Department of Defense." Responding to question Q-5 about what companies that win more contracts do differently, size is referenced with respect to the number of simultaneous contract pursuits:

That's a great question. The companies that do things differently, I believe are using, many more lines in the water, if you will. They've got multiple, multiple business opportunities out there. Fairly large business development organizations

that are pursuing 30, 40, 50 opportunities at any given time. And you win some and you lose some.

Participant P-5 clarified the specific value of congressional engagement invoking his company's smaller size as a factor in obtaining research dollars:

Research and development money is precious. It's hard to come by. It's especially hard to come by organically, without any congressional help. Those dollars are very precious. So especially from a small business side, they can be very, very elusive. Those R&D [research and development] dollars are very elusive, so certainly some congressional help there is a good idea.

The size and type of company factored in thematic coding as both a barrier to and facilitator of the decision to lobby Congress. Further, size and type of company can influence diversity and equality and participation and representation, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Although references to size and type were relatively few (22), they were raised by all participants and identified as a factor in three of the five categories (60%) directly related to the research question: both barrier and facilitator, diversity and equality, and participation and representation.

Theme 6: Compliance

The theme of compliance was the least active theme within the data, with 18 references; however, it was addressed by all participants and is one of only two themes identified in the coding analysis as a barrier to the decision to lobby Congress in the research. Participant excerpts reveal incorrect terminology and a general lack of understanding of lobbying compliance issues that will be further considered in the

Chapter 5 analysis. However, at this phase of reporting results, a linkage to awareness (Theme 1) and experience (Theme 2) is evident.

Participant P-1 demonstrated recognition of rules governing conversations with Congress in the context of competitive advantage:

Certainly, just like any member of the federal government, if you have conversations, very detailed conversations that are not available to your competitors, there's a concern that you violate some statute or some policy and get yourself in trouble that way. But I don't see the downside of engaging with Congress, but it is an investment.

Participant P-1 continued, "I think a lot of the rules are designed to ensure that very little is done in a back room with no visibility. So, it seeks transparency in that process." Further, P-1 states, "the rules likely are designed to promote fairness. I think that's a good thing. So, I don't know them well enough to know where there's a wall that we hit or a hurdle that we can't get over because the rules aren't right."

Participant P-10, on the other hand, acknowledged the existence of compliance issues but suggested the contract lobbyist would know what they are:

I guess I'm not aware enough of the compliance issues. I mean, that's really for the lobbyist people would know that kind of thing. Like, if you went to a fundraiser, what's the protocol? What can you do? What can you donate? That kind of stuff. The lobbying professional would do that.

Referring to rules that prevent an unfair advantage someone in Congress may bestow by sharing information with a relation, participant P-2, posited:

Half of it's what you read and half it's media. But you know, one particular politician may have a partner that's in a certain field and they make a decision.

It's sort of, it's not, it's not a level playing field at that point, because you know, person in the know has a distinct advantage

Participant P-3 viewed compliance through the lens of its impact on a competition and the risk of triggering a protest as opposed to conforming to rules of lobbying reporting, for example:

I don't think there's anything where we feel like we have to comply with law or policy or compliance in order to lobby, but I think it is in the process of lobbying, making sure we are staying clean on how far can you go with lobbying? What can you ask the Congressman or a committee, because you don't want a contract to be protested because the method in which you received the contract violates law or policy.

Participant P-3 went further, suggesting that some failure to comply with established rules may exist but is beyond that company's ability to see or remedy:

The real question and I think a lot of people question this and I don't know how much proof there is, how much of this lobbying really goes beyond the bounds of bribery of Congress or ethics violations of gifts and stuff like that. We hear about it, but honestly there's not much actual real investigations of corruption. So, could there be different laws or policies that kind of limit that?

Participant P-4 interpreted question 8(c) relating to concerns for lobbying compliance in terms of rules regarding supply chain requirements: “Compliance, what comes to mind is the Buy America Act.”

Participant P-5, who employs contract lobbyists, acknowledged internal company policy regarding lobbying within the context of formal rules governing lobbying:

My company is now a much larger organization than it was in the past. Legal departments, when we say that we’re going to go have a visit on the Hill, we go in, we have a little chat with our legal department, just to make sure that everything is on the up and up. I believe that the company’s size has a lot to do with that. If you don’t have a legal department, you sit around and you make sure you’re doing your best to stay as above board as you can.

Participant P-8 was not aware of any compliance issues that impact the lobbying decision in response to question Q-8(c), “No, I can’t think of anything at this point.”

Participant P-9 expressed a degree of concern regarding a lack of awareness about lobbying compliance when responding to the same question, Q-8(c):

Yeah, I mean, my first instinct is not to do it because it seems like a compliance issue, and it also seems like too long, drawn, complicated process, which may require time and money and investment with not sure what kind of return, plus we don’t even know how to actually do it.

Participant P-6 confirmed, “at least as long as I’ve been with the company, we’ve never really had even that discussion as to whether we should or shouldn’t [lobby].”

Participant P-7 similarly confirmed lobbying compliance was not an issue “because we don’t lobby.”

Compliance was categorized during the coding analysis as a barrier to the decision to lobby. In Chapter 5, I will further explore how other themes such as awareness (Theme 1) and experience (Theme 4) may affect compliance in the perception of defense executives’ decisions to lobby.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 4, I have described my data collection process in support of the research question. Identification of themes within the data may help identify perceived barriers to or facilitators of the decision to lobby Congress by defense executives of companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. I provided detailed descriptions of the IRB-approved recruiting process, data collection and preparation specifics, my considerations for applying thematic coding, and extensive samples of participant voices.

My research plan and implementation took steps to assure the trustworthiness expected of all qualitative research and described specifics in support. Participant voices provide rich texture to the themes that emerged from the deliberate and extensive manual and NVivo thematic coding and analysis. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the results, identify where the results fit into the existing body of research described in the literature review, and suggest areas for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the gap in the research literature by focusing on perceived barriers to or facilitators of congressional lobbying by executives of defense companies with company revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. The findings confirm certain perceptions of defense executives that present barriers to or facilitators of congressional lobbying, depending on the specifics of the situation. An executive's awareness of process, communications, and connections can allow the executive to perceive facilitators of and barriers to the decision to lobby Congress. Further, an executive's experience, focus on outcomes, understanding of investment return, and knowledge of compliance, also present both perceived facilitators of and barriers to the defense executive's decision to lobby. Lastly, the size and type of company influence whether an executive perceives a facilitator of or barrier to the decision to lobby Congress. In some cases, the presence of a theme can be a perceived facilitator while its absence can be a perceived barrier. These findings may inform policymakers and decision-makers of considerations for ongoing and future reforms associated with congressional lobbying.

The specific conditions of a perceived facilitator of or barrier to the decision to lobby Congress are interpreted in the following section. The research findings are examined through empirical and theoretical lenses, allowing a more elevated discussion of lobbying beyond perceptions of size, money, and ideology as previewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 confirmed that lobbying research to date relied largely on secondary data that fuels imperfect findings stemming from data of dubious quality in FEC and

LDA databases, and SEC filings. My research represents the first of its kind to look at primary data from the perspective of defense executives facing the lobbying decision.

In this chapter I will interpret the research findings, describe limitations of the study, and offer recommendations, both for further research and for policy makers. I then discuss implications for social change as well as theoretical implications of the study. I conclude the chapter by identifying an opportunity for Congress to improve the environment and conditions in which defense executives decide to lobby Congress.

Interpretation of Findings

In Chapter 2, I described the complex environment in which the decision to lobby Congress takes place. The orchestrated sequence of the budget cycle (Heniff, 2001; Saturno, 2020) requires that defense executives synthesize business, government, and political implications in considering the likelihood of specific outcomes lobbying might support. The interpretation of this complex environment goes beyond the basics of following the budget document for a given fiscal year from the executive to the legislature and back to the executive. The findings of the research confirm that understanding whether, where, or when to insert oneself into the process requires various levels of awareness, experience, and ability to foresee potential outcomes and returns on investments, all within a system of rules governing such decisions and communications.

The themes and subthemes emerging from the data presented in Chapter 4 each represent perceived facilitators of and barriers to the defense executives' decision to lobby Congress. The use of semistructured interviews based on the questions in Appendix A allowed the data to emerge without asking the research question directly of

the participants. In doing so, the questions elicited responses that revealed the executives' level of understanding of this complex environment, allowing me to examine their words and subsequently interpret their perceptions. In reviewing the themes and subthemes, I will describe how each is perceived by defense executives as a barrier to or facilitator of congressional lobbying. As mentioned, scenarios where the absence of the theme presents the opposite condition will also be identified. Later, I apply the theoretical lens of the polarities of democracy polarity pairs, diversity and equality, and participation and representation, to the same data. In doing so, I identify ways in which those polarity pairs might be effectively managed in support of democratic ideals on which defense lobbying within our democracy takes place.

Theme 1: Awareness

My analysis of the results generated by my study indicates that awareness captures an executive's ability to synthesize specific subelements of the budget cycle to include lobbying knowledge, experience, connections, appropriations, authorizations, networks, working with Congress, strategy, and colors of money. As described in Chapter 2, the lobbying environment is complex and multi-faceted, creating a challenge for defense executives to stay abreast of the many moving parts that could affect their business (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Leech et al., 2005; Hojnacki et al., 2015). High levels of understanding of such concepts were evident in participants who recognized lobbying Congress as an option that can help yield positive outcomes such as contracts, sales, and revenues described in Theme 2. The presence of high levels of awareness is a perceived facilitator of the decision to lobby. Conversely, lower levels of awareness of the inter-

relationships of the subelements of the budget cycle present a perceived barrier. As described in Chapter 4, the awareness theme is the only theme to inspire two meaningful subthemes within the data.

Subtheme: Process

Specific awareness of the legislative process that is influenced by lobbying, and that underpins the subsequent funding process, requires a high level of procedural awareness. The data derived from interviews is consistent with Dusso et al.'s (2009) demonstration that linkages of lobbying activities are required to influence process and outcomes. In my research data, defense executives who possess such awareness perceived lobbying Congress as a tool or lever at their disposal. Conversely, defense executives with low levels of process knowledge did not have the same perception of lobbying. In this subtheme, lack of process awareness presented a barrier to the lobbying decision, but one that is not always perceived by those defense executives.

Subtheme: Communications and Connections

Defense executives spend considerable time and energy determining with whom they must communicate amid a government audience that frequently changes positions and does not routinely publish useful directories of contact information. Communications in the executive branch and Congress are governed by rules and norms, each requiring varying degrees of sophistication that indicate one's level of awareness (U.S. Senate, n.d.-a). Milbrath's (1963) seminal work highlighting the significance of communications has been repeatedly confirmed in the literature (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2014; McGrath, 2018). Communicating effectively with Congress

requires that the defense executive appreciate when, where, and how to communicate with Congress, be it members of Congress or associated staffs. My research findings confirmed defense executives perceived a certain degree of connectivity is required in order to conduct congressional communications. Such connectedness requires relationships relevant to the legislative process that governs authorizations and appropriations of interest (Heniff, 2001).

As with the process subtheme, the absence of the necessary connections required for effective communications presents a perceived barrier to the lobbying decision. Some executives admitted that they did not know specifically with whom they would communicate, where others knew that they could turn to their network or external contract lobbyist for help. Though this perceived barrier was identifiable, all but two participants believed they could work through it.

Theme 2: Outcomes

Given limitations of executive time and resources, an executive must be able to see reasonable outcomes that any investment of either might support. Defense company outcomes are measured by revenue derived from federal contracts. As described in Chapter 2, legislative authorizations and appropriations must be in place before contracts can be awarded (Saturno, 2020). Executives with higher levels of awareness (Theme 1) are able to more readily identify the linkage of funding with contracts, allowing them to foresee a positive outcome from congressional lobbying (participants P-3, P-4, P-5, P-10). The potential for positive outcomes reflects perceived facilitators of the decision to

lobby. The data comports with the secondary data in that outcomes are recognized as a motivating factor of lobbying (Leys, 2021; Scott, 2015).

The absence of awareness of positive outcomes presents a barrier, yet my analysis of the data generated by my research suggests it is not clear whether all executives can perceive this barrier. Those with lower awareness acknowledge a “101” (participant P-1) or “Shipley” (participants P-1, P-6, P-7) level of knowledge, referring to business development courses where they learned process mechanics. Consistent with Leech et al. (2005), Baumgartner et al. (2014), and Hojnacki et al. (2015), generating policy and funding outcomes is the essence of lobbying. This limited textbook understanding of the relationship of outcomes and process appears insufficient to foresee positive congressional outcomes that could result from lobbying. Executives of service companies especially did not see congressional relationships as something that would lead to a more favorable outcome in the same way a manufacturer or product company executive might. Executives of service companies will be described further below in Theme 5: Size and Type of Business.

Theme 3: Investment

Defense executives recognize that use of limited resources such as time, research and development dollars, and product development efforts each involve trade-offs. Resources are a “zero-sum” (P-3, P-9, P-10), and research and development dollars are limited and “precious” (P-5). Resources required to develop relationships with members of Congress such as executive time come at the expense of other priorities.

The interview responses of my research confirm the breadth of decision factors any defense executive faces. The environment in which defense executives work is complex (Johnson, 2015; Schilling et al., 2017; Taft, 2019). The lobbying decision is one of many the defense executive confronts.

Defense executives with the experience (Theme 4) to recognize and estimate positive returns on such subjective investments can foresee positive outcomes (Theme 2). In these cases, investment is a perceived facilitator. Those with less experience (Theme 4) and awareness (Theme 1) do not see the same value of investments related to influencing the legislative phase in Congress. In these cases, investment is a perceived barrier.

Theme 4: Experience

Experience emerged as an attribute easily confused with time in the defense industry as opposed to the garnering of meaningful knowledge of the complex federal sales process. Krusemark (2019), in a qualitative examination of access to acquisition opportunities by service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses recognized the need for training to strengthen defense subcontractor capabilities and competitiveness. Johnson (2015) found a similar need for acquisition and process training in a qualitative study of women-owned small businesses in the defense industry. My study identifies a similar need for process training specific to the legislative process to supplement or accelerate a defense executives' knowledge and experience.

Experience is garnered through more than time in a position. However, nearly all participants identified on-the-job training as the primary means of learning the ropes of

how to make their company successful in federal sales. As indicated, 70% of participants had prior military service, and participants average over 6 years in their present role. Some indicated basic courses in business development supplemented their years of experience on active duty or in the defense industry.

A relationship among experience, awareness (Theme 1), outcomes (Theme 2), and investments (Theme 3) appears evident in my research. Participants with experience perceive facilitators in Themes 1 through 3, whereas those with less experience either perceive barriers or fail to see the same facilitators to the lobbying decision.

Theme 5: Size and Type of Business

Defense executives of service businesses don't see the sales opportunity, to include congressional engagement, in the same way as an executive of a product or manufacturing company. Differences in margins, commoditization of offerings, and competition appear to force defense executives of service companies to look inward to identify areas for improvement vice outward. Defense executives of companies associated with products or manufacturing saw engagement with Congress as an opportunity, where those associated with service companies did not.

As identified in Chapter 2, extensive research examines small business performance, primarily from the perspective of execution within the executive branch acquisition process. In Chapter 2, I referenced numerous studies that highlighted various aspects of small defense company success factors (Johnson, 2015; Richwine, 2017; Schilling et al., 2017). My findings suggest service companies, in particular, are less likely to see lobbying Congress as a pursuit that will contribute to their success. Defense

executives of service companies did not indicate a willingness to lobby Congress and perceived that their type of business was a barrier to congressional lobbying.

Companies that manufacture products use research and development or procurement dollars that have longer terms of use, meaning such categories of appropriated funds may be obligated for two or three years after being made available (Saturno, 2020). Conversely, appropriated funds that pay for services generally have a one-year life in which they may be obligated (Saturno, 2020). Defense executives of manufacturers and product providers perceived greater opportunity for ROIs that yield outcomes (Theme 2) along a more robust horizon worthy of the required investments (Theme 3). Again, the inter-relationships of multiple themes were evident.

Similarly, defense executives perceive size as advantageous if for no other reason than the availability of resources to consider investments (Theme 3) that might lead to better outcomes (Theme 2). Several participants identified personnel resources as a requirement of robust business development (P-1, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7). Larger size, therefore, represents a facilitator of lobbying Congress while smaller size represents a barrier to lobbying Congress.

Theme 6: Compliance

Communicating with both the executive branch and Congress involves various protocols, norms, and compliance with policies and laws, depending on the type and timing of the communication. Lobbying registration reporting as a research data resource is problematic, in part due to the reporting regime relying on public understanding of lobbying laws (LaPira, 2014; Thomas & LaPira, 2017). As such, lobbying compliance

reporting is limited by the vagaries stemming from its basis in self-report by those engaging in lobbying and influence aspects of compliance with the 2007 HLOGA (Ban et al., 2019; Chausow, 2015; Thomas & LaPira, 2017; Thurber, 2011; White 2015). Although the GAO (2021) annually identifies high levels of lobbying reporting compliance by lobbyists, no such review attempts to identify those companies that fail to report lobbying activity.

Four of 10 participants (P-3, P-4, P-5, P-10) demonstrated a working understanding of rules and laws governing lobbying communications with Congress described in Chapter 2. Only two participants (P-7, P-9) were not sure where they might learn more, and others believed they knew enough to either learn more from their network or their contract lobbyist. Most participants interpreted questions Q-8(c) and Q-9 related to compliance or company policy on political activity as relating to ethics training. Rules governing political giving were not well understood by any participant.

Compliance is perceived as a barrier to the lobbying decision for those who understand the specifics. For those who do not understand the respective rules, most demonstrated a respect for the unknown and that it was an area they would need to better understand. In the cases of participants who lobby (P-3, P-4, P-5, P-10), the perceived barrier was understood, addressed, and therefore removed.

Applying the Theoretical Framework

In Chapter 1, I described the right to lobby Congress as derived from the First Amendment of the Constitution (National Archives, n.d.). Applying Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework elevated the research to an examination of

the performance or underperformance of aspects of democracy. Two of Benet's five polarity pairs are specifically relevant to the condition of lobbying Congress. The polarity pairs of diversity and equality, and participation and representation are used below to further interpret Themes 1 through 6.

The polarity map in Figure 1 is useful in interpreting data in the context of Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework. The polarity map identifies four quadrants. The upper quadrants associated with each left or right pole reflect positives associated with actions or values of the respective pole. The two lower quadrants associated with each left or right pole reflect negatives associated with actions or early warnings of the respective pole. The polarity map allows the further identification of action steps that might help gain or maintain the positives of a polarity. Conversely, external early warnings can reflect indicators of movement toward the negatives of a polarity.

The generic polarity map of Figure 1 can be adapted for each polarity pair and is a useful tool for visualizing how a polarity pair might be effectively managed (Johnson, 1996). The upper bubble reflects where a greater purpose statement is written, while the lower bubble reflects where a deeper fear is written (Benet, et al., 2022).

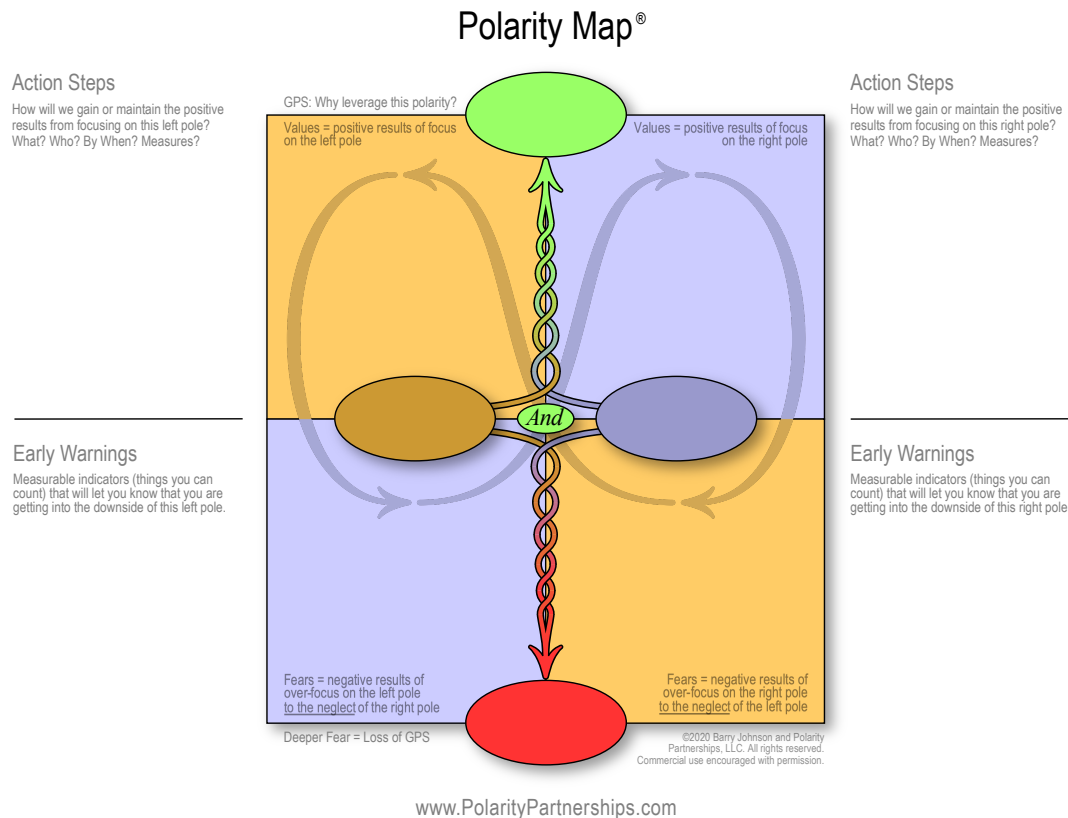
Figure 1*Polarity Map Template*

Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.

In the next sections, I describe how the polarity pairs of diversity and equality, and participation and representation can populate Figure 1 consistent with Benet's (2013) theory. Interpreting the themes that emerged from my research data I will then suggest how each theme or subtheme can influence positive or negative attributes of the respective polarity pair.

Reviewing the data through this theoretical lens elevates the discussion to one concerned with the impact of the executives' perceptions of the decision to lobby on the

advancement of greater democratization of congressional communication. Further, understanding the defense executives' perceived facilitators of or barriers to the decision to lobby can shed light on the association of lobbying with the appearance of unfair control in a democracy. Benet (2013) uses the term "oppression" (p.31), more commonly associated with issues of social justice. I use the control aspect of oppression, to refer to the unfair control one might leverage through lobbying over those that do not lobby.

Diversity and Equality

This polarity is helpful when exploring equality among government constituencies (Benet, 2013). In the case of defense executives, the constituencies include the individual, the corporation, and agencies of government. Using the polarity map, Figure 2 depicts diversity and equality from the left and right poles respectively. The upper bubble indicates the greater purpose statement of the polarity to "foster opportunity and sufficiency" (Benet et al., 2022). The lower bubble indicates the deepest fears of the polarity to "feed disparity and complacency" (Benet et al., 2022).

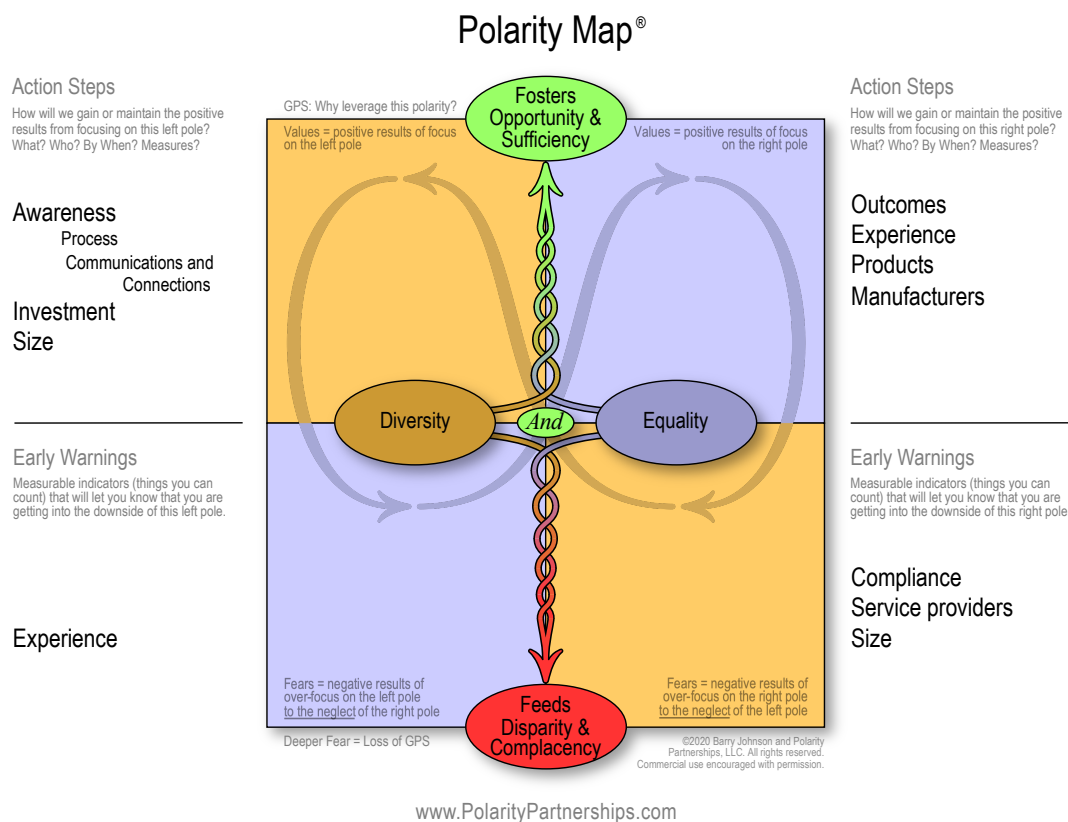
Figure 2*Polarity Map of Diversity and Equality Polarity Pair*

Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.

Interpreting the Themes in Context

The presence of high awareness, effective communications, and established connections each support actions associated with attaining the positive aspects of diversity through which unique solutions to government needs can be brought forward. Defense executives of companies of sufficient size, and capable of making investments, are best able to pursue opportunities associated with this polarity's highest purpose.

Similarly, defense executives of manufacturers or product companies, who also possess the requisite experience and can foresee future outcomes, can promote action associated with the positive opportunities of this polarity pair.

Conversely, a defense executive's low levels of experience and awareness, or executives associated with a small or service-oriented company, suggest early warning signs of the negatives of this polarity pair. Such early warning signs indicate conditions of movement away from the positives above, and toward the negatives more closely associated with disparities and complacency. The themes are not directly inverse. Rather they are subjective, which also makes them suitable for possible techniques such as policies or methods by which the polarity can be more effectively managed.

In the effective management of this polarity pair, improving a defense executive's level of awareness, communications, degrees of connection, perspective on outcomes, and experience, the conditions exist for movement toward the positives of the pair (opportunity and sufficiency) and away from the negatives. Failure to improve the areas reflected by each of these themes will increase the likelihood of movement toward the negatives (disparities and complacency).

Participation and Representation

Defense executives, like all citizens, can choose the degree to which they participate in the legislative processes of democracy. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the "function and meaning" of this polarity pair (Benet, 2013). The act of lobbying relates to function, and the regenerative quality of choosing when to participate invokes the meaning (Benet, 2013).

Figure 3 adapts the polarity map template that serves this polarity pair as it serves all polarity pairs, with upper quadrants reflecting positives and lower quadrants reflecting negatives. Participation and representation each reflect the left and right pole respectively. The upper bubble indicates the highest purpose of this pair, maximizing the positive aspects of “productive and responsive policies” while minimizing the negative aspects (Benet, et al., 2022). The lower bubble indicates the deepest fears of the polarity pair, “alienation or exclusion” where the negatives are maximized and the positives are minimized (Benet et al., 2022).

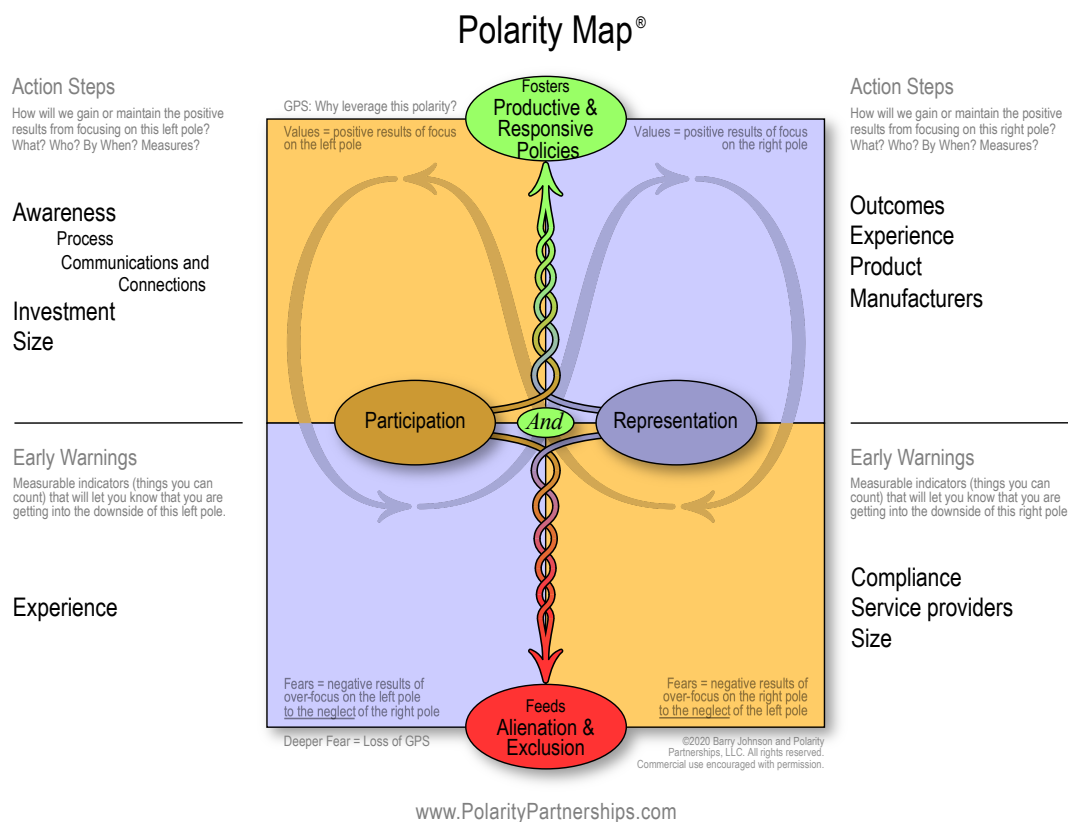
Figure 3*Polarity Map of Participation and Representation Polarity Pair*

Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.

Interpreting the Themes in Context

My research data indicated varying degrees to which defense executives value participation in congressional lobbying. The presence of high awareness, effective communications, and established connections allow for conditions supportive of this polarity pair's positives. Further, and consistent with diversity and equality above, defense executives of companies of sufficient size, and capable of making investments, may be able to pursue opportunities associated with this polarity's highest purpose.

Similarly, defense executives of manufacturers or product companies, who also possess the requisite experience and can foresee future outcomes, may be better able to associate with the positives of this polarity pair.

As was seen with diversity and equality in the previous section, a defense executive's low levels of experience and awareness, or association with a small or service-oriented company suggest early warning signs of the negatives of this polarity pair. Additionally, compliance, through conformance or absence respectively, has the potential to encourage negatives, or at least indicate early warning of the polarity pair's negatives.

The research did not sufficiently explore measures to objectively report where on the map a defense executive, company, or sector of the defense industry might sit. This emerging capability to make such measures will be discussed in the recommendations section. Like other polarity pairs, this pair can be managed to encourage positives over negatives. The positives of this pair could be best managed through policies supportive of higher levels of awareness and access, as well as encouragement of transparent communications.

Moving Forward From Theory

Unsolvable problems, or problems with multiple possible solutions, can be most effectively managed when the polarity is managed to maximize the positives and minimize the negatives (Johnson, 1996). When defense executives (participants) exercise the decision to lobby Congress, managing these positives supports the furtherance of the promise of democracy through equitable legislation and subsequent fair competition.

As described in Chapter 2, it is the positioning of funding and statements of policy in legislation that ultimately support the award of government contracts. The democratization of the interconnected processes that lead to a contract appears to fall short without further participation in congressional lobbying. When defense executives fail to exercise the decision to lobby Congress, conditions exist that allow the negatives of the polarity pairs to negatively affect government's performance. I will discuss potential management strategies to encourage positives over negatives in the recommendations section below.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, I outlined potential limitations of the study, each of which I attempted to mitigate. Some were successful; others less so. I'll describe how participant knowledge, researcher bias, and transferability might influence the research.

Participant Knowledge

Knowledge levels of the participants were a limitation of the study. I was concerned that inadequate understanding of the legislative processes that underpin the complex federal funding and contracting processes would be problematic. In fact, no participants failed to answer any interview question. However, variation in their degree of understanding was evident, suggesting levels of knowledge vary considerably. While those participants who use contract lobbyists or have lobbied in the past could connect the investment with possible outcomes, the majority of participants could not.

Some participants provided detailed responses indicating second- and third- order levels of knowledge, while some provided surface level answers. Not wanting to cause

embarrassment to the participants, my interview probes were gentle, and I let the responses stand knowing the thematic analysis would find fuller meaning. The interview questions surrounding compliance prompted the most uncertainty as participant responses tended toward ethics training and missed the relevance of unreported lobbying communications. As discussed in Chapter 2, shadow lobbying is the failure to report lobbying communications (Thomas & LaPira, 2017). A pre-test of participant knowledge might have improved the sophistication of responses by screening participants. However, such benefit would have been outweighed by the increased difficulty in recruitment the additional step would have required. Future studies would benefit from such participant screening.

Researcher Bias

My bias as a defense lobbyist is addressed to the extent practical by use of established and well-recognized tools of qualitative research, to include triangulation with field notes and literature, member checking during data collection, use of a reflexivity journal, and ongoing dialogue with my dissertation Chair. It is my experience in defense lobbying that led me to explore the perspectives of defense executives, as well as to recognize what are widely accepted flaws in the secondary data used in much of the extant lobbying research. My lobbying expertise may have helped contribute to the academic literature by bringing forth the problem examined.

Transferability of Results

Lastly, my findings are likely not widely transferable across the defense industry. In my attempt to elevate the research beyond the measure of small company versus large

company, the sample population varied substantially in experience and levels of knowledge. The variations in experience levels bely measurement through years in the industry alone. Further, the experiences and complexity of issues that face small versus medium-sized companies make concepts such as investment, outcomes, and return on investment challenging to compare directly. Very knowledgeable defense executives may be found in companies of all sizes, just as many companies have their share of less knowledgeable defense executives. This limitation will be an ongoing challenge in future qualitative research.

Recommendations

In Chapter 2, I described how prior research had relied on either secondary quantitative data or qualitative data drawn from in-house lobbyists. While this information is relevant to lobbying, it did not address perspectives of the company executives who decide to lobby, or the companies for which lobbying is performed by a contract lobbyist. My research explored this new area, and exposed related areas that might benefit from further study. The significance of executive awareness described in Chapter 4 and interpreted in Chapter 5 was a theme that nearly overwhelmed the data in my study. Its importance in this research could be readily associated with multiple additional themes that also emerged, and had both positive and negative implications.

Interview Questions

Drawing out executive knowledge requires carefully considered semi-structured interviews. Research interview questions could have been more narrowly focused on lobbying or executive decision making; however, as described in Chapter 2, the

environment in which lobbying takes place suggested too narrow a focus would risk limiting responses and missing key concepts. There is a balance researchers must achieve in asking enough questions to glean data while not making the interview cumbersome. Relevant questions for future research should more directly address whether a company is a prime or sub-contractor, or whether the company supports programs of record or new technology, or both. Further, asking the executive directly, “why do you lobby Congress?” or “why don’t you lobby Congress?” could be more effective. In retrospect, my interview questions might have been more nuanced and open-ended than necessary.

Measuring and Developing Expertise Over Experience

Research could benefit from understanding how defense executives accumulate their expertise and the associated executive-level awareness of the relationships between the executive and legislative branches. The practitioners of business, legislation, and lobbying are the actors who are best positioned to democratize the lobbying of Congress. The relationships between legislative process knowledge and competitive outcomes in subsequent contracting could inform lobbying and acquisition policy. Additional qualitative research focused on the professional development of defense executives of small and medium-sized companies, specific to legislative awareness, would be helpful.

Understanding Access to Participants in Government

Development of professional relationships suggests certain levels of access must accompany process knowledge. While my research focused on perceived barriers to or facilitators of lobbying, it would be useful for policymakers to understand what actual barriers to lobbying exist. My research did not directly explore challenges of access to

congressional decision makers, yet it could be derived to a degree from the levels of awareness in subthemes of communications and connectivity. Each requires degrees of access that may or may not be equally available to industry. The research to date relies on data drawn from in-house lobbyists who presumably have higher levels of access than do defense executives.

This gap could be explored with additional qualitative research. A comparative analysis of defense executives' communications with the executive branch versus Congress could be particularly informative. Additionally, case studies focused on midsize companies of varying size could prove useful. I identified above that there is substantial variation in midsize companies. Future research might be enhanced by dividing the revenue qualifier further. Companies with revenues between \$500 million and \$1 billion versus companies with revenues between \$50 million and \$500 million would likely yield different areas of concern for defense executives. Such differences could shed light on the need for a new category of "large-small" or "small-medium" when forming appropriate policies.

Applying the Theoretical Framework

The polarities of democracy theoretical framework proved both durable and flexible in this research. In prior academic research, the polarities of democracy theory was more often associated with issues of social justice (Benet, 2013; Hayes, 2019; McDaniel, 2019). Its use enabled an examination of lobbying free from the baggage of campaign finance, political ideology, and class. Further, the theory allowed the research methodology to examine the lobbying decision in the context of the performance of

democracy. My research confirms the utility of the theory for the additional qualitative studies suggested earlier in the chapter.

The measures within polarity maps referred to in Figures 1 through 3, whereby identification of where an executive, company or entity sits on the polarity map, was not explored in this research. Emerging work in the study of the polarities of democracy should allow for consideration of such measures in future research. Documenting the effectiveness of various techniques for effective management of the polarities of democracy presents a vast opportunity for further study.

My study focused on only two of the five polarity pairs identified in Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theory. In retrospect, my bias as a defense lobbyist may have obscured my initial selection of polarity pairs of interest. Working with the polarity maps at the conclusion of the study opened my understanding of the implications of actions and early warnings in the effective management of a polarity pair. Future research should consider the additional polarity pairs such as freedom and authority, or justice and due process when examining Congress.

Implications

By shedding light on how to more effectively realize the promise of democracy, my study has the potential to influence positive social change. The research findings can be used to inform policy makers of potential systemic issues that can hinder full participation in democratic processes. Findings of this research help demonstrate that conditions exist among defense executives faced with the decision to lobby that can risk

compromising equal opportunity and fair competitions in the federal contracting process that depends on legislative outcomes.

In Chapter 2, I identified that relatively few defense companies lobby Congress, yet those companies that perform best in federal contracting overwhelmingly lobby Congress. If democracy is to be a “solution to oppression,” its functions must be both understood and accessible to all (Benet, 2013). This study sheds light on perceptions of barriers to or facilitators of lobbying that shape the decision to lobby Congress. As such, it can inform considerations and policy associated with industry’s access to Congress.

Implications for Practice

In Chapter 2, I identified multiple studies confirming a decades-long effort by Congress to address defense acquisition reform. There is no evidence that confirms such emphasis has been applied to the understanding and use of the relationship between business and Congress as has been applied to the relationship of business and the executive branch. The research findings support the need to better identify and set conditions to improve executive levels of knowledge. Such improvements would allow such understanding of the role of Congress in federal funding, policy, and contracts, and perhaps support the effective management of the polarity pairs considered. Congress should consider incorporating these findings into practical policies that might encourage improved executive levels of awareness. Congress is well positioned to set conditions that allow for more effective management of polarity pairs that will allow greater democratization and move closer to fulfillment of the promise of democracy.

Conclusions

My research represents a first probe in attempting to understand facilitators of or barriers to defense executives' decision to lobby Congress, and was specific to companies with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion. The breadth of this criteria includes hundreds of thousands of defense companies (Esper, 2019). Themes described in Chapter 4 and interpreted in Chapter 5 suggest there is room to improve executive levels of integrated process knowledge critical to positioning for best competitive outcomes during the budget execution phase (GAO, 2020).

The inter-relationships of awareness, process, communications and connection, investment, outcomes, and experience were evident throughout the data. Closer examination of specific aspects of each theme would further the research literature and further inform policy makers. Executive education and training could help elevate levels of knowledge of defense practitioners, and allow for fuller participation across the entire budget development process.

Budgeting, legislation, and federal contracting are each inter-related and practical aspects of the performance of democracy. This research attempted to look beyond large vs. small company comparisons, and was separated from ongoing research and efforts in acquisition, campaign finance, and lobbying reforms. Understanding how defense executives perceive the environment in which they make the decision to lobby can inform all such reforms.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide with Researcher Prompts Italicized for Clarity

Welcome and rapport building before diving in. Establish common ground to enable interview subject's comfort and readiness to begin. (Rubin & Rubin, 2012)

Opening script. This will demonstrate my preparation, professionalism, and respect for the interviewee. Elements of the script will be general housekeeping such as allotted time, location of a restroom, offering water, and confirming general agreement on how the interview will proceed. I will discuss the consent form, my intent to record, and that the interview subject will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcript. (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016)

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I will ask you several questions to which there are no right or wrong answers. The questions focus on our lived experience as a defense executive. The interview will take about 30 minute or so, but don't feel constrained by that time limit if you'd like more time. I have your consent form and you acknowledge this is a voluntary interview for research purposes. I'll be recording our conversation, and will make the transcript available to you for review as soon as it is available. If you would like to amend any responses after reviewing the transcript, you'll have the opportunity to do so. Are you ready to begin? Comfortable? Ok, here we go.”

Research questions are reminders for the researcher, not to be expressed to the interview subjects:

R-1 What are the perceptions of small defense business executives with revenues between \$5 million and \$1 billion regarding the barriers to or facilitators of their participation in Congressional lobbying?

- Begin with easy, softball-type questions, to allow the interview subject to settle in. I'll encourage them talking about themselves and their business.
- Let' start with you telling me about your business and your company's federal sales.
 - a. I'm interested to learn about your area of focus, competitors, etc.

Next questions focus on level of knowledge

- How did you learn about how to succeed in federal sales?
 - a. On-the-job training?
 - b. Is there formal training available?

- Can you tell me how your federal contracts are funded?

Possible Probes:

- *Type of funding account Other Procurement Army, Operations & Maintenance, etc.*
 - *Type of contract vehicle: prime, sub, Other Transaction Authorities*
 - *Awareness of the Congressional authorization and appropriations process*
- Do you think working with Congress gives a company an advantage in federal sales?

Possible probes:

- *Relationships*
 - *Access*
 - *Proximity to decision makers*
- Thinking of companies that seem to win a lot of contracts, what do you think they do differently that leads to success?

Shifting to lobbying processes, procedures and understanding

- Do you have any thoughts on how working with Congress might help or hurt your competitive position?
- How would you describe lobbying?
 - a. Do you have observations of the costs vs. benefits of lobbying?
- Has your company ever considered lobbying Congress as part of your federal strategy?
 - a. Do you know how you would pursue a lobbying strategy?
 - b. Where would you learn how to lobby if you feel you need to learn more?
 - c. Can you describe any issues of compliance or policy that you weigh in your decision to lobby or not lobby?
- Are there company policies about political activity?
- What would encourage your company to participate more fully during the legislative phase of funding federal contracts?

- Do you have thoughts on how Congressional engagement helps or harms your federal sales?
- Do you have thoughts on how the playing field might be leveled with different policies regarding Congressional engagement?

Closing script. This segment will recap what just happened during the interview, review the plan to share the transcript, and see if the subject has any questions for me. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016)

“Thank you for making the time to answer each question so thoughtfully. Your responses will help me in this research project. As promised, the transcript will be available for your review. When the project is complete, you will be able to review it in its entirety. Also, as indicated on the consent form, your participation is completely confidential and your name and company name will not appear in the final report. Do you have any additional questions or comments for me?”

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Below is an example email outreach to a potential interview recruit identified through publicly available data, or referred via snowball sampling by another recruit.

Hello XX,

I hope this note finds you well.

I am a PhD candidate at Walden University pursuing a degree in Public Policy and Administration. I am conducting research of defense executives of companies with annual revenues between \$5million and \$1 billion. My research focus is on the perspectives of defense executives whose companies sell to the US government.

Qualified participants are executives who face the decision to lobby or not to lobby Congress in conjunction with their federal sales effort. Would you support my research by participating in a completely confidential, semi-structured interview focused on your decision making associated with the federal process?

The interview would include completion of an Informed Consent statement (I'll e-mail this to you); allowing me to interview by Zoom video. Strict protocols to protect your and your company's identity will be in place. The entire interview process should take no more than 60 minutes of your time, and likely much less time. You will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript and make desired edits to assure your words are your own, and will have access to the final research product.

If you know of other qualified executives, please share this request within your professional network.

Please let me know if you would like to participate by contacting me by text (preferred), [REDACTED], or email, [REDACTED], if you have any questions.

Thank you for considering assisting me with this task.

Sincerely,

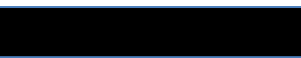
Gene Moran

Appendix C: Approval Letter



August 11, 2022

Dr. Gene Moran



Re: **Permission for use of Polarities of Democracy graphics in your PhD. Dissertation**

Dear Dr. Moran:

The Institute for Polarities of Democracy seeks to protect the intellectual knowledge of the Polarities of Democracy theory as described below:

- **Purpose:** Ensure proper acknowledgement of the source of the Polarities of Democracy[®] Map contents developed by Dr. William J. Benet & the Institute for Polarities of Democracy.
 - It is sufficient when sharing content to include the following sentence in a legible format on the Polarity Map[®] (either in the Polarity Map[®] graphic or bottom of a page where the Polarity Map[®] is portrayed):

The Polarities of Democracy[®] Map content is used with permission of the Institute for Polarities of Democracy.

In addition, Polarity Partnerships, LLC, a strategic partner of the Institute, has licensed the Institute for Polarities of Democracy to use the Polarity Map[®], principles, the Polarity Assessment[™], the 5-Step S.M.A.L.L.[™] process and miscellaneous tools and resources commercially. We realize the term “licensing” means different things to different people and seek to clarify what “licensing” means to Polarity Partnerships. The guidelines and underlying purpose associated with our licensing model are described below:

- **Purpose:** Ensure proper acknowledgement of the source of the Polarity Map[®], principles and associated processes and resources developed by Barry Johnson & Polarity Partnerships, LLC.
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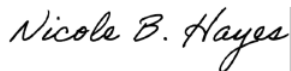
Institute for Polarities of Democracy, Advancing Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Communities.
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- **Purpose:** Protect the integrity of the Polarity Map® in its most current form.
 - Your Polarity Map® should include all key elements of the Polarity Map® including the quadrants, infinity loop, poles, use of the word AND between the poles, synergy arrows, *GPS*, *DF*, prompts in the Map, and when reprinted in color, maintain the original colors in the Polarity Map®. We encourage you to include the Action Steps and Early Warnings field when appropriate as they are an integral part of the Polarity Map® and 5-Step S.M.A.L.L.™ Process.

For the purposes of your dissertation, you may use the Polarities of Democracy® Maps and the Polarity Maps® with the following statement:

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Sincerely,



Nicole B. Hayes, PhD.
President, Board of Directors