

# Constructing Interest Group Coalitions

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## **Abstract**

Coalitions are one of the most important tools available to interest groups as they attempt to influence the policy process, yet relatively little is known about how interest group coalitions are constructed. Drawing upon an original dataset of 226 interviews with coalition leaders conducted in Washington, DC in 2014 and 2015, this paper examines the preferences of coalition leaders over bringing new members into their coalitions. It explains variations in leaders' stated preferences for organizational membership diversity with respect to ideology and issues using a two-stage mixed-process estimator. It focuses on four features of coalitions' issues – partisan lean, degree of controversy, distribution of benefits and costs, and venue. The results show that preferences for ideological membership diversity are associated with majoritarian politics, legislative rather than bureaucratic venues, younger coalitions, and larger coalition sizes. Preferences for issue membership diversity are associated with highly controversial issues, younger coalitions, and larger coalition sizes. The results should be interpreted with caution due to possible length bias. Future work on this project promises to yield better understanding of how interest groups, political parties, and coalitions are alternative but related institutions for strategic actors to advance their public policy interests.

## **Keywords**

Interest groups, coalitions, issues, ideology, diversity

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Observers of American politics have long registered concern about the potential for special interest groups to exert influence over public policy outcomes in ways that benefit elites to the detriment of ordinary citizens (Dahl 1961; Gilens and Page 2014). This concern has been channeled, in part, into research that examines the representational biases of participation in the interest group system, such as greater involvement by business and professional groups than by citizens' interests (Schattschneider 1960). Empirical research in this tradition often examines individual interest groups and the distribution of their political activities, especially lobbying, giving congressional testimony, filing amicus curiae briefs, making campaign contributions, and hiring political staff (Grossmann 2012; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). For example, research consistently finds that corporations, trade associations, and occupational interests spend more money on lobbying than do public interest organizations (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, p. 409).

Despite the interest group field's emphasis on the distribution of activities of individual organizations, research in the field also consistently shows that interest groups undertake a large share of their work collaboratively in coalitions (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, and Leech 2009; Hojnacki 1997; Holyoke 2011; Hula 1999). These coalitions are a critical part of the networks that interest groups form with one another (Grossmann 2014; Heaney 2006; Heaney and Lorenz 2013). Indeed, as Mahoney and Baumgartner (2015) argue, interest groups exert influence primarily in conjunction with their allies in the policy process and, thus, must be understood in that context.

Given the ubiquity of coalitions in the work of interest groups, it is surprising that representational issues have not been investigated more extensively within coalition settings.

Research that addresses these questions is generally limited in scope to studies that focus on selected policy areas (see, for example, Phinney 2010; Tattersal 2010). If interest groups exert their influence when acting in coalition, then should not the representation of interest groups be examined as they are situated in coalitions? Is it not the configuration of groups through their alliances that matters more than their individual capacities? If a group is individually well endowed, but it is unable to arrange suitable collaboration, it may not be able to successfully advocate for its interests. Conversely, if a group is individually poorly endowed, but it forges strategically savvy alliances, its goals may be within its reach (Strolovitch 2007; Tattersal 2010).

In order to have a better appreciation for how interests are represented in the policy process, more information is needed about how interest groups are configured through coalitions. The primary goal of this project is to build deeper knowledge about the nature of coalitions as institutions that mediate the influence that groups have over public policy. As a first step toward this end, this paper examines the logic that interest groups use in building coalitions. What do they look for in new members? Understanding why members of a coalition are chosen provides initial insight into which interests are and are not represented through coalitions. We argue in this paper that the issue context of a coalition shapes its motivations for seeking new members. In particular, we inquire about the conditions under which coalitions prefer diversity in the issues and ideologies reflected by their organizational members.

This paper presents the first findings out of a new study of 226 randomly-selected lobbying coalitions sampled from the full range of federal policy issues in the United States in 2014 and 2015. Personal interviews were conducted by the study's authors with a

representative of each coalition. The results shed light on how four features of issues – their partisan lean, degree of controversy, distribution of benefits and costs, and venue – correspond with the preferences that coalitional representatives express about issue and ideological diversity among members of the coalition.

The paper begins by drawing upon theories of coalitions and diversity to establish a working theoretic framework. Second, we derive hypotheses about coalitional preferences for members. Third, we explain the methods of collecting data. Fourth, we detail our empirical model. Fifth, we present the statistical results. Sixth, we discuss the implications of the findings for how interests get represented. The paper concludes by laying out the next steps for research.

### **Seeking Coalition Members**

Coalitions are a flexible way for interest groups to participate in political advocacy. An interest group coalition exists any time two or more autonomous interest groups agree to work together in advocating for their public policy interests (Wilson 1995). This encompassing definition recognizes that coalitions exist in a wide variety of forms. They may be small or large, temporary or long term, broad or narrow in scope, and formal or informal in their organizational structure (Tarrow 2005).

The flexible nature of coalitions means that their memberships are always potentially in flux. Some coalition memberships *may* remain stable over time. But coalitions also have the option to add or delete members at any time. Doing so is often as simple as updating a web page or letterhead. They may seek to do so as new organizations emerge, as an issue changes,

as interests evolve, or as the legislative process progresses (or stalls). In short, coalitional configurations may change when opportunities present themselves for change.

The question at hand in this paper is how coalition leaders think about making changes to their coalition memberships. Do they prefer to make changes that add diversity to a coalition or that reinforce existing strengths? If they seek diversity, on which dimensions? Would they like to add members that are diverse with respect to ideology, issues, or both? Of course, just because a coalition's leaders prefer diversity does not mean that they will actually achieve diversity in the coalition's composition. However, understanding these preferences is a first step toward explaining how coalitional configurations arise.

### *Theories of Diversity*

Diversity is a two-edged sword for coalitions that holds both potential advantages and disadvantages. These advantages and disadvantages relate to what a coalition's membership *signals*, as well as how it affects the way that members *collaborate*. First, the membership of a coalition contains information that sends signals to interested political observers, such as legislators (Kollman 1998; Phinney 2010). From this perspective, a more diverse coalition indicates that the coalition appeals to a wider range of interests. Policy makers are likely to view this breadth as an indication that they could also assemble a broad constituency behind the coalition's cause within their institutional context (such as on a congressional committee). Thus, coalitional diversity may be a signal that the coalition's cause is a good use of political capital.

Second, diversity in a coalition's membership may affect the way coalition members collaborate (Page 2007; Phinney 2010). A more diverse coalition may assemble more

information, resources, and skills than a homogenous one. Thus, greater diversity may lead a coalition to the actuality of greater success in its work. Some coalition leaders may view the construction of a diverse coalition itself as a kind of intermediate success on the path toward a longer-term goal (Tattersal 2010). Achieving diversity may correlate with collaborative norms that are otherwise seemingly unrelated to the coalition's specific concerns (Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, and Konrad 2006). Further, greater diversity may *signal* a greater likelihood of success, thus conflating the signaling and collaborative effects of diversity.

At the same time, diversity carries risks in the way that members of a coalition work together. A diverse coalition may be the proverbial "too many cooks that spoil the broth". Members may have differences that make them ill-suited for the coalition's work. These differences may also bring the members into conflict with one another, thus amplifying the coalition's internal maintenance difficulties. Under certain conditions, diversity may not be worth the cost.

### *Dimensions of Diversity*

The discussion of diversity up to this point is cast in abstract terms. However, there are many different dimensions of diversity that may be relevant. In common usage, diversity generally refers to differences in the race/ethnicity or sex/gender of *individuals*. This paper refers to the diversity of *organizations* and, thus, pertains to organizational characteristics. For example, the organizational members of a coalition may be homogenous or diverse with respect to dimensions such as their representation of certain industries or sectors, the geographic scope of their constituencies (e.g., local, state, regional, national, international), or their tactical expertise (e.g., lobbying, grassroots, legal).

This paper theorizes two aspects of diversity that are particularly salient in contemporary politics: issues and ideology. *Issues* are important because they orient the work of members of Congress, who choose to concentrate on a selected portfolio of issues (Sulkin 1995). Thus, broadening the issue diversity of a coalition may widen the interest of members of Congress in the coalition's cause. On the other hand, issue diversity among its membership may pull a coalition in too many directions, potentially undermining the focus needed for successful collective action.

*Ideology* is important because it correlates highly with partisanship in an era of intense partisan polarization (Theriault 2008). If coalitions are able to form across ideological boundaries, diversity may facilitate overcoming veto points in policy making (Sinclair 2006). On the other hand, ideological diversity may prove to be a stumbling block for coalitions, especially if partisan actors attempt to enforce party purity (Murakami 2008). Of course, issue and ideological diversity may correlate with one another because "issue ownership" by politicians often corresponds with party membership (Egan 2013).

### **Issue Contexts and Membership Preferences**

We do not expect coalition leaders to exhibit a strict preference for either diversity or homogeneity. Rather, we anticipate that the potential benefits of coalition diversity depend crucially on variations in the issue context. Thus, we hypothesize that the preferences of coalition leaders for diversity corresponds with four aspects of the issue context: (1) the partisan lean of the issue; (2) the degree of controversy associated with the issue; (3) the

distribution of benefits and costs surrounding the issue; and (4) the institutional venue where the issue is being considered.

First, we hypothesize that the partisan lean of the issue corresponds with coalition leaders' preferences for membership diversity. As Grossmann and Hopkins (2016) argue, Democrats are typically motivated less by ideological purity and more by group heterogeneity. Republicans, by contrast, traditionally prefer ideological purity to heterogeneity. Consequently, among coalitions focused on partisan-leaning issues, we expect Democratic-leaning coalitions to value ideological diversity more than do neutral- or Republican-leaning coalitions. Further, this expectation arises from the standing of the Democratic Party as the minority party in Congress during the period of this study. When a coalition's leader wish for its proposals to gain traction, it must contend with how well (or poorly) its concerns match with the present ideological distribution of members. For Democratic-leaning coalitions to gain traction in Congress, such coalitions may need ideological "cover" from non-liberal groups. In other words, these coalitions may possess a greater need for *ideological* diversity than may neutral- or Republican-leaning coalitions. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H<sub>1a</sub>: Coalitions focused on issues traditionally associated with the Democratic Party prefer to build more ideologically diverse coalitions than coalitions that are neutral-leaning or associated with the Republican Party.

However, both Democratic- and Republican-leaning coalitions may benefit or suffer from the diversity in the *issue* foci of their members. Thus, we hypothesize that:



H<sub>1b</sub>: Coalitions focused on issues traditionally associated with the Democratic Party prefer to attract members with issue foci that are no more or less diverse than coalitions that are neutral-leaning or associated with the Republican Party.

Second, we recognize that coalitions may have either positive or negative preferences for diversity when issues are especially controversial. Consistent with the signaling perspective, diverse coalitions in the wake of controversy may indicate that the coalition has found a way to resolve differences among key stakeholders. Along these lines, Bacheller (1977) finds that groups working on controversial issues are more likely to reach out to other groups in the policy process than are groups working on issues with less disagreement. Thus, coalition leaders may prefer to attract members with diverse issues and ideologies under these conditions. However, consistent with the collaborative perspective, controversy may make it more difficult for diverse members to work together. Thus, coalition leaders may prefer to avoid bringing in new members with diverse issues and ideologies under these conditions. Thus, we state competing hypotheses:

H<sub>2a</sub>: When the coalition's issue is controversial, coalitions leaders are more likely to prefer to attract members that are diverse in their issues and ideologies than is the case when the coalition's issue is not controversial.

H<sub>2b</sub>: When the coalition's issue is controversial, coalitions leaders are less likely to prefer to attract members that are diverse in their issues and ideologies than is the case when the coalition's issue is not controversial.

Third, we hypothesize that the distribution of costs and benefits among the stakeholders on an issue matter for coalition leaders' preferences over the diversity of their

members. Our argument follows the analysis of Wilson (1995), who distinguishes four types of issue politics, based on whether an issue's cost-bearers and beneficiaries are concentrated or diffuse. When cost-bearers and beneficiaries are mismatched—that is, when one group is diffuse and the other concentrated—change is unlikely. Client politics, Wilson argues, occurs when an issue or program's beneficiaries are concentrated and the cost-bearers are diffuse—leaving proponents of an issue or program far more intense in their advocacy than the cost-bearers. Programs benefitting from client politics, then, are extremely difficult to change or remove. Entrepreneurial politics works in a similar fashion. In this case, the cost-bearers are a concentrated group, whereas the beneficiaries are diffuse—rendering a particular program or issue extremely difficult to get started in the first place.

In contrast to the “mismatch” of client and entrepreneurial politics, change is a greater possibility when cost-bearers and beneficiaries are matched—that is, when both groups are diffuse or concentrated. When both cost-bearers and beneficiaries are concentrated, interest-group politics ensues. Under interest-group politics, two sets of intense actors spar over a contested program or issue, until one or the other prevails. Majoritarian politics, which occurs when both cost-bearers and beneficiaries are both diffuse, is similar. Under majoritarian politics, large groups of cost-bearers and beneficiaries contend over a program or issue, until the stronger side prevails. Often, particularly in the American system, the side favoring the status quo wins; however, the potential for change (or even a political fight at all) is greater than in the client or entrepreneurial cases.

Of these four types of politics, we argue that coalitions dealing with majoritarian politics are most likely to prefer both ideological and issue diversity in their memberships. Indeed,

because both cost-bearers and beneficiaries are wide and diffuse under majoritarian politics, coalitions operating in majoritarian situations benefit by building their coalitions as broadly as possible, in order to effect change. Thus, we posit:

H<sub>3</sub>: Coalitions focused on majoritarian issues prefer to build more diverse memberships with respect to issues and ideology than do coalitions focused on other issue types.

Fourth, we hypothesize that policymaking venue is a key consideration in coalition building. As McKay (2011) argues, lobbyists make strategic choices between lobbying the bureaucracy and lobbying the legislature. Given key differences in the motivations of bureaucrats and legislators, lobbyists likely adjust their advocacy strategies based on their choice of venue. When lobbying the bureaucracy, for example, coalitions may have to demonstrate both legal and policy expertise, in order to be heard by regulators. Moreover, as Nelson and Yackee (2012) argue, message coherence is particularly important when appealing to federal regulators. This coherence may be indicated by narrowness in the issue expertise and ideologies of coalition members (Browne 1990). As a result, one might expect coalitions who primarily target the bureaucracy to shy away from diversity in their memberships. As noted above, such diversity carries with it the potential for dissent and/or only surface-level agreement on key issues.

In contrast, legislative coalitions may well want to pursue diverse coalitions for a variety of reasons. A coalition may fail to gain access with a large number of congressional offices, if it lacks at least some connection with one party or the other. For instance, the Defenders of Wildlife may struggle to gain a meeting with a conservative, rural member Congress to advocate for funding for federal recreational lands, unless they are able to partner with a

conservative group like the National Rifle Association.<sup>1</sup> Further, because a majority of Congress (and, on many major issues, a supermajority in the Senate) is required for bill passage, coalitions targeting Congress may have to search for ways to appeal to a larger group of decision-makers than they would when lobbying the bureaucracy. For these reasons, we posit:

H<sub>4</sub>: When coalitions focus on the legislature, coalition leaders prefer to build more diverse coalitions with respect to issues and ideology than when they focus on the bureaucracy.

## **Research Design**

Data for this paper are drawn from a major interview project of 226 coalition leaders, conducted by the authors during the summers of 2014 and 2015. The interviews span coalition issue areas, partisan affiliations, sizes, and a wide variety of other parameters. To the best of our knowledge, these data are the most comprehensive set of interviews with coalition leaders collected to date. Given the fluidity (and occasionally, secrecy) of coalitions, however, we took great care to address potential sources of bias in our sampling and data collection. The following section details our data collection process, as well as procedures addressing a variety of data quality challenges.

### *Sampling Strategy*

Ideally, a fully representative sample of coalitions should include all types of coalitions, in proportion to their appearance in the population: ranging from large to small, formal to informal, partisan to nonpartisan, cooperative to non-cooperative, and so on. A major difficulty

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<sup>1</sup> For an example along these lines, see the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (Hirsche 2006).

in selecting such a sample, however, comes from the fact the population of coalitions is unknown. That is, there does not exist anywhere a list of all lobbying coalitions – or even a list of many lobbying coalitions. Moreover, because many coalitions exist on an informal or temporary basis, they typically do not generate the kinds of records that may make them amenable to systematic investigation. For example, coalitions are less likely than some types of advocacy organizations to make campaign contributions, register to lobby, establish a permanent office, or maintain a web page. The absence of this type of information complicates the process of identifying and sampling coalitions for statistical analysis.

In order to identify coalitions for analysis, we proceeded in four steps. First, we selected a random sample of interest groups, using records filed in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act. While not all interest groups register under this law, an extension of the law through The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 (Public Law 110–81) ensures that the most active interest groups are registered. Second, we conducted telephone interviews with randomly selected lobbyists from the identified interest groups. Selecting lobbyists randomly from within the groups ensures that there is no bias toward any particular type of coalition, especially since different lobbyists from the same interest group may vary in the issues and coalitions for which they act as representatives of the group. Third, the telephone interviews included questions about which coalitions the lobbyist had worked with in the past twelve months, in order to generate a list of coalitions for each respondent. We invited 1250 lobbyists to participate in the study, with 380 completing the interview, for a response rate of 30 percent. The interviews also included questions asking the respondents to rate the coalitions on the basis of their cooperativeness and effectiveness (and identify a leader

for each coalition), while at the same time acquiring demographic and other background information about the respondents. The interview schedule is available in the Appendix. Fourth, one coalition was randomly selected from each telephone interview to create a sample of coalitions. Once a sample of coalitions was identified, the representatives of these coalitions were invited to participate in in-person interviews in the Washington, DC metro area.

While we took care to ensure that our sample was as representative as possible of the population of coalitions, the design does carry the possibility of some bias. One concern of particular importance for our research design is *length bias*. Length bias is a common sampling problem that occurs when subgroups of a population are oversampled because of their size (Stein and Dattero 1985). In our case, we believe length bias is manifest in our research design through the oversampling of large coalitions. That is, because our phone interviews sample members of coalitions and large coalitions have more members, large coalitions are more likely to be mentioned in our interviews. As a result, they are more likely to be selected into our sample of coalitions. Traditionally, probability weights offer a solution to this sort of bias, as each observation is weighted according to its inverse probability of selection into the sample (based on the sampling design). We are presently in the process of building such weights, using the sizes of coalitions (selected and unselected) as the basis for the weights. Given that this data collection is currently ongoing, the present draft of this paper incorporates coalition size into our regression models to account imperfectly for this bias.

As a final precaution, we have also checked for measurable response bias in our sample. To address this possibility, we collected demographic information on those who were invited to be interviewed and compiled additional information about their organizations and associated

coalitions via public resources. Using this information, we estimated a variety of selection models, assessing the representativeness of our coalition and respondent samples on a number of dimensions. While we are still in the process of expanding this data collection to the entire sample of phone and in-person invitees, these models have uncovered no response biases in terms of interviewee gender, race, years of experience, revolver status, high-profile politics employment (i.e., being a Senate-confirmed bureaucrat or a former member of Congress), or in-house versus contract status. With regard to the actual coalitions sampled, we have found no response biases with regard to the coalitions' registration status, possession of a web site, or use of in-house versus contract lobbyists.

#### *Interview Structure*

After coalitions were identified, in-person interviews were conducted with each consenting coalition leader. We invited 339 coalition representatives to participate in the study, with 226 of them ultimately completing interviews, yielding a response rate of 67 percent. The research design puts a premium on conducting in-person interviews with coalition leaders, because in-person interviews are especially amenable to building respondent-interviewer trust when gathering sensitive information from political elites (Berry 2002). However, telephone interviews were conducted in a few cases where a respondent was willing to participate in the research but an in-person interview was impractical. The typical interview lasted 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews inquired about the identities of members of the coalition, how members were selected by the coalition, who their leaders are, the extent of their cooperativeness and effectiveness, their formal and informal organizational structures, issue contexts, and other factors relevant to coalition dynamics. The interviews included a mix

of closed- and open-ended questions in order to enable both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses. The interview schedule is available in the Appendix.

### **Empirical Model**

The purpose of our empirical model is to explain coalition leaders' preferences for diversity of coalition membership. We assess these preferences using two dependent variables: *Preference for Ideological Diversity* and *Preference for Issue Diversity*. Both of these variables are measured using questions from our interview. Respondents were shown a list of "Criteria for Selecting a New Coalition Partner" and asked to rate these criteria as "Very Important" (score of 3), "Somewhat Important" (2), or "Not a Consideration" (1). Among the ten options they were presented were "The organization brings an **ideological position DIFFERENT** from other coalition members" and "The organization represents **DIFFERENT concerns, issues, and/or interests** than other coalition members" (emphasis in original).

We model responses to these two questions in the style of seemingly unrelated regressions (Zelner 1962). This approach allows us incorporate information about the fact that the errors of the two equations are likely correlated because of cases in which leaders have a general preference for or against diversity that is not specific to issues or ideology. Given that the dependent variables are measured at the ordinal level, an approach is needed that estimates two ordered probit models simultaneously. We use a two-stage mixed-process estimator to do so (Roodman 2011). Missing values are imputed using complete-case imputation (Little 1988).



In order to test H<sub>1a</sub> and H<sub>1b</sub>, we coded the partisan lean of coalitions into three variables: *Republican Party Lean*, *Democratic Party Lean*, and *Neutral Party Lean* (the residual category). For *Republican Party Lean*, we coded a coalition with a value of 1 if its principal issue was typically associated with the Republican Party, 0 otherwise. Examples include the removal of the estate tax, promotion of school choice, and relief from Affordable Care Act requirements. For *Democratic Party Lean*, we coded a coalition with a value of 1 if its principal issue was typically associated with the Democratic Party, 0 otherwise. Examples include increases in environmental protection, guaranteeing social welfare benefits, and immigration leniency for undocumented workers. Coalitions not falling into one of these categories were reserved for *Neutral Party Lean*. Examples include funding for hearing health, surface transportation efficiency, harbor maintenance, and rules for nonprofit charitable deductions.

In order to test H<sub>2a</sub> and H<sub>2b</sub>, we utilized a question from the interview that asked respondents to assess *Issue Controversy*. Respondents were asked, “How controversial is the issue in terms of the likelihood that attentive constituencies are to disagree about the issue?” For this question, options included “Very Controversial” (scored as 3), “Somewhat Controversial” (2), and “Not at all Controversial” (1).

In order to test H<sub>3</sub>, we coded coalitions into four categories: *Majoritarian Politics*, *Interest Group Politics*, *Entrepreneurial Politics*, and *Client Politics* (the residual category). A coalition was coded as *Majoritarian Politics* when its principal issue is one where both the benefits and costs of the proposed policy are widely distributed among members of the public, 0 otherwise. Examples include immigration liberalization, top-line deficit reduction, and marijuana legalization. A coalition was coded as *Interest Group Politics* when its principal issue

is one where both the benefits and costs of the proposed policy are received by narrow stakeholders, 0 otherwise. Examples include workplace safety disputes, sugar subsidies, and online sales tax. A coalition was coded as *Entrepreneurial Politics* when its principal issue is one where the benefits of the proposed policy would be received by the public at large but the costs would be paid by a narrow set of stakeholders, 0 otherwise. Examples include prohibition of oil drilling, Medicare payment oversight, and consumer product safety. A coalition was coded as *Client Politics* (the residual category) when its principal issue is one where the benefits of the proposed policy would be received by a narrow set of stakeholders, but the costs would be paid by the public at large. Examples include industry-specific tax credits, funding for research grant programs, and Medicare coverage of particular medical services.

In order to test H<sub>4</sub>, we used data from an interview question about the founding goals of the coalition. We looked at two of the eight options respondents were offered. *Support Legislation* was coded using “The coalition was founded to **support** a particular piece of **legislation**” (emphasis in original), with “Agree” receiving a score of 3, “Somewhat True” a score of 2, and “Disagree” a score of 1. *Support Government Action* was coded using “The coalition was founded to **support** a particular **government action**, rulemaking decision, or implementation decision” (emphasis in original), with “Agree” receiving a score of 3, “Somewhat True” a score of 2, and “Disagree” a score of 1.

Additionally, our empirical model contains three control variables. It has measures of *Coalition Age* and *Coalition Steering Committee*, based upon direct questions in the interview. Further, it has a measure of *Coalition Size* based on the membership list provided by the

coalition representative in the interview or based on his/her best estimate of size in the few cases when such a list was unavailable.

## Statistical Results

The preferences of coalition leaders leaned slightly away from forming diverse coalitions, preferring instead to ally with partners that were close to them in issues and ideology. They viewed *Issue Diversity* in a more positive light than *Ideological Diversity*. About 21 percent of leaders thought that *Issue Diversity* was “Very Important” in selecting new members, 31 percent saw it as “Somewhat Important”, and 47 percent judged it to be “Not a Consideration”. About 10 percent of leaders thought that *Ideological Diversity* was “Very Important” in selecting new members, 27 percent saw it as “Somewhat Important”, and 63 percent judged it to be “Not a Consideration”. In explaining this variation, we found mixed support for our hypotheses. Estimates of our two-stage mixed-process model are reported in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The partisan lean of the coalition’s issue appears to play no significant role shaping a coalition’s preferences over diversity, yielding no support for H<sub>1a</sub> or H<sub>1b</sub>. *Issue Controversy*, however, is important. When a coalition’s issue is more controversial, leaders express a greater preference for *Issue Diversity* in the coalition’s membership, in line with H<sub>2a</sub>. However, the same is not true for *Ideological Diversity*. Consistent with H<sub>3</sub>, we find that coalition leaders express a greater preference for *Ideological Diversity* when the coalition’s issue is rooted in *Majoritarian Politics*. However, the same is not true with respect to preferences over *Issue*

*Diversity*. Our model provides support for H<sub>4</sub>, that coalitions that are more focused on the goal to *Support Legislation* also register stronger preferences for *Ideological Diversity*. Nevertheless, the same tendency does not hold for *Issue Diversity*.

The control variables make a difference in the model. An older *Coalition Age* is coincident with significantly lesser preferences for diversity, both with respect to issues and ideology. It could be the case that older coalitions have already had the opportunity to build diverse memberships, if that is one of their strategic goals, and thus may not need to add more members to achieve diversity. Or, it could be the case older coalitions place a less of a value on diversity since they were founded in an era when it was a less relevant political consideration than was the case for more recently founded coalitions. Finally, it is possible that diverse coalitions are less likely to survive long in Washington, due to the higher potential for increased internecine conflict than may be the case with more homogenous coalitions.

The presence of a *Steering Committee* was not associated with stronger or weaker preferences for diversity. A larger *Coalition Size* was associated with stronger preferences for *Issue Diversity* but not *Ideological Diversity*. These effects may be endogenous because coalitions may get larger precisely because they favor *Issue Diversity*. Despite this potential endogeneity problem, it is necessary to retain *Coalition Size* in the current model in order to make an (albeit imperfect) adjustment for length bias. This variable will be dropped in a future iteration of the analysis once proper survey weights to adjust for length bias are available.

The significant, positive coefficient on Arctangent  $\rho$  reveals that the decision to model the two dependent variables as a system of equations was appropriate. Doing so improves the efficiency of the estimation process over estimating separate equations for each dependent

variable. However, when we estimate separate equations using standard ordered probit models, we reach the same conclusions regarding our hypothesis tests. So, while there is a statically significant difference between the approaches, there is not a substantively relevant difference.

## **Conclusion**

Coalition leaders' expression of a preference for membership diversity is no guarantee that their coalitions actually achieve diversity. However, if coalition leaders express preferences *against* membership diversity, it seems unlikely that they will move their coalitions in the direction of becoming more diverse. Thus, this study offers an important new insight into the politics of constructing interest group coalitions: the central tendency of Washington, DC coalitions is to lean away from a preference for greater diversity in membership. This avoidance is greater for *ideological* diversity than for *issue* diversity. Rather than seeking to gather strange bedfellows, the normal course of coalition construction is about finding birds of a feather to flock together. To the extent that they are representative institutions, coalitions are a mechanism that tends to reinforce the specialization, narrowness, and exclusiveness in representation that is stereotypical of interest group politics.

At the same time, our findings demonstrate that there is variation among coalitions in how their members seek to construct coalitions. Indeed, there are some conditions under which diversity is especially valued. When coalitions are immersed in majoritarian politics, then their leaders are more likely to prefer to reach out to ideologically diverse allies. Likewise, coalition leaders engaged in legislative politics are more likely to prefer ideological diversity

than are those who are engaged in bureaucratic politics. Issue diversity is prized especially when issues are controversial. However, under many other conditions, coalition leaders express no special preference for membership diversity, such as in the cases of entrepreneurial, client, and interest group politics. Similarly, our results indicate that coalitions associated with neither party express especially stronger preference for coalitional membership diversity – which is at odds with the recent argument Grossmann and Hopkins (2016) that Democrats have more of a tendency toward interest heterogeneity than do Republicans.

Despite the somewhat provocative implications of our findings, we would be remiss if we did not advise more than the usual amount of caution in interpreting our results. We are particularly concerned with how the potential for length bias may affect our conclusions. While we have taken precautions by including *Coalition Size* in our model to adjust for this possibility, the issue is in need of much closer consideration before the results are to be fully trusted.

This preliminary paper merely scratches of the surface of what we may be able to learn about coalition politics from the original data set on which this paper is based. We have membership lists for 95 percent of the coalitions in the study. These lists themselves are an extremely valuable source of data. We are in the process of compiling of a database of the thousands of organizations included on these lists. We plan to match these data to other kinds of political information, such as campaign contributions. Doing so will allow us to incorporate information on how the membership *preferences* of coalition leaders correspond (or not) to the *actual memberships* of their coalitions. Such information would provide granular detail on coalition networks that would facilitate assessing the causal processes of forming and dissolving these alliances (Fowler et al. 2011).

The promise of this research is to offer greater insight on how coalitions act as institutions that forge links across nominally distinct fields of politics, especially between interest groups and political parties (Cohen et al. 2008; Fraussen and Halpin 2016; Heaney and Rojas 2015). Parties, groups, and coalitions offer different tools for attempting to exert influence politics. Yet these tools all used by the same underlying actors who seek to promote their own interests. By exploring more deeply how these organizations are fundamentally interrelated with one another, it is possible to push toward greater insight on the tension between organizing to represent elites and organizing to represent ordinary citizens.

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**Table 1. Determinants of Preferences for Issue and Ideological Diversity of New Members**

	Ideological Diversity	Issue Diversity	Descriptive Statistics	Imputation
	Coefficient (Std. Error)		Mean (Std. Dev.)	Percent Imputed
<i>Republican Party Lean</i>	-0.230 (0.291)	-0.307 (0.267)	0.117 (0.319)	1.77%
<i>Democratic Party Lean</i>	0.371 (0.223)	0.154 (0.212)	0.243 (0.427)	1.77%
<i>Issue Controversy</i>	0.037 (0.122)	0.294* (0.115)	2.133 (0.811)	0.00%
<i>Majoritarian Politics</i>	0.618* (0.260)	0.401 (0.252)	0.170 (0.370)	3.10%
<i>Interest Group Politics</i>	0.041 (0.229)	0.194 (0.214)	0.343 (0.469)	3.10%
<i>Entrepreneurial Politics</i>	0.763 (0.485)	-0.252 (0.504)	0.032 (0.174)	3.54%
<i>Support Legislation</i>	0.212* (0.106)	0.026 (0.099)	1.957 (0.813)	3.10%
<i>Support Government Action</i>	0.075 (0.103)	0.070 (0.098)	1.724 (0.832)	3.54%
<i>Coalition Age</i>	-0.025* (0.010)	-0.037*** (0.009)	9.922 (12.159)	3.98%
<i>Coalition Steering Committee</i>	-0.013 (0.106)	0.097 (0.101)	2.172 (0.810)	2.65%
<i>Coalition Size</i>	0.000 (0.000)	0.002* (0.000)	87.677 (248.669)	3.10%
Cut Point 1-1	0.925* (0.402)			
Cut Point 1-2	1.960*** (0.418)			
Cut Point 2-1	0.815* (0.379)			
Cut Point 2-2	1.789*** (0.390)			
Arctangent $\rho$	0.538*** (0.104)			
N	224			
Log Likelihood	-377.998			
Likelihood Ratio $\chi_{(22)}^2$	61.90***			

\*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Appendix. Interview Instruments**

**Working Together in Washington:**  
Assessing Collaboration within Coalitions of Interest Groups

Instrument for Lobbyist Interviews  
Revised December 7, 2014

**Introduction**

Hello, may I please speak with \_\_\_\_\_?

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a \_\_\_\_\_ at the University of Michigan.

I am conducting research on the extent to which advocacy organizations work in coalitions with other organizations. As part of this project, I am building a database of interest-group coalitions in the United States. For this purpose, I am interviewing hundreds of advocates to ask a few short questions about your involvement in interest group coalitions.

Would you be willing to participate in a brief, 15-minute interview on how you do or do not work with coalitions? It is anonymous and is strictly for academic research. If you participate, you would be free to skip any question that you wish not to answer or end the interview at any time without penalty to you. Participating in the interview would not expose you to any significant risks or provide you any benefits.

[Receive respondent's response.]

**Questions**

1. As you are aware, a coalition exists any time two or more advocacy organizations choose to work together on a common advocacy project.
  - A. Thinking only of the past 12 months, which coalitions have *you personally* worked with?
  - B. For each coalition, please tell me the issue area that it works on?
  - C. I am interested in *all types* of interest group coalitions—small and large, formal and informal, ad hoc and permanent, etc.—so please take as much time as you need to list all of the coalitions in which you've taken part. Are there any coalitions that you would like to add to the list?
  - D. So, you have told me that you have worked with the following coalitions over the past year. [Read list.] Are there any other coalitions that you would like to add to this list?
  - E. Are there any other coalitions?

2. For each coalition that you just mentioned, in comparison to other coalitions of which you have been a part, how cooperative are the members of this coalition in working together? [Solicit an answer for each coalition named.]

\_\_\_\_\_ Much more cooperative  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat more cooperative  
\_\_\_\_\_ About typical  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat less cooperative  
\_\_\_\_\_ Much less cooperative

3. For each coalition that you just mentioned, considering the issues that the coalition has worked on in the past year, how effective do you think that it has been in achieving its goals? [Solicit an answer for each coalition named.]

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all effective

4. [At this point in the interview, the interviewer uses a random number generator to select one and only one of the coalitions identified in question 1.] I have just randomly selected \_\_\_\_\_ from the list of coalitions that you just provided me. Could you tell me:

A. Who is the leader of this coalition? \_\_\_\_\_

B. Which organization does \_\_\_\_\_ work for? \_\_\_\_\_

C. [If the respondent gives the name of an organization in question 5.A., then ask:] Is there an individual person in organization \_\_\_\_\_ that acts as a leader for the coalition? \_\_\_\_\_

D. [If the respondent says that there is no leader of the coalition, or many leaders, then ask:] Is there someone whom you believe would know the most about the history and inner-workings of the coalition? If so, could you tell me their name and organizational affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Demographic questions. I would like to ask a few brief demographic questions in order to assess the representativeness of the sample. As I mentioned earlier, you are free to skip any questions you don't wish to answer.

A. [Interviewer records sex/gender without asking.]

B. Could you tell me how many years you have worked for [your organization]?

C. Could you tell me how many years you have been a registered lobbyist?

D. Have you ever worked for Congress or a member of Congress?

- E. Have you ever worked for a federal government agency?
- F. Could you tell me the year in which you were born?
- G. Could you tell me how you identify your race/ethnicity?
- H. Could you tell me, do you personally identify as a Democratic, a Republican, or a member of another party? Or, do you prefer not to identify with any party?
- I. Could you tell me, where would you place yourself on the right to left ideological spectrum? Are you: (i) to the right of very conservative; (ii) very conservative; (iii) somewhat conservative; (iv) moderate; (v) somewhat liberal or progressive; (vi) very liberal or progressive; (vii) to the left of very liberal or progressive. Or do you not think of yourself as being on this spectrum?

**Conclusion**

Thank you for your time. Would you like for me to send you a copy of the results when the study is completed? \_\_\_\_\_

[If yes, then ask:] How would you like me to send it to you? \_\_\_\_\_

Please let me know the e-mail or postal address that you prefer. \_\_\_\_\_



**Working Together in Washington:**  
Assessing Collaboration within Coalitions of Interest Groups

Instrument for Coalition Leaders  
Revised December 7, 2014

**Introduction**

Thank you for making the time to meet with me today.

As we discussed earlier, I am conducting research on the organization, inner workings, and effectiveness of advocacy coalitions. As part of this project, we are currently conducting anonymous interviews with hundreds of coalition leaders in order to understand why coalitions do what they do.

I expect today's interview to take about 30-45 minutes. 60 minutes would be the absolute longest it would take. The interview would cover the founding of the coalition, its membership composition, its internal operations, the issues it works on, its political targets, and its effectiveness in influencing public policy outcomes, as well as a few personal questions about yourself. Your responses would be anonymized so that you would not be identifiable from the interview data.

The interview responses you provide would be used strictly for academic research. If you participate, you would be free to skip any question that you wish not to answer or end the interview at any time without penalty to you. Participating in the interview would not expose you to any significant risks or provide you any significant benefits.

Are you willing to participate in the interview?

[Receive respondent's response.]

**Coalition Founding**

1. To the best of your knowledge, in approximately what year was the coalition founded?
2. To the best of your knowledge, what were the motivations for the formation of the coalition? Was there a particular issue that the coalition sought to address?

3. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD A. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following goals motivated the creation of the coalition? Indicate all that apply:

**CARD A: FOUNDING GOALS**

Founding Goal	Agree	Somewhat True	Disagree
The coalition was founded to <b>support</b> a particular piece of <b>legislation</b> .			
The coalition was founded to <b>oppose</b> a particular piece of <b>legislation</b> .			
The coalition was founded to <b>support</b> a particular <b>government action</b> , rulemaking decision, or implementation decision.			
The coalition was founded to <b>oppose</b> a particular <b>government action</b> , rulemaking decision, or implementation decision.			
The coalition was founded to <b>support</b> the continued existence or funding of a particular <b>government agency or program</b> .			
The coalition was founded to <b>oppose</b> the continued existence or funding of a particular <b>government agency or program</b> .			
The coalition was founded to <b>better inform</b> the public at large about a particular policy <b>issue or problem</b> .			
The coalition was founded for some <b>other purpose</b> , namely:			

4. To the best of your knowledge, was the coalition founded largely:
  - to preserve the status quo
  - to advance a modest change in the status quo
  - to advance a major change in the status quo

### **Nature of the Issue**

5. Which issue has the coalition been most active on over the past year?
6. Considering the issue that you named in the previous question, how sensitive is this issue in terms of the likelihood that attentive constituencies find discussions of the issue to be upsetting or offensive?
  - Not very sensitive
  - Somewhat sensitive
  - Very sensitive
7. How controversial is the issue in terms of the likelihood that attentive constituencies are to disagree about the issue?
  - Not very controversial
  - Somewhat controversial
  - Very controversial
8. How broad is this issue in terms of the size of the constituency that is interested in it?
  - Not very broad
  - Somewhat broad
  - Very broad
9. How high is the issue on the current agendas of relevant decision makers in government?
  - On the backburner
  - Actively being discussed
  - Political action on this issue is presently taking place
10. How urgent is the issue, in terms of the timeframe within which it needs to be resolved?
  - Not that time sensitive
  - Needs to be resolved in the next five years
  - Must be resolved this year or next

**Strategy and Tactics**

11. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD B. When the coalition is working on the issue that you highlighted earlier, what is the frequency with which the coalition targets each of the following actors:

**CARD B: INSTITUTIONAL TARGETS**

<b>Institutional Target</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
Republican Party Leaders in Congress			
Democratic Party Leaders in Congress			
Congressional Committees within Jurisdiction			
Congressional Caucuses			
Rank-and-File Members of Congress			
The White House / Executive Office of the President			
Federal Government Agency or Department			
The Federal Judiciary			
State or Local Governments			
Opposing Advocacy Organizations or Coalitions			
Private Corporations			
Other:			

12. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD C. When the coalition is working on the issue that you highlighted earlier, which of the following strategies characterizes your work with government decision-makers? Indicate all that apply:

**CARD C: OUTREACH TO SUPPORTERS**

<b>Outreach Efforts</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
We concentrate on collaborating with our <b>key allies in government.</b>			
We concentrate on reaching out to a <b>broad range of supporters in government</b> (i.e., beyond just key allies).			
We concentrate on reaching out to <b>our opponents in government.</b>			
We concentrate on reaching out to <b>supporters outside of government.</b>			
We concentrate on reaching out to <b>opponents outside of government.</b>			

13. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD D. When your coalition is working on the issue you named earlier, which of the following tactics does it use? And how often does it use them?

**CARD D: TACTICS**

<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
Lobbying			
Congressional testimony			
Formal comments on proposed regulations			
Press releases / press conferences			
Paid advertising			
Opinion Polls/research projects			
Amicus curiae briefs in federal courts			
Sponsoring Lawsuits			
Grassroots Organizing			
Other:			

**Criteria for Choosing Coalition Partners**

14. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD E. When you are attempting to attract new organizations to join the coalition, what do you look for in potential new coalition partners?

**CARD E: COALITION PARTNERS**

<b>Criterion for Selecting a New Coalition Partner</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Not a Consideration</b>
The organization represents <b>SIMILAR concerns, issues, and/or interests</b> as other coalition members			
The organization represents <b>DIFFERENT concerns, issues, and/or interests</b> than other coalition members.			
The organization brings an <b>ideological position SIMILAR</b> to other coalition members.			
The organization brings an <b>ideological position DIFFERENT</b> from other coalition members.			
The organization and/or its representatives is <b>well known to existing coalition members.</b>			
The organization has demonstrated <b>a willingness and ability to work hard</b> on issues important to the coalition.			
The organization has <b>monetary resources</b> valuable to the coalition.			
The organization has <b>critical expertise</b> valuable to the coalition.			
The organization has a <b>sizeable constituency.</b>			
The organization is <b>well known and influential in national policy debates.</b>			
Other:			

## **Coalition Membership**

15. To the best of your knowledge, when the coalition was founded, was there a particular goal for the coalition's size? What was that goal? Why was it set as it was?
16. To what extent, if at all, has the coalition revisited its original goals for size? Why has it done so?
17. Given the goals of the coalition, would you say that the current size of the coalition is
  - Much too large
  - Somewhat too large
  - About the right size
  - Somewhat too small
  - Much too small
18. Why do you think that?
19. Approximately how many organizations are members of the coalition? Is there a list of the organizational members of the coalition? If so, may I please have a copy?
20. Please look at the list of members of the coalition. Which of the organizations on this list act as leaders of the coalition? By "leaders," I mean organizations that actively help to guide the work and agenda of the coalition. (If the respondent is not willing to divulge the list of leaders, ask if, instead, she or he could provide an approximate count of the number of leaders.)

## **Internal Operations**

21. In comparison to other coalitions of which you have been a part, how cooperative are the members of this coalition in working together?
  - Much more cooperative
  - Somewhat more cooperative
  - About typical
  - Somewhat less cooperative
  - Much less cooperative
22. In comparison to other coalitions of which you have been a part, how divided are the coalition members on the issue identified earlier?
  - Much more divided
  - Somewhat more divided
  - About typical
  - Somewhat less divided
  - Much less divided



23. In some coalitions, some member-groups form relationships that extend beyond the work of the host coalition. In comparison to other coalitions of which you have been a part, how likely are the members of this coalition to work together in such sub-coalitions?

- Much more likely
- Somewhat more likely
- About typical
- Somewhat less likely
- Much less likely

24. Is there a steering committee or other formal leadership structure within the coalition?

25. PLEASE LOOK AT CARD F. Which of the following features characterize the governance of the coalition? Indicate all that apply:

**CARD F: GOVERNANCE OF THE COALITION**

Decision-making Mechanism	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Critical decisions of the coalition are made by a <b>central coalition coordinator</b> .			
Critical decisions of the coalition are made by a <b>steering committee</b> of leading members.			
Critical decisions of the coalition are made by a <b>majority</b> of its members.			
Critical decisions of the coalition are made by <b>consensus</b> of its members.			
Critical decisions of the coalition are made using <b>formal</b> procedures (as opposed to <b>informal</b> agreement).			
Other:			

26. How does the coalition decide which issues to work on?

27. Do member organizations in the coalition pay dues?

28. Is there a coalition coordinator that is paid specifically for his/her work with the coalition? If so, who is that?
29. In a typical month, how often does the coalition meet? Or does it meet less often than monthly?
30. Does the coalition have a web site? What is the web address?

### **Effectiveness**

31. Considering the issues that the coalition has worked on in the past year, how effective do you think that it has been in achieving its goals:

- From your **personal** perspective;

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all effective

- From the perspective of **other members** of the coalition;

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all effective

- From the perspective of **other lobbyists** and advocacy organization (not in the coalition);

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all effective

- From the perspective of **interested policymakers**

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat effective  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all effective

32. At the present time, what are your expectations for the **continued existence** of the coalition?

- \_\_\_\_\_ The coalition will continue to exist for a number of years
- \_\_\_\_\_ The coalition will likely disband within a year or so
- \_\_\_\_\_ The coalition will likely disband within the coming months
- \_\_\_\_\_ The coalition is already disbanded or is in the process of disbanding

33. What do you think explains the coalition's effectiveness or ineffectiveness? What explains any differences in perception among different audiences?

### **Personal Questions**

34. [Interviewer records sex/gender without asking.]

35. Could you tell me how many years you have been a registered lobbyist?

36. How central are coalitions to the work that you do as a policy advocate?

- Most of my work takes place in coalition.
- I work in coalitions often, but not all the time.
- I work in coalitions occasionally.
- I almost never work in coalitions.

37. Over the course of your career, how varied has been your experience working in coalitions?

- My coalition work has dealt with a wide variety of issues.
- My coalition work has concentrated on one issue area, but I have been involved with coalitions on a few other issues.
- Most of the coalitions I have worked on have dealt with similar issues.
- I have worked in too few coalitions to generalize on this point.

38. Have you ever worked for Congress or a member of Congress?

39. Have you ever worked for a federal government agency?

40. Could you tell me the year in which you were born?

41. Could you tell me how you identify your race/ethnicity?

42. Could you tell me, do you personally identify as a Democrat, a Republican, or a member of another party? Or, do you prefer not to identify with any party?

43. Could you tell me, where would you place yourself on the right to left ideological spectrum? Are you: (i) to the right of very conservative; (ii) very conservative; (iii) somewhat conservative; (iv) moderate; (v) somewhat liberal or progressive; (vi) very liberal or progressive; (vii) to the left of very liberal or progressive. Or do you not think of yourself as being on this spectrum?

**Conclusion**

44. Is there anything that I have not asked you about that you would like to add?

45. Would you like for me to send you a copy of the results when the study is completed? [If yes, then ask:] How would you like me to send it to you? Please let me know the e-mail or postal address that you prefer.

**Thank you for your participation.**