Power through Partnerships
Interest Group Coalitions, Informative Signaling, and Influence in Congress

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Abstract

This article develops a new theory of interest group influence to better understand the policy consequences of affluent dominance in the Washington pressure community. Building upon the insight that groups increasingly collaborate in pursuit of policy goals, the article develops a theory that identifies how and when *coalitions* gain influence. The theory's central premise is that a coalition gains influence through its diversity, defined as differences in the information that partners bring to a lobbying effort. I use formal theoretic modeling to establish the conditions under which two types of diverse coalitions will form and gain influence. The article contributes to existing research by identifying the mechanisms and conditions of coalitional influence and offering a set of testable hypotheses for future research. Moreover, because influence derives from diversity, the theory implies that the process of gaining policy influence may mitigate the policy consequences of affluent dominance in the pressure community.

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Affluent interest groups dominate the Washington pressure community. Corporate, trade, and business interests represent nearly half of all interest groups mobilized for national political action, while groups organized around the economic concerns of low-income Americans represent less than one percent (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). The voices of affluent interests are amplified by their resource advantages. Relative to other types of groups, corporate and business groups have larger budgets, report greater lobbying expenditures, and engage in higher levels of lobbying activity (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Baumgartner et al. 2009).

In recent years, rising economic inequality alongside a surge in political spending by wealthy groups has refocused popular and scholarly attention on the public policy consequences of affluent dominance the pressure community (Gilens 2012; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Recent research demonstrating that business interest groups are more likely than other groups to achieve their policy goals appears to validate popular concern that biases within the pressure community lead to biases in public policy (Gilens and Page 2014; Yackee and Yackee 2005). Yet the extensive scholarly literature that investigates the *mechanisms* of interest group influence in Congress yields conflicting findings, with some studies demonstrating that groups' resources and lobbying activities lead to policy influence and other studies finding little evidence of influence (see Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Hojnacki et al. 2012; Smith 1999).

In this article, I develop a new theory of interest group influence in an effort to better understand the mechanisms of interest group influence in Congress and the policy consequences of affluent bias in the pressure community. Building upon the insight that groups frequently collaborate in pursuit of policy goals (Hojnacki 1997; Hula 1999), the theory elevates the *interest*

group coalition as the analytic focus. Rather than view influence as deriving from an individual interest group lobbying autonomously, I view influence as deriving from a set of interest groups lobbying collaboratively. Focusing attention on the coalition highlights how the characteristics of a *set* of actors are expected to lead to policy influence, and speaks to broader questions regarding the mechanisms of interest group influence and the policy consequences of pressure system biases.

The theory views coalitions as signals that communicate information to legislators about the political support for policy change. The theory's central premise is that a coalition gains influence through its *diversity*, which is defined as differences in the informational resources that groups bring to a lobbying effort. When groups with different types of information collaborate, I argue, the heterogeneity of their voices enhances the credibility of the information they provide, thereby reducing legislators' uncertainty about the consequences of policy change and allowing groups to gain influence over policy choices.

I develop a formal theoretic model to identify the conditions under which diverse coalitions will form and gain influence. My model predicts, as other studies have (Hojnacki 1997; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004), that the emergence and influence of coalitions will vary alongside features of the issue context. Yet the model demonstrates that contextual features interact differently to inspire distinct types of coalitions. Specifically, coalitions that unite groups from different economic sectors will emerge when issues are contentious, salient to multiple actors, and uncertain in their implications. Coalitions that unite groups with different ideologies will emerge when issues are not contentious and when public support for existing policy is low.

The article makes several contributions to existing research. First, the article develops a theory, generalizable across policy domains, that explains how and when coalitions influence

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policy choices in Congress. The theory also yields a set of testable hypotheses for future empirical research. Second, the article contributes to broader debates about the policy consequences of pressure system biases by suggesting that affluent dominance in the pressure community may not directly translate into policies that disproportionately favor wealthy interests. Because coalitional influence derives from diversity, groups representing different types of interests must work together to achieve their policy goals. Thus the process of influencing policy may actually lessen the consequences of biases in the pressure community.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section following the introduction, I situate the theory within existing literature on interest group lobbying, collaboration, and informative signaling in Congress. In the second section, I explain how coalitions consisting of diverse partners reduce legislative uncertainty, thereby allowing groups to gain influence over policy choices. The third section presents a formal theoretic model that identifies the conditions under which different types of coalitions will form and gain influence. In the fourth section, I identify a set of hypotheses for future empirical research and discuss the central findings. The final section concludes.

Interest Group Collaboration and Influence in Congress

Interest group coalitions are prevalent in Washington. Nearly all groups engage in some type of informal networking and participation in formal coalitions is common (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Hojnacki 1997; Hula 1999; Loomis 1986; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Over the past fifty years, institutional changes including the expansion and decentralization of Congress and the growth of interest communities have increased the incentives for groups to collaborate. Across policy domains, the number of interest groups has grown, increasing the number of

potential allies while diminishing the political power of any individual group. Coalitions have

emerged as a vehicle through which organizations with similar policy goals can exhibit strength

and consensus in a political system in which policymakers can effectively choose which interests

to listen to and which to ignore (Hula 1999; Loomis 1986).

Recognizing the importance of collaborative lobbying strategies, interest group scholars

have increasingly prioritized coalitions in their research. A growing body of literature generates

valuable insights regarding the prevalence of coalitions and the conditions of coalitional activity

(Baumgartner et al. 2009; Loomis 1986; Salisbury 1990; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Hojnacki

1997; Holyoke 2004; Heaney and Lorenz 2013; Hula 1999; Mahoney 2007). Existing research

also draws attention to the benefits and costs of collaboration. In terms of influencing policy,

oalitions are beneficial because they allow groups to pool the resources necessary for reaching

multiple legislators, while communicating consensus and political strength (Gray and Lowery

1998; Mahoney 2007; Nelson and Yackee 2012). Yet collaboration is costly because a coalition

founder must provide the resources to organize and host a coalition and direct its early activities

(Hula 1999; Loomis 1986). Groups incur policy costs when collaboration requires a group to

deviate from its preferred policy position (Heaney 2004; Salisbury 1987), as well as opportunity

costs, as collaboration involves a lost opportunity to differentiate one's group from other

organized actors (Browne 1990).

While much is known about the determinants of collaborative activity, less is known

about the actual influence of coalitions. On the one hand, the sheer volume of collaborative

lobbying suggests that the benefits of collaboration exceed the costs, at least some of the time.

Interest group leaders also state their belief in the efficacy of coalitional strategies (Hula 1999;

Schlozman and Tierney 1986). On the other hand, quantitative research on coalitional influence

has produced mixed findings. Mahoney and Baumgartner (2004) find that across a sample of issues, formal coalitions are less likely than other organizations to achieve their policy goals. Analyzing coalitional influence on the issue of Medicare, Heaney and Lorenz (2013) show that groups that collaborate more frequently are not more likely to gain policy influence. Nelson and Yackee (2012), however, find that collaboration is associated with increased influence in federal rulemaking when coalitions are broad and when partners are aligned in their policy preferences.

The centrality of coalitions, coupled with mixed findings regarding their influence, speaks to the need to devote theoretical attention to the topic of collaborative lobbying and influence. How exactly do coalitions gain influence in Congress? And under what conditions will they succeed? Such questions remain largely unanswered in existing research, in part because theoretical scholarship on interest group influence overwhelmingly focuses on the individual group as the entity capable of influencing legislators' decisions (see for example Ainsworth 1993; Gerber 1999; Grossman and Helpman 2001; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hansen 1991). To better understand coalitional influence, it is necessary to shift attention away from an individual group and identify how the characteristics of a set of groups are likely to matter for legislative influence. Indeed, such a perspective enjoys the support of recent research. Baumgartner and colleagues (2009), for example, investigate the relationship between policy influence and the aggregated resources of policy "sides" across a sample of 98 issues in Washington, theorizing that sides that are able to mobilize a broader set of resources may be more likely to achieve their policy goals. Their findings suggest that sides enjoying a comparative resource advantage are more likely to achieve their policy goals, at least in the short term (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 215-238).

There are strong reasons to suspect that theories that move beyond the individual group may similarly help explain how and when interest groups gain influence in Congress. In the next two sections, I develop a theory that identifies the mechanisms and conditions of coalitional influence in Congress. The theory expands upon the insight that coalitions act as signals that communicate information to legislators about the underlying support for policy change (Heaney and Lorenz 2013; Mahoney 2004; Nelson and Yackee 2012). Yet while all coalitions are capable of providing information, the theory posits that it is only *diverse* coalitions that provide credible information and thus are able to gain influence.

Diverse Coalitions and Informative Signaling in Congress

The theory that diversity enhances coalitional influence builds upon a rich literature on lobbying and informative signaling in Congress (Ainsworth 1993; Austin-Smith and Banks 2002; Austin-Smith and Wright 1992, 1994; Lohmann 1993; see Grossman and Helpman 2001 and Potters and Van Winden 1992 for reviews). This literature draws attention to the fact that legislators face uncertainty about the impact of their policy choices on constituents, policies, and politics (Arnold 1990; Kingdon 1989). Because interest groups possess information about constituents' policy preferences (electoral information), substantive information about the relationship between policy instruments and outcomes (policy information), and information about the preferences and likely behavior of other political actors (political information), legislators rely on interest groups to address their informational needs (Esterling 2004; Kollman 1998; Schlozman and Tierney 1986).

Yet groups sometimes have incentives to exploit their informational advantage – for example, by overstating the extent to which group members view an issue as salient or by

manipulating research to indicate support for a favored program. As a result, it is not simply the content but also the credibility of information that helps groups gain influence (Ainsworth 1993; Austin-Smith and Banks 2002; Austin-Smith and Wright 1991; Esterling 2004; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Because legislators value credible information, groups devote considerable time and resources to developing expertise and establishing credibility.

Coalitional lobbying can provide information to legislators regarding the consequences of their policy choices. For example, a coalition may provide electoral information about the direction and strength of policy preferences across multiple groups of constituents, expertise about the cost and effectiveness of policies from a range of organized interests, and information about the alignment of policy support and opposition across numerous organized actors. Yet I argue that it is only diverse coalitions that offer *credible* information to legislators. I define diversity as differences in the informational resources that coalition partners bring to a lobbying effort. For instance, a diverse coalition may unite a group with information about constituents with an organization with policy expertise, thereby uniting electoral and policy information. Or, a diverse coalition may unite a group with information about liberal constituents with a group with information about conservative constituents, thereby uniting two different types of electoral information. I argue that diverse coalitions promote credibility in two ways: by providing heterogeneous informational cues about the consequences of legislators' policy choices, and by providing evidence of costly lobbying efforts.

The first way that diverse coalitions enhance credibility is by providing heterogeneous informational cues. The logic of heterogeneous information derives from formal theoretic work on legislative organization and informative signaling in Congress (Epstein 1999; Gilligan and Krehbiel 1989; Krehbiel 1992). Like interest groups, committee members have specialized

information about the consequences of policy choices and incentives to misrepresent this information if the preferences of committee members differ from the preferences of the median legislator in the chamber. Because legislators value accurate information about policy, they organize themselves in ways that facilitate the transmission of credible information from specialist committee members to non-specialist legislators in the chamber. When committees are heterogeneous, or composed of members with different preferences over policy outcomes, committee members with different preferences have incentives to provide the same information about a policy. When different committee members report the same information, the credibility of information is enhanced and legislative uncertainty is reduced (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1989).[1]

I argue that in much the same way, the information communicated by a coalition of groups with different preferences is more credible than the information communicated by a coalition of groups with similar preferences. The logic underlying this premise is intuitive: the fact that "strange bedfellows" would normally disagree makes the groups more believable when they do agree. For example, when U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, and the United Way coauthored a letter on October 11, 2013 urging an end the federal shutdown, the unusual

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[1] Gilligan and Krehbiel (1989) show that under an open rule, an equilibrium exists such that committee members with different preferences will provide confirmatory signals to the median floor voter about the relationship between policies and outcomes. When the variable that measures committee information is relatively extreme, heterogeneous committee members have incentives to provide confirmatory signals to the median floor legislator that allow her to determine the exact value of this variable. In such instances, a median floor legislator becomes fully informed about the relationship between policies and outcomes.

partnership communicated that the groups were actually united in their desire to see an end to the shutdown (AFL-CIO et al. 2013). Put another way, the partnership enhanced the likelihood that legislators would believe the information provided.

Beyond preference diversity, there are reasons to suspect that other types of diversity provide heterogeneous cues that similarly enhance the credibility of interest group information. For instance, if an energy corporation and environmental public interest group collaborate to push forth a green energy tax credit, this suggests that a policy enjoys the support of constituents and is valued by the corporation that will implement the policy. Similarly, an alliance between a social welfare research organization and a charitable service provider to expand funding for a welfare-to-work program provides technical information based on research and analysis as well as on-the-ground experience. By providing varied informational cues that point toward the same policy recommendation, a partnership between actors with different preferences or representing different interests thus provides information that can reduce legislators' uncertainty about the consequences of policy choice.

The second way that diverse coalitions reduce uncertainty is by signaling costly lobbying efforts. The logic of costly lobbying builds from a body of research that views costly lobbying as facilitating the flow of credible information between interest groups and legislators (Ainsworth 1993; Austin-Smith and Banks 2002; Austin-Smith and Wright 1992, 1994; Grossman and Helpman 2001; Lohmann 1993; Potters and Van Winden 1992). When lobbying is costless, interest groups have incentives to lobby irrespective of the truth of their claims. Yet when interest groups must pay a cost to lobby, those groups that seek to misrepresent information will

not lobby while groups that do not seek to misrepresent information will lobby.[2] Because only

one type of interest group lobbies, a legislator is assured that the information she receives is

credible (Ainsworth 1993).

It is clear from previous research that collaboration is costly (Gray and Lowery 1998;

Hojnacki 1997; Hula 1999; Nelson and Yackee 2012) and such costs are likely to be greater

when groups differ with respect to ideology or substantive policy area. For instance, it is more

difficult (and hence more costly) to identify gather information and coordinate with groups

active on different issues or in different economic sectors (Hula 1999). A group may face

reputational costs when collaborating with a partner with different ideological leanings, or large

policy costs if attempting to negotiate with a group whose policy preferences are not close to its

own (Heaney 2004; Hula 1999; Salisbury 1987). Collaboration with diverse partners thus reflects

a costly lobbying activity that can communicate that the information provided by the diverse

coalition is credible.

Diverse Coalition Formation and Influence

When will interest groups collaborate with diverse partners as a strategy of legislative

influence? In this section, I turn to formal theoretic modeling to establish the conditions under

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[2] Such differences emerge because the net benefits of lobbying (in other words, the benefits of a

successful lobbying effort minus the costs) differ for organizations. When lobbying is costly, an

organization that provides accurate information will gain more than it loses from a successful

lobbying effort, while an organization that provides inaccurate information will lose more than it

gains, even when the legislator decides in its favor (Ainsworth 1993).

which diverse coalitions will form and gain influence in Congress. Establishing the conditions of diverse coalition formation and influence is both a necessary component of the theory's development and an important precursor to studying the influence of coalitions empirically.

The model builds upon research that uses formal-theoretic methods to better understand the mechanisms and conditions of interest group influence (Ainsworth 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1992, 1994; Denzau and Munger 1986; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Helpman and Persson 2001; Mitchell and Munger 1991; Persson and Tabellini 2000). Signaling models are particularly useful for analyzing lobbying as an attempt to use information to influence legislators because they highlight informational asymmetries between groups and legislators (Banks 1991; Smith 1995). Signaling models identify the conditions under which lobbying can credibly convey information despite incentives for interest groups to misrepresent their informational resources.
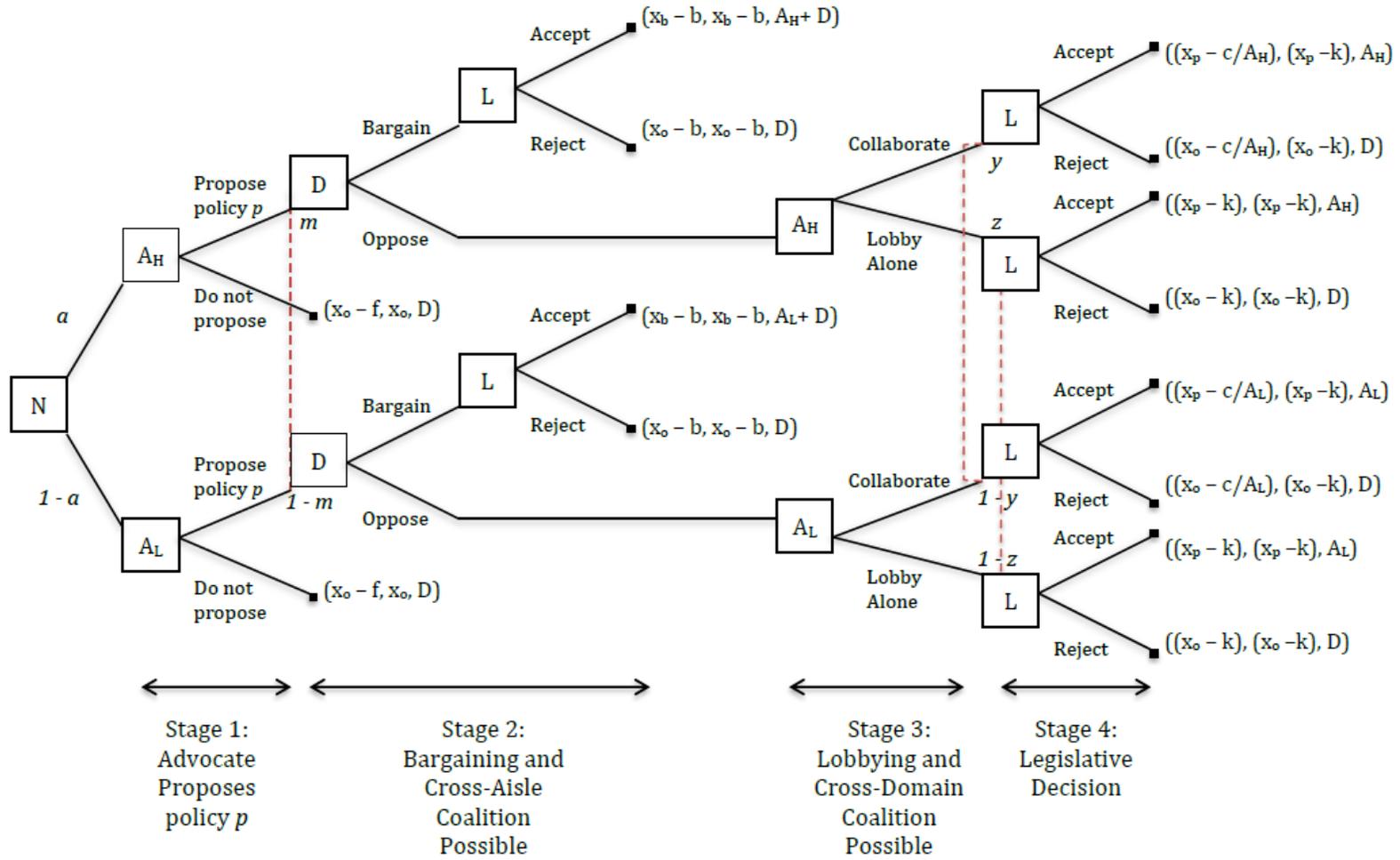
I model the process of coalition building and influence as a signaling game with three players: a group advocating for policy change (an *advocate*), a group opposing policy change and defending the status quo (a *defender*), and a legislator. I refer to the advocate's proposed policy change as policy p. The advocate's goal is to persuade the legislator to adopt policy p, while the defender's goal is to persuade the legislator to reject policy p, or retain the status quo. The legislator, wary of the uncertain consequences of policy change, will adopt policy p if there is credible evidence that the benefits of policy change outweigh its costs, but will otherwise reject policy change.

The advocate provides credible evidence by building a diverse policy coalition. Two types of diverse coalitions are possible in the model. A *cross-aisle coalition* forms when the advocate and defender jointly lobby for a policy that is somewhere between the policy proposed by the advocate and the status quo. This type of coalition is diverse because it contains groups

that are usually on opposing sides of a policy issue. A *cross-domain coalition* forms when the advocate collaborates with an outside supporter of policy change. The outside supporter is a group representing a different economic sector, but is not a formal player in the model. For instance, if the advocate is a public interest group pushing for the expansion of prescription drug monitoring standards, the outside supporter might be professional organization of doctors or an association of community colleges. The goal of the model is to identify the conditions under which cross-aisle and cross-domain coalitions will form and convey credible information to a legislator regarding the consequences of adopting policy *p*.

There are two types of advocates in the model: high and low. The high type advocate exists in an environment where an outside group supports policy change and views the change as salient. The presence of an outside supporter means that the high type advocate can build a cross-domain coalition with the outside supporter at relatively low cost. The low type advocate exists in an environment in which no outside supporter desires policy change and views the issue as salient. This means that the low type advocate can only build a cross-domain coalition at relatively high cost. Neither the defender nor the legislator knows whether the advocate is a high or low type. Thus, both the defender and the legislator make their decisions to bargain with the advocate and accept or reject policy change, respectively, under conditions of uncertainty.

Figure 1. Extensive Form Representation of Signaling Model

Stage 1:
Advocate
Proposes
policy p

Stage 2:
Bargaining and
Cross-Aisle
Coalition
Possible

Stage 3:
Lobbying and
Cross-Domain
Coalition
Possible

Stage 4:
Legislative
Decision

Description of the Model

The extensive form of the game is shown in Figure 1. In this figure, players' decision nodes are designated by each player's label and terminal nodes are solid black. The advocate is labeled A_i, where $i \in \{L, H\}$ and A_L denotes the low type advocate and A_H a high type advocate. The high type advocate's moves proceed along the top half of the extensive form and the low type advocate's moves proceed along the bottom half. The defender is labeled D and the legislator is labeled L. The vertical dashed lines at the defender's decision nodes and legislator's final decision nodes indicate that neither the defender nor the legislator know the advocate's true type. The final policy choice is labeled x_j, where $j \in \{p, o, b\}$). The policy choice x_p refers to adoption of policy p, x_b refers to the adoption of the policy achieved through bargaining, and x_o refers to the status quo policy.

In the first stage of the game, "nature" (or chance) selects the high type advocate with probability (α) and the low type advocate with probability *(1 - α)*. Upon viewing its type, the advocacy group decides whether to propose policy p. The advocate's proposal is costless and takes the form of an unobserved communication between the advocate and defender. If an advocate decides not to propose policy p, then the game ends and the policy choice is x_o.

If the advocate decides to propose policy p, then the game moves into the second stage. In this stage, the defender views the advocate's decision to propose policy p and updates its beliefs regarding the advocate's type, which are represented by m and *1-m*. The defender then decides whether to bargain with the advocate at cost b or lobby against the advocate at cost k. If the defender chooses to bargain with the advocate, then a cross-aisle coalition forms to lobby for a policy that is between the two groups' preferred policies, labeled x_b. If a cross-aisle coalition forms, then the legislator decides whether to accept or reject the policy achieved via bargaining.

If the defender chooses not to bargain but rather to lobby against the advocate at cost k, then the game moves to the third stage. In this stage, the advocate decides whether to lobby alone at cost k or build a coalition with an outside supporter of policy change at cost c/A_i, where $i \in \{L, H\}$ and c/A_L represents the cost paid by the low type advocate to collaborate and c/A_H represents the cost paid by the high type advocate to collaborate. If the advocate decides to collaborate with an outside supporter, then a cross-domain coalition emerges to lobby for policy p.

The legislator's decision to accept or reject policy p represents the final stage of the game. In this stage, the legislator views the advocate's decision to collaborate or lobby alone, updates her beliefs regarding the advocate's type, and accepts or rejects policy p. The legislator's beliefs about the advocate's type when she encounters a cross-type coalition are represented by y and $1 - y$, and her beliefs when she encounters an advocate lobbying alone are represented by z and $1 - z$. The legislator is adopting the advocate's preferred policy when she accepts policy p (or chooses x_p) and the defender's preferred position when she rejects policy p (or chooses x_o).

Players' Utilities and Assumptions

The advocate's utility is determined by the loss f associated with not lobbying for policy p, the costs of bargaining with the defender b, the costs of lobbying alone k, the costs of coalition building c/A_i, where $i \in \{L, H\}$, and the legislator's policy choice x_j, where $j \in \{p, o, b\}$. In the first stage of the game, the advocate receives a payoff of $(x_o - f)$ if it abstains from proposing policy p. In the second stage, the advocate receives a payoff of $(x_b - b)$ if the legislator accepts the policy achieved via bargaining and a payoff of $(x_o - b)$ if the legislator rejects the policy achieved via bargaining. If the advocate lobbies alone in the third stage, it receives a payoff of $(x_p - k)$ if the legislator accepts policy p and a payoff of $(x_o - k)$ if the legislator rejects policy p.

If the advocate forms a cross-domain coalition, it receives a payoff of $(x_p - c/A_i)$ and $(x_o - c/A_i)$ if the legislator accepts and rejects policy p, respectively. Of the three policy choices, the advocate places the highest value on policy x_p, and the lowest value on policy x_o. Thus for the advocate: $x_o < x_b < x_p$ (Assumption 1).

If the advocate does not propose policy p in the first stage of the game, it fails to demonstrate engagement on an issue of concern to its members and experiences a future loss f. When the advocate lobbies on its own, the cost k reflects the organizational costs associated with lobbying members of Congress, including devoting staff time to contacting Congressional offices, providing information to legislative staffers, testifying at hearings, or mobilizing members at the grassroots level. When the advocate and defender bargain and lobby for a modified version of policy p, the cost b reflects the costs associated with negotiating policy agreement as well as the costs of lobbying members of Congress.

For the advocate, the future costs associated with not lobbying for policy p exceed the costs of lobbying alone, or $k < f$ (Assumption 2). This assumption assures that the advocate will propose policy p and that the game will move beyond the first stage. By failing to lobby for policy p, an advocate may lose the support of existing members and limit its ability to attract new members. Abstaining from lobbying may also prevent the advocate from attracting funding or building relationships with like-minded groups and legislators. For an organization specifically mobilized to lobby for policy p or issues related to policy p, it is reasonable to expect such costs to exceed the material costs of lobbying legislators on a discrete issue.

In the third stage of the game, the advocate pays a cost to build a cross-domain coalition c/A_i, where $i \in \{L, H\}$. This cost reflects the fact that the advocate must invest resources in gathering information on potential coalition partners and in organizing and maintaining the

coalition. Coalition building for the high type is less costly than coalition building for the low type and lobbying alone (for either advocate) is less costly than coalition building, or $k < c/A_H < c/A_L$ (Assumption 3). Collaboration is less costly for the high type because the high type exists in an environment in which an outside supporter of policy p also considers the policy to be a salient issue. Therefore, the high type does not have to devote resources to changing preferences or building salience. Because the low type exists in an environment in which no other groups share its policy preferences or consider policy p to be salient, the low type must devote additional resources to convincing other groups to share its interest in policy p.

I further assume that the costs of coalition building for the low type advocate exceed the value of a policy win plus lobbying alone, or formally that $(x_p + k) < c/A_L$ (Assumption 4).[3] This assumption assures that if the low type advocate reaches its second information set, its dominant strategy is to lobby alone rather than collaborate. While this is a strong assumption, there are reasons to suspect that the environment in which the low type operates places considerable constraints on coalition building. Because no outside supporters share the advocate's policy preferences or consider policy p to be a salient issue, the low type advocate must devote resources to identifying a potential ally and persuading the ally of the salience of policy p. Because groups have incentives to lobby on their own to establish unique identities (Browne 1990), the outside supporter may be unwilling to engage in collaborative lobbying on an issue

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[3] For the low type advocate to prefer lobbying alone, the payoff from lobbying alone and having the legislator reject the policy $(0 - k)$ must exceed the payoff that the advocate receives if it builds a coalition and the legislator accepts the policy proposal $(x_p - c/A_L)$. In other words, $(x_p - c/A_L) < (0 - k)$. Solving for c/A_L leads to $(x_p + k) < c/A_L$.

that it does not already consider important. Put another way, the large costs associated with coalition building for the low type may effectively prohibit this activity.

The utility of the defender D is a function of the policy choice x_j, where $j \in \{p, o, b\}$, the costs of bargaining b, and the costs of lobbying alone k. The defender places the highest value on the status quo policy (x_o), and the lowest value on policy p (x_p). Thus for the defender: $x_p < x_b < x_o$, (Assumption 5). In the second stage of the game, the defender receives a payoff of ($x_b - b$) if the legislator accepts the policy achieved via bargaining with the advocate and a payoff of ($x_o - b$) if the legislator rejects the policy achieved via bargaining. In the fourth stage of the game, the defender receives a payoff of ($x_o - k$) and ($x_p - k$), if the legislator rejects and accepts, respectively, the policy of an advocate lobbying alone or in a cross-domain coalition.

I make two different assumptions about the costs of bargaining and lobbying alone for the defender. The assumptions are mutually exclusive and characterize different types of issue environments. As the next section will show, each assumption is necessary to support a particular equilibrium solution. The first assumption is that the defender's payoff from bargaining is less that the payoff received when the defender opposes and the legislator accepts the advocate's policy proposal, or ($x_b - b$) < ($x_p - k$) (Assumption 6a). The second assumption is that the defender's payoff from bargaining is greater than the payoff received when the defender opposes and the legislator accepts the advocate's policy proposal, or ($x_o - k$) < ($x_b - b$) (Assumption 6b). Assumption 6a assures that the defender's dominant strategy is to oppose the advocate, while Assumption 6b assures that the defender's dominant strategy is to bargain with the advocate. These assumptions will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

The legislator L makes the final policy choice. Her utility is a function of the future support of either the advocate or the defender. If the legislator accepts policy p and the advocate

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is a high type, then she receives the support of the high type advocate as well as the outside supporter in the next election (A_H). If the legislator accepts policy p and the advocate is a low type, then the legislator receives the support of the low type advocate (A_L). If she rejects policy p, then she receives the support of the defender in the next election (D). If the advocate and defender bargain and the legislator accepts policy x_b, then she gains the support of both groups ($A_i + D$). The legislator places the highest value on the support of a high type advocate, and the lowest value on the support of a low type advocate. This recognizes that when an advocate is a high type, a legislator can gain the support of the advocate as well as the outside supporter. Thus for the legislator, $A_L < D < A_H$ (Assumption 7).

Equilibria for the Game

In this section, I identify two equilibria that have strong behavioral implications regarding the conditions under which interest groups will collaborate with diverse partners. One equilibrium identifies a strategy in which the high type advocate forms a *cross-type coalition* and the low type advocate lobbies alone (Equilibrium 1), and the second identifies a strategy in which a *cross-aisle coalition* forms between the advocate and defender (Equilibrium 2). The equilibrium concept used is perfect Bayesian equilibrium, which permits players with incomplete information to update their beliefs about other players' types based on their behavior in the game. An important implication for this game is that the legislator is able to update her beliefs about the advocate's type based on behaviors that occur prior to her decision node. In other words, although the advocate's true type is known only to the advocate, the legislator can learn the advocate's type by observing how the advocate behaves in the game.

Equilibrium 1: Cross-Type Coalition Formation (Separating Strategy)

The first equilibrium describes a separating strategy in which both types of advocates propose policy p in the first stage of the game, the defender opposes the advocate in the second stage, the low type advocate lobbies alone while the high type advocate builds a cross-type coalition in the third stage, and the legislator accepts the policy of a cross-type coalition and rejects the policy recommendation of an advocate lobbying alone in the fourth stage. The equilibrium is characterized as a separating strategy because the two types of advocates pursue different actions (collaborating versus lobbying alone) upon reaching the third stage of the game.

This equilibrium requires that the defender prefers to oppose the advocate for all values of m, of formally, $(x_b - b) < (x_p - k)$ (Assumption 6a).[4] This situation is met when the costs of bargaining are large relative to the costs of lobbying alone, a situation that is illustrated in Figure 2a. In this figure, the defender's payoff is shown on the y-axis and the defender's belief that the advocate is a high type (m) is shown on the x-axis. The horizontal dashed lines show the defender's payoff from bargaining, while the diagonal dashed line shows the defender's expected

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[4] Notably, no separating equilibrium exists when the costs of lobbying k equal the costs of bargaining b. If $k = b$ for the defender, then the defender receives the highest payoff by opposing the advocate and winning and the lowest payoff by opposing the advocate and losing, or $(x_p - k) < (x_b - b) < (x_o - k)$. Because the payoff from bargaining exceeds the payoff from opposing and losing, the defender will bargain with the advocate for certain values of m and oppose the advocate for other values of m. However, the legislator will always adopt the policy of an advocate lobbying in a cross-type coalition, leading to the defender's lowest payoff $(x_p - k)$. The defender thus has an incentive to deviate from the equilibrium strategy by bargaining rather than opposing the advocate when the advocate builds a coalition.

payoff from opposing. This figure shows that when the costs of bargaining b^1 and lobbying alone k are small, the defender's receives the highest payoff from bargaining with the advocate at low values of m and the highest payoff from opposing the advocate at high values of m. When the cost of bargaining increases from b^1 to b while the cost of lobbying k remains constant, the defender receives the lowest payoff from bargaining regardless of its beliefs about the advocate's true type. Thus when the costs of bargaining are great, the defender has an incentive to oppose rather than bargain with the advocate for all values of m.

Figures 2a. Defender's Expected Payoff under Assumption 6a $((x_b - b) < (x_p - k))$
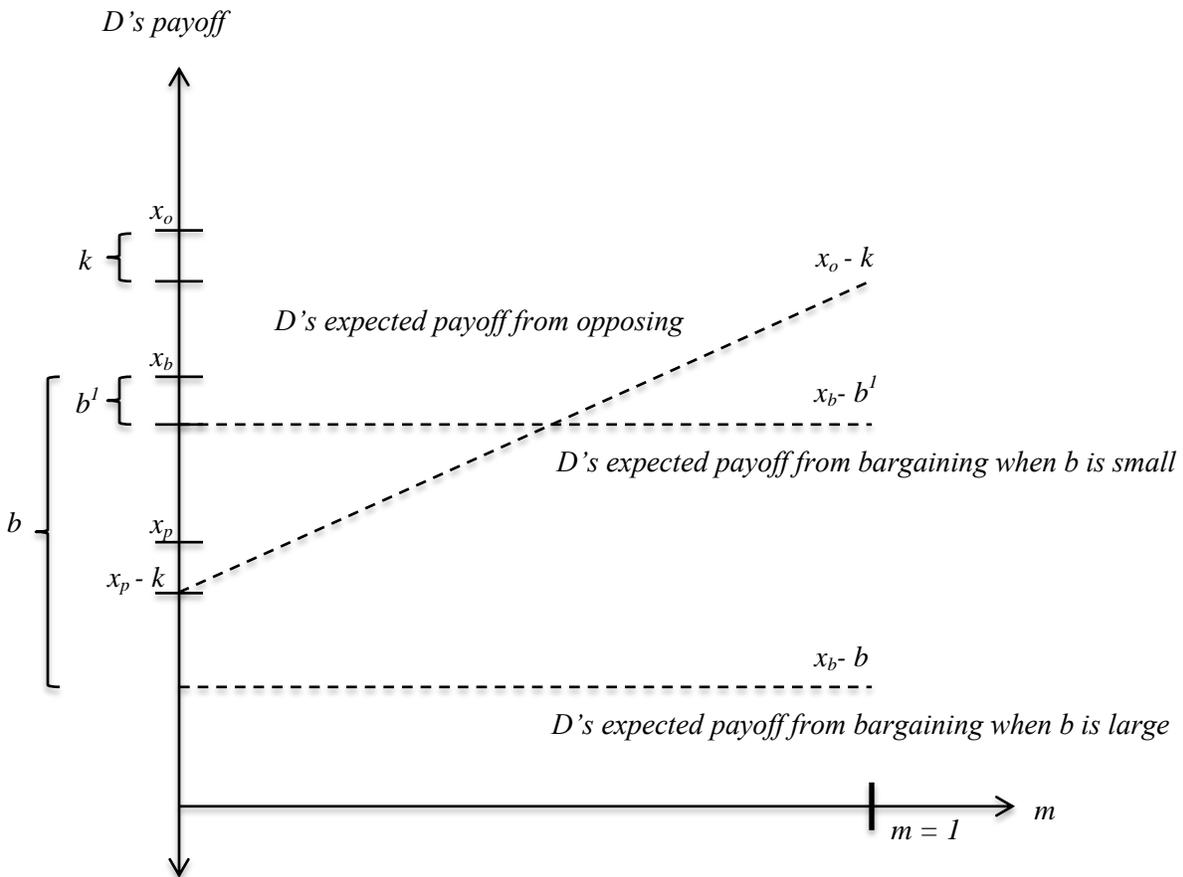
Because the advocate employs a separating strategy upon reaching its second decision

node, the advocate's actions reveal its true type to the legislator. Formally, the legislator's belief

that she is dealing with a high type upon seeing a coalition is 1 and her belief that she is dealing

with a low type upon seeing an advocate lobbying alone is 0 ($y = 1$ and $z = 0$). In other words,

when the legislator knows that she is dealing with a high type advocate upon seeing a cross-type

coalition and a low type advocate upon seeing an advocate lobbying alone. Due to Assumption 7

($A_L < D < A_H$), the legislator will accept policy p when she encounters an advocate lobbying as

part of a cross-type coalition and reject policy p when she encounters an advocate lobbying

alone.

Neither the low nor the high type advocate has an incentive to deviate from the

equilibrium strategy. Due to Assumption 1, the payoff received from lobbying alone exceeds the

payoff received from abstaining from lobbying, which leads both advocates to propose the policy

in the game's first stage. Assumption 4 holds that the costs of collaboration for the low type

advocate are so great that the low type receives a higher payoff from lobbying alone and losing

the policy battle than it receives from collaborating and winning the policy battle. Thus the low

type has no incentive to deviate by building a coalition even though the legislator rejects the

policy of the advocate lobbying alone. For the high type advocate, the payoff received by

collaborating (x_p - c/A_L) exceeds the payoff received by lobbying alone ($x_o - k$). Thus the high

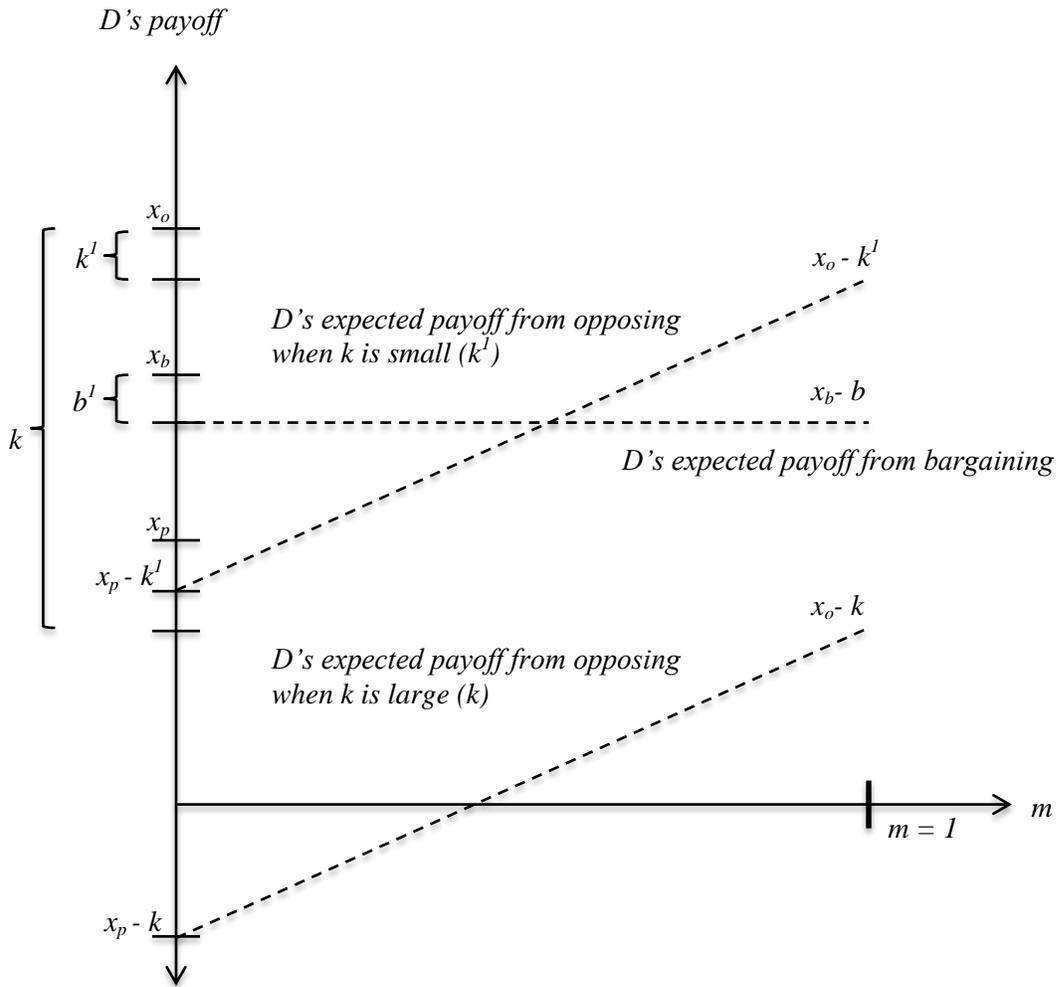type advocate always prefers to build a cross-type coalition rather than lobby alone.

Equilibrium 2: Cross-Aisle Coalition Formation

The second equilibrium describes when a cross-aisle coalition will form between the

advocate and defender. In this equilibrium, the low and high advocate propose policy p in the

first stage, the defender bargains with the advocate and forms a cross-aisle coalition, and the legislator accepts the policy proposed by the coalition in the second stage. The advocate does not reach its second decision node on the equilibrium path because the formation of a cross-aisle coalition preempts the signaling game played in the third stage of the model. Off the equilibrium path, the beliefs and strategies of the advocate and legislator mirror those in the separating strategy described above.

This equilibrium is sustained when the defender prefers to bargain rather than oppose the advocate for all values of m, a condition that is met when the defender's payoff received from bargaining exceeds the payoff received from opposing even when the legislator ultimately sides with the defender (Assumption 6b). This situation is illustrated in Figure 2b, in which the setup mirrors the previous figure. In Figure 2b, the defender's expected payoff from opposing the advocate is shown by the diagonal dotted lines while the payoff from bargaining is shown by the diagonal horizontal line. Figure 2b illustrates how the defender's expected payoff changes as the cost of lobbying alone increases from k^I to k. As the costs of lobbying alone increase, the defender's expected payoff from opposing, depicted by the diagonal dotted line, shifts down. When the costs of lobbying for the defender increase to k, the defender receives a higher expected payoff from bargaining rather than opposing the advocate regardless of its beliefs about the advocate's true type. Thus the defender will prefer to bargain rather than oppose the advocate when k is large.

Figure 2b. Defender's Expected Payoff under Assumption 6b $(x_o - k) < (x_b - b)$

D's payoff

x_o

$k^1 \{$

$x_o - k^1$

D's expected payoff from opposing
when k is small (k^1)

x_b

$b^1 \{$

$x_b - b$

k

D's expected payoff from bargaining

x_p

$x_p - k^1$

$x_o - k$

D's expected payoff from opposing
when k is large (k)

$m = 1$

m

$x_p - k$

Because the legislator receives the support of both the defender and the advocate if accepting a policy achieved via bargaining, the legislator accepts rather than rejects policy x_b. Neither the low nor high type advocate have an incentive to deviate from the equilibrium strategy because the payoff received from bargaining exceeds the payoff received from abstaining from lobbying in the first stage. Finally, the formation of a cross-aisle coalition means that the game never moves to the third stage and as a result, cross-type coalitions do not form.

Empirical Implications of the Theoretical Model

The equilibrium conditions of the formal theoretic model yield a set of empirical implications regarding the conditions under which different types of diverse coalitions will lobby in pursuit of shared policy goals.

First, the model implies that cross-type coalitions will emerge under conditions of salience, conflict, and uncertainty. The implication that diverse coalitions will form when an issue is salient to both a coalition founder and outside organization derives from Assumptions 3 and 4. These assumptions hold that the costs of coalition building differ for low and high type advocates and that the costs of coalition building effectively preclude collaboration for the low type but not the high type advocate. This means that diverse coalitions will only form when an advocate is a high type, or when the advocate exists in an environment in which an outside group considers the issue to be salient.

The implication that cross-type coalitions will form when conflict is high derives from Assumption 6a, which is necessary to support the separating equilibrium. This assumption states that the defender always prefers to oppose rather than bargain with an advocate, a condition that is met when the costs of bargaining are large relative to the costs of lobbying alone (see Figure

2a). Empirically, the costs of bargaining are likely to be large when issues are contentious. When issues are contentious, it is more difficult and hence more costly for the defender and advocate to negotiate policy agreement. The defender may lose the support of its members by working with an advocate, or may alienate funders or supporters in Congress. Thus the defender is likely to oppose rather than bargain with the advocate regardless of its beliefs about the advocate's type.

In addition, uncertainty in the issue environment sustains the separating equilibrium in which the high type advocate builds a cross-type coalition. When uncertainty does not exist, the high type advocate has no incentive to build a coalition because coalition building is more expensive than lobbying alone. A high-type advocate only has an incentive to build a coalition with the outside supporter when the legislator is unsure about the advocate's true type, because it is the presence of a cross-type coalition that reveals the advocate's true type to the legislator. Empirically, uncertainty is likely to be more pronounced on relatively new issues that have not been tested and evaluated at other levels or government or in other policy domains, issues in which constituents' preferences are not well developed, or issues in which partisan alignment is unclear.

Second, the model implies that cross-aisle coalitions will form when conflict is low and when the public supports a change to the status quo. Recall that a cross-aisle coalition draws together organizations with different ideological or partisan affiliations. The implication that cross-aisle coalitions will emerge when conflict is low and the public supports a change to the status quo derives from Assumption 6b, which is necessary to support this equilibrium strategy. This assumption holds that the cost of lobbying alone for the defender is high relative to the costs of bargaining. When conflict is low, the defender is unlikely to incur high costs related to negotiating policy agreement or lobbying alongside the advocate. Yet when the public supports a

change to the status quo, the defender is likely to face high costs when lobbying for its preferred position. For instance, the defender may need to run issue advertisements defending its position to the public or expend staff time and resources explaining its position and lobbying strategy to members, funders, or organizational allies. Thus when both conflict and support for the status quo are low, the defender prefers to bargain rather than oppose the advocate regardless of its beliefs about the advocate's true type.

Discussion

Taken together, the two parts of the theory identify the mechanisms and conditions of coalitional influence in Congress and yield four testable hypotheses for future empirical research. The first part of the theory posits that coalitions act as political signals that communicate information to legislators about the consequences of their policy choices. By providing evidence of heterogeneous signals and costly lobbying activities, coalitions that are diverse with respect to partners' informational resources offer credible information that can reduce legislators' uncertainty.

Because diversity enhances credibility, groups will seek to collaborate with partners that differ with respect to the informational resources they possess (*Hypothesis 1*). Such partnerships may unite different types of information, such as information about constituents and substantive policy expertise, or different forms of the same type of information, such as electoral information about two distinct groups of constituents. Because diverse coalitions provide credible information that reduces legislators' uncertainty about the consequences of policy adoption, diverse coalitions will be more likely than either homogeneous coalitions or groups lobbying alone to achieve their policy goals in Congress (*Hypothesis 2*).

These hypotheses imply that not all coalitions are created equal. Viewed through an informational lens, partnerships that unite similar groups are less credible than partnerships that unite different types of interests and are therefore less likely to gain influence. This insight may help explain why previous research yields conflicting findings regarding the influence of coalitions (Heaney and Lorenz 2013; Mahoney and Baumgarnter 2004; Nelson and Yackee 2012). To analyze coalitional influence, it is necessary to account for characteristics of coalitions that make them more or less likely to gain influence. Indeed, recent research that draws attention to consensus within coalitions provides support for the idea that the characteristics of coalitions matter for policy influence (Nelson and Yackee 2012).

In addition, the theory offers only a broad definition of diversity in order to accommodate the various dimensions of diversity that may emerge as salient across policy issues. It is likely that multiple types of diversity exist and that these types will matter differently across issues and policy areas. For instance, ideological diversity may be relevant on issues characterized by partisan conflict and economic sector diversity on issues that have historically divided different industries. Other types of diversity are also possible, such as regional diversity or class-based diversity. Future empirical research is necessary to both identify different types of diversity and establish whether certain categories of diversity are more or less important for assessing policy influence.

With respect to the conditions of diverse coalition formation and influence, the formal model yields two hypotheses, which have been elaborated upon above. First, cross-type coalitions, or coalitions that unite groups representing different interests or from different policy domains, will form when an issue is salient to both a coalition founder and outside actor, conflict is high, and uncertainty is high (*Hypothesis 3*). Second, cross-aisle coalitions uniting groups that

are normally on opposing sides of a policy will form when conflict is low and public support for the status quo is low (*Hypothesis 4*).

Several of these predictions are consistent with previous research showing that salience and conflict are associated with coalitional activity (Hojnacki 1997). Yet the model predicts that such characteristics will interact differently to inspire different types of coalitional activity. It is not simply that coalitions will emerge when salience and conflict are high, as previous research suggests, but rather that high salience and conflict will inspire coalitions that unite groups from different economic sectors, while low conflict and public support for policy change will inspire coalitions that unite groups on opposing sides of a policy issue. The formal model also highlights the importance of uncertainty in the policy environment, as it is uncertainty that creates incentives for the advocate to build a coalition with an outside supporter of policy change. Thus policy arenas that are rapidly changing or involve emergent interests or issues may be more likely to witness the development of diverse coalitions, relative to policy arenas that contain a stable set of issues and participants.

Finally, it is important to note that both informal and formal coalitions may act as informative signals that reduce legislative uncertainty. Coalitions do not always evolve into distinct organizational entities, and because there are costs associated with forming a new organization, many partnerships are likely to remain informal. This has implications for empirical research on coalitional influence. While most formal coalitions appear in lists of registered lobbyists or campaign contribution records, informal coalitions may only be observable through cosponsored advertisements, protests, or letters of members of Congress, to name just a few examples. Thus to identify the range of coalitions active across issues, scholars must move beyond the most easily accessible data on interest group activity in Washington, such

lists of registered lobbyists, in order to identify and classify the many types of coalitions active in the policymaking process.

Conclusion

Interest group scholars have long recognized the ubiquity of collaborative lobbying strategies in Washington. Yet theoretical research on interest group influence in Congress rarely elevates the coalition as the object of inquiry. I have argued in this article that the prevalence of coalitions across policy domains suggests that scholars must continue to elevate interest group coalitions in theoretical research. Focusing on coalitions need not negate the rich literature on how individual groups gain influence; the theory developed in this article builds entirely from scholarship that conceives of interest groups as autonomous actors. The critical shift is that it is the coalition that influences the legislator, rather than the individual group.

There are strong reasons to suspect that further research on coalitional influence can help scholars better understand how and when interest groups gain influence. Legislators face uncertainty across policy domains, creating incentives for all types of groups operating in a wide range of policy areas to collaborate as a strategy of legislative influence. Indeed, focusing analytic attention on coalitions may help resolve puzzling findings within existing scholarship that interest groups at times appear influential and at other times appear ineffectual. If interest groups lobby and achieve influence as part of a coalition rather than on their own, then studies that explicitly recognize the role of coalitions may better able to explain the circumstances of interest group influence in Congress.

Finally, the theory developed in this article suggests that affluent dominance within the pressure community may not directly translate into affluent dominance in public policy. To gain

influence over policy choices, interest groups representing the most advantaged citizens may need to collaborate with those representing different interests or groups of constituents. Moreover, although affluent interests may possess greater *material* resources than other interest groups, they do not necessary possess greater *informational* resources. Thus even the most advantaged interest groups likely encounter incentives to collaborate in pursuit of shared policy goals. This suggests that the process of gaining influence over policymaking may mitigate the consequences of biases within the Washington pressure community, leading to policies that reflect a broader range interests.

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