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Networking vs. allying: the decision of interest groups to join coalitions in the US and the EU

Christine Mahoney

ABSTRACT Ad hoc issue coalitions allow advocates to pool resources and signal support of their position to policy-makers. Ad hoc coalitions, however, are not formed in every instance; groups do not always choose to ally since there are also costs associated with membership. To understand why organizations sometimes decide to band together and sometimes choose to forge ahead alone, I argue that we must consider the institutional structure of the political system; the nature of the issue at hand; and finally the characteristics of the interest group itself. This theory is tested on original data based on interviews with 149 lobbyists active on a random sample of 47 policy issues in the United States and the European Union. The results show that EU advocates are building formal coalitions at a much lower rate than their American counterparts. The qualitative evidence suggests that the democratic accountability of policy-makers may explain these differences.

KEY WORDS Coalitions; European Union; interest groups; lobbying; United States.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly every scholarly work on lobbying mentions networking of one type or another (Hecl 1978; Sabatier 1988; Salisbury *et al.* 1987). Advocates share tidbits of information after committee meetings, forward emails with talking points, hold conference calls to get allies up-to-speed on policy-making developments, send joint letters to policy-makers; all of these activities can be referred to as networking or coalition activity.

Networking ranges on a continuum from very informal and loose, comprised of occasional information sharing, to highly coordinated enterprises with logos, letterheads and secretariats. Almost without exception, all lobbyists engage in some degree of networking; not all advocates pursue more formalized ad hoc issue coalition action.

What determines how coordinated like-minded advocates choose to be? What factors lead advocates to work in more formal ad hoc issue coalitions

rather than simply share information informally through loose networks? This paper seeks to answer these questions by analyzing original data based on 149 in-depth interviews with advocates in Washington, DC and Brussels lobbying on a random sample of 47 policy issues in the United States (US) and the European Union (EU).

Previous studies of lobbying in both the US and the EU have demonstrated that advocates (whether interest groups, corporations, or institutions) sometimes choose to work on their own (Salisbury 1984; Coen 1997), sometimes pursue their lobbying goals through their associations or federations (McLaughlin *et al.* 1993; Pollack 1997; Bouwen 2002; Walker 1991), and other times opt to work through a hired lobbying firm (McLaughlin *et al.* 1993; Bouwen 2002; Lahusen 2002). Ad hoc issue coalitions constitute another alternative. It is important to better understand this alternative route that advocates use to advance their positions since coalition action may have differential effects on interest group influence and since different types of interests may be benefiting from the strategy (see Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004). Do advocates join ad hoc issue coalitions when they face a particularly difficult fight? Do they join when they have the resources available to contribute to the collective? Are citizen interests more likely to band together than corporate interests? Numerous studies look at certain aspects of ad hoc coalition activity, but the focus has largely been confined to the US case, and little research has sought to determine the effect of institutional design on coalition activity. This paper seeks to fill this void. It does not attempt to determine if coalitions are more influential than other forms of interest representation, but rather aims to determine what contextual factors lead advocates to choose the issue coalition route to influence public policy.

The first section of the paper reviews the literature on interest group activity in coalitions. This section includes a definition of 'ad hoc issue coalitions,' as well as a discussion of why they are important to interest groups participating in the policy-making process. The second section identifies three sets of factors that appear to play a role in the decision of advocates to join issue coalitions and lays out the theoretical expectations about how these three groups of factors should influence formal coalition activity. The third section explains the research design and data. The fourth and final section presents the empirical analysis of the factors influencing coalition activity.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON INTEREST GROUPS IN COALITION

As mentioned, networking is ubiquitous. Lobbyists need information on policy proposals, intelligence on policy developments, and knowledge of the positions of other advocates active on a policy debate. Much of this can be gathered from simply talking with other lobbyists and thus some level of networking is expected on every issue.

But the question remains: why move beyond networking to build more formal ad hoc issue coalitions? By ad hoc issue coalitions I mean a very specific

type of coalition of groups – one which forms for a single discrete issue fight. Pijnenburg (1998) notes that ad hoc issue coalitions are characterized by low levels of formalization (compared to formal interest group organizations) and high levels of autonomy for the coalition's members. They are established in the short to medium term for the duration of a single legislative or regulatory debate. While some issue coalitions may last longer, they remain a coalition of autonomous groups; they do not establish their own direct membership or organizational structure. There is usually a coalition leader organizing the efforts of the members, regular meetings of the coalition members, joint lobbying actions such as joint letters, advertisements or press conferences, and very often an official name for the coalition and even a letterhead and a secretariat acting as the headquarters of the coalition (Berry 1989). Ad hoc coalitions are most often composed of different types of groups or associations representing different sets of interests. The concept of ad hoc issue coalitions should not be confused with Sabatier's (1988) concept of 'advocacy coalitions' which is a much broader theoretical construct than a discrete set of groups that have organized themselves for a single issue fight.

Groups could choose to work alone, or through their federation, or through a hired lobbyist but the ad hoc advocacy coalition offers unique advantages. From the literature it is clear that coalitions can be beneficial to interest groups in a political fight in two regards: (1) The coalition can signal to policy-makers that a policy position has the support of a large and varied group of interests; and (2) The coalition can provide a framework for more efficient use of resources.

Scholars from Mayhew (1974) to Kingdon (1995) to Esterling (2005) have suggested that policy-makers look for signs that a policy proposal has broad support. In political systems where policy-makers are elected, they will want to know whether a vote in favor of a provision could prove later to be detrimental to them in an election. If a large majority of the public is opposed to a proposal which a policy-maker supports, he or she could pay for it in the next election (Mayhew 1974; Arnold 1990). Thus coalitions can signal to policy-makers where the bulk of support lies. Coalitions can also indicate that advocates have worked out differences among themselves before approaching government officials and thus their final position is one that can be supported by the majority of the legislature and the public (Hecl 1978; Hula 1995, 1999). A coalition can thus garner more political supporting for a policy position by indicating a large set of interests already supporting the position.

From a resource efficiency standpoint, coalitions have the potential to pool the resources of their members, and thus coalition activity could be more economical. As Hojnacki notes 'almost all discussions of interest group coalitions refer to resource sharing as a benefit of coalition advocacy (Berry 1977, 1989; DeGregorio and Rossotti 1995; Hula 1995; Ornstein and Elder 1978; Scholozman and Tierney 1986)' (cited in Hojnacki 1998: 439). Some tactics like running issue advertisements can be very expensive, but if everyone in the coalition contributes some funds it lightens the burden on any one advocate.

Moreover, if coalition members divide up the lobbying work among them, they can more efficiently use the resources of the collective in the given policy fight. In addition, joining a coalition can be a relatively low-cost tactic and a rational lobbyist may incorporate this one tool along with many others in their advocacy strategy (Coen 1997; Pijnenburg 1998).

Since coalitions send cues to policy-makers about the desirability of a policy option and since they pool scarce resources, advocates have an incentive to join them. However, there are also costs associated with coalition membership; some money and time need to be devoted to the coalition and a group may need to modify their position on an issue to be in line with the coalition position. In addition, groups in crowded advocacy communities have an incentive to differentiate themselves from other interest groups in order to attract membership (Browne 1990). In short, there are also forces pushing groups to work alone. Thus we would expect groups to join coalitions in instances where there is a greater need than usual to signal to leaders the breadth of support for a position and a greater need to pool resources.

Previous research on ad hoc issue coalitions has addressed many questions about the behavior of advocates within coalitions but less about why groups join them initially. Hojnacki (1998) investigates when US groups in coalition free-ride and when they decide to be active contributors to the collective effort (for a similar study, see Heaney 2004). Hula (1995) also looks at why some US groups become coalition leaders while others are members in name but devote very few resources. He argues that groups that constitute the 'core' of the coalition are those with the most at stake, while those in the 'periphery' are only tangentially interested in the policy outcome.

Some studies have looked more directly at why advocates join coalitions. Hula's (1999) later work lays out a range of resource incentives that coalitions present to potential members – the traditional monetary resources, but also informational resources and political contact resources. He argues that resource sharing is an incentive that attracts members to a coalition even though they may need to modify their position to be included in the coalition. Pijnenburg's (1998) exploratory case study in the EU leads him to similar conclusions about the importance of resource incentives, specifically the provision of insider information and how the 'insider' status of some coalition members can be shared with other members.

Hojnacki (1997) models the decision to join a coalition as a cost–benefit analysis. Her evidence shows that US groups will not join a coalition when the costs of joining the coalition outweigh the potential benefits that the coalition might provide. Holyoke (2004) models the decision of advocates to join an ad hoc issue coalition as a bargaining process in which two advocates are in conflict and they can choose to cooperate and work toward a new policy position that pleases them both (through coalition building) or they can choose to engage in an advocacy war. The bargaining model suggests advocates' decisions to be very much influenced by the decisions of their potential coalition partner/ competitor. Coen's (2004) work also highlights the

importance of other actors in the advocacy community as well as institutional pressures when considering the rise of ad hoc coalitions in the EU environmental domain in the 1990s. He notes that competition among groups for sought after access to restricted policy forums drove business interests to ally and even modify their positions to gain entrance.

INSTITUTIONS, ISSUES AND INTERESTS: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO JOIN AN ADVOCACY COALITION

As the preceding section has shown, previous studies of ad hoc issue coalitions have considered the importance of a number of issue characteristics (i.e. conflict, importance of issue, position of other actors on an issue) and some interest group characteristics (i.e. resources, issue positions) on coalition membership, but there has been little research on the effect of institutional design on coalition formation. This omission is understandable since most studies of coalition activity are restricted to a single political system. However, a comparative research design opens the door to exploring this question. Following Kingdon's (1995) approach to understanding political phenomena, I work toward a more holistic model, recognizing that various streams of factors merge to determine the decision to join a coalition. Specifically, I argue that three critical streams of factors must be taken into consideration: the institutional structure in which the advocate is operating, the nature of the policy issue at hand, and characteristics of the interest group.

At the institutional level, I hypothesize that the democratic accountability of policy-makers is a key institutional factor when we seek to understand the decision to join a coalition. As discussed above, ad hoc issue coalitions have two advantageous qualities: they pool resources and they signal to policy-makers the breadth of support for a policy position. All things equal, advocates should have some base level of attraction to coalitions since they efficiently pool resources, but that attraction should increase in political systems where policy-makers are highly attuned to cues about public support for policy proposals, as they are when they are directly elected.

While there is variation on the level of democratic accountability within the EU, with the European Parliament (EP) being more democratically accountable than the Commission and Council, the EU institutions are largely not democratically accountable to the people – as is often lamented in the large literature on the democratic deficit (Weiler *et al.* 1995; Follesdal and Hix 2006). In addition, the democratic accountability of the EP, which is directly elected, is greatly reduced due to the use of party lists by the member states during EP elections (Kreppel 2001). Furthermore, Princen and Kerremans note that the EP 'is largely shielded from direct popular control because EP elections are usually decided on domestic themes and popular interest in the EP's work remains low between elections' (2005: 8). In the US, on the other hand, members of both the House and Senate are highly aware of their electoral vulnerability

and are thus highly accountable to the people in direct elections. Thus, a comparative US/EU study can provide some insight into the role of democratic accountability on coalition activity. Of course, there are other differences between the two systems in addition to the differences in democratic accountability, thus qualitative and interview-based evidence will be used to assess if accountability is a likely factor in explaining any observed differences in coalition activity.

When policy-makers are directly accountable to their constituents they should be more susceptible to claims about the broad support of interests for a specific proposal. Thus, we should expect more ad hoc issue coalitions to form in the US than in the EU. This is in line with Bouwen's (2002) work that argues that information on encompassing interests (which coalitions provide) is less desired by the European Commission than expert knowledge (which coalitions do not have a competitive advantage in producing) since the Commission is the primary target of lobbying in the EU.

There are, of course, other system differences that could account for differences in the prevalence of coalitions in the two systems. First, the EU system is characterized by multi-level governance. It could be that while ad hoc issue coalitions may not form at the EU level (the focus of this study), they may be forming in the member state capitals. National-level lobbying remains a significant focus of European interests (Kohler-Koch 1994; Beyers 2002; Imig and Tarrow 2001). Second, EU groups may have fewer resources to devote to an ad hoc coalition. While Brussels has long been making important public policy, some industries, sectors and interests still find it difficult to encourage their national organizations to contribute significant amounts of funding to the EU level. Some Eurogroups may simply not have the resources at their disposal to pass up to another level of organization. Third, there could be a difference in the composition of the interest group communities in the US and the EU – with the US having many more smaller specialized groups and the EU having more encompassing umbrella organizations. The smaller specialized groups in the US would have more reason to band together than larger Eurofederations of national associations. To parse out which of these factors, or combinations thereof, are most likely at play, I will rely on qualitative data from in-depth interviews in addition to quantitative data.

Issues and interests

The characteristics of the issue at hand should also determine whether a coalition is established on a given policy debate. First, highly conflictual issues may more likely lead to coalition formation because conflict gives groups an incentive to band together to face a common threat (Gais and Walker 1991; Hojnacki 1997; Whitford 2003). Advocates need to signal the strength of their position relative to their competitors to elected officials following the case. Thus, it is expected that the higher the conflict among actors on the issue, the higher the probability of coalition membership. Second, highly salient

issues are also expected to lead to coalition formation since these types of issues require that advocates demonstrate a broad base of support. In addition, issues that are the object of a great deal of public attention may require advocates to engage in more costly tactics such as issue advertisements or publicity raising events, and thus pooling resources may be even more attractive on such costly issues. Third, the scope should play a role. Larger scope issues that affect large portions of the population can be costly since advocates may need to convey their position to the affected public. In addition, large-scope issues, which will have significant implications for large sections of the electorate, should drive groups to signal their strength to policy-makers through allying in a coalition. Thus, the expectation is that the larger the scope of the issue, the higher the probability of coalition membership.

Some authors have suggested that some types of organizations are less likely to engage in coalition activity than other types of advocates. Clark and Wilson (1961) suggest that cooperation is more likely among utilitarian groups and less likely among purposive groups, largely because the latter are more restricted in their activities due to incentive systems (1961: 162). The idea here is that the added benefit of signaling and resource pooling does not outweigh the ideological cost of potentially having to modify one's position to fit with the coalition. Thus actor type should play a role in the decision to join a coalition, with the expectation that ideological citizen groups should be less likely to align.

Organizational resources should play a role in the decision to work through a coalition. Resource mobilization theorists emphasized the importance of resources in interest group mobilization and advocacy efforts (McCarthy and Zald 1978; Cress and Snow 1998). In order to mobilize for a policy debate, resource-poor groups need to identify resource sources and spend resources conservatively. Since coalitions pool resources, coalition activity could stretch scarce resources. Wealthy advocates, on the other hand, such as trade associations and corporations, do not face the same type of hurdles to mobilize. As an issue rises on their agenda, resource-rich advocates can more easily mobilize for the debate without having to rely on like-minded interests. Indeed this may be the cause for Caldeira and Wright's findings in their study of *amici curiae* activity which showed public firms and peak associations to be less likely to work in coalition (1990: 799). I use staff size as a proxy for resources and test whether organizational resources influence the decision to join a formal coalition. Since coalitions pool resources, the expectation is that resource-poor groups will be more likely to join coalitions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

To test the effects of institution, issue and interest factors on the decision to join an ad hoc issue coalition the project presented here collected data on a random sample of actors, lobbying on a random sample of cases in the two political systems of the US and the EU.¹ A random sample of American lobbyists was drawn from a sampling frame of all Lobby Disclosure reports registered in

1996 (see Baumgartner and Leech 2001). A random sample of EU lobbyists was drawn from a sampling frame I developed through combining the 2004 Registry of the European Parliament, the 2004 Commission registry of civil society organizations (CONECCS) and the 2004 *European Public Affairs Directory*.

Advocates who agreed to be interviewed were asked to describe the issue on which they had most recently been working. This served to generate a true random sample of issues, rather than the largest, most interesting or most important issue to the organization. This data collection process led to a random sample of 21 issues in the US and 26 issues in the EU.² In addition, interviewees were asked to identify the other major actors engaged in the policy debate who were then interviewed, forming the snowball portion of the sample.

Respondents were also asked about the background of the issue they were working on, the tactics they engaged in, coalition participation, the arguments they were employing, among other questions. For each advocate interviewed, I coded if they were members of any ad hoc issue coalitions, the names of those coalitions, and if there were any other coalitions engaged in the policy debate of which they were not members.

In addition to data collected through the in-person interviews I also collected information on the issues and the individual organizations. Small-scale case studies were conducted on each of the issues based on news coverage and official government publications. This research was the basis for the coding of the issue variables of scope and conflict. Salience was measured by news coverage of each issue collected through Lexis-Nexis searches. For the US cases, salience is indicated by the number of *New York Times* articles on the issue in the two-year period of research, and for the EU cases salience is indicated by the number of *Financial Times* articles.

Empirical findings

As expected more ad hoc issue coalitions were formed in the US than the EU. Across the sample of 21 US issues a total of 22 ad hoc issue coalitions were established. In the EU, only five coalitions were formed across 26 issues. Some issues prompted multiple coalitions to form like the Transportation Reauthorization issue in the US on which seven ad hoc issue coalitions formed or the Packaging and Packaging Waste issue in the EU for which two coalitions mobilized. Looking at the number of issues in the US and the EU on which one or more coalitions formed, we see 57 percent of US issues with coalition activity while only 15 percent of EU issues exhibit coalition activity, as seen in Figure 1a.

Looking at it at the advocate level, in the US 19 of the 65 advocates interviewed, or 29 percent, joined ad hoc coalitions established on the issue at hand. In the EU, only eight of 82 advocates, or 9.8 percent of advocates, reported joining an ad hoc issue coalition, as seen in Figure 1b.

The majority of issues in the US have coalitions organizing on them, while coalition activity in the EU is quite rare. However, not every advocate in the US is opting to work through coalitions on every issue; 70 percent of US

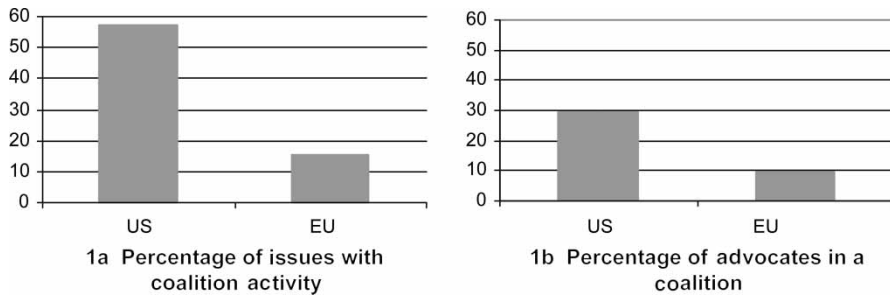


Figure 1 Coalition activity in the US and the EU

advocates are not joining coalitions on some issues. The nearly ubiquitous nature of coalitions across the 22 issues in the US sample suggests that a leader often forms a coalition, making the lobbying route available to advocates active on the issue. Whether the coalition then becomes one of the most important actors, or whether prominent advocates work through it, however, appears to be a different story. The data make clear, though, at either the issue or individual level, the rate of coalition activity remains much higher in the US than the EU.

The simple differences between coalition activity in the US and the EU are not enough to determine if electoral accountability is driving the difference or if another factor explains these system level differences. However, the hypothesis that advocates active in a system with greater electoral accountability will be more likely to work through coalitions does find qualitative support in addition to the quantitative evidence presented above.

In the US, a number of lobbyists active in coalitions describe the attempt to convey the breadth of support for their position. A company lobbyist on the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) debate described a coalition of which they were a member:

The Coalition for Vehicle Choice is a very broad group – there are auto companies in it, the suppliers are in it, the dealers are in it, but it also includes some of the safety organizations that are concerned about highway safety and some of the consumer groups like the Snowmobile Association, the recreation industry has been involved in this as well. So we've tried to be as creative and broad – reaching out to other groups – as we could be.

Similarly, a trade association lobbyist on the marine employment issue tried to convey the breadth of the coalition she was leading: 'In the coalition, we have over 100 people in the coalition, all different types of people, the marine related people, people from the insurance industry – we thought they would have a problem with it, they've actually joined the coalition.'

In addition to conveying the sheer size of support, it can be equally important to convey to elected policy-makers that different types of organized interests are on board. Some have referred to coalitions which have traditionally opposing

interests allying on a certain issue as 'strange bedfellow coalitions.' These are instances such as the extreme left and the extreme right agreeing on free speech issues; or leftist human rights groups and conservative religious groups agreeing on foreign policy proposals against oppressive regimes. In the US sample, strange bedfellow coalitions could be found between business and the environmental community. Advocates active on such coalitions emphasized the power of such alliances. A trade association lobbyist on the Wind Energy Tax Credit case explained: 'That's good when you can get disparate parties signing on to a letter, a Member of Congress sees a letter and it's signed by the Chamber of Congress and the Sierra Club, how often do you see that?'

The aim then is to build as big and as broad a coalition as possible. In this way advocates can signal to elected policy-makers that a large majority of the electorate will likely support them, if they support this proposal. This electoral signaling in effect says to elected officials: vote for this without concern for negative political consequences.

There is also evidence that pooling resources is part of the decision. While coalitions are in part about sending signals to policy-makers, they are also about resource efficiency. A citizen organization active on the issue of disability rights in the welfare program described how the members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) tried to stretch their resources by divvying up meetings with Members of Congress. A member of the Basic Education Coalition painted a similar picture of trying to magnify the impact of the coalition members. She explained how coalition members pooled resources to finance a trip for Members of Congress to education projects in developing countries. Thus in the US we see strong evidence that coalition building is about sending a 'big and broad' message to elected officials, but stretching resources is also a goal.

In the EU, the few actors that reported coalition activity focused more on resource sharing, rather than conveying the sheer breadth of support. As one of the members of the coalition on the Consumer Credit Directive explained, the aim was to share information and work out the details of their position before they approached policy-makers:

Last year we set up the EBIC – the European Banking Industry Committee – and that has as members ourselves, the European Banking Federation, the European Savings Bank Group, and some others; it is a kind of platform, the aim is to find our convergences, and once we do, the outcome is the drafting of letters to the Commission, to the EP.

Similarly, a trade association active on the packaging environment indicator in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive described how the goal of the coalition was to work out technical details:

We are really, I don't want to say the authority, but the major player when it comes to packaging. Now each of the major sectors, or materials also have their own organizations – beverage has its own, plastic, paper, and each has its own sub-section dealing with packaging and some resource devoted

to that. We work in coalition with them . . . So in those we exchange ideas, make sure we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.

Finally, a member of the coalition on solvent producers and users on the Clean Air for Europe issue emphasized that coalitions are more about hashing out the details and exchanging information than sending a political message. He noted that they met 16 times a year to debate the current problems and decide on a common position.

In further evidence of the resource pooling and not political signaling aim of coordinated activity in the EU, advocates reported high levels of networking. Though they may have not needed to convey the magnitude of their support, and thus did not need to establish an ad hoc issue coalition, advocates active on the Clean Air for Europe (CAFE), Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), Data Retention, and Animal Transport debates all engaged in highly organized networking. A trade association on the Data Retention issue explained: 'We decided to work closely with the other E-associations, so EUROISPA (European Internet Services Providers Association), GSM Europe (mobile industry trade association), ECTA (European Competitive Telecommunications Association) – the smaller telecoms companies, we did a lot of lobbying, we wrote letters, we did a lot of information gathering and sharing.' The coordination of industry on the CAFE debate was nearly surgical in its precision, organized at the top by the pan-EU business association UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe). Each of the lobbyists described divvying up tasks, sharing information and working in synchronization; as one trade association explained:

I can't possibly attend all the meetings. But we are always represented by UNICE, there is always one member of the working group at the meetings and then they share that and we circulate documents around. UNICE has a small working group set up on CAFE and it meets fairly often, once a month, and so we stay up to date that way . . . And UNICE is sending a letter to all the Commissioners, and we divide it up in the working group, so electricity has good contacts with DG Energy and so they will work on them, and we will talk with Enterprise, and it goes like that.

If the aim was to signal to policy-makers the breadth of their support it may have made sense to form an official ad hoc issue coalition, with a catchy name, and send out countless letters advertising their large and diverse membership. As it was, their aim was resource efficiency and they therefore organized their work and resource pooling behind the scenes.

Highly professional networking is not reserved for industry alone. An environmental organization active on REACH described how the green EU groups worked to coordinate their activities:

We all try to coordinate as much as possible so as to not step on each other's toes and also to enhance our work because each can do a different part. Also, each likely only has one person working on this, so that isn't that many people

really, and they also have other issues they have to cover, compared to CEFIC [Conseil Européen des Fédérations de l'Industrie Chimique], they have like 140 people here spending about 100 percent of their time on REACH.

While policy-makers in the EU may be less responsive to coalition communications because of their limited electoral accountability, one of the alternative explanations – that the advocacy communities in the US and the EU are composed of different types of actors, more specialized in the US, broader in the EU – also finds some support. Since EU umbrella organizations are alliances of national associations, they already represent a number of organizations and thus do not find it necessary to ally with other interest groups. As one industry lobbyist succinctly put it: 'We are the entire industry, so we don't really work with any other organizations.' A trade association active on the REACH debate conveyed a similar logic: 'Since we are an umbrella organization of 50 national and sectoral associations we are in a way a coalition.'

It is difficult to discount the other two alternative hypotheses – regarding multi-level governance and resource scarcity in the EU – but no evidence for them emerged from advocates' discussions of their coalition activity. I did ask advocates if they were also pursuing the national route as part of the larger project from which these data stem and none of the 82 lobbyists mentioned an ad hoc issue coalition which was established in any of the member states. A larger study that would specifically collect data on coalition activity at both the national and European level would be needed to accurately assess if this factor plays a role in lack of coalition formation in Brussels. Many actors in the EU did mention lack of funds, and the inability of their constituent members to see the importance of contributing money for representation in Brussels, but much the same complaints could be heard from the US lobbyists. Even the largest lobbies consistently feel their industry, sector or membership do not invest enough in their government relations activity. Moreover, while the lobbying industry as a whole may be better funded in the US, this should perhaps lead to more coalition activity in the EU rather than less. Coalitions do not necessarily require dues from the members; they can also be more of a work sharing framework to erase redundancies. If there is a set of interest groups who share the same goal on an individual issue and who are resource-poor, they could coordinate their efforts – divvying up Members of the European Parliament to visit and tactics to pursue. Net lack of resources in the EU therefore does not seem to be the strongest explanation for the lack of coalition activity in the EU. I look at the role of resources more directly within the US and the EU under the interest group characteristics section below.

In sum, we see evidence that the democratic institutional design of a polity plays a role in coalition activity. Coalitions in any polity offer the potential to pool resources and thus there is an incentive to forge coalitions. However, there is an added incentive to forge coalitions in systems where policy-makers are accountable to the public in direct elections, since those officials need to ensure the votes they take on individual policy proposals are supported by

large portions of the electorate. Ad hoc issue coalitions convey to elected officials the size and breadth of support for a proposal; and this may drive more coalition activity in the US than the EU.

Issues

The institutional structure within which an advocate is working is not, of course, the only consideration when deciding to join an issue coalition.

As discussed in the theoretical section, previous scholarship has suggested that issues characterized by high conflict may lead advocates to band together. The findings show that this is indeed the case in the EU, where the highest percentage of advocates joining coalitions are doing so on issues that have opposing perspectives fighting against each other. In the US, however, the data are more ambiguous. Table 1 suggests that advocates are most likely to join coalitions on issues that have a number of different perspectives, but not necessarily in direct opposition to each other. These are issues where camps of advocates are promoting different ways to solve a political problem. It is important, however, to not over-interpret the finding since the number of observations is rather small for this category. Issues characterized by no conflict differ from cases with numerous perspectives or directly opposing perspectives. On issues with some level of conflict or intense conflict, advocates have an incentive to band together.

Regarding issue scope, there is a clear pattern among advocates in the US; as the scope of their issue increases, they are more likely to join a coalition. Twenty-one percent of advocates that join coalitions are active on issues that will only impact a small sector, and 30 percent of joining advocates are active on those impacting large and multiple sectors, while 40 percent of advocates that decide to ally do so on the largest scope issues with system-wide ramifications. There is no clear relationship in the EU system between issue scope and coalition activity.

The other hypothesized relationship – that increasing public salience will lead to coalition membership – is also supported by the data but the effect only requires that there be some level of coverage of the issue in the news, there need not be hundreds of stories. In both the US and the EU, coalition membership is most likely when there is some level (even low) of news coverage of the issue.

The findings suggest that conflict and salience do play a role in the decision to join a coalition, while issue scope is only influential in the US. However, factors at the advocate level also play a role. I turn to those now.

Interests

The expectations about organizational resources are not borne out in the findings, as presented in Table 1. It is not the poorest organizations that need to pool resources and thus join coalitions, but rather it is the wealthier organizations that are engaging in this lobbying strategy.³ This may be because resource-poor

Table 1 Coalition membership by issue and interest characteristics

	US Freq.	N		EU Freq.	N
Conflict					
None	29 percent	21	None	6 percent	16
Multiple P	67 percent	3	Multiple P	0 percent	7
Opposing	27 percent	41	Opposing	12 percent	59
Scope					
Small sector	22 percent	23	Small sector	8 percent	24
Large sector	32 percent	22	Large sector	17 percent	23
Multiple sectors	30 percent	10	Multiple sectors	5 percent	19
System-wide	40 percent	10	System-wide	6 percent	16
Salience					
0 stories	33 percent	30	0 stories	9 percent	32
1–5 stories	43 percent	14	1–2 stories	20 percent	20
6–50 stories	9 percent	11	3 or more	3 percent	30
51 or more	20 percent	10			
Total–N	19	65		8	82
Total–percent	29 percent			10 percent	
Staff					
1–5	29 percent	14	1–5	3 percent	30
6–20	44 percent	18	6–20	16 percent	38
21 or more	50 percent	14	21 or more	7 percent	14
Total–N	19	46		8	82
Total–percent	41 percent			10 percent	
Type					
Citizen	50 percent	10	Citizen	6 percent	16
Foundation	38 percent	8	Foundation	0 percent	3
Trade	42 percent	19	Trade	15 percent	46
Corporations*	33 percent	9	Hired firms*	0 percent	7
Government	0 percent	19	Government	0 percent	10
Total–N	19	65		8	82
Total–percent	29 percent			10 percent	

*Note: The US sample included a number of individual corporations but no hired lobby firms, thus 'Corporations' is listed. The EU sample included a number of hired lobbying firms but only four individual corporations, thus 'Hired Firms' are listed and the corporations are included in 'Trade'.

organizations do not feel they can spare funding to donate to a coalition of organizations; or that coalition membership is more cost-intensive than scholars have realized – in time, money, and labor. The effort and energy expended hashing out a common position that is accepted by all coalition members

could be saved if an organization decided to go it alone and were thus able to make the final call on all advocacy decisions.

Turning to the second interest-group-level factor that was hypothesized to play a role in coalition membership, the type of actor does influence whether the advocate chooses to go it alone or band together with like-minded actors. The findings differ from expectations following from Clark and Wilson (1961) that ideological groups may be constrained from working with other organizations. In the US, citizen groups are the most likely to engage in coalition activities, with 50 percent of citizen group advocates reporting coalition activity compared to the average of 29 percent. The next most likely are trade associations, which report joining ad hoc coalitions at 42 percent. In the EU, trade associations are the type of advocate most commonly active in coalitions. However, citizen groups are the second most likely to engage in coalition activity and they are the only other actor type that reported doing so. Taken together, these findings suggest that citizen groups in both the US and the EU have a tendency to ally, but that they must have some level of resources to foot the bill that coalition activity requires.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the decision to join a coalition requires contextual and interest group information. The institutional design of the system in which an advocate is operating is critical. Will policy-makers respond to lobbying tactics aimed at signaling the support of large swaths of the electorate? If not, is there much sense in putting resources into coalition building and coordinating? The data gathered from lobbyists in the US and the EU suggest the answer is no. The democratic accountability of policy-makers appears to play a role in the decision to form and join coalitions.

However, we also saw evidence that the differences in the composition of the US and EU advocacy communities may also affect the propensity of EU groups to align, since larger pan-European federations do not see the same benefits as smaller specialized US groups.

The democratic accountability of policy-makers remains a strong explanation for the differences we find between the US and the EU. It must be noted that this is not to say that the US system is an ideal type. On the contrary, direct elections in the US lead to perverse imbalances of power. While American policy-makers are very much driven by the re-election motive, they are not driven to be equally responsive to all constituents. This is because direct elections in the US are coupled with private financing of elections. While it is always difficult to prove categorically, a great deal of evidence exists to suggest that policy-makers are more responsive to wealthy interests that are able to aid in funding the re-election campaign. Lacking direct elections and thus financing of elections, the EU is free of such a biasing force. However, it cannot be disputed that the difference in institutional forms (elections versus appointment) leads to diverging motivational forces for US and EU policy-makers

and consequently to different advocacy strategies (coalition formation vs. networking) for advocates in the two polities.

Institutional explanations are only part of the story. Though coalition signals may be more useful in the US, they are still not ubiquitous. Likewise, coalitions are not totally absent from the EU scene. Issue characteristics also play a role; US advocates ally more often on issues with multiple viewpoints, with a larger societal impact and some level of salience. The same pattern is evident in the EU. Finally, the characteristics of the advocate themselves determine if they will work closely with other organizations in an ad hoc issue coalition. Different types of actors engage in coalition activity at varying levels. Importantly, citizen groups in both systems see an advantage in banding together and, in the process, showing their solidarity and pooling their resources. Finally, coalition membership requires some threshold of resources in both polities, with advocates supported by medium and large offices more likely to engage in coalition activity. The data presented here on the influence of institutions, issues and interests on coalition activity have driven home the point: to understand the decision to ally or forge ahead alone we must look to the broader political context and the character of the advocate.

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NOTES

- 1 The US interviews were carried out in 2002 under the Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, and Kimball project – Advocacy and Public Policy-making Project – NSF grants number SES-0111224 and SBR-9905195. The EU interviews were carried out during 2004–05 with the support of a Fulbright Fellowship. Analysis was supported by a Fellowship from the Pennsylvania State University.
- 2 For a full description of the 47 issues, please visit <http://www.personal.psu.edu/cxm548>
- 3 Note that Congressional advocates are left out of this analysis; thus it is run on an N of 46.

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