Networking vs. Allying: The Decision of Interest Groups to Join Coalitions in the US and the EU
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Abstract: Interest group alliances allow advocates to share information, pool resources, erase redundancies and engage in more efficient lobbying. Advocacy coalitions, however, are not formed in every instance; groups do not always choose to ally. To understand why organizations sometimes decide to ban together and sometimes choose to forge ahead alone, 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 a 149 lobbyists in Washington and Brussels on a random sample of 47 policy issues. The results show that 1. EU lobbyists are building formal alliances at a much lower rate than their American counterparts, 2. certain types of issues appear to drive alliance activity and 3. citizen groups, or civil society organizations, are making significant use of the tactic in both the US and the EU when compared with other actor types.

Key Words: Coalitions; European Union; Interest Groups; Lobbying; United States

Introduction

One oft-cited adage about lobbying is: ‘It’s all about who you know.’ While that might not be the entire story, it is clear that whom you know, whom you talk to, and who shares information with you are indeed important determinants of lobbying behavior. Talking matters; communication is paramount. Indeed, an introverted lobbyist would not likely go far in either Washington or Brussels.

Nearly every scholarly work on lobbying mentions networking of one type or another (especially Heclo 1978; Sabatier 1988; Salisbury et al. 1987). Lobbyists share tidbits of information during hearing recesses, they forward emails with talking points, they hold conference calls getting like-minded interests up-to-speed on policymaking developments, they organize meetings to develop common positions, they send joint letters to policymakers, place joint adds in newspapers and appoint or hire secretariats to coordinate their activities; all of these activities can be referred to as networking, alliance building or coalition activity.

Networking ranges on a continuum from very informal and loose, comprised of occasional information sharing, to highly coordinated enterprises with logos, letterhead and secretariats. Almost without exception, all lobbyists engage in some degree of networking; not all advocates pursue more formalized coalition action. What determines how coordinated like-minded advocates choose to be? When are informal discussions in the lobbies of hearings sufficient and when are ad hoc issue coalitions required? This paper presents data on the informal and formal coalition activity of advocates in the United States and the European Union. The data stems from a larger project based on 149 in-depth interviews with advocates active on a random sample of 47 policy issues.

The existing body of literature would suggest that informal coalition activity, or networking, is nearly incessant. In fact, this is what was found. Since there is nearly no variation – almost every advocate in both polities reported engaging in this behavior – extensive theorizing on this point is unnecessary. In addition, empirical evidence does not convey much; thus, more qualitative evidence is presented on this point. The extant literature on more formal ad hoc issue
coalitions has established that there is indeed variation on the formation of and activity in coalitions; empirical evidence is therefore presented on this type of coalition activity. The first section lays out the theoretical expectations about how institutional, issue, and interest group factors should influence formal coalition activity. The second section presents the research design and data collection. The third and final section presents the empirical analysis of the relationship between institutional, issue and interest group characteristics and coalition membership.

**Institutions, Issues and Interests: Factors Influencing the Decision to Join an Advocacy 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 in every democratic polity, on almost every type of issue, by the full range of advocate types.

But the question remains: why move beyond networking to build more formal ad hoc issue coalitions? Coalitions can be helpful for a number of reasons. Scholars from Mayhew (1974) to Kingdon (1981) to Esterling (2005) have suggested that policymakers look for signs that a policy proposal has broad support. This may be because a coalition indicates that advocates have worked out differences among themselves before approaching government officials and thus their proposal is one that will likely work (Heclo 1978; Hula 1995, 1999). Or because policymakers want to know whether a vote in favor of this provision will later be detrimental to them in an election; if a large majority of the public is opposed to a proposal they could feel it at the polls (Mayhew 1974; Arnold 1990). Coalitions pool the resources of their members, and thus coalition activity could be more economical. 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). A large and broad coalition with the right
members signals a lot to policymakers; this can be invaluable in building support for a proposal (Hula 1995).

While there are many good reasons for establishing an issue coalition or joining one, they do not materialize in every instance of policymaking. Why? I argue that three critical levels of factors must be taken into consideration when seeking to understand any advocacy decision: 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, the democratic accountability of policymakers is a key institutional factor when we seek to understand advocacy decisions. The democratic accountability of an institution will influence which type of tactics a lobbyist pursues on an issue. Some lobbying tactics are designed to evoke the will of the people and tap the fear of policymakers accountable to those citizens. Other strategies are designed to convey technical information about policy proposals. Lobbyists are more likely to employ the former strategy if they are active in an arena were the officials are driven by the re-election motive.

While there is variation on this variable within the EU, with the 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 on the large literature on the democratic deficit. And even the democratic accountability of the EP, which is directly elected, is considerably reduced due to the use of party lists by the member states during EP elections (Kreppel 1999). In addition 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.

When policymakers 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.
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). 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. Third, the scope of the issue may matter, with larger scope issues driving groups to convey a larger presence through allying.

Some authors have suggested some types of organizations just simply are less likely to engage in coalition activity relative to other actor types. Clark and Wilson (1961) suggest that cooperation is more likely among utilitarian groups and less likely among purposive groups which are more restricted in their activities due to incentive systems (1961, 162). Caldeira and Wright in their study of *amici curiae* activity suggest public firms and peak associations are less likely to cooperate (1990, 799). Thus actor type should play a role in the decision to join a coalition.

Resource mobilization theorists have also suggested that organizational resources should play a role in tactic selection (McCarthy & Zald 1978; Cress & Snow 1998) Using staff size as a proxy for resources, I also 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.

Institutional, issue-specific and interest-group factors are all critical pieces of the advocacy puzzle and thus each will be measured and analyzed so that a complete image of influences on coalition activity can be constructed. For clarity, the independent variables for each level are listed below.

**Institutional Level**
- The degree of democratic accountability

**Issue Level**
- Scope
- Salience
- Conflict

**Interest-Group Level**
- Financial resources
- Group Type (i.e. Citizen, professional, trade, union, corporation, etc.)
Research Design and Data

The data presented in this paper stem from a larger project aimed at analyzing the determinants of each of the stages of the entire advocacy process. I carried out the American interviews during 2002 under the Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, and Kimball project. I conducted the European interviews during 2004-5. The American actors were randomly drawn from a database created from the Lobbying Reports for 1996 that were filed with the Secretary of the Senate compiled by Baumgartner & Leech (see Baumgartner and Leech 1999, 2000). In the European arena, I developed a sampling frame from the 2004 Registry of the European Parliament, the 2004 Commission registry of civil society organizations (CONECCS) and the 2004 European Public Affairs Directory.

The design consisted of randomly drawing advocates from the respective universes of lobbyists. These randomly selected actors were then asked to identify the issue they were most recently working on, forming the random sample of cases. Then snowball sampling was employed to gather information on the other major actors on that case. Other major actors could be any type of actor, if an official was named as being an active advocate on the issue they were allowed to fall into the sample, thus the sample includes a wide range of actor types in both polities including citizen groups, trade and professional associations, business groups, lobbying, PR and law firms, institutions, individual corporations, and policymakers, though to a greater extent in the US sample. This data collection process led to a random sample of 21 issues in the US and 26 issues in the EU.

Interviewees are asked about the background of the issue they were working on, the other major players on the issue, the tactics there were engaging in, coalition participation, the arguments they were employing, the opposition they were facing, the allies they found to support their cause, among others. The coding of their tactical strategy forms the basis of the data for this paper. Each interview transcript is coded (0 – not mentioned, or 1 – mentioned) as to whether the advocate reported membership in an ad hoc issue coalition.
Additional Data Collection from Publicly Available Sources

In addition to data collected through the in-person interviews I also collected information on the individual organizations and issues.

In the US I gathered information on group type, founding date, membership size, membership type, staff size, and annual budget from Associations Unlimited – an online directory of Washington organizations. For groups in the EU, I gathered information including group type, founding date, type of membership, and membership size from their websites.

On issues, in the US, I monitored Roll Call and the Washington Post and conducted research on the websites of the House of Representatives, Senate, administration, any relevant agencies and the Library of Congress’ legislative tracking system. In the EU, I monitored the European Voice and Euractive weekly as well as researching the issues on the Commission archives and EP Legislative Observatory OEIL as well as Pre-LEX. This issue research was the basis for the coding of the issue variables of Scope (coded: 0-impacts small sector, 1-impacts large economic sector, 2-impacts multiple sectors and 3-has pan-EU or pan-US impact ) and Conflict (coded: 0-only one perspective or view point on issue, 1-multiple viewpoints but not directly opposed, and 2-directly opposing viewpoints). The hypothesized directions are: the larger the Scope the higher the probability of coalition membership; and the higher the conflict the higher the probability of coalition membership.

A measure of “inside” and “outside” salience was collected for each issue. By “inside” salience I mean the level of attention given to an issue by policymakers and organized interests that are following the day-to-day work of the political institutions. “Outside” salience is the amount of attention the general public is giving to a policy issue. Salience is measured by news coverage. In the US, outside salience is indicated by the number of New York Times articles on the issue in the two year period of research. This variable was collected through Lexus-Nexus searches. For the inside salience measure I collected a measure of the number of articles in the Washington Post, also through Lexus-Nexus searches. Searches were limited to the two year time span of the 107th Congress (January 1, 2001-December 31, 2002), during which the US interviews were conducted. These are selected as indicators of salience; the aim was not to
identify the precise number of articles covering the issues in the sample. While the *New York Times* is clearly not read by everyone in the country, its stories are picked up by local papers, and it is a good indicator of what the media is paying attention to and thus about what the public is informed. The *Washington Post* has a larger inside-the-Beltway focus and is read more widely by members of the Washington community than it is in other parts of the country.

For an outside salience measure of the EU issues, I conducted Lexus-Nexus searches of the *Financial Times*. The inside salience indicator was collected from searches of the *European Voice* online archive. Searches were similarly limited to a two year time span surrounding the time period I conducted my EU fieldwork (June 1, 2003-June 1, 2005); this insures comparability between the US and EU media coverage measures. Again, these two EU sources are selected as indicators of salience; it is simply not possible to monitor media coverage of my sample issues of 26 issues in all 19 of the EU's official languages in the major papers of all 25 of the Member States. Therefore I have chosen the *FT* and the *European Voice* as measures of media attention to the issues, both are considered an unbiased presentation of EU news; “With few exceptions (such as the *Financial Times* or the Brussels-Based *European Voice*) the media invariably view EU developments through a national prism” (Watson & Shackleton 2003). However, the *European Voice* is little read outside of Brussels, while the *FT* is read around the world and gives an indication of what the Brussels-based press corps of the national papers are following.

**Empirical Findings**

Advocates were asked what other organizations or actors they were talking to or working with, as well as who else was involved on the issue. I coded whether the advocates were members of any ad hoc issue coalitions, what the coalitions were and if any other coalitions were engaged in the policy debate.

Establishing formal coalitions requires a different level of commitment and coordination than networking. The findings suggest that the political context and the characteristics of the actors themselves play a role in the decision to join an issue coalition.
Institutions

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 were formed across 26 issues. Looking at it at the advocate level, in the US 19 of the 65 advocates interviewed, or 29%, joined ad hoc coalitions established on the issue at hand. In the EU, only 8 of 82 advocates or 9.8% of advocates reported joining an ad hoc issue coalition.

One explanation for this may be that many advocates in the United States sign on to coalitions only in name but do not actually allocate much in the way of resources toward the coalition. This type of non-active coalition participation has been documented by previous authors (Hula 1995; Hojnacki 1998; Heany 2004). While it is true that a wide range of engagement can be found among the members of American ad hoc issue coalitions, each of the 19 American advocates that indicated involvement in this sample were active members or leaders of their coalitions. All were attending meetings and coalition Hill visits, sharing information, and contributing to coalition position development. None described a situation in which they had contributed their name but nothing more. Similarly in the EU those few advocates that mentioned coalition activity were highly engaged. This is likely due to the selection process used in this research – the identifying advocates named an issue that they were working on and thus contributing some level of resources to; advocates identified in the snowball portion of the sample were those that were major players on the issue. Thus, actors that were only marginally interested in the issues – those that would presumably be a coalition member in name only – are not included in the sample. The findings here coupled with previous research in this US however would suggest that if the sample was broadened we would find even more actors in the US reporting some level of coalition activity; considering the dearth of coalitions all together in the EU this is much less likely.

In the US, the coalitions that formed were largely of the ad hoc type. Those that would coalesce for a single battle and then disappear once that policy debate ended; like the Basic Education Coalition for the issue of the same name, the Coalition for Vehicle Choice to combat rising CAFÉ standards, or the opposing Water Infrastructure Network and the H2O Coalition on
the water infrastructure financing case. The Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research coalesced to promote stem cell research in the debate on a ban on human cloning but also worked on non-cloning issues. Other US issue coalitions were more long standing, extending beyond a single bill to provide a united front on the issue on other related policy proposals as they arose. Many such coalitions could be found on the Transportation Reauthorization case in which organizations combined to form seven different issue coalitions: Smart Growth America; Coalition for Smarter Growth; National Coalition to Defend NEPA; Tri-State Transportation Campaign; Surface Transportation Policy Project; Transportation Construction Coalition; and Americans for Transportation Mobility. Many of these coalitions had been on the scene for previous Transportation Reauthorizations, and would likely be there again for the next round. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities was standing but established a special task force specifically for the TANF Reauthorization debate.

In the EU there was much less coalition activity across the random sample of issues. All five of the issue coalitions that did exist were of the enduring type – they would continue to exist for future revisions of the Directives and for implementation. The Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive calls for periodic reviews and new target setting, as such, the Paper Packaging Coordination Group and the Packaging Chain Forum continue on, becoming more active when an actual revision is underway and going into stasis otherwise. The European Banking Industry Coalition formed in response to the Consumer Credit Directive revision but plans to continue on as a forum to share information and work together on issues that cut across the banking industry. Similarly the European Solvent VOC is a coalition that is active on CAFÉ but can also work together on other policy issues that effect solvent manufacturers and users. Finally, getting public health on the EU agenda is an ongoing task, the EU Public Health Forum, part coalition, part full time organization, will continue to push for EU legislation in this area.

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 CAFÉ debate described a coalition of which they were a member:
There is another coalition that exists, the Coalition for Vehicle Choice, which is a very
broad group of some of the organizations I just mentioned, 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, because these are people that trailer
snowmobiles, boats and that sort of thing, and they are concerned about continuing to
have vehicles that are able to tow a trailer, so that they can go and have their recreation
activities, 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 and helping them
to understand the possible implication for them or their membership from what was
being considered.

Similarly, a trade association lobbyist on marine employment tried to convey the breadth of the
coalition she was leading: “In the coalition, we have over a 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; they’d like us to be removed
[from the requirements] as well because they can’t insure people.” A member of the WIN
coalition on the Water Infrastructure case stressed the support they had behind their position:
One of the ways that organizations work is in coalitions with large groups. We were one
of the charter members of the WIN coalition, the Water Infrastructure Network, which
started three years ago now...First thing, we tried to organize everybody who had a
stake. So we tried to bring in all the stakeholders. That meant the state regulatory
bodies; the organizations of actual utility companies, public and private; all the people
involved in the design and construction of utilities, like us...In addition, we have people
who are designers, private engineering companies that design environmental facilities. We have people in construction, the people who actually build the facilities. So we represent a broad cross-section of the engineering community. We also have all the suppliers, the vendors -- the pipe manufacturers, the people who make the equipment, the Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association. So it's a very broad coalition.

In addition to conveying the shear size of support, it can be equally important to convey to elected policymakers 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 right 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 described 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?” A company lobbyist active on the repeal of PURPA which promotes co-generation, echoed this point:

And then we really worked hard on coalitioning; from the business community side we would go in with paper, steel, aluminum, autos, chemicals, oil, hospitals, just a really broad swath of people, so we go to Members and say this isn’t just good for the chemical engineers, this is broadly good in the manufacturing sector. And we worked with the environmental community, we never got them to lobby actively but we could represent them as being in favor of co-generation and we went through a lot of their past reports and testimony and pulled out statements very supportive of co-generation. And we bundled those up into papers and said the environmental community is supportive of
co-generation…Votes don’t get any easier than this, it’s a green, pro-manufacturing vote, how can you go wrong with that?

In addition to wanting to convey that support for your position is large and broad; coalition leaders also need to make sure they do not include organized interests that policymakers would not want to be seen supporting. A Congressional Staffer on the cogeneration issue noted how this type of consideration was relevant to their coalition:

That group pretty much stayed quiet, I think they tried to raise that as an issue, you know “this is great for us” we said look “you’re going to get killed by these other utilities because they hate you. If you start getting up there and saying ‘oh we like this’ – you’re going to sink this, we’ve got a shot at winning this right now so you better keep your mouth shut” and they did. So in the end they came out ahead but it was not our interest in helping them, it’s fine that they got helped but we weren’t trying to bring them along.

The pro-cogeneration advocates didn’t want this small group of energy producers that did not have electricity as a by-product but rather were producing electricity almost exclusively and exploiting a loophole in PURPA to be part of the coalition since it would be a political liability. The aim then is to build as big and as broad of a coalition as possible without including any detrimental groups in the mix. In this way advocates can signal to elected policymakers that a large majority of the electorate will likely support them, if they support this proposal.

There is of course also the logistical side, while coalitions are in part about sending signals to policymakers they are also about efficiency. A citizen organization active on the TANF Reauthorization described how the members of the CCD try to stretch their resources:

So I find that the best way to get my work accomplished is to work through coalitions with other groups. The biggest disability related coalition that exists in Washington, and where I spend a lot of my time and efforts, is the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, or CCD. I don't know if you've come across them in travels and interviews,
but CCD is an active coalition of over a hundred national disability related organizations. I also sit on their board of directors, chair the membership committee and a couple of the members. So we do our work with them. There are no paid staff people who work for CCD, we all contribute a small amount of dues every year. Then we set ourselves up to work by task force, and the task forces cover different areas… How many come on a given day to given meetings depends on everybody’s schedules and who’s available when – meetings are always set to meet the schedules of staff on the Hill. If the staffer you need to meet with says I’m only available Tuesday at two, we put out a notice to everybody who might be interested. We use a lot of e-mailing system, listservs, say we’ve got a meeting at two o’clock with so and so in this office, if you can be there, please be there. Whoever shows up, shows up.

A member of the Basic Education Coalition painted a similar picture of trying to magnify the impact of the constituent members:

So a number of organizations came together to form the Basic Education Coalition. Through that there has been more focus, there are probably about 3 or 4 members that are the most active but there are 16 total members of the coalition….The coalition has sponsored now, for two years, overseas trips for Members of Congress. We’ve had a Republican and a Democrat go each year. And they’re actually the ones that took the lead in this letter to the president. So they have really done very well in becoming interested and active in the area of basic education which was our hope. It’s not necessarily guaranteed results so we are very pleased. We have also had a fairly steady pattern of visits to members of the appropriations committee, supporting the highest possible funding level for basic education.
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 being in a coalition focused more on working out the details and finding a consensus before approaching policy makers, rather than conveying the sheer breadth of support. As one of the members of the coalition on the Consumer Credit Directive explained:

We set up last year 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. The arguments are general though, for example on the responsibility clause for lenders, we don’t get into the details in the coalition papers.

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 there are two standing ad hoc groups. The first is well we call it the G4 – that is us; AIM – French acronym for the branded industries; CIAA – Food and Drinks industry; and ASSURE – resource use. Then the second grouping is the PCF, the Packaging Chain Forum. So in those we exchange ideas, we have a meeting here next week to talk about our comments on the Commission study – make sure we are all singing from the same hymn sheet. So the second meets informally, how often depends on what is happening.
Finally, the description of the coalition on solvent producers and users on the Clean Air for Europe case, makes the point that coalitions are more about hashing out the details than sending a political message:

We work in close coalition with the industries using solvents. We have the standing coalition called the European Solvents VOC (or ESVOC), that includes industries like food, wood, furniture, - 30 association in all are members. That is organized into 4 subgroups 1. VOC, 2. Worker Health and Safety, 3. IPPC, and CAFÉ, each sub group meets once per quarter, so there are various configurations of members meeting 16 times a year. We hold those and organize those here in our space. Sometimes we bring in the Commission officials, maybe three of four times a year, we say ‘you know gentleman this is a very good opportunity for you since there will be representative of 30 associations there. So often they come, speak in the morning and then they never stay for lunch, they go back to their Commission offices and we can say ‘okay we’ve all heard what they had to say, now what?’

In further evidence of the logistical and not political 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 CAFÉ, 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, GSM Europe, ECTA – the smaller telecoms companies, we did a lot of lobbying, we wrote letters, we did a lot of information gathering and sharing.” A trade association active on the live animal transport issue noted: “Absolutely, we were in communication with the traders and transporters, the livestock transporters, we had our own meeting and we’d invited them over and they would have their meetings and invite us, so we wouldn’t coordinate meetings because that gets difficult but we did have a constant exchange of information.” The coordination of industry on the CAFÉ
debate was nearly surgical in its precision, organized at the top by the pan-EU business association UNICE. 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 CAFÉ 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.

Highly professional networking isn't 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 others 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, they have like 140 people here spending about 100% of their time on REACH. So we do a lot of face to face meetings with the others and of course we cross each other all the time around here at committee meetings, and we try to do letters jointly as much as possible and do press releases together.

While policymakers in the EU may be less responsive to coalition communications because of their limited electoral accountability, there may be another explanation for the lack of issue coalitions. That is, since EU umbrella organizations are alliances of national associations, they already represent a number of organizations and thus don't find it necessary to ally with other interest groups. As one industry lobbyists 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.”

Thus, we see evidence that the democratic institutional design of a polity plays a role in coalition activity. When policymakers are accountable to the public in direct elections, they 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 thus we see 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 indeed this is 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 is more ambiguous. Table 1 suggests advocates are most likely to join coalitions on issues that have a number of different perspectives, but not necessary 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 though since the N 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 scope, advocates in the US demonstrate a clearer upward pattern. Twenty-one percent of advocates that join coalitions are active on issues that will only impact a small sector, while 30% of joining advocates are active on those impacting large and multiple sectors, while 40% of advocates that decide to ally do so on the largest scope issues with system-wide
ramifications. Little relationship is evident in the EU system between issue scope and coalition activity.

The other hypothesized relationship – that increasing 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 needn’t be hundreds of stories. For both inside and outside salience 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 effects of conflict and salience can collide as they did on the case of funding for Water Infrastructure in the US. A trade association lobbyist described how they were originally part of the WIN coalition but had to leave due to an increasing rift between their thinking and the views of the original coalition. In response they developed a coalition of their own, and the salience-raising activities of the first coalition increased the coverage of the latter’s position in the media:

And WIN was out there spending all this money putting together press conferences and getting attention to the issue. We were able to just, I mean, typing out a press release and put it out and we would get equal coverage in these stories…And then, again, WIN was very, very effective at getting Congress’ attention. They started having all these hearings. And you have to have balanced hearings. So WIN would get invited to testify, and so would we. So we were at the hearing, we were sort of like equal footing, even though they were this huge organization, with hundreds of thousands of dollars, and it was just sort of us, you know.

The findings suggest that conflict and salience do play a role in the decision to join a coalition. But the overall results in Table 1 indicate that these general relationships are not overwhelming. Clearly, more goes into the decision to join a coalition than only the level of conflict and the degree of salience of the issue. I turn now to interest-based characteristics.
Interests

The expectations about organizational resources are not born out in the findings, as presented in Table 2. 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 tactic. This may be because resource-poor organizations do not feel they can spare funding to donate it to a coalition of organizations; or that coalition membership is more cost-intensive than scholars have realized; in time, money, and man-hours. 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 ban together with like-minded actors. The findings differ from expectations suggested by Caldeira and Wright (1990) that the industry groups are less likely to ally, and the expectation 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% of citizen group advocates reporting coalition activity compared to the average of 29%, the next most likely are trade associations, which report joining ad hoc coalitions at 42%. In the EU, it is the trade associations that are the type of advocate that are dominating the coalitions. However, it is citizen groups that are second most likely to engage in coalition activity and they are the only other actor type that reported doing so. While coalition activity is undoubtedly costly in some resources 6% of the EU citizen groups interviewed felt that allying also had an added value. Taken together, these findings suggest 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.

A multivariate analysis was also run to examine the relative influence of issue and interest group factors in the two polities. A Logit model showed the issue level factors to be significant, while the interest group level factors were not once controlling for the nature of the
issue. However the models were not very robust, with coefficient estimates changing with slight model adjustments. Due to the low N once missing staff data was accounted for, and the instability of the coefficients, I do not present the multivariate analysis here. Future research with larger numbers of respondents providing information on their coalition behavior should allow for more rigorous testing of the relative effect of institutional, issue and interest group factors on the decision to ally.

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 policymakers respond to lobbying tactics aimed at signalling that the electorate is united? 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 suggests the answer is no. The democratic accountability of policymakers plays a role in the decision to form and join coalitions.

One addition possibility is that in the US, with a longer tradition of lobbying, advocates have had more time to develop the art of allying. Some observers have suggested the US is more professionalized than the EU in terms of sophisticated lobbying techniques. Other research by the author dispelled this myth for some of the most common lobbying tactics (Mahoney 2005); coalition building however may be an exception. Coalitions are one of the more elaborate lobbying techniques. They take some experience to establish, assess the best composition, recruit members and successfully coordinate. It is perhaps possible that the EU interest group community has not yet fully honed their coalition skills. In addition, coalitions require the allocation of resources away from an organization; for many EU groups – that already have a difficult time convincing their national members to contribute resources to the EU level – this may seem an impossible move. Time will tell if coalition activity increases as the EU lobbying community further develops.

However, the democratic accountability of policymakers remains a strong explanation for the differences we find between the US and the EU. Future research may be able to provide
additional insight: one possibility would be to compare coalition activity across policy areas in one system, for example the EU, looking at those that involve institutions where the policymakers are democratically accountable and those that only involve institutions with non-elected officials. This would require a research design that would gather information on many more coalitions than found in this project. If more coalition activity was found on issues where the targets are democratically accountable and less on issues where officials are not faced with re-election, there would be additional support for the thesis that the democratic accountability of policymakers is a critical factor in understanding the decision to create and contribute to coalitions.

Institutional explanations are only part of the story. Though coalition signals may be more useful in the US, they still are 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 is banning 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 has driven home the point: to understanding advocacy decisions we must look to the broader political context and the character of the advocate. At every stage of the advocacy process – determining lobbying positions, formulating arguments, selecting targets, choosing inside and outside tactics, and finally deciding on coalition activity – it is the wider political environment that determines the lobbying strategies an advocate will pursue.
### Table 1. Coalition Membership by Issue Characteristics in the US & EU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple P</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposing</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
<td>41</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small sector</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Sector</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Sectors</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System-wide</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside Salience</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 stories</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 stories</td>
<td>59.09%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-20 stories</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or more</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outside Salience</th>
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<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 stories</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 stories</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-50 stories</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 or more</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total - N** 19    65
**Total - percent** 29.23% 9.76%

### Table 2. Coalition Membership by Interest Characteristics in the US & EU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 20</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or more</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total - N** 19    46
**Total - percent** 41.30% 9.76%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>42.11%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total - N** 19    65
**Total - percent** 29.23% 9.76%
References


Biographical Note:

Christine Mahoney completed a Ph.D. in political science on advocacy in the U.S. and the EU. Her resulting manuscript *Advocacy in the United States and the European Union* is under review with Georgetown University Press. She has published in *European Union Politics*, the *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* and *Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy and Democracy* (Ingram et al. 2004). Her research has been supported by a Fulbright Fellowship to the European Union, a RGSO Fellowship, a Martz Award and a position as visiting junior scholar at Nuffield College, Oxford University. She is currently working as the Advocacy and Education Associate at the Genocide Intervention Network, lobbying for international action to end the genocide in Darfur, Sudan.

Word Count: 8357

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1 Advocacy & Public Policymaking Project – NSF grants # SES-0111224 and SBR-9905195

2 Note: Congressional advocates are left out of this analysis, thus it is run on an N of 46.