


# The Power of the Party: Conflict Expansion and the Agenda Diversity of Interest Groups

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E. J. Fagan<sup>1</sup>, Zachary A. McGee<sup>1</sup>, and Herschel F. Thomas<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

To what extent do political parties have an effect on the policy-related activity of interest groups? Drawing from ideas of conflict expansion and the structure of extended party networks, we argue that political parties are able to pull interest groups into more policy conflicts than they otherwise would be involved in. We posit that parties are able to draw interest groups to be active outside of established issue niches. We suggest that several mechanisms—shared partisan electoral incentives, reciprocity, identification with the means, and cue-taking behavior—lead groups to participate in more diverse political conflicts. By linking data on interest group bill positions and the policy content of legislation, we generate a novel measure of 158 interest groups' alignment with political parties. We find that the more an interest group is ideologically aligned with a political party, the more diverse their issue agenda becomes.

## Keywords

political parties, policy agendas, interest groups, extended party networks

Recent scholarship has developed the concept of extended political parties to capture the influence of networks of interest groups and other intense policy demanders in the American party system (Bawn et al. 2012; Bernstein and Dominguez 2003; Cohen et al. 2008; Desmarais, La Raja, and Kowal 2015; Grossmann and Dominguez 2009; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009, 2010; M. A. Schwartz 1990; Skinner 2004). This literature tends to focus on the ability of these networks to constrain or shape the policy agendas and preferences of political parties. In this article, we examine the opposite: the impact of political parties on the policy agenda of the interest groups. We argue that interest groups that align themselves with political parties behave differently from interest groups that do not. As predicted by Schattschneider (1960), interest groups that align closely with political parties expand the scope of conflicts that they participate in. Groups then begin to take positions on policy that may be outside of their core mission and do so at their own peril. We claim that the expansion may be caused by both rational, policy-seeking behavior and boundedly rational motivations outside of the organization's mission. Various mechanisms—ranging from electoral incentives, reciprocity, identification with the means, and cue-taking behavior—result in a more cohesive extended party network where groups are more likely to take positions on issues outside of their typical niches and in cooperation with their aligned political party.

Schattschneider (1942, 37) once wrote that the “possession of the vast resources of a modern government, its authority, its organization, administrative establishment, and so on, will provide something for nearly everyone willing to join hands in the political enterprise.” We argue that extended political parties provide both opportunities and costs for interest groups. Through alignment with parties, groups gain the ability to weigh in on more issues than they may otherwise be able to, and therefore access the vast resources of modern government. But, they also risk being drawn into fights they may not otherwise wish to enter.

We examine the relationship between party alignment and the diversity of interest group agendas by examining the policy content of position-taking on bills considered by the 110th to 113th Congress. We draw our sample from Scholzman et al.'s (2011) “Washington Representatives” data set and link organizations to bill position information made available by Maplight. We measure the policy

<sup>1</sup>University of Texas at Austin, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Texas at Arlington, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Herschel F. Thomas, Department of Political Science, University of Texas at Arlington, Box 19539, 601 S. Nedderman Drive, Arlington, TX 76019, USA.

Email: herschel.thomas@uta.edu

content of these positions, as well as the support for each bill by members of each political party, using content coding information provided by the Policy Agendas Project. Our analysis reveals strong evidence that interest groups that are closely aligned with one political party have larger and more diverse policy agendas, while groups that support legislation by both parties tend to have more focused agendas.

## Interest Groups and Political Party Networks

Schattschneider (1960) first framed political conflict as a street fight, where losers of a political conflict seek to draw new participants into the fight to change its outcome. Schattschneider argued that even the largest and most powerful interest groups, who represented at most a small fraction of Americans, had no means of convincing a majority of members of Congress to act on their own. Rather, they had to band together with others to form a large enough coalition to compel action. Often, these coalitions are ad hoc and issue-specific, but groups may also form what Cohen et al. (2008, 26) later refer to as “long coalitions,”<sup>1</sup> where groups repeatedly support each other in political conflicts (see also Bawn et al. 2012). These long coalitions can form the foundation of political parties. And Schattschneider (1960, 4) clearly believed coalitions like these could be the foundation for political parties, writing that “every change in the scope of conflict has a bias; it is partisan in its nature. . . . By definition, the intervening bystanders are not neutral.”

Most efforts to change public policy fall victim to status quo bias (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Policy-making institutions resist change through various kinds of friction, such as institutional veto points and limited attention and resources (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Jones, Baumgartner, et al. 2009; Jones, Larsen-Price, and Wilkerson 2009). To overcome this friction, large-scale policy change often requires the mobilization of large, diverse coalitions of interests (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2009). These mobilizations can happen without parties, but the coalitions are temporary. In contrast, parties provide durable coalitions that facilitate (or prevent) major policy change over time. Thus, the interaction between parties and interest groups is essential to the study of party politics and mobilization of bias.

A rapidly developing literature is beginning to map and understand the relationship between political parties and interest groups. M. A. Schwartz (1990) first observed that the Republican Party in Illinois consisted of a network of formal and informal actors working together to elect aligned officials to office and achieve shared policy goals. These actors can also be described as “intense policy demanders” (Bawn et al. 2012), motivated by specific

policy goals rather than purely electoral incentives. Actors bind themselves together in long coalitions in mutual support for goals, often by appealing to some common ideological notion of policy preferences (Cohen et al. 2008). These long coalitions separate party networks from traditional interest group relations, which form coalitions with other interest groups only on an ad hoc basis. The interest groups in these coalitions coordinate and share information (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009, 2010), intervene in primary elections to challenge incumbents who do not support their missions (Desmarais, La Raja, and Kowal 2015), and shape the party’s message to maximize electoral returns for elected party members (Lee 2016). This policy-motivated idea of parties stands in contrast to the purely electorally motivated parties conceptualized by Downs (1957).

Thus far, the literature has mostly focused on the ways that intense policy demanders, such as interest groups, attempt to influence political parties and their officeholders. We argue that influence flows in the other direction as well; political parties pull their closely connected interest groups into conflicts in which they may not otherwise become involved. Many interest groups are integrated into political parties. For example, Fenno (1973, 34) interviewed one member of Congress who reported that the Democrats allowed labor unions to select members of the Labor committee,

With one exception, John McCormack and Andy Biemiller (Director of the AFL-CIO Legislative Department) have decided who gets on [the Labor Committee]. Last year, for example, they picked all six members.

When an interest group becomes aligned with a political party, we argue that the party is able to draw that interest group into policy conflicts beyond established issue niches (Browne 1990; Gray and Lowery 1997; Layman et al. 2010). In addition to the interest group’s core issues of concern, the party may persuade them to work on more peripheral issues that extend beyond narrow issue concerns. For example, a labor union aligned with the Democratic Party might be motivated by the party to devote resources to fights over same-sex marriage, while a neutral labor union might stick more closely to issues related to collective bargaining and the narrow interests of their members. We term this process *party-aligned agenda expansion*. In addition, we follow Halpin (2015) in applying the notion of policy agendas to interest groups, which we characterize as involvement with or discussion of particular policy issues or conflicts. As Halpin (2015) distinguishes between three layers within a groups’ policy agenda—interested, prioritized, and actioned—our focus here is on how political parties affect the internal prioritization of issues on which groups take

action. As we detail below, we consider the taking of public positions on specific pieces of legislation as a measure of groups' "actioned" policy agendas.

Agenda expansion can be both beneficial and harmful for an interest group. A more diverse agenda opens up opportunities for groups to achieve goals outside of their core interests. For example, a group focused on preventing rhinoceros poaching might advocate for an anti-money laundering bill, as stricter controls on money laundering would make it harder to sell poached rhino horn for a profit and decrease poaching on the margin.

However, groups that reach too far outside of their core policy areas risk mission creep. Resources (both tangible resources, such as staff time or money, and intangible resources, such as reputation) are scarce, and any time spent advocating for policy outside of their core area carry an opportunity cost. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a nonprofit group whose mission statement promises to work "in the courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States."<sup>2</sup> They have a well-defined core policy area of civil rights and the courts. However, the ACLU is also generally considered a progressive interest group and broadly aligned with the Democratic Party. During the intense public debate over health care policy in June of 2017, the ACLU publicly called on Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) to oppose the repeal of the Medicaid expansion.<sup>3</sup> Health care policy is well outside of the ACLU's core policy area. We argue that the ACLU's relationship with the Democratic Party may have caused it to reach outside of its core policy area and enter the health care policy debate. The decision to enter new peripheral policy areas likely comes at the expense of their core policy goals.

Political parties, however, prefer as large and diverse a coalition as possible on their side for any given issue. Groups lend their resources, reputations, and unique abilities to policy fights. In Schattschneider's street fights, the side which draws in the most participants wins. Political parties often seek out new issues to mobilize idle or unaligned constituencies (Karol 2009). And they will attempt to draw in as many interest groups as possible to any given fight. Larger extended political parties thus lead to more intense political conflict on more issues.

Importantly, we distinguish between expansions in agendas as a result of increases in *agenda diversity* from *agenda size*. Agenda size is simply the number of items a group works on. Groups may expand the size of their agenda as government attention lurches to their core issues or if their resources increase. However, we argue that party-aligned agenda expansion results in an increase in agenda diversity, as interest groups are drawn into fights outside of their core missions.

## Mechanisms of Party-Aligned Agenda Expansion

Various mechanisms lead us to expect that increases in agenda diversity result from party-aligned agenda expansion. We assume that all interest groups start with a set of preferences for policy outcomes based on their narrow interests. Groups that are unaligned with political parties will only participate in political conflicts involving this set of interests. However, groups that are aligned with political parties may also be interested in supporting policies that will help the party's future electoral outlook—in what can be described as shared electoral incentives—even if they are indifferent to the policy output. When a party increases their share of seats in the next election, the aligned interest group may find more allies to support their preferred policies. The policies enacted by the victorious party's members might structure institutions in ways that support the party coalition (Cox and McCubbins 1993), such as relaxing campaign finance rules, or the party coalition might benefit from a major policy victory—or be harmed by a major policy defeat.

Interest groups may also trade their support for certain policies in return for reciprocal support for other issues by engaging in a logrolling strategy with other members of the extended party. In contrast, interest groups that are unaligned with political parties may have difficulty creating coalitions based on mutual support. Without shared policy goals, these unaligned groups have no easy mechanism to ensure compliance with any agreement in the future, other than idiosyncratic coalitions between groups and lawmakers that are usually issue-specific and dissolve after the issue fades from the agenda (Williamson 1985). Parties, as long coalitions, facilitate this cooperation. Repeated interactions build trust among allies. Thus, party-aligned interest groups will expand their agendas in support of their allies, without expanding their preferences for policy outcomes.

Interest groups in party networks tend to associate with other members of that party network in ways that may generate social group effects. They raise money from similar sources (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009), attend conferences and events together, and are more likely to socialize in Washington, D.C., with other members of their networks. Furthermore, prominent party actors actively work to connect members of the networks together. These connections facilitate collaboration between groups, which will lower the cost of—and create opportunities for—agenda expansion. Close associations create two types of psychological reinforcement for decision makers in party-connected interest groups. First, the closely associated individuals in groups tend to identify with the means and adopt the preferences of the group as a whole (Simon 1946). That is, associated individuals

recognize the value of the party's success (the means) and further recognize that helping the party will help them accomplish their group's policy goals. Helping the party is not always a rational choice because sometimes helping the party may mean taking a stance on an issue that has nothing to do with the policy the group formed to advocate for. Identification with the means stands in contrast to individuals acting only in ways that immediately help them meet their group's policy goals. Ostrom (2005, 129) argues that an individual's mental model of the world is "affected by . . . the shared culture or belief in which an individual is embedded." According to Jones, Thomas, and Wolfe (2014, 151), these mental models "imply that policies are not simply judged for their instrumental value, but for their role in buttressing belief systems as well." This contributes toward agenda expansion by convincing decision makers in party-aligned interest groups that the goals of other organizations are in fact goals of their own.

In addition, scholars of interest groups refer to the interdependence of behavior among organizations and the lobbyists that advocate on their behalf. Through mimicking or cue-taking behavior, organized interests and the individuals that represent them may turn to others to inform their prioritization of issues (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Thomas 2017). Interest groups embedded in extended party networks, we argue, may be more likely to communicate with each other and be part of the same networks of information transmission (Heaney 2014; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; Layman et al. 2010). As a result, groups closely associated with political parties may be more likely to take their cues from fellow members or "pivotal players" within these networks (Hojnacki 1997), and thus more likely to expand their agenda given cues from political parties.

As groups become increasingly aligned with political parties, we expect that they will engage in more diverse issue agendas. That is, we expect interest groups to take public positions on issues that they would otherwise ignore, if not for the influence of the political party. Political parties expand conflicts and drive the increasing diversity of issue agendas of interest groups by stressing shared electoral incentives, fostering an identification with the means (Simon 1946), and encouraging mimicking/cue-taking behavior (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Thomas 2017).

**Party Conflict Expansion Hypothesis:** Groups that are more closely aligned with political parties will have more diverse policy agendas.

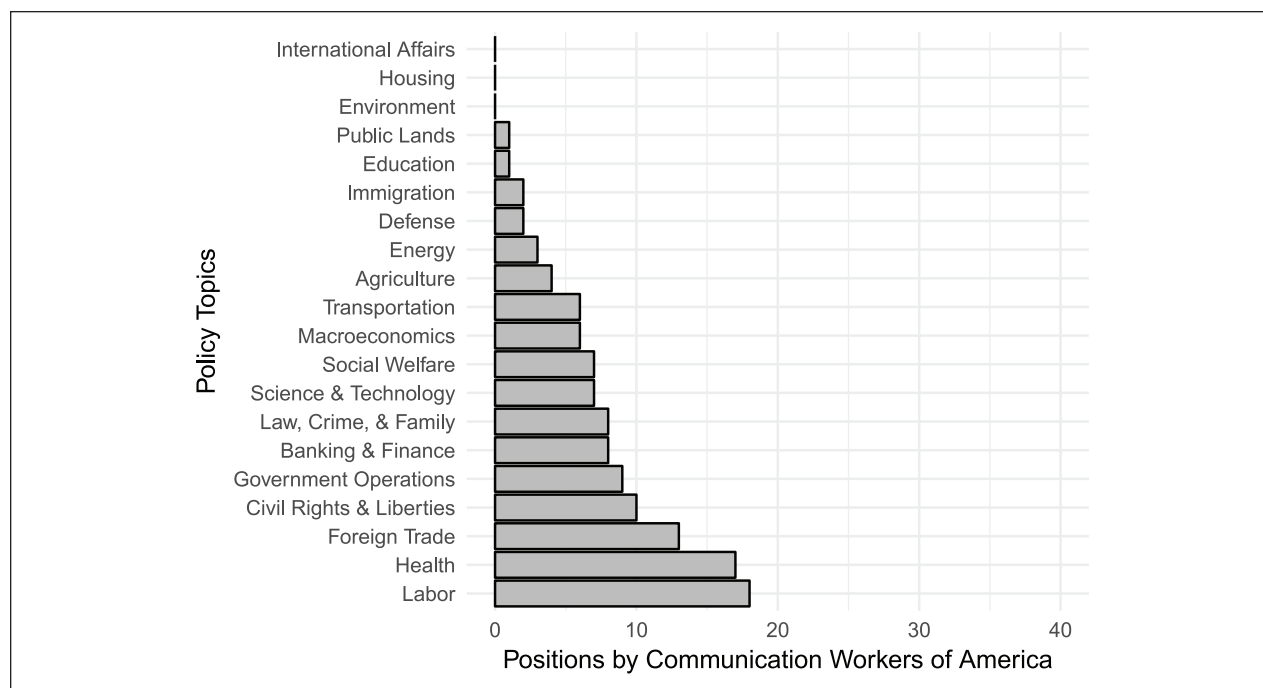
The opposite causal direction, where groups with more expansive agendas align with political parties, is also possible, but we argue that it is less likely than the

direction where parties cause groups to expand their agendas. Groups with naturally larger agendas may find that they need stable, predictable allies to contest more political fights. Groups with more focused agendas could concentrate their resources and succeed either unsupported, in ad hoc coalitions, or in durable nonpartisan coalitions. However, we do not expect these effects to be as powerful as the logrolling, social group, and cue-taking effects theorized above. We also expect that agenda diversity is less likely to cause party alignment independent of agenda size, which similarly should cause groups to look for allies under the same logic.

## Data and Measurement

To test our hypothesis and examine the factors that explain the diversity of interest group agendas, we first draw on publicly available data published by Kay Schlozman and colleagues' (2011) "Washington Representatives Study (Organized Interests in Washington Politics)."<sup>4</sup> This source includes information on all organizations listed in the *Washington Representatives* directories spanning 1981, 1991, 2001, 2006, and 2011, that have offices in Washington, D.C., or have engaged in contract lobbying activity. These data are used in major works on political representation and influence (see Schlozman 1984; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012) and, as Schlozman (2010, 431) notes, are regarded "as the single most nearly comprehensive listing of politically active organizations in Washington." To construct our list of organizations for study, we draw only on those 15,196 entities listed in the directory in 2011—the most recent year available.

We follow Halpin, Fraussen, and Nownes (2017, 3) in further defining interest groups "as formal organizations that are collective in nature (they have members/affiliates/a constituency) and are substantially engaged in public policy." We thus restrict our sample of organizations to those that meet that definition. Given the high granularity in which Schlozman and colleagues classify each organization, we are able to include or exclude organizations across a set of categories. We primarily include those that are coded as citizen advocacy organizations, business associations, unions, institutional associations, and service organizations. In addition, we do not include companies or business firms, institutions, foreign governments/associations, government corporations, and other entities such as airports. This resulted in 3,761 organizations that fit our scope of inquiry, of which we drew an initial random sample of 1,600 organizations (42.5%). After further cleaning of this initial sample to exclude 245 organizations with regional/local geographic identifiers (e.g., the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association, California Prune Board, Associated Fisheries of Maine, Pensacola Chamber



**Figure 1.** Policy content of bill positions taken by the Communication Workers of America.

of Commerce), leisure groups, and Native American tribal organizations as well as remaining political action committees (PACs), duplicate entries, and government entities, our resulting sample included 1,328 organizations.

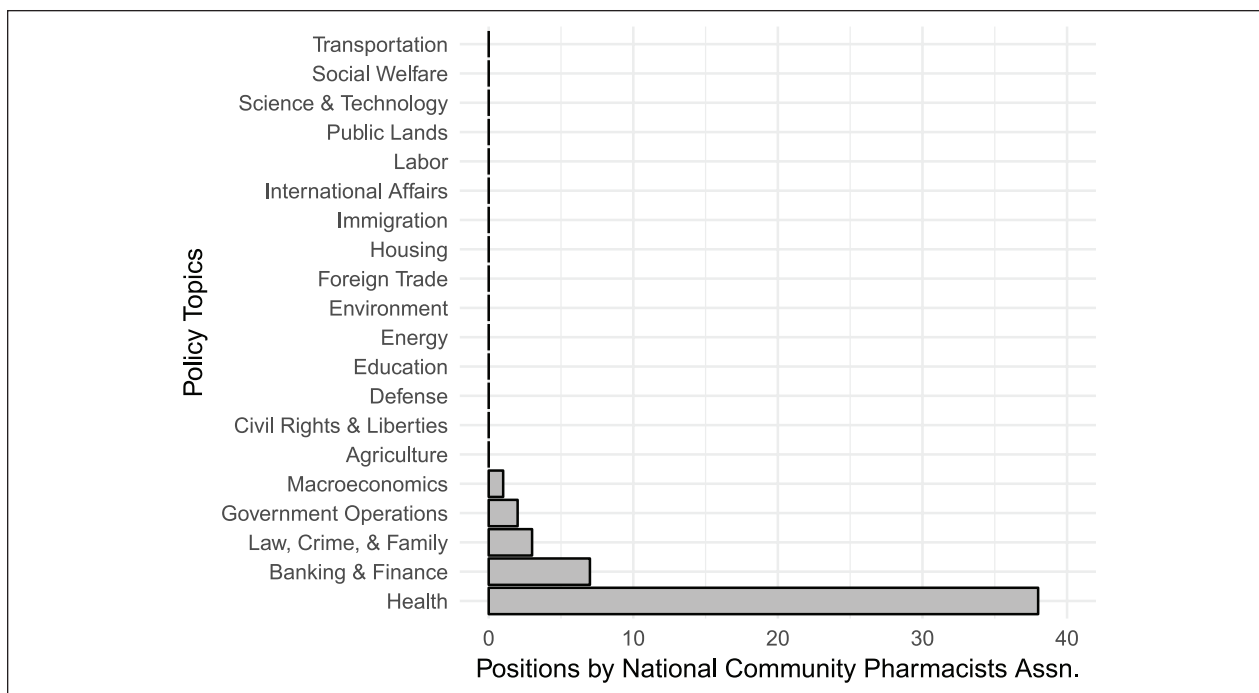
These organizations include prominent and well-known staples of interest group politics such as the Sierra Club, American Cancer Society, American Medical Association, National Retail Federation, American Petroleum Institute, and American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Others cover specific industries and professions—such as the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Brick Industry Association, American Mosquito Control Association, National Wild Turkey Federation, and the American Honey Producers Association—or focus on specific policy issues—such as the Water Advocates, Center for Individual Freedom, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, and American Forests.

### Agenda Diversity

Ideally, we would identify the core issue areas of each interest group in our sample and compare those core areas against the issue agenda of that group. Unfortunately, we find no scalable, generalizable method of identifying these core issues. Instead, we directly operationalize *agenda diversity* by observing the issue content of public position-taking by interest groups on legislation during the 110th to 113th Congresses. We draw our cases from Maplight’s data set of bill positions, which is generated through original,

nonpartisan research of news media publications to catalog and classify the positions of interests on noncommemorative legislation that is either “newsworthy” or precedes through the legislative process<sup>5</sup> (Lorenz 2017). These data include 13,513 individual public positions taken by the 1,328 groups in our sample. Of those, Maplight observed at least one public position taken during the 110th to 113th Congresses by 719 groups. For each position, we matched the content of the bill to one of twenty Policy Agendas Project’s policy topics using the Congressional Bills Project bills data set,<sup>6</sup> which contains information on 456,268 bills introduced in Congress since 1945.

Using this information, we calculate a Shannon’s H entropy score (Shannon 1948) as our dependent variable and measure of *agenda diversity*. We follow Boydston, Bevan, and Thomas (2014) in our use of this measure to capture the relative breadth or concentration of the set of issues on which groups take positions. Shannon’s H entropy is more sensitive than alternatives such as the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index; high values of diversity indicate an even distribution of activity across issue areas, whereas low values of diversity indicate a concentrated, narrow focus on a small number of issue areas (Boydston, Bevan, and Thomas 2014). For example, as pictured in Figure 1, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) not only took 126 total positions with eighteen being on labor-related bills, but also took positions in seventeen other issue areas including seventeen health care bills and thirteen foreign trade bills. The



**Figure 2.** Policy content of bill positions taken by the National Community Pharmacists Association.

resulting *agenda diversity* of the CWA was 2.59. In contrast, Figure 2 illustrates that the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), which took fifty-one total positions and had a much more focused policy agenda. All but thirteen bills that the group took positions on were coded as related to health care—resulting in an *agenda diversity* of 0.86.

By summarizing the distribution of interest group policy agendas with Shannon's H, it becomes straightforward to discern which groups have highly concentrated agendas and which engage in a broad array of issue areas. Although it is possible to imagine why a given interest group might consistently be involved in multiple policy areas—even the most specialized interest group will need to weigh in on bills that tangentially impact their core area of interest over time—we posit that this broadening of focus results from party-aligned agenda expansion.

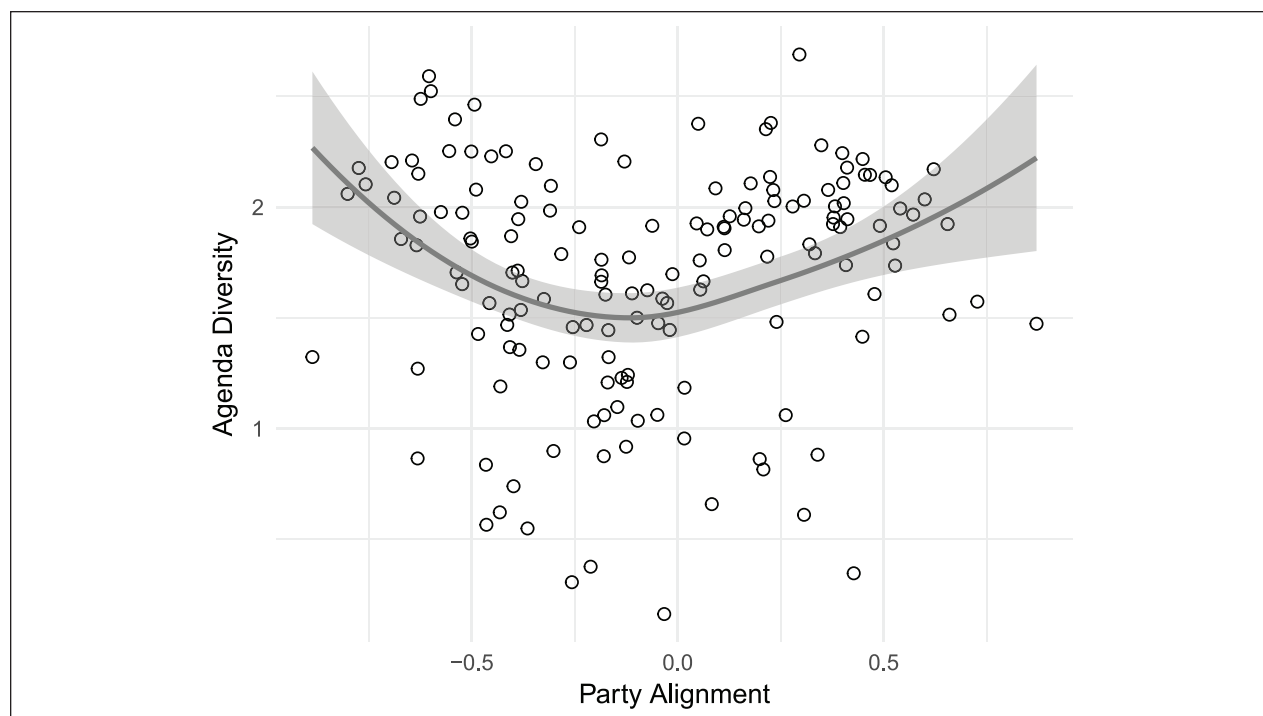
### Party Alignment

To generate our primary independent variable, *party alignment*, we calculate alignment scores for each interest group and assign scores ranging from  $-1$  to  $1$ . A score of  $-1$  represents Democratic Party-aligned organizations and a score of  $1$  represents Republican Party-aligned organizations. To calculate the scores—at the bill-group level—we identify the party of the members of Congress who sponsored or cosponsored the bill and then the position the interest group took on the bill (if they took a

position) divided by the total number of sponsors of that bill. For example, if the bill was sponsored by a Democrat and cosponsored by three Republicans, and supported by the interest group, the alignment score of the position would be 0.75. We then take the average of each groups' scores. For example, CWA largely supported Democratic-dominated bills, such as the Currency Exchange Rate Oversight Reform Act of 2013, which was cosponsored by seventeen Democrats and five Republicans, resulting in a party alignment score  $-0.77$ . On average, CWA supported bills with a mean party alignment score of  $-0.60$ . NCPA, however, tended to support on average bipartisan bills with a slight Republican advantage, resulting in a score of 0.20.

### Agenda Diversity and Party Alignment

To test our *Party Conflict Expansion Hypothesis*, we examine the relationship between our *agenda diversity* and *party alignment* measures. Figure 3 plots both of these measures and a fitted exponential, regression line with a 95% confidence interval. The pattern is clear—as *party alignment* moves away from 0 (no alignment) toward  $-1$  or  $1$  (high alignment, in either the liberal or conservative direction), the *agenda diversity* of interest groups also increases. We can infer from this relationship, and the parabolic-like shape of the fitted line, that interest groups that align with political parties have more diverse



**Figure 3.** Agenda diversity and party alignment ( $N = 158$  interest groups).

*Agenda Diversity* is a Shannon's H entropy score; *Party Alignment* is measured from  $-1$  for Democratic Party-aligned groups to  $1$  for Republican Party-aligned groups.

policy agendas. We see moderate evidence of asymmetries between both Democratic- and Republican-aligned groups. The groups who lean Democratic tend to be farther to the left than the groups who lean Republican tend to be to the right. Twenty-four groups had a *party alignment* score under  $-0.5$ , while just twelve had *party alignment* scores over  $0.5$ . This pattern is different from the asymmetries observed by Grossman and Hopkins (2016), where Republican policy makers tend to be more ideological. However, their mean agenda diversities are not significantly different.

This finding is made clearer if we look to the activity of individual groups. The American Petroleum Institute (API), with a *party alignment* score of  $0.45$ , is aligned with the Republican Party and appears on the right side of Figure 3. API is a trade association representing the oil and gas industry. Accordingly, we expect that this alignment will draw the group into conflicts outside of API's primary policy interests of energy, environmental policy, and public lands. Indeed, API took positions on 152 bills spanning seventeen different issue areas and has a high *agenda diversity* score of  $2.15$ . Toward the center of Figure 3 is the Credit Union National Association (CUNA), with a *party alignment* score of  $0.26$ . CUNA is not strongly aligned with either party, so we should expect it to stick to its core policy area of finance. Indeed, CUNA took positions on 108 bills, almost all of which

were coded as financial policy and has a low *agenda diversity* score of  $1.06$ . Tables 1 and 2 show the groups with the most and least diverse issue agendas. In our analysis to follow, we square *party alignment* such that increases in value are indicative of alignment with either the Republican or Democratic parties.

### Staff, Electoral Participation, Location, and Agenda Size

In addition to our main variables of interest, we control for standard covariates in models of interest group behavior to isolate the independent effect of partisan alignment on groups' agenda diversity. As scholars of interest groups document, resources can contribute to groups' capacity to engage in political activity. As Halpin (2015, 54) notes, there are "practical questions about resourcing that likely create disparities in the size and scope of the issues groups are able to work on." Organizations with access to full-time staff resources may be able to address the core issues of concern to the group *as well as* those issues that emerge through the extended party network or that rise to the top of the government agenda (Leech et al. 2005). Those with limited resources—or reduced "policy capacity"—however, may be constrained in the breadth of issues on which they can engage (Halpin and Binderkrantz 2011; Halpin, Fraussen, and Nownes 2017). We also account for

**Table 1.** Top-15 Interest Groups by Agenda Diversity.

Organization	Agenda diversity	Party alignment	Num. of positions
United States Chamber of Commerce	2.69	0.30	829
Communications Workers of America	2.59	-0.60	126
National Council of Jewish Women	2.52	-0.60	112
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People	2.49	-0.62	236
United Steelworkers of America	2.46	-0.49	173
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby	2.40	-0.54	60
American Farm Bureau Federation	2.38	0.23	201
Club for Growth	2.38	0.05	104
National Retail Federation	2.35	0.21	212
American Friends Service Committee	2.31	-0.19	43
Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association	2.28	0.35	46
National Low Income Housing Coalition/LIHIS	2.25	-0.55	62
Union of Concerned Scientists	2.25	-0.42	113
American Association of People with Disabilities	2.25	-0.50	55
National Federation of Independent Business	2.24	0.40	180

**Table 2.** Bottom-15 Interest Groups by Agenda Diversity.

Organization	Agenda diversity	Party alignment	Num. of positions
American Medical Association	0.88	-0.18	101
National Association of Secondary School Principals	0.87	-0.63	33
National Community Pharmacists Association	0.86	0.20	51
American Association of State Colleges and Universities	0.84	-0.47	25
American Association of Exporters & Importers	0.82	0.21	23
National Association of State Energy Officials	0.74	-0.40	23
American Sugar Alliance	0.66	0.08	25
American Cancer Society	0.62	-0.43	40
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons	0.61	0.31	44
National Association of Community Health Centers	0.57	-0.46	24
American College of Physicians Services, Inc.	0.55	-0.36	36
Infectious Diseases Society of America, Inc.	0.38	-0.21	24
National Association of Health Underwriters	0.35	0.43	35
American College of Cardiology	0.31	-0.26	28
American Society of Anesthesiologists	0.16	-0.03	27

whether groups are affiliated with a PAC, whether they engage in independent campaign expenditures, and whether they maintain a physical office within the D.C. Beltway.

To operationalize these variables, we draw from information published through the *Associations Unlimited* online directory. This source draws on data collected and distributed through the *Encyclopedia of Associations* series, which has been published for fifty years and includes information on over twenty-five thousand national organizations active in the United States. Scholars of interest groups and organizations routinely use this source for longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses of association populations (Bevan et al. 2013). Research assistants searched for each organization name

in our sample and recorded the resulting directory information. The first measure, *staff*, is the simple number of staff listed by *Associations Unlimited*.<sup>7</sup> Given that it is highly skewed across organizations, we log the count of staff in our analysis to follow.

*Beltway location* is coded 1 if the headquarter location of the organization was listed in the directory as Washington, D.C., or within the D.C. metro area (e.g., northern Virginia), and coded 0 otherwise.<sup>8</sup> In addition, research assistants completed searches for group names in the Center for Responsive Politics' (CRP) OpenSecrets.org database and recorded information about independent expenditures and affiliated PAC membership. *Independent expenditures* is coded 1 if the group is listed by CRP as having made independent campaign expenditures to



candidates running for federal office in 2016, and coded 0 otherwise; *PAC* is coded 1 if the group was listed by CRP as affiliated with a PAC, and coded 0 otherwise.

## Group Type

We also control for a potential confounding variable in interest group type. Different types of groups may have inherently more expansive agendas due to the nature of their interests. A group that represents a particular constituency may have a larger agenda due to the multidimensionality of representing a set of people affected by many different issues. Conversely, a group that represents a single industry or occupation may have a narrower agenda specific to that industry. If group type is correlated with party alignment, its omission from a model could create a spurious relationship between party alignment and agenda diversity.

We created nonmutually exclusive binary variables to categorize interest groups into four types using information from the Schlozman et al. (2011) data set. In that project, each group is assigned by Schlozman and colleagues to up to three of forty-three categories, such as “Trade Association,” “African American,” or “Single Issue Public Interest Group, Liberal.” As the authors describe in their codebook, this classification of group captures “the nature of their functions, the interests represented, and, in many cases, their organizational structure.” From these preexisting categories, we created three group types. *Industry* is coded 1 if the group represents a corporate, industry, or trade, occupational or professional association, such as the American Farm Bureau or American Medical Association. *Constituency* is coded 1 if the group represents a broad socioeconomic group, such as Latinos, mainline Protestants, or women. *Issue* is coded 1 if the group advocates for a cause but does not represent a constituency or industry, such as government reform, environmental issues, or civil liberties. Finally, *Other* is coded 1 if groups that do not follow into any of these categories, such as consortiums of governments. The distributions of these groups can be found in Table 3. We see that the majority of the 158 groups represent an industry, while about a quarter each either represent a constituency or advocate for an issue.<sup>9</sup>

## Estimating Agenda Diversity

To test our hypothesis, we estimate a linear ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model of *agenda diversity*.<sup>10</sup> Given that Shannon’s H entropy cannot be reliably calculated across groups with minimal observations of bill position-taking behavior, we include only those 158 groups taking more than twenty issue positions are included in our regression analysis.<sup>11</sup> We have *a priori*

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Agenda diversity	158	1.7	0.5
Party alignment	158	0.3	0.2
Political action committee	158	0.5	0.5
Independent expenditures	158	0.1	0.2
Staff	156	84.6	176.1
Staff (logged)	156	3.4	1.4
Beltway location	158	0.9	0.3
Industry group	158	0.6	0.6
Constituency group	158	0.3	0.4
Issue group	158	0.2	0.4
Other group	158	0.1	0.3
Total positions	158	63.0	75.6

expectations regarding the number of bill positions needed to reliably calculate the Shannon’s H entropy score, but in Supplemental Table A1, we report the bivariate coefficients and standard errors between Shannon’s H and Party Alignment at several different thresholds. We find positive, stable, and significant results at all thresholds above  $n = 5$ , suggesting that the relationship between the two variables is positive and robust to different inclusion thresholds. There appears to be little difference in the bivariate relationship at different thresholds, suggesting that the relationship between Party Alignment and Agenda Diversity is similar for groups with medium-sized policy agendas (who take close to twenty positions) and larger ones. Our results are unable to generalize to smaller, less-active group policy agendas.<sup>12</sup>

We find significant results for our chief explanatory variable *party alignment* ( $p < .01$ ) across all five model specifications (see Table 4). As *alignment* with either of the two parties increases, interest group agendas become significantly more diverse, on average. These results present robust evidence in support of our *Party Conflict Expansion Hypothesis* and show that interest groups take positions on a broader array of policy issues when alignment of political parties increases. However, the coefficient on *alignment* decreases by about 0.20, or about 0.4 standard deviations, when group type variables are included in the model. Constituency groups, with their multidimensional representation, have more diverse agendas in both models 4 and 5 ( $p = .008$  and  $.006$ ). Once agenda size is accounted for in model 5, issue groups also tend to have more diverse agendas ( $p = .028$ ). Industry groups do not have significantly different agenda diversity.<sup>13</sup>

We find mixed evidence that resources increase agenda diversity. In model 2, which does not account for agenda size, interest groups that directly intervene in elections using independent expenditures increase their agenda diversity by 0.36, which is slightly less than one standard

**Table 4.** Ordinary Least Squares Estimation of Group Agenda Diversity.

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Party alignment squared	0.67** (0.19)	0.71*** (0.19)	0.68*** (0.18)	0.55** (0.20)	0.52** (0.19)
Size and resources					
Independent expenditures		0.36* (0.16)	0.09 (0.15)	0.31 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.17)
Political action committee		0.14 (0.08)	0.11 (0.07)	0.21* (0.10)	0.23* (0.09)
Beltway location		0.20 (0.13)	0.15 (0.13)	0.20 (0.14)	0.14 (0.13)
Staff (logged)		-0.02 (-0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)
Total positions			0.003*** (0.001)		0.003*** (0.001)
Group type					
Constituency group				0.25* (0.13)	0.28** (0.12)
Industry group				0.18 (0.14)	0.17 (0.13)
Issue group				0.24 (0.13)	0.30* (0.12)
Other group				0.09 (0.17)	0.19 (0.15)
<i>n</i>	158	156	156	156	156
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.07	.15	.28	.19	.33

Standard errors in parenthesis.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

deviation ( $p = .02$ ). Groups with an affiliated PAC also have higher agenda diversity in all models, but the relationship is only statistically significant in models 4 and 5, which account for group type ( $p < .05$ ). There is no evidence that groups with a beltway headquarters have higher agenda diversity. Our measure of resources, staff size (logged), is in the negative direction suggested by Halpin (2015) and others, and significant when agenda size is included in models 3 and 5 ( $p = .008$  in model 5).<sup>14</sup>

Our regression results tell a clear story: groups that align themselves with political parties have more diverse policy agendas independent of their resource-based capacities to engage multiple areas at once or their group types. Groups that work with both parties roughly equally may have larger agendas in terms of size, but those agendas are concentrated on fewer policy areas. Given that our data on bill positions does not have a sufficient longitudinal dimension, we are unable to test a dynamic hypothesis at this time, though future research may be able to shed further light on the temporal connection between party alignment and bill position-taking behavior by interest groups. We caution that these empirical results do not imply a causal relationship between the two variables, only a correlation, even if our theoretical expectations favor a causal relationship.

## Conclusion

This paper offers several contributions to the literature on extended political parties and interest groups. We claim that extended political parties not only act to constrain formal parties and their officeholders and candidates, but that they may influence the behavior of the interest groups that make up their extended networks. We argue that parties

incentivize or persuade groups to expand their scope of conflict by advocating on issues that they might not otherwise spend scarce resources on. Numerous mechanisms associated with party alignment, including rational logrolling, cue-taking behavior, and social group dynamics can contribute to this party-aligned agenda expansion.

To evaluate our hypothesis that party alignment is associated with increased agenda diversity, we use a random sample of interest groups active in Washington and link data on interest group position-taking with the policy content of legislation. We measure the diversity of interest group agendas and their degree of alignment with both the Democratic and Republican parties when taking public positions on bills. Our empirical analysis confirms our expectation that the diversity of interest group policy agendas increases as party alignment increases.

If groups that align themselves closely with political parties expand and diversify their policy agendas, groups should be wary of such alignments. Extended political parties may open up logrolling opportunities or offer support for policy goals outside of core issue areas. Yet parties may also draw in groups to policy conflicts for less rational reasons, and resulting agenda expansion may lead to unplanned mission creep. Our findings suggest there is a need for future study of the effects that extended political parties can have on the policy agendas of interest groups, especially over time. We have demonstrated that position-taking is related to alignment with political parties, but it is unlikely that position-taking is the only influence that extended political parties have on party-aligned interest groups. Further specification of the relationship between party-aligned interest groups and extended political parties is warranted. In addition, one important implication of the nature of the available bill

position-taking data is that our empirical findings are restricted to those organizations that take sufficient numbers of positions for inclusion in our study. Party-aligned issue expansion may develop in qualitatively different ways for highly active position-takers or those with access to high levels of resources and internal group capacity. Future research, with larger samples, should aim to test hypotheses about interactive effects between position-taking frequency, interest group capacity, and the expansion of policy agendas.

Although we posit that the direction of the causal arrow points one direction, available data do not allow us to establish causality. To rule out a competing claim of reverse causality would require dynamic time-series that are not yet available. As a result, future research should focus on data collection to support dynamic models of party alignment and agenda diversity across long time periods. Although party coalitions tend to be durable, they may change over time (see Karol 2009; Wolbrecht 2002). According to our argument, groups whose agendas change from bipartisan to partisan should enter into additional issue areas outside of their core mission, while groups whose party alignment remains should have stable agenda diversity. However, Maplight's observation period for bill positions only covers a small number of recent Congresses. Researchers might instead employ counts of interest group committee testimony across issues, which can be measured back to at least 1970. They might also take a case study approach, examining the effect of changes in party alignment on key interest groups.

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### Notes

1. Cohen et al. draw this idea from an unpublished essay by Thomas Schwartz (1989).
2. See <https://www.aclu.org/about-aclu>.

3. The American Civil Liberties Union (@ACLU). "And that's why you should vote against it, @SenDeanHeller." June 22, 2017, 9:40 a.m. Tweet. Available at: <https://twitter.com/ACLU/status/877929322912391168>.
4. Available from <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/35309>.
5. Accessible via API available at: [https://maplight.org/data\\_guide/bill-positions-api/](https://maplight.org/data_guide/bill-positions-api/). See Lorenz (2017, 90–91) for discussion of Maplight's bill selection and temporal variation.
6. E. Scott Adler and John Wilkerson, Congressional Bills Project: (110th–113th Congresses), NSF 00880066 and 00880061. The views expressed are those of the authors and not the National Science Foundation. Available at: <http://www.congressionalbills.org>.
7. Where staff information is missing in the *Associations Unlimited* directory, research assistants visited organization websites, counted individuals listed on staff pages, and recorded this number. Where location information is missing in the directory, research assistants recorded mailing address location listed on organization websites.
8. A robustness check to expand the scope of our *beltway location* variable to include non-headquarters offices or in-house lobbyists working in Washington, D.C., yielded three additional organizations. A replication of our analysis with this broader specification left our findings unchanged.
9. Of those organizations in our analysis that represent industry, twenty of the 158 are listed in *Associations Unlimited* as "Health and Medical Organizations" and forty-two are listed as, "Trade, Business and Commercial Organizations." Other large subject areas include "Public Affairs Organizations" (fifteen) and environmental and agricultural organizations (thirteen).
10. We tested the same five models presented in Table 3 using an alternate operationalization of agenda diversity, the total number of major topic areas where the group took at least one position. This dependent variable is highly correlated with the Shannon's H measure of diversity ( $\rho = 0.85$ ), and thus the model estimates are similar. These results can be found in Supplemental Table A3.
11. These 158 organizations meet our twenty-position threshold for inclusion, among those in our sample drawn from Schlozman and colleagues' data set. We estimate that approximately four hundred organizations would meet this threshold using the universe of available data.
12. Difference of mean *t* tests indicate that organizations that meet our threshold for inclusion tend to have more staff, are more likely to have beltway activity (broadly defined), and are more likely to engage in independent expenditures/be affiliated with PACs. Group type differences are present for industry and issue-related organizations. These differences are reported in Supplemental Table A2 and we make no claims that our findings apply to organizations with low levels of bill position-taking activity.
13. Although both agenda diversity and party alignment are drawn from the same observed positions, and thus could both increase together if they are correlated with the total number of positions taken, there is no evidence that agenda size represents a confounding variable that creates a

spurious relationship between the two variables. Although agenda size is correlated with agenda diversity ( $\rho = 0.4$ ), it is not correlated with party alignment ( $\rho = 0.02$ ).


14. We have also tested models using alternate specifications to measure total resources, including organization's budget, logged budget, and unlogged staff size. None are significant predictors of agenda diversity in model 2. Unlogged staff size is a significant and negative when tested in model 3. Further robustness checks include the separate estimation of agenda size using the independent variables of models 1 and 2. We find that resources have a positive and significant effect on agenda size, although party alignment has no relationship with agenda size.


### Supplemental Material

Replication materials are available online at [http://www.zacharymcgee.net/replication/fagan\\_mcgee\\_thomas\\_prq19.zip](http://www.zacharymcgee.net/replication/fagan_mcgee_thomas_prq19.zip).

### ORCID iDs

E. J. Fagan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4432-8000>

Zachary McGee  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2462-0269>

Herschel F. Thomas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6855-8102>

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