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## Original Article

# Assessing citizen views of interest group alliances

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**Abstract** How do members of the public view collaboration among organized interests and what factors contribute to attitudes about working in coalition? Interest groups frequently must decide whether to partner formally in pursuit of a shared objective while minimizing potential losses of revenue, reputation, and issue ownership. Using a nationally representative survey with an embedded experiment, we consider the potential ramifications of group collaboration from the perspective of potential members. Results show that, while a substantial minority views group collaboration negatively, most do not, and experimental exposure to a collaborating group yields positive evaluations and higher prospective contributions. The results reinforce the essentially pluralist public perceptions of interest groups that are supportive of their existing collaborative efforts.

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“Associated activity needs no explanation; it is made that way.”  
—Dewey 1927

The central tension in attempts to understand organizational representation of citizen political interests regards the nature of association. Is “man a social animal” as Truman leads his chapter 2 (1951, p. 14)? Or do people weigh benefits to costs when deciding to act on behalf of common interests (e.g., Olson, 1965)? In this paper, we examine this tension from the perspective of a new problem, asking how citizens evaluate interest groups working in coalitions. While considerable research has documented interest group decisions to collaborate and has advanced convincing explanations for it, several explanations rely on citizen-level dynamics not yet subjected to testing. We ask: how do people view group collaboration and why? Is collaboration among groups a sign of weakness to citizens and thus



something to be feared by groups, or is it a pathway to success as a reflection of a generally social public? What dispositional factors correspond with individual beliefs about collaboration, and to what extent do such beliefs reflect pluralist notions? This paper adds to this literature by providing (1) additional evidence in a core debate about pluralism in interest representation and (2) an additional mechanism that supports interest group coalition behavior more specifically.

We address these questions using original survey data from a nationally representative sample of Americans with an embedded experiment that variably presents a story of a group working in coalition. We show that people think positively about coalition work generally and tend to support and reward interest groups when shown an instance of one working in coalition. The results therefore shed additional light on how citizens think about group representation, which pushes beyond the narrow confines of Olsonian (1965) exchange rationality.

In what follows, we first identify notions in the literature about how people would evaluate interest group collaboration and articulate a range of alternate dispositions that may shape how they view collaboration. Following a description of our experimental and survey design choices, we present results modeling adherence to general beliefs about interest group collaboration before exploring the results of our survey experiment on group support.

## **The Rationality of Collaboration**

Cooperation is perhaps the cornerstone concept in studies of life in societies, small and large. This broad literature has focused on the foundations of individual cooperation with other individuals, groups, organizations and states, exploring instrumental and social motivations (e.g., Tyler, 2011). A growing number of studies in political science have examined cooperation between organizations, primarily exploring the degree to which cooperation flows naturally from common aims or is inhibited by competition over resources (Djupe and Niles, 2010; Gray and Lowery, 1998; Heaney and Lorenz, 2012; Hojnacki, 1997, 1998; Hula, 1995; Salisbury *et al*, 1987). But, in the conduct of society's affairs, particularly governmental affairs, cooperation plays a heretofore undocumented role. That is, there is an important gap between these two kinds of literature, in which individuals make decisions to delegate the representation of their interests on the basis, in part, of collaboration at higher levels among representatives. Thus, representative-level decisions to collaborate are compounded by principal-agent relations (see Lupia and McCubbins, 1998).

The mechanisms demonstrating how citizens would think about collaborating groups are at least implicit in the interest group literature. From a historical perspective, we should begin with the pluralist perspective. Guided by Truman, Tocqueville, and Aristotle,<sup>1</sup> pluralism suggests that association is a marker of



humanity, solving basic problems and helping to manifest higher order achievements (Truman, 1951, pp. 14–15). From this perspective, collaboration at any level, among citizens or between organizations, will be seen positively as a natural, collectively rational way to solve problems held in common (see Hula, 1995).

After Mancur Olson's work (1965), it was difficult to accede to the view that association was natural and expected, and concerns shifted to individually rational, selective benefits that would incentivize working in concert. Subsequent work qualified central assumptions of Olson's, primarily that people are perfectly informed (e.g., Moe, 1981; Rothenberg, 1988). In one formulation, individuals actually join a group to discern whether the organization is a good representational fit (Rothenberg, 1988), which confirms that people are profoundly mal-informed about relevant opportunities to join groups (see also Djupe, 2011; Djupe and Lewis, 2015). One of the consequences of collaboration among groups, therefore, would be that news of the existence, effectiveness, and agendas of other organizations may reach citizens. As a result, citizens would have a wider variety of options for joining interest groups available to them. If the resources an individual has to give to a group are limited, then expanding the menu of available options may actually hurt an organization.

Organized interests offer a range of benefits in exchange for membership dues, including material, solidary, purposive, and expressive (Salisbury, 1969). These selective benefits are theorized to overcome the collective action problem induced by vastly diluted collective benefits and easy free ridership (Olson, 1965). However, ensuing investigations highlighted the particular importance of purposive (political) goals and ideological congruence (see Hansen, 1985; Rothenberg, 1988), which are almost indistinguishable from the pluralist's "interests." If political goals are valued, then the trouble with collaboration is that it sends a signal that the group is weak and incapable of providing promised purposive benefits on its own. Hojnacki (1997) ratifies this perspective by finding that groups pursuing *expressive* goods are more likely to join alliances. Expressive benefits are those for which there is value in simply giving voice to an interest regardless of achieving some outcome (a purposive benefit), highlighting the possibility that collaboration is an acknowledgement of inefficacy.

Beyond signaling the group's lack of efficacy, a fourth consequence is that collaboration may dilute the group's reputation as a competent advocate. This is different from Hojnacki's (1997) use of reputation, which bears on the willingness of groups to work with others driven by the perception of being a good partner. It is closer in concept to the willingness of a citizen to learn about a group and become a member (Koch, 1993). Essentially, agents (interest groups) need to send credible signals of competence to principals (citizens) in order to facilitate the delegation of their need for representation (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). Simply put, collaboration dilutes that signal to the extent the group relies on others to help carry their message.

A fifth force may work at cross-purposes with the last three. We suspect that Schattschneider's (1960) metaphor of the dynamics of a street fight has popular



resonance. When people see others getting ready to fight, it will be widely understood that there is significant opposition. Thus, even if groups band together when they are weak, risking their reputation as competent representatives, they may be seen as doing so because they face a tough battle (Gray and Lowery, 1998). Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that people reward groups that overcome normal obstacles to battle a powerful foe.

Taken together, these arguments drawn from interest group studies provide five plausible and competing explanations for how the public could view groups working in coalition. To summarize, first, collaboration is a democratic, even a human good, and news about collaborative efforts will reflect positively on the group. Second, news about group collaboration may simply alert citizens that other groups exist, providing more options and thus diluting the exclusive connection between a member and organization. Third, collaboration may signal that the group is weak and not capable of representing the member's interests. Fourth, collaboration may dilute the group's reputation as an advocate on a particular issue. Fifth, collaboration may send the signal that there is significant opposition, which may act as a counterweight to any negative beliefs about collaborative efforts.

Collaboration can advance a shared goal and positively influence a group's reputation among members and the public. While evidence of frequent collaboration suggests groups often find alliances favorable (e.g., Hojnacki, 1997; Hula, 1995), individual attitudes toward this behavior remain unexplored, and the group behavior stands in contrast with expectations, at least from the Olsonian perspective. This study, therefore, allows us to assess whether groups or theory are out of sync with the public's preferences toward collaboration.

## Collaborative Dispositions

One way to assess whether pluralist notions find support is to account for a number of dispositions that signal the willingness to work with others in or outside of politics. These include personality, support for democratic norms, select religious values, group participation, and political resources. We take them up in turn.

As the personality project has coalesced in psychology around the Big 5 model (McCrae and Costa, 1987), its influence has spread across the social sciences into political science. Though consideration of personality has long been present in political science, only in the last few years has its appearance been marked (e.g., Gerber *et al*, 2010; Mondak, 2010). The Big 5 model consists of OCEAN: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (or emotional stability).<sup>2</sup>

Politics depends on extraversion, in which outgoing, bold, energetic people communicate their views and run for office. It is natural to assume that extraverts would approve of groups "socializing" and working together in some larger social



enterprise. Collaboration of this kind is a much more formal mode of interaction than the personality trait captures. Agreeableness better captures the spirit of collaboration given how Mondak (2010, p. 58) describes the state of understanding of this trait: kind, sympathetic, trusting, compliant, and cooperative. More agreeable people should approve more of collaboration efforts.

Openness to experience incorporates curiosity, intellect, and a desire for new experiences. We suspect that those more open bristle at limitations to individual or group choice and thus are more likely to support group collaboration. Conscientiousness is, in essence, the sense of the yeoman farmer who is dependable and hardworking and who exercises self-control. High conscientiousness does not preclude working together with others, but presumes that one's house is in order before other pursuits are undertaken. Thus, the conscientious are outcome-driven and look with disdain on forces that impede task completion. This logic leads to two possible arguments regarding views toward groups operating in coalition. First, the conscientious may be particularly impressed that collaborative ventures weaken the reputation of a group as capable of achieving a promised outcome. On the other hand, if conscientious people are more concerned with reaching promised outcomes, then they may feel that groups in coalition are taking desirable steps.

Understanding of the need for consensus in order to run a democracy has long been at issue (Berelson, 1952; Prothro and Grigg, 1960; Tocqueville, 1994[1840]), with the debate centered on just what demonstrates democratic commitment, how many people need to commit, and whether people even need such value commitments at all. One of the underlying premises of this vast literature is that such values guide the attitudes of citizens. This leads us to the unsurprising hypothesis that those who believe in the value of collaboration in a pure and political sense (“It is important to work together to get things done even if less gets done as a result” and “It is important for members of Congress to compromise in order to get something done.”) are more likely to see the value in collaboration between organized interests.

Given the extraordinary religiosity of Americans, especially in a developed nation (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2007), consideration of Americans' religious experiences and values is appropriate. In a growing number of studies, one particular set of religious values shapes how expansively individuals draw in-group boundaries. These inclusive and exclusive values are widely given voice in American religious groups by clergy and have been shown to affect foreign policy attitudes, immigration attitudes, and political tolerance judgments in national, regional, and congregational samples (see Djupe and Calfano, 2013). Analogously, we suspect that those who draw narrow in-group boundaries fueled by holding exclusive religious values should emphasize the costs of collaboration and view participating groups more negatively. Those drawing expansive in-group boundaries from holding inclusive values should emphasize the benefits of collaboration and view participating groups more positively. We also include a measure of worship service attendance, which we expect to have negative effects on views



toward group collaboration because of its correlation with having more insular, agreeable social networks (Mutz and Mondak, 2006). We also include a measure of communitarianism (Mockabee *et al*, 2007), which should be related to positive views of collaboration since it reflects the mandate of religion to either primarily fix oneself (=0) or help others (=1).

Lastly, we consider the effects of being politically resourceful. Our expectations from the effects of political knowledge, participation, income, education, and partisan strength are split. On the one hand, participation in politics teaches people about the necessity of compromise, collaboration, and diversity (e.g., Layman, 2010; Leighley, 1991). Thus, the more resourceful and participatory should respect the worth of collaboration. At the same time, the resourceful are more efficacious and recognize that they are capable of engaging in activities that few others undertake. From this perspective, the resourceful may see relying on others as a sign of weakness. Because both stories are plausible, we are ambivalent about these expectations.

## Design and Data

To investigate these claims about the public's views of group collaboration and their consequences for group evaluations, we conducted a national survey of 412 randomly chosen respondents using the Qualtrics web interface and data collection service.<sup>3</sup> Opinions about group collaboration were gauged in two ways – through an experiment and then through several non-experimental measures regarding respondents' beliefs about the costs and benefits of collaboration generally. First, we engaged a 2 × 2 experimental design and presented respondents with a brief news story about an interest group with manipulations that jointly varied whether (1) the group was engaged in collaboration and (2) the salience of the group's objective. We used a number of measures, including a modified dictator game, to assess how these treatments influence contributions to the group.<sup>4</sup>

Upon agreeing to take the survey, respondents were randomly presented with a story that appeared to be taken from the AP wire service (see the [Appendix](#) for complete language). The stories in these manipulations established a policy objective and whether the group, Families USA, was acting in collaboration.<sup>5</sup> We selected health care as the issue to set a realistic scenario where respondents would believe groups could easily be working together or alone in lobbying (*collaboration condition*). The complexity or perceived relevance of a cause could lead some to value collaboration differently (e.g., Gray and Lowery, 1998), thus we varied the salience of the issue by presenting either lobbying for universal health coverage (*high salience condition*) or a rule requiring insurance companies to shift to a short, consumer friendly form to explain the cost and extent of coverage (*low salience*).

One concern with this approach is that by choosing a politicized issue such as health care reform respondents might rely heavily on prior opinions in evaluating the group.



Thus, later in the survey, we assessed the extent to which respondents found the group to be partisan (*partisan group*) and whether there was a relationship between their perceptions and self-reported ideology (*conservatism*) and partisanship (*Republicanism*).<sup>6</sup> We also considered the extent to which respondents considered health care reform an important issue (*health care important*).

Immediately following the story, respondents were asked a set of questions evaluating the Families USA organization. These included ordinal response questions as to whether the respondent could: trust the group's advocacy, stand by the organization, imagine learning more about their policy objectives or the group itself, see themselves as likely to join or help out with grassroots efforts, view them as effective, imagine donating, and see the group as credible. These nine items formed a very cohesive scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ), which we use as one of the primary indicators of the effect of the collaboration treatment.

Because of the hypothesis that collaboration might present monetary consequences for a participating group, we added a modified dictator game, which has been widely used in economics (Camerer, 2003) and political science (see Fowler, 2006; Fowler and Kam, 2007). In such games, participants are given real or hypothetical resources that they can choose to grant to a recipient in denominations from 0 to maximum. Despite their name, dictator games are used to assess altruism since individuals can choose to share or not without constraint or incentive. While many dictator games are blind to the recipient to assess altruism in a vacuum, some have manipulated the recipient to assess the conditional nature of other-regarding preferences (e.g., Fowler and Kam, 2007; McCauley, 2015). We follow that tack here, assessing how variations in interest group strategy shift allocations individuals are willing to make to Families USA:

Imagine that tax law changed and now allows you to allocate up to \$100 of your federal taxes, without reducing your refund, to a nonprofit interest group of your choosing. How much, if any, would you allocate to Families USA?

This question elicited a mean donation of \$32, which echoes typical allocations in dictator games (Camerer, 2003, p. 43), and responses spanned the entire range from 0 to 100.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these dependent measures tied to the collaboration and salience manipulations, we included a set of questions toward the end of the survey (about 8 minutes of questions past the experiment) to gauge popular beliefs about the consequences of groups working in concert. Specifically, we asked the extent to which respondents agreed with four beliefs about collaboration:

- When interest groups work together it is more likely that they will be successful (*leads to success*).
- I am less likely to donate to a group that frequently teams up with other organizations (*donations declining*).



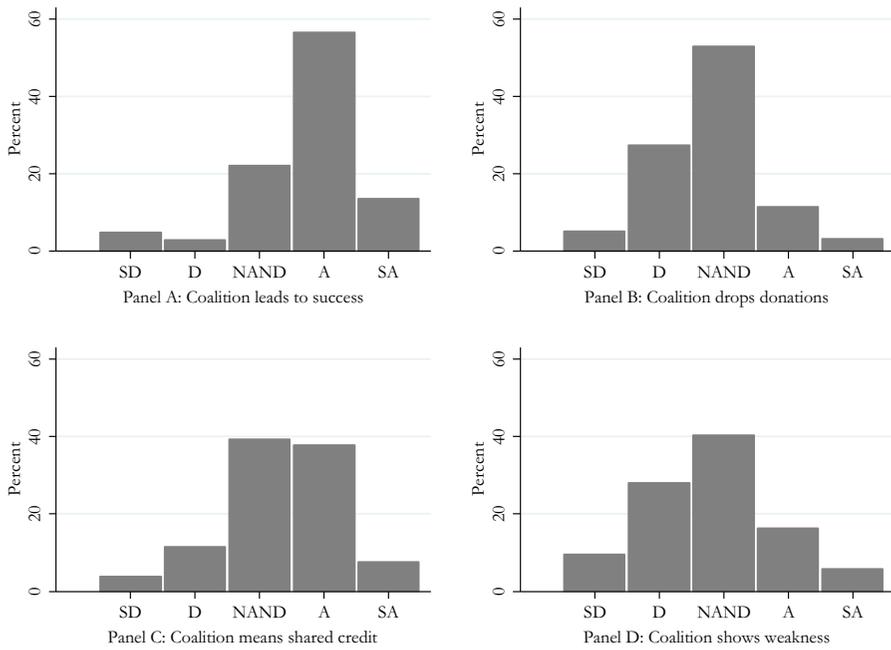
- One consequence of interest groups working together is that they have to share the credit for any successes (*shared credit*).
- Groups work together when they are politically weak (*weak groups*).

With these dependent measures in place, the bulk of the survey instrument contained a host of explanatory factors and controls to evaluate the alternate explanations highlighted above. For each of the four dimensions of personality considered (*agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness*) we adapted five question batteries established in the literature (Mondak, 2010). Similarly, to capture support for democratic norms we combined two measures (working together is important, members of Congress should compromise) to create a *need for cooperation*. Beyond a measure of the respondent being an interest *group member* to capture the influence of being a joiner, we also included a measure of *political participation*, which sums activities in the political process. Per the discussion in the previous section, a set of attitude items were combined to create composite measures for *inclusive* and *exclusive* religious values, in addition to worship *attendance* and *communitarianism*. Political resources reflect traditional controls and socio-economic factors (*age, income, education, race, gender, and partisan strength*).

## Results

We begin with an examination of four general beliefs about group collaboration introduced above. Figure 1 reports the responses to each on the Likert scales that accompanied the statements. There is widespread agreement with the classic pluralist argument that groups in collaboration are more likely to be successful (panel a), while many more disagree that pursuing collaboration will result in a drop in donations (panel b). The high proportion of neutral responses suggests that many people are simply agnostic about how collaboration would affect their donation decision. The majority of respondents agree that collaborating groups will have to share credit (which bears on their reputation – see panel c). While a sizable number disagree that groups only collaborate when they are weak, which is a noncontroversial position in the interest group literature (e.g., Gray and Lowery, 1998; Hojnacki, 1997), there are also a nontrivial number of people in panel d who agree that weakness drives collaboration.

The distribution of responses suggests that people view collaboration as a natural strategy for groups that will not result in a lesser reputation or lesser commitment. However, it is also evident that many people do not care much (or are ambivalent), while others take a negative view of collaboration, which underscores some of the explanations highlighted earlier that group collaboration may not be universally rewarded. The views of the latter may or may not be particularly important,



**Figure 1:** Distribution of responses to beliefs about interest group collaboration.

*Note* Number of responses for each panel are: A 411; B 412; C 410; D 410.

depending on whether they are involved in the system. They could be written off as nonparticipants who simply don't understand the necessities of democratic functioning. But, if those with a dim view of collaboration happen to be active players with resources, then their opinions will take on more weight with interest group elites. Only further analysis will give us insight on this point.

Toward that end, Table 1 presents ordered logistic estimation results of these four beliefs about interest group collaboration. Given that the survey opened with an experiment, we included the treatments to assess whether they affect these four general beliefs toward group collaboration (which, again, appeared in the survey long after the treatments – by about 40 questions). We have no expectation of treatment effects here since they were not intended to change beliefs, but instead to engage those beliefs in order to shape attitudes toward a particular organization. When considering the full sample, the treatments have no measurable effect in any of the four models.

The next battery of items in the models captures four of the Big 5 personality dimensions. Those open to experience believe collaboration is natural and beneficial – they are more likely to believe collaboration leads to success, will not decrease donations, and is not undertaken by weak groups. The conscientious,



**Table 1:** Ordinal logit estimates of four beliefs about interest group collaboration

	<i>Collaboration leads to:</i>							
	<i>Success</i>		<i>Donations declining</i>		<i>Shared credit</i>		<i>Weak groups</i>	
	$\beta^*$	(SE)	$\beta^*$	(SE)	$\beta^*$	(SE)	$\beta^*$	(SE)
Salience treatment	.05	(.23)	.02	(.22)	.09	(.21)	-.04	(.21)
Coalition treatment	-.01	(.23)	-.01	(.22)	-.11	(.21)	-.03	(.21)
Openness	1.45 <sup>†</sup>	(1.09)	-2.65 <sup>***</sup>	(1.06)	-.77	(1.02)	-1.26 <sup>†</sup>	(1.00)
Conscientiousness	.73	(1.17)	-.03	(1.12)	1.98 <sup>*</sup>	(1.11)	1.11	(1.07)
Extraversion	.38	(.72)	.32	(.67)	.14	(.68)	-.19	(.66)
Agreeableness	1.94 <sup>*</sup>	(1.04)	1.36 <sup>†</sup>	(1.00)	.42	(.97)	-1.77 <sup>**</sup>	(.95)
Need for cooperation	1.04 <sup>***</sup>	(.17)	.42 <sup>***</sup>	(.15)	.37 <sup>***</sup>	(.15)	.04	(.15)
Political knowledge	.03	(.07)	.02	(.06)	.02	(.06)	.05	(.06)
Political participation	.11	(.14)	.19 <sup>†</sup>	(.14)	.37 <sup>***</sup>	(.13)	.22 <sup>*</sup>	(.13)
Female	.16	(.25)	-.13	(.24)	-.25	(.23)	-.42 <sup>*</sup>	(.23)
Year born	.00	(.01)	-.01	(.01)	.00	(.01)	.00	(.01)
Income	-.05	(.06)	.01	(.06)	.01	(.05)	.00	(.05)
Education	.06	(.10)	-.29 <sup>***</sup>	(.10)	-.04	(.10)	-.10	(.10)
Attendance	-.13 <sup>†</sup>	(.08)	-.15 <sup>*</sup>	(.08)	.02	(.08)	-.07	(.08)
Communitarianism	-.19	(.24)	-.30	(.24)	-.24	(.22)	.17	(.22)
Inclusive values	.17	(.18)	-.45 <sup>***</sup>	(.17)	.15	(.16)	-.49 <sup>***</sup>	(.16)
Exclusive values	-.09	(.16)	.17	(.15)	.07	(.15)	.47 <sup>***</sup>	(.14)
White	-.17	(.32)	-.60 <sup>**</sup>	(.31)	.04	(.29)	-.36	(.29)



Partisan strength	.09	(.11)	-.40***	(.11)	-.20**	(.10)	-.08	(.10)
Group member	.06	(.31)	-.56*	(.30)	-.34	(.28)	-.94***	(.28)
/cut1	-4.77	(16.39)	-27.30	(15.75)	-8.09	(15.20)	-6.84	(14.80)
/cut2	-4.06	(16.39)	-24.64	(15.74)	-6.19	(15.20)	-4.89	(14.80)
/cut3	-1.92	(16.39)	-21.84	(15.72)	-4.19	(15.19)	-2.95	(14.80)
/cut4	1.61	(16.38)	-2.11	(15.72)	-1.66	(15.20)	-1.27	(14.80)
Model statistics	N = 333 LR		N = 334 LR		N = 333 LR		N = 333 LR	
	$\chi^2 = 101.59$ ***		$\chi^2 = 52.17$ ***		$\chi^2 = 35.41$ **		$\chi^2 = 50.48$ ***	
	Pseudo $R^2 = .14$		Pseudo $R^2 = .07$		Pseudo $R^2 = .04$		Pseudo $R^2 = .05$	

Source: Original survey data. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ , †  $p < .10$  (one-tailed).



who are concerned about personal responsibility and boundary maintenance, do not differ from average in how they view collaboration except in their agreement that collaborating groups must share credit (and we suspect that they do not see this in a positive light). Given the importance of sociability in politics, one would expect that extraversion would positively correlate with views of collaboration, but we see no evidence of it here. Instead, more agreeable people take the positions that collaboration leads to success and is not perpetrated by weak groups. The agreeable also tend to agree (although only very modestly more) that collaboration would drive a drop in donations.

It is no surprise that those with a stronger *need for collaboration* generally would be linked to the beliefs about group collaboration we presented to respondents. Those committed to the democratic norm of collaboration think it leads to success, forces groups to share credit, and also may lead to a drop in donations. Of course, these are people who agreed that collaboration should be pursued even if less can be accomplished as a result.

Current interest group members are agnostic about whether collaboration leads to success, but are clear that collaboration will not drive down donations nor is it pursued by weak groups. In one of the more interesting twists in these models, political participants do not follow the same path as interest group members. Instead, they appear willing, if modestly so, to punish collaborating groups with lower donations, and agree that collaboration forces groups to share credit and indicates weakness. Political participants see group collaboration as a sign of weakness, all else equal. Thus, a decision to collaborate may be viewed by interest group members as positive at best, or neutral at worst, but potential members (in terms of political participants) may well be deterred.

The remainder of the effects are mostly concentrated in the model on beliefs about how donations would shift when a group collaborates. And they work in ways that suggest it is not costly for groups to engage in collaboration. That is, those with higher measures of political resources including higher education, white identity, and religious attendance tend to report that their donations would not decrease when the group collaborates – negative and significant effects.

In addition, there is some evidence that the religious values of inclusion and exclusion bear on views about collaboration. Inclusion, which draws in-group boundaries quite broadly, is related to disagreement that donations would drop and thinking that collaborating groups are weak. On the other hand, those holding more exclusive values, which hem in group boundaries, are more likely to think collaborating groups are weak. If there is some solace here for interest groups, it is that inclusive values are communicated much more often by American clergy (see Djupe and Calfano, 2013), which is not surprising given the tight link between religion and American social norms (e.g., Tocqueville, 1994).

Taken together, we note the close, positive connection between variables linked to civic activism and views promoting collaboration, with only a few exceptions



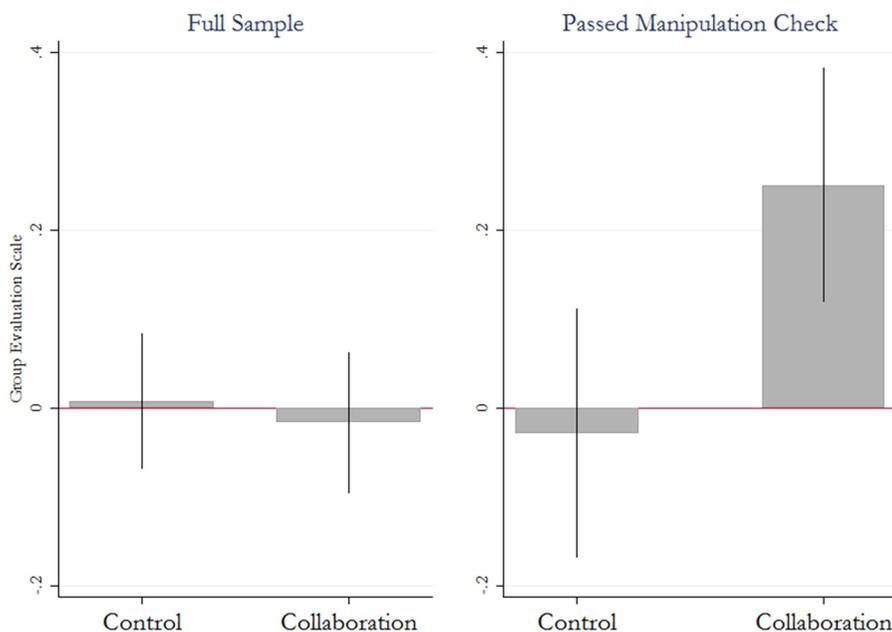
(like the statistically marginal political participation effects). From these data, collaboration does not appear to weaken and may even strengthen the position of a group in the eyes of those most likely to be paying attention and doing something about it.

### **Manipulating Collaboration**

Collaboration among groups elicits mostly positive views when presented abstractly (above), but this is only suggestive evidence of how the public evaluates collaboration. Experimental manipulation will provide much more certainty about any effects of working in coalition on the evaluation of a group. As discussed above, we presented respondents with a brief news wire story highlighting the actions of Families USA, a nonprofit organization engaged in lobbying for health care reform. The scenario manipulated two key components: (1) whether Families USA was working alone or in a broad coalition, and (2) whether the policy objective was more affordable health care and thus likely to be perceived as highly salient or the less salient goal of more transparent reporting of insurance policies.<sup>8</sup> In initial analyses (not shown), the salience treatment did not have a direct or interactive effect with the collaboration condition on the various dependent measures we employed, nor did it produce significantly different responses in terms of whether the group was viewed as partisan. Consequently, in the results that follow, we pool responses across the salience conditions to increase statistical power and focus solely on the key collaboration manipulation.

The left panel of Figure 2 presents the treatment effects and 95 % confidence intervals.<sup>9</sup> As the left panel highlights, respondents presented with the news that Families USA was working in collaboration did not have significantly different evaluations of the group. While this fails to confirm the sentiments of the previous section that collaboration promotes more positive evaluations, the results also do not support the view that collaboration promotes a negative reaction. At worst the results in the left panel including all respondents indicate that the public may be agnostic toward collaboration, suggesting that factoring the public's response into decisions to work in coalition would be a minor factor at best. This result could provide individual-level confirmation of the null finding that groups competing for resources are no less likely to collaborate (Hojnacki, 1997).

However, another possibility is that many respondents did not pay attention to whether the group was working in coalition and the realistically muted manipulation was not internalized by respondents. Thus, following best practices with experimental treatments, we included a set of items to assess the effectiveness of the collaboration and salience manipulations (see, e.g., Mutz, 2011). First, we checked to see whether the name of the organization could be recalled – 88 % of respondents correctly identified Families USA as the group in the story. Since many of the dependent measures use the group by name (and it was included in the



**Figure 2:** Effects of collaboration on group evaluations for all respondents and those who identified the collaboration treatment correctly.

*Note* There were 412 total responses, of whom 134 (33 %) identified the collaboration treatment correctly. The dependent variable is a standardized scale with Cronbach's alpha = .92. Effects estimated using bivariate OLS with 95 % confidence intervals (two-tailed).

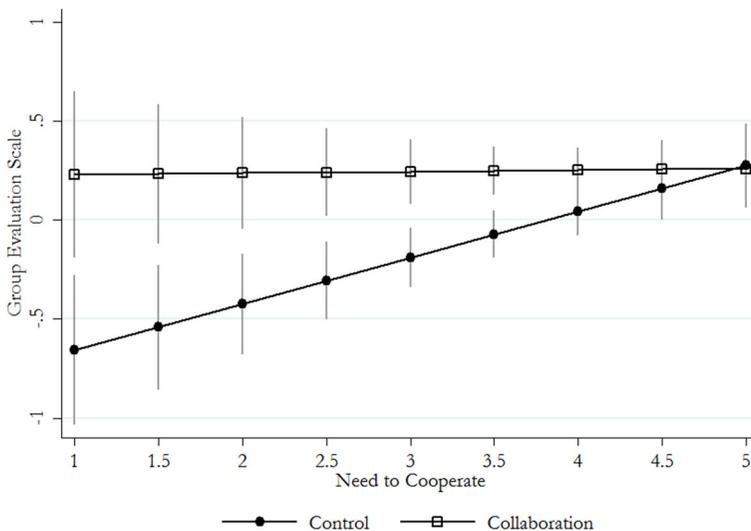
headline), this high level of recall cannot be solely attributed to a close reading of the story. We also checked for recall of the policy goal pursued by the group. Here the manipulation check suggests cursory reading with only 38 % of respondents correctly identifying the specific issue in the condition they were assigned.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, we also asked whether Families USA was working alone or in coalition; 33 % of the sample correctly recalled this feature. While this low recall suggests the treatment was successful in its subtlety, this also presents us with an analytic advantage. We can assess whether correct recall of this specific fact is linked to systematic use of the collaboration information. Of course, it is possible that randomization no longer holds among the subset who correctly identified the collaboration treatment and that identification is linked to other variables of interest such as political attentiveness and political resources. However, randomization holds and the composition of the treatment cells is still statistically indistinguishable across demographic groups; moreover, correct identification of collaboration is *not* related to politically significant resources like political knowledge, group membership, and education.<sup>11</sup>



Thus, in the right panel of Figure 2, we present analyses of the treatment effects on the treated – only respondents correctly identifying their assigned collaboration condition in the manipulation check were included.<sup>12</sup> The results are visibly different in direction, magnitude, and statistical significance. The effect of collaboration is positive and significant ( $p = .04$ ). Among those able to correctly recall the cooperative efforts of Families USA, collaboration is indeed associated with higher evaluations – the positive effect of .28 amounts to about 10 % of the standardized scale. This result reflects the earlier analysis that collaboration is indeed rewarded, at least when it is noticed. Put differently, since collaboration is significantly associated with more positive evaluations, most of those correctly recalling the manipulation were not simply guessing on the manipulation check. Moreover, these results do not hold when respondents answered other manipulation checks correctly (instead, they resemble the non-effects in the full sample). Only when respondents correctly identified the collaboration treatment do these effects obtain, providing greater confidence that it is the group's collaborative effort driving higher evaluations.

We also assessed a number of tests for conditional effects to see if the treatments were indeed sample level or worked only among a subgroup. We found none in the full sample and only one in the subsample that correctly identified the treatment. Figure 3 shows that the *need to cooperate*, a measure of democratic norms, interacts with the collaboration treatment. Importantly, the collaboration information does not enhance the effect of democratic norms, it substitutes for it. That is, those receiving the collaboration treatment have the same estimated level of support

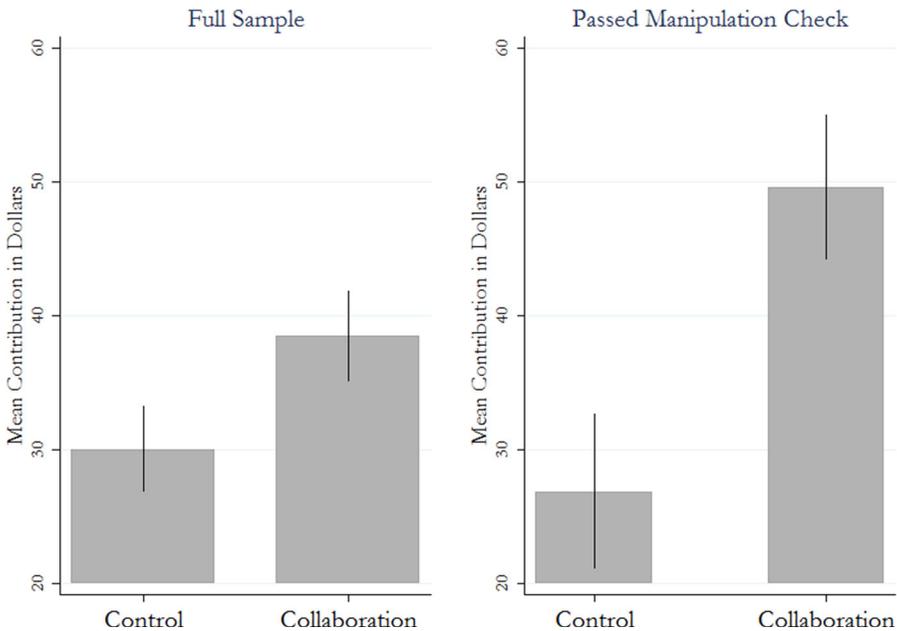


**Figure 3:** Interactive effects of the collaboration treatment dependent on the need to collaborate (90 % confidence).



for Families USA regardless of their need for collaboration. Those who did not receive the collaboration condition varied in their support, showing higher support if they had a higher need for collaboration. Thus, the results here reinforce that the collaboration treatment had sample-level effects, at least among those who received the cue.

The final dependent measure we consider is the hypothetical dictator game question of how much money, of \$100, an individual would allocate out of their tax break to Families USA. The question wording made it clear that this money was not out of pocket, so if collaboration is punished, then this measure would likely underestimate the monetary penalty a group would face. On the other hand, if collaboration is rewarded, this measure may well overestimate the potential benefit since individuals are not asked how much they would contribute out of pocket. However, this provides an estimate of whether individuals are disposed to reward or punish Families USA for working in coalition. We followed the same approach as with the scale above. Figure 4 shows the average donations in the full sample given assignment to the collaboration treatment (left panel) and average donations among those who correctly perceived the treatment (right panel).



**Figure 4:** Effects of collaboration on expected contribution for all respondents and those who identified the collaboration treatment correctly.

*Note* There were 412 total responses, of whom 134 (33 %) identified the treatment correctly (right panel). Difference in mean contribution for both panels is significant ( $p < .01$ ), despite 95 % confidence intervals shown for consistency. The dollar figure reported is based on a maximum \$100 of potential allocation. See text for more on this question item.



Unlike the results shown in Figure 2, the average allocation in the full sample supports the claim that collaboration will be rewarded. Respondents in the collaboration condition were willing to give \$8.46 more to Families USA (the difference is significant at  $p = .01$ ). But similar to the results in Figure 2, the benefit of collaboration is even greater – \$22.75 – when isolated to respondents who were aware whether Families USA was working in coalition (that difference remains significant at  $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

Another motivation for assessing the public's views about group collaboration is the tension over group conflict. The major question concerns whether political interests drive the behavior of organizations and conflict thus occurs between ideological foes or whether nonpolitical organizational priorities govern and conflict appears between potential allies (see, e.g., Gray and Lowery, 2004; McFarland, 2007). This tension has been investigated across a number of interlaced questions, including who works with whom (Salisbury *et al*, 1987), the diversity of policy concerns in a policy sector (Baumgartner and Leech, 2001; Browne, 1990), the experience of competition over policy goals and resources (Gray and Lowery, 1996), joining alliances (Gray and Lowery, 1998; Hojnacki, 1997), the extent of participation in coalitions (Heaney, 2004), behavior within alliances (Hojnacki, 1998), and organizational mortality anxiety (Gray and Lowery, 1997). These works reach diverse answers, to be sure, but there is a consensus in this literature that interest groups carve out a niche in response to pressures exerted by isomorphic (similarly structured and ideologically akin) groups in densely populated systems. This corresponds with a classic Olsonian perspective in which individuals seek selective benefits that cannot be obtained elsewhere in exchange for dues. That is, concerns for the maintenance of the organization are generated by the presence of potential *allies* and force groups to partition their resource base to attempt to avoid organizational mortality. Therefore, efforts that bridge these partitions may be perceived to threaten the persistence of the organization. Of course, groups can collaborate without signaling to their membership that they are doing so. Our evidence suggests that this fear may be unfounded and that advertising participation in a broad coalition could lead to benefits in public perception, participation, membership, and donations.

## Conclusion

In contrast to Olsonian arguments that suggest negative consequences result from decisions to work in coalition, both the analysis of the abstract beliefs (Figure 1 and



Table 1) and manipulation of exposure to a collaborating group (Figs. 2 and 4) indicate that collaboration is viewed positively and is rewarded. In fact, the results in Table 1 reinforce a pluralist perspective, showing that general attitudes about collaboration reflected in democratic norms, agreeable personality traits, and even religious values co-vary with positive responses to interest group collaboration. The hunt for conditional effects nearly came up empty and what conditions were found reinforced sample-level effects. People value collaboration when they see it, and seeing collaboration in action can make up for unsupportive dispositions. It is equally important to reaffirm that any potential benefit to the group from working in coalition might need to be recognized and internalized (as opposed to passively consumed) to be realized. Thus, the analyses of the treatment effects present first-hand evidence that organized interests need not fear collaboration. In fact, in the scenario presented here, a group might actually benefit in the public's eye.

Before concluding that collaboration among groups is an unconditional good, several caveats should be mentioned. It is not clear how actual members of a group view collaboration. Our analysis focused on potential members, defined quite broadly, and included members of other groups. Self-identified members of other groups are less likely to see collaboration as a sign of weakness. However, the calculation may be different if frequent collaboration bears on one's own particular selective benefits. Second, and related, we did not test the information hypothesis – that news about a collaborative effort provides novel information about other groups and hence enables choice. This is not an insignificant proposal, but again a sample of members of a particular group is more suitable to test it.

Third, future work may consider whether collaboration among similar or disparate groups influences the direction and magnitude of evaluations. When partisanship and the scope of collaboration are vague, as in our analysis, collaboration is consistently rewarded. Yet, if two seemingly ideologically opposed groups were to join forces, would evaluations change? What if the coalition was a conglomeration of ideologically similar organizations? An additional and obvious path is to incorporate the nature of the opposition specifically. Does the threat that encourages group collaboration (e.g., Gray and Lowery, 1998; Hojnacki, 1997) also invite positive evaluations of the groups who rally together? These future avenues aside, the results present a positive picture of collaboration among groups, which suggest that the pressure system need not automatically fear the public ramifications of collective efforts. The pluralist public, by and large, values working together and appears prepared to reward organizations that are willing to as well.

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## Notes

- 1 For instance, Aristotle in *Politics* writes, “He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god” (I.1253a27).
- 2 We adopted a semantic differential approach to measuring the Big 5 taken from Mondak (2010, pp. 76–77), though we left out emotional stability because of its failure to correlate with much of anything political (see Gerber *et al.*, 2010; Mondak, 2010 for more; though see Marcus *et al.*, 1995). We used five items per dimension (see the discussion in the “Design and Data” section below for more details and coding in the Appendix).
- 3 The survey spanned February 15–17, 2012 and had a gender quota of 50 percent of in each category of males and females, which matches the distribution in the US. The sample is somewhat more white than the nation (81 percent compared to 76 percent of all Americans, a few of whom may have chosen another race as well). Just over 7 percent identified each as black and Hispanic. The average age of respondents was 47, which matches the average age of adults over 18 in the US. Pew (Pew Research Center, 2012) reports 38 percent independent (including independents who lean; 12 percent pure independent), 32 percent Democratic (48 with leaners), and 24 percent Republican (40 percent with leaners) in 2012. Our sample is 31 percent pure independent, 38 percent Democratic (including leaners), and 32 percent Republican (including leaners) – our distribution comes from a single partisanship question and not from the traditional branched construction. Thus, save in terms of partisanship, the sample does closely resemble the population in 2012.
- 4 Randomization was employed with ultimate quotas to ensure equal numbers of respondents across the treatments.
- 5 Families USA is an actual nonpartisan organization (<http://www.familiesusa.org/>) chosen to minimize a partisan perception while having a realistic group name. The low-salience issue was adopted from their website (<http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/newsroom/press-releases/2011-press-releases/rule-on-benefit-language.html>).
- 6 While 42 % of the sample did view the group as partisan, these responses were balanced across all treatments. Neither the high salience condition nor the respondent’s party strength was a significant predictor of this decision. Ultimately any partisan perceptions were equivalent across treatments. Consequently, our design does not allow for an analysis of collaboration in a partisan versus nonpartisan issue frame.
- 7 There are two concerns with this question. One concern is that people would give all their resources to the group in question since no other options for their allocation are offered. Clearly this is not the case, which suggests respondents were willing to embrace the question and consider keeping it or dividing their “free” allocation to groups not mentioned in the survey. The second concern is that the responses are unreliable since they do not involve actual money (or tangible rewards like lottery tickets). While games using tangible resources often result in somewhat lower grants from the dictator (see Forsythe *et al.* (1994), in which both were compared experimentally), Fowler and Kam’s (2007) average (using lottery tickets) resulted in a higher mean grant (.39). There is no indication in the literature that hypothetical dictator games yield a different type of response from “for pay” games, merely that the intercept tends to be lower in the latter.
- 8 It was suggested to the authors that collaboration is not something people pay attention to and may not be widely advertised. The survey opened with the story containing the treatments and the manipulations were placed contextually into the body of the news story as opposed to the header to reflect this suggestion. While perhaps more realistic, this may have led satisfying respondents to miss



the treatment (Krosnick, 1999). We explicitly included manipulation checks to evaluate this possibility and discuss the implications and alternate analyses below.

- 9 The composition of the sample across the four conditions was balanced across key demographic variables and thus randomization was effective. Given the balance across the randomized treatments the main effects are robust to model specification. Many different models with controls from Table 1 were considered, and the results that follow in this section remain unchanged. Consequently for clarity and ease of presentation we only report the effects from bivariate comparisons for the remainder of the analysis.
- 10 One of the other issue choices presented in this check was universal health care. Since this category could arguably be considered an alternative to affordable health care in the high salience condition, the recall rate for the issue objective could be higher. In fact, if this is considered a correct response for the high salience group, 55 % were correct.
- 11 Similarly, the logic behind pooling respondents across the salience conditions also holds. The issue objective of the group presented to this subset of respondents did not influence the dependent measures or partisan evaluation of the group.
- 12 As before, we considered many robustness checks varying model specifications (available upon request) and the significant, positive relationship holds in this subset. We also considered other methods of splitting the sample to hone in on the group receiving the treatment (e.g., getting at least any two checks correct), but results from these approaches mimicked the full sample, again suggesting that the important check was whether the respondent remembered whether the group was working alone or in collaboration.

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## Appendix – Experimental Treatments and Variable Coding



Associated Press Wire  
November 11, 2010

Families USA Group Active to Change Health Care Law  
By Jim Robinson

Both before and after the passage of the Health Care Reform Act, lobbying groups have been highly active trying to change provisions of the law. For instance, the public interest lobby, Families USA, [has been working/has been working in a coalition with many other organizations] to target key lawmakers in Congress to build support for their {proposals to promote high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans \ proposal for a government rule requiring insurance companies to shift to a short, consumer friendly form to explain the cost and extent of coverage}.

Note: the coalition conditions are demarcated by square brackets “[ ]” while the salience conditions are marked by curly brackets “{ }”.

### Variable Coding

**Leads to Success** “When interest groups work together it is more likely that they will be successful.” 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

**Donations Declining** “I am less likely to donate to a group that frequently teams up with other organizations.” 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.



**Shared Credit** “One consequence of interest groups working together is that they have to share the credit of any successes.” 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

**Weak Groups** “Groups work together when they are politically weak.” 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

**Openness to Experience** Each semantic differential item is coded 1-7, introduced with, “As you examine each of the following pairs of words, which comes closest to describing you? The better a word describes you, choose a button closer to that word. If both words describe you equally well, then click the middle button.” Openness combines scores on the following pairs, with the first label the low number (1; some were reversed for scaling): unimaginative–imaginative, unanalytical–analytical, uncreative–creative, uncurious–curious, and unintellectual–intellectual.

**Conscientiousness** Combines scores for the following pairs: unsystematic–systematic, lazy–hardworking, sloppy–neat, carefree–careful, irresponsible–responsible.

**Extraversion** Combines scores for the following pairs: introverted–extroverted, quiet–talkative, timid–bold, shy–outgoing, inhibited–spontaneous.

**Agreeableness** Combines scores for the following pairs: cold–warm, harsh–gentle, unkind–kind, rude–polite, unsympathetic–sympathetic.

**Need for Cooperation** Averages scores from two items, both coded 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. “It is important to work together to get things done even if less gets done as a result.” And “It is important for members of Congress to compromise in order to get something done.”

**Political Knowledge** “For each of the political figures on the left please try to identify the political office they hold and enter it in the box:” John Boehner, Joe Biden, John Roberts, David Cameron, Angela Merkel, Eric Holder.

**Political Participation** Additive scale of 1 point per activity, introduced with: “Of the following ways of participating in politics, which have you done in the past 2 years?” Vote in the 2010 elections, Give money to a candidate or party, Write a letter to an elected official, Protest or march for a political cause, Give money to a



political cause, Attend a rally for a candidate or cause, Volunteer time to a political campaign.

**Female** = 1, 0 = male.

**Age** in years.

**Income** “Which of the following categories best captures your total family income for the 2011 tax year?” 1 = \$0–25,000, 2 = 25,001–40,000, 3 = 40,001–55,000, 4 = 55,001–70,000, 5 = 70,001–85,000, 6 = 85,001–100,000, 7 = 100,001–115,000, 8 = 115,001–130,000, 9 = Over 130,001.

**Education** “What is the highest level of education you have received?” 1 = Less than a high school/GED, 2 = high School graduate/GED, 3 = some college/associate’s degree, 4 = four year college degree (BA, BS, BFA, etc.), 5 = more than 4 year college degree (e.g., classes toward a master’s), 6 = Master’s or doctoral degree.

**Attendance** “Lots of things come up that keep people from attending religious services even if they want to. Thinking about your life these days, how often do you attend religious services, not including occasional weddings, baptisms, or funerals?” 1 = More than once a week, every week, 2 = Almost every week, 3 = Once or twice a month, 4 = A few times a year, 5 = Once a week, every week, 6 = Never.

**Communitarianism** “If you have tried to be a good person of your faith, which did you try to do more: avoid doing sinful things yourself or help other people?” 0 = Avoid sinful things, 1 = help other people.

**Inclusive Values** Averages two items introduced with, “Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about being a \*good person of your faith\* (whatever it is).” Each is coded: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. “It is important to ‘love the stranger as yourself.’” And “It is important to invite others to my house of worship even if it begins to change as a result.”

**Exclusive Values** Averages of two items introduced with the same text as for inclusive values and using the same coding. “It is important to shop as much as possible at stores owned by people of my faith.” And “It is important to keep company with other people of my faith.”

**White** = 1, 0 = otherwise.



**Partisan Strength** Recoded from a single item partisanship measure, “Where would you place yourself on the following scale regarding your political party affiliation?” 4 = Strong Republican/Democrat, 3 = Not so strong Republican/Democrat, 2 = Independent who leans Republican/Democratic, 1 = Independent.

**Group Member** “Are you a member of an organization that tries to influence government? These might include professional organizations, churches, environmental organizations, gun rights groups, abortion groups, AARP, etc.” 1 = Yes, I am a member, 0 = No, not a member of such a group.

**Group Evaluation Scale** (Figure 2 DV) Incorporates all of the following variables, first standardizing them to have mean = 0, var = 1 before averaging the scores.

**Credible** “How credible do you view Families USA’s actions to be?” 0 = not at all to 10 = completely.

**Donate** “If asked, how likely would you be to do any of the following regarding Families USA? Donate money.” 1 = very unlikely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = somewhat unlikely, 4 = undecided, 5 = somewhat likely, 6 = likely, and 7 = very likely.

**Effective** “How effective do you think Families USA will be in seeking their proposed changes?” 1 = very ineffective, 2 = ineffective, 3 = somewhat ineffective, 4 = neither effective nor ineffective, 5 = Somewhat effective, 6 = effective, 7 = very effective.

**Help Grassroots** “If asked, how likely would you be to do any of the following regarding Families USA? Help with their grassroots effort in my community.” 1 = very unlikely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = somewhat unlikely, 4 = undecided, 5 = somewhat likely, 6 = likely, and 7 = very likely.

**Join** “If asked, how likely would you be to do any of the following regarding Families USA? Join their mailing list.” 1 = very unlikely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = somewhat unlikely, 4 = undecided, 5 = somewhat likely, 6 = likely, and 7 = very likely.

**Learn Group** “Would you like to learn more about Families USA?” 0 = definitely not to 10 = definitely yes.

**Learn Policy** “Would you like to learn more about Families USA’s policy proposals? 0 = definitely not to 10 = definitely yes.



**Stand** “How likely are you to stand with Families USA to press government on health care reform?” 0 = definitely not to 10 = definitely yes.

**Trust** “How much do you trust Families USA to advocate on your behalf?” 0 = not at all to 10 = completely.