Power to the Partner: Collaboration, Representation, and Influence in American Lobbying

Book Prospectus

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Overview

Members of historically marginalized groups such as women, people of color, and low-income people struggle to gain adequate representation in American politics. Barriers to political participation and biased electoral incentives lead representatives to downweight the needs of their disadvantaged constituents. And, legacies of slavery, voter disenfranchisement, and expropriation often prevent such groups from accumulating resources necessary to access opportunities available to political elites.

However, the interests of such vulnerable communities *do* occasionally gain significant political and policy traction. These gains often occur through organizational advocacy. But, many social and economic justice organizations are newer entrants to politics and face significant limitations. These groups have fewer members, smaller budgets, and more limited agenda space than private and professional groups. They are often funded by government grant programs, charitable foundations, and membership dues, leaving them vulnerable to the preferences of political actors, patrons, and active members. Their advocacy is thus limited in scope and volume and plagued by representational bias – bias in favor of their most privileged constituents.

In response, these organizational advocates have come to rely on specific tactics to mediate their intra- and extra-organizational constraints, including, prominently, the formation of *coalitions*. Lobbying coalitions are a common interest group strategy. They allow individual groups, particularly those representing weaker, more diffuse interests, to overcome barriers to advocacy and are considered a critical and effective lobbying tactic. Scholars have

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reported that these collaborations compose the majority of lobbying activity – inclusive and exclusive of advocates for historically marginalized communities – and that organizations themselves view coalition building to be vital for achieving influence over public policy.

Power to the Partner: Collaboration, Representation, and Influence in American Lobbying provides the first comprehensive treatment of the character and outcomes of coalitional lobbying in American national politics. This book poses three fundamental questions, focused on the activities of social and economic justice organizations. First, can collaborative lobbying enhance the influence of organizational advocates? Second, do these patterns and outcomes of collaboration differ from those of mainstream interest groups? And third, does collaborative lobbying allow groups to promote more equitable, intersectionally-minded, lobbying agendas? I argue that collaborative lobbying enhances the abilities of groups to develop expert, and influential, policy recommendations. Moreover, I propose that in comparison to mainstream interest groups, collaboration uniquely enhances the advocacy efforts of social and economic justice organizations. Finally, I argue that collaboration can allow groups to advocate on behalf of a wider range of policy issues, especially those addressing the interests of their most vulnerable, intersectionally-disadvantaged, constituents.

To measure collaboration, I introduce a novel dataset of co-signature patterns within advocacy efforts targeting the American federal bureaucracy through the notice-and-comment process – the most common target of interest group lobbying. Groups often use this process to pursue their advocacy, in large part by suggesting regulatory language through public comments. I use this dataset to identify policy advocacy occurring in coalitions through the incidence of co-signed public comments and use plagiarism detection software to determine a comment's influence by measuring the extent to which each comment's language overlaps with that of its corresponding final rule. This dataset includes information on over 15,000 coalition members advocating on 2,400 agency rules proposed by 150 agencies over a 17-year period (2000-2016).

Using these data, I demonstrate that collaboration is a valuable lobbying tool with substantial and pointed consequences for representation and influence in advocacy agenda-setting and the American rulemaking process. This finding has significant implications for our understanding of inequality and networks in lobbying, organizational behavior, and democratic legitimacy in administrative policymaking. Practically, this work identifies effective lobbying tactics for the policy representation of vulnerable groups and concludes by prescribing strategies for the mediation of representational bias in advocacy and policymaking – of

value to organizational leaders and political activists.

Expected Contributions

As organizational advocacy strategies gain greater public attention – high-profile exposés describing women's organizations' advocacy tactics recently appeared in *The Washington Post* and *The Daily Beast* – both scholars and practitioners have heightened concern for the patterns underlying and outcomes of organizational choices, particularly by those groups representing vulnerable communities. This book is a timely and relevant contribution to this conversation.

Empirically, due to limited data availability, there is little research on interest group coalitions. As of August 2022, only five published articles and two books have explored the subject, six of which focus their empirical efforts on a small number of cases and on lobbying activity in the legislative setting. In contrast, this book leverages modern text analysis tools to introduce a novel, large-N dataset of coalitional lobbying efforts representative of the population of nationally active interest groups in an under-studied and consequential policy process: federal agency rulemaking. This project thus represents the first comprehensive, book-length treatment of lobbying coalitions in American national and regulatory politics.

Theoretically, this project speaks to growing bodies of research on advocacy by social and economic justice organizations and regulatory lobbying, and established bodies of research on American policymaking and public administration. It responds directly to calls for research on coalitional lobbying by Frank Baumgartner, Jeffrey Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David Kimball, and Beth Leech's *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why* (Chicago, 2009) and Dara Strolovitch's *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics* (Chicago, 2007). It is in close conversation with Robin Phinney's *Strange Bedfellows: Interest Group Coalitions, Diverse Partners, and Influence in American Social Policy* (Cambridge, 2017) in its study of coalition building and influence, though it differs in its focus on regulatory lobbying, large-N empirical approach, and examination of all major topics on the national policy agenda. Finally, this work is fundamentally concerned with collective action and people power in American democracy; as such, it connects to Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa's *Prisms of the People: Power & Organizing in Twenty-First-Century America* (Chicago, 2021) – a story of mobilization and grassroots organizing in modern politics.

Target Market and Likely Audience

This book threads several timely and important topics: organizational representation, advocacy strategy, and bureaucratic policymaking. This work will be of interest to students and scholars of American political institutions, public administration, interest group politics, identity politics, inequality, and collective action and organizing. It will thus be of use in graduate and advanced undergraduate courses on American political institutions, public policy processes, bureaucratic politics, interest group politics, the politics of identity, the politics of inequality, and political advocacy and activism. This book is also designed to be accessible to an audience of practitioners. Technical and advanced statistical details are discussed largely in appendices and the main-text discusses empirical findings broadly, focusing on examples, applications, and prescriptions. Anecdotes from elite interviews are also integrated throughout the book to enhance the richness of the text and underscore the consequence of the research findings.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: The Power of Partnership. Advocacy organizations provide one of the only consistent sources of representation for historically marginalized communities in the United States. This opening chapter explains why their work plays such an important role in mitigating representational disparities in politics and policy, particularly in the American rulemaking process. I describe how prior scholarship on inequality and representation has paid limited attention to the role of these organizational advocates, and scholarship on their advocacy has focused nearly entirely on representation in legislative policymaking. In contrast, this book provides a unified theory of advocacy by social and economic justice organizations in the most consequential – and opaque – national policymaking process: federal agency rulemaking. This chapter introduces the book's core argument that advocacy organizations representing historically marginalized communities *strategically collaborate* to further their influence over policy outcomes and to promote more equitable, intersectionally-minded advocacy. The chapter concludes with a roadmap of the book's structure, which roughly tracks the arc of the advocacy process.

Chapter 2: Collaboration as Compensation. Policy advocacy is expensive and arduous, particularly in the regulatory context. Because the arguments I make rest on collaboration as a means of compensation for social and economic justice organizations, it is important to provide readers with a basic understanding of interest group behavior and the regulatory

policymaking process. I begin by putting the role of organized interests in a historical context to explain their prominence in our current governmental system. I then describe the origins of social and economic justice interest groups in social movements for women's rights and civil rights in the early and mid-1900s, their unique role as "compensatory representatives" in American politics, and the barriers they face in political advocacy. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how organizations strategically build coalitions to compensate for these barriers and how their targets – in this case, agency rules – guide their use of coalition tactics. In describing the unique relationship between coalition tactics and targets, I trace the process by which federal agencies develop, publicize, and finalize their rules and the entry points for organizational advocacy in this process. Throughout this chapter, I offer vignettes from interviews conducted with policy directors of advocacy organizations and agency bureaucrats.

Chapter 3: A Text-as-Data Measurement Approach. This chapter tackles the challenge of collecting large-N data on organizational collaboration – an informal activity with little to no documentation. Unlike organizations and lobbyists, which are required to submit tax documents and disclosure reports, most coalitions develop on an ad hoc basis without fixed or named memberships. I begin by describing the impact of this data problem on prior scholarship and introduce the innovative solution used in this book: the *Collaborative Regulatory Advocacy Dataset*, an original dataset tracking coalitions through co-signature patterns on public comments and comprising information on over 15,000 organizations advocating on 2,400 rules issued by 150 agencies over a 17-year period (2000-2016). Using these data, I explore patterns of collaboration across organizational types, resource levels, and policy and agency characteristics.

Chapter 4: Collaboration and Influence. This chapter develops and tests the first portion of the book's theoretical argument – that collaboration boosts the influence of social and economic justice groups lobbying federal agencies. I describe the expectations of regulatory advocacy and the incentives of agency bureaucrats to emphasize the unique capabilities of organizational partnership. I show that across advocacy efforts, social and economic justice groups bear greater influence over agency rulemaking when they collaborate. This analysis highlights the important role that a simple tactic – coalition-building – plays in elevating policy ideas and mediating representational disparities in rulemaking and lobbying.

Chapter 5: Diverse Collaboration. Coalitions come in many forms. The most striking collaborations consist of "strange bedfellows" – for instance, social justice groups working with business groups, or liberal and conservative organizations joining forces. These diverse

collaborations are common and, when formed, attract attention. This chapter examines common types of diverse coalitions and their influence over lobbying outcomes. I argue that coalitions with organizational, constituent, and resource diversity exert greater influence over the rulemaking process than those that are homogeneous. I show that these diverse collaborations do, in fact, enjoy this privilege, but find evidence of a threshold effect – wherein the entry of diversity, rather than a greater degree of diversity, is most consequential for coalition influence. In contrast to the popular narrative of bureaucratic imperialism, this chapter offers evidence of a more legitimate and participatory policy process, where the interests of diverse – pluralistic – coalitions are favored.

Chapter 6: Collaboration in Context. The American lobbying environment is increasingly crowded, competitive, and costly. The wealthiest, most privileged, interests often reign supreme. Can strategic collaboration level the playing field? This chapter develops and tests the next portion of the book's theoretical argument – that collaboration lends greater benefits and outcomes to social and economic justice-oriented interest groups than their mainstream counterparts. By replicating the analyses of Chapters 4 and 5 using data on collaborative regulatory advocacy by mainstream interest groups, I show that coalition building does indeed uniquely benefit organizations representing historically marginalized communities.

Chapter 7: Collaboration and Representation. This chapter develops and tests the final portion of the book's theoretical argument. I explain how, from an organizational perspective, collaboration is a complex but useful tactic for *intersectional* advocacy. Due to stringent resource limitations, social and economic justice organizations are often beholden to the preferences of their patrons and active members, many of whom represent the identities and promote the priorities of the groups' most advantaged constituents. As such, their advocacy on behalf of their most vulnerable constituents – those with intersectional disadvantage – falls short. I argue that collaborative strategy allows these groups to advocate on behalf of issues concerning these constituents by conserving resources and avoiding the ire of members and patrons through the "cover" provided by coalitions. Using the *Collaborative Regulatory Advocacy Dataset* in conjunction with a novel, hand-coded measure of the occurrence of intersectional advocacy, I demonstrate that coalition work and financial resources moderate organizations' pursuit of intersectional advocacy.

Chapter 8: Conclusion. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of the book's findings for the study and practice of advocacy-based representation in American policymaking. While efforts to promote the interests of marginalized communities do not

often succeed, this book sketches a portrait of resolute and conscious organizational actors that strategically collaborate to compensate for barriers to representational equality. The evidence demonstrates that this tactic is, in fact, an effective tool for mediating representational bias in organizational agenda-setting and public policymaking. I conclude by prescribing a series of practices that organizational leaders and activists may apply to enhance their collaborative advocacy. This book is certain to engage ongoing popular and scholarly debates regarding organizational behavior, participatory democracy, and intersectional frameworks in policymaking.

Manuscript Details

The manuscript totals approximately 57,000 words. Portions of Chapters 4 and 7 are published in the February 2022 issues of the *American Political Science Review* and the *Policy Studies Journal*. However, these chapter portions contain analyses based on data updated since the original publications; the manuscript as a whole consists primarily of original content.

Author Biography

Maraam A. Dwidar (Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin, 2020) is an Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. In Fall 2022, she is a Visiting Fellow in the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University. Her award-winning research – which focuses on organized interests, representation, and bureaucratic rulemaking in American politics – has been published in numerous outlets, including the *American Political Science Review*, the *Policy Studies Journal*, and the *Journal of Black Studies*. Prior to entering academia, she worked as a researcher for the Brookings Institution and the California Civic Engagement Project.