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The collaboration between interest groups and political parties in multi-party democracies: Party system dynamics and the effect of power and ideology

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Abstract

Whereas many advanced democracies have a long-standing tradition of collaboration between parties and interest groups, it is still contested what drives such collaboration. Linking data on political parties with survey data from over 750 Danish and Dutch interest groups we find evidence of groups focusing on collaboration with large and ideologically moderate parties in both systems. However, our findings also indicate that the importance of power and ideology for interest group-party collaboration is conditioned by crucial aspects of the institutional context in which such collaboration occurs related to party system dynamics and coalition governance. In Denmark, where governments tend to alternate between left and right, collaboration between parties and interest groups is more likely to follow a similar left-right division. In contrast, such collaboration is more likely to reflect a division between core and marginal parties in the Netherlands, where change in government composition is typically only partial.

Keywords

coalition government, interest groups, left-right politics, legislative strength

Collaboration between interest groups and parties is a cornerstone of democratic governance. In modern democracies, parties are often not directly in touch with the voters. Instead they rely on interest groups to represent the concerns of the public when setting public policy. In this way, the interaction between groups and parties plays a crucial role for how representation works in practice. The pattern of collaboration between groups and parties shapes both the character of public policies as well as the quality of democracy. At the end of the 19th century close links developed between ideologically aligned parties and groups in Europe. Traditional links between parties and groups have weakened (Katz and Mair, 1995). Groups still interact with parties and party politicians today but these contacts are less institutionalized and structured than in the past (Allern and Bale, 2012; Rasmussen and Lindeboom, 2013). Despite a number of recent additions to the literature on parties and interest groups (see e.g. Allern, 2010; Rasmussen, 2012; Rasmussen and Lindeboom, 2013, 2014), the overall body of literature on this relationship is still

sparse compared to separate studies of parties or interest groups. Whereas many of the classical works on political representation took an encompassing perspective incorporating both parties and groups (Easton, 1957; Schattschneider, 1948; Truman, 1951), the study of parties and groups later became separated into two communities with only a small subset of studies looking at the relation between the two (Allern, 2010; Heaney, 2010).

Our key contribution is to determine how characteristics of the party system affect with which parties interest groups cooperate. A common factor considered in the literature is

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whether group relations to parties are directed towards those with similar policy preferences or are driven by other concerns, e.g. the power of specific parties and politicians (for an overview, see Hojnacki and Kimball, 1998). We show that the effect of power and ideology on the dynamics of party-group collaboration depends on the institutional context in which groups and parties interact. Specifically, we test whether patterns of cabinet formation (wholesale or partial alteration) influence the emphasis groups place on collaborating with ideologically aligned versus powerful parties. Extending Peter Mair's work on the structure of party competition (1997), we argue that multiparty systems may experience different patterns of party-group collaboration depending on whether cabinet formation tends to be wholesale or partial. In the former, left and right-wing governments alternate and party competition is bipolar whereas, in the latter, there is partial alteration and the key distinction is between core and marginal parties. Our argument is that these party system dynamics have implications for not only the interaction of the parties themselves but also their exchanges with interest groups.

Relying on survey data with responses from more than 750 Danish and Dutch interest groups we find similarities in the factors determining party-group links in the Netherlands and Denmark, with groups being more likely to interact with large parties and parties close to the political centre. However, our study indicates that the relative importance of power and ideology for party-group collaboration is conditioned by the institutional context in which such collaboration occurs in line with our expectations. Party size has less effect in the Danish system with a tradition of wholesale cabinet alteration than in the Dutch one where partial alteration is the norm and cabinets are formed around the three large centre parties. In contrast, the tendency for trade unions and environmental interest groups to interact with left-wing parties is weaker in the Netherlands than in Denmark where coalitions alternate between the left and the right. In this way, we show that system-level differences do not only result in overall differences in patterns of party-group behaviour between countries but also shape the rationale underlying the state-of-play between parties and groups within them.

Party-group collaboration

In Easton's classical model of a political system, parties and interest groups are seen as transmission belts between the public and the system (Easton, 1957). The important difference between the two is that parties run for office whereas interest groups do not (Schattschneider, 1948). However, there is potential for exchange between them, since they both possess a different portfolio of resources attractive to the other. According to an exchange logic, groups get the opportunity to influence decision-making by interacting with parties, and parties benefit from the expertise, public support

and sometimes also financial contributions from interest groups (Allern et al., 2007; Warner, 2000; Witko, 2009). Just as the prospects of obtaining mutually beneficial gains from interaction may influence degrees of institutionalization in party-group interaction, they may increase the strength of collaboration between the two.

The study of parties and interest groups is sparse compared to separate studies of the two and has become more polarized than in the classical works on political representation (Easton, 1957; Schattschneider, 1948; Truman, 1951). Studies of interest representation have developed a narrower focus compared to the days of the 'group approach' when research often had a system focus (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998). Especially in corporatist Western European states, it has been more important to lobby the bureaucracy than parliament because of the institutionalized relationships between executives and interest groups (Schmitter, 1979). Recently corporatism has declined and parliamentary power has increased. In parallel the study of the interaction between interest groups and national parliaments/the European Parliament has grown (Binderkrantz, 2003; Christiansen and Rommetvedt, 1999; Crepaz, 1994; Kohler-Koch, 1997; Wessels, 1999).

Another group of studies have examined the interaction between interest groups and individual legislators. It has centered on the question of whether interest groups lobby actors that are ideologically aligned or others, e.g. powerful legislators (for an overview, see Hojnacki and Kimball, 1998). Most evidence points towards the former, but some findings are less clear-cut: As an example, Crombez (2002) argues that it is optimal to lobby 'friends' during agenda-setting and 'pivotal policy-makers' at the vote stage. According to Marshall (2014) interest groups have an incentive to lobby non-ideologically-aligned representatives if coalition formation is unpredictable.

Party political studies typically focus on specific groups, parties and/or types of links rather than conduct large-N studies with variation in all these factors. There are many case studies of the relationships between the players involved in the 'traditional' or highly institutionalized links rooted in social cleavage structures (see e.g. Allern et al., 2007; Quinn, 2010; Sundberg, 2003; Thomas, 2001; Warner, 2000). Pogunkte (2000, 2002) includes a greater range of actors but focuses on formalized rather than informal contacts, which account for the majority of party-group contacts in recent years (Rasmussen and Lindeboom, 2013). Allern (2010) includes all Norwegian parties, many group types and different types of links even if her work, like the remaining share of the party politics literature, does not analyze the informal links in detail. Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013) conduct a cross-national study of different links between many group and party types in three European countries but analyze how interest group characteristics can explain variation in overall links rather links between specific parties and interest groups.

Conceptualizing party-group collaboration

Party-group links have been conceptualized and measured in multiple ways (Allern and Bale, 2012). A key distinction can be made between ‘behavioral’ and ‘attitudinal’ measures. The former judge links based on the nature and volume of behavior between groups and parties (see e.g. Allern, 2010). Groups and parties are said to be linked if they possess certain organizational overlaps or have held specific activities together. In contrast, we use an attitudinal measure, which judges links based on the perception of the actors involved to capture aspects difficult to map as objective facts. This means that, rather than refer to frequency of certain types of activities (such as specific types of meetings), we used the respondents’ assessments of their level of collaboration distinguishing between no, low, regular and intense collaboration. By collaboration we refer to patterns of behavior where group and parties work together to achieve shared goals. We do not refute ‘behavioral’ measures, which have been successfully used in existing research, but employ an ‘attitudinal’ one as a result of its distinct purposes for our research question.

First, we avoid having to specify a list of possible ‘contacts’ between groups and parties in which they would need to engage in order to qualify as cooperation partners beforehand. Existing research underlines that the challenge to do so is greater than one might expect. In a recent study (Rasmussen and Lindeboom, 2013), interest groups only reported having had a range of different contacts with a limited number of parliamentary parties even if the list of possible ‘contacts’ offered to them was long and based on existing research. The category for ‘other contacts’ was one of the most frequently selected categories indicating that many of the ad hoc activities between groups and parties, which may be the centre point of today’s collaboration between them, are not easy to specify. If the measures used in existing research do not fully capture the broad range of actual activities between groups and parties, they may miss certain elements of their cooperation.

Second, and more importantly, our attitudinal approach emphasizes that cooperation is about the endurance and to some extent the content of interaction independent of the form. As a result, we do not operate a fixed ‘threshold’ for respondents to say e.g. that they have had regular collaboration, such as requiring them to have had a specific type of activity together or conducted certain activities a fixed number of times. By allowing the respondents to judge the contents of a given type of activity, we underline that the same number of meetings with two different parties may involve a different degree of collaboration for a given interest group. Every year in September, the chair of the largest Dutch trade union meets with the chairs of all Dutch parties. However, the fact that s/he has such a specific type of meeting a fixed number of times with a given set of

parties does not mean that her/his union regards these different parties as equally close cooperation partners.¹

Explaining party-group collaboration

The literature points to two factors as influential for the decision of interest groups and parties to collaborate: ideology and power. First, interest groups may choose to collaborate with parties that share the same policy preferences. Links between ideologically aligned parties and groups have traditionally been strong and persistent (Allern and Bale, 2012). The group literature makes clear that the tendency to lobby ‘legislative friends’ is strong (see e.g. Baumgartner and Leech, 1996; Hojnacki and Kimball, 1998; Wessels, 1999). Interest groups need ideologically aligned legislators to set the agenda. Moreover, lobbying is not simply about persuading legislators to make certain decisions but about picking *agents* that can represent the interest groups. Party-group relations are not one-shot contacts, and ‘collaboration’ often has a longer time horizon than ad hoc lobbying contacts. Even if a group occasionally seeks out a legislator from the other side of the political spectrum for strategic purposes in a one-shot interaction, the long-term pattern of cooperation may still be dominated by an ideological line of conflict (such as the left-right one) since ultimately interest groups have an interest in fulfilling their policy priorities.

Alternatively, groups do not only act based on strategic calculation but may continue using energy on ideological aligned parties to whom they had strong institutionalized bonds in the past because of institutional stickiness. Hence, as a result of sunk costs, interest groups may keep existing bonds to parties even when the power status of these parties changes.² Changing allegiances may be costly for groups because they could lose credibility with their own support base. Trade union supporters may see an agreement between a trade union and a right-wing government as betrayal of the ‘working class’ cause. Interest groups have to deal with the tension between responding to their base while also negotiating with ideological opponents (Sabel, 1981).

If groups collaborate with ideologically aligned parties, interest groups with left-wing views will be more likely to interact with left- than right-wing parties and vice-versa. Whereas the policy preferences of all interest group types cannot be established, some interest group types are ideologically aligned with either the right or the left side of the political spectrum. Based on a more refined coding of our dataset using the Interarena coding scheme (Baroni et al., 2014), we make a theoretical distinction between social, business and other groups for theoretical reasons. We regard trade unions, environmental groups, and national and international humanitarian interest organizations as aligned with left-wing parties. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to these as ‘social’ interest groups. Conversely,

business groups are regarded as aligned with the right-wing parties. In summary:

- 1) *Ideology hypothesis*: Interest groups have a stronger degree of collaboration with parties with whom they are ideologically aligned.

Second, we look at the importance of power. It follows directly from an exchange perspective that interest groups should be particularly keen to establish close relations with powerful parties. As outlined, such power concerns play a role for the volume of group interaction with parliaments as a whole (see e.g. Binderkrantz, 2003; Christiansen and Rommetvedt, 1999; Crepaz, 1994). There is also evidence that groups contact influential individual legislators. According to Marshall (2014: 2), lobbying powerful members of the European Parliament is important because of frequent uncertainty who will form ‘the winning coalition’ on an issue. Interest groups are therefore more likely to lobby strategically placed members, e.g. those who hold seats on relevant committees and are spokesperson on an issue. This parallels US research where groups frequently contact influential legislators, such as party leaders and committee and subcommittee chairs (for an overview, see Hojnacki and Kimball, 1998).

Based on a similar logic, we can also expect ‘power considerations’ to play a role for collaboration at the party level. At least three characteristics make parties powerful: 1) being part of the governing coalition, 2) representing the median legislator and 3) having a high number of seats.

A key distinction in parliamentary democracies is between the government and the opposition. The government coalition sets the parliamentary agenda for the coming period in the coalition agreement (Timmermans and Andeweg, 2000). Moreover, the government presents the budget, initiates most of the legislation and typically coordinates compromises on issues as they arise. Motions and amendments written by government parties are more likely to find a majority than those of opposition parties; therefore they are more likely to fulfill their promises (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). This makes government parties attractive partners for interest groups:

- 2) *Government participation hypothesis*: Interest groups have a stronger degree of collaboration with government than opposition parties.

The literature on cabinet formation emphasizes two additional power bases of parties: their location in the political spectrum and their size within the legislature. The left-right dimension is the dominant ideological dimension in parliamentary voting, in particular in the Netherlands and Denmark (Hansen, 2008; Otjes, 2011). Under simple majority voting, the median member of parliament on this dimension acts as the pivotal voter by being the one who makes or breaks the majority (Black, 1948). The closer a

party is to the political centre, the more likely it is that the median legislator is among its members. Because governments are likely to include the median party, centrist parties are powerful during government formation (Laver and Schofield, 1990). Therefore, interest groups are likely to focus on centrist parties who are more powerful in influencing policy decisions independently of their groups’ own policy positions:

- 3) *Party centrism hypothesis*: The closer a party is to the ideological centre, the stronger its degree of interest group collaboration will be.

The final source of power for parties is their size. The number of seats is an important determinant of a party’s political relevance (Sartori, 1976). As parties prefer coalitions with a minimal number of parties, larger parties are more likely to be represented in the coalition and they are also likely to supply ‘the formateur’ (Bäck and Dumont, 2008), who shapes the coalition agreement itself, as well as the prime minister, who exerts considerable control over policy-making (Glasgow et al., 2011). Third, statistically speaking larger parties are also more likely to include the pivotal lawmakers than smaller parties. Finally, parliaments distribute resources (such as staff) in proportion to party size (Brauninger and Debus, 2009). All these assets give large parties a high chance of influencing policy:

- 4) *Party size hypothesis*: The higher the number of seats a party has, the stronger its degree of interest group collaboration will be.

We propose that the extent to which ideology and power play a role when it comes to shaping party-group collaboration depends on the nature of coalition governance and party system dynamics. A party system is more than a collection of parties. It is also crucial how these parties interact. A key distinction between party systems is to what extent changes in cabinet composition are typically *wholesale* with shifts between the right- and left-wing of the ideological spectrum or *partial* with at least one core party remaining in power (Ieraci, 2012; Mair, 1997). In some countries, cabinets of left-wing parties and cabinets of right-wing parties alternate and the left and the right never govern together. If the left-wing parties have a majority they will govern, if the right-wing ones do they will. If the cabinet changes, this change is wholesale. In other countries, the parties of the centre-left and centre-right govern together, and after the elections some parties stay in the coalition, while others rotate in and out. Here, the exact composition of the governing coalition is less predictable after the elections, but one can be certain that one of the governing parties stays in power. The key division in such systems is between core and marginal parties (Smith, 1989).

Linking party system dynamics to party-group interactions allows us to elaborate on how the current and expected future character of the coalition cabinet of a political system may influence the strength of ideology and power in explaining party-group collaboration. We predict that ideology plays a stronger role in systems with wholesale alterations between left-wing and right-wing parties than in those with partial alterations in coalition cabinets. Since societal cleavages may be more likely to exist in systems with wholesale alteration to begin with, one would expect a higher likelihood that party-group relations are structured in line with these cleavages in such systems. Moreover, according to Marshall (2014), uncertainty about coalition formation affects party-group relations. In cases of high uncertainty, groups have to lobby both ideologically aligned and unaligned representatives since both may ultimately end up joining the coalition. Such uncertainty exists in systems with partial alteration where – even if one can be sure that one of the main governing parties remains in government – the exact combination of future coalition partners is uncertain. This stimulates groups to be less ideologically oriented. In contrast, groups have less of an incentive to maintain strong relations with parties across the political spectrum in a system in which wholesale alteration is more likely. Here, left- and right-wing parties are unlikely to govern together, in which case groups can focus more narrowly on ideologically aligned groups:

- 5) *Ideology interaction hypothesis*: The extent to which interest groups have a stronger degree of collaboration with parties with whom they are ideologically aligned is stronger in systems with a high likelihood of wholesale as opposed to partial alteration in future coalitions.

Conversely, we expect that other explanatory factors play a stronger role in a system with partial as opposed to wholesale alteration. First, *centrism* is more of an advantage in a system with partial alteration. In such a system, coalitions typically consist of core parties located close to the ideological centre, and ideologically extreme parties are less likely to participate in government. In contrast, extreme parties are more likely to have coalition potential in systems with wholesale alteration between ideological left-wing and right-wing coalitions, as they may be needed for either a left- or right-wing majority. Second, as cabinet formation is less predictable in party systems with partial alteration, *party size* matters more for whether parties will enter the government coalition there. In contrast, in countries with wholesale alteration, the determinant is whether the bloc obtains a majority, which leaves smaller parties at a comparative advantage. When the coalition changes only partially, it is also more likely that the big parties remain in power. Our last hypotheses are therefore:

- 6) *Party centrism interaction hypothesis*: The positive effect of party centrism on party collaboration is stronger in systems with a high likelihood of partial as opposed to wholesale party alteration in future coalitions.
- 7) *Party size interaction hypothesis*: the positive effect of seats on party collaboration is stronger in systems with a high likelihood of partial as opposed to wholesale party alteration in future coalitions.

Analysis design and data: Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands

To test our idea that structural differences in government alteration shape party-group collaboration, we compare the Netherlands and Denmark. In the Netherlands government formation is typically characterized by partial alteration, and in Denmark by wholesale alteration. Our study constitutes a most similar systems design: these systems differ in this crucial respect, but are similar in a number of other aspects that can be expected to influence party-group collaboration.

Both countries are multiparty parliamentary democracies with a proportionally elected parliament and coalition governments. In the period studied, there were 5.4 effective parliamentary parties in the Dutch Tweede Kamer and 5.3 in the Danish Folketing. The two party systems are strikingly similar: in both systems left-wing and right-wing parties hold each other in balance roughly, the right is divided between liberals, conservatives and rightwing populists and the left between social-democrats, social-liberals, left-wing greens and socialists. In addition, both countries have strong parliaments with MPs organized in disciplined parliamentary parties (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011; Skjæveland, 2001).

Both countries are corporatist systems (Siaroff, 1999). In the Netherlands, government interacts with advisory bodies which include interest group representatives. Links between parties and interest groups were very strong in the era of pillarization (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002). In the 1970s, the ties between specific parties and groups began to weaken (Van Schendelen, 1999). In Denmark, the state has also granted interest groups privileged, regularized and formalized access to the bureaucracy (Arter, 1999). As in the Netherlands, specific organizations and specific parties enjoyed special ties but they have weakened somewhat over the years. Instead, lobbying parliament gained importance in the last decades of the 20th century (Christiansen and Rommetvedt, 1999).

The Netherlands and Denmark are also similar in their system of party finance: parties rely on public finances and membership fees (Weekers, 2008). Danish parties receive between 66 and 99% of their finance from the government (Weekers, 2008) and Dutch parties receive between 28 and

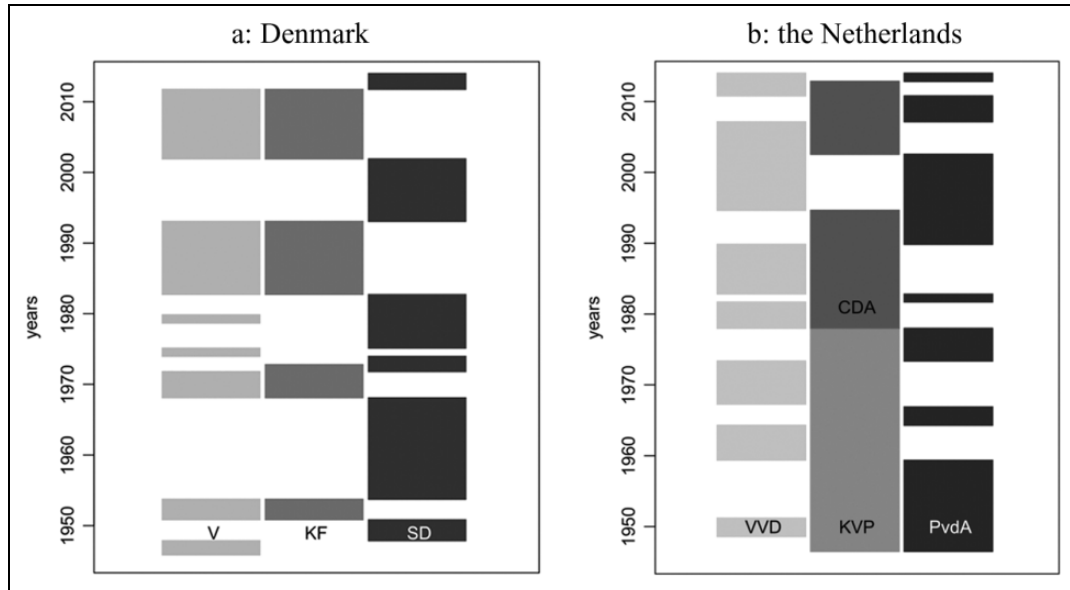


Figure 1. Government participation of core parties.

The figures show in which years the Liberals (VVD), Christian-democrats (KVP and CDA) and Labour (PvdA) were in the Dutch government and the Liberals (V), Conservatives (KF) and Social Democrats (SD) were in the Danish government.

78% (own calculations). Hence, whereas interest groups play a key role in generating income for parties elsewhere, this is not the case in the countries examined.³

Denmark and the Netherlands differ crucially in the nature of their coalition governments. Figure 1a shows whether the three major parties in Denmark, the Social-Democrats (SD), Conservative People's Party (KF) and the Liberal Party (V), were in the government since the Second World War: either the Social-Democrats governed with participation or parliamentary support from other left-wing or centrist parties (for 33 years), or the major right-wing parties governed with support or participation from other right-wing or centrist parties (for 29 years).⁴ In the period studied, the coalitions of Liberals and Conservatives were supported by the Danish People's Party (DF). In this way, the major cabinet parties in Denmark have traditionally been from *either* the left or the right.

In contrast, all Dutch cabinets have been formed around coalitions of two of the three core parties: the Liberal Party (VVD), the Labour Party (PvdA) and the largest Christian-democratic party, i.e. the Catholic People's Party (KVP) before 1977 and Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA) after 1977. As Figure 1b shows, the Christian-democrats governed either with the VVD (for 31 years) or with the PvdA (for 28 years). During an eight-year period in the 1990s the Christian-democrats were in opposition and the VVD and the PvdA governed together. During the period studied the majority coalition was formed by the CDA, PvdA and a small orthodox Christian party, ChristianUnion (CU). There are no constitutional reasons for the difference in coalition formation patterns between the two countries:

rather they appear to be an expression of different historical traditions. We argue that these different traditions shape the party-group interactions.

Our study is conducted by linking a 2009 survey of more than 750 Danish and Dutch interest groups about their degree of collaboration with all parties represented in the national parliament with background data on the parties. The response rates for the Danish and Dutch surveys are 56 and 55% respectively with a total number of 506 Danish and 273 Dutch respondents. There is no single cross-national, comparative source of interest groups for the two countries. Instead, we surveyed interest groups which have used different, comparable formal tools to contact their political systems. In Denmark, groups a) mentioned on consultation lists and/or who submitted evidence in national government consultations issued from 1 January to 30 June 2008 and/or b) who sent letters to parliamentary committees on bills from 2004 to 2008 were surveyed. In the Netherlands, interest groups who a) sent letters to the parliament from January 2008 to the summer recess 2008 and/or b) participated in parliamentary roundtables and hearings from January 2007 to the end of June 2008 were surveyed. Due to institutional differences in the tools used to contact the political system in the two countries the tools are not 100 percent identical. However, even if we had been able to rely on identical tools in the countries groups, there might be systematic differences in how groups use them. The best is therefore to rely on tools as comparable as possible while ensuring a sufficient number of respondents per country for causal inference.⁵

Our online Appendix displays frequencies for a more fine-grained set of group types among our respondents

Table 1. Multinomial regression results (1) Outcome 'no collaboration', baseline: low collaboration.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.89 (0.21)	1.00 (0.22)	1.61*** (0.30)
Government	0.77 (0.13)	0.77 (0.13)	0.90 (0.11)
Seats	0.09*** (0.08)	0.09*** (0.08)	0.07*** (0.04)
Extremism	8.96*** (6.01)	9.42*** (6.64)	3.71*** (1.16)
Type = Social ^a	0.87 (0.16)	0.66 (0.17)	0.46*** (0.08)
Type = Other ^a	1.00 (0.11)	0.85 (0.12)	0.80 (0.15)
Right	1.07 (0.17)	0.85 (0.17)	0.61*** (0.11)
Netherlands	0.73* (0.13)	0.73* (0.13)	0.29*** (0.08)
Right * Type = Social ^a		1.58 (0.46)	1.89*** (0.39)
Right * Type = Other ^a		1.32* (0.22)	1.28 (0.25)
Seats * Netherlands			0.57 (0.78)
Extremism * Netherlands			5.14 (5.61)
Type = Social ^a * Netherlands			2.94*** (0.88)
Type = Other ^a * Netherlands			1.11 (0.20)
Right * Netherlands			1.88** (0.46)
Right * Type = Social ^a * Netherlands			0.71 (0.23)
Right * Type = Other ^a * Netherlands			1.28 (0.29)
N	5607	5607	5607
Pseudo R-squared	0.04	0.05	0.05

^aBaseline is 'business groups'. Standard errors clustered by party. 0.1 > *; > 0.05 > **; > 0.01 > ***.

based on a recoding of the more detailed Interarena interest group scheme (Baroni et al., 2014) into meaningful theoretical categories for our analysis. Two independent coders coded group types based on group websites and disagreements were checked by a third experienced coder. The proportions of different group types are fairly similar, even though there are differences between the two systems in e.g. the share of business groups. To make sure these differences do not bias our findings, we explicitly control for the main categories of groups. We distinguish between social (trade unions, environmental organizations and humanitarian organizations), business and other types of groups (used as the baseline).⁶

Our unit of analysis is each individual party-group-dyad rather than the total number of survey responses. As background characteristics for the parties remain the same no matter with which interest groups they collaborate, we cluster the standard errors by party (Moulton, 1990). We use multinomial logistic regression, using the middle category as the baseline, as the Brant test indicates that we cannot use ordered logistic regression. Our online appendix displays descriptives.

Our dependent variable is a survey question asking interest groups: 'overall how would you describe your degree of collaboration with the following [Danish/Dutch] parties.' For each party in parliament they had four options: 'No collaboration', 'Low collaboration', 'Regular collaboration' or 'Intensive collaboration'. Because the category 'intensive collaboration' was only used for 6% of the answers, we merged it with regular collaboration.⁷ To test whether groups collaborate with ideologically aligned parties, we construct an interaction effect between group and party type. We distinguished

between right- and left-wing parties using the general left-right dimension from the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert survey (Hooghe et al., 2010). Parties were considered right-wing if they scored higher than the centre of the scale and left-wing otherwise. By using a dichotomous version of the left-right measure this variable is unrelated to our centrism variable. Moreover, as we only have dichotomous data for the interest groups, interval level data for the party positions would not be useful: we do not believe that business groups are more likely to collaborate with far-right parties than they are with centre-right parties. For party centrism we used the same expert survey (Hooghe et al., 2010) and calculated the absolute distance of parties from the centre. Higher values indicate a low degree of centrism and vice versa. We standardized the distance (which was zero to 10) from zero and one, so all variables have the same order of magnitude, which aids interpretation. All parties that held ministerial portfolios in the Danish and Dutch governments in office in 2009 are regarded as government parties, i.e. the CDA, PvdA and the CU in the Netherlands and the KF and V in Denmark.⁸ Party size is measured on the basis of the composition of parliament when the 2009 survey was conducted. Because the Dutch and Danish parliament have a different number of members we take seats as the percentage of the total seats (ignoring the seats for Greenland and the Faroe Islands in Denmark).

Analysis

We present three models and display relative risk ratios in Tables 1 and 2: the first model is a simple multivariate

Table 2. Multinomial regression results (2) Outcome ‘regular collaboration’, baseline: low collaboration.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.86 (0.15)	0.65*** (0.09)	0.57*** (0.09)
Government	1.07 (0.15)	1.09 (0.15)	0.99 (0.14)
Seats	21.86*** (9.54)	21.56*** (9.13)	14.25*** (8.33)
Extremism	0.46** (0.17)	0.44** (0.17)	0.57 (0.19)
Type = Social ^a	0.88 (0.21)	1.56*** (0.18)	1.65*** (0.04)
Type = Other ^a	0.74 (0.12)	1.02 (0.14)	1.34*** (0.15)
Right	0.96 (0.10)	1.55* (0.37)	2.02*** (0.52)
Netherlands	0.42*** (0.10)	1.52*** (0.16)	1.83 (0.37)
Right * Type = Social ^a		0.34*** (0.11)	0.28*** (0.09)
Right * Type = Other ^a		0.55* (0.15)	0.40*** (0.13)
Seats * Netherlands			4.86** (3.54)
Extremism * Netherlands			0.41 (0.39)
Type = Social ^a * Netherlands			1.09 (0.25)
Type = Other ^a * Netherlands			0.61** (0.13)
Right * Netherlands			0.69 (0.26)
Right * Type = Social ^a * Netherlands			1.44 (1.02)
Right * Type = Other ^a * Netherlands			1.83 (0.92)

^aBaseline is ‘business groups’. Standard errors clustered by party. 0.1 > *; > 0.05 > **; > 0.01 > ***.

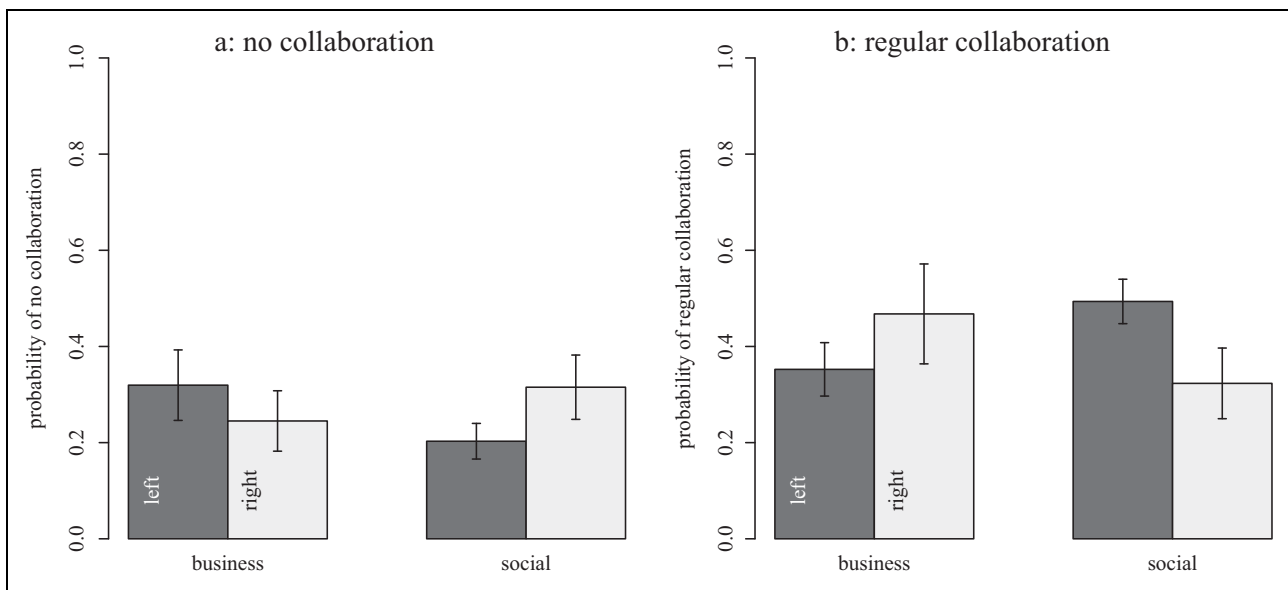


Figure 2. The effect of interest group type and party position on collaboration. Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals. Based on Model 2.

model without interactions. The second model includes the interaction between interest group type and party positions, and the third one includes the political system-level interactions.

Our first hypothesis suggests that interest groups have a stronger relationship with parties with which they are ideologically aligned. The interaction effects in Model 2 indicate that the relationship between ‘social’ interest groups and left-wing parties is indeed stronger than their relationship with right-wing parties. Figures 2a and 2b show the predicted probabilities that business and ‘social’ interest

groups have no and regular collaboration with left- and right-wing parties with 95 percent confidence intervals holding the remaining variables at their mean. It shows that ‘social’ interest groups are significantly more likely to have ‘no collaboration’ with right-wing parties than with left-wing parties and that they are significantly more likely to have regular collaboration with left-wing parties than with right-wing parties.

The relationship between business groups and right-wing parties is stronger than their relationship with left-wing parties. According to Figures 2a and 2b, business

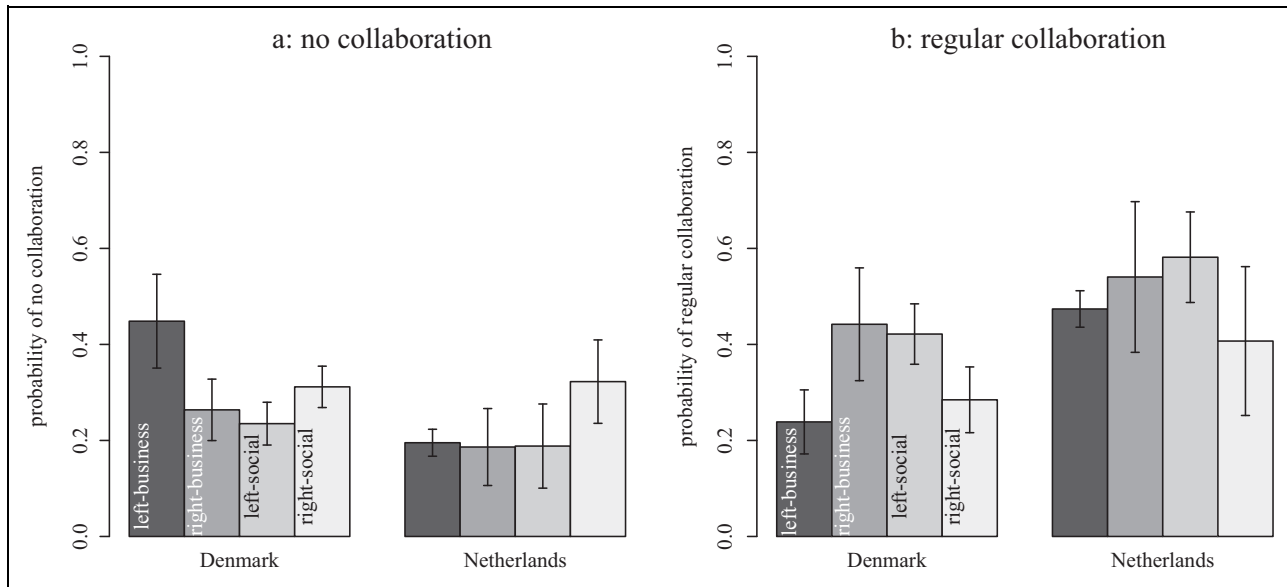


Figure 3. The effect of interest group type, party position and country on collaboration. Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals. Based on Model 3.

groups are less likely to have no collaboration with right-wing parties and they are more likely to foster regular collaboration with right-wing parties than left-wing parties. However, even if all of these differences are in the expected direction they are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, being in government never has a significant effect. In Models 1, 2 and 3, the sign indicates that interest groups are less (but not significantly less) likely to have no collaboration with government than opposition parties and more likely to have regular collaboration with government than opposition parties. There may be both statistical and substantive reasons why the effect of being in government is not significant. Even if the models do not suffer from multicollinearity, the fact that many of the government parties in the period examined were both right-wing parties and held many seats may weaken the government effect. Moreover, one should not disregard the effect of government participation for other systems given that both Denmark and the Netherlands have strong opposition parties (Andeweg et al., 2008; Christiansen and Pedersen, 2012). Hence, these traditions make them a stronger test for finding differences between government and opposition parties in practice.

We find strong evidence that, in line with the extremism hypothesis, party centrism influences collaboration. There is a strong positive and significant effect of a party's distance to the centre on levels of 'no collaboration'. The opposite is true for a party's distance to the centre and 'regular collaboration'. Interest groups are oriented towards centrist parties. In addition, they foster contacts with larger parties. In both Models 1 and 2, there is a significant and

negative relationship between the number of seats a party has and having 'no' collaboration with interest groups and a positive, significant relationship between the number of seats and having 'regular' levels of collaboration.

Next, we examine whether there are any differences in these main effects between the two political systems as a result of the differences in cabinet governance between them. The third models in Tables 1 and 2 present the results of this part of the analysis. The ideology interaction hypothesis holds that groups are more likely to collaborate intensively with ideologically aligned parties in a system with wholesale as opposed to partial cabinet alteration. It is tested with the three-way interaction between country, group and party type.

While above we found no overall, significant difference between whom the business groups collaborate with, Figures 3a and 3b also show significant differences in the collaboration patterns between business groups and left- and right-wing parties: in Denmark there is a significant difference between degree of collaboration of business groups and left- and right-wing parties in the expected direction in contrast to the Netherlands. Danish business organizations are more likely not to collaborate with left- than right-wing parties, and conversely they are more likely to have regular collaboration with right- than left-wing parties. Figures 3a and 3b also support our expectation that the relationship between 'social' interest groups and left-wing parties is stronger in Denmark than in the Netherlands. While in the Netherlands the differences in regular collaboration of 'social' interest groups with left- and right-wing parties are not significant, they are in Denmark: here the predicted probability for 'social' interest groups to have 'regular collaboration' with left-wing parties is significantly higher

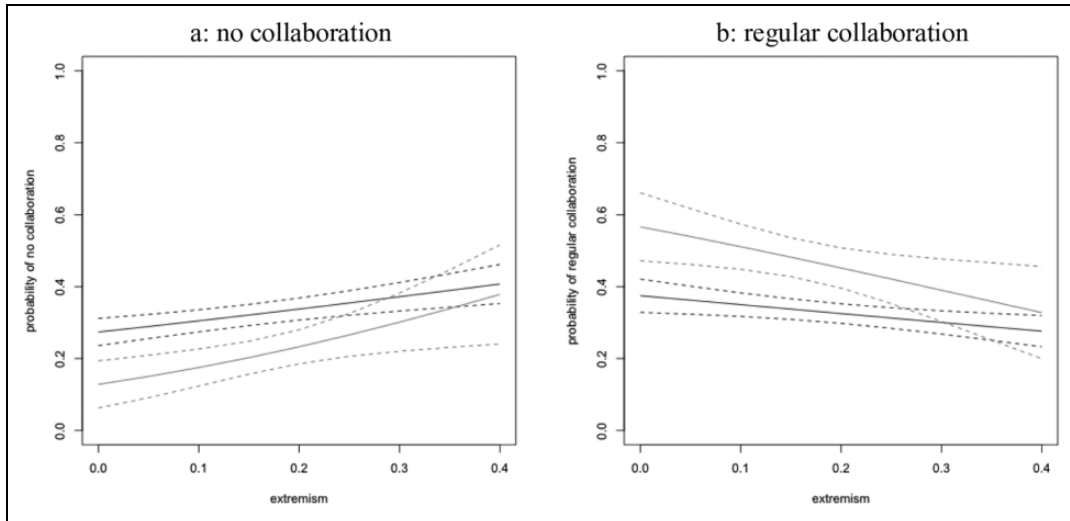


Figure 4. The effect of extremism and country on collaboration. Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals. Black lines represent Denmark; grey lines represent the Netherlands. Based on Model 3.

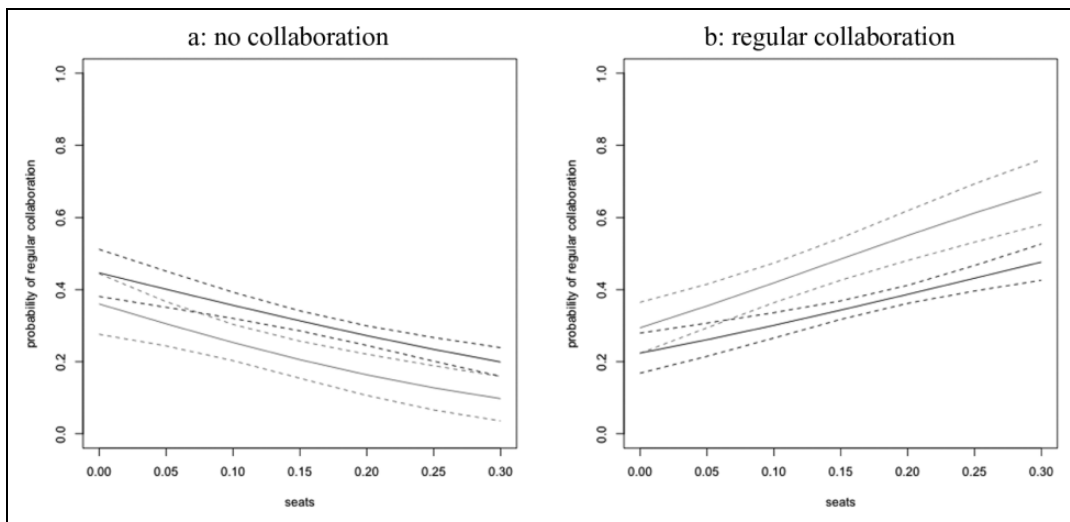


Figure 5. The effect of seats and country on collaboration. Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals. Black lines represent Denmark; grey lines represent the Netherlands. Calculated based on Model 3.

than it is for them to have collaboration with right-wing parties.

Figures 4a and 4b show that in both Denmark and the Netherlands interest groups are *less* likely to have ‘no collaboration’ and *more* likely to have ‘regular collaboration’ with centrist than extreme parties. There is also an interaction relationship in line with the prediction in the centrism interaction hypothesis: The most centrist parties from the Netherlands are significantly *less* likely to have ‘no collaboration’ with interest groups than Danish ones. They are also significantly *more* likely to have ‘regular collaboration’. This means that being centrist makes parties more appealing to interest groups in the Netherlands than it does

in Denmark. This result also supports the ideology interaction hypothesis. As parties move away from the centre, the difference between the Netherlands and Denmark decreases and the advantage that Dutch parties had disappears. Hence, the slopes are somewhat steeper in the Netherlands than in Denmark. The probability of no collaboration *increases* and the probability of regular collaboration *decreases* more rapidly in the Netherlands than in Denmark as parties become more extreme. While there was no overlap between the confidence intervals for parties with an extremism score lower than 0.25, they overlap beyond that point. This shows that there is a small but significant effect of the nature of the party system on the

level of party-group collaboration for extremists and centrists.

Finally, Figures 5a and 5b illustrate the conditional effect of different systems of cabinet governance on the relationship between party size and the chance of collaboration. In both the Netherlands and Denmark, seats have a significant effect on the probability of different degrees of collaboration. As above, however, the extent to which the 95% confidence intervals of estimates overlap changes as the values for party size increase: for the smallest parties there is no significant difference for the Netherlands and Denmark. Danish and Dutch small parties are as likely to have regular collaboration with parties. If we look at the largest parties, however, there is a significant difference: the predicted probability for interest groups to have 'regular collaboration' with large parties is higher in the Netherlands than in Denmark. Like above there are small differences in the slopes for the Netherlands and Denmark. The steeper slope of the relationship between party size and regular collaboration in the Netherlands indicates that the probability of regulation collaboration increases more rapidly with party size here than in Denmark. This corroborates the final hypothesis that the positive effect of seats on party collaboration is stronger in systems with partial as opposed to wholesale party alteration.⁹

Conclusion

Whereas interest group and party politics scholars agree that party-group collaboration is a crucial feature of democratic governance likely to shape both the nature of public policies and the quality of democracy, the question of which factors drive this collaboration is still contested. This is surprising given the important role played by interest groups and interest groups in modern democracies. In the literature, a key distinction is between ideology and power-based explanations of party group collaboration. Our study contributes to this discussion by conducting a systematic cross-national comparison of the extent to which more than 750 Danish and Dutch interest groups collaborate with parliamentary parties. This enables us to analyze party-group collaboration in a large-N, cross-national research design with a number of different interest group and party types. Party-group collaboration clearly persists in the 21st century but groups orient themselves toward a much broader range of parties than the ones with which they have traditionally been allied.

Our findings add to a sparse cross-national, comparative literature of party-group collaboration and show that, even if many studies have been concerned with assessing whether considerations of ideology and power dominate party-group collaboration, both play a role. Interest groups cooperate with moderate and large parties that are more likely to possess strategic resources, whether in government or in opposition.

Conversely, they spend less attention on extreme parties that are unlikely to possess the pivotal votes among their members.

In addition, we lay the ground for a new research agenda, which goes beyond assessing the potential trade-off between power and ideology to considering how different party systems condition the effect of the power and ideology. We demonstrate that systematic differences between influence the rationale underlying party-group collaboration by presenting evidence that differences in the dynamics of party systems shape the relative importance of factors related to power and ideology for predicting party-group collaboration. In a most similar systems comparison of the multiparty parliamentary democracies of Denmark and the Netherlands, we show how differences in the patterns of government alteration condition the causes of party-group collaboration.

As expected, ideology is more important in Denmark with a tradition of wholesale alteration: here, business groups interact with right-wing parties and 'social' interest groups interact with left-wing parties, while this pattern cannot be found in the Netherlands. In a system with wholesale alteration, groups have less incentive to maintain strong relations with parties across the political spectrum and focus on ideologically aligned parties instead since it is unlikely that both left- and right-wing parties will be in power in the future. Moreover, in the Netherlands, where partial government change is the norm and several large, moderate parties typically participate in government, the effect of party size is stronger than in Denmark where two blocs composed of smaller and large parties compete. By underlining these intersystematic implications for the intrasystematic state-of-play between parties and groups within countries we shed new light on the underlying rationale behind party-group collaboration in modern democracies.

At the same time, our findings also raise new questions, which call for additional research. Our cross-sectional two-country design forced us to focus on the conditioning impact of only one aspect of party system dynamics and cabinet governance, namely the difference between partial and wholesale alteration. Future studies with more countries or a temporal dimension (and hence a higher 'degree of freedom') may consider the conditioning impact of variation in coalition discipline or different cultures of consultation. Such research could also test whether the explanatory strength of power and ideology depends on how long a group's ideologically aligned parties have been out of power and incorporate additional explanatory variables at the interest group level.

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Supplemental material

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Notes

1. Our 'attitudinal measure' is not fundamentally different from an 'activity'-based one. In addition to asking respondents to judge their degree of collaboration with parliamentary parties, they were also asked to report whether they had 10 different categories of contacts with these parties. We have constructed a measure for each group's total number of reported activities with each party. A group's reported degree of collaboration and its overall level of activity is strongly correlated with a (Krusal and Goodman's gamma coefficient of 0.69 in our stacked dataset).
2. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.
3. A measure relying on donations would be of a 'behavioral' nature, which is less appropriate for our purpose since fiscal transfers of equal sizes to different parties would not necessarily imply that groups perceive the degree of collaboration to be similar.
4. The only exception was a shortly lived cabinet of SD and V in 1978–1979. Smaller centrist parties have participated in both left-wing and right-wing governments in Denmark in the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s.
5. The lower number of Dutch respondents is a result of the fact that we could not rely on similar consultation information for singling out the Dutch respondents as we did in Denmark. In the Netherlands, the government launched a pilot project on consultations, but did not systematically conduct public online consultations on later new pieces of policy in the period examined (Rijksdienst, 2011). Our survey includes key interest groups on major advisory committees of the Dutch government. Moreover, we included a somewhat longer time period of parliamentary activity data in the Netherlands to ensure a sufficient number of Dutch respondents.
6. As a robustness check, we have also run all our regressions with the more fine-grained categorization of groups listed in our online Appendix. The patterns reported in our existing analysis remained the same and the strength of some relationships became even stronger.
7. As a robustness check, we have also run the analysis without merging the upper categories 'regular' and 'intensive' collaboration, which does not substantially change the results.
8. The Danish and Dutch coalitions had changed composition in 2001 and 2007 respectively, allowing time for parties and

interest groups to adjust their collaboration patterns before the 2009 survey.

9. It comes as no surprise to us that the pseudo R^2 s of our models are relatively low. Rather than aiming at maximizing explained variance, our focus has been on how party characteristics affect interest group–party collaboration. As a result, we have explicitly left out explanatory variables on the interest group side in our models.

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