Coordinated policy action and flexible coalitional psychology: How evolution made humans so good at politics

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Abstract

The observation that politics makes strange bedfellows may be hackneyed, but it is also often true: Politicians and other actors in the policy process routinely align themselves on specific issues with actors with whom they otherwise have broad disagreements. This fits with social psychological research showing that humans have a coalitional psychology that is remarkably flexible, allowing us to feel strong bonds toward the coalitions to which we belong but to also break those bonds and move on to new coalitions when circumstances change. How is this flexibility possible? Here we examine the possible ways in which evolutionary forces helped shape our species' trademark flexible coalitional psychology, focusing in particular on gene-culture coevolution and cultural group selection. We conclude with some examples of coordinated policy action among erstwhile foes in contemporary politics.
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1. Introduction

In early 2015, a political coalition that included Charles and David Koch, Americans for Tax Reform, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for American Progress, and the NAACP, among others, announced a campaign to support criminal sentencing reform in the United States, the country with the largest prison population and the highest imprisonment rate in the world. The announcement was met by exclamations of surprise from journalists and political pundits. Organizations that had routinely opposed each other on such varied topics as financial regulation, collective bargaining, healthcare, and climate change were now working together as part of a

$5 million coalition to reform aspects of the criminal justice system.

Neera Tanden, the president of the Center for American Progress, told *The New York Times*: "We have in the past and will in the future have criticism of the policy agenda of the Koch brother companies, but where we can find common ground on issues, we will go forward. I think it speaks to the importance of the issue" (Hulse, 2015).

Although this was perhaps an extreme case -- or in any case, unusual enough to warrant numerous news stories -- for those who study policymaking, the idea that politics makes strange bedfellows is commonplace.[1] A Google

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[1] The phrase "strange bedfellows" originates in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, although there it was not "politics" but "misery" in the form of a storm that prompts the jester Trinculo to seek shelter under Caliban's cape. The essayist Charles Dudley Warner was the first to add "politics" to the phrase as he mused about strawberries, raspberries, garden beds, and politicians of the era (Warner, 1871, 131).

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Scholar search of the phrase brings up dozens of scholarly articles, many of them considering cases of former enemies working together toward some common political goal. How is it possible for people who are otherwise so much at odds to join forces in this way?

In fact, former enemies work together in politics (and in life) so often that there may be a tendency to find the cooperation unsurprising. It may seem simply rational that former opponents would work together if they share common ground on some new issue, as the libertarian Koch brothers and the left-leaning Center for American Progress clearly did. But although this mutualistic action is perhaps "rational" in game theoretic terms, such choices would be unusual behavior in any nonhuman primate. Although many nonhuman primates cooperate within their own groups, outsiders are often physically attacked (De Waal, 2007; van der Dennen, 1995). No matter how mutually advantageous it might potentially be (and contrary to whatever may have been portrayed in the *Planet of the Apes* movies), different bands of nonhuman primates (let alone different species) do not routinely join together for common purposes (such as taking over the world).

Why are humans so good at forming and reforming teams and working with one-time enemies? The answer suggested by evolutionary theory is that our species possesses a flexible coalitional psychology that evolved in the context of gene-culture coevolution and cultural group selection. In the rest of this article, we will explain the evolutionary underpinnings of flexible coalitional psychology and provide some examples from the literature on policymaking of it in action.

2. Why are humans so good at forming teams?

The human ability to form, dissolve, and re-form teams is extraordinary. How did this ability evolve? What aspects of our cognitive architecture help us in this regard? In this section, we explore four things that are involved. First, we point out that our species' ability to cooperate in general is largely a reflection of our ability to coordinate our social behaviors, a skill made possible by the evolution of several specific cognitive mechanisms, in particular the ability to imagine other people's cognitive states. Second, we explain the theory of gene-culture coevolution. Third, we link the idea of gene-culture coevolution to the theory of cultural group selection. Finally, we argue that the key to our species' ability to form teams is our flexible coalitional psychology, which evolved through a combination of gene-culture coevolution and cultural group selection.

2.1. Theory of Mind and social coordination

Much of the evolutionary literature on cooperation has concerned collective action dilemmas, in particular the two-person collective action dilemma modeled by the Prisoner's Dilemma scenario (e.g., Axelrod, 1984). However,

increasing attention is now being paid to coordination problems and the cognitive, behavioral, and cultural adaptations that help humans solve them (e.g., Alvard, 2001; Cronk, 2015; Cronk & Leech, 2013; Tomasello, 2009). Research has shown, for example, that humans are much better than nonhuman primates at following each other's gaze (Wyman & Tomasello, 2007). This shared *attention* may be a step to shared *intention* (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007) which may in turn be a step toward full blown Theory of Mind (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Also known as mentalizing, Theory of Mind is the ability to imagine the mental states of others and to understand that those mental states may differ from one's own. Cognitively normal humans excel at this kind of mind-reading, so it could simply be a byproduct or reflection of our species' impressive cognitive abilities in general. However, studies of Theory of Mind development in children and of people who lack it in adulthood support the idea that it evolved due to selection pressure specifically for its usefulness in social coordination rather than as a side effect of our high general intelligence (Baron-Cohen, 1995). Interestingly, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies indicate that the same part of the brain, the medial prefrontal cortex, is used for thinking about the mental states of others and when cooperating with other players in economic games – but not when playing against a computer (Schreiber, 2012, 559).

Although many nonhumans do interact socially without possessing much in the way of Theory of Mind abilities (and although there is some evidence of Theory of Mind in nonhumans, e.g. Bugnyar, Reber, & Buckner, 2016; Hare, Call, & Tomasello, 2001), it is no exaggeration to say that human social life - and in particular human politics - would be impossible without our well-developed skills at imagining other people's mental states - their emotions, their knowledge, and so on. This applies, of course, not only to our friends but also to our foes. While the minute-by-minute theories about others' mental states we create may or may not be accurate, they are essential to our abilities to work in coalitions or to outfox our opponents.

2.2. Gene-culture coevolution

Evolutionary behavioral scientists, whether they study humans or nonhumans, generally define culture as *socially transmitted information* (Alvard, 2003; Cronk, 1995, 1999). In anthropology, such ideational definitions have roots going back to at least the 1950s and the advent of cognitive, symbolic, and interpretive approaches to the study of culture (Keesing, 1974). For behavioral science, the advantage of ideational definitions of culture is that they clearly separate behavior from culture, thus making it possible to use culture, along with other factors, to explain behavior in causal terms (Cronk, 1999, 2016). Ideational definitions do share one characteristic with virtually all other definitions of culture circulating among anthropologists and

other social scientists: They exclude information that is transmitted genetically. This distinction between information transmitted culturally and information transmitted genetically makes possible the study of gene-culture coevolution. Durham (1991) identified two modes of gene-culture coevolution: genetic mediation and cultural mediation. In genetic mediation, genes create the environment in which competing culture traits evolve. Because the human mind is shaped by our genes and because it is also the locus of culture, genetic mediation is surely a widespread and powerful force. However, because the genes that shape the mind and behavior do not, as far as we now know, differ significantly between human groups, it is rarely noticed. As an example of genetic mediation, Durham offers the underlying similarities between different languages' coding schemes for colors (Berlin & Kay, 1991). Although there is some variation from language to language, all languages break up the visible electromagnetic spectrum in basically the same way. This reflects the fact that, colorblindness aside, we all have the same sorts of visual systems.

More interesting for our current purposes is the second mode of gene-culture coevolution: cultural mediation. In this mode, culture creates the environment in which different genes compete. The best-documented examples of gene-culture coevolution have to do with changes in our digestive systems that have evolved since the onset of agriculture. The best understood of these is the evolution of lactose absorption in adulthood. Lactose is a sugar found in milk. Lactase is the enzyme that breaks it down. Mammals normally lose the ability to produce lactase - and thus to digest lactose - after weaning. One cultural work-around to this problem is to have other organisms digest the lactose for us, thus producing yogurt and cheese that even most lactose intolerant people can eat. However, that solution comes with a cost in terms of the amount of calories provided to humans by the milk. Two different human populations, one in northern Europe and one in East Africa and adjacent portions of Asia, have independently evolved a biological solution: produce lactase in adulthood. At high latitudes, the ability to digest fresh milk in adulthood has an additional advantage: lactose acts as a substitute for vitamin D. Vitamin D, which is important for calcium absorption, is produced when skin is exposed to sunlight, something that may happen rarely in places with few annual days of sunshine and climates that encourage heavy clothing (Durham, 1991; Tishkoff et al., 2007; Wagh et al., 2012).

We thus have at least one clear example of gene-culture coevolution leading to a novel behavior. However, the behavior in question - adults drinking fresh milk - is not very interesting, at least not to social scientists. More interesting would be examples of the ways in which gene-culture coevolution may have helped shape the psychology behind our social behaviors. Evolutionary anthropologists, cultural transmission theorists, and evolutionary psychologists have provided a few intriguing possibilities. For example, there is evidence that we are more likely to allow our behavior to be shaped by culture traits that help us coordinate our social behavior with that of others than by culture traits that refer to individual behaviors (Cronk, 2016). This bias in favor of following the dictates of social coordination conventions was likely to have been favored by selection among our ancestors because it helped them reap the benefits of social coordination. Cultural transmission theorists refer to this as a "content-related bias." Other content-related biases have been shown to influence which traits get transmitted and which do not. Examples include information about social interactions (Dunbar, 1997; Mesoudi, Whiten, & Dunbar, 2006), information about facial attractiveness judgments (Jones, DeBruine, Little, Burriss, & Feinberg, 2007; Little, Burriss, Jones, DeBruine, & Caldwell, 2008), culture traits that are more emotionally evocative (Bangerter & Heath, 2004; Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001), minimally counter-intuitive concepts in both religious and nonreligious contexts (Atranm, 2002; Barrett & Nyhof, 2001; Boyer, 1994), and sensory metaphors (Akpinar & Berger, 2015). Context-related biases, such as a "when in Rome" tendency to imitate behaviors performed by others who are more familiar with a given situation than oneself and a tendency to be more influenced by culture traits displayed by high status individuals and individuals similar to oneself, are also likely the products of gene-culture coevolution (Henrich & McElreath, 2003). Gene-culture coevolution may also have helped us to become especially sensitive to indications that others are or are not following culturally variable rules regarding social contracts (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

2.3. Cultural group selection

In everyday speech, "culture" is often used as a synonym for "society" or "group." Although technically incorrect, such usage is understandable: the distribution of culture traits across the landscape is indeed often very clumpy rather than even, and what distinguishes one group from another is often not just their physical location in space but also what sorts of culture traits they share. This is a result of a variety of forces that help shape the ways in which culture is transmitted. In addition to the context- and content-related biases described above, cultural drift, with communities going in different cultural directions due simply to random differences in which culture traits get transmitted to the next generation, may be an important force leading to group-level differences (Bentley, Hahn, & Shennan, 2004). Such differences set the stage for selection at a new level of organization: the culturally defined group.

Cultural group selection refers, very broadly, to competition among groups that are defined in terms of shared culture traits. Culturally defined groups can succeed in such competitions by growing larger than their competitors, outlasting them, spawning more daughter groups than them, or by some combination of these.

Group selection is a controversial topic among evolutionary scientists. The reasons for that controversy need not concern us here. What is important is that the controversy surrounds the idea of *biological* group selection, not *cultural* group selection, which are very different phenomena (Richerson & Boyd, 1998). They resemble each other only in that they both involve groups. The actual mechanisms involved in the two processes can be quite different. For example, biological group selection is strongest when biologically defined groups are very distinct, with very low rates of migration between them (e.g., reproductively isolated populations of organisms). In contrast, when selection acts on groups that are defined in terms of their shared culture traits rather than their reproductive isolation, movement from group to group can actually strengthen cultural group selection. Provided that immigrants adopt the culture traits of their adopted groups that help that group succeed, then the group will both grow and retain its cultural distinctiveness. Because many such culture traits are social coordination norms or adaptations to local environments, it often makes good sense for the individuals involved to conform to them. This kind of "voting with your feet" may sometimes be a major determinant of which groups fail and which succeed.

For a good example of cultural group selection, consider competition among companies in a market economy (Johnson, Price, & Van Vugt, 2013). Even if they provide the same product or service, companies differ from one another, and those differences are clearly cultural (i.e., due to social learning), not genetic. Furthermore, those cultural differences lead to differential success among companies, with some surviving and others failing and shutting their doors. Of course, companies also have characteristics that make them somewhat unusual among the wide variety of culturally defined groups that humans form. First, competition among them is intense, with companies being founded and dying out with great frequency. Second, companies are normally quite discrete from one another, with occasional mergers or acquisitions duly noted as important exceptions to this rule. Third, companies are functionally integrated and have clear corporate structures. In contrast, other culturally different groups might better be thought of simply as categories, i.e., people who share some common characteristic but who do not interact in an interconnected set of roles or within any sort of corporate structure (Keesing, 1975). Consider ethnic "groups," for example. Particularly in nonstate societies, such "groups" are really

just categories, that is, people who share a bundle of culture traits (e.g., a common language) but who do not necessarily have any sort of functionally integrated corporate structure.

These differences among different kinds of culturally defined groups may lead to different kinds of cultural group selection (Table 1). Selection among companies (e.g., Arthur, 2012), political interest groups, (e.g., Gray & Lowery, 1995, 1997; Hannan & Freeman, 1988; Weed, 1991), organized religions (e.g., Stark, 1996), descent groups (Cronk & Gerkey, 2007; Keesing, 1975) or other corporate, functionally integrated groups will largely be on culture traits that influence their ability to achieve their group-level goals, possibly at the expense of their constituent individuals. We refer to this as "hard cultural group selection" (Cronk, 2015; Gerkey & Cronk, 2014). On the other hand, when cultural group selection occurs among "groups" that are really just categories lacking functional integration, such as those shaped by shared ethnicity (Barth, 1969), spirituality (e.g., Fuller, 2001), and nationality (Anderson, 1991), then no traits for group-level functional integration exist. Instead, such groups differ in terms of the extent to which the culture traits that are prevalent within them help their individual members to survive and reproduce. We call this "soft cultural group selection." Between these two extremes lies what we call "firm cultural group selection": Selection among groups based on characteristics that provide less functional integration than is seen in corporate groups but more than is seen in categories.

Selection among companies, states, or any other functionally integrated corporate groups will suffice as an example of hard cultural group selection. For an example of soft cultural group selection, consider the possibility that some ethnic groups may succeed and others may fail because some happen to have culture traits that help or harm their bearers' survival and reproduction but that have nothing to do with the group's ability to work as a unit. For example, when members of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities are persecuted, it is typically because they belong to a particularly category of people rather than to an organized group. For a more positive example of soft cultural group selection, consider the Maasai of East Africa, who have been emulated by and absorbed numerous less successful neighboring groups, the members of whom now identify and act as Maasai (Cronk, 1989, 2002, 2004). As for "firm cultural group selection," consider

Table 1
Types of cultural group selection.

Type of group	Associated type of cultural group selection	Examples
Category	Soft	Persecution of religious and ethnic groups; favoritism to other religious groups, ethnic groups, and classes
Group	Firm	Maasai and their mildly integrating institutions (e.g., age sets) vs. other groups
Corporate group	Hard	States, religious organizations, corporations, etc.

selection acting on characteristics that provide some functional integration but not as much as that seen in corporate groups. Again, consider the Maasai. Although Maasai society has never been fully functionally integrated in the manner of a chiefdom or state, they do have other institutions that provide a limited degree of functional integration at local and regional levels. These include a descent system, an age set system, and a system of risk pooling (Aktipis, Cronk, & de Aguiar, 2011; Aktipis et al., 2016; Cronk, 2007; Cronk & Wasielewski, 2008), all of which may have helped Maasai succeed in competition with neighboring groups. Firm cultural group selection might be implicated in some episodes of religious conversion, as well. For example, Ensminger (1997) has argued that the spread of Islam in Africa was aided by the fact that it brought with it an innovative system of organizing trade.

2.4. Flexible coalitional psychology

What impact might this one-two punch of gene-culture coevolution and cultural group selection have had on our evolved psychology and cognitive abilities? As a first step toward an answer to this question, let's imagine that most cultural group selection among our ancestors was of the "hard" variety and, additionally, that it was difficult to move between groups. In that case, then the strength of selection between groups may have been much stronger than the strength of selection between individuals, leading to the evolution of tendencies to be very prosocial, even altruistic. Although individuals with such characteristics might do poorly in comparison to others within their groups, groups with many such individuals would do well in competition with groups with few such individuals. Consider, for example, military units during wartime: side-switching is virtually impossible, fitness interdependence (Roberts, 2005) among members of the group is high, and self-sacrifice is advocated and expected. However, examples like this may be more the exception than the rule. Most culturally defined groups have relatively flexible memberships, and their success often depends less on the costs they impose on their members than on the benefits they provide to them (Clark & Wilson, 1961). Given that people can often move from group to group and that such movement can enhance rather than undermine the power of cultural group selection, its main effect on human psychology may have been to enhance our ability to deal with coalitions rather than to make us generally prosocial.

Depending on the type of cultural group selection that is operating, cultural group selection may favor different sorts of characteristics in individuals. When soft cultural group selection acts on categories, it will favor an ability to correctly predict the impact of membership in different categories on one's own success. By itself, this would not necessarily favor prosociality or cooperativeness. Although some categories of people may be more successful than others because they have found ways to be more cooperative, others may have succeeded by finding ways to avoid costly social entanglements. Hard cultural group selection among corporate groups, in contrast, should favor individual characteristics that enable entire groups to function well as integrated wholes. Individuals play specific and important roles in such groups, and group members need to know that everyone involved is committed to playing those roles. This should lead to individuals who become emotionally attached and committed to such groups and that send convincing signals to their fellow group members regarding those attachments and commitments. Paradoxically, selection on individuals to move from less successful to more successful groups would also favor an ability to shift loyalty from one group to another. The perfect person in this scenario would be one who feels and signals an honest commitment to the groups to which he or she belongs but who can also switch loyalties to other groups and then feel and send equally convincing signals of his or her new-found commitments. Obviously, such "perfection" may be difficult to achieve. Our actual coalitional psychology may be a suboptimal mixture of these two abilities, involving considerable anguish and internal conflict in the face of uncertain, conflicting, and shifting loyalties.

Evidence of our flexible coalitional psychology can be found in the existing social psychological literature. In a classic study that might now have trouble getting past an Institutional Review Board, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif (1961) studied boys camping at a state park in Oklahoma. Before setting up camp, the boys were divided into two arbitrary groups. Despite the arbitrariness of group membership, when the two groups became aware of each other's existence they quickly formed strong coalitional identities, labeling their groups the "Eagles" and the "Rattlers." They also became rivalrous and competitive, with their mutual enmity at one point deteriorating into a food fight. It is also surprisingly easy to get people to form strong coalitional attachments in more controlled settings. For example, Tajfel, Billig, and Bundy (1971) had people rate paintings by Klee and Kandinsky and then divided them into two groups based ostensibly (but not actually) on their preferences. Subjects who then had to divide a sum of money between members of their own group and the other group gave more to members of their own group.

More recently, social psychologists in England focused on the coalitional psychology of football (soccer) fans, in particular fans of Manchester United (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005). Subjects who had already been identified as fans of Manchester United were given a series of questionnaires to heighten their sense of identification with the team and with their fellow fans. They were then taken across campus for the second part of the study. As they were walking across campus, a confederate playing the role of a jogger fell down and shouted as if in pain. The experimental condition was in which of three shirts the jogger was wearing: a Manchester United shirt, a plain shirt, or a shirt branded with the logo of MU's bitter rival, Liverpool FC. All but one of the subjects who saw a fellow Manchester fan fall down came to his aid, but they helped

the runner in the plain shirt only a third of the time, and they helped the Liverpool fan even less often. In a follow-up study, the researchers again recruited Manchester United fans, but this time they gave them questionnaires that primed their sense of being football fans in general rather than Manchester fans in particular. This time, both the Manchester United and Liverpool FC shirts elicited high rates of helping compared to the plain shirt, thus demonstrating the ease with which people's group identifications can be manipulated.

Because coalitions are flexible, people should be able to pick up cues that are easily changed, such as clothing and jewelry, as well as those that are more fixed, such as accents and physical similarities. To explore this, Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides (2001) showed people photographs of members of two rival basketball teams and told them to form impressions of the individuals on the teams. Each picture was paired with a statement that the person had supposedly made about the teams' rivalry. The actual pairing of sentences with photos was randomized across subjects. Subjects were then given a surprise memory test involving matching statements with photos. Because this was a difficult task, they made a lot of errors, and the patterns in the errors reveal that they used statements associated with faces along with other cues, such as the basketball jersey colors, to identify coalitions. One of this study's most interesting findings is that flexible cues such as the statements people make and the clothes they wear swamp the effects of race as a coalitional cue. This makes sense in light of how our ancestors lived. Given that their mobility was limited by how far they could walk, they were very unlikely to have encountered people as physically different from themselves as we routinely do now, and it would make little sense for us to have an evolved tendency to focus on the kinds of physical characteristics that we now use to identify "race" when determining coalitions. Kurzban et al.'s conclusion is that racism may simply be a misfiring of a psychological mechanism designed to pick up on more flexible coalitional cues. And indeed, in an fMRI study by Schreiber and Iacoboni (2012), activity in the amygdala – which had been associated with negative racial attitudes in other studies – was found to be triggered primarily by violations of social norms rather than by race per se. The encouraging conclusion of both of these studies is that race's importance as a way to sort people into groups is greatly diminished when it is disconnected from actual coalitions.

Laboratory studies have also revealed how even fleeting cues of coalitional membership can influence not only subjects' memories but also their mental states and behaviors. Burnham, McCabe, and Smith (2000) used an extended two-person economic game to explore the effects of in-group vs. out-group identifiers on trust and trustworthiness. Rather than follow usual practice and label the other person playing the game simply as one's "counterpart," they instead labeled them as either "partner" or "opponent." That small change was enough to change the way people played the game, with the "partner" label generating more trust and more trustworthiness than the "opponent" label. In the same spirit, Batiste (2015) used the phrases "cooperative task" and "competitive task" to frame a Theory of Mind task that focused on the participant's ability to take the perspective of another person. Subjects in the "cooperative task" condition made fewer perspective-taking errors than subjects in the competitive frame.

3. Examples within politics

Politics, almost by definition, is about joining together in coalitions. While brute force may produce desired outcomes for the dictator in a very small community, as groups become larger and more complex, alliances with others become a necessity for retaining power. Political history and modern day politics both indicate that humans are quite good at joining with others in this way. We can see it in alliances among nations, among political parties, between interest groups and politicians, and in the agenda-building process of any political issue.

3.1. Coalitional politics among institutions

In the field of international relations, strange-bedfellow relationships are common. Countries often ally with countries that at some previous time were their sworn enemies; political scientist Ethan Resnick argues that these "alliances of convenience" come into being because the alternative to allying is even worse (Resnick, 2010). Resnick points to the American alliance with France during the Revolutionary War, just after the colonists had battled against the French in the French and Indian War. Likewise, the US eventually sided with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, despite Iraq's hostilities toward Israel, arms deals with the Soviets, and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The US found an alliance with Iraq the lesser of two evils, since in 1979 the Ayatollah Khomeini had come to power and Iranian students had taken over the US Embassy in Tehran, holding hostages there for more than a year. In these cases we have the corporate groups described above, here in the form of states, with leaders that decide to cooperate with other leaders. Certainly any success that can come from such alliances with former opponents depends strongly on the human ability to think about the incentives and likely behaviors of those new, and perhaps temporary, allies. The field of international relations, with its focus on bargaining strategies and game theoretic models of likely behavior, is in many ways focused on Theory of Mind. It is easier to cooperate with a long-time, trusted ally because of such an ally has likely demonstrated shared preferences and acted in a supportive way over many years. These hard-to-fake signals of being a good country to cooperate with makes such alliances unproblematic, whereas alliances of convenience require all of the abilities of country leaders to monitor shirking and avoid getting burned, not always successfully.

Within countries, such alliances of convenience often become necessary because of the structure of proportional parliamentary governments. With multiple parties gaining seats in direct reflection of the number of votes received in a given district (as opposed to the ''first-past-the-post,'' winner-take-all system in place in the United States), there often can be legislators without the majority of seats needed to govern. Coalition building is necessary. These coalitions can sometimes become quite strange, as in the cooperation between the leftists and the ultranationalists in Turkey and the nationalist and internationalist socialist parties in Eastern Europe and former Soviet satellites in the 1990s (Baskan, 2005; Ishiyama, 1998).

This is not to say that it is easy for people to collaborate with others who do not share their values. Winslow (2002) for example, examines the interactions between civilian NGOs and military personnel during humanitarian crises in war zones. Although such alliances have many tensions, both sides usually find a way to serve the interests that they do share:

> ``Traditionally, interactions between the military and humanitarian workers were characterized by avoidance or antagonism. Each group held (and sometimes continues to hold) stereotypes of the other. However, for security reasons and because of limited resources, the military and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) must work together in order to accomplish their tasks''.
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> [Winslow, 2002, 35]

The policymaking process within governments provides innumerable examples of flexible coalitional psychology, in part because political actors' preferences often are crosscutting, as they were in the case of sentencing reform. An opponent on one issue may agree with you on another issue. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), one of the best-resourced trade associations in the United States, and the AIDS Action Council, a community-based membership organization that advocates for people with AIDS, are such a pair. The two groups are frequently in opposition on such issues as the (ultimately successful) effort in the early 1990s to force companies that manufactured AIDS treatments to allow generic versions of those drugs to be manufactured, overriding their patents, to help with the AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. But every year the pharmaceutical companies, the AIDS Action Council and other AIDS activism groups come together under the guise of the ADAP Working Group to lobby Congress and express support for continued appropriations for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program. The pharmaceutical companies are in favor of the efforts because the appropriations are spent to purchase AIDS drugs that they manufacture. ACT UP and the other AIDS activism groups are in favor of the efforts because the drugs that are purchased are given to uninsured and underinsured people with AIDS. According to one pharmaceutical company lobbyist interviewed in 2000, the members of the ADAP coalition met together eight times a year, agreed to spend at least two full days lobbying on the issue, and contributed money ($5000 for each of the companies; $500 for each of the AIDS groups) toward administration of the group and toward providing congressional briefings (including snacks for congressional staffers) each year (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009). The corporate groups that represented the two sides found a common interest in increased government funding levels, and so put away their differences to cooperate on this issue.

In an article titled ''Strange Bedfellows Make Normal Politics,'' R. Shep Melnick (1998) argued that environmental policies in the US are frequently the result of environmentalists and polluters working together, and that perhaps revisions to environmental policy would be impossible if not for such collaborations. For example, in the Clean Air Act of 1977, environmentalists allied with coal producers and miners to limit requirements for scrubbers that would have reduced sulphur dioxide emissions, with the environmentalists getting on board to keep labor on their side and limit development in the West. The flip side of such an alliance occurred in the Clean Air Act of 1990, when ethanol and methanol producers allied with the environmentalists in hopes of making more money selling "clean" fuels.

3.2. Coalitional politics among individuals

Coalitional psychology may help explain why campaign contributions help lobbyists to be influential, and why they often donate to both Republican and Democratic candidates. Studies of campaign contributions from interest groups to members of Congress have come to very mixed conclusions about whether these donations help advance the policy interests of the donating group. That is, campaign contributions do not seem to be part of a strict quid pro quo relationship -- the money does not "buy" the vote. Instead, campaign donations most often tend to flow to members of Congress who already agree with the policy perspectives of the group in question. Political scientists Jennifer Victor and Koger (2016) argue that the donations may actually be used as signals that the lobbyists are a potentially friendly coalition partner. Victor and Koger use social network analysis to show that members of Congress are more likely to vote together when they are linked by contributions from the same lobbyists: "To the extent that 'birds of a feather flock together', lobbyists and legislators exhibit homophily, the natural tendency of people to form connections with those who share their characteristics" (2016:1).

Partisan affiliation provides a case of long-term, stable coalitions that still are occasionally deviated from when it seems advantageous. Individual citizens do tend to vote and change policy preferences based on their partisan affiliation. Self-identified Democrats vote for Democratic candidates and self-identified Republicans vote for Republican candidates. These tendencies seem to be chosen less

because of rational shared belief systems and more as a form of social identity formation. Political scientists Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) argue that partisanship is a form of social group identification that tends to be very stable -- lifelong party identifications are not uncommon. And these group identities affect more than just which candidate voters choose to support: "Indeed, Democrats and Republicans offer contrasting views not only on party leaders and their programs but also on their family, friends, (and) pets" (Green et al., 2002:1). Individuals do join temporary coalitions with the other party to support specific issues or specific candidates, but most voters switch back to their original parties after the issue is resolved or the election is over. A Republican can vote for a Democrat and yet remain a Republican.

Even in the polarized Congress of modern Washington, bipartisan bills exist. Each bipartisan bill is an example of a legislator forming a new coalition (however temporary) outside of the party coalition to which he or she belongs. These new coalitions are formed and reformed as a part of daily representational life in Washington, and are seen as so much a part of the normal fabric of governance that journalists and academics alike voice concern if they observe fewer such alliances occurring. Without bipartisanship, very few new policies can pass, and so on the items that do pass, members of opposing parties join forces.

Of course, not all politicians are equally good at forming coalitions or at getting along with others. One of the reasons why Sen. Ted Cruz is reportedly so disliked in Washington, and why he has had a difficult time garnering support for his policy goals among the powers that be in the Republican Party, is that he tended to act as a loner, rather than working with his fellow senators. In the words of political consultant Ed Rogers, "In Washington, you don't need friends but you do need allies" (Rogers, 2014).

Previous research indicates that having presidential support for an issue matters greatly for interest group policy success (Baumgartner et al., 2009). And so alliances with the president are valuable whenever common ground can be found. The Koch brothers have found such common ground with the Obama administration not only on sentencing reform but also on the economic issue of licensing. States in recent decades have greatly increased licensing requirements for professions (in the 1970s, only 10% of the US workforce required a license to work, compared with 30% today), and these licenses don't just cover doctors and lawyers, but professions as varied as forest worker, security guard, upholstery repairer, and pet masseuse (Cohen, 2016). The Obama administration and the Koch brothers found common ground in the economic problems caused by unnecessary licensing: increased costs for consumers and greater unemployment for potential workers.

3.3. Imperfect preference sharing

Throughout these examples we have seen how our psychological and cognitive abilities help humans coordinate with others when they have shared political preferences. What happens when preferences are imperfectly shared, and individuals who normally would be allies differ about how important or preferable various outcomes would be? What happens to team building then? Game theorists have a classic game, known as the Battle of the Sexes, that captures this dilemma.

In the Battle of the Sexes, a husband and wife share a common goal: they would like to spend the evening together. While the wife would prefer to go to the ballet, the husband would prefer to go to a football game.[2] If both of them attend the same event, they both succeed in the goal of spending the evening together. But if they attend the ballet, the wife gets a greater benefit than the husband, and vice versa if they attend the football game. Of course the solution would become easier if the pair could meet or call each other and negotiate where to go, but the set-up of the game assumes that the pair must decide without any consultation.

The Battle of the Sexes poses a coordination problem that humans are cognitively well suited to solve. Theory of Mind helps us to imagine, when in such a situation, whether the other person is likely to be agreeable and go to the event that pleases us, or the event that we prefer less. And Theory of Mind also would help us predict that if it were raining, the other player would head to the ballet rather than the stadium. When the ability to communicate is added in, the game becomes somewhat easier, although when the game is transported out of the fictional marriage and into the real world of politics, humans also need all of their abilities of discernment to tell the difference between true signals and false ones. This is where coalition building intersects with political agenda building.

3.3.1. Agenda setting as a Battle of the Sexes game

Thousands of bills are introduced in each session of the U.S. Congress, and only a few hundred become law. There are even more *potential* issues that might be proposed, but are not. Which of these issues become the focus of general attention and thus have a chance to move forward in the political process is the task of agenda setting, or agenda building. Agenda setting fits a Battle of the Sexes framework because, although it is in the interest of each political actor to be working on the same issues that everyone else is working on (because those are the only issues that are moving forward in the process), preferences about which issues these should be are not perfectly shared. Each actor -- be it a member of Congress, the president, or a lobbyist for an interest group -- has only enough time to devote to a few potential issues. Thus, each actor must decide whether to work on the same issues that everyone else is working on, even if those are not that actor's top priorities. For example, in the case of sentencing reform, all members of the

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[2] Gibbons (1992) tells a gender-neutral version of this game, involving two friends, Chris and Pat.

coalition agree that such reform is a good idea. But the issue has long been a top priority for the ACLU and may have been a lower-ranked issue for the Center for American Progress or for the Kochs. But when the Obama administration also decided to make the issue a top priority for the last years of the administration, all of the potential interests saw that the issue had a very good chance of moving forward and attaining success. This bandwagon effect, where the issues that are attracting attention then attract more attention, is common in politics and is the way political agendas are built (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001).

4. Discussion

To recap, cultural group selection comes in three varieties, corresponding to different kinds of groups. When the groups that are in competition with one another are defined solely in terms of some shared characteristic, we refer to the groups as categories and the type of cultural group selection as "soft." In the realm of politics, a variety of categories may be important, such as those based on racial, ethnic, gender, and religious identities. At the other end of the spectrum, when the groups in competition with one another are functionally integrated corporate entities, we refer to the kind of cultural group selection that occurs among them as "hard." Corporate groups are easy to identify in politics and include not only political parties but also organized interests, PACs, and labor unions, as well as actual business corporations involved in political advocacy. Between these two extremes lies competition between groups that have more functional integration and common purpose than categories but not as much as corporate groups. We refer to the kind of cultural group selection that occurs among these kinds of groups as "firm."

What kinds of groups are political coalitions? Because they share more than simply a categorical identity but are not as fully functionally integrated as corporate groups, they fall in the middle, making them simply "groups." According to the framework outlined above, groups undergo firm cultural group selection. At least to our minds, this makes them extraordinarily interesting. While categories remain stable as long as people care about whatever characteristic defines them and while corporate groups remain stable as long as they remain functionally integrated, coalitions have the potential both to remain stable for long periods and to be ephemeral. Coalitions are the heart of political change and thus are central to the study of politics. This leads to a variety of interesting questions about the determinants of coalitional stability and how our evolved flexible coalitional psychology may both contribute to it and detract from it, depending on circumstances.

One way to approach future work on this topic is to think about it at two levels: (1) competition among organized interests, and (2) individual coalitional behavior.

The observation that organized interests compete with one another is usually followed up by an example that focuses on groups that have opposing agendas – the National Rifle Association vs. the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, for example. However, competition among organized interests also occurs on any one side of a particular issue (for discussions of competition among similar groups for resources see Browne, 1990; Gray & Lowery, 1996). For example, the Brady Campaign competes for activists and donations with other groups in favor of gun control, such as States United to Prevent Gun Violence, to name only one. Similarly, people who consider themselves environmentalists can choose to support a variety of competing organizations such as the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, and the Friends of the Earth, to name only a few. An easy prediction to make is that groups that are better at tapping into coalitional psychology will do better in competition for members and donations than other groups focusing on the same or similar issues.

At the level of the individual, it may be that some people are more adept at shifting their allegiances, and thus at forming temporary coalitions, than others. For example, if someone's personal identity is very much bound up in membership in either a category or a corporate group, then it might be difficult for that person to reach out to people in other categories or corporate groups, even when their interests do align. People with more flexible and situational personal identities, on the other hand, may be better able to form coalitions with unlike parties for what may be temporary but are still very real shared goals. Existing research on the relationship between personality traits and coalition formation lends support to this conjecture. For example, "agreeableness," one of five traits in a popular model of personality structure, has been found to predict membership in coalitions and strategic alliances and to rank highly among the factors that people look for when seeking coalitional partners (Buss, 1996; Mondak & Halperin, 2008).

5. Conclusion

The policymaking process thus provides many good examples of our flexible coalitional psychology at work, as well as many opportunities for future research. There may be a temptation to imagine that we are able to form, dissolve and re-form coalitions in this way simply because we are so smart. But, smart as we may be, we are smart not just in general but also in a variety of specific ways that can be linked to specific selective forces during our species' evolutionary history (Kurzban, 2010). Just as we do not have the ability to model the cognitive states of others simply as a result of having big brains but rather due to selection for that specific ability, our ability to identify and join coalitions that will help us further our current goals can also be tied to the selective forces at work in a species that is highly social and that forms groups based on shared culture traits.

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