Wanted, but Not Wanting: Group Inclusion Goals in Party Coalitions

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Abstract

Political parties are coalitions of social groups, but groups may play very different roles in shaping coalition opinion. What determines which groups lead the coalition? We argue that opinion leadership depends on a group's leverage with the party coalition. That leverage reflects two considerations: how much a group wants to be a key member in a party's coalition (subgroup inclusion goal), and how much the party wants the group to be its key member (coalition inclusion goal). We expect groups that are highly valued by the party and are less invested in belonging to it are less influenced by the majority opinion within that party. At the same time, the attitudes of these groups are more likely to lead other party members' attitudes. Here we present our preliminary descriptive findings. Using coordination games to measure inclusion goals, we find that subgroups generally do not seek inclusion in unwelcoming coalitions. Additionally, we find substantial differences between the Democratic and Republican coalitions. The Democratic coalition has many more social groups to answer to than the Republican coalition. Moreover, there is less consensus between groups and the Democratic coalition about their degree of inclusion. These results offer a coalition-based explanation for the asymmetry between the two parties – Democrats must cater to the diverse demands of a larger group of discrete subgroups than Republicans. We conclude by briefly outlining our planned experiments to understand which groups hold stronger influence than others over party positions.

1 Introduction

Political parties are coalitions of social groups, and the importance of these groups in shaping party issue positions has attracted a long line of scholarship (e.g., Riker 1962; Karol 2009; Bawn et al. 2012). This raises a question: what types of groups exert disproportionate influence within each of America's two party coalitions?

Plenty of work has shown which groups are or are perceived to be associated with each party coalition, leveraging a variety of data (Grossmann and Dominguez 2009; Ghezae, Lelkes, and Cikara 2026; Kane, Mason, and Wronski 2021; Ahler and Sood 2018; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). What remains unknown, however, is whether association with the party equates influence on party positions. Here we share our first set of findings in a series of ongoing studies unpacking what types of groups hold power over parties. In particular, we argue that the inclusion goals of both groups and coalitions are key to this question. Are groups happy where they are in the coalition, or do they wish for either an exit from the coalition or further inclusion? Do parties wish for each group to be further included, or do they wish to exclude them? The answers to these questions are crucial, we argue, for understanding opinion leadership in parties, as the core groups in party coalitions are not necessarily those exerting the greatest influence on party issue positions, and small but strategically well-positioned groups can decide which way an election tilts (Riker 1962).

In this paper, we leverage social psychological theories of group inclusion and prototypicality (Ellemers and Jetten 2013) to map subgroups' positions in the Democratic and Republican coalitions. Using novel inclusion goal measures, we capture subgroups and parties as interactive forces pushing and pulling for subgroup inclusion, going beyond one-dimensional categorizations of subgroups as either core or peripheral in party coalitions. Furthermore, we show that our measures demonstrate substantial asymmetry between the compositions and dynamics of the Democratic and Republican coalitions, where the Democratic coalition includes a large tent of diverse subgroups while the Republican coalition shows clear separation between its core and marginal subgroups.

In mapping the subgroup and coalition inclusion goals in the Democratic and Republican coalitions, we make several contributions. First, our coalition maps help identify which groups a party may try to win over by adjusting its policy positions, and which groups a party would have no problem alienating or attacking because they are not sought after. Second, from the subgroup's perspective, our maps also suggest which groups may have more leverage over party positions than others. In particular, our measures identify the subgroups at the margins of inclusion – those that are reluctant to be part of, but are highly sought after by a party coalition. These subgroups may be the hardest for parties to win over, and thus may have disproportionate influence on party positions. Third, whereas previous work showed the Republican electoral base demonstrate stronger ideological coherence than the Democratic base (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Lelkes and Sniderman 2016), we offer a coalition-based explanation for why that might be the case – Democrats must cater to the diverse demands of a larger group of discrete subgroups than Republicans.

We conclude the paper by summarizing our findings, discussing their implications, and briefly outlining future planned experiments to unpack which groups hold stronger influence than others over party positions.

1.1 Group influence in party politics

What determines the policy positions that parties take? According to what has been known as the UCLA School, interest groups, or "intense policy demanders," constitute the major movers, not ordinary citizens who support the same party (Karol 2009; Bawn et al. 2012). Groups have strong enough preferences on the issues they care about to aggressively advocate for their narrow issue agendas by directing funds to aid party campaigns, leverage activist networks to influence public opinion and mobilize votes, and influence party primary nominations and, ultimately, elections (Karol 2009; Bawn et al. 2012). Ordinary voters do collectively control the vast majority of votes in elections, but their mercurial preferences (Converse 2006), inattentiveness to political information (Zaller 1992), lack of organization, and lack of participation in party primaries significantly limit their ability to shape party positions. This led Bawn and coauthors (2012) to argue, "parties are no great friends of popular sovereignty. ... [T]hey cede as little policy to voters as possible. Parties mainly push their own agendas and aim to get voters to go along."

To understand the sources of party positions, then, it becomes critical to identify which groups hold such influence for each party coalition. Tracing the histories of the Democratic and Republican parties helps us identify which specific groups have wielded the most power in each coalition (Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2024; Schlozman 2015; Karol 2009). Historical accounts, however, say little about the more abstract question of what *types* of groups are influential. Empirical evidence has also shown which groups are and are perceived to be aligned with each party. Grossmann and Dominguez (2009) used campaign endorsement and contribution networks to map distinct interest groups networks in the Democratic and Republican coalitions. Ghezae, Lelkes, and Cikara (2026) recovered a latent liberal and conservative coalition using network approaches. Literature on group-based partisan stereotypes shows stable and exaggerated perceptions of the proportion of prototypical social groups among Democratic and Republican supporters (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Kane, Mason, and Wronski (2021) used cross-sectional surveys to compare actual and perceived vote shares of 24 gender, racial, religious, socioeconomic, and political groups to measure actual and perceived group alignments with each party. However, what remains unknown is if core groups, whether measured by actual alignment or perceived prototypicality, are the most influential groups. In fact, a body of work in social psychology suggests a different story – some marginal groups may have a larger influence on coalition norms than core groups.

1.2 The MARGINI model: Why prototypicality does not equate influence

Social psychological literature that developed from the self-categorization theory (Turner 1987) tends to assign prototypical group members the highest potential for influence in group processes (van Knippenberg, Lossie, and Wilke 1994; van Knippenberg and Wilke 1992; Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1998). Marginal group members, in turn, are generally seen as uni-directionally motivated to become more prototypical. Yet as Ellemers and Jetten (2013) argued, such an approach overlooks the *inclusion goals* of both the members and the group: 1) not all group members desire to be part of the group's core, and 2) not all groups desire for its marginal members to achieve core membership. Based on

different combinations of such inclusion goals, the authors proposed the Marginality as Resulting From Group and Individual Negotiation About Inclusion (MARGINI) model, which defines four categories of marginal group members. The *socializing marginals* are group members who want to be included, and are reciprocated by their group also wanting their inclusion as the core. These group members are approximating core membership, and are the most commonly studied in prior work. Notably, the model defines core members as essentially a special case of socializing marginals – they are maximally eager about inclusion in the group, and the group in turn are maximally eager to include them. The *independent marginals*, in turn, are group members who neither want to be included, nor are wanted by their group. These are members who are happy at the margins. More interestingly, the two orthogonal quadrants include group members who do not want the same thing as the group. The *rejected marginals* want to be included, but their eagerness is unrequited as the group does not wish to include them. The *admired marginals*, in contrast, can act like *prima donnas* – they are highly sought after by the group, but are not themselves particularly eager for inclusion.

What does the MARGINI model predict about group opinion leadership? Previous literature expects core members as the most likely to lead, followed closely by socializing marginals. However, the model predicts that admired marginals may be the most likely to lead the group, because the group has to work harder to win over admired marginal members than they would for socializing marginals. As Ellemers and Jetten (2013) explained, this leverage grants admired marginals the agency to differentiate and take advantage of the group's advances to serve their individual goals. Though admired marginals as measured by inclusion goals have not been systematically assessed in social psychology, French social psychologist Serge Moscovici's studies of minority influence suggests counter-normative group deviants can challenge existing norms when they stay consistent and firm in their minority views, which can ultimately lead to conversion of the group majority (see a review in Martin and Hewstone 2012). Subsequent research on leadership and innovation also imply that groups can benefit from innovations introduced by minority dissenters (e.g., Abrams et al. 2008; De Dreu and West 2001). On the flip-side, the model also predicts that rejected marginals would be the least likely to lead the group, because they have the least leverage out of the four categories of marginals and would have to ingratiate the group the most by demonstrating group loyalty. Goldman and Hogg (2016) found, for example, that marginal group members who perceived there was a chance for themselves to be accepted were more likely to engage in and support antisocial and aggressive behaviors against their outgroup than prototypical group members.

We expect that the same argument extends to the relationship between subgroups and party coalitions in U.S. politics. Each party coalition likely does not solely consist of socializing marginal and independent marginal subgroups, where the subgroup and the party align on how much they should be included. Instead, we ask whether subgroups will be distributed across the four quadrants. In particular, we are interested in identifying subgroups sought after by the party coalition but do not themselves want to be included (admired marginals), and subgroups rejected by the coalition and want to be included (rejected marginals).

> RQ1: Are all four types of marginals represented in the Democratic and Republican party coalitions?

1.3 Partisan asymmetry

All political coalitions are not the same. In American politics, in fact, the Democratic and Republican coalitions are built very differently. How would this asymmetry translate to the distribution of the four types of marginals in each coalition? In this section, we briefly review the historical and empirical evidence on the asymmetry between the two parties, before laying out our expectations of how the two coalitions differ as measured by inclusion goals.

A review of the development of the two parties after the New Deal era generally shows the Republican Party as a coalition of ideologically united conservatives, and the Democratic Party as a big tent of interest groups with idiosyncratic interests (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, Chpt. 3; Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2024). In the Republican Party, the conservative ideological brand not only united diverse policy agendas, the "three-legged stool" of free-market capitalism, hawkishness in national security, and moral traditionalism, but also fused these diverse policy demands with anti-liberal sentiments (Nash 1976) and symbolic appeals to traditional family and work values (Ellis and Stimson 2012, Chpt. 1 and 8). In the Democratic Party, symbolic liberalism never appealed to American voters as

much as symbolic conservatism, despite operationally liberal policies being significantly more popular than conservative policies (Ellis and Stimson 2012). Aside from its ideological appeal, the Democratic coalition's constituent subgroups have also been particularly diverse. At the height of its internal division in the 1960s and 70s, the Democratic coalition was split between Southern conservative Dixiecrats who ultimately realigned with the Republican Party, socialist progressives that broke off into the Progressive Party, and economic liberals focused on the government's role in managing economic cycles, rather than also in labor rights and inequality (Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2024). Institutionally, reforms introduced by the McGovern-Fraser Commission in 1969 stripped control over the primary nomination process from local parties and distributed it among all party members, dramatically decentralizing Democratic primaries to an extent unmatched by the Republican Party (Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2024). Democratic presidents over the decades, in particular Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton, and Joe Biden, have also avoided adherence to ideological liberalism, instead adopting a pragmatic approach to expand the Democratic coalition through appealing to a broad base of social groups, each with idiosyncratic policy demands (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, Chpt. 3; Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2024). In summary, despite both parties constituting long coalitions of distinct interest groups, the Republican Party had the advantage of an ideological brand that unites its various constituents despite their differences, while the Democratic Party continues to struggle in defining what it stands for.

Empirical evidence points to the same finding that the Democratic coalition constitutes a larger tent than its counterpart. Focusing on voters, Lelkes and Sniderman (2016) found Republicans are much more ideologically sorted, aware about each party's ideological reputations, and attracted to their in-party on ideological grounds than Democrats. Grossmann and Hopkins (2016) further show that the Democratic Party is linked to a larger number of civic groups than their counterpart (Chpt. 3; see also Grossmann and Dominguez 2009), and that its core subgroups consists of a broad range of gender, religious, and racial minorities (e.g., gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, Black Americans, nonreligious people), while core Republican subgroups are generally pluralities of the electorate (e.g., white Americans, married people, suburbanites) (Chpt. 3). This partisan asymmetry manifests in other forms as well: Republican voters consume more ideologically conservative media than Democratic voters consume liberal media (Chpt. 4), Republican elites engage in ideological campaign rhetoric while Democratic elites appeal to group identity (Chpt. 5), and Republican policies tend to be more ideologically guided, focusing on preserving the status quo and thus limiting government expansion, while Democratic policies tend to focus on substantive policy changes addressing diverse social problems (Chpt. 6).

Taking together the historical and empirical evidence on partisan asymmetry, we expect the following finding from our mapping of the two party coalitions' inclusion goals:

> H1: Whereas the Republican coalition should be "short" with clear separation between core and marginal subgroups, the Democratic coalition should constitute a "long" coalition of numerous diverse subgroups.

2 Methods

We conducted an online survey in May and June, 2026, using an online convenience sample recruited through Prolific (N=2,054). The platform recruits representative samples by political affiliation by quota-matching on age by sex by three-point political affiliation groups. Age by sex group proportions come from US Census Bureau population group estimates from 2021, and political affiliation by age and by sex group proportions come from Pew Research Center's 2023 data (Doherty, Kiley, and Asheer 2023). We excluded pure independents and people who failed an attention check. The appendix shows the demographic distribution of our sample.

We measure three sets of variables: participants' subgroup and party identity, subgroup inclusion goals (SIG), and coalition inclusion goals (CIG).

Respondents were first asked about their self-identification in each of five dimensions: gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, and parental status.[1] They were then asked to indicate out of the five identities they self-reported, which was the most important to their identity – this constitutes the respondent's subgroup. We thus recovered a total of 20 subgroups (see Table 1).

[1] In our pretest, we also measured class identity, rural/urban identification, education status, and homeownership, but found few who reported these as their most important identity.

We then asked for participants' partisanship using the typical branched ANES seven-point measure, which we collapse into a binary measure to indicate their party coalition membership. Leaners are categorized in the same way as partisan identifiers.

Identity Dimension	Subgroup	N
Gender	Men	290
	Women	357
	Gender non-binary people	12
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual or straight people	69
	Gay and lesbian people	23
	Bisexual people	23
Race and ethnicity	Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander people	35
	Black people	82
	Hispanic people	19
	Native American and Indigenous people*	1
	White people	43
Religion	Atheist people	30
	Religiously agnostic people	31
	Buddhist people	5
	Christian people	368
	Hindu people*	1
	Jewish people	10
	Muslim people	4
Parental status	Parents	600
	People who do not have children	51

Table 1: Identity dimensions and subgroups. N = number of respondents categorized into each subgroup. *: We exclude these subgroups in our SIG analyses as we only recruited one member for each.

Our measure of inclusion goals was derived from an incentive-compatible coordination game design to measure normative beliefs (Krupka and Weber 2013). The game asks participants to guess the average percentage estimate of their subgroup or their party coalition – i.e., what they think their group believes. We compared their guesses to the average guess of other subgroup members, and rewarded a $0.15 bonus for each accurate guess, which we preregistered as falling within 10 percentage points in either direction of the average guess in the participant's subgroup or party. This method avoids conventional self-reports' potential shortcomings, such as low-effort responding and social desirability bias. More importantly, the measure captures the "groupy" nature of subgroups, which coordinate and form consensus on positions that are not necessarily a simple aggregation of their members' individual opinions. Conceptually, this distinguishes our approach from, for example, Mason and Wronski's (2018) "objective sorting" measure (see also Mason 2016) which averages subgroup members' self-reported partisan identification. We applied this task to two sets of questions.

First, we measured injunctive and descriptive subgroup inclusion goals (SIG). The injunctive SIG measure captures what the subgroup believes ought to be the case, while the descriptive SIG measure captures what the subgroup perceives as its current behavior (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990). For the former, we asked each participant what percentage of their subgroup think they should strive to be included as key members of the Democratic and Republican parties. For the latter, we asked what percentage of their subgroup is currently striving to be key members of the parties. These are measured on a sliding 101-point scale indicating percentage point guesses. We average across all estimates within a subgroup to derive that subgroup's SIG for each party.

Second, we measured injunctive and descriptive coalition inclusion goals (CIG). The injunctive CIG measure captures what the coalition believes ought to be the case, while the descriptive CIG measure captures what the coalition perceives as its current behavior. Each participant was randomly assigned one subgroup from each of the five identity dimensions, excluding the participant's own subgroup. For each subgroup, we then calculate the pooled average guess among all party members assigned to

evaluate its CIG. Table 2 defines the various inclusion goal measures mentioned above.

Measure	Type	Democratic coalition	Republican coalition
Subgroup inclusion goal (SIG)	Injunctive	How much the subgroup believes it *should* work hard to be included in the Democratic Party	How much the subgroup believes it *should* work hard to be included in the Republican Party
	Descriptive	How much the subgroup believes it *is currently* working hard to be included in the Democratic Party	How much the subgroup believes it *is currently* working hard to be included in the Republican Party
Coalition inclusion goal (CIG)	Injunctive	How much Democrats believe they *should* include members of the subgroup as key members of the Democratic Party	How much Republicans believe they *should* include members of the subgroup as key members of the Republican Party
	Descriptive	How much Democrats believe they *are currently* including members of the subgroup as key members of the Democratic Party	How much Republicans believe they *are currently* including members of the subgroup as key members of the Republican Party

Table 2: Operationalizations for SIG and CIG measures

3 Results

3.1 Interpretation and Face Validity

Figure 1 plots the distribution of subgroups' injunctive SIG and CIG for each party coalition. Following Ellemers and Jetten's (2013, Figure 1) typology, we use 50% as the cutoff on each axis to classify subgroups into one of four quadrants: subgroups with high SIG and high CIG form the coalition's *core*; those with low SIG but high CIG – wanted by the coalition but reluctant to be included – are *admired marginals*; those with low SIG and low CIG, content to remain peripheral, are *independent marginals*; and those with high SIG but low CIG – seeking inclusion the coalition does not reciprocate – are *rejected marginals*. Within the upper-right quadrant, we further distinguish between groups that sit above or below the 45 degree line. Because those below the diagonal have higher SIG than CIG, we suspect they have less leverage than those above the line.

To demonstrate how the figure should be interpreted, take the example of men for the Democratic coalition. According to estimates from all participants who reported that being a man is their most important identity, 42.34% of fellow men think they should strive to be included as key members in the Democratic party (SD = 21.49, BCa 95% CI: [40.11, 44.89]) – this constitutes men's injunctive SIG for the Democratic coalition. On the other hand, according to estimates from Democratic respondents randomly assigned to evaluate whether to include men as key members, 63.12% of Democrats think they should include men as key members of their party (SD = 22.24, BCa 95% CI: [60.86, 65.46]) – this constitutes men's injunctive CIG for the Democratic coalition. Because a majority of the Democratic coalition wishes to include men as key members, but only a minority of men think they should try hard to be key members of the party, men are categorized as *admired marginals* within the Democratic coalition. [2]

Figure 1's mapping of the two party coalitions provides evidence that our novel measures are valid: the core subgroups it recovers for each party match those identified by prior work using entirely different measures (Kane, Mason, and Wronski 2021; Mason and Wronski 2018; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). For instance, women, Black people, and gay and lesbian people occupy the core of the Democratic coalition, and straight people, men, white people, and Christians occupy the Republicans' core. The

[2]Note here that we define subgroups as independent of, rather than nested within party coalitions. As such, the SIG estimates of men for the Democratic coalition are contributed by both Democratic and Republican men. For the same reason, the point sizes for the same subgroup is equal across the Democratic and Republican panels.

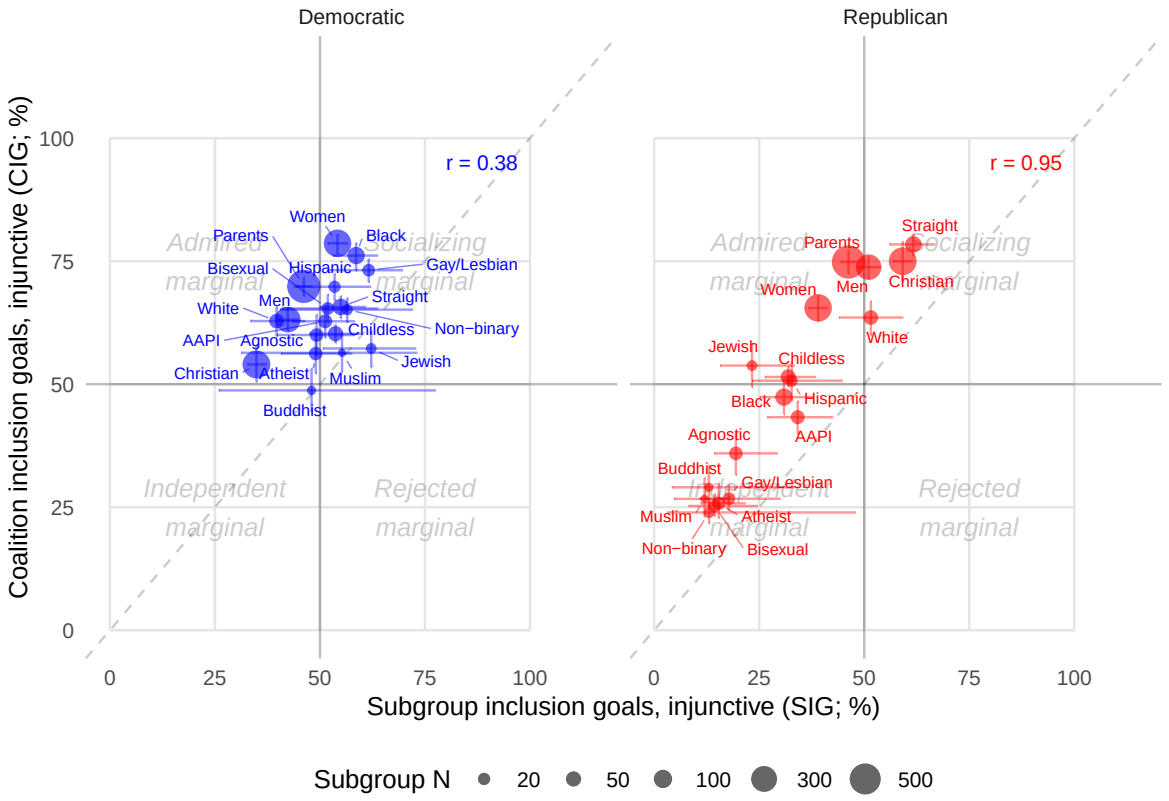


Figure 1: Marginality of subgroups as indicated by injunctive inclusion goals (100% = highest inclusion goal). Bias-corrected accelerated (BCa) bootstrap 95% CIs are included to correct for subgroups with small samples and/or skewed inclusion goal distributions.

same core-group recovery holds using the descriptive inclusion goal measure (Figure 2), which we return to below in assessing the congruence between ideal and current alignment.

The advantage of our measure is not just that it can identify the descriptive positions of subgroups within each coalition – something that has been accomplished with self-reported partisanship, vote choices, and feeling thermometer scores toward the various groups (Kane, Mason, and Wronski 2021; Ghezae, Lelkes, and Cikara 2026) – but that it separately captures subgroup and coalition goals, a distinction static self-report measures collapse into a single number. An independent marginal subgroup and a rejected marginal subgroup can look identical on a simple closeness scale; only our approach tells them apart.

3.2 Subgroups rarely seek inclusion a coalition won't reciprocate

Across both party coalitions, no subgroup falls into the rejected marginal quadrant. However, within Democrats' socializing marginal quadrant, Jewish people have stronger subgroup inclusion goals than coalition inclusion goals. Hence, while they are not rejected, they likely hold comparatively little leverage over the coalition, wanting inclusion more than the coalition is currently willing to grant it. This result may reflect recent debates over the place of Jewish Americans within the Democratic coalitions (AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research 2026; Gottheimer 2026), though we caution that it may simply be attributed to noise, as only 10 of our respondents were Jewish and the BCa bootstrap 95% CI for the CIG estimate crosses the diagonal line.

One interpretation of this finding is that subgroups' aspirations respond to the coalition's perceived receptiveness. The reverse causal ordering is also possible: the coalition may take an interest in a subgroup because the subgroup itself wants to belong. Under either interpretation, then, it is difficult to see how rejection at the margins could persist. Either the subgroup will revise its aspiration to belong or the coalition will revise its view of the subgroup, narrowing the gap (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). Lastly, for almost all subgroups, the coalition wishes to include them more than the subgroup wishes to be included, suggesting that the contemporary American political context appears to grant more political leverage to subgroups than parties.

3.3 Democrats include broadly, Republicans include reciprocally

Rejected marginals are largely absent from both coalitions, but otherwise the Democratic and Republican coalitions relate to social groups quite differently. Democrats are willing to include a broad range of groups as key members, many of which show little interest in joining. Republicans are more selective, and the groups they want to include also want to be included. While partisan asymmetry is well documented (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Lelkes and Sniderman 2016), our measures reveal dimensions of this asymmetry that existing approaches have overlooked. We document these differences by comparing who is at the core and who is at the margin of each coalition, the alignment between what subgroups want and what the coalition wants, and how current levels of inclusion compare with desired ones.

3.3.1 Composition of core and marginal subgroups

Consistent with previous research on the social composition of party coalitions (Kane, Mason, and Wronski 2021; Mason and Wronski 2018; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016), Figure 1 reveals starkly different maps of the Democratic and Republican coalitions. The Democratic core includes a relatively large number of distinct subgroups spanning multiple identity dimensions, including women, Black people, and gay and lesbian people. In the Republican coalition, though, only straight people and Christians approximate core status, with men and white people closely following. Thus, while the Democratic core is made up of a diverse set of groups, the Republican core is concentrated among fewer groups.

Starting in the upper-right "socializing marginal" quadrant, subgroups here are either on their way to becoming core members or have nearly achieved core membership status (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). In the Democratic coalition, socializing marginal subgroups are numerous, though each is relatively small in size. In the Republican coalition, though, only straight people and Christians attain core status, while men and white people sit on the margins. As we elaborate in the Discussion section, because each subgroup has a unique set of policy demands, a diverse set of socializing marginal

subgroups not only makes it difficult to achieve ideological coherence in the coalition, but also risks internal division.

Moving to the quadrant of admired marginals, the MARGINI model (Ellemers and Jetten 2013) predicts that these subgroups may have disproportionate leverage over dictating the coalition's decisions and changes, because the coalition needs to work the hardest to attract these groups. Though the two party coalitions share a similar number of subgroups in this quadrant (six for Democrats, five for Republicans), Democrats' admired marginal subgroups are notably larger in size than Republicans' (compare Parents, Men, and Christians for Democrats against Parents and Women for Republicans), implying that the Democratic coalition may be forced to constantly update its set of policies and appeals to cater to these subgroups' demands, while the Republican coalition is comparatively less pressured.

If the Democratic coalition stands out for its inclusiveness, the Republican coalition stands out for its exclusivity. In the lower-left quadrant for independent marginals, we find subgroups that agree with the coalition that they should not be included, or as Ellemers and Jetten (2013) describe, "happy at the periphery." Almost all religious, ethnic, and sexual minority subgroups we measured fall under this quadrant for the Republican coalition, while practically no subgroup is an independent marginal for the Democratic coalition.

3.3.2 Alignment between coalition and subgroup inclusion goals

Inclusion goals are also more aligned in the Republican than in the Democratic coalition, indicating the former coalition is more congruent than the latter. In a more congruent coalition, subgroups that the party wants to include should also want to be included, and subgroups marginalized by the coalition also want to distance themselves from it. When subgroup and coalition inclusion goals diverge, however, either the coalition or the subgroup must concede for the subgroup to remain in the coalition. Coalitions hoping to retain admired marginals would need to work harder to appeal to such subgroups to increase their SIG, otherwise these admired marginals may further distance themselves from the coalition and eventually drop out. Were a group to become rejected marginals, they would need to work harder to appeal to the coalition to increase their CIG (Ellemers and Jetten 2013).

Figure 1 demonstrates that subgroups show remarkably high correlation between their SIGs and CIGs in relation to the Republican coalition (r=0.95), indicating a high degree of consensus between the coalition and subgroups of their in-party status. In contrast, subgroup SIGs and CIGs show a weak correlation in relation to the Democratic coalition (r=0.38, Zou's 95% CI for $r_{Dem} - r_{Rep}$: [-1.06, -0.20][3]). Thus, subgroup and coalition inclusion goals are much more congruent within the Republican than within the Democratic coalition.

This appears to be driven by the party being more willing to include the subgroups as key members than the subgroups are. On the y-axis in Figure 1, a majority of the Democratic coalition appears willing to include almost all subgroups that we measured as key members – all but Buddhists scored higher than 50% in their CIGs. Contrast this with the x-axis, where subgroups appear tightly clustered around 50% in their SIGs for the Democratic coalition, suggesting they are generally ambivalent about their inclusion.

3.3.3 Convergence between ideal and current alignment

At first glance, the coordinates of subgroups using either descriptive and injunctive norms look similar (Compare Figures 1 and 2). However, comparing the two measures directly reveals that ideal and current alignment converge far more closely in the Republican coalition than in the Democratic coalition. When a coalition and its subgroups are as aligned about the *current* status of each subgroup as they are about their *ideal* status, we may say ideal and current alignment converges. However, when there is a gap between these two types of alignment, ideal and current alignment diverge. As the injunctive inclusion goal measures capture what the subgroup or the party believes ought to be true, we define the correlation between injunctive SIG and CIG as a measure of alignment about *ideal* status. The descriptive inclusion goal measures, in contrast, capture subgroups' or coalitions' current behavior, and thus measure alignment about *current* status. Figure 2 shows the descriptive inclusion goals for the two party coalitions.

[3]See Zou (2007). Zou's 95% CIs were calculated using the R package 'cocor' (Diedenhofen and Musch 2015).

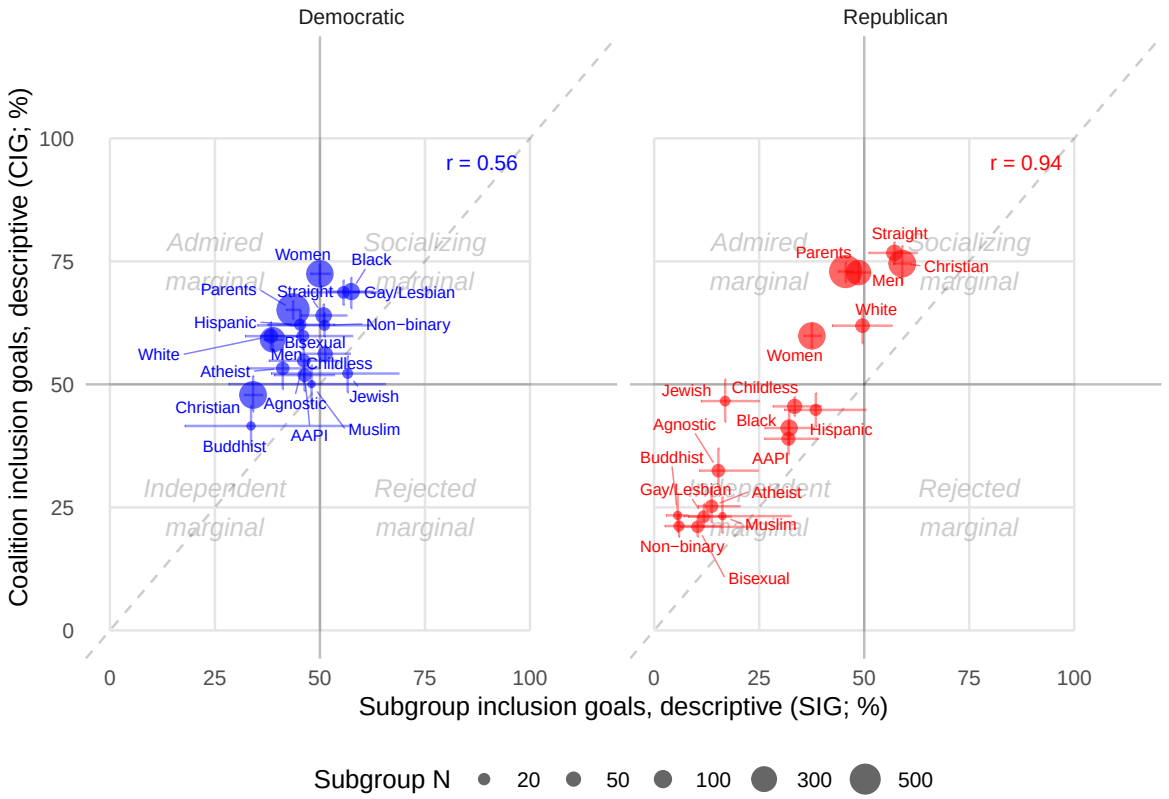


Figure 2: Marginality of subgroups as indicated by descriptive inclusion goals (100% = highest inclusion goal). Bias-corrected accelerated (BCa) bootstrap 95% CIs are included to correct for subgroups with small samples and/or skewed inclusion goal distributions.

In the Republican coalition, not only do subgroups and the coalition align on subgroups' *ideal* status (r=0.95), but they also align on *current* status (r=0.94, Zou's 95% CI for $r_{Rep,inj} - r_{Rep,descr}$: [-0.051, 0.081]). In the Democratic coalition, while there is only a weak level of alignment on subgroups' *ideal* status (r=0.38), subgroups and the coalition align moderately to strongly on subgroups' *current* status, though the difference between the two correlations falls short of statistical significance (r =0.56, Zou's 95% CI for $r_{Dem,inj} - r_{Dem,descr}$: [-0.48, 0.061]). The fact that subgroups disagree with the Democratic coalition more on how much they *should be included* than on how much they *are currently included* suggests latent pressure for change – some subgroups are unhappy about their current position in the coalition and will thus either try harder to be included, or distance themselves from the party.

3.3.4 Differences in coalition inclusion goals

The Democratic coalition is also more eager to include subgroups than the Republican coalition. If a coalition assigns a subgroup an injunctive CIG *higher* than its descriptive CIG, we can say that the coalition would like to include the subgroup *more* than it currently does. On the other hand, if a subgroup's injunctive CIG is *lower* than its descriptive CIG, the coalition wishes to include it *less* than it already does.

Figure 3 shows the difference between each subgroup's injunctive and descriptive CIG in each coalition. The blue vertical lines in the background illustrate the coalition-wide pooled average difference with a band representing the 95% CI. Comparing these pooled average differences, the Democratic coalition is 1.25 percentage points more inclusive of subgroups on average than the Republican coalition (SE = 0.51, 95% CI: [0.24, 2.25]).

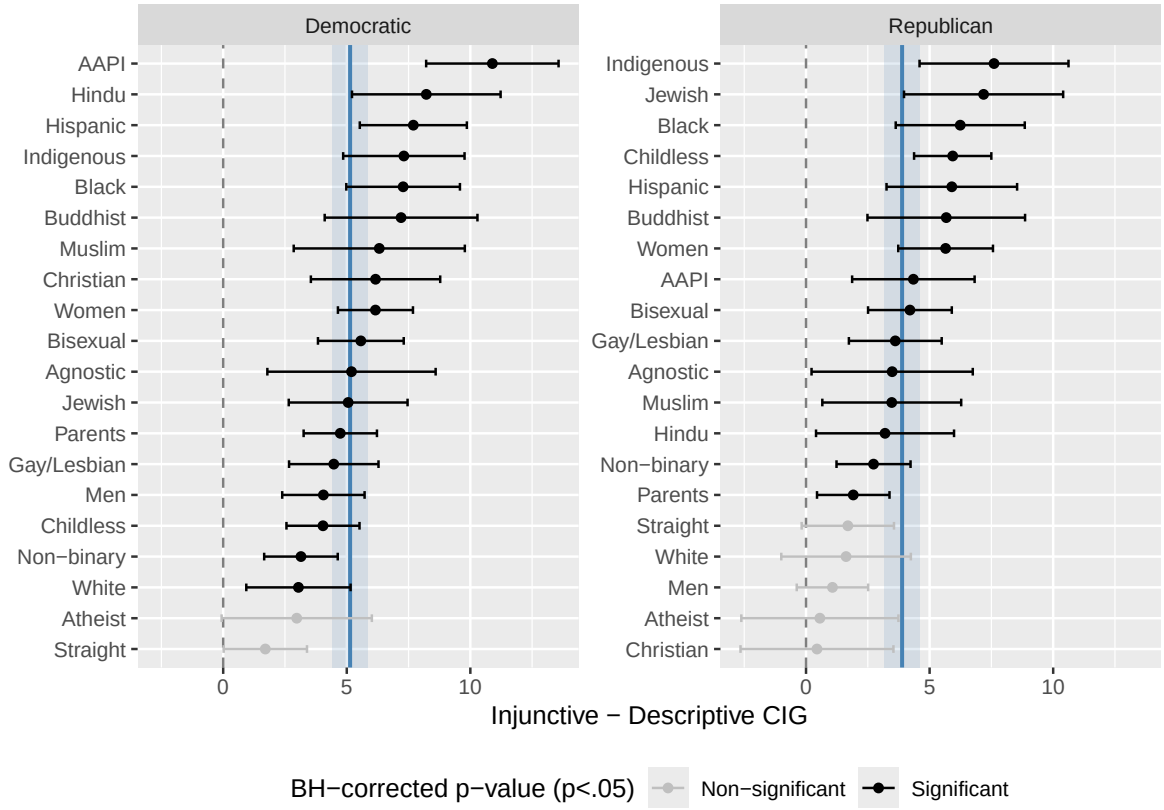


Figure 3: Differences between injunctive and descriptive CIGs by subgroup. 95% CIs are corrected for multiple hypothesis testing using the Benjamini-Hochberg method. Blue vertical lines represent party pooled average injunctive-descriptive differences with 95% CIs.

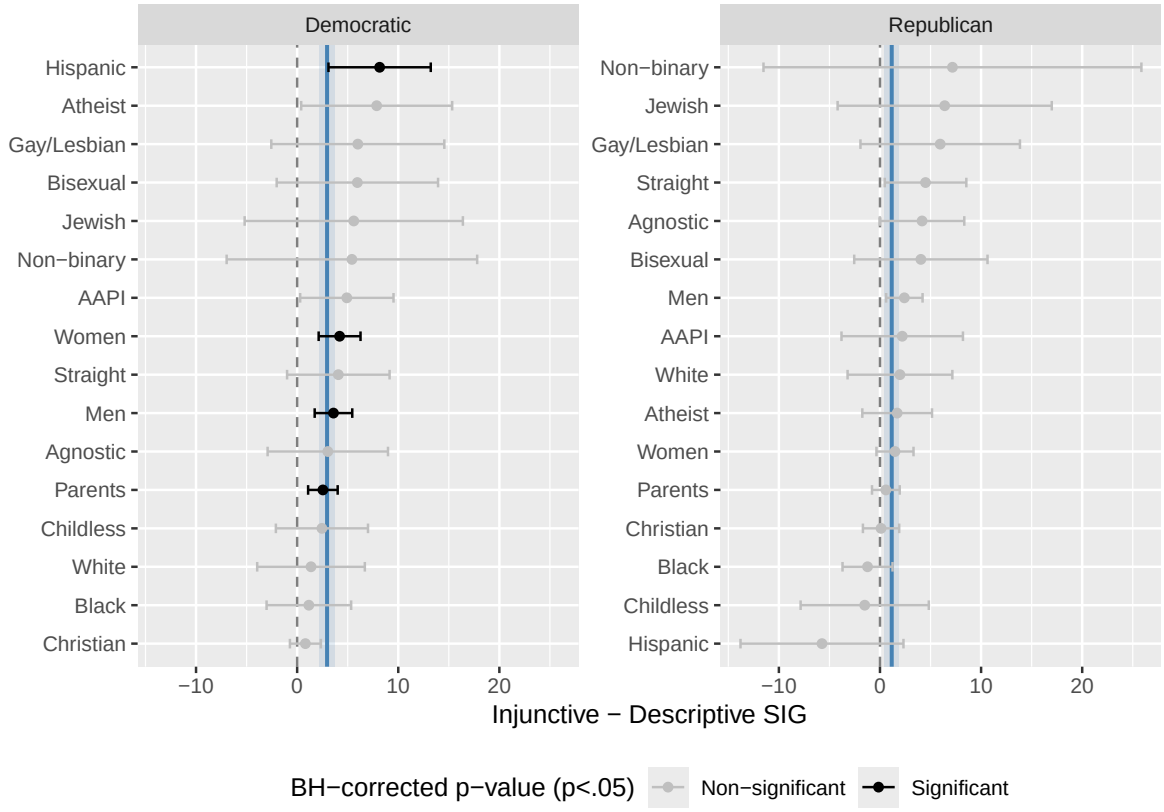


Figure 4: Differences between injunctive and descriptive SIGs by subgroup. 95% CIs are corrected for multiple hypothesis testing using the Benjamini-Hochberg method. Blue vertical lines represent party pooled average injunctive-descriptive differences with 95% CIs. Subgroups with 5 members or less are excluded.

3.3.5 Democrats are more popular than Republicans

Lastly, we find that subgroups are more eager to be included in the Democratic than the Republican coalition. If a subgroup assigns a coalition an injunctive SIG *higher* than its descriptive SIG, we can say that the subgroup would like to be included in the coalition *more* than it currently does. On the other hand, if a subgroup's injunctive SIG is *lower* than its descriptive SIG, the subgroup wishes to be included *less* than it already does.

Figure 4 shows the difference between each subgroup's injunctive and descriptive SIG for each coalition. As before, the blue band represents the coalition-wide pooled average difference with 95% CI. Comparing these pooled average differences, subgroups are 1.80 percentage points more eager to be included in the Democratic than in the Republican coalition (SE = 0.47, 95% CI: [0.88, 2.72]). The difference appears to be driven by participants reporting being Hispanic, a woman, a man, or a parent as their top identity, as all four subgroups wish to be included more than they currently are in the Democratic coalition. In contrast, no subgroup wishes to be included more than their current level in the Republican coalition.

4 Discussion and future planned studies

Using novel coordination game measures of subgroup and coalition inclusion goals, we mapped subgroups' positions in the Democratic and Republican coalitions. We demonstrate three key findings: 1) subgroups rarely seek inclusion in an unwelcoming coalition, 2) the Democratic coalition consists of a larger tent than the Republican coalition, and 3) subgroups seek inclusion in the Democratic coalition more than they do in the Republican coalition.

First, whereas subgroups distance themselves from a coalition when it rejects them, coalitions are perfectly happy to accept reluctant subgroups, as almost all subgroups are placed above the diagonal line in Figure 1. It is possible that this heightened eagerness of coalitions to expand their camps is driven by increasingly narrow margins of control in national races (Tricaud and Wacziarg 2025). Indeed, electoral competition predicts democratic responsiveness (Abou-Chadi 2018; Griffin 2006). That said, once such electoral competition fades away, we may not continue to see such eagerness for inclusion for both parties. As Riker's (1962) size principle suggests, political coalitions do not seek to maximize their coalition size unconditionally, and instead seek to reach the minimal winning coalition. The larger the winning coalition, the more diverse and conflicting interests are represented, and the smaller the per-capita gain from the coalition's victory.

This leads us to our second and most important finding, that the Democratic coalition is "longer" than the Republican coalition. Across various tests, we show convergent evidence that Democrats want to include almost all subgroups, and thus must cater to more demands from this diverse coalition. In contrast, in the Republican coalition, subgroups and the party are of the same mind of who are included and who are not. This points to a potential peril of the Democratic coalition: because inclusiveness is their brand, they also have to cater to more subgroups, and carry the risk of internal division. Even when Democrats win elections, they may end up pleasing few in their coalition because of the diverse interests they represent (Riker 1962). Our finding echoes Lelkes and Sniderman's (2016) argument that Democrats sustain their coalition through attracting a broad coalition and catering to popular policy choices, whereas Republicans sustain their coalition through ideological agreement.

At the same time, Democrats' brand as the inclusive party also has its benefits, namely that it attracts more eager subgroups. As we showed in Figure 4, Hispanic Americans, women, men, and parents all hope for further inclusion in the Democratic coalition, whereas no subgroup that we measured has such aspirations in the Republican coalition. Whereas prior takes on the asymmetry between the Democratic and Republican coalitions have focused on Republicans' advantage in ideological coherence (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Lelkes and Sniderman 2016), we intimate a parallel Democratic advantage in inclusiveness.

Our inclusion goal mappings are not without limits. First, pluralistic ignorance could threaten the validity of our incentivized coordination games, as it is possible that party or subgroup members misperceive the norm in the same direction on average, and thus coordinate on that misperceived norm. For example, mass media can induce partisan stereotypes and perpetuate socially constructed party images (e.g., Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Here we attempted to strike a reasonable tradeoff between this shortcoming and construct validity and avoiding social desirability, as we discussed in the Methods section, but invite future work to develop better measures. Second, though interest groups and elites may have disproportionate influence in deciding party inclusion goals and in forming images in people's minds of who should be included in the party, here we focus on the mass public and weigh each participant's contribution to the subgroup and coalition goals equally. Third, we do not consider intersectional identities at this point (e.g., white evangelical Christians; Black women), though we plan to include them in future studies.

Our descriptive findings presented here represent our first step in understanding conditions for subgroup influence on party coalitions. Translating our mapping of subgroups' inclusion goals to an understanding of *opinion leadership*, of course, requires causal evidence. We expect admired marginal subgroups are less likely to follow the party majority opinion. At the same time, the attitudes of these groups are more likely to lead other party members' attitudes. In other words, the social groups most likely to guide party platforms are those that the party needs to work hard to win over, not those that are already core members of the party and unlikely to defect. If our hypothesis is correct, we would find that admired marginal subgroups are the most likely to lead and the least likely to follow.

We are currently planning two survey experiments designed to test these expectations directly. The first examines which groups follow the party. We randomly assign whether a policy position is described as supported by the respondent's party and test whether the effect of this party cue varies according to the respondent's subgroup membership. This allows us to test whether members of groups located in different quadrants of the inclusion goal map differ in their willingness to follow the party. In essence, we expect that higher SIG would amplify cue-taking effects, higher CIG would dampen such effects, and the combination of low CIG and high SIG would dampen cue-taking effects more than high CIG and high SIG. The second experiment examines which groups lead the party. We randomly assign respondents information about whether a particular group supports a policy position and test

whether that cue changes the views of other members of the party coalition, and whether this pattern matches the predictions of our framework. In addition, in the future, we plan to validate our inclusion goal map (Figure 1) with a representative sample.

Here we have demonstrated the potential utility of our novel inclusion goal measures in capturing social group leverage. In these future experiments, we hope to further provide causal evidence for the effects of such leverage to understand the coalitional dynamics of public opinion.

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Appendix: Sample demographics

Variable	Category	*N*	%
Age	18–24	244	11.9
	25–34	342	16.7
	35–50	558	27.2
	51–64	636	31.0
	65+	274	13.3
Gender	Man	1,000	48.7
	Woman	1,034	50.3
	Gender non-binary	20	1.0
Race/ethnicity	White	1,547	75.3
	Black	267	13.0
	Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander	96	4.7
	Hispanic	86	4.2
	Native American and Indigenous	11	0.5
	Other	47	2.3

Table 3: Sample distribution by age, gender, and race/ethnicity