

**Cooperation and Conflict in Multiracial School Districts**

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Politics, as it is commonly defined, is the determination of “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell 1948). This definition implies the presence cleavages within a political system. Arguably, some of the most pronounced and enduring cleavages in American political culture have been rooted in racial and ethnic differences (Hero 1998; Carmines and Stimson 1989). The problem of inter-group or inter-racial conflict has grown more complex as the landscape of America itself has become more diverse. The number of minorities (non-Anglos) has grown considerably in the recent years. Likewise, the composition of minorities has grown increasingly more diverse. Several recent studies have been quick to point out that the rapidly growing Latino population has complicated the situation, as Latinos now compromise the largest minority group in the nation (12.5% compared to 12.3% African-American). Moreover, the geographic isolation of minorities is becoming less prevalent. It is becoming increasingly evident that the majority of Latino political activity does not occur on the ranchland of South Texas, as V.O. Key (1949) believed it to, but rather in urban centers such as Houston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Urban centers which, of course, also have reasonably sized African-American populations.

These trends have renewed scholarly interest in the manner in which minority groups relate to one another, and whether or not those relations are characterized by interracial conflict or cooperation (McClain et al. 2003; Rodriguez and Segura 2003; Meier, McClain, Wrinkle, and Polinard, 2004). The extent to which inter-minority relations are dominated by collaboration or discord holds considerable implications for the formation of rainbow coalitions and the general political process in a variety of urban settings. This paper is an attempt to understand what conditions result in inter-minority competition or cooperation.

The setting for this study is sample of over 300 multiracial school districts in Texas over eight years. School districts provide an excellent forum for examining multi-racial coalitions

because of the number of representational and policy indicators they provide. Moreover, school districts also vary greatly in terms of racial contexts, and allow a large degree of discretion in terms of faculty hiring and policy implementation. This paper extends the literature on minority coalition building by examining hiring within these school districts, as well as how the demographic composition of school district teachers influences outputs. This approach is somewhat analogous to McClain and Karning (1990) and McClain (1993) who examine inter-minority competition with respect to municipal employment. This project also borrows from an approach taken by Meier, McClain, Wrinkle, and Polinard (2004), who also examine the issue of inter-minority competition at the school district level. However, this project utilizes a considerable larger dataset and also corrects for some of the methodological shortcomings Meier et al. (2004) faced.

### **How Are Inter-Minority Relations Best Characterized?**

Numerous scholars have examined the way racial/ethnic groups interact with one another. Recent work has focused on how these interactions differ under various circumstances. For example, when a political scenario is viewed within a zero-sum context, that is the political benefits under question are limited, we would anticipate a higher level of interethnic discord. When removed from a zero-sum context, however, this relationship should be characterized by increased degrees of cooperation (Meier et al. 2004).

Despite this, inter-minority relations remain heavily influenced by a variety of other factors. De la Garza (1997) suggests that several points are likely responsible for the inability of Latinos and African-Americans to form numerous and long-lasting rainbow coalitions. These include:

1. Resentment among many blacks over Latino access to affirmative action programs that blacks believe were designed for them.

2. Tensions because of the perception that immigration results in job displacement and the reallocation of public resources to Latinos rather than to blacks.
3. Battles over reapportionment and redistricting. Population is the foundation for allocating legislative seats. The numbers of state legislative seats is fixed, while the number of congressional seats allocated to each state may vary slightly as a result of the census. Given that, in cities with substantial Latino and black populations, these groups often live in juxtaposition and where Latino population growth greatly exceeds black population growth, any increase in legislative seats designed to accommodate the growth of the Latin population could come at the expense of blacks. (pp. 453)

Relying primarily on survey data, the literature thus far has found that support for different coalitional strategies varies with economic conditions, perceived social distance, experiences with discrimination, income, education, group size, age, political integration, and the amount of resources available to each group (Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989; Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994; McClain 1993; Fearon and Laitin 1996; Meier and Stewart 1991; Garcia 2000). Garcia (2000) finds that Latino support for programs geared towards helping African-Americans increases with education, perception of African-American discrimination, as well as levels of political attentiveness. Jackson, Gerber, and Cain (1994) note that blacks in Los Angeles felt close to Latinos when compared to national figures. Age is also a positive influence on support for political strategies that would foster interracial cooperation. As with most previous research, socioeconomic status positively affects support for Latino – African-American coalitions.

Aside from the demographic characteristics that facilitate or hamper efforts to form multiracial coalitions, a number of social and structural variables influence the process. Perceived social distance is perhaps the best studied of these influences (Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989; Meier and Stewart 1991, McClain et al 2003). Meier and Stewart (1991) point out that while ideological similarity might aid in the creation of rainbow coalitions, elevated levels of social distance make such an outcome unlikely.

Based upon a survey of 1200 Texas residents, Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel (1989) note that for most types of social interaction, especially interactions which require the formation of a substantial permanent relationship (ie: intermarriage), both African-Americans and Latinos preferred to associate with Anglos. Similarly, Jackson, Gerber, and Cain (1994) find that African-Americans nationally were much more likely to identify with Anglos than with Latinos. A sample they drew from the Los Angeles area turned up comparable results.

The presence of social distance is compounded by the unique ethnic situation in which Latinos find themselves. As the US Census form indicates, Latinos (or Hispanics to use Census terminology) are technically “White”, yet remain a unique subgroup within that categorization. Munoz and Henry (1986) observe that “most Latino political leaders have historically promoted a white identity for Latinos and this has contributed to a lack of interest in building rainbow coalitions.” This approach also does not consider the difficulties which may arise when Latinos are considered in non-panethnic terms. Thus, while political ideology would seem to lead minorities to form rainbow coalitions, social distance lends support to the power thesis, which concludes that Anglo-Latino coalitions more likely than inter-minority ones.

In their examination of this topic, Meier and Stewart (1991) find that there is a tradeoff between African-Americans and Latinos in terms of beneficial education policies. Yet, other studies have found inter-minority coalitions have formed in order to contend with problems which the African-American and Latino communities share, such as poor socioeconomic conditions. Moreover, coalitions have also been observed for potential “wedge issues”, such as immigration (Estrada, Garcia, and Marcias 1994; Browning Marshall and Tabb 1984; Espiritu 1992).

Taking this previous literature into account, we might expect inter-minority relations in the bureaucracy to be characterized in several different ways. McClain (1993) offers what is arguably the best articulation of these hypotheses.

Inter-minority Cooperation:

Gains by African Americans in terms of policy and representation will increase along with gains made by the Latino community and vice versa.

Inter-minority Conflict:

Alternatively, gains by African Americans in terms of policy and representation may come at the expense of gains made by the Latino community and vice versa.

Inter-minority Independence:

Gains made by one group will be unrelated to gains made by the other.

McClain (1993) finds evidence that representational gains on the part of African-Americans are likely to negatively affect Latinos, while gains made by Latinos do not necessarily limit African-American opportunities. Thus, while we might expect inter-minority relations to be generally characterized by competition or cooperation, it is conceivable that the true relationship is mixed. Moreover, the degree of the competition or cooperation may vary. That is, even if African-American – Latino relations are found to be mutually competitive or cooperative, African-American representation might negatively or positively influence Latino representation to a greater or lesser degree than Latino representation influences African-American representation.

### **Minority Experiences in the Education Policymaking Process**

The history of minorities within the education system is filled with accounts inequality and disparate treatment for both African-Americans and Latinos (Barr 1995; San Miguel 1986, 2001; Woodson 1933). This, combined with the importance of education for improving the

quality of life and creating opportunities for upward social mobility, has led minority activists to make equality within the educational system a high priority (Barr 1995). Recent attempts to ameliorate the condition of minorities within the education system have been aided by the election of minorities to school boards, as well as the hiring of minority administrators and teachers. The election of minorities to school boards increased substantially in the 1980s, largely as a result of the adoption of single member district systems and the resulting elimination of a number of at-large electoral arrangements (Meier, Stewart, and England 1989; Welch 1990; Barr 1995). While such progress might offer encouragement to proponents of racial equity within the educational system, serious obstacles continue to exist. In Texas, for example, only 37 percent of African-Americans attended desegregated school as of 1989. Likewise, as late as twenty years ago only three African-Americans held the position of superintendent in the over 1000 school districts in Texas (Barr 1995). By 1995, that number had only climbed to 8. Similar inequities exist at the level of school administration and teachers. These factors have combined to ensure a relatively high degree of salience for race within the educational system. This concern has not ignored the potentially conflicting goals which minority group may advocate. Along with the three points mentioned earlier, de la Garza (1997) also notes that African-American - Latino relations have suffered from

“Tensions resulting from Latino population growth that produces Latino majorities in schools that previously had black majorities, administrators and staff. Latino demands for curricular reform and staffing changes thus become Latino-black competitions (pp. 453).”

Using the education system as a setting for this study, I develop the following operational hypotheses.

#### Operational Competition Hypotheses:

As the number of African-American administrators within a school district increases, the number of Latino administrators will decrease, and vice versa.

As the number of African-American teachers within a school district increases, the number of Latino teachers will decrease, and vice versa.

As the African-American TASS (standardized test) pass rates increase, the Latino pass rate will decrease.

#### Operational Cooperation Hypotheses:

As the number of African-American administrators within a school district increases, the number of Latino administrators will likewise increase, and vice versa.

As the number of African-American teachers within a school district increases, the number of Latino teachers will likewise increase, and vice versa.

As the African-American TASS (standardized test) pass rates increase, the Latino pass rate will likewise increase.

### **Data and Methodology**

The data for this study are taken from sample of multi-racial school districts in Texas. Data sources include the Texas Education Agency, the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and the 1990 Census. In order to be considered multi-racial, districts were required to have a student enrollment that was over five percent African-American *and* over five percent Latino. Texas is rivaled only by California in terms of multiracial districts. However, the Texas Education Agency requires districts to report a number of performance indicators by race, making it a superior population from which to draw a sample. The data for the analysis pools performance indicators and representational variables for the years 1994 through 2001. This yields approximately 1980 cases.

#### Dependent Variables

Three dependent variables are considered in this study. The first two variables consist of the percentage of African-American/Latino administrators and teachers. These variables should

be adequate for testing hypotheses regarding representation and have the added benefit of being placed within a zero-sum context.

A third variable measures the pass rate on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TASS) exam for African-Americans/Latinos. The TAAS exam was a standardized exam, the passage of which was required for high school graduation. TAAS pass rates are highly salient within the educational bureaucracy, as well as among the general public. Although the TAAS exam is not necessarily an encompassing measure of all the educational objectives school districts strive to meet, it is critical to the state's educational accountability system and is consistently ranked as the top priority of superintendents within the state.

#### Independent Variables of Interest

Benefits in terms of policy are likely to be the result of racial/ethnic representation. The causal process of representation in the education policymaking process is relatively well established (Polinard, Wrinkle, and Longoria 1990; Polinard et al. 1994; Fraga, Meier and England 1986; Meier, Stewart, and England 1989).

School board members directly influence the hiring of upper level officials within the educational bureaucracy, namely superintendents and school administrators. Administrators, in turn, influence the hiring of teachers, education's version of street level bureaucrats (Meier and Stewart 1991). Teachers, who possess relatively substantial amounts of discretion, can then impact outputs such as student performance.<sup>1</sup> This influence can occur through a variety of direct as well as indirect means, such as serving as role models and providing more effective

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<sup>1</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the representation and casual linkages in the education political making process see Meier, Stewart, and England (1989) pp. 9-39.

instruction. (Aaron and Powell 1982; Cole 1986, Meier and Stewart 1991; Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999).<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, when modeling the racial/ethnic composition of administrators, representation on the school board is used as one of the independent variables of main interest. Data on the percentage of Latino school board members was coded from the roster of elected Latino officials produced annually by NALEO. An analogous roster for African-Americans is gathered by the Joint Center.

When modeling composition at the teacher (street) level, administrative representation becomes the key independent variables. Lastly, when modeling bureaucratic outputs (student performance), the racial/ethnic composition of the teaching staff is an independent variable of concern.

### Control Variables

In order to accurately estimate the relationship of our key independent variables, several other rival explanations must be controlled for. For the most part, these explanations can be linked to district resources and constraints, all of which should influence the performance of school districts to some degree.

The percentage of low-income students in a district is among the most profound of these constraints. Lower levels of socioeconomic status limit the educational resources available to children, and make the process of education more difficult. In order to account for poverty, I control for the percentage of students within a district who qualify for the state's free lunch program. This should provide an appropriate gauge of the percentage of low-income students in a district.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a very top-down conceptualization of the education system. Although we know from previous literature (Meier and Smith 1994) that the educational system possess some bottom-up characteristics, this straightforward view of the process is used for this analysis.

The relationship between expenditures and educational performance remains unsettled (Hanushek 1996; Hedges and Greenwald 1996; Evans, Murray, and Schwab 1997). Despite this, increased expenditures remains a potentially positive influence on outputs. For this reason, I control for several measures of district expenditures. The first among these is per-pupil expenditures on instruction. Per-pupil expenditures for non-instruction purposes (such as athletics) are not considered, as they should not directly influence student performance. A second measure of expenditures consists of average teacher salaries. Higher teacher salaries should increase performance by attracting more talented teachers (Hanushek and Pace 1996). Lastly, the state aid is used as a control. State aid is a method of supplementing districts whose tax bases do not provide them with an adequate amount of revenue. Increases in levels of state aid should also have a positive affect on performance indicators.

The final control variable introduced into my models is a rough measure of the quality of the school. This variable is crucial as it ensures that differences in student performance are not the result of minorities systematically attending schools of lesser quality. Meier, McClain, Wrinkle, and Polinard (2004) rely on a measure of Anglo student performance in order to control for school quality. As high-quality schools are likely to raise the performance of all students, Anglo performance should at least provide a base line for district quality (Weiher 2000). The use of this measure is further bolstered by Jencks and Phillips' (1998) observation that minority student performance should increase when placed within a high achieving atmosphere.

### Endogenous Variables

In a similar study, which also employed a school district dataset, Meier et al. (2004) note that questions regarding minority cooperation and conflict involve analyzing tradeoffs between minority groups. These tradeoffs complicate the estimation of statistical models, as an endogenous relationship emerges wherein, for example, representational gains by Latinos in

terms of teaching or administrators might influence the representation of African-Americans, since the number of administrators and teachers is limited. The endogenous relationship presented here means that OLS is an unsuitable method of estimation. As a result this study relies on 3 stage least squares (3SLS). 3SLS tackles the problem of reciprocal causation by relying on the use of exogenous instruments (Greene 2003; Kennedy 2003). 3SLS obtains estimators by first regressing the theoretically endogenous independent variables against a list of instruments. These fitted values are then retained and used in the regression against in place of the theoretically endogenous independent variables. Unlike 2SLS, 3SLS utilizes *all* the exogenous instruments for each of the endogenous variables and is preferred because it accounts for correlation between the disturbances in the different structural equations (Greene 2003).

The instruments utilized here include the percentage of low-income students, average teacher salary, the amount of state aid received by a district, instructional expenditures, the percentage of Latinos living in poverty, the percentage of African-Americans living in poverty, the percentage of Latino who possess a college degree, and the percentage of African-Americans who possess a college degree. Additionally, African-American/Latino representation on the school board are included as instruments for the models in Table 1. The instruments for the models presented in Table 2 are similar to those offered in Table 1, except here the percentage African-American/Latino administrators are the included as representational instruments. Each group's representation in terms of teachers in added to the instruments used for Table 3.

The usage of this time-series dataset raises concerns with the possible presence of serial correlation and heteroscedasticity. To control for serial correlation, I insert a set of dummy variables representing individual years in all the models presented here. Examining the residuals for each year indicated that heteroscedasticity was not an issue in these models, thus no such

corrections were used. Levels of multicollinearity were also within acceptable levels in all these models.

### **A Note About 3SLS and Instrumental Variables**

Table A1 through A3 present the results for the first stage regressions used this analysis. On the whole, some these models do a relatively unsatisfactory job of predicting each of the dependent variables. This is the case for the models presented in Table 1 especially. The instrumental variables for the results on Tables 2-3 have an  $R^2$  which is more in-line with acceptable levels for 2 and 3 stage least squares analysis. The lower the  $R^2$  in these cases, the less confidence we have regarding the final results of the 3SLS analysis. Meier et al. (2004) used a similar set of instruments, except a lagged dependent variable was included in the first stage regression. This, of course, raised the  $R^2$  of the first stage regressions considerably. However, using a lagged endogenous variable as an instrument raises concerns about its true exogeneity. The findings presented here were replicated using a lagged dependent variable as an instrument. While the results presented in Tables 1 through 3 do not include potentially endogenous lagged dependent variables, and thus suffer from a lower level of explanatory power, Tables A4 through A6 show what the results for the key independent variables would have looked like had a lagged dependent variable been used.

Interestingly, the added results change little despite the fact that the instruments used for the models in Tables A4 – A6 enjoyed a much higher  $R^2$ <sup>3</sup>. For example, the coefficient for the main independent variable of interest for African-Americans in Tables 2 and Table A5 show a change of the coefficient from -.21 to -.25. Although other coefficients in the analysis change to greater and lesser degrees, the significance and direction on the coefficients remains constant. Importantly, the size of the coefficients for the impact of African-Americans/Latinos on the

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<sup>3</sup> The results from the first stage regressions used for Tables A4 – A6 are shown on Tables A7 – A9.

representation of the competing group is unchanged. Thus, although the 3rd stage results presented in Table 1 may not be ideal, the low level of explanatory power by the instruments may be of less concern than one might initially suspect. This is less of an issue with the results on Tables 2 and 3, where the predicative ability of the instrumental variables is substantially higher in the first stage regressions.

### **Findings**

As mentioned earlier, the findings produced by these models are largely in line with the expectations suggested by the previous literature. Table 1 presents the 3SLS estimates with the percentage of African-American/Latino administrators as the dependent variables. In line with the competition hypothesis, we find that inter-minority relations are *not* characterized by simultaneous gains. Also in accordance with theoretical expectations, representation on the school board has a significantly positive effect on administrative personnel. Interestingly, the coefficient for African-American school board members on African-American administrators is over twice as large than the analogous coefficient for Latinos (.62 and .27 respectively). This indicates that African-Americans may be more effective than Latinos at translating their political offices into descriptive representation in the bureaucracy. The coefficients for the other independent variables of interest, the percentage of administrators from the competing minority group, show that increasing the percentage of Latino administrators negatively influences the percentage of African-American administrators and vice versa. This finding complements Selden (1997), who also found that the hiring of African-Americans by the Farm Home Administration negatively affected the number of Latinos employed.

[Table One About Here]

In contrast with McClain (1993), Table 1 also indicates that gains made by the Latino community are likely to be far more detrimental to African-Americans (coefficient =  $-.21$ ) than gains made by African-Americans are to Latinos (coefficient =  $-.07$ ). Meier and Stewart (1991) suggest that in a multi-racial setting Anglos are much more likely to form coalitions with Latinos than with African-Americans (for the reasons discussed earlier, including lower levels of social distance and more compatible political ideologies).<sup>4</sup> Viewed in this light, it seems plausible that Latino gains disproportionately hurt African-Americans because of Anglo support in these multi-racial settings. This level of support cannot be replicated by African-Americans, minimizing the extent to which African-American gains impair Latinos in this regard.

In addition to tradeoff effects, I examine whether school board members influence this process directly. Latino school board members influence the number of African- American administrators because they advocate hiring Latinos and thus limit the slots available to African-Americans. However, it is conceivable that a direct relationship exists. Table 2 shows this to be the case. An increase in the percentage of African-American school board members lowers the proportion of Latino administrators even when controlling for African-American administrators. Yet, the reverse is not true. The coefficient for Latino school board members is insignificant in this case. This finding contrasts those of Meier et al. (2004) who found a direct relationship for *both* Latinos and African-Americans. If, as suggested earlier, African-American school board members are more effective than Latinos at translating their political power into descriptive representation, this may explain the results in Table 2.

[Table 2 About Here]

In Table 3 we see that the relationship in terms of teachers is similar to that of administrators. Once again, we see that inter-minority competition appears to be the norm.

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<sup>4</sup> This is referred to as the “Power Thesis”.

Increases in the proportion of the teaching staff that is African-American/Latino is associated with lower levels of Latino/African-American teachers. As with administrators, the coefficient for the impact of Latinos on African-Americans (-.13) is substantially large than the coefficient for African-Americans upon Latinos (-.08). However, the difference is not as large as it was with administrators. This implies that the phenomena predicted by the Power Thesis are more likely to occur at higher levels of the bureaucracy, or at levels that can be more directly influenced by political forces. Levels of the bureaucracy that are more insulated from overtly political forces are slightly less likely to experience the same outcome predicted by the Power Thesis. Alternatively, scarcity may be the driving factor behind this relationship. As resources become scarcer, one minority's gain is more likely to become another's loss. Administrative positions are fewer in number than teaching slots, and therefore exaggerate the level inter-minority competition.

[Table 3 About Here]

Upper level bureaucratic representation appears to also be of significant importance, as increased levels of same-race administrators positively influence representation at lower levels of the bureaucracy. Although the coefficient for same-race administrators is slightly larger for African-Americans than for Latinos, the difference is not as great as it was when considering the relationship between school board representation and administrators. Thus, while African-Americans still appear to be more effective at translating their representation at higher levels of the bureaucracy to lower levels, their effectiveness appears to be stronger at the school board level. Attempts to uncover a direct relationship, as we saw in Table 2, were made. However, the coefficients for the impact of administrators on teachers were insignificant, indicating that no direct relationship exists (results not shown). Lastly, I examine the influence of inter-minority

competition on a policy output measure, student performance on the TAAS exam. Unlike the composition of administrative staff and faculty, student performance does not occur within a zero-sum context. That is, the success of an African-American student on the TAAS exam does not necessitate a corresponding failure for a Latino student. Rather, both groups can make gains independently of one another. Meier et al. (2004) found that removing inter-minority success from a zero-sum game also removes the inevitability of competition, facilitating the development of a cooperative relationship.

[Table 4 About Here]

The results presented in Table 4 speak to this conclusion. Here, African-American success is characterized by a complementary increase in student achievement on the part of Latinos and vice versa. Latinos appear to also benefit from increases in the Anglos pass rate, a proxy measure for overall school district quality. The coefficient for the impact of Latino test scores on African-Americans is slightly larger than the coefficient for the reverse relationship, .99 and .31 respectively. As was the case for administrators and teachers, representation appears to have a slightly more positive effect on African-Americans than it does for Latinos. Combined, these three findings show a consistent relationship with regard to the effectiveness of African-American representatives compared to Latinos.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

One can interpret these results in a variety of ways. Most obviously, it appears that scarcity of resources fosters competition between groups that might otherwise be expected to form cooperative relationships. This supports the initial work on inter-minority relations done by McClain (1993), who found that economic conditions engender competition. Another reading of these results might indicate that inter-minority hostility increases as the process becomes more

politicized. The more insulated a set of actors are from political forces, the less emphasis they place on racial heuristics for determination of “who gets what when.” While it is easy to see how electoral politics might be aided by the use of racial heuristics, street-level bureaucrats may interpret their mission in less competitive and cynical terms.

Jennings (1997) remarks that “it is clear that the bigger American cities and key electoral states are becoming increasingly populated by blacks *and* Latinos.” A proper understanding of how African-American – Latino relations operate is becoming increasingly necessary for scholars who desire to fully understand the dynamics of influential political bodies. The last pages of *Pursuing Power* (Garcia 1997), the last major work collected on the subject of Latino Politics, lists several questions that the literature has thus far not fully addressed. The first two of these questions read “What is the history of black and Latino political relationships in different cities regarding various policy issues?” and “What conditions or factors lead to political cooperation or competition between black and Latino activists?” While several scholars have used survey data to understand the attitudinal foundation of inter-minority coalitions, (Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994; Garcia 2000; Rodriguez and Segura 2003), we know far less about how competition plays out in the bureaucracy and policymaking process (see McClain and Karning 1990; McClain 1933; Meier and Stewart 1991). Further research should continue to utilize measures of different representational and policy outputs in order to fully understand the dynamics of rainbow coalitions.

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