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# Reputation and Organizational Politics: Inside the EU Commission

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*Abstract*. This paper uses reputation theory to address a century-old puzzle: what guides the choice of coordination efforts in large politico-administrative systems? Max Weber, founder of the modern study of bureaucracy, famously considered a hierarchy superior to other organizational models. However, modern governments are not organized as one big hierarchy, but as a set of parallel hierarchies, typically 15-20 ministries. This raises a coordination challenge, which in practice has proven surprisingly difficult to meet. Based on reputation theory we argue that concerns of audience management are likely to be an important factor when deciding on the level of coordination. We investigate this argument in the European Union's central executive institution, the EU Commission. Based on more than 7,000 cases from the EU Commission's internal digital coordination system we analyze the impact of audience sensitivity and audience involvement on coordination efforts. Our findings suggest that audience concerns are important drivers of agencies' interdepartmental coordination.

# Reputation and Organizational Politics: Inside the EU Commission

## 1. Introduction

Coordination in large administrative systems fascinates and perplexes public administration scholars. Max Weber (1970 [1922]), the founder of the modern study of bureaucracy, famously considered a hierarchy superior to other ways of organizing administrative systems. However, organizing large administrative systems such as modern governments as one big hierarchy is probably done nowhere. The exact reasons why this is the case are not entirely clear. However, as suggested by Luther Gulick (1937: 7), a prominent scholar from the scientific management school in the early twentieth century, one of the reasons lies in human nature: "Just as the hands of man can span only a limited number of notes on the piano, so the mind and will of man can span but a limited number of immediate managerial contacts."

Whatever the reason, the fact is that in the real world most large governmental systems are not organized as one big hierarchy but as a set of parallel hierarchies, typically 15-20 ministries. This raises a challenge of how to secure coherent policies across these hierarchies. The simple answer is coordination. However, finding out how and to what extent policies should be coordinated across hierarchies has proven surprisingly difficult. Scholarship agrees that coordination has the potential to increase organizational performance and quality but that moving beyond minimal coordination in the form of simple clearance points carries considerable transaction costs and may lead to turf battles. Further, scholarship agrees that almost all modern politico-bureaucratic systems struggle with the coordination challenge and, finally, that the real world presents a wide variety of coordination efforts (Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest 2010; Christensen and Lægreid 2008; Jordan and Schout 2006; Koop and Lodge 2014; Lægreid et al. 2014; Metcalfe 1994; Peters 2015; Scharpf 1994; Wegrich and Stimac 2014; Wilson 1989).

Our understanding of this variation is limited. The puzzle is what guides the choice of coordination efforts in large organizational systems? This paper addresses this question through the lens of reputation theory. The core claim of this theory is that agency managers seek to build a strong reputation for their agency as a means to secure autonomy and to create a shield of protection against hostile actors in the environment. Its crucial concept is that of audience. A core argument is that agency managers pay close attention to their audiences and to the fact that their audiences monitor them (Carpenter 2001; 2010; Moffitt 2010; Wæraas and Maor 2015).

The reputational perspective offers an answer to the puzzle of coordination, namely that interdepartmental coordination is part of an agency's audience management. Managers will prioritize coordination efforts according to the attention that important external actors pay to their work. Cases with the attention of this audience will receive the most careful coordination. This is especially true in large fragmented agencies facing hostile environments. In such agencies, it is both costly and urgent to secure a unified position. Thus, studying interdepartmental coordination from a reputation-based perspective in such a setting offers an opportunity to increase our understanding of this core issue in the study of bureaucracy. At the same time, it offers an opportunity to develop the reputational perspective on public agencies. This perspective has so far mostly focused on the external implications of an agency's audience management. By contrast, our study of coordination focuses on the internal implications of audience management and thus expands the theory's empirical domain.

This paper investigates coordination inside the EU Commission, the central executive institution in the European Union.[1] This is a promising empirical testing ground. The EU Commission is an unusually fragmented organization. Its top management is divided among 28

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[1] The Commission's official name is the "European Commission", cf. Treaty on European Union, article 13, but it is more commonly known as the "EU Commission" or simply the "Commission".

different commissioners, one for each EU member state[2], while its administrative part is split into almost fifty different directorates-general and specialized services. At the same time, the EU Commission faces a highly skeptical environment in the form of the EU member states, the European Parliament, organized interests, the media, and the wider public. Consequently, internal interdepartmental coordination represents a challenge of considerable dimensions. In sum, the EU Commission offers a promising case for studying audience-driven interdepartmental coordination.

Although coordination is a long-standing concern in the study of bureaucracy, the concept is rarely defined in an exact way. Building on Koop and Lodge (2014), we define coordination as *the attempted adjustment of actions among interdependent actors to achieve specified goals*. This definition treats coordination as instrumental behavior by units in an organizational system, but it leaves the outcome undetermined. Thus, we define coordination as a process, not an end-state, cf. the conceptual discussion in Peters (2015: 10–11).

The paper is structured as follows. We first discuss the reputational perspective and argue how this perspective provides an understanding of coordination efforts. We then apply this argument to the EU Commission. We briefly introduce this institution and explain what we already know about its internal interdepartmental coordination. We then move to methods and data. Our data stem from the EU Commission's internal digital coordination system, CIS-net. We have obtained access to all initiatives subjected to CIS-net coordination in 2015 and 2016, a total of more than 7,000 cases. Having presented this dataset and how we use it to measure coordination, we present our empirical analysis. We analyze the impact of audience sensitivity and audience

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[2] The Treaty of Lisbon originally stipulated that the number of Commissioners from 2014 was to be reduced to two thirds of the number of member states, unless the European Council decided otherwise. However, the Treaty was rejected by voters in Ireland in 2008 with one main concern being the loss of their Commissioner. In 2009 the European Council therefore decided that the Commission, incl. its President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs, would continue to consist of a number of members equal to the number of member states. This decision is, in principle, temporary and needs to be reviewed before either the appointment of the first Commission following the date of accession of the 30th member state or the appointment of the Commission succeeding the present Commission, whichever is earlier (European Council 2013).

involvement on coordination efforts. We find that the former has a strong impact, while the result for the latter is mixed. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for reputation theory.

## 2. Reputation and organizational behavior

Like other agencies, the EU Commission (from now on simply "the Commission") protects its reputation particularly as a competent and unbiased  guardian of the EU treaties. An agency's reputation is defined as a set of symbolic beliefs about the agency's capacity, history, and mission that are embedded in multiple audiences. An agency's reputation is a valuable political asset that increases the autonomy and legitimacy of the agency. It can be used to build political support, to increase formal discretion, to protect the agency from political attack, and to build a set of constituencies in the agency's environment. A reputation-based understanding of agency behavior is based on the assumption that the agency is driven by concerns of status, legitimacy, and survival rather than budget maximization, monetary incentives, or empowerment (Carpenter 2001; 2010).

The reputation-based understanding of agencies builds upon several strands of public administration literatures, including studies of bureaucratic autonomy and cooptation (Wilson 1989; Selznick 1984 [1949]), organizational sociology and its focus on legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1991), and theories on blame avoidance (Hood 2011). However, the reputational perspective is distinct by its focus on the organization's audience. An audience is any actor that observes the agency and can monitor it. Examples include political institutions, interest groups, the media, and the mass public. The reputational perspective also has a certain affinity with principal/agent-theory. For example, principal/agent-theory also holds that external groups may be important for agency managers. This is because these groups can act as "fire alarms" that alert politicians to sensitive agency actions (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). However, since external groups are not in a

formal principal/agent-relationship with agencies, the question of how agencies relate to external groups and how agencies may try to influence external impressions of the agency has not been a core focus in principal/agent-studies. The general argument in the reputation literature is that audiences empower or weaken an agency—for example, political institutions increasing or reducing the agency's formal authority, or firms accepting or challenging its regulation. Agencies therefore need to adapt to their audiences. Thus, agency behavior is to a large extent shaped by anticipation and reaction to audience. A reputation-based understanding of agencies therefore involves studies of audience-induced behavior (Carpenter 2010: 33–34; Maor 2015; Moffitt 2010).

Audience management has implications for an agency's external behavior as well as its internal organization and decision-making. However, the literature has primarily focused on external manifestations of audience management. A considerable number of studies have analyzed agencies' communication strategies and branding tactics as a means to handle reputational threats (e.g., Gilad, Maor and Bloom 2015; Maor, Gilad and Bloom 2013; Wæraas and Maor 2015). However, a range of other external manifestations of audience management have also been investigated, including the difference between pre- and post-market regulation by the US Food and Drug Administration (Carpenter 2010: 465–544, 585–635); the macroeconomic projections of US fiscal agencies (Krause and Douglas 2005); reputation as a driver of accountability behavior (Busuioc and Lodge 2016); public health agencies' responses to influenza pandemics (Baekkeskov 2017); network performance (Moynihan 2012); and regulatory agencies' collection of information on non-compliant behavior by regulatees (Etienne 2015).

Compared to this sprawling literature on external manifestations of audience management, internal manifestations have received far less attention. Nonetheless, the reputational perspective has plausible implications for internal organizational behavior. Audience management is not only a driver for external action; it is for internal affairs as well. If consequential, audience

management is also organizational politics. Strategic adaptation to audiences requires a careful allocation of an organization's scarce resources. By implication, reputational concerns can be studied by focusing on internal organizational dynamics. However, so far, this has only been done to a very limited extent. Studies have been limited to reputation-driven prioritization of selected agencies' organizational tasks (Gilad 2015), decision-making time (Carpenter 2002; 2010: 492–505; Maor and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2013), and the involvement of advisory committees in internal decision procedures (Moffitt 2010).

   The key theoretical contribution of this paper is to take the study of reputation-driven behavior inside an organization one step further. This is done by focusing on the Commission. This organization offers a setting where audience management should have straightforward implications for internal dynamics. As will be argued below, the Commission is an increasingly fragmented and specialized institution, so interdepartmental coordination has grown into a considerable challenge. Securing coherent regulatory initiatives and a united Commission behind these initiatives is demanding. Since the Commission is expected to produce several thousand regulatory initiatives every year, coordination cannot be comprehensive in all cases. So, prioritization of coordination efforts is necessary. If audience management matters, it should matter for the decision of when to engage in comprehensive interdepartmental coordination. In the following, this argument is spelled out in more detail.

## 3. A reputational perspective on interdepartmental coordination in the EU Commission

According to the founding Treaties, the Commission is endowed with impressive independence. The Treaty on European Union states that "[i]n carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission shall be completely independent…. the members of the Commission shall neither seek nor take instructions from any Government or other institution, body, office or entity" (TEU, article 17). In

addition, the Commission has a wide range of resources at its disposal. Its formal powers include a near-monopoly of legislative initiative, delegated powers to issue tertiary regulation in almost all policy areas, and discretionary power to bring infringement proceedings against member states that fail to comply with EU law. To solve these tasks, the 28-person College of Commissioners has a civil service of approximately 33,000 employees. In sum, the Commission has a privileged basis for assuming an autonomous role in EU politics.

These formidable powers might suggest that the Commission is set up as a European "super-agency." Yet, de facto the Commission's autonomy is far from unlimited. The member states and the European Parliament control the appointment of the commissioners, decide the Commission's budget, modify and adopt its legislative proposals, and control its delegated powers to issue tertiary regulation. In addition to these fundamental constitutional traits, the Commission's autonomy has been severely challenged over the past two decades. First, since Maastricht, the member states have been reluctant to continue the apparently ever-increasing power of the EU and, by implication, the Commission (Pollack 2000). Second, successive functions have been carved out of the Commission's portfolio and entrusted to European agencies. Today, more than 30 such agencies operate alongside the Commission. Third, the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the EU's foreign policy capacity and carved out the main external functions of the Commission and transferred them to the new common EU foreign minister and foreign service (the "High Representative" and the "European External Action Service"). Fourth, the Commission has been under growing pressure from the European Parliament whose powers have been strengthened over successive treaty changes since the Single European Act in 1987. The Parliament has also acquired increasing powers over the appointment of the Commission and has installed a hearing procedure that enables it to influence the selection of individual commissioners and the distribution of portfolios among them. Finally, with the increase in the EU's functions over time—not least to include sensitive issues like

food safety, environmental protection, and financial regulation—the Commission's actions are also increasingly a matter of public concern. In the reputational perspective, these developments amount to an increasingly alert and skeptical audience for the Commission.

Due to these developments, most observers agree that the Commission is treading a fine balance between autonomous action and responsiveness to its environment. Kassim et al. (2013: 130) talk about "a citadel under siege." Hartlapp, Metz and Rauh (2014: 27) consider the Commission's institutional context politicized and consisting of elements that "constrain or facilitate policy choices." Wille (2013) finds that the Commission has gradually become enmeshed in an "accountability architecture" with "more mechanisms in place than ever before." Majone (2002) discusses the gradual parliamentarization of the Commission and its growing dependence on the majority position in the European Parliament, whose "influence will be felt in all its [the Commission's] activities, whether administrative or legislative." Ellinas and Suleiman (2012: 201) find that the Commission and its employees are faced with "political attempts to curb their autonomy" and "an increasingly more adverse political environment."

In other words, the Commission's ability to manage its audiences—the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, member states, interest groups, the media, and the wider public—appears more important than ever. However, at the same time, adapting to the outside world is arguably more demanding than ever for the Commission. Adaptation requires a capacity for strategic interaction with outside actors. This again presupposes a certain capacity to act as a unitary actor. This assumption is often readily assumed fulfilled, and the Commission is often portrayed as a unified "engine of integration." However, in reality, the Commission is a fragmented organization, and coordinated action is challenging and time-consuming.

Fragmentation is most evident at the top of the organization, the College of Commissioners. As noted by Coombes (1970) in the first major study of the Commission:

> The Commissioners […] differ from most national executive leaders in that they are not bound together by membership of the same political party or by adherence to the same mandate. Since each Commissioner is approved in practice by his own country's government it cannot truly be said that they are collectively responsible for their tenure of office. Indeed no one has yet found a satisfactory explanation of what holds them together (Coombes 1970: 252).

The difficulties identified by Coombes almost fifty years ago have intensified many-fold over the ensuing years. The Commission is now led by a college of 28 commissioners. They do not necessarily know each other upon taking office, are not tied together by any party organization or shared ideology, and do not have any common future once their time in office is completed.

However, fragmentation not only occurs at the political level; it is also evident at the administrative level. First, the Commission is divided into an increasing number of Directorates-General (DGs) and services. The number of DGs now exceeds the number of ministries in most national government systems. The DG structure has grown from the original nine to (so far) 31, cf. online Appendix Table A1, which shows the DG structure as of 2017. To this number can be added 16 so-called services of a more technical nature.[3] This dramatic development is partly due to the growth in the EU's policy competences over time, partly due to the enlargement of the EU and the associated increase in the number of commissioners, which again has expanded the need for a sufficient number of Commission portfolios (Nugent and Rhinard 2015: 167–200). Second, the growth in the number of member states has led to an increasingly fragmented work force. The multinational composition of the Commission now includes officials of 28 different nationalities.

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[3] Examples include the European Anti-Fraud Office, the Commission's Internal Audit Service, and the Commission's Legal Service.

The Commission therefore also faces a host of challenges of socialization, communication, and cross-cultural (mis)understandings (Ban 2013).

The most immediate challenge facing the Commission if it seeks to engage in audience management is thus internal interdepartmental coordination. Credibility and legitimacy is damaged if the Commission cannot present a unified position to the environment. However, coordination is extremely demanding because of the Commission's fragmented nature and the large number of regulatory initiatives it is expected to take. Every year the Commission adopts 3-4,000 binding rules (mostly implementing acts, cf. Brandsma and Blom-Hansen 2017). Comprehensive coordination cannot be done in every case. It needs to be allocated carefully.

The reputation-based perspective provides a clear hypothesis on what guides the prioritization of coordination: cases that have the attention of the Commission's audiences will receive the most careful internal interdepartmental coordination. Coordination thus becomes part of reputational-minded bureaucrats audience management. More specifically, we conjecture that the potential damage to the Commission's credibility and legitimacy depends on how involved external actors are in the Commission's decisions (henceforth: "involvement of the audience") and how salient the Commission's decisions are to those actors (henceforth: "sensitivity of the audience").

In the following, we discuss our strategy to investigate the effects of audience involvement and sensitivity empirically. However, before doing so, we briefly explain what we already know about coordination inside the Commission.


**4. State-of-the-art: Coordination inside the Commission**

Although no comprehensive account of coordination inside the Commission is available, it is not unchartered territory. We start with the formal set-up, which signals high coordination ambitions. The Commission's rules of procedure require that "the department responsible for preparing an

initiative shall ensure from the beginning of the preparatory work that there is effective coordination between all the departments with a legitimate interest in the initiative" (Commission 2010a: Article 23).

This procedural rule is supported by a number of organizational arrangements at both the administrative and political level. At the administrative level, a number of units with special coordinating responsibilities exist. The most important is the Secretariat General with a staff of about 600, which reports directly to the Commission president. It is comparable to the prime minister's office in national governments, but it occupies a much more active coordinating role (Kassim 2006). Other special coordinating units at the administrative level include the Commission's Legal Service, DG Budget, and DG Human Resources. At the political level, several coordination mechanisms exist. The Commission President sets the agenda for the entire Commission. Groups of commissioners are often formed to focus on important cases; a system that Commission President Juncker took to new heights in 2014 when he appointed vice-presidents as "super-commissioners" in charge of priority projects cross-cutting several portfolios (Commission 2014). Each commissioner has a personal office, the *cabinet*, which is responsible for keeping the commissioner informed about the work of other commissioners (Spence 2006). Finally, the College of Commissioners is collectively responsible for all decisions and meets once a week to discuss important cases.

These coordination mechanisms may ensure "negative coordination," a concept introduced by Scharpf (1994). Specifically, this means clearance systems that seek to ensure that new initiatives do not interfere with the established policies and the interests of other units. In contrast, "positive coordination" seeks to maximize the overall effectiveness by exploiting the concerted efforts of several independent units. This is a much more ambitious type of coordination

that needs to take place at the level of policy-preparing units. In the Commission, this would mean in the daily work in the individual DGs.

We now turn from the formal set-up to research on coordination in practice. Several studies based on different sources suggest that a considerable amount of cross-DG coordination in fact happens in the daily work of the Commission. First, informed inside accounts based on participant observation provide colorful descriptions of time spent in endless coordination meetings on deploying sometimes devious coordination tactics in turf battles, e.g., Ross (1995), a researcher who was stationed for a year in the cabinet of Jacques Delors in the early 1990s, and Eppink (2007), a Dutch civil servant who spent seven years in the Commission around the turn of the millennium.

Second, a number of studies based primarily on interviews also indicate a high level of day-to-day coordination. Hooghe (2001: 62) reports that top Commission officials normally meet weekly with administrative equals in other DGs. Stevens and Stevens ( 2001: 212–214) explain that all directors-general meet regularly once a week to keep an overview of the progress of work. They also find that new initiatives are prepared in inter-service groups as a matter of standard operating rule. They estimate that internal interdepartmental coordination in the Commission occurs more widely than in national administrations. Wille (2013: 146–161) finds that a clearer distinction between administrative and political roles in the Commission is developing; a distinction in which the role of the DGs is to secure that all inside turf battles are taken care of before new initiatives are sent on to the political level.

Third, studies based primarily on survey data also suggest a high daily level of coordination. The most comprehensive study is Kassim et al. (2013) who surveyed 4,621 senior and junior Commission officials. They directly asked these officials about their views on information sharing inside the Commission and on interdepartmental coordination. They found the answers

"surprisingly positive" (p. 188) since most respondents provided positive or neutral answers to all their questions on these two issues.

Finally, analyses based on case-studies point in the same direction. The most comprehensive one is Hartlapp, Metz and Rauh (2014) who studied the Commission's preparation of 48 legislative proposals. They found that the preparation of proposals is a lengthy process, taking more than two years on average. Much of this time is spent on internal coordination across relevant DGs. They often found this process to be conflictual but also to entail some strategic options for the responsible DG. However, most of all, they found coordination to be comprehensive and time-consuming. These findings are echoed by Jordan and Schout (2006) who conducted a detailed study of coordination in the environmental area. They found interdepartmental coordination in the Commission to be conflictual but very ambitious.

In sum, there is no doubt that the Commission expends considerable efforts on internal interdepartmental coordination before presenting regulatory initiatives to the outside world. However, the available evidence does not provide insight into how coordination efforts are prioritized. Nevertheless, as argued above, the reputational perspective provides a clear hypothesis on this question, namely that cases with the attention of the Commission's audience will receive the most careful cross-DG coordination. We now turn to the practical investigation of this hypothesis.

## 5. Methods and data

Our general model to investigate the relationship between the Commission's internal interdepartmental coordination and the involvement and sensitivity of its audience is this:

$$COORDINATION_{ik} = \alpha + \boldsymbol{\beta} I_{ik} + \boldsymbol{\vartheta} S_{ik} + \delta_k + \boldsymbol{\gamma} X_{ik} + \varepsilon_{ik},$$

where $COORDINATION_{ik}$ is the number of DGs consulted over proposal $i$ which is coordinated by the responsible DG $k$. We are interested in two sets of variables: $I_{ik}$ represents the vector of variables which operationalize audience involvement and $S_{ik}$ represents the vector of variables which operationalize audience sensitivity. $\delta_k$ represents the fixed effect of responsible DG $k$, $X_{ik}$ is a vector of control variables and $\varepsilon_{ik}$ is an error term.

To investigate this model, we use data from CIS-net, an electronic database introduced by the Commission's Secretariat-General in 2001. It is used to circulate draft proposals and draft decisions to concerned DGs. The system registers which DG is responsible for the proposal, which DGs are consulted, the DGs' exchange of written documents, their agreement, opposition and comments. We have obtained access to all initiatives subjected to CIS-net coordination in 2015–2016—that is, the first two full years of the Juncker Commission.[4] While our dataset records all coordination activities, it does not include the content of exchanged documents.

All initiatives that require a formal decision by the College of Commissioners must be coordinated via CIS-net. In practice, this primarily means draft binding rules, e.g., legislative proposals, delegated acts, and implementing acts. Other initiatives (e.g., soft law initiatives, letters from commissioners, reports, programs, and papers) can, but need not, be coordinated via CIS-net (Commission 2010b). In our analyses, we do not include initiatives that are voluntary to subject to a CIS-net procedure since we do not know how representative they are.

The CIS-net procedure is started when an initiative has reached such an advanced stage that the responsible DG considers it ready to send on to the political level. This means that impact assessments, consultation with outside actors, and all other preparatory work must be completed. It is the final clearing by the DGs that have either been directly involved in the

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[4] The dataset does not include confidential files (e.g., decisions to individual companies).

preparation of the initiative or have a legitimate interest in the initiative. Usually, the CIS-net procedure is therefore relatively short lasting only 10–15 working days.

In the following, we explain how we use the CIS-net data to construct measures of the variables in our model above to investigate cross-DG coordination in the Commission.

*Dependent Variable: Coordination*

Our measure of coordination is the number of DGs and Commission services that the responsible DG consults with. This can vary quite dramatically across initiatives. For example, the CIS-net database shows that DG Education and Culture consulted with no less than 30 other DGs in 2016 when preparing a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council for a European year of cultural heritage. In contrast, the same DG only consulted with five other DGs in 2015 when preparing a recommendation for a Council decision designating the European capitals of culture for the year 2019 in Bulgaria and Italy. The distribution of our dependent variable is shown in online Appendix Figure A1.

*Independent Variable I: Involvement of the audience*

The involvement of the audience refers to the degree to which external actors are involved in the Commission's initiatives. We measure this by the decision-making procedure, which varies considerably acoss initiatives, cf. Table 1.

(Table 1 about here)

Table 1 shows that approximately 7,000 initiatives go through CIS-net coordination annually. This amount can be compared to informed estimates of the number of annual decisions made by the

Commission. For example, Szapiro (2013: 27), an official in the Commission's Secretariat General, reckons that the Commission makes approximately 10,000 formal decisions every year. Since initiatives that do not require formal approval by the College of the Commissioners are not necessarily included in the CIS-net database, these numbers seem compatible.

Table 1 further shows that draft binding rules comprise approximately half of all initiatives subjected to CIS-net coordination over the years 2015–2016. Since these rules must be subjected to CIS-net coordination, this is a comprehensive measure of the Commission's rule production. The most frequent rule type is a Commission implementing act. This type of act amounts to approximately 2,000 instances per year. In comparison, Commission proposals for legal acts to be decided by the Council and the European Parliament only amount to 1–200 per year. According to Table 1, around 3,000 "other initiatives" are annually coordinated by the CIS-net system. However, as noted, these initiatives are not obligatory to coordinate through this system, so we do not include them in our analyses since we do not know how representative they are.

The number of observations in our study is therefore the 7,372 draft binding rules subjected to CIS-net coordination in 2015 and 2016. These rules are decided under a variety of procedures and, hence, a variety of ways of involving the Commission's audiences, cf. Table 1. Proposals for *Legal Acts* are relatively few in numbers but often very salient. They are proposed by the Commission but decided by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. These institutional actors thus take a keen interest and subject these acts to intensive scrutiny. Consequently, the Commission goes to great lengths to anticipate their preferences (Crombez and Vangerven 2014; Thomson 2011). These acts are also objects of intense lobbying by interest groups

(Greenwood 2011; Klüver 2013). Finally, although EU affairs do not figure prominently in the media (Machill, Beiler and Fischer 2006), these acts sometimes make it into the news.[5]

Compared to proposals for Legal Acts, all other regulatory initiatives by the Commission usually receive far less attention from the environment. However, a distinction can be made between *Delegated Acts* and *Implementing Acts*. These acts were introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. The idea was to make a distinction between political and technical delegation. Although this distinction turned out to be controversial in practice, *Delegated Acts*, which are directly controlled by the EU legislators, are used more frequently in controversial areas like food safety, environmental protection, and financial regulation. In contrast, *Implementing Acts*, which are controlled by member state committees (known as "comitology"), are used in less controversial areas like agriculture, fisheries, and transportation (Brandsma and Blom-Hansen 2017). Therefore, we expect the Commission to be more audience sensitive toward delegated acts than implementing acts. The final type of act, the so-called *Commission Acts*, includes secondary acts based directly on treaty powers as well as tertiary acts that are not delegated or implementing acts, but adopted under pre-Lisbon comitology procedures. Due to their heterogeneous nature, they are difficult to compare to delegated and implementing acts. So, we do not formulate a concrete expectation beyond that the Commission is plausibly less audience sensitive than in the case of legislative proposals.


*Independent variable II: Sensitivity of the audience*

The sensitivity of the audience refers to how salient the Commission's decisions are to its audience. Salience is not a straight-forward concept to measure, and in empirical EU studies several measurements have been used, all with distinct advantages and disadvantages (Warntjen 2012).

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[5] An illustration of this point is the fact that the researchers in the *Decision-Making in the European Union* project were able to select 125 legislative proposals for analysis based on their coverage in the media (Thomson 2011: 29–30).

Some studies rely on expert interviews, e.g. Thomson (2011). This method is useful because it allows actor-specific measures of salience. However, its use is limited to relatively dramatic and recent events; otherwise actors are not likely to remember them accurately. Other studies rely on public opinion surveys such as Eurobarometer to measure salience, e.g. Hagemann et al. (2017). This measure taps the salience for the electorate, and by implication, but depending on the responsiveness of the political system, also for political actors. However, it is very rare that individual legislative acts are included in opinion surveys, so this measure is most useful at the level of policy areas or above. Media coverage is a third indicator that can be used to measure salience (e.g. Givens and Luedtke 2004), but outside some specific policy areas it is less useful for EU studies because of the limited general media coverage of EU affairs (Machill et al. 2006).

To measure the salience of individual legal acts, EU researchers therefore need to turn to other methods. The general approach is to rely on attributes of the individual acts that signify their salience. For example, Häge (2007) measures an act's salience by its number of recitals arguing that the importance of an act varies with the number of reasons given for its adoption. Rasmussen (2011) uses the legal nature of the act and the legal status quo. Steunenberg and Kaeding (2009) measure salience by a composite measure based on the legal nature of the act, the legal status quo, and the number of recitals and articles in the act. Using attributes of the individual act as a salience measure has some limitations. First, any individual attribute may be open to more than one interpretation. For example, recitals may measure salience, but have also been used to measure issue complexity (Thomson and Torenvlied 2011). This limitation can be addressed by including several attributes that more reliably measure salience. Second, attributes of individual acts measure variation in salience across acts, not actors. It is thus based on the assumption that, across a large number of cases, there are act-specific variations in salience that are general to all actors.

With these caveats in mind we follow the general approach and operationalize salience by the following attributes of the individual acts:

1) Number of numbers relative to number of words in title of act: Numbers in titles are often used to designate specific chemical, biocidal or medical products, to classify goods in the nomenclature of the common customs policy, or to refer to specific cases in previous Commission decisions. The frequency of numbers relative to words therefore, on average across a large number of cases, signals that the content of the act is relatively technical and uncontroversial. The following is an example of an act with a high value on this indicator: "Draft Commission implementing decision concerning the transfer of the designation of "68Ga-2,2'-(7-(4-((S)-1-((4S,7S,10S,13R,16S,19R)-4-((R)-1-amino-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)-1-oxopropan-2-ylcarbamoyl)-10-(4-aminobutyl)-16-(4-((S)-2,6-dioxohexahydropyrimidine-4-carboxamido)benzyl)-7-((R)-1-hydroxyethyl)-6,9,12,15,18-pentaoxo-13-(4-ureidobenzyl)-1,2-dithia-5,8,11,14,17-pentaazacycloicosan-19-ylamino)-3-(4-chlorophenyl)-1-oxopropan-2-ylamino)-1-carboxy-4-oxobutyl)-1,4,7-triazonane-1,4-diyl)diacetic acid" as an orphan medicinal product under Regulation (EC) No 141/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council".

2) Length of title (log. of number of all words in proposal's title): Since the description of specific and detailed aims generally require more words than broad and general aims, long titles can be used as an indicator of technical and less salient acts. The following is an example of an act with a low value on this indicator: "Commission delegated regulation on food for special medical purposes"; while the following is an example of an act with a high value: "Commission decision on the signature of an agreement concerning the financing of the European schools of Luxembourg I and Luxembourg II between the European

Commission, the European schools and the European Investment Bank representing also for the purpose of this agreement the European Investment Fund, as well as of an agreement concerning the financing of the European schools of Luxembourg I and Luxembourg II between the European Commission, the European schools and the European Stability Mechanism".

3) Legal instrument: Binding EU legislation can take three forms: Directives, regulations, and decisions. They are used for different purposes. Directives typically lay down broad policy principles and often deal with strategic issues. Furthermore, while regulations and decisions are directly applicable, directives require a change in national law which may be difficult for some governments due to a lack of parliamentary majorities or opposition from interest groups. Directives are therefore generally considered more significant and controversial than regulations and decisions (Golub 2008: 172; Schultz and König 2000: 658; Sloot and Verschuren 1990: 79). Compared to directives, regulations and decisions focus more on operational decisions and administrative matters. But while regulations are general, decisions only bind the addressee, typically one member state or a company. Decisions are therefore generally less controversial than regulations.

4) Legal status quo: An act may introduce a new policy, or it may modify an existing one. New acts require more comprehensive assessment, since all actors need to define their position for the first time. New acts are therefore arguably, across a large number of cases, more controversial than amending acts, where actors can draw on previous positions. Amending acts are therefore more likely to be routine affairs. Amending acts are measured by words such as "amending", "modifying", or "supplementing" in the individual acts' titles.

5) Member state addressee: Some acts are directly addressed to an individual member state. This indicates that the act has a high salience to at least one government. For example, this

act is likely to be salient to the Latvian government: "Proposal for a Council implementing decision on authorising the Republic of Latvia to extend the application of a measure derogating from Article 193 of Council Directive 2006/112/EC on the common system of value added tax." Member state addressees are measured by a dummy variable that equals 1 if one or several member states are directly mentioned in the titles of the individual acts.

6) Budgetary implications: Some acts have expenditure implications and are therefore, ceteris paribus, arguably more controversial than acts that do not involve money. Budgetary implications are measured by the occurrence of words like "fund", "payment", "expenditure", "aid", "finance", or "contribution" in the titles of the individual acts.

*Control variables*

Coordination may be influenced by other factors than the involvement and sensitivity of the Commission's audience. For example, area-specific policy dynamics may have an impact on coordination, different DGs may have different coordination traditions, or coordination may vary over time as a new College of Commissioners get acquainted with each other and with the DGs. To control for these potential confounders, we used fixed DG effects to control for factors that vary across DGs and year dummies to control for factors that vary across time.

## 6. Empirical analysis

We opt for a negative binomial regression model because our dependent variable is the counted number of consulted DGs, which is significantly overdispersed, i.e. "Alpha">0 (Table 2). Following Allison and Waterman (2002), there is no straightforward implementation of a conditional fixed effects negative binomial model. Here, we follow their advice to use

unconditional fixed effects instead[6]. In addition, we provide bootstrapped standard errors to accommodate the risk of bias.

We start with a baseline model that is restricted to include unconditional fixed effects for responsible DGs and an identifier indicating the year. Next, we test the type of legal act, which operationalizes audience involvement. Figure 1 reveals that we predict the highest average number of DGs (approx.8) to be consulted over proposals for legal acts. This finding supports our argument. However, we find no evidence that more DGs are being consulted over delegated as compared to implementing acts. Instead, we find that the heterogenous group of Commission acts leads to an average of only 6 DGs being consulted. This is significantly less than both Commission implementing and legal acts. Overall, the second model only marginally outperforms the baseline model.

By contrast, the third model, which includes our proxies for audience sensitivity, causes a larger boost in explanatory power. The two most powerful variables are (i) legal instrument and (ii) budget implication. The predictions plotted in Figure 2 reveal that a proposal for a directive leads to an average of approx. 10 DGs being consulted. By contrast, a proposal for a regulation involves an average of 8 and a proposal for decision slightly less than 6 DGs. These highly significant differences confirm our expectations about audience sensitivity. Furthermore, the marginal effects show that proposal with budget implications involve on average two DGs more than proposals without budget implications. Again, this difference is highly significant and in support of our theoretical argument. Furthermore, we find significant support for our argument when comparing proposals amending existing legislation with original proposals. On average, amendments leads to approx. 0.8 fewer consulted DGs. Moreover, we find the expected significant

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[6] Allison and Waterman (2002) critically discuss the Hausman, Hall and Griliches (1984) estimator as not being a "true"fixed effects model. Furthermore, they provide simulation evidence showing that the unconditional fixed effects negative binomial "does not appear to suffer from any incidental parameters bias" (p.248).

and negative effect for title length as another proxy for audience sensitivity. There are no significant effects for the remaining two proxies, namely technicality and the mentioning of a specific member state in the title.

Finally, we integrate both sets of variables into a single model, which does not alter the above findings. Overall, we find weak evidence for our argument on audience involvement, yet strong support in favour of our argument that audience sensitivity leads to a higher number of consulted DGs. We would expect the largest number of consulted DGs over new proposals for the most controversial legal instruments – directives decided by the Council and European Parliament – that have budget implications and general aims (measured as simple, short titles). By contrast, we expect the lowest number of consulted DGs over amending Commission acts without budget implications and with specific aims (measured as complex, long titles).

Table 2 about here

Figures 1 and 2 about here

According to Abadie et al. (2017) the use of clustered standard errors is recommended in either of two scenarios. First, if a subset of clusters were sampled randomly from a population of clusters.This is not applicable to our study, which deals with the poplation of all DGs. Second, if the assignment of the treatment is correlated within the clusters. Applied to our study this implies that DGs (instead of individual proposals) are assigned to one or several of our independent variables. We cannot outrule that the frequently informal rules of proposal allocation within the Commission have such an effect. Most obviously, the DG Budget will be selected to deal with proposals having budget implications. Consequently, we reestimated the full model with standard errors being clustered in responsible DGs (see Table 3).  As a result some of our weaker indicators are

insignificant, namely "Amendment" and "Title Length". However, our findings for "Budget Implication", "Legal Instruments" as well as the differences between the decision-making procedures are robust against clustering.


Table 3 about here


**7. Conclusion**

"If subdivision of work is inescapable, co-ordination becomes mandatory." With this statement, made more than eighty years ago, Gulick (1937: 6) identified the root cause of coordination. Today there is still scholarly agreement that specialization is the major cause of coordination (Peters 2015; Bouckaert et al. 2010). In addition to this understanding of the causes behind coordination needs, we also have an understanding of the forces making coordination difficult: managers often demonstrate a certain turf consciousness and are therefore reluctant to engage in coordination (Wegrich and Stimac 2014; Wilson 1989). Furthermore, from empirical studies, we know that coordination in real government systems is done to highly varying degrees (Christensen and Lægreid 2008; Koop and Lodge 2014; Lægreid et al. 2014). With the Scharpfian notion of negative and positive coordination (Scharpf 1994) and the Metcalfe scale (Metcalfe 1994), we even have a language for discussing varying degrees of coordination.

What is missing from this rather functionalist picture is an understanding of the reasons why politico-administrative systems invest varying amounts of resources into the coordination of different policy proposals. The reputational theory offers an answer to this puzzle. Managers will prioritize coordination efforts according to the attention that important external actors pay to their work. Cases with the attention of this audience will receive the most careful

coordination. Thus, coordination becomes part of reputation-minded bureaucrats' audience management.

We investigated this conjecture in the case of the EU Commission. This is a promising testing ground since the Commission is a large fragmented organization operating in a hostile environment. The Commission is divided into almost fifty parallel hierarchies; a fact that makes interdepartmental coordination a considerable practical challenge. The Commission's audience—the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, member states, interest groups, the media, and the wider public—keeps a close and increasingly skeptical watch over it, so interdepartmental coordination is important in order for the Commission to act strategically in the EU system.

Our results suggest that audience concerns are important drivers of the Commission's internal interdepartmental coordination efforts. We found a strong impact of our measures of salience, which external actors attach to the Commission's decisions ("audience sensitivity"), while the involvement of external actors ("audience involvement") had a mixed effect.

By providing an account of the prioritization of the Commission coordination efforts, our findings depart empirically and theoretically from current research on the Commission. They also further develop theories of bureaucratic autonomy and reputation. By applying the reputational perspective on coordination efforts, we have expanded the empirical domain of this perspective. The core claim of this theory is that an agency's behavior is shaped by its audience. Agency behavior has an external as well as an internal aspect. However, the former aspect has received much more scholarly attention than the latter in studies of audience management. Our study suggests that audience concerns are also important for an agency's internal behavior, i.e., its organizational politics.

The potential of the reputational perspective to address unanswered questions about organizational politics therefore seems to be a relevant research agenda. However, the limitations of

our study should be acknowledged. First, our choice of case, the EU Commission, was based on a most-likely logic. Due to its hostile environment and fragmented structure, audience-induced coordination was a likely scenario. How relevant this is in less-likely settings is important to investigate. Second, our two measures of audience impact—"sensitivity" and "involvement"—did not turn out to be equally important. The results of the involvement measure were mixed. One reason might be that this measure only includes the formal influence of external actors, not the informal influence of, say, interest groups and the media. Future research should endeavor to construct more encompassing measures of audience involvement. Finally, our study focused on a selected aspect of internal organizational politics, namely, interdepartmental coordination. However, according to the reputational perspective, audience management is a more general explanation of organizational politics. Thus, it is likely to have implications for a wide range of internal affairs of an organization, including staffing policies, budgetary priorities, and organizational structures. Future studies might well investigate these aspects.

In sum, our study supports the broader claim made in Carpenter's (2001; 2010) influential work as well as in later contributions within this intellectual stream (Krause and Douglas 2005; Moffitt 2010; Wærass and Maor 2015), namely that it is important to study an agency's reputation in order to understand its behavior. Our study focuses on the importance of reputation for an agency's internal organizational politics. It is designed as a plausibility probe, but it suggests that it is worthwhile to explore further how far the reputational perspective can take us in understanding this aspect of agency behavior.

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**Table 1: Initiatives subjected to CIS-net coordination in 2015 and 2016**

| Type of initiative | Decision procedure | No. of initiatives | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
| Proposal for a legal act | Commission proposes rule; Council and/or European Parliament decides | 124 | 199 | 323 |
| Delegated act | Commission adopts rule but may subsequently be vetoed by Council and/or European Parliament in specified approval period | 183 | 208 | 391 |
| Commission implementing act | Commission adopts rule after approval by comitology committee composed of member state representatives (post-Lisbon procedure) | 2,049 | 2,284 | 4,333 |
| Proposal for Council implementing act | Commission proposes rule; Council decides | 6 | 16 | 22 |
| Commission act | Commission adopts rule after approval by comitology committee composed of member state representatives (pre-Lisbon procedure); or Commission adopts rule based on competence specified by the Treaty | 1,179 | 1,124 | 2,303 |
| Other initiative | Non-binding rules; no legal requirement to involve external actors (NB: dataset not comprehensive) | 3,421 | 3,187 | 6,608 |
| Total | | 6,962 | 7,018 | 13,980 |
| Total, excl. other initiatives | | 3,541 | 3,831 | 7,372 |

**Table 2: Negative Binomial Regression (Y= No. of Consulted DGs)**

| N=7,372 | Controls Only | Involvement | Sensitivity | Involvement and Sensitivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Audience Involvement:* | | | | |
| Commission Act | | -0.304*** | | -0.276*** |
| | | (0.038) | | (0.042) |
| Delegated Act | | -0.173*** | | -0.210*** |
| | | (0.038) | | (0.053) |
| Commission Impl. Act | | -0.218*** | | -0.199*** |
| | | (0.035) | | (0.042) |
| Council Impl. Act | | -0.440*** | | -0.243** |
| | | (0.119) | | (0.115) |
| Legal Act | | *refer. category* | | *refer. category* |
| *Audience Sensitivity:* | | | | |
| Type: Decision | | | -0.588*** | -0.511*** |
| | | | (0.071) | (0.055) |
| Type: Regulation | | | -0.312*** | -0.242*** |
| | | | (0.0694) | (0.0536) |
| Type: Directive | | | *refer. category* | *refer. category* |
| Technicality | | | -0.335** | -0.206* |
| | | | (0.135) | (0.125) |
| Title Length | | | -0.0670** | -0.083*** |
| | | | (0.028) | (0.024) |
| Amendment | | | -0.118*** | -0.117*** |
| | | | (0.015) | (0.014) |
| Mention of Member State | | | 0.0239 | 0.0339 |
| | | | (0.026) | (0.029) |
| Budget Implications | | | 0.268*** | 0.279*** |
| | | | (0.029) | (0.026) |
| *Controls:* | | | | |
| Year 2015 | 0.067*** | 0.072*** | 0.067*** | 0.073*** |
| | (0.014) | (0.016) | (0.014) | (0.016) |
| Alpha | -1.994*** | -2.029*** | -2.081*** | -2.108*** |
| | (0.061) | (0.057) | (0.058) | (0.053) |
| Log Likelihood | -18239.2 | -18185.6 | -18003.2 | -17963.7 |
| AIC | 36548.36 | 36449.14 | 36090.49 | 36019.33 |
| BIC | 36790.05 | 36718.45 | 36380.52 | 36336.98 |

Note: Boot strapped Standard Errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$; All models include unconditional fixed effects for 33 Responsible DGs. See online appendix Table A2 for descriptive statistics. McFadden's Pseudo- $R^2$= 0.101 (model 1), $R^2$= 0.106 (model2), $R^2$=0.113 (model 3) and $R^2$=0.117 (model 4).

**Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression (Y= No. of Consulted DGs; Standard Errors clustered in Responsible DG)**

| N=7,372 | Involvement and Sensitivity | |
|---|---|---|
| *Audience Involvement:* | | |
| Commission Act | -0.276*** | (0.102) |
| Delegated Act | -0.210** | (0.091) |
| Commission Impl. Act | -0.199*** | (0.076) |
| Council Impl. Act | -0.243 | (0.222) |
| Legal Act | *reference category* | |
| *Audience Sensitivity:* | | |
| Type: Decision | -0.511*** | (0.182) |
| Type: Regulation | -0.242* | (0.135) |
| Type: Directive | *reference category* | |
| Technicality | -0.206 | (0.377) |
| Title Length | -0.0832 | (0.065) |
| Amendment | -0.117 | (0.079) |
| Mention of Member State | 0.0339 | (0.147) |
| Budget Implications | 0.279*** | (0.093) |
| *Controls:* | | |
| Year 2015 | 0.073 | (0.050) |
| | | |
| Alpha | 0.121*** | (0.359) |
| Log Likelihood | -17963.7 | |
| AIC | 35953.34 | |
| BIC | 36043.11 | |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$
All models include unconditional fixed effects for 33 Responsible DGs.
See online appendix Table A2 for descriptive statistics. McFadden's
Pseudo- $R^2$=0.12.

**Figure 1: Predicted Number of Consulted DGs by Audience Involvement** (Note: Based on Full Model; 95% CIs; all other variables at their mean)
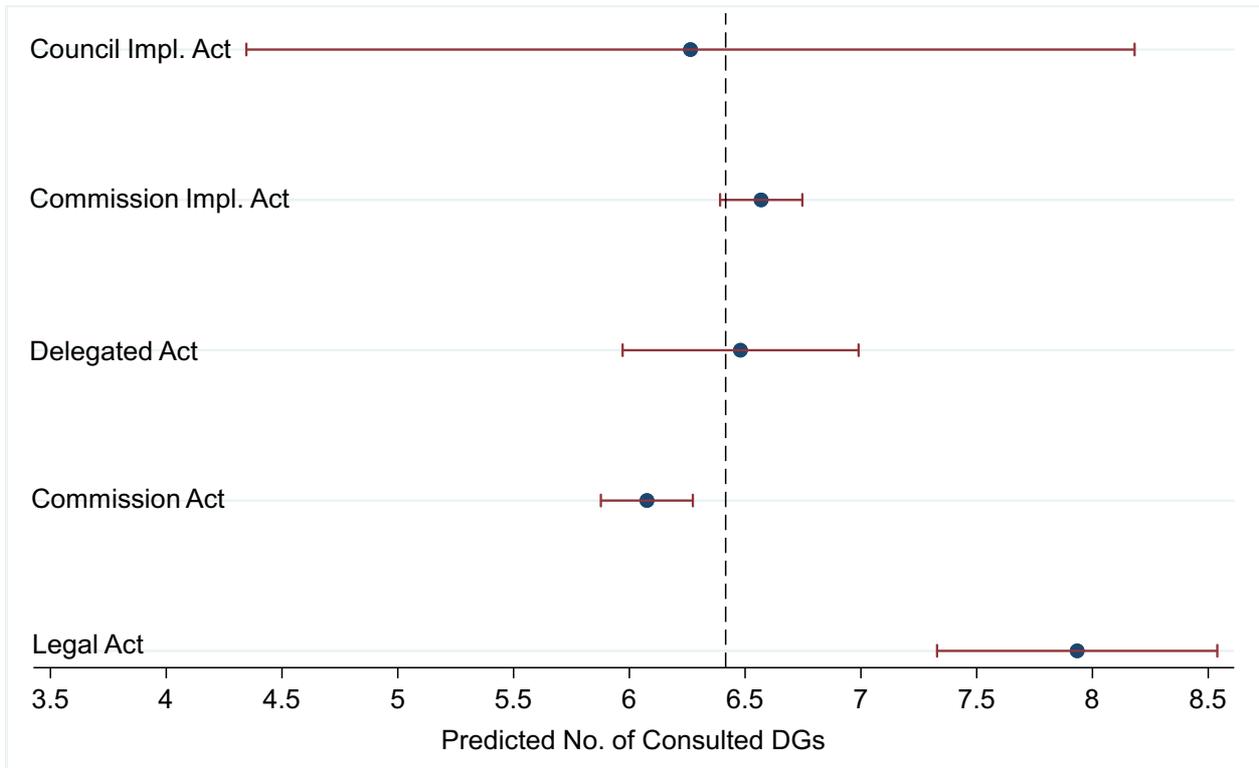


**Figure 2: Predicted Number of Consulted DGs by Audience Sensitivity** (Note: Based on Full Model; 95% CIs; all other variables at their mean)