

# Attaining weakness by seeking strength: The preference for “strong” bargaining positions in coalition formation

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## Background & Rationale

Previous research (e.g., Gamson, 1964; Vinacke & Arkoff, 1957) shows a **strength-is-weakness effect** in which individuals with more input are disproportionately excluded from coalitions.

A proposed explanation for this effect is that individuals (are expected to) adhere to the parity norm (Gamson, 1964), leading “strong” individuals to demand a larger share of the outcomes making them less attractive partners than “weak” individuals who demand less.

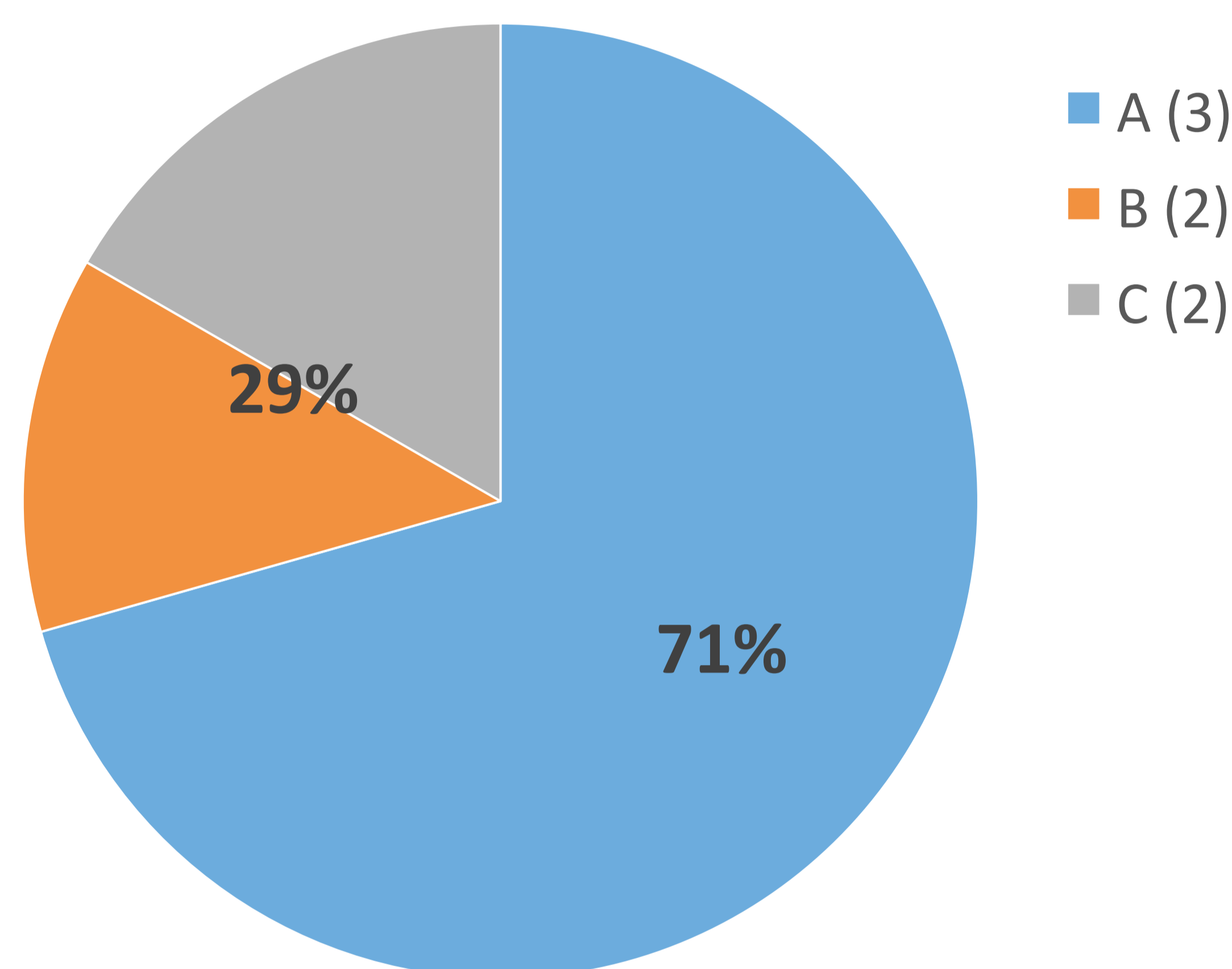
The empirical question addressed in the presented studies is whether individuals understand this and thus avoid this “strong” position or whether individuals actively seek out this position and therefore increase their chances of being excluded.

## Conclusion

1. In coalition formation individuals actively seek out seemingly strong, but in reality disadvantageous, bargaining positions.
2. This result was replicated in a 5(432) study (see handout), which rules out that individuals choose the 3 because it is a unique and salient position.
3. Assigning individuals to an (advantageous) “weak” position attenuates the choice for (disadvantageous) “strong” positions to a certain extent.

## Results (Study 1)

Choice of Bargaining Position



$\chi^2(2, N = 204) = 127.88, p < .001$

## Method (Study 1)

Sample: 204 Undergraduate Psychology Students.

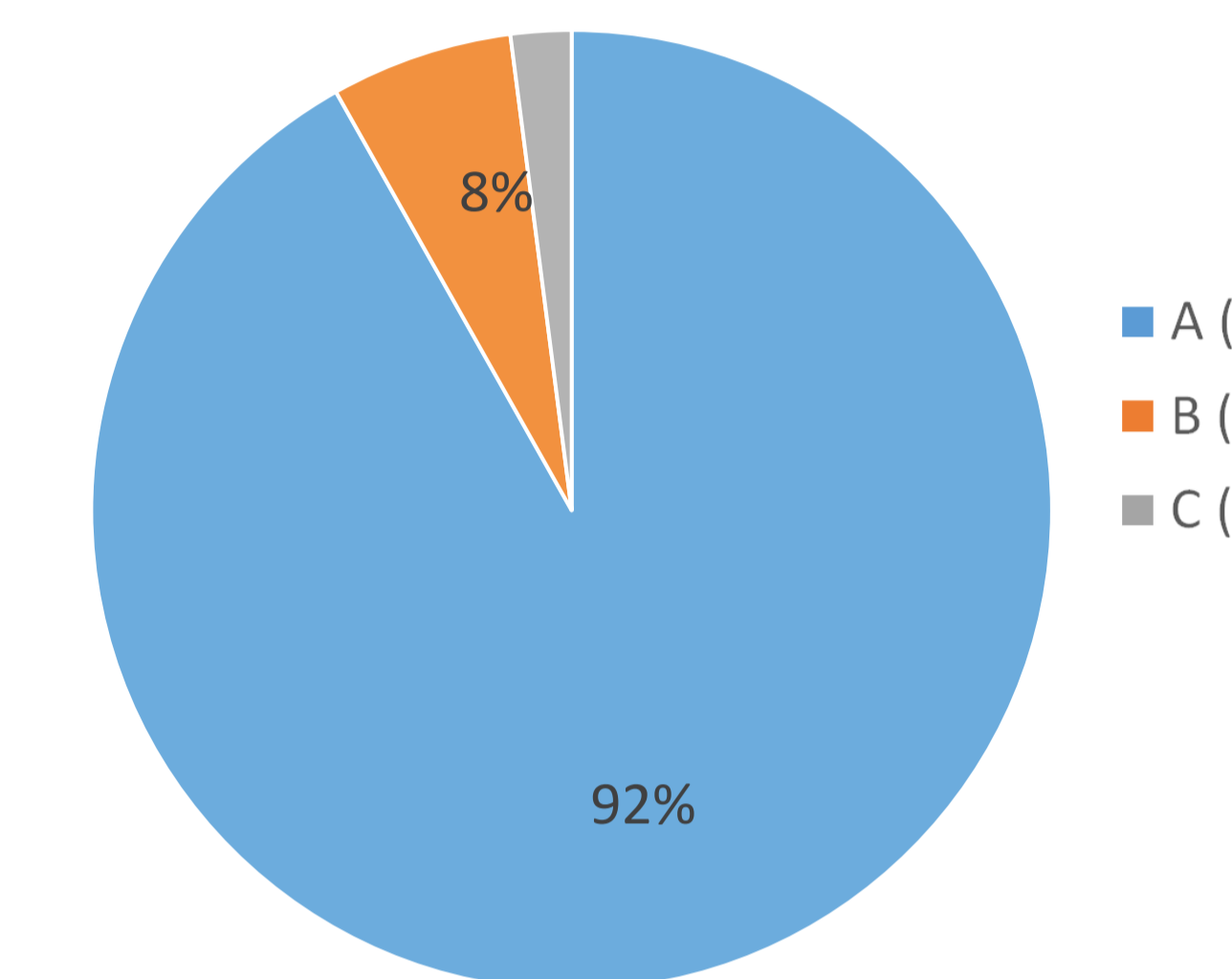
Design: Hypothetical 4(322) political convention game in which individuals select their bargaining position.

DV: Choice of bargaining position:

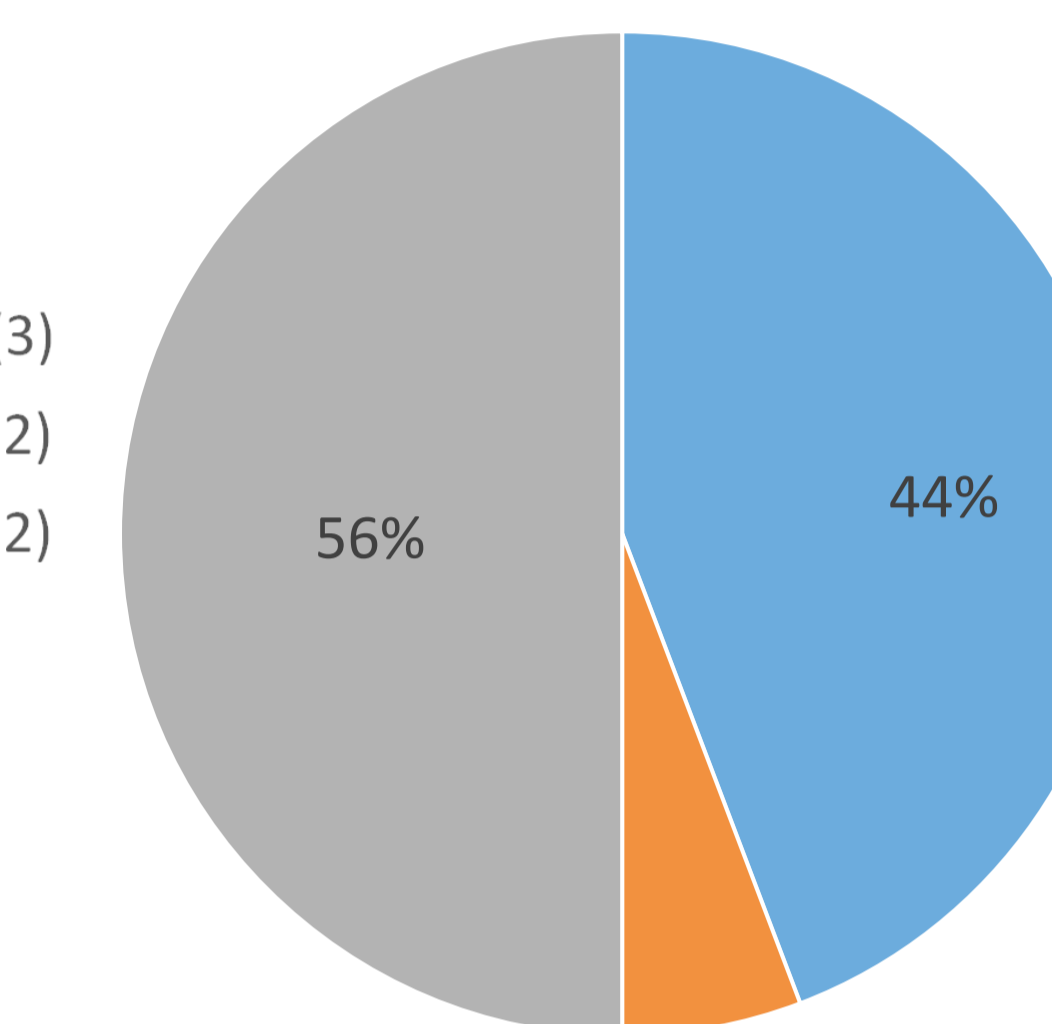
- Player A (3 Votes)
- Player B (2 Votes)
- Player C (2 Votes)

## Results (Study 2)

Choice of Bargaining Position:  
Assigned A (3 Votes)



Choice of Bargaining Position :  
Assigned C (2 Votes)



Assigned Position \* Final Position:  $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 25.42, p < .001$

## Method (Study 2)

Sample: 100 Amazon Mechanical Turk Workers.

Design: Hypothetical 4(322) political convention game in which individuals were assigned to an initial position and allowed to switch to a different position.

IV: Initial position:

- A (3 Votes)
- C (2 Votes)

DV: Choice of final bargaining position:

- Player A (3 Votes)
- Player B (2 Votes)
- Player C (2 Votes)

## References

- Gamson, W. A. (1964). Experimental studies of coalition formation. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology Vol 1* (pp. 81-110). New York: Academic Press.
- Vinacke, W. E., & Arkoff, A. (1957). An experimental study of coalitions in the triad. *American Sociological Review*, 22(4), 406-414.