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More business as usual? Explaining business bias across issues and institutions in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

Business interest groups numerically dominate the European Union (EU) interest group communities. However, scholars note that the relative proportion of business interests varies by either the institutional venue or the policy issue. Exchange-theoretical approaches emphasize the distinct informational needs of policy-makers at different venues, hereby favoring business actors to a varying degree. Other scholars emphasize the importance of conflict and argue that containment or expansion of conflict on concrete policy issues shapes the relative presence of business interest representatives. We simultaneously test both hypotheses comparing interest group activities on seventy issues observed in the European Parliament, the European Commission and in the EU media. We find little differences between the EU venues in terms of the interests represented. Rather, the salience and scope of issues seem more important denominators for variation in business lobby activity.

KEYWORDS Interest groups; lobbying; European Union; business interest representation

Introduction

The European Union interest group population has been widely documented as dominated by business organizations. While this is clearly true at the aggregate level, there is still much variation in the extent to which this applies to subsets of interest groups in Europe, such as at the various institutions in the EU or in particular policy fields. Depending on the venue or policy field one looks at, the presence of business organizations compared to other types of interest groups varies considerably. A key question then is: what causes variation in the relative presence of business interests in interest group communities in Europe?

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The most dominant perspective states that various parts of government have greater needs for certain types of information and are therefore more receptive to certain types of organized interests. This leads to specialized communities of interest groups related to distinct institution-specific policy domains (e.g., Bouwen 2004). In such communities of 'policy-specific transfer networks' (Pappi and Henning 1998: 558), interest groups organize a transaction between 'information'-hungry policy-makers and knowledgeable and interested actors in society or the economy. In line with this reasoning, a great deal of studies has put high emphasis on the *institutional* origins for biases in interest representation (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bouwen 2002, 2004; Dür and Mateo 2016; see also Berkhout et al. 2018; Bunea and Baumgartner 2014; Hanegraaff et al. 2015).

We challenge an exclusive focus on 'simple' exchange relationships for being inattentive to the dynamics of political conflict. This is central in a second perspective that puts high emphasis on *issue* characteristics. Hereby scholars note that, irrespective of the venue-specific demand of government officials, issues have their own conflict dynamic (Wonka et al. 2018). Most notably, 'conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved' (Schattschneider 1960: 4) because the inclusion of new players is likely to affect the existing power balance. This implies that the number of political actors who attend to an issue (scope) and the potential for further public involvement (salience) must directly be related to the relative presence of business interest groups (bias). In other words, the scope and salience of conflict affect the balance of power, or the diversity of interests represented. As a result, business bias should be relatively strong on narrowly scoped, low salient issues (e.g., Beyers et al. [2014b]; Kollman [1998]).

To test our hypotheses, we compare the institutional and issue hypothesis by comparing the share of business groups active at three EU political venues – the EC, the EP, and the media – on a *set of similar issues* (see INTEREURO project, Beyers et al. 2014b). This makes it possible to disentangle the relative importance of institutional and issue characteristics for the differences in business bias across interest communities. Our analyses provide more support for the issue hypothesis than for the institutional hypothesis. We proceed as follows. We start with an overview of the current literature on the sources of variation in bias across interest group communities, most prominently related to a resource exchange and a political conflict perspective. We follow with an overview of the data collection. We then provide a test of our hypotheses in our empirical section. We end with a discussion of the main results and provide some venues for future research in the conclusion.

Institutions and bias in interest communities

The argument that institutional characteristics considerably shape interest group populations departs from a number of theoretical assumptions on the resource dependency of organizations. It is assumed that organizations are not internally self-sufficient but rely on their environment to gain critical resources to survive. Different types of organizations exchange resources between each other from which they both benefit. (see Bouwen [2004]; Pappi and Henning [1999]). As classically outlined by Schmitter and Streeck (1999), this is what occurs between interest groups and political institutions, and, outside the focus of the underlying paper, between interest groups and their members (also see e.g., Berkhout [2013]). Most notably, Bouwen (2004) provides a clear exchange-theoretical example of how policy interaction is affected by the nature of political institutions (also e.g., Chalmers [2013]). These exchanges conceptually aggregate upwards into exchange networks (e.g., Pappi and Henning 1998). The aggregate resource 'demands' of policy-makers and the aggregate resource 'supply' of different types of interest groups, can be modeled as explanations for the density and diversity of interest group populations (Gray and Lowery 1996; Gray et al. 2005).

The key in understanding how institutions shape interest group communities thus lies in the link between what policy-makers need and what interest groups can provide to them. What types of exchange goods are relevant here? Scholars commonly distinguish between technical and political information (e.g., De Bruycker [2016]). Technical information as supplied by interest organizations refers to substantive expert information about the scientific aspects, the feasibility or the effectiveness of a certain policy. This is, of course, politically 'biased' information, but as noted by Lindblom (1968: 32), these 'biases actually can be helpful, since they provide a way of focusing analysis and action'. Political information refers to the level of political and societal support for a policy. This is what Hall and Deardorff (2006) have termed 'political intelligence' or what Pappi and Henning (1998: 563–4) label 'support resources'. Interest organization signals the level of support policies enjoy, for instance, from the broader public or from a specific constituency, such as the agricultural or the banking industry. Government officials require such support in order to increase their (organizational) legitimacy or win internal bureaucratic battles (Greenwood 2007). Elected representatives need political information to link their political work to the interests of constituents. Sometimes lobbyists will combine different types of information and the analytical distinction is commonly used to explain why certain types of interests are attracted to particular institutional venues.

Building on these insights, many scholars have argued that some policy-makers especially depend on information on the political implications of

policy proposals, supplied by only certain types of organizations, most notably citizen groups, whereas other policy-makers seek technical input, presumably favoring business interest organizations. They therefore intensify contact with groups that are able to provide the type of information sought. More specifically, citizen groups are commonly understood as relatively well-positioned to deliver political information, presumably needed in public-oriented fora such as Parliaments and the media. In contrast, business organizations are assumed to be relatively well-positioned to provide technical information, i.e., the sort of information much needed by technocratic staff employed in administrative institutions such as the EC.

This argument is recurrently used in the EU literature on (business) interest representation. Staff at the European Commission is not democratically elected. This means that they are not (so much) driven by reelection incentives but are driven by bureaucratic motivations and therefore prioritize technical information over political information. This leads them to attract business interest organizations willing to provide 'high quality technical' information (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bouwen 2002; Dür and Mateo 2016). In contrast, Members of the European Parliament presumably need political information in order to enhance their chances of renewed selection on the candidate lists. This benefits citizen groups which possess more political information relative to technical information. Overall, this means that due to the type of information that groups possess, the relative share of citizen groups is higher at public forums than at administrative forums, and the reverse is true for business groups. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1 'Institutional hypothesis': The share of business groups – compared to citizen groups – is higher at EU public venues compared to EU administrative venues.

Issues and bias in interest communities

The structural logic of exchange between policy-makers and interest groups has theoretical foundations in the literature on political exchange, (organizational) resource dependency and (rational) incentive systems. However, there are a number of conceptual weaknesses that must lead us to revise the approach or identify alternative theoretical arguments. We identify the theoretical problems related to (1) the assumptions about actor incentives, (2) the exclusion of much of the political context, and (3) the aggregation of dyads into systems.

First, one needs to make assumptions about the incentives of the exchange partners involved. Empirical studies are inconclusive on the validity of these assumptions: for instance, De Bruycker (2016: 614) shows, based on interviews with 143 interest groups representatives in the EU, that 'interest group type has little impact on which type of information is supplied to policy-makers.

Instead of interest group type, the political venues and communication channels used appear to be much more powerful explanatory factor'. This means that the possession of political or technical information is no intrinsic characteristic of interest groups, such as their types of members, but rather strategic options available to all interest groups (see also Chalmers 2013).

In addition, the venue-specific *demands* may vary a great deal as well. That is, different European Commissioners and Directorates-General (DG) in the Commission might value information depending on the issue that is being discussed as well as their field of responsibility. In other words, various types of policy-makers want political information at some times and expert information at other times. Venues are also mutually dependent on each other, further reducing the differences in demand: the Commission will have a great interest in finding out about political opposition and support for a given proposal so as to prevent that it will be shot down by the Council and EP at the later interinstitutional policy stage. In a similar vein, different committees/parliamentary groups might be interested in information on various aspects – and assuming that Members of the European Parliaments (MEPs) are driven both by electoral and policy incentives, they will have a demand for both technical and political information.

Second, the value of the goods under exchange, or the demand/supply function for any given dyad, is assumed to be relatively constant over time and independent on the particular issue on the policy agenda of the exchange venue at hand. This assumption greatly limits the external validity of this approach. That is, in particular policy domains, or 'systems of limited participation', one may assume a relatively isolated policy process of similar participants over a long time period, such as the agricultural sector (Pappi and Henning 1999), the financial sector (Bouwen 2002, 2004) or the particular neo-corporatist exchange settings scrutinized by Schmitter and Streeck (1985). However, most venues deal with various policy fields and issues with strongly diverging 'needs' and supplies. This makes exchanges highly context-specific, possibly to such an extent that they become meaningless as independent theoretical constructs.

Third, in order to study bias, the various exchange dyads will have to be aggregated upwards to, most commonly, the level of institutional venues. This aggravates the problem of contextual factors. At the level of individual group-policy-makers dyads, one can, to a certain extent, control, through selection or measurement, for varying incentives of the exchange partners and for differences in context. However, this is practically impossible when comparing institutional venues, especially when there are theoretical reasons to assume that exchange relationships are dependent on each other. For instance, a Green MEP starts working on a chemical industry issue in exchange for favorable public attention at a public event of an environmental group and, at the same time, a conservative MEP receives

important technical information from a representative of a chemical industry association. The political value of these exchanges, and the likelihood of their occurrence, is related to each other. This mutual strengthening (or weakening) of exchange relationship in the ups and downs, or 'bandwagons', of the policy process is unaccounted for when relationship are studied in a methodologically individual manner.

In short, there are a number of conceptual reasons to expect that the information exchange perspective only provides partial explanations for differences in the relative presence of business lobbyists. What would be an alternative explanation? We argue that a focus on the particular characteristics of policy issues potentially provides us with better-specified models of (business) bias in interest communities.

Issues are the central units of analysis for scholars studying lobbying from a policy process perspective (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Wonka et al. 2018). The academic interest in issues arises from the idea that mechanisms expanding the scope of participation potentially contribute to more democratic policy-making processes (e.g., Baumgartner and Jones 1993: 11). This focus on issues has attracted renewed interest lately in two major research networks in the EU and US (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Beyers et al. 2015), revising our view on organizational communities, interest group strategies and their influence. Recent research shows that the aggregate sum of issue-level interest group communities hardly differs from the full interest group population assessed independently from the policy process (Berkhout et al. 2018). At the same time, the political strategies of interest groups vary considerably across issues (Beyers et al. 2015; Dür and Mateo 2016). Also, issue-level explanations have been found to be very important for the influence different types of groups have in the political arena (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Dür et al. 2015).

Various types of actors pay attention, position themselves and argue about issues, and through such activities jointly characterize an issue in terms of its scope, salience, dimensionality and others aspects. At the same time, actors have distinct incentives to respond to what others actors are doing, creating an interactive political process where the root cause of action–reaction patterns is practically and conceptually impossible to identify. This also means that issues, at a given point in time and from the perspective of individual groups, 'have' certain characteristics that are, for all practical purposes, beyond the effective control of individual political actors. These actor-induced dynamics also lead to patterns of politics on particular issues that create variation across issues in business bias. The hypotheses presented below address this relationship. In part, business bias may potentially trigger reactions of other actors, creating a countermobilization, and therewith may 'cause' the salience and scope of an issue, rather than the other way around as hypothesized below. However, we think that such

countermobilizations only partially work along the lines of different group types. We now discuss how the scope and salience of an issue affect the relative presence of business interest representatives.

First, the *scope* of participation in a policy conflict refers to the number of actors that are actively part of a policy domain or issue within it. It may alternatively be labeled actor expansion (Grande and Hutter, 2016: 8) or issue crowdedness or density (Berkhout et al. 2017). We here refer to the scope of mobilization rather than the substantive breadth of the policy under consideration (also sometimes referred to as policy scope). We depart from the assumption that 'scope and bias are aspects of the same tendency', and the narrower the scope of conflict, the stronger the business bias of the interests involved (Schattschneider 1960: 34). As noted, the expansion of the scope of conflict (including a larger number of actors), or it's containment within in narrow policy niches is likely to be a very important predictor for potential change to the status quo. How may this affect the distribution of citizen and business organizations in issue communities of interest groups? Following, among other authors, Baumgartner and Leech (2001), we expect that business groups tend to thrive on narrowly scoped issues. They (2001: 1203, 1206) note that on most issues 'only one or a few lobbyists become involved and on those issues the business community is much more likely to be lobbying alone'. Citizen groups, they find, are more likely to be involved in the relatively open processes involving larger numbers of participants (also Dür et al. 2015). This is related to the likely different relative distributions of power within policy conflicts. That is, assuming that citizen groups are in a relatively disadvantageous position in EU policy issues, we follow Schattschneider's (1960: 40) notion that 'it is the weak who want to socialize conflict, i.e., to involve more and more people in the conflict until the balance of forces is changed'. Politically 'weaker' citizen groups will be in a more favorable position on broadly scoped issues compared to issues contained in narrow policy circles in which the 'balance of forces' is more likely to favor business interests.

Over time, such processes also lead to positive feedback mechanisms in which more interest group mobilization, attract even more organizations to become active on these issues. Such 'bandwagon mechanisms' have been documented in the literature (e.g., Halpin [2011]) and refer to the process whereby individual organizations respond to the mobilization dynamics on a given issue, and by becoming active also 'cause' the mobilization to become precisely one organization broader. This is a reciprocal ongoing process. Given the distinct conceptual levels, the scope of mobilization on an issue is largely exogenous and, in the literature noted, conceptually prior to the incentives and political decisions of individual interest groups. Yet, as argued, we expect citizen groups to be primarily sensitive to hop on a

bandwagon once issues become more densely populated. In short, we expect the share of citizen groups to be higher when the mobilization is broadly scoped.

> **H2** 'Scope of mobilization hypothesis': The broader the scope of an issue is, the smaller the share of business groups – compared to citizen groups – active

Second, recent Schattschneider-inspired studies on politicization identify, at least, one additional dimension of politicization: salience (Grande and Hutter 2016: 7–10).[1] *Salience*, the object of interest of agenda-setting studies, refers to the publicly visible government attention to issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Beyers et al. 2018). We define salience as the degree of public attention and political scrutiny by the government, party and other actors an issue is visibly subject to. The higher the salience, the more attention policy-makers will pay to issues and the more they are potentially pressured by other interests, public opinion and electoral incentives.

For three reasons, we expect that salience increases the share of citizen groups active. First, citizen groups are more likely to take positions that are relatively popular among the public. This favorable public opinion context will drive them to make use of salient situations as much as possible (Kollman 1998, 159). Second, politicians have an incentive to include a wide variety of actors on salient issues because it is likely that more constituents are interested in such issues (Halpin and Fraussen 2017). This increases the access opportunities of citizen groups to a greater extent than for other groups. Third, interest groups need to survive as organizations and have to choose on which issues they will be more active than others. We expect that citizen groups more strongly than others, hereby opt to lobby on issues that are most salient because this allows them to be as visible as possible to members (Hanegraaff et al. 2016). Similar as for scope, we are largely agnostic about the original cause of this process (what come first?). As argued above, we expect citizen groups to more often increase the salience of an issue than business groups, but once an issue has become more salient, it will also attract more citizen groups to become active on these issues. In any case, we expect:

> **H3** 'Issue-salience hypothesis': The more salient an issues is, the smaller the share of business groups – compared to citizen groups – active

Research design

We use data from the INTEREURO project on EU lobbying. This collaborative project traces the entire lobby process – ranging from mobilization to population, strategies and influence – on a sample of EU policy issues derived from 125 legislative proposals (2008–2010) (See for exact full procedure, Beyers

et al. [2014a]). The actors active on these proposals were mapped via the media, the European Commission and the European Parliament. First, as regards the *media*, we relied on an online search in the electronic archives of five media outlets (see below) in which all stakeholders related to the legislative proposals were identified (see De Bruycker and Beyers [2015]). The media also provide us with a measure of salience (number of times a legislative proposal is mentioned). Second, in case of the *Commission*, we asked the officials responsible (70 interviews) to list all relevant stakeholders that were actively involved in the specific legislative case (658 interest groups were identified). Finally, for *Parliament*, we use a sample of 29 legislative proposals (22 directives and 7 regulations) for which have been identified in *all* three venues. This is critical because this makes it possible to differentiate between the effects of issues and venues. In sum, we run our analyses based on a set of 21 proposals on which 212 unique interest groups were identified. The salience and scope of the policy conflicts on these proposals are similar to the full sample studied and this selection is therefore likely to be representative of all policy issues in the EU. Furthermore, we collected data on group type on the basis of organizations' websites. Student-coders were supervised by a post-doctoral researcher, trained in three distinct groups of four students, held regular meetings to validate the treatment of specific cases and inter-coder reliability checks were satisfactory.

In our analysis, we look at business bias across institutional venues and at the issue-level. First, we identify three distinct interest communities in the entire interest group population, each related to one particular *venue* in the EU (EC, EP, and media). To test whether either one of these interest communities is more dominated by business groups than the other, we present several logistic regression models predicting the chance that a business organization, compared to other types of organizations is active at a particular venue. Second, to test the issue salience and scope hypotheses, we cluster all groups according to the legislative proposal they lobby for. We measure *salience* in terms of the number of times issues where mentioned in the *Agence Europe, European Voice, the Financial Times, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and Le Monde*. This resulted in a list of issues and the number of times these issues are mentioned in either one of the European media sources (see Beyers et al. [2014a] and De Bruycker and Beyers [2015] for more information on the selection of these news outlets and articles). Organizations are connected to legislative proposals on the basis of the interviews and media analysis mentioned above. The final dependent variable – the scope of an issue – is constructed by adding up the number of groups active on the particular issue. We rely on a Poisson regression analysis to estimate the chance that a business interest organization is active on issues with varying levels of salience/scope.

As argued, our *independent* variable in each analysis is group type. In the descriptive section, we differentiate six types of organizations on the basis of their membership. The first group type is business interest associations which represent the interests of firms. The second group contains individual firms. The third category contains NGOs which have individuals as members or supporters and defend some sort of public good or social cause. The fourth groups are professional associations, which include groups that defend the interests of professionals such as doctors or professors. The fifth category is labor unions, which are organizations representing workers. The sixth and final group includes institutions. These are organizations with (semi-) governmental actors as members, such as hospitals. This category also includes (semi-) governmental actors lobbying by themselves, such as Universities. For our statistical models, we categorize the organizational types into two broader categories, in line with our hypotheses. For citizen groups, we group together NGOs and labor unions as they both represent citizen interests. For business groups, we grouped together firms, business associations, and professional associations.

We include several *control* variables. First, Several studies have shown that EU-level groups are relatively active at the EC, compared to at the EP and in the media (Bouwen 2002, 2004) and, due to their permanent Brussels presence expect to be active on narrow issues. We therefore include the level of mobilization and differentiate between organizations from EU member states, EU-level organizations, and foreign interest groups. We also control for the resources of an organization as reported in the Transparency Register (budget for advocacy). More resourceful associations seem to be involved in multiple arenas, indicating that presence in one arena spills over into another (Binderkrantz et al. 2015).

Empirical analyses

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution by all coded actor types in the columns and institutional and issue characteristics in the rows (our dependent variables). The first set of rows present the institutional variation across the media, the EC, and the EP. The second set of rows deal with issue scope and we distinguish narrow (less than 10 other organizations active on the issue), averagely scoped (between 10 and 20 other organizations), and broad issues (more than 20 other organizations). The final set of rows present variation across issue salience. We hereby differentiate between low (less than 5 articles in EU media regarding the issue) medium (between 5 and 10 articles), and high salient (more than 10 articles) issues.

Table 1. Distribution across venues and issues (scope and salience).

	Citizen interests		Business interests			
	NGOs	Labor unions	Prof. Ass.	Buss. Ass.	Firms	Institutions
Institutions						
Media	24%	2%	4%	35%	24%	11%
Commission	27%	3%	6%	35%	23%	8%
Parliament	31%	1%	5%	34%	16%	12%
Issue scope						
Narrow	52%	2%	6%	16%	4%	20%
Average	23%	3%	8%	42%	15%	10%
Broad	19%	1%	2%	33%	36%	9%
Issue salience						
Low	14%	2%	8%	40%	30%	6%
Medium	25%	2%	2%	34%	22%	15%
High	34%	4%	3%	26%	24%	8%

Note: Rows add up to 100%.

Table 1 provides stronger evidence for the issue hypotheses compared to the institutional-resource exchange hypothesis. To start, we find little variation in the presence of distinct actors across *institutions* as can be seen in the first column. Here we observe, first, relevant but overall limited differences in the presence of citizen groups at different institutional venues. We observe these in somewhat higher numbers at the Parliament than at the EC (24% at the media, 26% at the EC, and 31% at the EP). These are small differences but they are still in line with the resources exchange model on which our first hypothesis is based. Yet, there is hardly any difference in the relative presence of citizen groups in the media and at the EC, contrary to the institutional hypothesis that stipulates substantially different information demands and associated types of actors. For business, we see a similar pattern. Some results are in line with the institutional model (i.e., less business activity at the EP than at the EC and media); yet, this model would also predict a larger share of business groups active at the EC compared to the EP, something we do not observe.

We find much stronger and consistent support for the issue hypotheses. First, we see strong differences in the relative presence of distinct types of groups for issue *scope*, yet to our surprise, in the direction that is exactly opposite to our hypothesis. In more broadly scoped, dense issue populations, the number of citizen groups decrease (from 52% to 19%), whereas the number of business groups increases substantially (from 20% to 69%). Second, more *salient* issues attract relatively large proportions of citizen groups (14% at low salience to 34% at high salience issues). The reverse is true for the proportion of business interest organizations. When we take business associations and firms together, their relative share drops from 70% at low salience to 50% on high salient issues. In sum, on the basis of this bivariate cross-tabulation, we find quite strong support for the argument that issue characteristics, and not so much institutional variation fuel bias.

Multivariate analyses

In our multivariate analysis, we run two sets of models: one analysis in which we test the institutional hypothesis and one in which we analyze the importance of issue characteristics. In both cases, we only include the group types relevant to our theoretical model, namely the attendance of business organizations and citizen groups across the three venues, and across issues with varying levels of salience and density. First, for the examination of the *institutional* hypothesis, the dependent variable is the attendance of both types of interest groups at three European venues: the media, the EP, and the EC. We construct three logit models, each highlighting the attendance of an organization at a specific venue. Some organizations lobbied on multiple issues which could lead to heteroscedasticity of the error terms. For this reason, we cluster our standard errors on organizations. In Table 2, the results are presented.

The results of the multivariate logit regression models are even more outspoken than the bivariate analysis. Controlling for the issues on the table, the distribution of organizational types, the distribution among business groups and citizen groups is similar across the EC, the EP, and the media. In order to get a sense of the size of the effects, we plotted the predicted probabilities of the different groups at the various venues (see Figure 1). Here, we see that the predicted percentage of groups does not vary meaningfully across venues,[2] as the confidence intervals overlap considerably. Moreover, there are wide confidence intervals in all figures indicating that, depending on

Table 2. Logit regression models on lobbying at EU media, EC, and EP.

	Media		Commission		Parliament	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Constant	−1.61**	0.76	0.52	0.78	0.25	0.73
Independent variable						
Actor type						
Business (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Citizen group	−0.30	0.35	−0.13	0.37	0.05	0.34
Control variables						
Level of mobilization						
National	−0.65	0.66	1.50**	0.74	−1.28*	0.73
EU level (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Foreign/global	0.27	0.48	0.48	0.48	−0.05	0.48
Budget	−0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.03
Brussel office	1.15**	0.47	0.63	0.47	0.19	0.46
Salience	0.08***	0.03	−0.01	0.03	−0.02	0.03
Density	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.03	−0.04*	0.02
Diagnostics						
LL	−124.91		−113.70		−123.84	
LR χ^2	20.59		5.91		14.09	
Prob > χ^2	0.00		0.55		0.05	
N	197		197		197	

Note: Based on 197 EU institution-group dyads.
Significance: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01.

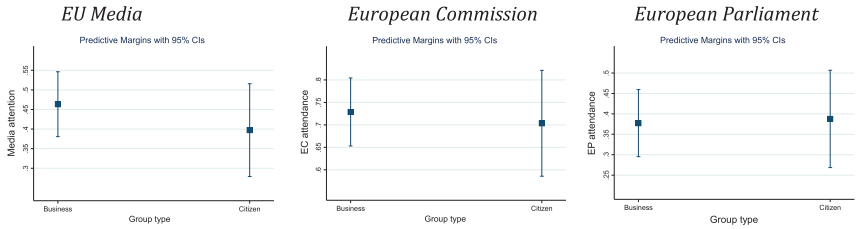

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of actor type distribution at EU venues.

the issue, business groups and citizen groups vary much in targeting the media, the EC, and the EP in Europe. This leads us to reject hypotheses 1. We do not find relevant variation in the distribution of group type across the three venues.

We turn to our results on issue characteristics. Table 3 shows the coefficients and standard errors of the regression models. Because issue salience and density are count measures we rely on Poisson regressions. Poisson regressions are suited for count data without considerable dispersion as is the case with our data. What can we infer from these findings? First, the negative and statistically significant coefficients reported in the top-section indicate substantial differences in the distribution of business and citizen groups according to the *scope* of issues (H2). However, as already noted in the bivariate table, the effect is opposite to our expectation. That is, on issues with larger numbers of organizations active, the percentage of citizen groups is lower compared to business groups. While this does not confirm

Table 3. Poisson regression models on the salience and scope of issues.

	Salience		Scope	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Constant	2.01***	0.08	2.97***	0.05
Independent variable				
Actor type				
Business	Ref.	–	Ref.	–
Citizen group	0.29***	0.05	−0.29***	0.04
Control variables				
Level of mobilization				
National	0.02	0.10	0.07	0.06
EU level (ref.)	Ref.	–	Ref.	–
Foreign/global	0.05	0.08	0.07	0.05
Budget	−0.02***	0.01	0.01***	0.00
Brussel office	−0.00	0.08	0.00	0.05
Diagnostics				
LL	−712.70		−734.65	
LR χ^2	49.55		75.22	
Prob > χ^2	0.00		0.00	
N	197		197	

Note: Poisson regression with robust standard errors.
Significance: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01.

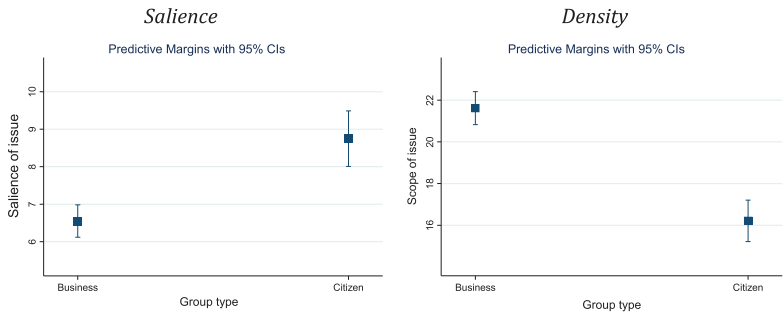

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities group type diversity by level of salience and density.

hypothesis 2, it does highlight the importance of scope of issues for bias in interest communities. In the discussion (next section), we extensively discuss why the direction of this effect is different from what we expected (and what the literature has long suggested).

Second, *salience* has an important effect on the distribution of groups active on these issues (H3). The negative and significant coefficients reported in the top rows in the salience model indicate that on salient issues business organizations are less active than citizen groups. In order to visualize the size of this effect, we use this model to plot the predicted probabilities of the relative saliency of issues in relation to the presence of the two distinct group types (see Figure 2, left) and across the scope of issues (see Figure 2, right). The results are consistent: citizen groups are more active on salient issues, whereas business groups are more active on issues with a large scope. More precisely, while citizen groups are active on issues with roughly nine articles in the EU news media, business organizations are active on issues with an average of five articles in the news. These results provide strong evidence in favor of hypothesis 3 about issue salience. For scope, we see the opposite trend: business organizations are active on issues with an average of 21 other interest groups active, whereas citizen groups are active on issues with an average of 15 other interest organizations. This provides strong support against hypothesis 3.

Discussion

What are the implications of these empirical findings for existing literature? First, our null-findings on institutional venues matter. According to Bunea and Baumgartner (2014), the resource exchange perspective is the most frequently used theory in the interest group literature to explain variation in interest group attendance at various venues. We, however, find no evidence that this is a valid explanation for why certain types of groups lobby at different venues in the EU when controlling for the issues on the agendas

of these venues. This does not mean that the institutional model is without merit: it may indicate that researchers should be more careful in their assumption about the link between interest types and strategic choice in general and information provision in particular. The outcomes are more in line with recent findings suggesting that all types of groups adapt their information flows to the needs of different types of institutions (De Bruycker, 2016, 614). This means that political or technical information should not be treated as intrinsic characteristics of interest groups, such as the type of members, but rather a strategic option available to *all* interest groups. Moreover, we only looked at one dimension of bias, namely business bias. It could very well be that on different dimensions, such as those related to resources, professionalization or expertise, the resource exchange model does adequately explain why policy-makers and interest groups interact. Future research should address this and see whether other types of bias are triggered by institutional variation, such as resources or scope of representation.

A second key finding is that citizen interest organizations are relatively active on narrowly scoped issues and business interest associations have a relatively strong presence on broadly scoped issues. This is surprising. Theoretically, policy conflict literature had led us to expect that narrowly scoped, closed 'systems of limited participation' are likely to exclude citizens groups and favor business interest representatives (Cobb and Elder 1983; Schattschneider 1960). Empirical studies substantiate that claim (Baumgartner and Leech 2001). However, we may have relied too strongly on these assumptions related to the nature of policy conflict or the policy process more broadly, at the cost of mobilization and population-related explanations. To start, as regards mobilization, citizen groups, compared to business collective action, will, at least partially, mobilize by means of expressive incentives on explicitly political causes, and will therefore have principled public policy positions (De Bruycker et al. 2017). Their constituents provide a clear, proactive and constraining mandate regarding specific political goals such as reducing environmental pollution. This will force citizen groups to focus on a limited set of policy issues, partially independent of other actors or the heat of issue politics. The by-product nature of business interest lobbying may be more flexible and more reactive, but also more prone to bandwagoning and less focused, and therefore more likely to produce a strong focus on broadly scoped issues. Furthermore, on the basis of population ecological theory, one should expect issue density to depend on the energy or demand on the side of the policy process and area or supply on the side of society and the economy (Gray and Lowery 1996). This implies that the relatively large numbers of business interest representatives, at least for a substantial part, follows from the relatively strong 'carrying capacity' for interest organizations supplied by the forces of economic production (Lowery et al. 2005). During large periods of time, such organizations may be in political 'hibernation' (Berkhout and

Lowery 2011: 10) and only relevant as a 'potential' or latent group. In other words, there are just large numbers of business interest representatives readily present to be attracted to a set of issues related to the regulation of the European economy.

Third, as theorized, we find that issue salience has a strong effect on how biased an interest system is. This is in line with earlier findings that indicate that citizen groups are more invested in salient issues (e.g., Dür and Mateo 2016; Hanegraaff et al. 2016). As noted, there are a number of theoretical arguments to substantiate this: first, citizen groups are drawn to salient issues as media attention simultaneously helps them realize both their political and organizational maintenance goals (Walker 1991). Second, it follows from the conflict theoretical notion that 'spectators are an integral part of the situation for the *audience* determines the outcome of the fight' (Schattschneider 1960: 3) and that citizen groups, by their very nature, have better ties to the public than business groups, and, will benefit from a change in the balance of forces as other actors are visibly engaged in the issue.

At the same time, we think that our supporting evidence for our expectation based on theories of policy conflicts is promising but also challenging. It is promising in the sense that, empirically, it holds relatively strong explanatory power and, conceptually, indicates relatively broad external validity. That is, the arguments made on issue-dynamics are at the level of theories of the 'middle-range' that should be valid on a broad range of contexts and pertaining to several aspects of interest group politics. The main limitation of this trajectory of theory-formation lies in the ambiguous nature of causality and the relationship between incentives on the part of policy participants and the characteristics of the issue. Do groups shape the issue or do they respond to its characteristics? Future studies could aim to address this in conceptual terms and by means of research designs that allow unpacking these causal chains.

Notes

1. Please note that for reasons of conceptual clarity, we here exclude conflict intensity or polarization (i.e., the positional differences among relevant actors) from the definition of politicisation. This is in contrast to most of the works cited here but common in agenda-setting studies.
2. Please note that while not directly hypothesized, the only exceptions are research organizations (see Appendix 1). These are more present in the media and less present at the Commission. However, given the type of exchange goods research organizations possess, independent technical information, from a resources exchange perspective, we should expect these types of organizations be more present at the Commission, whereas they are the least active at this venue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Logit regression models on lobbying at EU media, EC, and EP per more detailed group types (n = 212 EU institution-group dyads)

	Media		Commission		Parliament	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Constant	−1.70	0.75	0.20	0.77	0.55	0.45
Independent variable						
Actor type						
Citizen group (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Professional	−0.28	0.85	1.41	1.04	0.41	1.03
Association	0.11	0.40	0.23	0.42	−0.11	0.39
Firm	0.38	0.48	0.26	0.50	−0.06	0.49
Institution	1.79**	0.82	−1.95***	0.70	−0.01	0.58
Control variables						
Level of mobilization						
National	−0.70	0.58	1.38*	0.64	−1.03	0.67
EU level (ref.)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Foreign/global	0.19	0.46	0.43	0.49	−0.01	0.49
Budget	−0.01	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.49
Brussel office	1.16**	0.46	0.58	0.54	0.26	0.26
Salience	0.07**	0.03	−0.03	0.03	0.01**	0.03
Density	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.03	−0.05**	0.02
Diagnostics						
LL	−132.94		−121.09		−130.32	
LR χ^2	19.32		21.89		21.75	
Prob > χ^2	0.03		0.02		0.02	
N	212		212		212	

Significance: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01.

Appendix 2. Poisson regression models on the salience and scope of issues per more detailed group types (n = 212 eU issue-group dyads)

	Salience		Scope	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Constant	2.33***	0.08	2.71***	0.05
Independent variable				
Actor type				
Citizen group	Ref.	–	Ref.	–
Professional	−0.18	0.12	0.29	0.08
Association	−0.17***	0.06	0.21***	0.04
Firm	−0.58***	0.08	0.49***	0.05
Institution	−0.26**	0.11	0.09	0.07
Control variables				
Level of mobilization				
National	0.04	0.10	0.02	0.06
EU level (ref.)	Ref.	–	Ref.	–
Foreign/global	0.12	0.08	−0.01*	0.05
Budget	−0.02***	0.00	0.01***	0.00
Brussel office	−0.09	0.08	0.02	0.05
Diagnostics				
LL	−743.06		−856.71	
LR χ^2	79.13		136.37	
Prob > χ^2	0.00		0.00	
N	212		212	

Note: Poisson regression with robust standard errors.
Significance: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01.