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### Lobbying alone

*A study of political access and lobbying behavior of corporations in Western Europe*

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# Lobbying Alone.

A Study of Political Access and Lobbying Behavior  
of Corporations in Western Europe.

Academisch proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus Prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College van Promoties ingestelde commissie,  
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door

Ellis Aizenberg  
geboren te Woerden, Nederland

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Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

## PREFACE

This dissertation, entitled *Lobbying Alone. A Study of Political Access and Lobbying Behavior of Corporations in Western Europe* was written at the University of Amsterdam. The chapters comprise the following collection of articles:

1. Aizenberg, E., & Hanegraaff, M. (2020). Is politics under increasing corporate sway? A longitudinal study on the drivers of corporate access. *West European Politics*, 43(1), 181–202.
2. Aizenberg, E., & Hanegraaff, M. (2020). Time is of the Essence: A Longitudinal Study on Business Presence in Political News in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(2), 281–300.
3. Aizenberg, E., & Müller, M. (2020). Signaling expertise through the media? Measuring the appearance of corporations in political news through a complexity lens. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1–23.
4. Aizenberg, E. Salience and Conflict as Drivers of Corporate Lobbying? An Elite Survey Experiment. Under review.
5. Aizenberg E. (2020) Text as Data in Interest Group Research. In: Harris P., Bitonti A., Fleisher C., Skorkjær Binderkrantz A. (eds) *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Interest Groups, Lobbying and Public Affairs*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

In all co-authored articles, I developed the design, collected and analyzed the data and wrote the majority of the texts. The co-authors contributed to theory development, data analysis and writing of the articles.



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# Chapter 1.

Introduction

## 1.1. THE POINT OF DEPARTURE: CORPORATIONS AS ORGANIZED INTERESTS

On October 11, 2018, CEOs from 16 different multinationals called a meeting with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. On the agenda: the somewhat distant relationship between business and politics and the broader plans of the Dutch government to create more favorable conditions for multinationals in order to attract foreign companies and promote employment. Initially, these plans included the abolishment of corporate tax on dividends. This was highly contested, as none of the parties from the governing coalition had campaigned for the tax break during the general elections and an introduction of the policy would go against the advice of the finance ministry. After pressure from Members of Parliament (MPs), internal memos of the government's formation and the plans to abolish the tax rule were released.

The memos indicated that while the most important Dutch business association VNO-NCW had lobbied for elimination of the dividend tax for a decade, threats from multinationals Shell to not move their British stock exchange listing and Unilever to not establish their headquarters in the Netherlands had been decisive for the government coalition to announce their plans concerning the tax scrapping.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after Unilever abandoned its plans to move its headquarters from London to Rotterdam due to pressure from its international investors, Prime Minister Rutte backtracked on his controversial plan. In a reaction, Rutte said: "The fact that such a large company that had decided to come to the Netherlands has withdrawn its plan is very relevant. That's why we will reconsider our measures".<sup>2</sup> The course of events led to astonishment among MPs and questions about why the most important business association in the Netherlands, VNO-NCW had not been able to manage the lobby process well.

The dividend tax issue provides an insightful example of how corporations can be directly involved in policy negotiations and can operate as key players in politics, sometimes independent of and sometimes acting in concert with business interest associations. Corporate involvement in politics is widely observed and acknowledged by political scientists studying pluralist interest systems such as that of the United States (US). This system differs from many systems in Western Europe such as those of the Netherlands or Germany (see Lijphart & Crepaz, 1991 for an overview of how countries are categorized), which are characterized by corporatism in terms of how state-interest group relations are managed. Within corporatist contexts, the government is thought

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1 Belastingontwijking of staatssteun?, *Somo*, June 16, 2018

2 U-turn causes headache for Dutch PM, *The Times*, October 6, 2018

to share its power with a select number of membership groups such as labor or business associations, and avoids interaction with corporations directly (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). Countries with a pluralist arrangement such as the U.S. or the United Kingdom (U.K.) are known to have a greater variety of organized interests that are involved in the political process, such as NGOs and corporations (Ibidem).

## 1.2. RESEARCH QUESTION

When it comes to the representation of business interests, business associations are thought to be the most important players in corporatist systems of interest representation. That is, instead of many different corporations competing or working together to gain access and influence, there are a few membership organizations with which government extensively deliberates (see Schmitter, 1974; Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). Such membership organizations, tend to be broadly oriented and centralized compared to the more fragmented and specialized business lobby in pluralist systems (Ibidem). Yet, as the dividend tax example perfectly illustrates, corporations are successfully representing their interests on their own behalf in corporatist contexts as well. While corporations are thus not necessarily incentivized by structures of corporatism to lobby individually, empirical examples highlight that corporations are important players in policy negotiation processes within these contexts. This thesis asks how we should interpret these contrasting views.

Corporations are thought to be key participants in pluralist pressure systems such as that of the U.S. (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Danielian & Page, 1994; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) and to some extent that of the European Union (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen, 2004; Coen, 1997). Although students of organized interests focus relatively more on groups with members compared to corporations (Hart, 2004:47), in distinct pluralist contexts and mostly that of the U.S., corporations are acknowledged and studied by political scientists as part of the interest group community that seeks to influence politics and policy-making processes. In the European context, corporations have been studied by interest group scholars to a more limited extent, mostly focusing on the European Union institutions (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen, 2002; 2004; Coen, 1997; Chalmers, 2018; Dür et al., 2015), which – although this is disputed – are also thought to be characterized by a pluralist arrangement (see Coen, 1997; Streeck & Schmitter, 1991). This highlights that most research on corporate lobbying has been conducted in a distinct pluralist context, leaving us with relatively limited knowledge on the phenomenon and especially

outside of such contexts (but see Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2019; Fraussen et al., 2015).

We thus know little about the individual lobbying behavior of and access that individual corporations gain to political systems outside of the U.S. and in different contexts than those characterized by pluralism. This thesis speaks to this void and sheds light on individual lobbying behavior of corporations in a European, corporatist context by asking:

*To what extent do corporations lobby individually and which factors drive this activity?*

By posing this research question, the thesis aims to answer to what extent corporations lobby individually as opposed to via an association and in how far they are granted access in comparison to other organized interests to multiple political venues in different countries and over time. This endeavor also attempts to explain these patterns of corporate access and lobbying behavior by addressing explanatory factors at the macro-, meso- and micro-level.

## **1.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING INDIVIDUAL CORPORATE LOBBYING**

### **1.3.1. Normative importance**

Ever since Schattschneider (1960:xxi) criticized the pluralist ideal of the interest system – summarized by the idea that it would be ‘automatically representative of the whole community’ – political scientists have been intrigued by the idea of a certain overrepresentation of business interests within the interest system. Schattschneider argued that the interest system is not very suitable to serve diffuse interests and that it is rather a ‘flawed heavenly chorus that sings with a strong upper-class accent’ (Schattschneider, 1960:35). Olson (1965) also expressed his critique toward the pluralist view by stating that economic and concentrated interests are likely to be overrepresented within the pressure system, whereas more diffuse and majority interests are likely to be trumped due to a free-rider problem that becomes stronger once a group is larger. Such an overrepresentation of business interests in the interest system is problematic as it can cause bias in patterns of access that interest groups gain to political systems and different arenas. This is worrisome as patterns of access can indicate which voices are heard, both in the political and public debate. When such patterns are skewed toward certain interests, it ‘violates norms of equal access, representativeness, balance

and diversity in the marketplace of ideas' (Danielian & Page, 1994:1056), and it could eventually lead to policy outcomes in favor of subsections of society occurring at the cost of other members of the public (Olson, 1982). What is more, some political venues such as the news media serve as an important source for citizens to learn about politics. When the public has access to a diverse range of ideas, it is better enabled to build a well-informed opinion about politics and policy-making (Ibidem).

By studying individual corporations as actors in the interest group system, the degree of access that they gain to political systems and their lobbying behavior, this thesis speaks to this apprehension. Yet, individual lobbying by corporations is associated with more normative concerns than such activity by the business community in general. That is, first, corporations enjoy the advantaged position within the interest system that business interests have compared to other organized interests. This privileged position finds its roots in a 'different point of emergence in the history of class struggle' compared to labor interests, and business interests are thought to encounter less severe collective action problems compared to diffuse interests (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980: 76; Olson, 1965). In addition, business is thought to benefit from an advantaged position within the political system as 'governments are fundamentally conditioned by their dependence on the willingness of capitalists to continue to invest' (Swank, 1992:38; Lindblom, 1977; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1998). Second and in addition, corporations are characterized by a hierarchical structure and aim to maximize profit, whereas associations seek to accommodate the interests of members and aim to influence public policy based on these stances (see Hart, 2004). Corporations therefore, can decide at board room level when to start lobbying on an issue as they see fit (Hart, 2004), and according to Olson's (1965) logic, corporations that lobby solo are able to mobilize quicker compared to business associations. Simply because they do not have to liaise with peers and find a common ground on particular issues when lobbying alone.

In addition to the above advantages that corporations have compared to other organized interests and the normative concerns that are related to this, there are more worrisome aspects associated with corporations that engage in individual lobbying. Namely, associational lobbying of the business community is associated with representation focused on concerns and ambitions that are shared by a collective (Heinz et al., 1993; Gray et al., 2004; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Martin, 2005; Martin and Swank, 2004; Wilson, 1973). When corporations lobby alone, their behavior is linked to interest representation with a more self-oriented, less moderate and narrower focus compared to associational lobbying activity (Hart, 2004; Mizruchi, 2013; Salisbury, 1984). Therefore, the lobbying activity of corporations has been linked to concerns regarding fragmented

interest group systems, and fragmented policy outcomes as a possible result thereof.

Furthermore, and in addition to concerns about fragmentation that are related to individual corporate lobbying, normative apprehensions exist regarding the so-called 'quiet' nature of the representation that business interests are thought to engage in (Culpepper, 2010). That is, whereas groups that represent public interests thrive in arenas and by means of strategies that are visible to the public (De Bruycker, 2017; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2019; Kollman, 1998), business interests are thought to prefer operating under the radar. That is, they are expected to avoid the public spotlight so that they can reduce the risk of receiving scrutiny from the public concerning their legitimacy (Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997; Hart, 2004). What is more, while business interests in general are thought to shy away from the public spotlight as much as possible, this mechanism is thought to be even stronger for corporations as political actors. An explanation for this is that business associations need their membership in order to survive. They therefore have to show their members that they are actively representing their interests, whereas corporations do not experience this pressure (Chalmers, 2018). These mechanisms could have negative implications for the functioning of democracy, as when the political activity of corporations is not visible, it is hard for other actors to monitor and criticize their behavior. What is more, it might be harder for other organized interests to mobilize on such issues as well, simply because they are not aware of the lobbying activity being carried out by corporations.

A final normative concern that this thesis addresses more broadly, regards the lack of transparency that is often linked to the activity and access of organized interests to political systems. Transparency of their behavior and access is important as it enables room for engagement, assessment and critique by citizens, journalists, scholars and other organized interests. Ensuring transparency could therefore make interest representation more accessible and possibly more democratic. What is more, only by assessing it can one find out whether norms of equal access and representativeness (Danielian & Page, 1994) within the interest system are met. This thesis speaks to this concern by exploring innovative methodological text collection and analysis avenues through which large-scale interest group patterns of behavior and access are mapped.

### 1.3.2. Theoretical relevance

From a theoretical angle, this thesis conceptually situates the political activity of corporations within that of the broader interest group system. It does so as this entity operates in the same institutional venues right alongside all other kinds of organized

interests and just like them, corporations strive to influence public policy through their political activity. This thesis therewith speaks to the broader literature on organized interests by positioning the study of the corporation as a political actor and its activity within the interest group literature. Importantly, however, while this thesis shows that explanatory factors which matter for organized interests with members can account for corporate lobbying behavior as well, it does acknowledge that the lobbying behavior of corporations and organized interests with members is different when it comes to its dynamics. That is, their difference in nature affects how their political activity is triggered.

Corporations differ in kind from other interest groups and relatedly also in their behavior such as how they form preferences, mobilize and employ strategies. Mostly this is because they have different goals and structures (Hart, 2004; Salisbury, 1984). While corporations are important players in the interest group system, their place in it has been underexplored. They are institutions that are organizations without members (Gray et al., 2004; Hart, 2004; Salisbury, 1984), and it would be more fruitful if they were treated as such in scholarly work. As Hart (2004:53-54) convincingly puts it: 'Interest group theory must be qualified and amended and some aspects of it discarded if we are to get analytic purchase on them'. This thesis speaks to this scholarly call to (further) develop theory on businesses as political actors. It does so by speaking to two important broader theoretical voids.

The first, concerns patterns of access to politics that corporations gain. While business associations – organizations with corporations as members – are by default considered by scholars as the interests that represent the business community, corporations are not. That is, at first glance, corporations do not necessarily match the common understanding of an ideal-typical interest group (Hart, 2004). When it comes to studying patterns of access of the business community in the European context, scholars tend to have a focus on business associations as well (see e.g. Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Kriesi et al., 2007). Within this context this is not surprising as this strand of work is largely embedded and rooted in corporatist ideas in which it is accepted that business associations are the main interest representation channels for business interests (Schmitter, 1974; Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). Yet, scholarly work that has studied patterns of access, shows that in pluralist contexts, corporations gain access to different political venues more often than any other interest group type (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Danielian & Page, 1994; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984). Corporations thus play an important role within the political system and therefore deserve more scholarly focus.

In order to fully understand interest group representation and its role in the political system, corporations and their political activity must be seen as a part of that (Baumgartner & Leech, 1999; Hart, 2004). What is more, as business associations are commonly seen as the actors that represent the business community, many studies that aim to assess the existence of a possible overrepresentation of business or a so-called bias toward this group, probably underestimate the actual presence of business lobbyists in politics (see Hart, 2004 for a similar argument). This thesis speaks to this void in knowledge that there is on the degree and nature of access that corporations gain to political venues within contexts that are thought to be characterized by corporatist arrangements. It does so by assessing the degree and nature of access that corporations gain to different political venues through a longitudinal and cross country perspective.

The second gap is related to explanatory factors of patterns of corporate access and lobbying behavior, and to the question of which mechanisms drive the decision for corporations to lobby alone. This thesis identifies and discusses three main explanatory perspectives that exist within the literature. In doing so, it brings together a branch of literature that speaks to corporate lobbying specifically (see e.g. Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Grier et al., 1994) and one that treats corporations as political actors that are part of the interest group system under the label of institutions (see e.g. Gray et al., 2004; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Salisbury, 1984). The three broader explanatory mechanisms can be categorized under the labels of organizational (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Coen, 1997; Bouwen, 2002; Grant, 1982), sectoral (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Grant et al., 1989; Grier et al., 1994; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Madeira, 2016) and structural explanations (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998).

Both the organizational and sectoral explanations for corporations to engage in individual lobbying are largely inspired by a standard profit-seeking model. The idea behind this model is that corporations are thought to become politically active in order to obtain benefits that are generated through coercive powers that government can employ and the resources that they can distribute (Andres, 1985; Grier et al., 1994). This point of departure allows for a logical explanation of why larger corporations as compared to smaller ones, and corporations operating within concentrated or smaller sectors, are more inclined to lobby alone as well as why the level of government involvement at the firm can have an effect on that decision (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Zardkoohi, 1985). That is, as Grier and colleagues (1994) argue, the obtainable benefits for corporations are dependent on the costs that are involved in collective action endeavors and cooperation. In order for them to start actively lobbying, the obtainable benefit needs to be sufficient

so that their efforts are worthwhile (Olson, 1965:46; Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009).

The third category concerns mechanisms that are structural in nature and are mostly centered around economic and political-institutional factors. Lowery & Gray (1998) have made some first important steps in this direction by suggesting that the state of the economy can affect the decision for institutions to engage in solo lobbying. Their argument departs from the idea that associations have the difficult task of accommodating the interests of their members. When economies are in a downturn this might become even harder; that is, when the economic conditions are poor, it is 'every man – or institution – for himself' (Ibidem:236). Whereas the first two perspectives have received some scholarly focus, the latter is least developed. While theories of how the economy and institutional contexts can affect corporate political activity have been expounded, rigorous empirical tests are limited. This thesis speaks to this void by introducing a theoretical framework which incorporates both economic and political-institutional factors as structural drivers of corporate lobbying. It subsequently empirically tests these and does so for the first time in a distinct corporatist context.

This thesis also introduces and tests theoretical ideas on how issue drivers and relational mechanisms between business associations and corporations such as conflict might affect individual corporate lobbying. While issue level factors are thoroughly explored as drivers for lobby strategies of organized interests (see e.g. Beyers et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2015; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018), less is known about how they can affect the strategies of corporations specifically. Recent work by Chalmers (2018) engages in an argument about the conditional nature of success of lobbying endeavors by the financial industry. Importantly, Chalmers' article argues that the motivation behind lobbying alone for corporations rather than via an association can be explained by associations that are stepping back on an issue. The article hints that salience or organizational conflict on an issue could account for individual lobbying endeavors by corporations. Vice versa, Chalmers' work states that delegation of interest representation via business associations is likely to occur when corporations want to avoid the public spotlight because of the critique they might face from the public regarding its legitimacy (Chalmers, 2018).

This thesis builds on these insights by asking whether issue-level factors can account for corporate lobbying strategies, and if so, which matter the most. It does this by creating a theoretical framework that speaks to the literature on issue-level drivers of interest group behavior more broadly (see e.g. Dür & Mateo, 2015; De Bruycker, 2017, Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018; Kollman, 1998) and to a strand on corporate lobbying

more specifically (Hula, 1999; Marshall & Bernhagen, 2017; Mitchell et al., 1997; Hart, 2004). This thesis subsequently tests these theoretical arguments empirically in a context characterized by corporatist arrangements.

## 1.4. AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION

By acknowledging on the one hand that corporations are significant players within the interest system, while simultaneously treating them as specific institutions on the other hand, this thesis aims to contribute to a better and more complete understanding of the business interests that are participating in the interest system. It does so by asking and testing why corporations engage in individual lobbying behavior, and to what extent they manage to gain access to the political system. In addition, it sheds unique empirical light on the phenomenon by analyzing it through a longitudinal and cross-country lens. The thesis furthermore employs innovative methods such as an experimental design and text analysis. It also offers a discussion of trade-offs and advice to students of interest groups on how to employ the latter category of methods in the field.

### 1.4.1. Empirical contribution

As outlined at the beginning of this introduction, this thesis aims to make an important empirical contribution. While most of the work on corporate lobbying is carried out in a distinct pluralist context (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen, 2004; Coen, 1997; Danielian & Page, 1994; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984), this thesis attempts to add to our empirical knowledge on the phenomenon in corporatist contexts. For this very reason, both the Netherlands and Germany – characterized by corporatist arrangements – were selected as countries under study as well as the U.K. The U.K., known for its pluralist system when it comes to how organized interests and state relations are shaped (Lijphart & Crepez, 1991), was selected to enable comparison of the results found in corporatist arrangements. This thesis thereby sheds unique light on corporate lobbying within the context of corporatist arrangements. In doing so, it enables me to address the theoretical questions about why corporations lobby alone, and to what extent they manage to gain access in an empirical context where corporations are not necessarily incentivized to interact with politicians directly (Schmitter, 1974; Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005; Lijphart & Crepez, 1991). In addition to the contribution it aims to make regarding context, this dissertation attempts to provide a unique and first view into the empirical world of the past by shedding light on levels of access that organized interests gain to political venues in both the Netherlands and the

U.K. By means of the longitudinal lens that this thesis employs, theoretical answers to explanatory drivers of corporate lobbying characterized by a more structural level such as economic and political-institutional developments can be addressed.

### **1.4.2. Methodological innovation**

Through employing text collection and analysis methods as well as an experimental design, this thesis aims to make an important methodological contribution by exploring the applicability and fruitfulness of these methods within the study of organized interests. First, the current endeavor does so by offering a new methodological approach that enabled large-scale identification and analysis of interest group populations. Through this pursuit, datasets were created by which measurement of access of organized interests to parliamentary hearings and the news media was enabled. Through cross validation, by comparing it to other endeavors and manual verification, this method seems to be fruitful for use by other students of organized interests or political actors more broadly. It is important to note that I acknowledge that employing such methods come with its trade-offs and that manual verification and cross validation is always required. Hence this thesis elaborately discusses these trade-offs and offers advice to students of interest groups on how these methods can be employed.

Second, the dissertation makes a methodological contribution by employing an experimental design. That is, the interest group field is largely dominated by survey studies. The experimental study that is part of this dissertation perfectly illustrates that an experimental design allows for testing of theories that concern behavioral aspects of organized interests. Such designs are quite suitable for assessing behavior as they are thought to be high in internal validity and hence appropriate to test causal mechanisms. For this reason, experimental designs might be very useful for theoretical testing of the factors that drive mobilization and strategies of organized interests, as well as assessing which of these endeavors prove to be most successful in accomplishing influence.

## **1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

This thesis comprises four empirical chapters, a methodological chapter and a conclusion. The empirical chapters and methodological chapter are separate research papers. These chapters assess relative patterns of corporate access across different countries and political venues through a longitudinal lens. They theorize on and model factors accounting for such access and lobbying behavior. The chapters are

## Chapter 1. Introduction

each embedded in somewhat different strands of literature, have their own relevance, arguments, designs and employ original data. The methodological paper has a slightly different set-up that deviates from the typical academic paper and reads like a research note.

Chapter 2 analyzes patterns of corporate access in the Netherlands, as opposed to access of other types of organized interests from 1970 to 2017. It identifies drivers accounting for corporate lobbying at different levels of analysis and tests these. Chapter 3 taps into access as well and studies the presence of organized interests in political news in the U.K. and the Netherlands between 1990 and 2017. The fourth chapter speaks to this topic as well and analyzes how corporations appear in media coverage on different policy domains through a complexity lens in British newspapers between 2012 and 2017. Chapter 5 picks up on explanatory factors again and assesses salience and conflict as issue and organizational drivers of corporate lobbying by means of a survey experiment among lobbyists in Germany and the Netherlands.

The sixth chapter is a methodological chapter that elaborates on why text analysis as employed throughout chapters 2,3 and 4 can be a useful method for interest group scholars, sheds light on different types of text applications and their associated trade-offs, discusses applications in the field, and highlights interesting avenues for future research. The concluding chapter aims to provide a reflection on the changed relative degree and nature of access that corporations have gained to different political systems and engages with the question of why corporations decide to engage in solo lobbying endeavors.





# Chapter 2.

Is politics under increasing  
corporate sway? A longitudinal  
study on the drivers of  
corporate access

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Why do corporations increasingly participate in the political process on their own behalf? This question is important because if interest representation of the business community takes place via associations, the interests need to be accommodated among members and “encompassing associations tend to focus members’ attention on broader shared concerns and collective ambitions” (Gray et al., 2004; Martin, 2005; Martin & Swank, 2004:598; Wilson, 1973:310). Instead, when corporations increasingly lobby on their own behalf (see Gray & Lowery, 2001; Gray et al., 2004; Madeira, 2016), they can represent their interests through minimal liaison with peers, leading to interests that are overall less moderate, narrower and more self-oriented (Salisbury, 1984; Hart, 2004). An increase in individual corporate lobbying thus has important consequences for the functioning of political systems, as it causes bias through the fragmentation of interest systems (Gray et al., 2004:20). With this in mind, it is worrisome that most studies now highlight that individual corporations constitute the largest set of actors in interest group communities across many Western democracies (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Lowery et al., 2005; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984).

In this paper we aim to find out what has caused this shift towards increased corporate access to the political process. The current study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, *theoretically*, the current literature has addressed questions on drivers of corporate lobbying by conducting research at different levels of analysis. We identify three main explanatory perspectives, each associated with the level of analysis of these studies: an organizational, a sectoral, and a structural perspective (e.g., Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Bouwen, 2002; Coen, 1997; Grant et al., 1989; Gray et al., 2004; Grier et al., 1994; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Salisbury, 1984; Walker & Rea, 2014). The first two perspectives have received most attention in that they produced both appealing theoretical arguments and empirical tests to validate the arguments. The latter perspective, nonetheless, has received far less scholarly focus. Whilst several scholars certainly recognize the importance of structural changes for lobbying activity of corporations such as variation in the economy and political systems (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998), their ideas are hardly empirically tested. As a result, we do not exactly know to what *extent* corporations have replaced other types of organized interests at the political negotiating table over time, let alone which structural factors have *caused* such shifts. To fill this void, this paper therefore carefully maps the extent to which corporations have gained access to the political system over time, as well as theoretically developing and testing structural factors that could affect such access. More precisely, we develop hypotheses associated with several economic

and political-institutional changes that could affect the extent to which corporate actors – relative to other types of organized interests – gain access to politics over time. The second contribution of this paper is our *empirical focus*. Most of the current studies on corporate access either focus on lobbying in a U.S. context (e.g Boies, 1989; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) or toward the European Union institutions (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen 2004; Coen, 1997). This means that most of the academic endeavors on corporate lobbying were carried out in a distinct pluralist system such as the United States, or an ‘elitist pluralist system’ such as the European Union (Chalmers, 2013:484; Eising 2007:384). We therefore know little about corporate lobbying in a more corporatist setting. This paper seeks to fill this gap through expanding the empirical focus by studying the Netherlands, a country that is characterized as neo-corporatist (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). This is an important addition as it adds to our knowledge on possible biases toward business interests in contexts outside of the U.S. or toward EU institutions (Beyers, 2004; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Hanegraaff et al., 2016).

Our third innovation is of a *methodological* nature. By employing both web scraping and automatic content analysis methods, we make use of and test a new approach that enables large-scale identification and analysis of interest group populations. More precisely, we created a dataset on access of interest groups to parliamentary committees in the Netherlands between 1970 and 2017. This study seeks to test whether this approach is reliable and thereby useful for other scholars that aim to identify large-scale interest group communities, and possibly other types of political actors.

In the following sections, we set out the theoretical framework, where we provide an overview of state-of-the-art work on why corporations tend to lobby and seek access on their own behalf. Subsequently, we theorize on potential structural explanatory factors. Through large-scale empirical analysis, trends of the phenomenon under study are generated and modelled. Lastly, we discuss our results and outline suggestions for further research.

## **2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CURRENT EXPLANATIONS FOR WHY CORPORATIONS LOBBY ALONE**

The political science literature has certainly not ignored the political interests of corporations (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Hojnacki et al., 2012). Indeed, several of the most influential political scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have carefully considered

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how various economic interests, including business interests, were represented. In his seminal piece, Truman (1951) poses that interest groups representing economic interests are highly significant for the political process and can play a major part in a system's stability. In Schattschneider's (1960:xxi) work, business interests are a substantial part: he rejected the description of politics as a "balance of power" and denounced the myth that the "pressure system is automatically representative of the whole community." Pressure politics, rather, is a "selective process ill designed to serve diffuse interests" and a "flawed heavenly chorus that sings with a strong upper-class accent, most notably economic interests" (Schattschneider, 1960:35). Olson (1965) also criticized the pluralist view, arguing that concentrated economic interests will be overrepresented, whereas diffuse majority interests are trumped due to a free-rider problem that becomes stronger when a group becomes larger. The importance of business interests was indeed a crucial part of their work.

Others, carefully considered business interests and the individual interests of corporations as a part of that. Schattschneider (1935) and Bauer and colleagues (1972) for example, studied the interests involved in the tariff policy negotiations, including those of large and smaller firms. Bauer et al., (1972:230) find that leaders from larger corporations are more actively involved in information exchange on foreign-policy compared to small firms and that this latter group was more likely to engage in matters specific to their own company rather than to general policy. Smith (2000) illustrates in his book that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which has both organizational and individual members, resisted to participating in a policy debate that affected only a small part of the membership. When there is no broader support among the members for the association to act upon, corporations are inclined to "wage their own political battles on particularistic issues" (Smith, 2000:41). Both Scholzman (1984) and Salisbury (1984) have also studied the interests of individual corporations. They observed that of all organizations having a Washington presence, corporations constitute the largest part (45.7% and 33.5%, respectively). Gray and colleagues (2001; 2004) have demonstrated that the relative share of institutions (of which for-profit organizations constitute the largest share) registered to lobby increased from 39.55% in 1980 to 57.51% in 1997. In the European Union, we see a similar trend. While it seemed that individual firm lobbying decreased somewhat over the course of 1996 to 2007 (see Berkhout & Lowery, 2010), in a recent study, Berkhout et al. (2018) found that individual corporations now comprise the largest part of the lobbying community in the EU.

Despite the increasing dominance of corporations within interest group communities, our knowledge about *why* corporations lobby alone is still quite limited. We currently

recognize three sets of explanations for why corporations tend to lobby alone, of which some are more developed than others. We can summarize these as explanations focusing on organizational characteristics, explanations focused at the level of policy sectors, and structural explanations (e.g., Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Bouwen, 2002; Coen, 1997; Grant et al., 1989; Hart, 2004; Walker & Rea, 2014). In the remainder of this section we discuss these three perspectives and argue what we aim to contribute to these debates.

A first set of explanations focuses on *organizational* incentives that influence the strategic decision of corporations to seek access on their own behalf. Material interests of corporations, for example, form an important driver to engage in individual lobbying efforts. However, these interests can only explain such behavior when tied to long-term relationships with the state, that is, corporations “with the richest history of interaction with the state are amongst the most politically active” (Boies, 1989:830). Coen (1997:103) has illustrated that the take-up of new political channels by corporations, amongst other things through individual representation, is influenced by cost considerations, and concludes that “as the importance of cost grows, the greater the uncertainty of political returns associated with a specific channel.” In this context Bouwen (2002:374) has argued that when it comes to individual representation, “the reasoning is obvious: large players have more resources to invest.” Large firms are therefore more inclined to undertake individual lobbying attempts compared to smaller firms, as the latter group has to rely on collective action more often (see also Grant, 1982).

A second set of studies highlights determinants at the level of *policy* issues or interest *communities*. The most influential work in this regard is provided by Grier et al. (1994; see also Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009). Their cost-benefit model of firm political activity describes how variations in the structure of economic sectors provide different incentives for firms to engage in political activity in order to pursue investment-oriented goals. The ability to achieve such goals is conditioned, on the one hand, by the benefits of political action and, on the other hand, by the costs of engaging in cooperation and collective action (Grier et al., 1994). Madeira (2016) finds that U.S. corporations increasingly lobby alone in economic sectors characterized by intra-industry trade. The competitive nature within these sectors makes it difficult to coordinate trade preferences among individual corporations, leading them to increasingly bypass business associations and engage in lobby activity by themselves. Lowery and Gray (1998) have also provided important work in this regard, but these authors studied “institutions” which include corporations, but also other actors, and focused on the dynamics of interest populations.

Lowery and Gray (1998) relied on the assumption of population ecology to explain individual lobbying by institutions. They tested two ideas at this level, describing mechanisms that could lead to relative increased individual lobbying by institutions. The first is related to the argument that relative levels of institutional representation increase as interest systems become denser (see also Wilson-Gentry et al., 1991:5). The second hypothesis, “competitive exclusion”, states that if the number of members within an association grows, the association has a harder time to accommodate all the wishes of its members. As a result, members will have greater incentives to look for specific modes of representation (Gray et al., 2004). In the context of Europe, Grant et al. (1989) studied the convergence between large firms and governments with regard to the chemical industry in Britain, Italy and West Germany. Whilst the study is mostly descriptive, the authors theorized about underlying pressures, such as the internationalization of the industry, with the “increasing use of joint ventures between companies, and a growing European presence in the United States” (Ibid:89).

The third set of studies provides hypotheses on how *structural* explanations could trigger corporations to lobby on their own behalf. Yet, of all three perspectives, the determinants of individual corporate lobbying from a structural perspective are by far the least developed. True, in a pluralist context, scholars have put forward several interesting ideas on how variation in economies and governments could affect the likelihood of institutions engaging in representation on their own behalf (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998). These hypotheses, however, have hardly been empirically tested due to a lack of available data. In a corporatist context, scholars have extensively theorized about a more general trend towards less coordinated decision-making processes: the so-called decline of the traditional corporatist set-up (e.g. Binderkrantz, 2012; Crepaz, 1994; Öberg et al., 2011; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). Yet, applied to interest groups, a decline of corporatism is a description of an overall trend towards the declining importance of umbrella organizations in political decision-making. Who has filled this void and why has been largely overlooked so far (but see Binderkrantz, 2012), let alone which economic and political-institutional factors could have caused these shifts in interest representation.

What we are interested in is therefore a) to map the nature of interest representation over time, and b) to link this to specific indicators of economic and political-institutional changes in society over an extensive time-frame. In other words, do we observe a substantial rise in corporate access to the political process over the past decades, and if so, can we explain this through changes in the economic and political-institutional settings during this timeframe? This study seeks to explore this question, as it employs a

novel dataset of interest group access to parliamentary commissions in the Netherlands over an extended period of time (almost 50 years). It builds on research that assessed the distribution of interest group communities and possible biases towards certain groups in constant changing contexts (Berkhout et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2004; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984). By adding a longitudinal perspective to these debates we are able to carefully link the presence of different types of interest groups to (structural) variation in the state of the economy and the political-institutional context over time (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998).

### 2.3. HYPOTHESES: EXPLORING STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF CORPORATE ACCESS

Broadly, we consider two types of structural factors which could potentially affect the access corporations gain to policymakers: economic and political-institutional. We start with the effect of the *economy* on corporate access. Lowery and Gray (1998:251) have suggested that institutions dominate when governments are large compared to the economy, and during times of economic stress, where “the impact of economic size seems to be a function of enhanced free-riding within larger economies.” The underlying assumption is that more diverse and/or larger associations are more constrained compared to smaller or more homogeneous groups when it comes to interest representation (Aldrich et al., 1990; Wilson, 1973). These constraints can be “exacerbated by economic conditions” (Lowery & Gray, 1998:236); that is, when the economic conditions are better, it might be easier to accommodate or balance interests compared to when the economic conditions are tight, which might lead to a situation where lobbying is an endeavor of “every man – or institution – for himself.” In other words, when the state of the economy weakens, corporations may not be content with the decisions or performance of an association, as the latter actor may find itself in a situation where it becomes harder to accommodate all the wishes and needs of its members. This leads to the first hypothesis:

**H1:** *Negative tendencies in the economy of a country lead to relative increased access of individual corporations to the political system.*

We continue with factors related to *political-institutional* developments. Our second explanation of individual corporate access is based on the idea of the benefit-cost model (Grier et al., 1994). In terms of this theoretical model, corporations are thought to engage in lobbying efforts to “secure sales and avoid or modify costly regulations”

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(Hansen & Mitchell, 2000:892). We apply this logic to the development of Europe as a single market and the associated political opportunities and constraints that emerged in Europe. During this process, several treaties were signed, such as the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, which we believe triggered corporations to increase individual lobbying instead of seeking access to politics via associations. For instance, Streeck and Schmitter (1991) noted that during the late 1970s business was granted the opportunity, on the one hand, to withstand corporatism at the national level and, on the other hand, to keep its distance from collective action endeavors at the EU level. In this way, corporations were “successfully playing the two political markets against each other” (Coen, 1997:94).

This also put pressure on the relationship between corporations and national business associations. Indeed, corporations no longer need to collectively bargain with a national association, but can play at multiple boards at the same time to increase their own gains as much as possible (see Coen for a similar argument, 1997:94). Likewise, governments are less able to force corporations to lobby via associations, as was common in a corporatist setting, but need to accommodate the individual needs of corporations to keep them on board. Hence, we believe, increased Europeanization has greatly strengthened the position of individual corporations at the expense of associations. As a result, firms have often bypassed associations, while politicians are more frequently forced to include them in parliamentary hearings. Overall, we therefore expect that European integration has led to increased incentives for corporations to lobby by themselves, rather than rely on business associations alone, and a willingness by MPs to grant them access. We therefore state that:

***H2: The increased degree of political opportunities due to European integration leads to relative increased access of individual corporations to the political system.***

Third, the size of the *government* could serve as a trigger for individual corporate access (Esty & Caves, 1983; Salisbury, 1984; Wilson, 1973). Although not exclusively discussing corporations, Wilson (1973:341) made a careful first step in this direction by arguing that political activity initiated by interest organizations is related to the scope of government. In 1983, Esty and Caves demonstrated that government expenditures facilitate favors being conferred on an industry. Salisbury (1984:68) has also provided important work in this regard by proposing triggers of the dominance of corporations within interest group communities, arguing that their dominance increases as governments and the scope and impact of their policies expand. Lowery and Gray (1998) have explored the relation between the size of governments and the relative dominant position of

firms by building on the work of Wilson-Gentry et al. (1991), stating that the potential advantages to particular interests become larger when governments become larger compared to the costs involved when one would initiate an individual lobbying effort or set up a specialized association (Lowery & Gray, 1998). This mechanism then leads to a higher rate of specialized interests. As a result, we should expect to find that the relative share of corporate access increases as the size of the government grows (and vice versa). This leads to the following hypothesis:

**H3:** *Increased government size leads to relative increased access of individual corporations to the political system.*

Finally, we explore whether the *political orientation* of the government of a country matters. We expect that corporations are more inclined to seek access on their own behalf when the government has a right-wing or liberal political orientation. First, corporations are thought to lobby on narrow and specific issues when they lobby individually (Gray et al., 2004), and are therefore more likely to lobby their friends (see Gullberg, 2008; Kollman, 1997:539). Second, governments with a more right-wing or liberal political orientation are thought to have better ties with capital than with labor. Although the Netherlands is characterized by a depillarized society (Mair, 2008), where ties between the right wing and capital and the left wing and labor have been loosened, traditionally they are still there, for example because they generally share common interests and viewpoints on issues (Kollman, 1997). We therefore argue:

**H4:** *An increased degree of right-wing or liberal political orientation in government leads to relative increased access of individual corporations to the political system.*

## 2.4. DATA AND METHODS

The data that we relied on for this study consist of two parts. First, we scraped<sup>3</sup> the minutes of parliamentary hearings of various commissions from 1970 to 2017. Prior to attendance, a process takes place between the organizations that seek to attend parliamentary hearings and the members of parliament who invite organizations to attend.<sup>4</sup> For this endeavor, we used the attendance lists of these minutes. While

3 Scraping was done by writing a script in the programming language Python that automatically identified, downloaded and stored our documents of interest.

4 According to a head of public affairs that works for a big airline company and a senior policy advisor that directly reports to the Prime Minister. These explorative interviews were held in October and November 2016, respectively, in preparation for the data collection.

parliamentary hearings are not necessarily representative of the entire degree of access interest groups may gain to the political system, it is a very important point of access for interest groups in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> Most important for our case, parliamentary hearings are an important link between the state and civil society (see Hough 2012; Helboe Pedersen et al., 2015). If we found an increase of corporate lobbying within this venue, it would be a strong indication that similar processes, perhaps even more outspoken, are taking place within other venues, such as in bureaucratic access (see Binderkrantz et al., 2015:105; Bouwen, 2004:358; Braun, 2013). It must be noted here that minutes were not always kept and documented. Up until 2008, transparency of the political process was deemed less important and for this reason it could very well be the case that more hearings were held which are not included in our data set. We controlled for this deficit by determining the relative share of the presence of organized interests in parliamentary hearings. Our data set contains 1,080 documents.

Second, we employed the database of the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce. We used its database to generate reliable, population-wide data over an extended period, that is, a list of all the names of organizations that were active between 1970 and 2017. The organizations that were included in our data set are corporations with 250 employees or more. This cut-off point was selected, first, because although these corporations are large, they represent a broad range of companies and different sectors. Second, as larger firms are more likely to represent themselves individually than smaller firms, the odds that smaller firms representing themselves would be ignored are small. The data set also includes (professional) membership groups, business associations, unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), groups of institutions and authorities, and research/think tank groups with 100 employees or more. The cut-off point for all the other organized interests is lower, as they tend to have smaller numbers of employees. To ensure that we would, on the one hand, capture these organizations and, on the other hand, would have a comparable sample, this cut-off point was set. The only problematic factor here is the category of NGOs, which often only have a small number of employees and many volunteers. To compensate for this, we included a list of NGOs that were active in the Netherlands over an extended period.<sup>6</sup>

As for the variables and measurement, we start with the operationalization of our *dependent variable*: access of corporations to parliament, relative to the access of all types of interest groups. We employed a similar categorization of interest groups to that

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>6</sup> This list was extracted from a news platform, Oneworld.nl, that reports on the work of NGOs in the Netherlands.

applied by Binderkrantz (2012). More precisely, corporate access was measured as the relative share of individual corporate access per year, that is, the number of mentions of individual corporations relative to the number of mentions of associations and non-profit organizations in parliamentary hearings per year. Table 2 in the appendix displays the full operationalization and measurement of our dependent variable under study. The dependent variable was measured by running an automated query of the names extracted from the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in our data set of minutes of parliamentary hearings.

To ensure reliability of this method, a random sample of 50 documents, and therewith 245 organizations, was manually coded.<sup>7</sup> When comparing the original list of organizations and the documents, the automated query missed 5.7% due to a different spelling that was used in the documents compared to the register. Of the 245 organizations, 7.6% was double-counted. This occurred when both the full name and abbreviation were used in the documents or when a merger of two organizations took place during the period under study. 92.4% of the identified organizations can therefore be categorized as correct. In total, there was an error of 13.3%. Reliability of the manual coding scheme was ensured by involving a second independent coder who coded an identical sample of 20 documents, yielding Krippendorff's alphas of 0.94, 0.86, 0.65, 0.71 and 0.62. The reported alphas correspond with the variables of the coding scheme which is included in the appendix. The errors caused by the automatic method could have been prevented when all documents were coded manually, however when one would like to make inferences on large-scale populations, this is highly time consuming and therefore costly. Compared to using random or policy samples to identify the interest group population (see Berkhout et al., 2018 for a discussion), this method is a good way forward for scholars that seek to identify interest group communities across different countries and time. That is, when the necessary documents are available and when the method is combined with close monitoring of systematic error that could bias the results and manual verification.

To model the development of corporate access over time and to test whether our independent variables have an effect, we used an autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) model (Box & Jenkins, 1970). The autoregressive integrated moving average model is a time series analysis model that takes into account that observations are sequential, and often there is a matter of autocorrelation. The latter means that a current value is correlated with previous values over time. The main assumption of an ARIMA is that "a time series variable's own past can help to explain its current value,

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7 The coding scheme is included in the appendix.

and therefore before exogenous explanatory variables can even be considered, it is first necessary to model the series' own past and thus capture its endogenous dynamics" (Vasileiadou & Vliegthart, 2014:696).

We now turn to our *independent variables*.<sup>8</sup> In order to measure tendencies in the economy (H1), we used the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country under study and, more specifically, the annual growth rate of the GDP, for which we relied on statistics provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For the degree of political opportunities and constraints that came into existence due to European integration (H2), we relied on the treaties signed by the EU. A treaty is a binding agreement between members of the EU and has several objectives, such as the introduction of new areas of cooperation. Since several treaties were signed within our period under study, this variable has an ordinal measure. To measure government size (H3), we used government expenditure as a proxy, which was calculated as the percentage of actual government expenditure in million euros from the actual GDP in million euros. Subsequently we calculated the growth rate, which is the change in growth compared to the previous year. The actual expenditure by government was extracted from the database of Statistics Netherlands (CBS). For our final political-institutional variable (H4), that is, the political alignment of government, we relied on data gathered and coded as part of the Comparative Political Dataset (Armingeon et al., 2018). More specifically, for this project, cabinet composition was coded, using the Schmidt index that has a 5-point scale, where 1 stands for "Hegemony of right-wing (and center) parties" and 5 stands for "Hegemony of social-democratic and other left parties." Table A2 in the appendix displays the full operationalization and measurement of our independent variables under study.

## 2.5. ANALYSIS

### *Descriptive analysis*

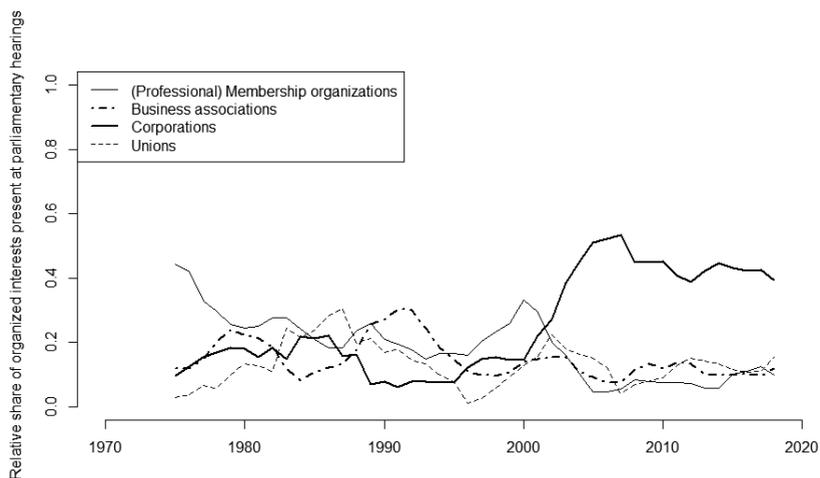
In this section, we first present a descriptive analysis, followed by the explanatory analysis of our study in the next section. Over time and in total, we identified 1,784 organized interests that gained access to parliamentary hearings. The largest category present at the hearings comprises corporations, which made 664 appearances at parliamentary hearings in the Netherlands during our period under study. Professional and regular membership groups are ranked second, with a total of 264 appearances. The

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<sup>8</sup> As a test of robustness, multicollinearity checks were conducted. No multicollinearity was identified between the independent variables, as all correlated no higher than  $r < 0.36$ .

third-largest category consists of unions, with a total of 230 appearances, and the fourth category comprises business associations, with 213 appearances. The appearances of these four categories during the entire period under study are depicted in Figure 2.1.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 2.1. Moving average of relative share of organized interests, including corporations, present at parliamentary hearings over time in the Netherlands**



Note: Moving average is calculated as the means of nonoverlapping groups of five

The trends of appearances of the four categories depicted in the first figure range in nature from positive to stable and slight negative trends. When we take a closer look at business associations that attended parliamentary hearings, we can identify a trend that is slightly negative ( $r(46)=-0.19, p=0.18$ ). When we consider both business associations and corporations as part of the business community, however, the image alters. While this category was certainly not the most substantial group at the beginning of the period under study, corporations have managed to gain access at an increasing rate from the mid-1990s onwards ( $r(46)=0.59, p<0.0001$ ). This indicates that, just as in pluralist contexts, corporations constitute the largest set of actors that gain access to politics (Schlozman, 1984; Salisbury, 1984; Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al.,

<sup>9</sup> Figure A2.2 in the Appendix depicts the appearances of all organized interests that were identified during the period under study.

2018; Chalmers, 2013) and have also managed to increase this access (Gray et al., 2004). Both the decrease of appearances by business associations and the increase of appearances by corporations that have managed to gain access to policymakers in a corporatist context are in line with ideas on the decline of neo-corporatist arrangements (Öberg et al., 2011; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). More specifically, the latter concept could account for an increase in corporate lobbying, as scholars have argued that due to such a decline, groups that were by default invited to the negotiating table are no longer necessarily included (Binderkrantz, 2012; Crepaz, 1994). It makes sense, therefore, that the members of these umbrella groups, which previously participated in the political process through their representatives, are more inclined to represent their own interests compared to before. While this general phenomenon could help to explain a broader trend of increased access by corporations to the political process in the Netherlands, it cannot account for the trend while ruling out randomness with an explanatory model, nor can it necessarily explain the steep increase that is visible from 1995 onwards, as scholars have stated that corporatist exchange “was at its heydays [sic] in the Netherlands between 1990 and 2005” (Woldendorp, 2011:22). In other words, there must be other structural factors that can explain this sudden and lasting peak of increased corporate access in the Netherlands beyond the decline of corporatism. We shall analyze this in the next section.

### *Explanatory analysis*

We now turn to the explanatory part of our analysis. Our variables were modeled in an ARIMA framework, where we first tested assumptions and attempted to generate the best possible model fit. One of the most important assumptions of an ARIMA model is stationarity. This means that the mean of the time series dependent variable should be “unaffected by a change of time origin” (Vasileiadou & Vliegthart, 2014:696). In our case, we can see an upward trend in the dependent variable, which means that our data are non-stationary. The augmented Dickey-Fuller test also indicated that our data are non-stationary. We therefore differenced our dependent variable to ensure that we meet all the requirements of the test.<sup>10</sup>

This resulted in a test statistic that confirms that our data are now stationary. Subsequently, we found that an ARIMA (4,1,0) model had the best fit, that is, with four AR terms, first order differencing and zero MA terms. We first ran the effects separately, as we did not have any prior expectations about the causal order of our independent variables, and subsequently fitted them into one model.

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<sup>10</sup> The dependent variable after first order differencing is depicted in Figure A2.3 in the Appendix.

**Table 2.1. Separate macro effects with four lags on individual corporate lobbying and combined in one model (n=47)**

	Separate effects			Model 1		
	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC
Univariate model	-0.39***	0.13	-29.98	-0.55***	0.12	-32.6
H1: Economy	-0.03***	0.01	-34.75	-0.03***	0.01	-32.6
H2: Political opportunities and constraints	0.04	0.05	-28.74	0.06*	0.04	-32.6
H3: Government expenditure	0.01	0.002	-29.09	0.001	0.003	-32.6
H4: Political alignment of government	-0.03	0.03	-29.31	-0.02	0.02	-32.6

Note: Dependent variable is made stationary by first order differencing. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed test).

Our explanatory analysis indicates a significant negative effect of *economy* on our dependent variable, which indicates that when negative shocks are observable in the state of the economy, individual access of corporations increases. By adding this exogenous variable to our model, the fit increases, as the AIC decreases from -29.98 to -34.75. When controlling for all the other exogenous variables under study, the significant effect remains. This finding is in line with the economic stress mechanism (Lowery & Gray, 1998; Gray et al., 2004), where the relative share of corporate access increases as a result of a negative shock in the state of the economy. This finding also echoes macroeconomic lows in the Netherlands before 1995, as well as both the subsequent linkage between the market and public sectors and the economic drop after 9/11 and the so-called internet bubble burst (Woldendorp, 2011). After 2005, the public and market sectors were again delinked (Idem). Although these trigger events could certainly help explain peaks in corporate access, our model rather confirms our first hypothesis, indicating that broader negative tendencies in the economy lead to a relative increase in corporate access.

Our measure of *political opportunities* and constraints as a result of European integration indicates a positive effect on corporate access. While the separate effect is not significant, when we control for other macro determinants it is ( $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, when we add this variable to the model, the AIC decreases, thereby increasing the fit of our model. This means that when the degree of political opportunities within Europe increases, individual corporate access increases. This finding is in line with Coen's observation that firms aim to 'play two political markets against each other' (Coen, 1997:94). This finding also explains why we observe a longer episode of higher shares of corporate access

starting in 1994 (see Figure 2), which could be caused by the political opportunities and constraints that were created with the realization of two important European treaties (Maastricht and Amsterdam), which were signed and came into force between 1992 and 1999. Overall, we confirm hypothesis 2: an increased degree of political opportunities and constraints due to European integration has led to increased corporate access.

The third hypothesis, on *government size*, where we used government expenditure as a proxy, indicates a positive effect on the degree of corporate access. The effect has the direction that we expected, but it is non-significant, and we can therefore not confirm our third hypothesis. This finding does not align with earlier work (Esty & Caves, 1983; Salisbury, 1984; Wilson, 1973), which indicates that government expenses could trigger individual corporate access. Also, Gray and Lowery (1998) empirically found a positive and significant relation between state expenditure and firm lobbying in the U.S. across states. It is unclear whether the different findings for these studies relate to the context (pluralist versus corporatist) or to the research design (cross-sectional versus longitudinal). Future research should address this. For now, however, we cannot confirm that state expenses affect individual corporate access over time.

Our last measure, *political orientation* of the government, indicates a negative effect on the degree of individual corporate access. This would suggest that the more right-wing the government, the more access individual corporations gain. We do not, however, find this effect to be significant. An explanation for our finding could be that other mechanisms occur simultaneously, that is, when organized interests lobby foes (Ainsworth, 1993) or opt for both depending on different conditions such as the policy issue (Gullberg, 2008). Yet our data do not allow including such measures, as they are micro-level explanations which fall beyond the scope of this study. We can state here that, overall, it does not matter which government is in power for the degree of access that corporations gain. We do not confirm the fourth hypothesis.

## **2.6. DISCUSSION**

Scholarly work indicates that corporations are amongst the most frequent policy participants in our political systems. Yet, important work on this phenomenon has focused strongly on the U.S., leaving a gap in our knowledge on corporate lobbying within European contexts. This paper illustrates for the first time that, in contrast to several decades ago, corporations have over time managed to increase their access to policymakers in a European context that is neo-corporatist. What is more, this category

now constitutes the largest group participating in the political process, highlighting the robustness and generalizability of work on the same phenomenon in pluralist contexts (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Gray & Lowery, 2001; Gray et al., 2004; Lowery et al., 2005; Schlozman, 1985; Salisbury, 1984).

The main finding of this study resonates with ideas on the decline of traditional corporatist arrangements (Öberg et al., 2011; Rommetvedt et al., 2013), as umbrella groups such as business associations have not necessarily managed to expand their access to the political process. While this could have led to a more diverse distribution of organized interests that gain access to the political process, it seems that it is rather the members of this latter category that have managed to expand their access, as they have been inclined to seek other modes of interest representation such as representing themselves. As a result, when both business associations and corporations are considered as business interests, the distribution of organized interests involved in the political process is largely skewed towards business. This study thus illustrates an even stronger overrepresentation of relative access of business to parliamentary venues than other studies that look at parliamentary access (see Binderkrantz et al., 2015:105; Fraussen & Beyers, 2016:17). What is more, other work that studied interest group access to parliamentary venues indicates that bias toward business is less strong in political venues compared to bureaucratic venues (Bouwen, 2004:358). This would mean that we can expect an even stronger overrepresentation of business when it comes to administrative access, which is a problematic finding as democracies thrive when many different voices are expressed.

While the so-called decline of traditional corporatist set-ups could help explain a general trend of corporations that have managed to expand their access to the political system, it cannot explain the steep increase in corporate presence from 1995 onwards, nor can it account for the phenomenon under study in this paper while ruling out randomness. The explanatory model of this paper indicates that when the economy weakens, corporations tend to interact with politicians more frequently. The former finding is in line with mechanisms that have been labeled as the “economic stress mechanism,” where “fragmentation is caused by the general economy as it is easy to have an umbrella organization when there is a lot of money to go around”; however, when the economy is in a bad state, “lobbying may devolve to a situation of every man for himself” (Lowery & Gray, 1998:236-237). This is worrisome due to the potential threats it can pose to democratic systems (Hart, 2004; Gray et al., 2004; Martin & Swank, 2004; Olson, 1965; Salisbury, 1984; Wilson, 1973:310).

## Chapter 2. Is politics under increasing corporate sway?

Second, corporations have also gained more access due to increased European integration. This could explain the observed longer shock of higher shares of corporate access in the decade of the 1990s, and resonates with Coen's (1997:94) suggestion that increased political opportunities for corporations allow them to participate in two political markets at both the European and national level. This is an important finding, as it indicates that Europeanization could account for changed state-interest group interactions in recent decades. While we contend that we cannot overgeneralize based on our case and dynamic model, we do believe this warrants more research to critically examine the effects of corporatism on lobby behavior and access in other contexts, and more importantly, how these relate to the Europeanization of political and economic processes.

Finally, this study illustrates that our automated approach to identify large-scale interest group populations is a reliable tool. With equivalent materials at hand and manual verification to minimize systematic error, it is a way forward compared to other approaches for identifying interest group communities such as complete manual coding or the use of policy or random samples. With registers of organizations available in most countries in Europe, the U.S. and Australia, scholars are able to create queries of all organizations active over extensive periods of time and can test for political activity in documents ranging from minutes and agendas of parliamentary meetings to political newspaper coverage. The former would indicate political activity through interaction with political elites and the latter participation in the political discourse when filtered for political news. With the availability of statistical data on societal, economic and political developments, scholars can also study drivers of interest group patterns beyond the scope of corporations. In short, we believe that with the current offer of methods and data, large-scale interest group communities can be studied in a systematic manner over extended periods of time and across political systems.

Whilst this endeavor has contributed to our knowledge of the development of corporate access over time, certain factors *limited* our pursuit. The first aspect concerns the dataset on which we relied to measure individual corporate access, that is, minutes of parliamentary hearings. Although this set provides a good source from which to draw inferences regarding the presence of corporations in the political process, it does not include all hearings that were held during this period, as it was not always obliged to take minutes and store these on a platform accessible to the public. However, we do not see this as a major problem for this study, as we controlled for this by determining relative shares. At the same time, we certainly encourage other studies to validate or challenge our findings, either in a similar context or beyond.

Second, our focus on parliamentary hearings means that we did not shed light on access to the entire policy process, most notable the bureaucracy. Yet, most studies indicate that biases toward specific interests are higher at bureaucratic venues, given their need for technical and detailed information. The parliamentary hearings are by design intended to provide various stakeholders the opportunity to voice their concerns or provide input on (potential) legislation. Hence, the fact that we find an increase of corporate lobbying even at this venue suggests that this is part of a broader trend. Yet, more research is needed to substantiate this expectation.

Finally, it is important to stress that it is impossible with our type of data to shed light on the causal mechanisms in place before corporations (or other groups) managed to gain access to the policy process. In other words, we do have a better understanding of when corporations participated in the process, but we have not been able to grasp their unsuccessful efforts to gain access nor those of other organized interests to compare the two groups. Moreover, we find links between certain structural changes in society and changes in corporate access. Yet, the dynamic nature of our model does not allow us to make strong causal claims about the origins of these links. These illustrated links however, represent interesting paths to pursue in future research. For instance, it would be recommended to delve deeper into the sudden change in corporate lobbying in the 1990s. Case studies could seek to address whether this was indeed, as we expect, mainly driven by changes in European governance. More specific analysis in this regard would be a great addition to capture the more nuanced mechanism underlying the broad trend we present in this paper.

To conclude, with this paper we aimed to highlight, and explain, the growing importance of corporations in political systems beyond the US. Through the current endeavor, we sought to test a new approach, which proves to be a useful tool to identify large-scale interest group populations that is applicable in other contexts. We hope that European scholars are now keener to further acknowledge the role and importance of corporations within our political systems by exploring why corporations lobby, what strategies they use, and ultimately, what impact they have on policy-making.



# Chapter 3.

Time is of the Essence:  
A Longitudinal Study on Business  
Presence in Political News in the UK  
and the Netherlands

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The media has become a core intermediary between citizens and politics over the past decades (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). More than ever, the 'political reality' of citizens is shaped by and based on what is covered by the media (Kepplinger, 2002) and many issues debated in parliament are driven by news coverage. Political actors are therefore in a competitive battle to gain news coverage and, in doing so, have an impact on the political process. One type of such actors is organized interests, which represent a key source of information for journalists (e.g., Berkhout, 2013; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Moreover, with the growing importance of the media, gaining access to this venue has become an increasingly relevant goal for organized interests, even if they already possess an established insider status in the political process (Kollman, 1998; Kriesi et al., 2007).

Focusing on the media presence of organized interests is important as it indicates which voices are getting heard and to what extent there is a balance in the public debate. The latter is important as democracies thrive when criteria of representativeness, equal access and diversity are met (Binderkrantz, 2012; Danielian & Page, 1994; Sartori, 1987). When the public has access to different types of ideas, it can create a more informed opinion about politics and policy (see Danielian & Page, 1994 for a discussion). According to some, 'the role of the news media in any political process can best be understood by looking at competition over the media as part of a more general struggle for political control' (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009:147).

Given its increasing importance, a vast scholarship has emerged that analyzes patterns of interest group coverage in the media (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2016; Danielian & Page, 1994; Kollman, 1998; Thrall 2006; Van der Graaf et al., 2016; Woll, 2012). This work shows that attention for interest groups in media channels is similarly skewed toward a select group of business actors in insider channels (i.e. channels in which organized interests interact directly with politicians or policy-makers), thereby impeding the representative nature of political news coverage (e.g. De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Danielian & Page, 1994). Unfortunately, these studies tend to offer snapshot insights into media appearances of interest groups, which does not allow us to see whether the bias toward business groups in news media has increased or decreased over time. To our knowledge, the only paper that analyzes the presence of various types of interest groups in the media over time is by Binderkrantz (2012), who analyzes Denmark. She finds, quite surprisingly, that business presence in political news media has decreased

over time. While acknowledging the groundbreaking relevance of this study, in this paper we challenge the finding that interest groups' presence in the news has become more diverse over time.

Our first contribution to the literature relates to the inclusion of *corporations* in the analysis. Binderkrantz (2012) finds that business associations have lost ground to NGOs in the political media discourse in Denmark, and the overall discourse has as a result become more diverse. We expect that, just as in insider channels, corporations will outnumber any other interest group (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013, Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) and will have managed to have increased their media access the most (Gray et al., 2004). Consequently, we expect the combined relative presence of business groups – that is, business associations *and* corporations – in the political news discourse to be more prominent now than ever before.

Our second contribution to the literature is that we expect variation in interest group activity in the media over time to differ across types of *countries*. We therefore apply a comparative perspective, by comparing a corporatist country (the Netherlands) with a pluralist country (the United Kingdom). The two systems differ in terms of how state-interest group relations are organized. In corporatist arrangements, it is common that the state shares some of its power with selected umbrella groups such as labor and business associations (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). In pluralist set-ups, a greater variety of organized interests is tolerated as long as these interests limit their activities to parliament (*Ibidem*). We expect that corporations have increased their lobbying efforts over time in corporatist countries much more than in pluralist countries. With the declining political importance of traditional interest groups in corporatist countries (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Lijphart, 2012), we expect corporations to have swiftly seized this opportunity and sought to increase their grip on political news coverage. Moreover, journalists are willing to provide corporations more access as they tend to be more inclined to take up stories that involve powerful actors (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Consequently, we expect media coverage to be more biased to in favor of business interests in the Netherlands than in the United Kingdom.

The hypotheses are tested on a dataset of political news coverage of all organized interests in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands from 1990 until 2017, consisting of 150,136 Dutch and 200,577 British articles. To make sure our findings are robust we include, for each country, one newspaper with a more right-wing and conservative alignment (*The Times* from the UK and *Algemeen Dagblad* from the Netherlands), and

one newspaper with a more progressive and center-left orientation (*The Guardian* and *NRC*). The combination of variation of newspapers within and across countries allows us to identify broader patterns associated with interest group presence in the media, exceeding the narrower objectives of newspaper editorial boards such as the ideological position or world view these newspapers aim to convey. Using quantitative text collection and analysis methods, interest groups were identified, mapped, and compared over time in the political media discourse. During the period under study, 34,657 interest groups were identified in political news sections across the aforementioned newspapers in the United Kingdom (15,196), and in the Netherlands (19,461). We hereby link interest group presence in the media to actual political events addressed in the newspapers. This allows us to trace which groups increased their share in the news media over time, and to make a comparison between the two countries.

### 3.2. ARE BUSINESS GROUPS OVERREPRESENTED IN POLITICAL NEWS?

Analyzing the 'biased' nature of interest representation—that is, a disproportional overrepresentation of certain groups in the political process—is one of the perennial and central concerns driving the study of interest groups and lobbying (e.g., Schattschneider, 1960; Lowery et al., 2015). In such studies, the distribution among different types of groups – business organizations, NGOs, labor unions, etcetera – is compared to see whether interests are equally represented. In a typical policy process, we will find larger numbers of organizations representing business interests than organizations representing citizens (e.g., Berkhout et al., 2018). This skewness can be observed in many organizational patterns present at political venues (Gray et al., 2004; Halpin et al., 2016) as well as in broader terms of direct political participation by interest groups (Rasmussen & Carroll, 2014).

What is less common, however, is the mapping of the presence of organized interests in *the media*. Having said that, several important studies have been conducted in this regard (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2016; Danielian & Page, 1994; Thrall, 2006). These studies are important contributions, because today the news media constitute a crucial part of politics, that is, in recent decades politics has lost some of its autonomy and is increasingly dependent on and shaped by the news media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). As a result, both political actors and journalists are dominant powers in the process of political communication and play a mediating role between citizens and those

responsible for substantial political decisions and actions (Kepplinger, 2002). Observers of the political process argue that the success of political actors often depends on their ability to shape the news-making process and to use other channels of mass media communication to influence public opinion, electoral outcomes, and the policy process (Kepplinger, 2002; Lipsky, 1965; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, Strömbäck, 2008). Media strategies are therefore an increasingly important tool for interest groups to impact political decision-making processes.

Analyzing potential 'biases' in the media presence of interest groups is particularly important, as it highlights whether particular venues confer advantages to specific groups or whether the same types of groups dominate all political arenas, so that losers in one arena have nowhere else to turn (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). Schattschneider (1960) differentiated between certain privileged insider groups that enjoy direct access to policy-makers, and outsiders who are denied such access. In scholarly debates, outsider strategies are generally thought to be employed by outsider groups in order to make up for their lack of direct access (see also Lipsky, 1965). It is therefore important to know whether media outlets are dominated by business interests, just as the insider channels tend to be, or if they serve as alternative venues for marginalized groups to challenge the status quo.

Most empirical studies indicate that business interests are also more present in news coverage (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Danielian & Page, 1994; Kollman, 1998; Thrall 2006; Van der Graaf et al., 2016; Woll, 2012). Yet, can we interpret these differences in media presence as bias or disproportionate? Indeed, the extent of interest group bias is notoriously difficult to identify, given that the real or actual distribution of interests in society is conceptually and empirically impossible to determine (Lowery & Gray, 2004). As a minimal approach, the assessment of bias 'should always entail comparison across venues, jurisdiction, or time' (Lowery & Gray, 2004: 21). We can refer to only four studies including such a benchmark to assess interest presence in the media.

First, two studies compare distributions of interest groups across venues: De Bruycker and Beyers (2015) in the EU, and Binderkrantz et al. (2015) in Denmark. These studies highlight how outsider channels reveal remarkable consistency with insider channels. This does not mean that outsider channels are more biased toward business associations, yet they are also not necessarily more diverse across venues. Second, Binderkrantz et al. (2016) compare bias across three jurisdictions: Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Spain. The results, again, show much coherence across group types. In all countries,

business is overrepresented in the media, yet there does not seem to be much variation across countries. The third and final comparison is over time. As discussed, Binderkrantz (2012) illustrates in corporatist Denmark that the proportion of business and labor groups' presence in the media is in decline, and sectional and public interests groups (i.e. NGOs) have gained more presence in recent decades, indicating a trend toward a more diverse set of interests being expressed in the media. Other studies without a comparative design have identified the declining presence of labor unions in the media in other countries, such as Great Britain (e.g. Ward and Lusoli, 2003) and Canada (e.g. Fowler and Hagar, 2013). The growing role of NGOs in the news media has also been identified in several studies, such as in the United States (e.g. Bob, 2005), and Belgium and the Netherlands (e.g. Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2012).

Overall, these studies represent a great step forward in assessing the changing role of interest groups in the media over time, yet two elements remain underexplored and we believe these are essential in assessing whether or not business presence in the media has indeed decreased, as Binderkrantz and others suggest. *First*, most of these four benchmark studies do not include corporations in the analysis (but see de Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). We believe this leads to erroneous conclusions about the actual business presence of business organizations in the media. In a nutshell, and explored further in the next section, we agree that business associations have lost ground in the media, but at the same time we also expect that corporations have taken up the space of business associations in the media in an exponential way. As a consequence, the system has not become more diverse, but more prone to business capture.

Our *second* contribution is that we compare interest group activity in the media over time across countries. We think that institutional differences across countries are critical to understand patterns of interest group activity in the news media over time. We expect that the decline of corporatism has led to a bigger gap between the visibility of business and civil society actors in the news media, compared to countries with a pluralist system of interest representation. The following section explores our hypotheses in more detail.

### **3.3. BUSINESS PRESENCE IN THE NEWS MEDIA ACROSS TIME AND COUNTRIES**

In this section we develop two broad hypotheses: one for variation in business presence in political news over time, and one for variation across countries. Our first focus is

to explore whether there is a difference in the relative presence of business groups (compared to other types of organizations, most notably NGOs) across *time*. There are certainly good reasons to expect that corporations have substantially increased their share of coverage in the news media—that is, if inside lobbying is a good indication of media lobbying, which much of the literature seems to suggest (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2016). Several studies report that corporations now constitute the largest part of interest group communities in most political systems. In the pluralist context of the US, both Schlozman (1984) and Salisbury (1984) demonstrated back in the 1980s that of all organizations having a Washington presence, corporations constitute the largest part (according to the two studies, 45.7% and 33.5% of all interest groups, respectively). Gray et al. (2004) illustrated that this pattern has intensified even further since then, as the relative share of institutions (of which corporations constitute the largest share) registered to lobby increased from 39.55% in 1980 to 57.51% in 1997. In the European Union we see a similar trend: Berkhout et al. (2018), and Chalmers (2013) show that individual corporations now comprise the largest part of the lobbying community in the EU.

Assuming that there is at least some overlap between insider and outsider channels, it seems likely that business bias in the media has also increased. Importantly, this would contradict the study of Binderkrantz (2012), who has observed a decline in business presence in the media in Denmark and an increase in the presence of NGOs. Yet, as previously stated, this study does not include corporations, which we believe changes the picture dramatically. While we expect that business associations have lost ground in the political media discourse, and NGOs have to a certain extent taken up this space, we expect that corporations have managed to exponentially increase their presence in the media in recent decades. As a result, if one excludes corporations, one will observe a decrease in business presence in the media, but if one *includes* their share, the share of business groups *increases* over time. As a net result we therefore expect that: *The relative share of business interests in the political media discourse has increased over time* (H1).

While we expect an increase of business exposure in the media over time, what do we expect to find across *jurisdictions*? As mentioned, there is only one study that systematically analyzes the distribution of interest groups across various countries (Binderkrantz et al., 2016). The authors compare three countries – Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom – and find that business groups are overrepresented in all news media outlets; however, the variation per country is not striking. The question therefore is whether this will still hold true once we include corporations in the equation. We expect it will not hold, and that there will be substantial variation across pluralist and

corporatist countries. In pluralist systems, corporations are incentivized to lobby on their own behalf, as in such contexts the activity of organized interests is controlled by creating room for competition amongst organized interests which have 'constitutional rights to lobby the democratically elected parliament' (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005: 445). In corporatist systems, it is more common that a government tempers the activity of organized interests by channeling it. In practice, this means that it shares authority with a selection of umbrella groups such as labor unions and business associations (*Ibidem*). Importantly, however, corporatism is experiencing a stark decline (e.g., Binderkrantz, 2012; Crepaz, 1994; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). The declining importance of traditional corporatist arrangements, as has occurred in the Netherlands, could lead to a more diverse distribution of organized interests' presence in the media, as traditional umbrella groups have lost ground and NGOs have expanded their position (e.g. Binderkrantz, 2012). As a result, one could expect a stronger business presence in the media in the United Kingdom than in the Netherlands (see Binderkrantz 2012). However, this reasoning negates the role of individual corporations, which have also profited from new political opportunities associated with the decline of corporatism. Indeed, actors that were previously represented by umbrella groups, i.e. corporations, now seek to represent themselves in political processes (see Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2019).

We expect this shift to individual corporate lobbying to be so severe in corporatist systems that such interest systems have now become even more biased in favor of business interests than pluralist systems (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2019). First, when new political opportunities arise, such as due to the decline of corporatism, corporations are more likely to take advantage of this situation than NGOs, given their more limited constraints for collective action and the greater resources that they possess compared to NGOs (Olson, 1965; Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Chalmers, 2013). This allows corporations to make use of new opportunities, such as seeking access to media, more easily, which is something we have seen in other newly opened political venues as well (Gray & Lowery, 1996). Second, the information that business associations and labor unions provide to the media is mostly of an economic nature. Even when these traditional economic actors become less important as the spokespeople of the economic sector, journalists and news editors still demand economic input. It seems plausible that predominantly corporations, rather than NGOs, would step in to fill this void. As there are so many more corporations than associations and unions in society, journalists will be flooded by input from corporations and this will likely lead to a much stronger dominance of business actors in the media over time (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Lowery et al. 2016). Combined, we therefore expect that: *the relative share of business interests in the political media discourse overall is greater in the Netherlands than in the United Kingdom* (H2).

### 3.4. DATA AND METHODS

This study relies on a newly collected dataset of four important British and Dutch daily newspapers between 1990 and 2017 and the presence of organized interests in the political coverage of these newspapers. It is important to add that this study only includes print newspapers and no online news outlets, for example. Although this endeavor does not deliver results that can be generalized to all news media, it provides a useful approximation as there tends to be overlap between print media and their online counterparts (see e.g. Quandt, 2008). Moreover, we include newspapers with a distinct ideological editorship to account for variation related to the type of news these newspapers prioritize and aim to convey. It does not fit within the scope of this paper to include all types of newspapers and/or news outlets, but creating variation within and across countries enables us to make some generalizations from our findings. Moreover, in case of differences between types of newspapers we can more directly analyze the sources of this variation.

The data include two components. First, it consists of the political newspaper coverage that appeared between 1990 and 2017 in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *NRC Handelsblad*, which we obtained by downloading from LexisNexis and filtering for political news using a simple query<sup>11</sup>. The article selection filter includes important political venues and political parties that held at least four seats in the Dutch Parliament or British House of Commons during the full period under study.<sup>12</sup>

The second component consists of a full list of corporations, with 250 employees or more, which have been active during the period under study in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This component also includes a full list of business associations, labor unions, professional membership groups, membership groups, NGOs, groups of institutions and authorities, and research or think-tank groups that were active during the period under study and have 50 or more employees.<sup>13</sup> The lists were extracted from the databases of the Dutch Chamber of Commerce and the UK's Companies House.

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11 Inclusion of political parties in the filter is based on statistics and numbers provided by both governments <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7529> and [https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhronvx6/zetelverdeling\\_tweede\\_kamer\\_1946\\_heden](https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhronvx6/zetelverdeling_tweede_kamer_1946_heden). Full queries can be found in appendix 3.4 in the Supplementary Information file.

12 Additional information on the query and how validity and reliability are ensured can be found in appendix 3.4.

13 Information on cut-off points for the number of employees of organized interests that are included can be found in appendix 3.4 as well as additional information on the databases.

We established the proportion of groups being mentioned in the news media by running automated queries of the names of the organizations active over the chosen time period on the dataset of political news coverage. Our unit of analysis is the presence of actors, in this case organized interests in Dutch and British political newspaper coverage.<sup>14</sup> The employed method is very similar to the one applied by Binderkrantz et al. (2012; 2016); here, however, it is employed in an automated manner which enables us to analyze a large quantity of news articles. This specific method has been applied to parliamentary hearings as well (see Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a for a discussion of the reliability of this method). Since the nature of this data is different, a sample of 150 articles and therewith 387 organized interests were coded manually to ensure validity.<sup>15</sup> To ensure reliability of the manual coding, a set of 50 articles was coded by an external coder, yielding Krippendorff's alphas of 1, .71, .62 and .89.

As the density of news and the number and distribution of organizations were not always equal over time, the dependent variable was constructed by calculating the relative share of corporations and business associations compared to other organized interests visible in the political media discourse. To ensure that the presence of corporations that were added to the analysis actually indicated involvement in the political media discourse, the context of the presence of the actors was manually coded using a method similar to the technique employed by De Bruycker and Beyers (2015). Six hundred articles were coded: 150 per media outlet and 50 per decade. In total, 1,568 actors were coded.<sup>16</sup>

To explain the relative share of business interests compared to other organized interests in the political media discourse, we relied on two types of variation, cross-country and time, and we controlled for media outlet. First, for our hypothesis on differences between the two countries, we relied on the observed variation of the relative share of business interests in the political media discourse in each country. As discussed, the countries vary in institutional arrangements and thus how state-interest group relations are managed: the United Kingdom is characterized by pluralism and the Netherlands by a neo-corporatist set-up (Lindvall & Sebring, 2005). This allows us to test whether the type of interest mediation system affects media presence, similar to insider lobbying efforts. The two cases under study also vary in terms of media systems, with the UK having a liberal media system and the Netherlands a democratic corporatist system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This 'most-different system design' allows us to meaningfully interpret

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14 The query includes common abbreviations to ensure that all mentions were captured. Double hits were deleted from the final dataset.

15 The coding scheme and the results of this endeavor are included in table A3.5 in appendix 3.4.

16 The coding scheme is included in appendix 3.4 as well as information on how reliability was ensured.

the results in light of the differences across countries and type of newspaper, that is, to determine which of these two factors is more important for the results. Second, to test our hypothesis of change over time, we measured the trend of the relative share of business interests compared to other organized interests across the timeframe under investigation. Third, in order to ensure the robustness of our findings, we controlled for potential variation across different types of newspapers. Namely, *The Guardian* and *NRC Handelsblad* are characterized by a center-left and progressive alignment, while *The Times* and *Algemeen Dagblad* are rather right-wing and conservative.

### 3.5. ANALYSIS

In this section we analyze how the share of business groups varies across *countries* (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) and *time* (1990-2017).<sup>17</sup> Because there is a limited number of studies analyzing the presence of interest groups in the media including corporations, our analysis is aimed at providing an overview of general trends. More specifically, during the period under study, 34,657 interest organizations were identified in political news coverage in the two countries: 19,461 in the Netherlands and 15,196 in the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> In the Netherlands, 1,331 business associations and 11,824 corporations were identified. In the United Kingdom, 1,473 business associations and 6,954 corporations appeared in political news coverage. In total, 8,427 business interests were identified in the UK and 13,155 in the Netherlands. To ensure the robustness of our findings, we manually coded a random sample of 600 news items. In short, these results indicate that if business organizations are mentioned in the political news sections, they are quoted as the sources of information of either a journalist or a political actor also mentioned in the article, or because they are engaging in an activity within a political context.<sup>19</sup>

We first provide a general overview of interest groups in the media *without* the inclusion of corporations. This allows us to compare our findings with those of other studies and highlight whether we observed similar trends (see Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2016). Figures 1 and 2 depict how the different organized interests appear in

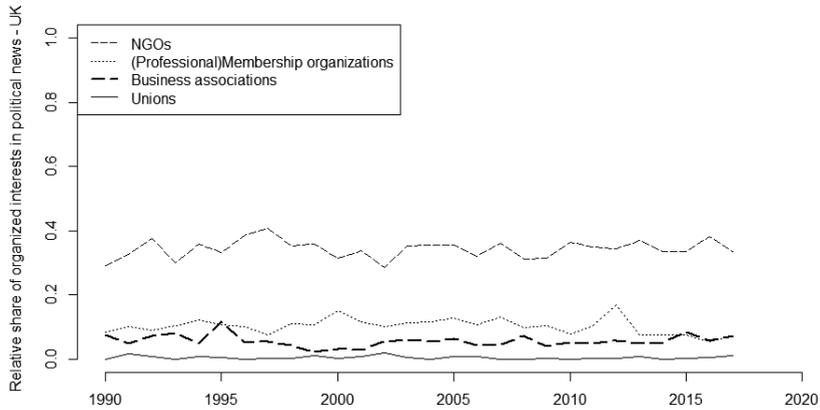
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17 We controlled for variation between media outlets with different readerships and political alignment. These results are included in appendix 3.3 in figures A3.1 to A3.4, which indicate little variation.

18 An overview of the descriptive statistics of organized interests per country and news outlet during the entire period under study can be found in Table A3.1 in appendix 3.1.

19 A complete overview and discussion of the results of the manual coding can be found in appendix 3.4 as well as some examples of when the context was categorized as negative, neutral or positive.

political newspaper coverage over time in the UK and the Netherlands, respectively.<sup>20</sup> For each country, they highlight the *relative* share of NGOs, (professional) membership organizations, business associations and unions.

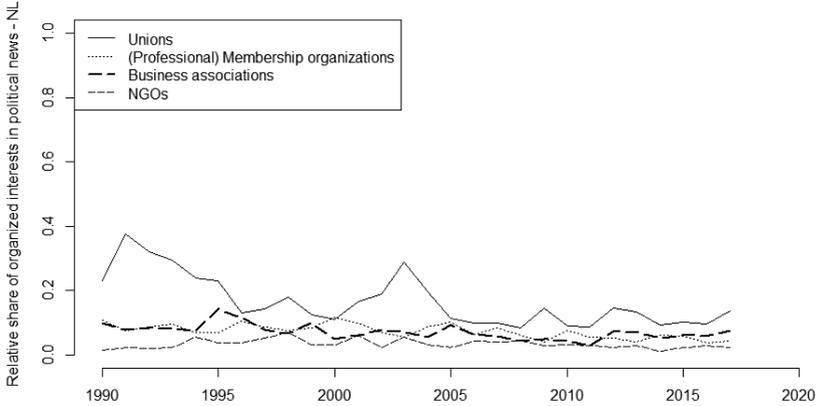


**Figure 3.1. Relative share of presence of organized interests in political news in the United Kingdom**

What are the main findings? First of all, in *both* countries business associations do not have a substantial stake in the political media discourse. In the United Kingdom, NGOs are by far the actors most present in the newspapers, ranging between 30% and 40% over 30 years. Oxfam, an NGO that aims to battle poverty, is mentioned most often, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament comes second and the Fawcett Society, an organization that campaigns for gender equality and women’s rights, comes third. In the Netherlands, labor unions (although at a decreasing rate) comprise the largest part of organized interests in the political media discourse. The three most visible groups are the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV), the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions (CNV), and ABOP, which is the National Union for Education. In the early 1990s, labor unions comprised almost a quarter of all interest group mentions in political news, yet since the beginning of the new century this has dropped to around 15%, with some fluctuations. A second point that stands out is that the presence of

<sup>20</sup> The figures depict a selection of categories of organized interests. See figures A3.5 and A3.6 in appendix 3.3 for an overview of how all the appearances of organized interests develop over time.

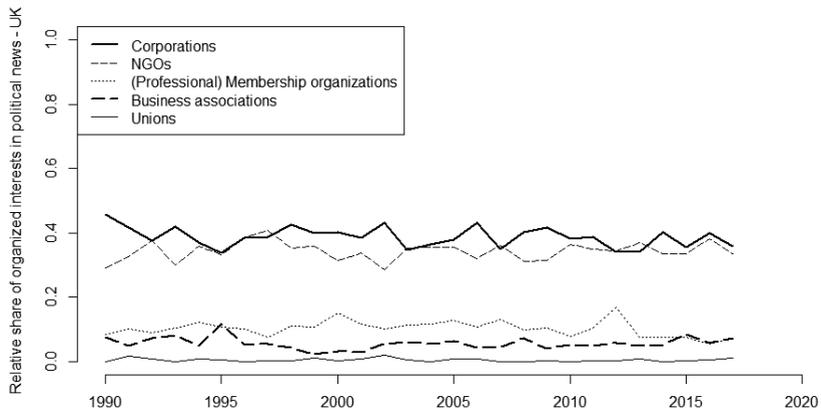
business associations is rather *stable* over time in the UK ( $r(26)=-0.087, p=0.65$ ), with approximately 10% of the mentions. In the Netherlands a modest, but significant, downward trend is visible ( $r(26)=-0.59, p<0.001$ ). Their share has dropped from around 15% in the 1990s to less than 10% since 2000.



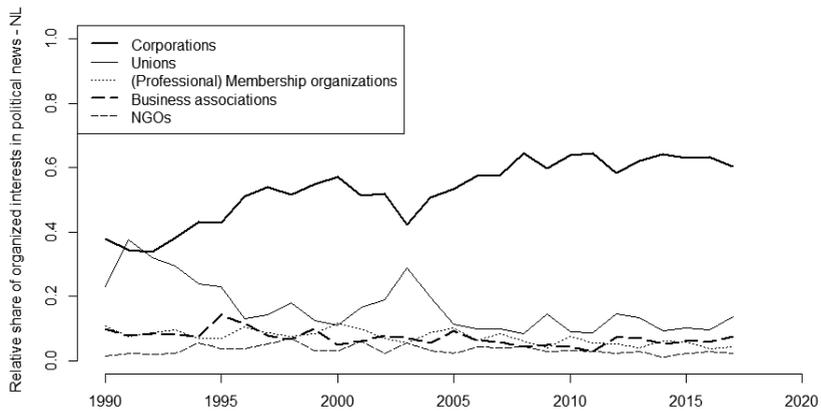
**Figure 3.2. Relative share of presence of organized interests in political news in the Netherlands**

More broadly, the results highlight two key trends. First, in line with Binderkrantz (2012), we observe a vast decline in the presence of traditional business umbrella organizations in the media in the Netherlands. This illustrates the robustness of Binderkrantz’s (2012) study on the decline of traditional economic actors in the political news in Denmark, and the generalizability of her findings to other corporatist systems. The results are also in line with the ideas that institutionalized group access has declined in corporatist countries (see Binderkrantz, 2012 and Crepaz, 1994), and that outsider channels mirror the distribution of insider channels (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). At the same time, in the United Kingdom we observe an entirely different pattern. In this context we do not see much decline in the media presence of traditional business groups, yet their overall presence is rather limited. Rather, NGOs seem to be the most visible interest groups in British political news, and this seems to have been the case consistently since the early 1990s. Hence, institutional differences are quite stark, even if we exclude corporations.

### Chapter 3. Time is of the Essence



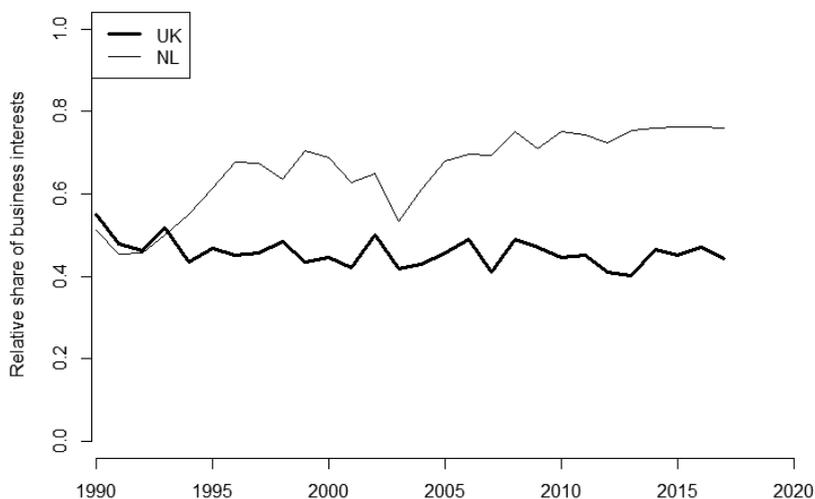
**Figure 3.3. Relative share of presence of organized interests including corporations in political news in the United Kingdom**



**Figure 3.4. Relative share of presence of organized interests including corporations in political news in the Netherlands**

These differences become even more pronounced once we include corporations in the analysis (see Figures 3 and 4). The figures display that in both countries, and during the entire period under study, corporations were in fact the most prominent actors. The companies that are mentioned most often are Shell, PricewaterhouseCoopers and

Philips. When looking at the development of the presence of corporations over time in the political discourse, one can observe a strong increasing trend in the Netherlands ( $r(26)=0.88, p<0.0001$ ) and one that is slightly negative, yet far more stable in the UK ( $r(26)=-0.34, p<0.1$ ). This finding indicates that interests that are not by default included in the policy-making process in a corporatist system (Crepaz, 1994; Binderkrantz, 2012) have not only gained ground as insiders, but also as outsiders. This suggests that the important role of corporations as insiders in both pluralist and corporatist contexts (see Berkhout et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2004; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) also holds for outsider platforms.



**Figure 3.5. Relative share of presence of business interests in political news in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands**

To highlight the differences in the visibility of business and non-business actors more clearly, in Figure 5 corporations and business associations are combined into one category as business interests, and juxtaposed with all non-business actors mentioned in the news media. The figure shows that the presence of business interests increased strongly in the Netherlands ( $r(26)=0.85, p<0.0001$ ) while it remained more stable in the UK, with a slight negative trend ( $r(26)=-0.38, p<0.1$ ).

In sum, the above analyses highlight an overall trend toward more relative business presence in the political news media, yet this is entirely driven by the country in which we study interest group presence in the media, as shown by the drastic increase of business presence in the Dutch media and its relative stability in the British case. This means that we can only understand variation in business presence over time (H1) if we consider variation in political systems (H2). In addition, the *extent* to which corporations have increased their relative share in the Netherlands is notable. When looking at organized interests in political news, we can observe that news in the Netherlands is now almost entirely dominated by business groups in general, and corporations specifically. This image contradicts any positive depictions about the plurality of news sources in corporatist settings (see Binderkrantz, 2012). Rather, we see a system of news media that is dominated by business interests.

In the United Kingdom, where there have been no major shocks in the interest mediation system, we observe a state of relative equilibrium. Over a long period of time, almost 30 years, roughly the same types of organizations appear in political news media. Also, visibility appears to be rather evenly distributed, even though traditional business actors are not major players in this area. Rather, corporations and NGOs divide most of the space in political news, but do so in an equal manner. If anything, it seems that pluralist UK demonstrates more consistency with the system of plurality in political news coverage.

This brings us to the final question of the study, namely what could be potential *causes* for the trends we observe? While the trends may be clear, they do not tell us much about what explains these opposite trends in the two countries. The most likely explanation in our view, as argued, is the decline of corporatism in the Netherlands. In corporatist settings, business actors already had the advantage of privileged access to policy-makers and the news media; hence there was a greater dependence on groups that could provide input on economic issues. With the decline of corporatism, corporations have now apparently filled this void. In light of the theories of collective action this is not surprising. Indeed, when new venues open up, specialized interests face fewer obstacles to taking advantage of the situation (see Gray & Lowery, 1996).

Yet, alternative explanations are possible, such as changes in economic trends (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998) or political configurations and alignments (see Allern & Bale, 2012 for a discussion). Unfortunately, there is no data on the exact decline of corporatism over time, so we cannot link this directly to shifts in corporate presence in the media. What we can do, however, is test several of the

alternative explanations in a time series analysis. We conducted such an analysis, in which we controlled for economic trends, variation in government spending, the level of globalization of the economy, and the type of government in office.<sup>21</sup> As can be seen in tables A2 and A3 (see appendix 2 in the Supplementary Information file), these have almost no effect on the trends we observe. In fact, both for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the model fit of the time series regressions are better without these control variables. This is a clear indication that the rise of corporate lobbying in the media is not due to economic trends or changes in government. These results make it, at the very least, plausible that the changes we observe are indeed driven by the broader institutional structure of interest mediation in a country.

### 3.6. CONCLUSION

This study has assessed whether the increasing activity of interest groups in the media has led to a more balanced playing field among interest groups or whether certain groups have profited more than others. Most importantly, we analyzed the role of corporations, which was missing in earlier accounts. The results are striking. When corporations are not included, the data suggest a rather stable pattern of the presence of organized interests in the UK, where NGOs have the greatest share. In the Netherlands, we find a decrease of both business associations and labor unions. These observations highlight the robustness and generalizability of the findings of Binderkrantz (2012) and are aligned with the work of scholars who argue that the corporatist system is in decline (Binderkrantz, 2012; Crepaz, 1994; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). Yet, when corporations are included, the data indicate that this category has the greatest share of presence in the political media discourse in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This suggests that the important insider role of business interests (Berkhout et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2004; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) also translates to outsider venues (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2016; Danielian & Page, 1994; Kollman, 1998; Thrall, 2006; Van der Graaf et al., 2015; Woll, 2012). Moreover, this effect is so strong that, overall, news coverage has become more focused on business, and not more diverse, as former studies indicated. This in turn suggests that the news media may amplify existing imbalances between different types of interest groups. More broadly, it confirms the growing importance of corporations in political processes (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a), as journalists tend to be keen to include stories on actors that are powerful (see Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001).

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21 The results of the analysis are included in appendix 3.2

While the main objective of this paper was to empirically highlight the increasingly important role of corporations in the media, we also provided a potential *explanation* for the variation we observed. Variation in time highlights that the presence of business interests indicates a stable trend in pluralist UK and a marked increase in the corporatist context of the Netherlands, where the presence of business interests has become more prominent over the years. Moreover, this holds once we include a set of plausible alternative explanations. This is an important finding, as corporatist systems functioned as buffers to prevent the capture of political processes by specialized interests (Lijphart, 2012; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). Similar to insider channels, these buffers seem to have disappeared in the media.

While this leads us to conclude that the decline of corporatism probably accounts for most of the variation over time and across countries, we acknowledge that there may be other factors at play. Future research should therefore further disentangle the reasons why corporations are so prominent in the news. This can be done in a quantitative or qualitative way. For the former, an interesting path for future research would be to grasp the context in an automated manner by conducting clause analysis (e.g., Van Atteveldt et al., 2017). This method can automatically extract statements and actions of political actors in a text corpus. This in turn allows for analysis of their actions and positions on issues (*Ibidem*). Interviews with journalists and interest groups may help unravel the exact causes of the changing nature of interest group presence in the media. While these have fallen beyond the possibilities of this paper, we see them as promising avenues for future studies. As such, we see our endeavor mostly as a starting point to explore new questions and certainly not as the final answer.

Another caveat of our findings is that interest groups in the Netherlands might be in a transition period. It could very well be that business interests have simply taken advantage more rapidly of the opportunities that arose with the decline of corporatism. This would mean that in the future we would see balancing effects and a relative decline of business presence in the media (see Gray & Lowery, 1996). This could affect both the trend over time and across countries. For interest organizations we have seen similar trends when a new venue opens up: while business organizations at first increasingly dominate the interest group populations at these new venues, over time a more balanced distribution is established (Hanegraaff, 2015). If these balancing mechanisms are very strong, as they were for interest organizations, this could even mean that the Netherlands will become similar to the United Kingdom in terms of the number of groups present in political news. Future studies should therefore address these developments across time and countries.

To conclude, this paper has highlighted that the organized interests present in the media are becoming increasingly populated by corporations. Such imbalance in media presence interferes with 'norms of equal access, representativeness, balances and diversity in the marketplace of ideas' (Danielian & Page, 1994: 1056). What is more, it violates the idea that the more diverse a public debate is, the more democracies are able to thrive (Binderkrantz, 2012; Danielian & Page, 1994; Sartori, 1987). Indeed, this optimistic idea that assumes a public debate in which many different voices are expressed seems further away than expected.



# Chapter 4.

Signaling Expertise through the  
Media? Measuring the Appearance of  
Corporations in Political News through  
a Complexity Lens

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Why do corporations employ media strategies? Addressing this question is important as corporations are key players in contemporary Western democracies. They are found to dominate political systems in different institutional settings, such as pluralist (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984) and corporatist contexts. What is more, they have managed to expand their access to politics over time (Gray & Lowery, 2001; Gray et al., 2004; Madeira, 2016), and tend to not only dominate insider channels but are quite prominent participants when it comes to outsider platforms as well (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b; Danielian & Page, 1994).

Corporations' individual involvement in politics can harm the functioning of our democracies, even more so when it comes to their engagement in the public debate. That is, when lobbying alone, corporations tend to focus on narrow and self-oriented issues compared to encompassing matters when lobbying via business associations and this can in turn lead to fragmented interest systems (Hart, 2004; Salisbury, 1984; Gray et al., 2004; Martin & Swank, 2004: 598; and see Wilson, 1973, pp. 310 for a similar argument). When they are involved in the public debate via the news media, it is likely that they voice such concerns as well. What is more, scholarly work on interest group visibility in the media illustrates that there is already an overrepresentation of economic groups in the media (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2015), and when corporations are added as a category, such skewness becomes stronger. This is problematic as most citizens learn about politics via the news media (Carpini & Keeter, 1996 and see Kleinberg & Lau, 2019 for a more recent discussion), and for a democracy to function at its best, citizens need access to a wide range of different ideas so that they can form well-informed and reasoned opinions about politics and policy-making (Danielian & Page, 1994).

There are two important strands of literature that speak to corporations' visibility in the media and their employment of public strategies, such as using the media, and these give a puzzling picture. Before introducing these, it is important to note that students of organized interests are thought to focus relatively more on groups with members as compared to corporations (see Hart, 2004, pp. 47). In this context that means that when business interests are studied, there is a focus on business associations - organizations with corporations as members - in comparison to corporations as individual political actors. In a European context, corporations have been studied by interest group scholars to an even more limited extent (but see Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen,

2004; 2002; Coen, 1997; Grant, 1982 and Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a for a recent overview and discussion of studies in this context on corporate lobbying).

This is not different in the literature that the current endeavor seeks to engage with. That is, in both of the literature strands on outside strategies and media appearance, especially those studies conducted in the European context, there is a focus on mechanisms of business associations when referring to the representation of business interests (Beyers, 2004; Kriesi et al., 2007; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz et al. 2017). This study therefore partially departs from insights from the studies of business association strategies and media appearance as well and derives and tailors arguments that more specifically refer to interest representation strategies of corporations. A first line of research focuses on strategies that organized interests pursue through publicly visible arenas. This strand of literature suggests that citizen groups tend to prevail in public arenas, whereas business interests tend to focus on platforms that are less visible to the public in order to get their way (Salisbury, 1984; Dür et al., 2015, pp. 958). Business interests and corporations more specifically are thought to oftentimes avoid the public spotlight in order to reduce the likelihood of facing public scrutiny concerning their legitimacy (see Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997; Hart, 2004). A second branch of literature studies aggregate patterns of visibility of organized interests in the media, and shows that media attention to groups is skewed toward economic groups such as business associations and that corporations are especially overrepresented (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b, Binderkrantz et al., 2017; Danielian & Page, 1994; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). While corporations are thus thought to prefer insider strategies, they are found to often be the most dominant players in the news media. How should we interpret these two contrasting views?

In order to understand these two views better, this paper asks in which contexts corporations use media strategies. It does so by building on the important knowledge that we have on lobbying success. That is, we know that attempts to influence policy-making are more successful when multiple strategies are involved (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; Beyers, 2004; Kriesi et al., 2007, pp. 53). This article argues that corporations use both insider and media strategies in order to maximize the odds of getting their way. However, when pursuing media strategies, they do so with a specific aim: to signal technical expertise to specific constituencies such as policy-makers or business elites. This phenomenon is described by Beyers (2004) as *information politics*: the presentation of information that is not necessarily addressed to the public at large but to smaller target groups. We also expect that with the shift from *descriptive* to *interpretive* journalism, the demand for expert knowledge among journalists has increased (see

Patterson, 2000; Albæk, 2011). When journalists contact organized interests during research for political news coverage, we believe that business interests are more likely to be contacted than other types of organized interests such as NGOs on matters that are more technical in nature, because of their core activities (Bouwen, 2002; De Bruycker, 2016). As a consequence, we expect that the coverage in which corporations appear is more technical in nature, and less accessible to the public at large, compared to coverage in which other organized interests appear. The paper tests this by analyzing the appearance of corporations and other types of organized interests in 35,674 newspaper articles on six different policy areas in terms of degrees of technicality and accessibility, which are two different measures of complexity.

## 4.2. MEDIA STRATEGIES AND THE VISIBILITY OF CORPORATIONS

Scholarly work that speaks to the involvement of corporations in the political media debate can be roughly categorized into two lines of research. A first branch of work speaks to the strategies that corporations undertake to engage in the public debate. These are also known as outsider strategies (Kollman, 1998; Thrall, 2006), and can be defined as strategies in which organized interests engage in order to ‘mobilize public support, stimulate grassroots activity, and generate favorable media attention to issues in order to exert pressure on policymakers’ (Thrall, 2006, pp. 407). Such strategies are rooted in the political resource of protest and are deemed as important tools for citizen groups and organized interests that represent the ‘powerless’ (Wilson, 1973)—that is, groups which do not have enough resources to bargain with, and hence lack the ability to influence the policy-making process (Wilson, 1973). More well-endowed groups which do have the resources to establish an important insider position are in turn thought to oftentimes rely less on outsider strategies. That is, business interests, and corporations more specifically, are thought to avoid conflict and are therefore less keen to be seen in visible arenas such as the media (Bernhagen & Trani, 2012; Dür et al., 2015; Heinz et al., 1993; Salisbury, 1984). According to some, corporations shy away from the media arena in order to avoid scrutiny from the public concerning their legitimacy (Hart, 2004; Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997). In summary, according to this strand of literature, corporations are not too inclined to involve themselves in the media arena. A second strand of literature is concerned with aggregate patterns of visibility of organized interests and most notably the degree of diversity (or lack thereof) therein. This strand of work stems from one of the most crucial questions that has shaped the work of many political scientists and those studying the interest system more specifically.

That is, ever since Schattschneider (1960) coined the idea of bias in the interest group system, many scholars have been trying to describe what such bias in the interest group system looks like, and have aimed to arrive at a yardstick against which to assess the extent of bias (Lowery et al., 2015). This work resonates in the studies of scholars that have been trying to determine the extent of bias; that is, assessing the distribution of organized interests in different venues across different countries, time and venues (e.g. Berkhout et al., 2018; Binderkrantz et al., 2015). When it comes to political venues, scholars have been analyzing the distribution of different types of organized interests in parliament and the bureaucracy (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Bouwen, 2004), which indicates that the degree of access is skewed toward economic groups and especially toward corporations (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Gray et al., 2004; Salisbury, 1984). A similar image is sketched by political scientists studying the news media (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b; Binderkrantz et al., 2017; Danielian & Page, 1994; Thrall, 2006; Van der Graaf et al., 2016).

The latter line of research suggests that while corporations prefer to use insider strategies, they tend to dominate the media arena, even more so than business associations (Danielian & Page, 1994 and see Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b for a recent empirical test and discussion). An explanation is that corporations do pursue outsider strategies next to insider strategies in order to maximize influence (Kriesi et al., 2007). When they do so, they benefit from the advantaged position that business has in politics (Lindblom, 1977), and are able to mobilize quicker than encompassing interests as they experience less collective action problems (Olson, 1965). In addition, due to corporations' established insider positions, it might be easier for them to gain access to journalists, as the latter are more inclined to report on powerful actors (Binderkrantz, 2012; Galtung & Ruge, 1965).

While explanations for why corporations are successful in gaining access to media outlets are abundant, less is known about why corporations employ media strategies. This paper argues that corporations use the media as part of their lobbying endeavors to maximize influence, and when they do so, they aim to signal their technical expertise to specific constituencies. This argument is based on a distinction that is made in the literature regarding the different types of information that organized interests supply, and the target groups of their lobbying endeavors. The next section will discuss these differences as well as the other side of the coin, that is: the journalists that decide which groups make the news and thus function as important gatekeepers. It then presents the arguments that this paper aims to test.

### 4.3. INFORMATION POLITICS AS A MEDIA STRATEGY AND JOURNALISTS' DEMAND FOR EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

In order to understand the strategies of interest groups behind the interactions between them and their publics, one needs to understand two important elements: the aim of the lobbying endeavor, and its target group. That is, what do the interest groups want to achieve, and who are they targeting? When groups aim to mobilize the public in order to put pressure on policy-makers, the odds are that they will use an outsider strategy such as interacting with the media in order to expand the scope of conflict (see e.g. Kollman, 1998). When instead groups seek to keep the scope of conflict small, interacting directly with policy-makers makes more sense.

The two questions outlined above also matter for the type of information that is used in interest groups' lobbying endeavors. Political scientists working on modes of information supply of interest groups tend to make a distinction between two types of information that is used in the lobbying endeavors of organized interests: technical information, and political information (see Chalmers, 2011; De Bruycker, 2016). The first type is predominantly used in expertise-based exchanges between lobbyists and policy-makers (De Bruycker, 2016). The second type is thought to be used in instances where lobbyists want to signal to policy-makers that there is support, or indeed opposition, from the public on an issue (Ibidem). As corporations are thought to prefer to avoid the public spotlight in order to decrease the risk of receiving criticism regarding their legitimacy, using outsider lobbying strategies therefore seems at odds with their usual behavior. How can we then explain their dominance in the media arena?

This paper departs from the idea that corporations seek to maximize influence by using multiple strategies (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; Beyers, 2004; Kriesi et al., 2007), meaning that they combine insider and outsider strategies. We argue here that corporations mainly use media strategies to signal expertise through the transmission of technical information to specific constituencies such as policy-makers or financial elites. This argument is based on a concept developed by Beyers (2004) that can be referred to as *information politics*. He states that differences exist between public strategies. Voice strategies occur in arenas that are visible to the public (Beyers, 2004, pp. 214). The author then further distinguishes between information politics and protest politics. What these two concepts have in common is that they both involve public presentation of information. While protest politics 'implies the explicit staging of events in order to attract attention and expand conflict' (Beyers, 2004, pp. 214), information politics is meant to signal expertise to specific target groups such as business elites or policy-

makers and is not necessarily addressed to the public at large (Ibidem).

Though it might be the aim of corporations to appear in the news, they depend on the gatekeepers for these news appearances; that is, the journalists. It is therefore of utmost importance to discuss the other side of the coin, namely how journalists decide who to include in their news coverage. Organized interests are an important source of information for journalists (see Berkhout 2013; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). This is especially so given the change in news reporting from descriptive towards interpretative journalism, wherein journalists are required to act as analysts, rather than observers (Albæk, 2011; Patterson, 2000). As a result, journalists are more inclined than earlier to consult experts on issues in order to receive help in interpreting the news (Albæk, 2011). Such experts can be researchers, or economists, and organized interests could also function as experts. Here we expect that when journalists interact with organized interests, they are keener to consult business interests when covering economic or technical matters compared to other types of organized interests such as NGOs. We expect this as business interests have more knowledge on these matters compared to other types of groups, because of their economic and technical core activities (Bouwen, 2002; De Bruycker, 2016).

Our first argument relates to both the aims of corporations when using media strategies and the expert input that journalists demand. We expect that corporations seek to maximize influence but in a manner that does not necessarily expand the scope of conflict, instead having a rather specific goal: to signal their expertise to smaller target groups through the transmission of technical information. In turn, we pose that journalists are keener to consult business interests compared to other types of organized interests on technical matters and tend to be perceptive to corporations' media strategies. As a result of both phenomena, we pose that:

*H1: Corporations are more likely to appear in news coverage that is technical in nature compared to other types of organized interests.*

The second argument relates to the accessibility of the coverage in which corporations appear. That is, we expect corporations to employ media strategies in a manner that does not seek to address the general public but is meant for specific constituencies. Text accessibility has been shown to decrease when the authors or subjects have been trying to shield themselves against public scrutiny (Owens et al., 2013). We therefore expect that they aim to be included in coverage that is not necessarily accessible to the public at large, to avoid the risk of expanding conflict while still speaking to their

specific target group. At the same time, and as highlighted, we expect that journalists are keener to consult business interests on issues that are more technical, and such coverage might therefore not be as accessible to the general reader compared to coverage on issues that are less technical in nature. We therefore pose that:

*H2: Corporations are less likely to appear in news coverage that is highly accessible compared to other types of organized interests.*

## 4.4. DATA AND METHODS

The research draws on data displaying the media visibility of corporations compared to various types of organized interests on six different policy issues in two British daily newspapers, the *Guardian* and *The Times*, between 2012 and 2017. We selected these two newspapers based on their focus on policy issues, their wide circulation, and because they cover center-left (*Guardian*) and center-right (*The Times*) viewpoints and agendas.<sup>22</sup> The policy issues were selected from the policy issue categories of the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al., 2011). The policy issues that were included are: energy; environment; education; transportation; community development and housing issues; and law, crime and family issues.

The articles went through two search filters to make sure that they focus on institutions involved in policymaking, and on the specific policy areas that we wanted to sample. We therefore first sampled a general set of news articles focusing on U.K. policymaking institutions, using a general search string that included references to these institutions (N=49,804).<sup>23</sup> In a second step, we constructed search strings for each policy issue that we then applied to the sample of policy-related news, to create subsamples of articles that cover the policy issues of interest.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in a dataset of 35,674 articles, which were subsequently stored in a NoSQL database called AmCAT (van Atteveldt, 2008). To ensure validity of the different search strings, 30 articles per string were coded according to whether they did indeed cover the particular policy issues. Two independent coders coded the same article sets in order to ensure the reliability of the coding. Both validity and reliability scores range from acceptable to good.<sup>25</sup>

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22 See Appendix 4.H for more information on the newspaper selection

23 See Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b for another application of this approach and to read more about the approach's validity

24 All search strings can be found in appendix 4.B

25 See appendix 4.C for a discussion of the results of this endeavor

To detect corporations in the selected news articles, we used a query approach.<sup>26</sup> The U.K. parliament publishes a register of all meetings of public and private organizations with Members of Parliament and ranking officials within the ministries<sup>27</sup>. The meetings are labeled with the policymaking institution that they are most closely linked to. We subsequently matched the sampled issue categories of our news database with the labels of the meeting registry. Using the names of the organizations that have met with the officials included in the register, we ran queries in the subsamples of news articles that cover the corresponding policy issues to detect mentions of these organizations in the coverage.<sup>28</sup>

Since the organizations in the registry have not been categorized into any subcategories, we hand-coded the resulting matches (i.e. appearances of organizations in newspaper articles) into one of these categories: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business associations, corporations, unions, (professional) membership organizations, research bodies and think tanks, and groups of institutions and authorities (GIAs). The news article metadata was re-matched with the classified search results to ensure that no errors occurred in the matching and classification process, resulting in a final dataset of 13,463 news articles that contain mentions of organizations.

The dependent variable of this study is based on the database mentioned above and measures the number of mentions of corporations in each newspaper article compared to the other organized interests identified in the text corpus. We therefore excluded all articles that did not mention any organization contained in our queries. Whilst using a percentage as a dependent variable makes the statistical analyses potentially more difficult, this way of measuring corporation appearance accounts both for text length and organizational dominance: if one used a simple count of appearances, longer texts would probably result in higher counts. At the same time, by counting the appearance of other types of organizations than just corporations, and then weighing these against the appearance of corporations, we ensure that we know whether corporations dominate an article or not. Simply counting the appearance of corporations would mean that we lose such relativizing information (summary statistics in appendix A).

We conceptualized text complexity as a two-component measure. We separated it into two sub-measures addressed by the two hypotheses (H1: text technicality, H2: text readability). Text technicality aims to capture the complexities of text as they relate to

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26 See Aizenberg 2020 for a discussion of this method

27 The dataset covers the same timespan as our news article dataset

28 See appendix 4.D for the specifics of this approach

the actual informational content of the text. Ideally, a text technicality measure would detect if a text contains much specialist knowledge that is relatively inaccessible to non-specialists on a given subject. Following from this definition, text A is more technically complex than text B if it contains more information (also referred to as entropy) within the same unit of text (either sentences, words, or characters). Text readability relates to complexities in text as they relate to the structure of the text. If the text is readable, there are few obstacles within the text that make reading difficult. Such obstacles could be unfamiliar (or highly specialized) words, long words, or long sentences with lots of inner-sentence, word-relational information.

There is a large variety of measures that aim to capture how technical or readable a text is, depending on the specific measure. Whilst text technicality formulas usually measure the variety of the vocabulary, text readability formulas focus on how familiar and accessible the text structure is for the (expected) readership. Most measures were developed for specific applications (e.g. readability of manuals or school books). Since there is no measure that was developed to measure technical complexity in newspaper texts, we calculated the most common text technicality measures for all newspaper articles in our sample using the `quanteda` library for RStudio (Benoit et al. 2018) to select the measure that most closely measures the information-rich technicality that we have described above. We sampled the most widely used measures and checked whether the scores correlated with our own assessment of the technicality of the articles (i.e. if measure X predicts high complexity, is the text indeed complex according to our standards?). We eventually chose Carroll's Corrected Type-Token ratio (CTTR) as the best formula to capture technical complexity in policy-focused newspaper articles (Carroll 1964). This formula measures how many unique words (i.e. types) appear in a text in relation to the overall number of words (i.e. tokens):

$$CTTR = \frac{\text{Number of unique words}}{\sqrt{2 \times \text{Number of total words}}}$$

It includes a term that corrects for increasing text length as the likelihood that any particular word will be repeated naturally increases as the text gets longer. A high CTTR therefore signals a high technical complexity of the text, whilst a low CTTR signals less technical complexity. This happens because if a text contains many unique words, it contains much information on a variety of matters.

We proceeded in the same way to select a text readability formula. In contrast to text technicality measures, readability formulas typically measure either how long typical words are or how familiar they are to the typical reader (via dictionaries). The Coleman-

Liau index provided the most precise results to assess how accessible a text was for readers of the newspaper articles in our sample (Coleman & Liau 1975). This test was initially used to assess the readability of U.S. high school educational material and has become one of the most widely used readability measures. It combines measures on the average word length (based on characters) and the length of the average sentence, and includes correction terms to scale results:

$$\text{Coleman-Liau index} = 5.88 \times \text{Average word length} + 29.6 \times \frac{\text{Number of sentences}}{\text{Number of words}} - 15.8$$

To ensure the validity of both our key independent variables, we manually coded a sample and conducted intercoder reliability checks between two coders and the predictions of our measures (appendix F). The subsequently calculated Cohen's Kappa values are within the acceptable range, showing that our chosen measures indeed measure technicality and readability. We furthermore controlled for a number of alternative explanatory variables. To control for the varying degree of "competition for attention" in the different policy fields, we included both the diversity (Shannon entropy, see Shannon, 1948) as well as the density (number of organizations) of the stakeholder population in each of the policy fields in our news dataset. We furthermore controlled for the newspaper outlet, as the two publications under observation might attract different kinds of stakeholders to their coverage. Lastly, as it can be expected the presence of corporations and the general distribution of stakeholders will vary across policy areas, the subsequent statistical models also control for the different policy areas. However, to ensure that the impact of text technicality and complexity is robust across policy areas, additional full models that do not control for the policy area are included in appendix G.

## 4.5. RESULTS

In this section, we present the results from our statistical analyses. We first provide a summary of our data before moving to the estimated (logistic) models that test our hypotheses. 36.3% (N=13,463) of the sampled 35,674 articles mentioned stakeholders that gained access to policymakers. Corporations dominate the list of appearances in the articles and represent on average 42.4% of the stakeholder mentions per article, followed by public institutions (20.2%) and NGOs (18.8%). It is important to note here that although this study relied on insider data to measure appearances in the news, scholarly work carried out in similar contexts that has employed different sampling strategies illustrates a comparable image. One where corporations form the

category that gains most access to the news compared to other types of organized interests (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b; Danielian & Page, 1994). The appearance of stakeholder varies between policy areas. See appendix E for an overview and discussion of the differences.

Turning to an examination of our hypothesis, we estimated five different models. Since the dependent variable (i.e. share of corporations amongst total mentioned stakeholders per newspaper article) is a proportion that ranges between 0 and 1, the analysis was run with a beta regression, using the `betareg` package in RStudio.<sup>29</sup> To observe the two hypotheses independently, we estimated two models each for text technicality and text readability. The first models (i.e. models 1 and 3) only test stakeholder-level control variables, whilst the second models additionally control for the newspaper (Guardian vs. The Times) and policy field (i.e. models 2 and 4). The fifth model includes all variables under investigation.

The significance values of our results should be interpreted with a strong sense of caution, as a large  $n$  sample such as ours will very likely produce significant results (Lin et al. 2013). We will instead focus on discussing the effect size and standard error terms of the various variables and visualize them via marginal effect plots. The results table shows much support for H1, as text technicality is always positively associated with corporation presence in the news. This indicates that corporations are indeed more likely to appear in coverage that is more technical in nature compared to other organized interests: departing from the distribution of our text technicality variable, the predicted share of corporations in the news articles rises from 44% in the first quartile of the CTTR distribution ( $=8.7$ ) to 51.5% in the third quartile ( $=11.96$ ). This finding is in line with our expectations that corporations are in all likelihood more inclined to be involved in coverage of a technical nature to signal expertise to specific constituencies (see Beyers, 2004), and that journalists are more perceptive to corporations' media strategies than other types of organized interests when consulting them on such matters (Albæk, 2011). The standard errors are very small and the 95% confidence interval never crosses 0. The impact of text technicality on the projected share of corporations in a news article is strong, as the marginal effect plot in figure 1 shows.

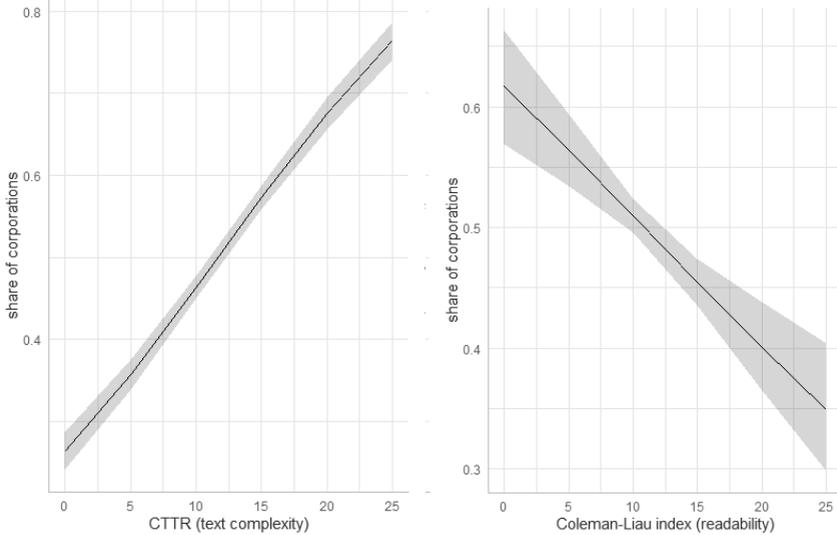
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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 4.I for further information on the model

**Table 4.1: Regression results**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Share of corporations in articles				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
CTTR (complexity)	0.088*** (0.004)	0.090*** (0.005)			0.088*** (0.005)
Coleman-Liau index (readability)			-0.062*** (0.009)	-0.058*** (0.009)	-0.044*** (0.009)
Density	0.117** (0.048)	0.124** (0.049)	0.345*** (0.049)	0.353*** (0.049)	0.168*** (0.049)
Diversity (Shannon's H)	-0.567*** (0.100)	-0.672*** (0.101)	-0.799*** (0.102)	-0.918*** (0.102)	-0.746*** (0.102)
Medium ref: The Times		0.004 (0.027)		-0.179*** (0.026)	-0.010 (0.028)
Policy: energy		0.154*** (0.037)		0.169*** (0.038)	0.154*** (0.037)
Policy: environment		-0.410*** (0.114)		-0.296** (0.115)	-0.371*** (0.114)
Policy: housing		0.124*** (0.039)		0.143*** (0.039)	0.120*** (0.039)
Policy: law, crime, family		-0.355*** (0.038)		-0.314*** (0.039)	-0.349*** (0.038)
Policy: transport		-0.058 (0.042)		-0.012 (0.042)	-0.049 (0.042)
Constant	-1.229*** (0.062)	-1.211*** (0.070)	0.194* (0.102)	0.237** (0.106)	-0.729*** (0.117)
Observations	13,463	13,463	13,463	13,463	13,463
R <sup>2</sup>	0.051	0.081	0.012	0.044	0.084
Log Likelihood	65,427.420	65,559.460	65,255.000	65,391.100	65,572.430

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01



**Figure 4.1. Marginal effects: Predictions of share of corporations in articles based on changes in complexity and accessibility of the text (based on model 5)**

The second plot in Figure 4.1. displays a different trend than expected: the more readable (i.e. accessible) the text is, the higher the predicted share of corporations in the article. As with text technicality, the findings are robust across all models that include text readability (2,4,5). The strength of this effect is much weaker than the effect of text technicality (see Figure 2). The share of corporations mentioned in each newspaper article drops from 51% at the first quartile of the Coleman-Liau index distribution (=10.6) to 46% at the thirist quartile (=12.4). This finding is not in line with our expectations. A possible explanation could be that corporations are not necessarily afraid to take a risk and when seeking to maximize influence, they want to ensure that their specific constituency understands the coverage. Another explanation for this finding is that journalists nowadays use readability scores for articles in order to make it accessible to the reader. To ensure that the observed effects are generally present across topics (independent of the policy area), we ran additional models that do not control for the policy area (appendix G). The results are very similar to the findings presented above.

## 4.6. DISCUSSION

Research on the involvement of corporations in political news coverage states that, on the one hand, business interests, and corporations more specifically, are not too keen to be seen in publicly visible arenas such as the media. They are thought to avoid such arenas in order to avoid the scope of conflict from expanding (see e.g. Bernhagen & Trani, 2012; Dür et al., 2015), and to reduce the risk of receiving scrutiny from the public regarding their legitimacy (Hart, 2004; Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997). On the other hand, another strand of literature illustrates that corporations are amongst the most dominant players when it comes to gaining access to the media arena (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b; Danielian & Page, 1994; Van der Graaf et al., 2016). While corporations are thus thought to prefer insider strategies, they dominate political news compared to other types of organized interests.

This paper asked how these findings should be interpreted. It argues that corporations use multiple strategies, such as interacting directly with policy-makers and employing media strategies, in order to maximize their influence (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; Beyers, 2004; Kriesi et al., 2007). When engaging in media strategies they are thought to do so with a specific goal and target group, in order to signal expertise to specific constituencies (see Beyers, 2004). We also expected journalists to be more inclined to consult business interests compared to other groups when covering issues with a technical nature as this is part of businesses' core activities and therefore they tend to have more knowledge on such matters (Albæk, 2011; Bouwen, 2002; De Bruycker, 2016). As a consequence, we expected corporations to be involved in coverage that is both technical and not necessarily accessible to the public at large.

The paper found that corporations are indeed more likely to be involved in political news coverage with a technical nature compared to other types of organized interests. This is an important finding as it highlights for the first time that the nature of news coverage in which corporations appear can in some contexts be different from news coverage in which other types of organized interests appear. The results also illustrate that this coverage is not necessarily less accessible; on the contrary, corporations are more likely to appear in news that is more accessible to the general reader.

These findings are important as they tell us more about the nature of how key players of the political process are involved in political news. In doing so, this paper adds to the strands of literature on how organized interests employ public strategies (see e.g. Beyers, 2004; Kollman, 1998; Thrall, 2006), and it provides more context to the branch of

## Chapter 4. Signaling Expertise through the Media?

research on appearances of organized interests in the news media (see e.g. Binderkrantz et al., 2017; Danielian & Page, 1994). What is more, it implies that the coverage in which they appear is more accessible than initially thought, which is a positive finding for the functioning of our democracies. That is, newspapers are an important source for citizens to learn about politics and thus form a well-informed opinion (Danielian & Page, 1994). For this very reason, coverage on key players in politics should be accessible.

Importantly, while this research aimed to study technicality and accessibility of policy news in which corporations appear while controlling for policy area, some interesting differences between policy areas were observed as well. While zooming in on these differences and the possible related mechanisms falls outside of the scope of this paper, this would be an interesting avenue for future research. It is also important to note that this study did not examine the nature of appearances of corporations on social media channels. Although a majority of citizens source their news from either print (decreasingly) and online (increasingly) news media, a considerable share also consumes news via social media (Geiger, 2019). Due to the different structure and communicational dynamics (e.g. short messages instead of full articles, direct interaction between originator and audience, different audiences), we could expect varying behavior of corporations on these platforms. Therefore, future research could provide a more nuanced image of how corporations (and other stakeholder groups) appear on online news platforms and social media channels.

Although this study provided some important findings, there are two key limitations that are important to highlight. First, this paper only sheds light on the context in which corporations are involved in news coverage, and does not necessarily grasp the motivations from corporations to become involved in news coverage. We tried to incorporate agency of the corporations by including organizations that are already active on a policy issue, and by tracing them in news coverage on these same issues. Still, conducting a survey experiment or in-depth interviews to grasp the motivations behind corporations incorporating the media in their strategies would be interesting avenues for future research. Such endeavors could also tap into internal mechanisms within corporations by looking into which departments and professionals take the lead when pursuing outside strategies. Are public affairs managers in charge or rather communication specialists or a combination of these?

Second, it needs to be acknowledged that this article makes an argument about a general mechanism that concerns the media strategies and appearance of corporations. The authors expect that there might be important differences between corporations

concerning how media strategies are approached. It could be the case for example that some companies tend to pursue an overall low key strategy due to the core business that they operate in and the associated criticism that is targeted at the concerning sector. That is, companies operating in the chemical industry are probably more likely to face public scrutiny compared to businesses that produce electric bicycles. Another factor that might be important here is the issue that is at stake. The strategy of choice is expected to be influenced by the issue as companies might be more inclined to communicate openly about corporate social responsibility activities they are engaging in compared to when it is discovered that the corporation engaged in tax avoidance. When an issue thus might hurt their image, corporations are expected to be more inclined to employ a strategy that avoids the public spotlight. Further research is needed to explore these differences.

To conclude, with this paper we aimed to provide a better understanding of the way in which corporations are involved in political news. As they are dominant players in contemporary democracies, we hope that scholars are keen to further explore motivations behind the lobbying behavior of these key political actors through the media and beyond.



# Chapter 5.

**Salience and Conflict as Drivers  
of Corporate Lobbying?  
An Elite Survey Experiment**

## 5.1. INTRODUCTION

Do issue characteristics influence the lobbying strategies of corporations? This paper asks whether saliency and conflict have an effect on the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via a business association. Answering this question is important as business interests have an advantaged position within the interest group system compared to groups that represent diffuse interests (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Olson, 1965). When corporations start lobbying alone as a result of conflict with their business association, this could lead to a situation where members start engaging in solo lobbying endeavors for interests that are more self-oriented, narrow and less moderate as opposed to when lobbying via the association as this process is simply less democratic (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Hart, 2004; Martin, 2005; Martin and Swank, 2004; Salisbury, 1984). When corporations lobby alone on issues of low saliency, the scope of the issue tends to be smaller, meaning that corporations would have more leeway in influencing policy. What is more, solo lobbying endeavors by corporations have shown to be a strong predictor of lobbying success (Chalmers, 2018). Moreover, individual lobbying activity by corporations is thought to be able to contribute to fragmented interest systems and eventually policy outcomes.

This article thus aims to study whether issue characteristics affect corporate lobbying behavior. In doing so, it attempts to make a theoretical contribution to the interest group literature and more specifically one on the behavior of key business actors in the interest group system. Previous research has addressed drivers of corporate lobbying behavior at organizational (Boies, 1989; Coen, 1997; Bouwen, 2002; Grant, 1989), sector (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Grier et al, 1994) and structural level (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998). While we know that issue characteristics affect lobby strategies of organized interests, we do not know if and in what way they can account for the decision for corporations to lobby alone or via an association. This study takes explanatory factors at the issue level as a point of departure by arguing that issue drivers are essential in order to fully understand the motivations behind the decision for corporations to lobby alone or via their association.

The study poses two important arguments. First, it argues that a low degree of saliency on an issue has a positive effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby alone rather than via a business association and expects the mechanism to be vice versa for high saliency on an issue. This is expected as corporations are thought to prefer to decrease visibility when lobbying on an issue so that the odds of facing public scrutiny concerning their legitimacy are kept at a minimum (Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997;

Hart, 2004) and business associations are expected to step back from an issue that is low in salience (Chalmers, 2018). Second, it argues that conflict on an issue can affect the organizational relationship between the corporation and the business association. That is, it is expected that when there is conflict on an issue, this might have a negative effect on the organizational relationship that the corporation and business association have. When such conflict occurs, this article expects that it has a positive effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby alone rather than via a business association. In the absence of conflict, corporations are expected to be more inclined to lobby via their business association as it should not affect their relationship. This is hypothesized as business associations often have a difficult task in accommodating all the different interests of their members. When they are successful in doing so, corporations are expected to be more inclined to tag along with their association. When levels of conflict between the association and its members increase however, corporations could feel less content with the representation of the business association and are therefore urged to seek other modes of interest representation such as going alone.

The arguments are tested through a 2x2 elite survey experiment among German and Dutch corporate lobbyists. This paper therewith offers a unique insight in decisions that corporate lobbyists make concerning their strategies as experimental designs are hardly employed within the literature on lobbying and interest groups (but see LaPira, 2008; Furnas et al., n.d.). The two countries under study were selected as most of the research on corporate lobbying has been conducted in distinct pluralist contexts such as the US, UK or the institutions of the European Union (e.g. Boies, 1989; Salisbury, 1984; Chalmers, 2018). The current research endeavor is conducted in a corporatist context as little research has been conducted in such a context. Both Germany and the Netherlands form least likely cases as corporatist contexts are thought to be consensus oriented where governments share a part of their power with umbrella organizations such as unions or business associations (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). Corporations therefore, are not by default incentivized to lobby on their own behalf in within such arrangements.

The results of this study show that salience does not affect the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via an association, indicating that corporations are not necessarily afraid of facing public scrutiny when lobbying. The findings of this study do indicate that conflict affects corporate lobbying behavior. It does so in two ways: when there is conflict between the corporation and business association, corporations are more inclined to lobby alone. When conflict is absent, corporations prefer associational lobbying, indicating that in order to understand the organizational relation between

the corporation and association as trigger for lobbying behavior, the issue level is a fruitful point of departure. These findings raise mixed normative apprehensions. First, it is a positive finding that corporations do not seem to necessarily aim to lobby alone under the radar. That is, when their lobby behavior is not necessarily less visible, it does not interfere with the possibility for actors such as citizens to criticize their behavior or other organized interests to mobilize on the issue as well. Second, the finding on conflict is associated with more cause for concern. That is, when corporations' interests are not channeled via business associations, their individual lobby behavior could contribute to more fragmented pressure systems and policy outcomes. When conflict triggers such behavior, this indicates that when business associations fail to find a common stance which accommodates most of their members, this affects the relationship between corporations and their business associations. As a result, corporations are inclined to engage in individual lobbying activity, even in contexts that are characterized by consensus-oriented deliberation.

## **5.2. EXPLANATORY FACTORS OF CORPORATE LOBBYING BEHAVIOR**

Within the current literature on corporate lobbying, three main levels of explanatory factors of the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via an association can be identified. That is, there are explanations on organizational, sectoral and structural level. Existing arguments on the organizational and sectoral level are largely derived from the standard profit-seeking model. This model has been tested in the context of corporate lobbying in the US (Grier et al., 1994) and a modified version of that in the European Union as well (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009). The theoretical argument of this model suggests that corporations become politically active in order to generate benefits both from incentives offered and the coercive powers used by policy-makers (Ibidem).

A first line of arguments at organizational level, focuses on how characteristics of corporations and their relationship to government affects the likelihood of them to lobby solo or via an association. On this level, it is argued and showed that firm size matters (Boies, 1989; Grier et al., 1994). As Bernhagen and Mitchell (2009:159) eloquently argue: "large firms with sufficient resources, a stake in the policy issue and the size to attract the attention of regulators will be more likely to lobby". The authors show that both firm size and government involvement in the operations of the corporation affect the likelihood of individual lobbying by corporations (Ibidem). Government involvement can be procurement, subsidies or regulation (Ibidem). Both Boies (1989) and Bernhagen

and Mitchell (2009) emphasize the importance of the effect on corporate lobbying of regulation and legal actions taken against the corporation.

A second set of existing explanatory factors can be categorized at sectoral level. Building on the idea that corporations which can obtain greater benefits from government such as large firms, Grier and colleagues (1994) argue and show that actually generating such benefits are dependent upon the costs that are associated with cooperation and collective action endeavors. That is, the share of the benefit that is obtainable needs to be sufficient enough so that engaging in corporate lobbying in order to generate that benefit is worthwhile (see Olson, 1965; Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009). This reasoning is related to small sized or concentrated industries (Zardkoohi, 1985) as the fraction of the benefit for the corporation is higher, as well as to firm size because the odds of realizing a substantial benefit increases when the firm is large (see Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009 for an elaborate discussion).

The third branch of arguments is centered around factors that are more structural in nature. The most developed one in this sense is an argument that can be referred to as the *economic stress* mechanism (Lowery & Gray, 1998). This reasoning departs from the idea that it can be challenging for business associations to accommodate the interests of their members. That is especially the case for diverse and large organizations and less so for smaller or more homogenous associations (see both Aldrich et al., 1990 and Wilson, 1973). This mechanism strengthens when economies are under stress. That is, when there is less money to go around, it might even be harder for associations to meet all the different wishes from members (Lowery & Gray, 1998). The members might therewith opt for other modes of representation such as going alone and thus when economies are in downturn, corporations might increasingly start lobbying solo to ensure that their interests are represented (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a).

Other arguments at this structural level are less developed, most are centered around government size and their political orientation. Government size can play a role as their scope is related to policy impact, expenditures and potential advantages that they can offer or the threat they could form to corporations. As these aspects are simply larger compared to the costs that are involved when lobbying solo, corporations might be more inclined to engage in such strategies (see Esty & Caves, 1983; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Salisbury, 1984; Wilson-Gentry et al., 1991). Political orientation of government can also have an impact on the lobby endeavors of corporations. They are thought to be more inclined to lobby alone when the government has a right-wing orientation as capital is thought to have better ties with right-wing and liberal politicians. What is more, as

corporations are thought to lobby on more narrow issues when going solo, they are more inclined to target their friends (Gullberg, 2008; Kollman, 1997).

More recently, work by Chalmers (2018) explored novel explanatory factors of corporate lobbying endeavors. Chalmers engages in a broader argument about the contingent nature of success of financial industry lobbying endeavors. More specifically, the study aims to find out whether lobbying success is a function of how well the industry is able to speak with a unified voice. It shows that solo lobbying strategies by financial firms are strong predictors of success. More importantly, the author argues that the decision for corporations to lobby alone rather than via an association, a strategy that the author refers to as 'Control' can possibly be explained by associations that are stepping back on actively lobbying because of 'the inability to form consensus on a matter or the unwillingness (perhaps of low salience on the issue) to do so' (Chalmers, 2018:11). The author thus hints at either salience or organizational conflict on an issue and the difficulty for business associations as a result to reach consensus among its membership. Control could thus signal conflict among industry members on certain issues and the level of salience might also play an important role. 'Delegation' occurs when the corporation delegates the interest representation to the business association, this is likely to happen when corporations wish to avoid the public spotlight due to the possibility that they might face criticism from the public (Chalmers, 2018). The current paper builds on these insights on both salience and conflict as predictors of corporate lobbying behavior. In doing so, it aims to find out: do these mechanisms matter and if so, which matters the most? The next section elaborates on both mechanisms and explains in what way they are different from one another. Subsequently arguments are derived on how they are expected to affect solo and associational lobbying endeavors of corporations.

### **5.3. HOW ISSUE CHARACTERISTICS CAN AFFECT CORPORATE LOBBYING STRATEGIES: A SALIENCE AND CONFLICT ARGUMENT**

Issue-level characteristics have spiked the interest of a broad range of political scientists over the past decades. Varying from studies related to European Parliament Elections (De Vries et al., 2011) and research in the field of political communication (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015) to interest group research (Dür & Mateo, 2015; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018). The latter strand of research is thought to be inspired by research on politicization (De Bruycker, 2017; De Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter & Grande, 2014) in which

important dimensions of the phenomenon are identified. These dimensions are all associated with dynamics that can either broaden or narrow the scope of a policy issue (Schattschneider, 1960). The two issue characteristics of interest, salience and conflict, both stem from these literatures.

Salience of a policy issue can mean many things (see Beyers et al., 2018 for a recent discussion). It can refer to the degree of attention by the public or political actors such as party members or government. In this study, it is understood as the former, that is, the degree of importance that the public assigns to an issue (Wlezien, 2005). Within the interest group literature, it is widely acknowledged that lobbying on salient issues provides stronger incentives for groups that represent public interests – such as NGOs or consumer organizations – than for business groups. This can be explained by three broader arguments. First, groups that represent public interests, naturally have better ties with the public and are therefore more inclined to take up positions that are salient among them (De Bruycker, 2017; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018; Kollman, 1998). Second, these groups survive through attracting and maintaining members and therefore need to be visible. Such visibility can best be generated by showing their members that they are active on issues that are salient to them (see Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018). Third, while business interests are usually more advantaged compared to groups that represent diffuse interests in both the interest system (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Olson, 1965) and political system (Swank, 1992:38; Lindblom, 1977; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1998), policymakers and politicians are thought to be more inclined to be attentive to public interests when they are salient (De Bruycker, 2017).

What do these mechanisms imply for the lobbying behavior of corporations? The degree of salience is expected to affect the strategies initiated by them. That is, as business interests more generally are thought to focus on political arenas that are not so visible to the public compared to groups that represent public interests (Culpepper, 2010; Dür et al., 2015; Salisbury, 1984), they are also less incentivized to lobby on publicly salient issues. More specifically, business interests are expected to avoid the public spotlight in order to reduce the risk of facing scrutiny from the public concerning their legitimacy (Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997; Hart, 2004). Business interests therefore are expected to be most active on issues that are characterized by a low degree of salience (De Bruycker, 2017). Yet, a difference is expected in the behavior between business associations and corporations.

Business associations are dependent upon their membership for survival. They therefore have to show to their members that they are actively representing their

interests whereas corporations do not face this pressure. When salience is low, lobbying on that issue might be interesting or necessary for only few members of the association and as associational lobbying is characterized by interest accommodation, associations are thought to focus on issues that are important for most or all members (Chalmers, 2018:5; Gray et al., 2004:19). On issues of low salience, business associations are thus more inclined to step back from lobbying actively, while corporations are thought to take their chances by simultaneously keeping the risk of public scrutiny at a minimum. On issues of high salience, corporations are expected to prefer to let the business association lobby for them for the very same reason. That is, through associational lobbying, it might not become apparent right away that a specific corporation is lobbying on an issue to the public, making them less susceptible to criticism. In turn, when issues are characterized by a high degree of salience, business associations might have to step their game up. That is, when an issue is high in salience, the odds are that the concerning issue is of importance to a large share of the membership of the association, urging it to actively lobby on such an issue.

*H1: Salience on an issue has a negative effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby alone rather than via a business association.*

*H1a: Salience on an issue has a positive effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby via an association rather than alone.*

The second phenomenon under study, conflict, is understood as the degree on which organized interests disagree on a certain policy issue (De Bruycker, 2017). Just as the *economic stress* argument (Lowery & Gray, 1998), the conflict argument departs from the idea that business associations engage in the highly complex and important task to channel and accommodate the interests of their members. This is expected to be even harder for organizations that have a diverse and large membership group compared to more homogeneous and smaller associations (Aldrich et al., 1990; Wilson, 1973). When the degree of conflict among members is high on a specific policy issue, it is expected that business associations will not always be able to find a common ground and to translate this into a lobbying strategy that serves all or even most. This mechanism is expected to influence the contentment of the relationship that the corporation has with its business association. That is, when the corporation does not agree or is less satisfied about the stance and how the business association will lobby on a certain issue, it is expected to seek other modes of interest representation. Such behavior is similar to venue shifting activities to harmonious venues by corporations as a result of moving their lobbying endeavors away from venues where the relations between government

and business are conflictual (Marshall & Bernhagen, 2017). It is thus expected that when corporations do not agree with the approach of the business association, they are more inclined to lobby alone. Vice versa, it is expected that when such conflict is absent, corporations are more likely to delegate the lobbying to the association.

*H2: Conflict on an issue between corporations and business associations has a positive effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby alone rather than via a business association.*

*H2a: Conflict on an issue between corporations and business associations has a negative effect on the degree of willingness of corporations to lobby via the association than alone.*

## 5.4. DATA AND METHODS

### *Design*

A survey experiment has been conducted to test whether salience and conflict have an effect on corporate lobbying behavior. While the use of survey experiments is common in political science research (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; Lupu, 2013) it has not been employed widely in the field of interest group research and studies on lobbying. By employing vignettes that describe scenarios, this study aims to grasp whether issue characteristics affect the decision of corporations to engage in solo lobbying endeavors or via a business association. This method provides experimental realism yet maintains a high level of internal validity (Mutz, 2011). The vignettes describe a scenario in which a tax issue is presented that comes close to a realistic situation, yet the variables of interest of this study salience and conflict were manipulated. Based on the presented issue, corporate lobbyists had to opt for a lobby strategy of choice.

The design of this study is a 2(salience: high and low) by 2(conflict: high and low) between-subjects design. All participants were exposed to the same issue and randomly assigned to two of the conditions. The study was pre-registered at [Aspredicted.org](https://aspredicted.org).

### *Data and sample*

For this study data was collected in Germany and the Netherlands. Two databases of corporate lobbyists and their contact details were constructed. Because organized interests operate in relative secrecy compared to political parties or political leaders, it can be a challenging task to collect data on this group. For the Netherlands, a

combination of the full list of members of the Dutch Association of Public Affairs<sup>30</sup> and datasets that were constructed by the author for different research endeavors were employed (see Aizenberg, 2020 for a discussion). In order to construct the database for Germany, the lobby register of the Bundestag<sup>31</sup> and the register of the German Association for Public Affairs Professionals<sup>32</sup> were employed. This resulted in a database of 1.000 companies (500 per country), ranging from business active within a wide range of sectors, which were all approached through Qualtrics and phone by a team of student assistants.

### ***Stimulus material***

Each respondent was exposed to a scenario written in text in which a situation is described. Before seeing the scenario, the participants were instructed that a hypothetical scenario concerning a policy issue was about to be presented. The respondents were asked to read through the scenario carefully and to imagine the situation as if they were actually experiencing it. The vignette describes a scenario in which a new tax proposal is presented by the relevant Minister in each country. The proposal concerns the raise of corporate tax which affects the financial situation of corporations across different sectors substantially, an issue that was selected as this is thought to be an important issue to corporations as it directly affects them. The scenario describes that therefore, the company decides to lobby on this issue to prevent the bill from passing. In order to keep the scenario as close as possible to a real world experience, the presented frame of the issue was selected as organized interests are thought to be more inclined to lobby when a policy proposal affects them (Chalmers, 2018). This is an important aspect as this paper aims to measure lobbying behavior.

The vignette then continues to describe that the main business association in the concerning industry has put out a statement in which it announces its stance on the proposal and the intended lobbying strategy. The scenario subsequently describes that corporations as members agree (no conflict condition) or disagree (conflict condition) with the general stance of the association on the issue and the initiatives the association is planning to undertake. In the remainder of the vignette, the conditions of saliency are presented. That is, the tax proposal has either not received (low saliency condition) or received (high saliency condition) a great deal of attention. The stimulus material was pre-tested by different lobbyists whom were asked to assess it on credibility, whether it is easy to comprehend and whether the issue invoked active lobbying behavior (an

30 The full list can be found here: <https://bvpa.nl/leden/ledenlijst>

31 The full register can be found here: <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/189456/925-cafb1b852e9b692fba1d115b1ccd6/lobbylisteamtlich-data.pdf>

32 <https://degepol.squarespace.com/persoenliche-mitglieder>

English translation of the stimulus material can be found in Appendix 5.1).

### ***Procedure***

The participants were invited to complete the questionnaire online. The study starts with a general briefing and an informed consent question. They were then asked to answer questions about characteristics of the company that they work for, their responsibilities within their job and their memberships with business associations. Subsequently, the lobbyists were randomly assigned to two of the conditions. Based on the vignette they were exposed to, the participants were asked to state how likely it is for them to engage in representation via the business association or on their own behalf. The study followed with a credibility check, manipulation and recall check, demographics and a debriefing.

### ***Measures***

This study assesses whether issue characteristics have an effect on the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via an association. On this level of analysis, Chalmers (2018) has made important first steps by measuring this behavior via document coding and interviews. This is the first time however, that this specific behavior was studied via a survey experiment. Based on the described scenarios, participants could indicate how likely it is for them to opt for the following lobby strategies: *representation via the business association* and *representation on own behalf*. Answers were assessed on a 7-point scale respectively ranging from *very unlikely* to *very likely*.

To ensure that participants were actually properly exposed to the vignettes, a compliance check was included that asked whether the respondents had carefully read the scenario before they were redirected to the dependent variable question. A credibility check was also carried out by asking how likely it is that the participant would encounter such a scenario in their professional lives. The answers were assessed through a 7-point scale ranging from *very unlikely* to *very likely*. The vignettes were furthermore designed to manipulate salience and conflict. The questionnaire therefore asked whether the scenarios included these treatments in order to check whether the manipulation worked and if these elements could be recalled.

## **5.5. RESULTS**

The analyses that will be presented in this section were carried out on the full sample. Before turning to the variables under study, the current section will first discuss the results of checks regarding credibility, compliance and manipulation of the stimulus

material. The scenarios were perceived as rather credible across conditions ( $M=4.96$ ,  $SD=2.56$ ). The manipulation of saliency and conflict worked reasonably well as 62.5% was able to recall the correct treatments of their vignette, that is whether they were exposed to a conflict, no conflict and high or low saliency. The two dependent variables of interest (Representation on own behalf:  $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=1.85$ , Skewness=  $-.20$ , Kurtosis= $-1.19$  (scale:1-7) and representation via business association  $M=4.86$ ,  $SD=1.81$ , Skewness=  $-.45$ , Kurtosis= $-0.93$  (scale:1-7)) show a mean slightly under the median and a skewed shape. These descriptive numbers indicate that the data is not characterized by a normal distribution and the Shapiro-Wilk normality test indeed indicates that both variables are not normally distributed ( $W=0.90$   $p < .000$  for representation via the business association and  $W=0.91$   $p < .000$  for lobbying alone).

In order to test whether the independent variables under study have a significant effect on the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via an association, regression models were employed. The analysis first focuses on saliency as predictor and subsequently turns to conflict. As can be seen in the first table, saliency shows a negative effect on the decision of corporations to lobby alone. The direction of this effect is in line with the expectation that was formulated. This also holds for the positive effect it has on the decision to lobby via an association as is displayed in Table 2. Both effects however are non-significant, indicating that *hypotheses 1 and 1a* do not receive support.

Turning to conflict, the regression provides a positive effect on individual corporate lobbying that is significant at the 0.1 level. Vice versa, conflict has a negative significant effect on associational lobbying. These effects have the expected directions and provide at least some support to *hypotheses 2 and 2a* that corporations are more likely to lobby alone in case of a conflict between them and their business association and prefer associational lobbying in case of the absence of conflict.

**Table 5.1. Explaining individual corporate lobbying across treatment groups**

	<i>coef</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>SE</i>
Saliency	-0.04	.93	0.44
Conflict	0.79	.07	0.42
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04		
N	73		

Note: this table displays the results of an OLS regression and unstandardized effects are presented

**Table 5.2. Explaining associational corporate lobbying across treatment groups**

	<i>coef</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>SE</i>
Saliency	0.24	.56	0.41
Conflict	-1.25	.00	0.41
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12		
N	73		

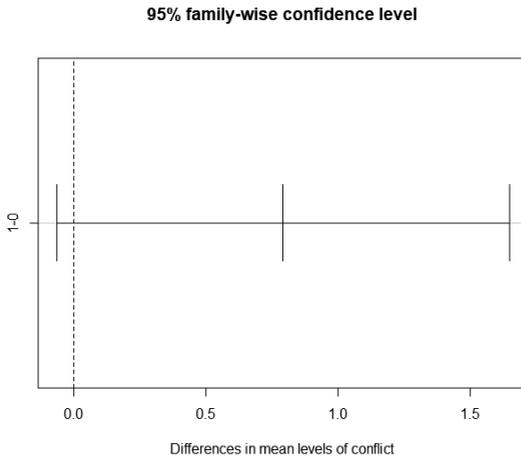
Note: this table displays the results of an OLS regression and unstandardized effects are presented

In order to test the robustness of the acquired results of this study, post hoc tests were conducted. First, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess whether there are differences between the groups. Subsequently, a Tukey test was conducted to assess where the differences can be found. Second, as this study is characterized by a relatively low number of participants, post hoc power tests were carried out.<sup>33</sup> Usually, power analyses are conducted before the data of a study are collected. In this case however, there is no existing benchmark study to compare it with and a pretest of such kind was therefore not among the options.

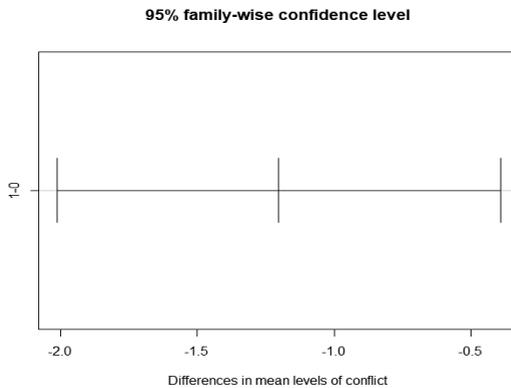
The Tukey test that is presented here, concerns a pairwise comparison of the mean levels of conflict across treatment groups for individual lobbying (Figure 1.) and associational lobbying (Figure 2.). Both the ANOVA and Tukey test are carried out to test whether the significant findings of the regression are robust. As can be seen in Figure 1. the difference between mean levels concerns 0.79 and is still significant at the .1 level. Figure 2. displays a difference of 1.20 between mean levels which is significant below .01. This test thus seems to indicate that the findings on conflict seem to be quite robust.

<sup>33</sup> For both post hoc tests, a one-way ANOVA model was employed as input

**Chapter 5. Salience and Conflict as Drivers of Corporate Lobbying?**



**Figure 5.1: difference in mean levels across treatment groups for individual corporate lobbying. Note: difference is 0.79 and  $p < 0.1$**



**Figure 5.2: difference in mean levels across treatment groups for associational corporate lobbying. Note: difference is 1.20 and  $p < .01$**

A post hoc power test was conducted to calculate the ability of this study to detect the actual effect size that is estimated (see also Gillett, 1994). More specifically, in this case it is of interest to determine whether the number of participants is sufficient. This

test was conducted by employing the package *WebPower* in Rstudio.<sup>34</sup> This endeavor calculated the power of each predictor of this study given the number of treatment groups, number of participants, the F-statistic of the model and the significance level. It indicates that for lobbying alone, the predictor conflict has 100% power and salience only has 10% power. For associational lobbying, conflict has 100% power and salience has 40%. This post hoc power test thus reveals that there is sufficient power associated to conflict, yet this is different for salience. It might thus be the case that no effect was found due to the lack in power of this study.

## 5.6. DISCUSSION

This article asked whether issue characteristics influence corporate lobbying behavior. It argued more specifically, that both salience and conflict have an effect on the decision of corporations to lobby alone or via an association. This study showed that salience does not have an effect on this decision but that conflict does. Corporations are more inclined to lobby alone when there is conflict between the corporation and business association, when such conflict is absent, they prefer associational lobbying. The former finding on salience indicates that corporations do not necessarily prefer to avoid the spotlight and therewith scrutiny from the public concerning their legitimacy (Hart, 2004; Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997). That is, they do not seem to prefer to lobby alone under the radar when salience on an issue is low or safely through the business association when salience is high.

These findings make an important theoretical contribution. They highlight that, in addition to drivers at organizational (Boies, 1989; Coen, 1997; Bouwen, 2002; Grant, 1989), sector (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Grier et al, 1994) and structural level (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Lowery & Gray, 1998), factors at the issue level can also explain corporate lobbying behavior. More specifically, they indicate that in order to fully understand corporate lobby behavior and the decision to become active by themselves or via an association can be explained through issues. The paper shows that it is not necessarily salience that seems to matter for this decision but that it is rather conflict on an issue that can affect the organizational relation between the corporation and the business association. These findings are in line with the idea that conflict can affect the strategies of corporations, yet also show that salience is of less importance to corporations when deciding on their lobby strategies (Chalmers, 2018). Second,

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34 See the following documentation for more information on the *WebPower* package in Rstudio: <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/WebPower/WebPower.pdf>

although business interests and especially corporations are thought to be different from interest groups when it comes to the nature of their political behavior (Hart, 2004), this study shows that issue characteristic not only matter for how organized interests behave (Baumgartner et al., 2009; De Bruycker, 2017; Dür et al., 2015; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018; Wonka et al. 2018) but also affect the political behavior of corporations. These results matter for our understanding of why corporations opt for associational lobbying which tends to focus their attention to goals and ambitions inspired by a collective and concerns that are shared more broadly (Gray et al., 2004; Martin, 2005; Martin and Swank, 2004; Wilson, 1973:310) and why corporations decide to go it alone where liaison with peers is minimal and their interests tend to be more narrow, self-oriented and less moderate (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020a; Hart, 2004; Salisbury, 1984). The specific results of this study imply that corporations are not as avoidant of the risks that are associated to lobbying alone on salient issues as initially thought. This can be perceived as a positive implication for the functioning of our democracies. That is, when the lobby endeavors of corporations are not necessarily less visible, their activity does not interfere with the option for actors such as citizens to criticize this behavior or other for organizations to also mobilize on the concerning issue. The results on conflict imply more cause for concern. That is, when corporations opt to lobby alone as a result of it, their interests are not channeled via business associations and their behavior could therewith contribute to pressure systems that are fragmented (Gray et al., 2004) which could eventually lead to biased policy outcomes. When conflict triggers such behavior, this indicates that when business associations fail to find a common stance which accommodates most of their members, this affects the relationship between corporations and their business associations. As a result, corporations are inclined to engage in individual lobbying activity, even in contexts that are characterized by consensus-oriented deliberation.

In addition, this paper also makes an empirical and methodological contribution to the field. First, it shows for the first time in a corporatist set-up that when corporations disagree with their business associations, they will go it alone. This is an interesting finding as these arrangements are thought to be characterized by interest representation that is consensus oriented and where business interests are channeled via umbrella organizations (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). Second, experimental designs are hardly used in interest group research. To the authors knowledge, this is the third time that such a design has been employed in the field (see LaPira, 2008; Furnas et al., n.d.). While experimental studies can yield results that are high in internal validity, the field is dominated by large survey studies. As this study perfectly illustrates, experimental designs can allow for testing of theories on strategies and could also improve the

knowledge that we have on mechanisms that affect mobilization and influence of organized interests. These would be interesting avenues for further research to pursue. While the study contributed to our knowledge on corporate lobbying behavior, the study has some limitations that are worth discussing. The first is related to the number of participants that took part in this study. Although the population of corporate lobbyists is obviously smaller than the number of citizens in a country, the N of this study is quite low. It should be noted that a great effort has been put in collecting sufficient responses by a team of student assistants that contacted possible respondents both online and by phone. Nonetheless, the low number of participants could lead to power problems. A post hoc power test was therefore conducted which indicated that the study yielded sufficient power to detect the estimated effect for conflict, however not for salience. This indicates that the null findings produced for salience might be incorrect. More research is therefore needed to assess the influence of salience on corporate lobbying strategies. A second limitation of this study is that the respondents were exposed to just one issue concerning corporate tax. This issue was selected as most corporations are thought to care about tax issues and only one was included in the vignette due to the major time constraints that corporate lobbyists face. It could be the case however, that the findings of this study are caused by exposure to this issue. Follow up studies therefore need to be conducted where different issues are employed.

To conclude, this article contributes to our theoretical knowledge on organizational drivers of corporate lobbying as in order to understand organizational conflict as a trigger of corporate lobbying, this paper shows that the issue-level explanation is an important point of departure. In doing so, it brought us closer to understanding the circumstances in which corporations are driven to engage in lobby behavior that contributes to fragmented pressure systems and eventually policy outcomes. Through the current endeavor, the author sought to contribute to the literature by studying key players in the interest system in an institutional context that is underexplored by employing a design that has been rarely used within the interest group field. The author hopes that interest group scholars are now keener to explore the mechanisms of mobilization, strategies and ultimately influence by means of experimental designs.



# Chapter 6.

Text as data in interest group research

## 6.1. KEYWORDS

Text analysis, Computational methods, Interest groups

## 6.2. DEFINITION

Text analysis is highly useful for scholars working on lobbying and interest groups. It is a method through which organized interests, their positions on issues and the frames that they employ can be identified within bodies of text. This technique allows scholars to measure access to different types of venues and the policy positions that groups express. It can reveal patterns of populations and communities that can be used as (in)dependent variables. In turn, these can be linked to characteristics of organized interests, the context in which they operate and policy outcomes.

Analysis of content in texts can be best described as ‘the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics’(Neuendorf, 2002: 1). There are different types of text analysis and these types can usually best be described by the degree of human involvement in the coding process. The types range from human coding and supervised coding to unsupervised coding which are associated with different trade-offs when it comes to validity and reliability.

This chapter explains why text analysis is a useful method for interest group scholars, sheds light on the different types of text analysis, their benefits and limitations, notes the main empirical applications in the field of interest group research and discusses promising applications for future research.

## 6.3. INTRODUCTION

Studying the creature that is referred to as the interest group can be a challenging task. That is, interest groups operate in high numbers and often in relative secrecy, compared to political parties or political leaders. Interest group scholars therefore oftentimes have to be creative when they seek to study this phenomenon empirically.

Text analysis has been employed by several scholars – benefiting from the amount of available text that is vast and growing. Examples are the increasing online availability of transparency registers, press releases, minutes of parliamentary meetings, policy

documents and newspaper coverage. These documents can be used for text analysis and help scholars answer questions about patterns of interest group populations, access and influence (see chapters on interest group populations, interest group access and influence).

While surveys and interviews have enlightened us with important findings concerning the activity and impact of organized interests, text analysis can help to answer questions of a slightly different nature. That is, both surveys and interviews rely on data that is self-perceived while documents allow for measurement of observational data. What is more, it grants us access to view into the empirical world of the past.

This chapter proceeds with a discussion of the different types of text analysis and the associated trade-offs. Subsequently, it elaborates on the empirical studies within the field that have employed text analysis and illustrates some interesting applications for future research.

## **6.4. TEXT ANALYSIS AND TRADE-OFFS**

Text analysis can best be characterized by the degree of human involvement and varies from classic content analysis to unsupervised machine learning. Full manual coding can be carried out by employment of a pre-defined coding scheme. It is associated with high levels of validity and is technically easy to employ. It can, however, become procedurally complex as it often requires training of coders. Another advantage is that humans are able to understand phenomena from texts that are highly complex. The main disadvantage related to hand coding is that there are reliability issues related to this approach. Problems with reliability can especially occur when the coding task at hand is ambiguous and when there are multiple human coders involved as different coders could potentially understand the coding task in different ways. Reliability of manual coding can be evaluated on the basis of intercoderreliability tests and measures such as Krippendorff's alpha (see Krippendorff, 2004 for an elaborate discussion on different coefficients that exist to assess reliability). Hand-coding is also time-consuming and consequently requires a sufficient budget.

A second category of text analysis – computer assisted analysis – is characterized by less involvement of humans. Examples of methods that require the involvement of both humans and computers are querying and dictionary coding. Key words are central to both methods. Scholars can employ querying when interested in knowing how often a

certain word appears in a political text and dictionary coding when interested in broader phenomena. Dictionary coding relates certain words to categories that are pre-defined (see Laver & Garry, 2000 for an empirical example that estimates policy positions in political texts). Such methods employ the relative frequency of certain key words to measure categories (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). Another range of methods that belongs to this category are supervised machine learning techniques. Here, humans code a set of documents manually. The algorithm learns from the hand-coded dataset and applies the coding to the remainder of the documents. These methods can be validated with statistics of model performance and ensure scholars to create and implement clear concepts in their coding endeavors (see Grimmer & Stewart, 2013 for an elaborate discussion and Fraussen et al., 2018 for an application in the field). An example of such a technique is known as entity recognition (NER), which is a method that identifies and extracts entities such as events, people and places from a text corpus. NER applications based on dictionaries or unsupervised machine learning also exist (see Nadeau & Sekine, 2007 for an elaborate overview and discussion).

A third category can be placed on the other end of the continuum when it comes to human involvement. That is, unsupervised machine learning. This category refers to a “class of methods that learn underlying features of text without explicitly imposing categories of interest” (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013:281). Thus, for such methods it is not necessary to have a pre-defined set of categories one is interested in. Applying unsupervised learning techniques can be useful when one seeks to study a text corpus but is unsure which categories are of interest. An example is topic modelling such as latent dirichlet allocation (see both Blei et al., 2003 and Grimmer & Stuart, 2013 for more information and elaborate discussions on the method). Both R and Python are recommended for the management and analysis of text analysis. Suitable packages are *corpusTools* and *quanteda* (see Welbers et al., 2017 and Benoit et al., 2018 for further reading).

A major advantage associated with the usage of computers is that they are able to count quickly and can therewith work with large datasets in a relatively short period of time. Computers however, are able to count, yet cannot read texts as humans can. It is therefore of utmost importance to carry out extensive validity tests (see both Grimmer & Stewart, 2013 and Klüver, 2015: 460 for an elaborate discussion). It is furthermore important to note that any form of text analysis requires substantial effort to collect, preprocess and store the text documents of interests. Data collection can be done through manual downloading, bulk downloading or data scraping. The latter is an automated technique which reads, extracts and stores data in a desired structure and

place and can be carried out through R or Python. When the data of interest is collected, there is often quite some work to be done to preprocess the text in order to reduce dimensionality. Examples are the removal of stop words and punctuation.

## **6.5. APPLICATIONS OF TEXT ANALYSIS IN INTEREST GROUP RESEARCH**

Text analysis has been applied by several scholars in the field of interest group research. Ever since Schattschneider (1960) coined the term of bias in the pressure system, political scientists have been struggling with this concept both theoretically and empirically. That is, there is no yardstick against which to assess bias (see Lowery et al., 2015). Reflecting the call to study bias in the pressure system empirically, a strand of research has focused on assessing the appearance of organized interests in different political arenas. Binderkrantz (2012) for example, has assessed the diversity of interest group media attention in the Danish news media between 1984 and 2003. She shows that diversity has increased over time as both public and sectional groups gained more relative attention over time. The coding approach of this study was fully manual.

Others apply text analysis as well to study patterns of access. For instance, Aizenberg and Hanegraaff (2020a) employ data scraping and a query based method to identify the organized interests that gain access to parliamentary meetings in the Netherlands between 1970 and 2017. They find that corporate access to parliamentary hearings has increased and by employing it as a dependent variable, they show that it is triggered by economic downturns and new political opportunities. Fraussen and colleagues (2018) employ a query based method as well to identify organizations in parliamentary debates in Australia. In order to assess 'prominence' – operationalized as groups that are used as a resource by legislators – the authors use a supervised machine learning technique through which they show that the pattern of prominence is highly skewed to a small number of groups.

Text analysis is also applied by scholars interested in measuring the degree to which interest group policy positions and policy outcomes overlap. Klüver (2009) presents a case study in which she codes both texts of interest groups and the European Commission in the consultation process. She compares the results of hand-coding to the results of two automatic approaches, a supervised machine learning technique and an unsupervised machine learning approach. The results strongly correlate and thereby demonstrate that the techniques can be useful tools to measure overlap between

policy positions of interest groups and outcome. Similarly, Bunea and Ibenskas (2015) compare estimates of qualitative hand-coding and those of an unsupervised scaling approach in the same context, but, in contrast to Klüver, find little correlation between the two. The authors criticize the 'Bag of Words' approaches in quantitative text analysis as they neglect the broader context in which these words occur as well as the validity of an unsupervised machine learning approach, leading them to argue that employing unsupervised learning algorithms raises challenges when it comes to analyzing lobbying in the European Union.

In a response, Klüver (2015) addresses the issues raised by Bunea and Ibenskas (2015). She agrees that it is indeed a 'simplifying assumption' as language is contextual but argues that this does not mean that such analysis cannot provide valid results (Klüver, 2015:457). She emphasizes that quantitative text analysis techniques can be promising as long as scholars pay careful attention to the assumptions of the models and rely on both internal and external validation techniques such as hand-coding and cross-validation of the output with estimates of other quantitative text approaches as well as external substantive data (Klüver, 2015:460).

## **6.6. CONCLUSION**

Text analysis is a method through which one can systematically analyze characteristics of content. Political scientists studying organized interests and lobbying have used text documents as data sources to study interest group communities in different political arenas and linked policy positions of interest groups to policy outcomes. In doing so, they have benefited from the increasing availability of text corpora and have seized the opportunity to rely on observational data and the ability to shed light on the empirical world of the past. Interest group scholars which have employed text analysis for their endeavors have contributed to our knowledge in many ways, most notably on the shapes of interest group communities and preference attainment. Others have carefully shown that scholars need to be cautious when using these techniques as they can produce invalid findings. It is therefore of utmost importance that the researcher always carries out extensive internal and external validity checks on the produced findings.

Although caution is thus highly desired when relying on text analysis, it holds promising paths for future academic research. To date, however, text methods are not applied to their full potential in the field. With the right skill set, every political scientist working on lobbying and interest groups can exploit the vast amount of text that is available. A first

avenue for future research that is worth highlighting builds on the work on prominence that has been carried out by Fraussen and colleagues (2018). In their endeavor, they sought to not only identify stakeholders that participate in politics but also account for the context in which they do so in an automated manner. A different way to involve context, would be to apply clause analysis. This method automatically grasps the context in which political actors operate by extracting actions and statements of actors in an automatic manner from a text document (see Van Atteveldt et al., 2017).

A second interesting path for future studies would be to focus on the dynamics displayed on social media. An interesting example is set by Theocharis and colleagues (2016) who assessed Twitter's democratic promises by studying the interaction between party candidates and citizens through employing automated text analysis. Studying the interaction between organized interests, their members and political elites are all promising avenues for future research.



# Chapter 7.

Conclusion and discussion

## 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

To what extent do corporations lobby individually and which factors drive this activity? This dissertation studied the extent of individual corporate lobbying compared to associational corporate lobbying, and how far individual corporations are granted access to political systems in comparison to other organized interests. It also investigated which explanatory factors account for corporate access and lobbying behavior at the macro, meso and micro level of analysis. In order to engage with these questions, I studied the patterns and the nature of corporate access to different political venues, across countries and with a longitudinal perspective, and addressed drivers of these patterns and lobbying behavior with original data. This involved employing text collection and analysis methods as well as an experimental design.

In this final chapter, I summarize the results of the dissertation by elaborating on how these answer the research questions of this study. Based on these findings, I draw this dissertation's main theoretical and empirical conclusions. Subsequently, the implications of this study, both normative and societal, are discussed. The chapter continues with limitations, outlines for future research and concluding remarks.

### 7.1. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

RQ1: *To what extent do corporations lobby individually?*

The first empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) engaged with the question concerning the extent to which corporations lobby alone. They did so with different perspectives, yet all investigated the extent to which corporations are able to gain access to political systems. The thesis examined patterns of access to parliamentary hearings of corporations in comparison to other organized interests in the Netherlands during a timeframe of almost 50 years (Chapter 2). The study also investigated patterns of access to the media in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom during a time span of almost 30 years (Chapter 3). The fourth chapter studied access to the media as well, yet did so through a different angle than chapter three. It analyzed the nature of how corporations appear in the media debate on different policy domains in the U.K. through a complexity lens. I shall now shed light on the most important findings from these chapters, first elaborating on the extent of access that corporations gained to different venues, followed by the nature of it.

Previous scholarly work has illustrated that corporations are amongst the largest group of actors that gain access to political systems. This work, however, has had a strong focus on contexts characterized by pluralism such as that of the U.S., leaving a gap in our knowledge on arrangements characterized by corporatism. Within this latter context, business associations are thought to have a more privileged position compared to corporations when it comes to gaining access to the policy-making process. In a pluralist arrangement, it is supposed to be more common for individual corporations to be granted access to this process too. This scholarly endeavor illustrates for the first time that, in contrast to several decades ago, corporations have managed to increase their access to the political system in a corporatist context. What is more, it highlights that, corporations are currently the actors that gain most access to the political system as compared to other types of actors. A similar picture, again in a non-U.S. context, is seen in the media venue. That is, while the access of business associations to the political media debate has decreased, corporations have increased their degree of access. In the pluralist system of the UK, a rather stable pattern was revealed. Yet, also in this context, corporations gain the highest degree of access in comparison to other organized interests.

This dissertation also explored the nature of the appearance of corporations in the news media. It showed that corporations are more likely to be involved in media coverage that has a technical nature compared to other interest groups. This finding thereby illustrates for the first time that the nature of news coverage in which corporations appear, is different from the coverage in which other interest groups appear. And contrary to what was expected, such coverage is not necessarily less accessible to the general reader. What is more, corporations are more likely to appear in news coverage that is more accessible to the general reader compared to the coverage in which other organized interests appear.

RQ2: *Which factors drive this activity?*

The first and last empirical chapter of this dissertation (Chapters 2 and 5) tapped into the explanatory factors of individual corporate lobbying. Chapter 2 introduced a theoretical framework that incorporated both political-institutional and economic factors as structural drivers of individual corporate lobbying. It subsequently tested these in the Netherlands empirically with a longitudinal design. The fifth chapter introduced and tested theoretical ideas on how issue drivers may affect individual corporate lobbying. More specifically, it tested whether salience and conflict have an effect on the decision for corporations to lobby alone or via a business association.

Scholarly work on drivers of individual corporate lobbying behavior has had a focus on organizational (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Coen, 1997; Bouwen, 2002; Grant, 1982) and sectoral explanatory factors (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Grant et al., 1989; Grier et al., 1994; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Madeira, 2016), which can be categorized at the micro and meso levels of analysis. However, limited knowledge, exists regarding explanatory mechanisms at a macro level of analysis. Chapter two provided important insights into how structural explanatory factors could account for individual lobbying endeavors. The study showed that when the economy of a country is in a downturn, corporations as compared to other organized interests tend to interact with politicians more frequently. That is, the empirics revealed that when negative shocks occur in the state of the economy, individual access of corporations increase. This chapter also indicated that increased political opportunities and constraints are associated with higher degrees of individual corporate access. In this study, trigger events during the process of European integration were employed as a measure.

The last empirical chapter of this dissertation investigated whether issue characteristics affect the decision for corporations to lobby alone or via an association. It was found that salience does not affect corporate lobbying behavior. That is, corporations do not necessarily aim to lobby under the radar when salience is low. However, conflict does seem to matter and it does so in two ways: when there is conflict between corporations and their business associations, corporations tend to be more inclined to engage in solo lobbying endeavors. Vice versa, when such conflict is absent, corporations prefer to delegate the representation of their interests to the business association.

## 7.2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE THESIS

The current section takes a step back and discusses and reflects on what the empirical findings mean for our theoretical understanding of individual corporate lobbying. That is, it aims to engage with the question: which theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this dissertation? In the following, I will first reflect on how the empirics highlight that corporations are key actors within the interest system, even in contexts that we would not expect. The findings thus illustrate the need for scholarly recognition and focus on corporations as individual participants as part of the interest group system. Subsequently, I discuss the identified explanatory factors of individual corporate lobbying and discuss how some of these are very different from those underlying the lobby activity of interest groups with members.

### ***7.2.1 Corporations as key organized interests within corporatist contexts***

This thesis has shown that corporations are key players in the interest group system and manage to generate high levels of access, as compared to other organized interests, to different political venues over the past decades. The findings highlight the generalizability of findings on the same phenomenon in pluralist contexts (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout et al., 2018; Chalmers, 2013; Gray et al., 2004; Lowery et al., 2005; Salisbury, 1984; Schlozman, 1984,) and more importantly they illustrate the key role that corporations have in interest systems that are thought to be characterized by corporatist arrangements as well. That is, the collective findings of this thesis illustrate for the first time that corporations have managed to increase levels of access to politics over time in corporatist contexts. These findings are striking as when it comes to the representation of business interests in this context, business associations are thought to play a key role whereas corporations are not necessarily incentivized to interact with politicians directly. More specifically, in corporatist political systems, access for business interests is thought to be more restricted, with consultation of business associations being preferred to that of corporations so that the interests of this category are channeled and moderated. Within pluralist contexts, competition of many different organized interests aiming to generate access is seen as a way to reach moderation of these actors (Streeck & Kenworthy, 2005). In corporatist contexts therefore, corporations do not seem to be incentivized to lobby on their own behalf. It is thus quite surprising that corporations are found to be key participants in the political process within a context nowadays that is thought to be characterized by corporatism.

An important conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that in order to understand the patterns of the degree of access that organized interests gain to political systems, corporations must be taken into account, even within contexts characterized by corporatism. What is more, the findings of this thesis clearly indicate that in order to understand the presence of business interests in these settings, corporations cannot be overlooked as it might lead to inaccurate conclusions about the levels of access that this category of actors gains to politics. This conclusion is in line with claims made by scholars about the importance of corporations as individual actors in the interest system and their role in politics (see Baumgartner & Leech, 1999; Hart, 2004). That is, in order to completely understand interest representation and the role that organized interests have in politics, corporations and the political activity that they engage in, must be seen as a part of that (see Baumgartner & Leech, 1999; Hart, 2004). Corporations should thus be treated as important actors within both the interest system and politics by students of organized interests. What is more, they deserve more scholarly focus and especially so in corporatist contexts due to the relatively limited knowledge that we

have on access that they gain and the lobbying behavior they engage in within such arrangements (Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2019; Fraussen et al., 2015; Grant et al., 1989).

This thesis indicates that corporations are key organized interests within interest systems beyond pluralist contexts and therefore interest group scholars need to conceptually situate them as important actors as part of the interest system. The current academic endeavor also illustrates that although there are important similarities, the explanatory factors for access, as well as the lobbying behavior of corporations tend to be quite different from that of organized interests with members. Corporate lobbying therefore requires a theoretical approach that is, at critical points, conceptually distinct from interest group theory more broadly. In part such theoretical refinement originates from empirical changes: most notably, when it comes to patterns of access in corporatist contexts, corporations have managed to increase their presence while the access of business associations has dropped over the past decades in different types of political venues such as parliament and the news media. More theoretically and related to access of organized interests to discussions on policy issues in news coverage, it was shown that corporations are more likely to appear in news coverage that is technical in nature compared to other types of organized interests. An underlying driver behind this is that corporations and other organized interests seem to employ the media as part of their strategies in a different manner.

Business interests tend to focus more on political arenas that are not necessarily visible to the broader public as compared to diffuse interests (Culpepper, 2010; Dür et al., 2015; Salisbury, 1984). Corporations are especially expected to do so as compared to business associations as the latter category has a membership base to engage and communicate with while the former does not necessarily have this. Rather, the former tends to shy away from public venues and strategies in order to reduce the risk of receiving scrutiny from the public regarding their legitimacy (Hart, 2004; Hula, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997). Yet, this thesis has shown that they nowadays gain most access to the news media as compared to other organized interests. The expected underlying mechanism of this observation can be described by how corporations employ media strategies, which are determined by both the aim of their lobbying endeavor and the target group, and is thus different from how other organized interests tend to use the media.

As a point of departure, corporations are thought to make use of the media in combination with insider strategies in order to maximize their influence (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Beyers, 2004; Kriesi et al., 2007). Yet, when they do so, this tends to be in a way that deviates from how other organized interests employ the media. They are

expected to do so in order to: 1) voice technical expertise on policy issues, and 2) to signal this knowledge to specific target groups such as their shareholders, financial elites and policymakers (Beyers, 2004:214). This approach diverges from how more diffuse interests are thought to use the media. Scholars have argued that in order to compensate for their lack of access to policymakers, diffuse interests are inclined to use outside strategies so that they can signal that there is opposition or support from the public on a certain issue (De Bruycker, 2016; Kollman, 1998). What is more, I also believe that corporations' media usage differs from that of business interests with a membership. Where the latter category of actors needs to showcase to their members that they are actively representing their interests on for example salient issues in the media venue, corporations are keener to avoid such public attention as they do not rely on a membership base for survival (Chalmers, 2018).

Moreover, the findings on patterns and the nature of access illustrate that although corporations and other organized interests operate within the same political venues, their patterns of and nature of this access diverge, which may lead us to believe that both actor types engage in interest representation in a varying way. This conclusion gives purchase to Hart's (2004:54) argument that if students of interest representation aim to analytically study corporations as individual actors as part of that system, interest group theory must be adjusted and some elements of it discarded. The subsequent part of this conclusion discusses the different identified explanatory factors of individual corporate lobbying behavior in this dissertation. In doing so, it sheds further light on some of the important differences between corporations and other organized interests active within our political systems.

### ***7.2.2 The driving factors of individual corporate lobbying***

As corporations are not necessarily incentivized to lobby alone within arrangements that are thought to be characterized by corporatism, the findings of this study raise the question of how these patterns of access and behavior can be explained. In other words: which underlying factors can account for individual lobbying activity? The current section will elaborate and reflect on these aspects. It starts with a discussion on structural factors, followed by meso- and micro-level drivers of individual corporate lobbying and a broader reflection on how the explanatory findings of this thesis contribute to the literature.

The finding that corporations have managed to expand their share of access while patterns of business association access have dropped over the past decades resonates with ideas on the decline of so-called traditional corporatist arrangements (see Öberg

et al., 2011; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). In this context, political scientists have theorized about a broader trend of such a decline which implies a movement towards decision-making processes that are less coordinated (Ibidem; Crepaz, 1994). When it comes to organized interest and government relations, this would in practice entail that organizations such as labor organizations and business associations lost some of their importance within the political decision-making process. That is, when corporatist arrangements declined, such membership groups did not necessarily have benefit from privileged access to policymakers anymore (Binderkrantz, 2012; Crepaz, 1994). It seems sensible therefore that when it comes to business interest representation, corporations as members of business associations, were urged to seek other modes of interest representation such as engaging in solo lobbying endeavors. This broader trend could therefore very well explain some of the increased degrees of access that corporations have managed to generate over the past decades. While this development could help explain the increased access of corporations as compared to business associations as a broader phenomenon, it cannot account for the sudden shocks that the empirics of this thesis illustrated. This thesis therefore also explored other possible explanatory structural factors in a more systematic manner.

First, this academic endeavor illustrates that when the economy of a country experiences a downturn, an increase occurs in individual corporate access, which indicates that such trigger events could affect increased levels of interaction between individual corporations and politicians. This finding could possibly be explained by circumstances that are exacerbated during times of negative economic shocks (Lowery & Gray, 1998). That is, business associations have the challenging task to channel the different interests of their members. When they are not successful in doing so, corporations might seek other modes of interest representation such as going alone. In economic downturns, their task is expected to be even more challenging and corporations could increasingly be inclined to engage in individual lobbying as a result.

Within the literature, this mechanism can be referred to as the 'economic stress' mechanism. A mechanism, that is used to describe the logical argument on how economic conditions can affect the dominance of institutions within interest communities (Lowery & Gray, 1998:251). It departs from the idea that diverse and larger interest associations are more constrained when it comes to interest representation as compared to homogeneous or smaller organizations (Aldrich et al., 1990; Wilson, 1973). When economic conditions are poor, the task for such organizations to accommodate the interests of their members might become impossible, leading institutions to increasingly lobby on their own behalf. The findings of this thesis on economic stress

are in line with findings on the presence of institutions within lobbying communities in the US. That is, when economies are stressed, Lowery and Gray (1998) show that institutions – organizations without members – dominate within lobbying communities. This finding illustrates that, also in different institutional settings, organized interests without members – corporations in this instance – show similar behavior. It hence gives purchase to arguments from scholars about how such actors should be treated and analyzed in a deviant manner as compared to organized interests with members (Hart, 2004; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Salisbury, 1984), mostly as “institutions have little need to accommodate others when lobbying while organizations with members however must avoid alienating them” (Lowery & Gray, 1998:232; Aldrich et al., 1990).

Second, this thesis has illustrated that increased political opportunities and constraints are associated with increased access of corporations to the political system. When new opportunities or constraints arise, corporations are expected to be more inclined to start lobbying and as a net result manage to increase their access to political decision-making processes. The thesis applied this logic to several political constraints and opportunities that emerged through the process of European integration. The findings indicate that throughout this process and due to trigger events such as treaties that were signed, there was an increased degree of access observable for individual corporations. Importantly, this mechanism resonates with the idea that the existence of both national and European political systems, allowed corporations to successfully participate in these two arrangements (Coen, 1997:94). That is, business was thought to be able to withstand corporatism at the national level while keeping distance from collective action initiatives at the EU level (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991).

Moreover, it created a new reality in which national business associations became less important, which in turn put pressure on the relationship between national business associations and their members. The urge for corporations to collectively bargain with an association decreased and enabled corporations to employ multiple lobbying strategies in the two systems to secure benefits for their own gains as much as possible (see also Coen, 1997: 94 for a similar argument). In turn, governments were less likely to enforce business lobbying via business associations in order to still accommodate the interests of corporations as they inherently depend heavily on the willingness of capital to invest (Swank, 1992; Lindblom, 1977; Przeworski & Wallerstein, 1998).

A third explanatory factor that was identified by this thesis revolves around conflict. That is, conflict can affect both the decision to engage in associational – as well as individual – corporate lobbying. More specifically, when there is conflict between

corporations and their business association, corporations are more inclined to lobby alone. On the contrary, when conflict is absent, corporations prefer to delegate their interest representation to the business association in question. The underlying mechanism can most likely be found in associational representation processes. Just like the point of departure of the economic stress mechanism (Lowery & Gray, 1998), this argument starts with the idea that business associations engage in the sometimes challenging task of accommodating the interests of their members. When conflict occurs among members regarding a certain policy issue, the odds increase that finding a common stance and lobby approach for this issue becomes harder. Conflict in this thesis, is conceived of as the degree to which organized interests have disagreement over a certain policy issue (De Bruycker, 2017).

This mechanism most likely influences the contentment of the relationship that corporations have with their business association. When the business association does not meet the expectations of the corporation when it comes to the stance and representation approach, the corporation might start to seek other modes of interest representation such as lobbying on its own account. This behavior is similar to venue-shifting activity as a result of perceived conflict between corporations and policy-makers in one venue, leading them to shift from a venue where there are high levels of perceived conflict to venues that are more harmonious in nature (Marshall & Bernhagen, 2017). It also gives purchase to Chalmers' (2018:11) argument on individual corporate lobbying which states that such behavior can signal organizational conflict, perhaps because of the 'inability to form consensus on a matter'.

This finding is striking, because if conflict triggers individual lobbying behavior, this indicates that when business associations fail to accommodate the interests of their members in a sufficient manner, this is likely to affect the relationship between the business association and its members. Thus, when business associations are not successful in carrying out their important task of channeling the interests of their members, corporations might be more inclined to engage in individual lobbying endeavors. Importantly, they might be eager to do so even in contexts that are characterized by consensus-oriented deliberation. The current identified explanatory factor of individual corporate lobbying relates to both meso- and micro-level factors. That is, it departs from an issue-level perspective which is thought to affect the relationship between corporations and business associations at the micro level.

The explanatory factors that are identified through this thesis, contribute to our theoretical knowledge and understanding of access and individual lobbying behavior by

corporations. It does so in two overarching ways. First, this thesis provides a theoretical framework on structural drivers of individual corporate lobbying and tests these empirically. It shows that in addition to organizational (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Boies, 1989; Coen, 1997; Bouwen, 2002; Grant, 1982) and sectoral factors (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Grant et al., 1989; Grier et al., 1994; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Madeira, 2016), political-institutional and economic factors affect corporate lobbying activity. The former finding gives purchase to the idea that the process of European integration created a new reality which triggered a shift in business interest representation, whereby national business associations lost some of their importance and corporations initiated individual lobbying endeavors more often both at the national and EU levels (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991; Coen, 1997). The latter finding on economic stress shows that explanatory factors of individual corporate lobbying activity in a corporatist context resonate with theory and tested patterns on institutions as political actors within the pluralist context (Lowery & Gray, 1998).

Second, this thesis shows that issue-level factors not only matter for the behavior of interest groups (Baumgartner et al., 2009; De Bruycker, 2017; Dür et al., 2015; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018; Wonka et al. 2018), but also drive corporate lobbying behavior. This theoretical contribution provides some nuance to the claim that there is a 'fundamental mismatch' between theory on corporations as political actors and scholarly work on interest groups (Hart, 2004:51). That is, while patterns of access by corporations and organized interests with members diverge immensely, as does the nature of this access and explanatory factors for the underlying behavior, interest group theory can still be fruitful and act as an important point of departure when it comes to building theory on corporations as political actors.

Based on these theoretical insights, I argue that in order to fully understand interest group politics, interest group scholars need to conceptually situate corporations as part of the interest system, instead of studying them separately (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009; Bouwen, 2002; Coen, 1997,1998; Hart, 2004), or not acknowledging these actors as part of the interest system at all (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2015:2017; Kriesi, 2007; Walker, 1991) as they perhaps do not fit the common definition of an interest group with members. What is more, this thesis indicates that drivers which matter for organized interests with members, matter for corporations and their lobbying behavior as well, such as issues. Yet, although I do not entirely agree that there is a 'fundamental mismatch' between theory on interest groups and corporations, I do follow Hart (2004) by acknowledging that there are different dynamics at play which could be explained by the differences in nature between corporations and organized

interests with members. That is, their nature affects how their lobbying activity is triggered when it comes to mobilization and preference formation. This implies that in order to understand the role of corporations in the interest system, interest group theory can be fruitful but needs to be adjusted accordingly when studying corporations and their political activity (Hart, 2004).

## 7.3. IMPLICATIONS

This thesis has provided some important insights on access that corporations gain to politics and factors that drive their behavior as individual political actors. Here I will discuss how these findings can be interpreted from a normative viewpoint as well as which societal implications this thesis has.

### 7.3.1. Normative implications

*Is the individual presence of corporations in politics and the degree of that problematic?*

*The collective findings of this thesis indicate that corporations as individual political actors gain the highest levels of access to political systems in both pluralist and corporatist contexts. What is more, in the latter context, they have increased their access to different political venues tremendously over the past decades. Can these findings be evaluated as problematic? The answer is yes. First, the presence of individual corporations in politics can be interpreted as harmful as associational interest representation of business interests is thought to have a focus on concerns and ambitions that are shared by a collective (Heinz et al., 1993; Gray et al., 2004; Lowery & Gray, 1998; Martin and Swank, 2004; Wilson, 1973). Instead, when corporations lobby alone, their behavior is associated with activity that is focused on the self, is less moderate and knows a narrower focus as compared to associational interest representation (Hart, 2004; Mizruchi, 2013; Salisbury, 1984). That is, associational representation processes are more democratic in nature and such umbrella organizations are deemed as legitimate policy participants as they represent membership constituencies (Salisbury, 1984; Truman, 1951). When corporations aim to influence public policy on their own behalf, however, they do not have to deliberate with peers in order to find common ground and an appropriate representation approach. As Salisbury (1984:67) illustrates it: 'when a corporation seeks to affect public policy – regarding pollution standards, for example – it does not justify its effort by alleging that it is reflecting the values of its employees'. Thus when lobbying alone, the interests of a membership base are not central. Rather, the judgement of the leaders*

of the corporations about what is important for the company to survive is key (Ibidem, Hart, 2004).

This is worrisome as society is thought to benefit when businesses act in a moderate and responsible manner. That is, Baltzell (1979) and Judis (2001) argue that democracies flourish when the corporate elite exercise their power in such a manner (see also Mizruchi, 2013). When it comes to the involvement of companies in politics, I think this argument holds for one important reason: governments' dependence on corporations to invest (Swank, 1992:38, Lindblom, 1977; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1998). Moreover, the revenue that a country makes depends largely on taxes which are in turn influenced by high degrees of economic activity (Lindblom, 1977; Mizruchi, 2013:11). High levels of economic activity can best be achieved through investment of capital. In order for this to happen, companies must have good faith that the economy will continue to thrive, which is largely influenced by the economic policies of the relevant government (Ibidem). Thus when corporations gain a seat at the negotiating table to discuss these policies, it is desirable that they use their role in a responsible manner. Instead, when these actors have a seat on their own behalf, especially when they do so as a result of conflict, it might be harder to engage in interest representation that moves beyond the interests of the corporation and to focus on long-term interests that benefit the broader business community and society in the long run.

Second, the high degree to which corporations gain access to the political system on their individual behalf can also be interpreted as problematic from a normative viewpoint. That is, in addition to the fragmented representation that corporations are thought to engage in when lobbying solo, the degree to which these actors gain access to politics nowadays also generates great cause for concern. A certain overrepresentation or bias toward a specific type of interest within the interest system and politics can be harmful to the functioning of our democracies. Democracies flourish when all sorts of ideas and voices are heard in the political and public debate (Binderkrantz, 2012; Danielian & Page, 1994). When patterns are heavily skewed toward economic interests, norms of representativeness and equal access (Ibidem) are severely violated. What is more, it can lead to policy outcomes in favor of subsections of society, which can be at the cost of others (Olson, 1982). In addition, some venues such as the news media also serve as an important source for the public to learn about politics. When this source is heavily skewed towards a certain type of voice, citizens might not be able to get a full picture of the different voices that are out there to base their opinion on.

*Is the nature of the access of corporations and the strategies they engage in problematic?*

A second overarching concern that this dissertation speaks to relates to the interest representation of corporations and the quiet and hidden nature that is often associated with that (Culpepper, 2010). Whereas groups that represent diffuse interests are thought to thrive in arenas and through public strategies (De Bruycker, 2017; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018; Kollman, 1998), business interests are thought to prefer to lobby under the radar. This thesis however, illustrates that corporations are both strong insiders and outsiders. That is, when it comes to gaining access, they dominate both political arenas that are more hidden to the public such as parliament, and venues that are typically more accessible to the wider public such as the news media. As outlined in the former section, it can be evaluated as problematic that corporations dominate political news and coverage on policy issues. Yet, from a normative angle, it also has a positive side to it.

When corporations are involved in such coverage, this means that patterns of this access, the types of issues that they mobilize on, and the discussions they engage in, can be read, assessed and critiqued by the public, other organized interests and scholars. What is more, this thesis has shown that when corporations appear in news coverage on policy issues, the nature of these articles is rather accessible to the general reader. The wider public should therefore not only be able to see when corporations become visible in the media, but should also to some extent be able to follow the substance of what is discussed in the coverage.

This thesis also illustrates that corporations are not necessarily more inclined to lobby alone on issues of low salience. That is, they do not seem to prefer to lobby under the radar so that they can maximize influence while reducing the risk of receiving criticism regarding their legitimacy and involvement in politics. While the skewed patterns in media access in favor of corporations are a major cause for concern, the not so 'quiet' nature of both access and strategies of corporations provide a positive outlook on individual corporate lobbying when looked at from a normative angle. Moreover, it creates room for other organized interests to also possibly mobilize on similar issues. It allows citizens to follow, engage and critique their visibility and it also enables scholars to analyze patterns of access and their behavior within the media venue. This matters as only by assessing it, can one see which voices are heard and whether norms of diversity and equal access in the interest system are met (Binderkrantz, 2012; Danielian & Page, 1994).

### ***7.3.2. Societal implications***

In addition to the several normative implications of this thesis, it has some important societal implications as well. As discussed throughout chapters 2, 3 and 4, access is a two-way process where organized interests aim to generate it through representation activities, and through policymakers and journalists who can grant them access to political venues. Where organized interests aim to generate access to politics, journalists and policymakers function as gatekeepers. For this reason it might not be reasonable to state that it is only corporations that have to carry out their role in a responsible manner. That is, both journalists and policymakers as gatekeepers also have an important responsibility within society when it comes to communicating these voices to the public and by granting or withholding them access to political-decision making.

That being said, the collective findings of this thesis suggest that a fragmented business community is participating in our political systems. This community which enjoys high levels of access, not as a unified actor but one that consists of many different individual actors with their own interests and which are not hesitant to represent their interests at individual account when conflict arises between them and their business association. For this reason, more importance should be placed on the channeling and connecting role that business associations have when it comes to the representation of the interests of the business community. This matters to a great extent as such umbrella organizations, might be able to focus the interest representation of the fragmented members of the business community on collective and long-term goals that move beyond the interests of their individual businesses and could possibly benefit society in the longer run.

Unfortunately, I believe that this is not something that could easily be achieved. A one-size-fits-all plan through which umbrella organizations could always successfully accommodate and channel the interests of a fragmented community does not exist, simply because fragmentation of a community indicates in this context that individual businesses aim to lobby for interests that are rather focused on goals that are important for them in order to survive. Such interests might overlap with the goals of other members of the business community, yet it rather indicates that individual corporations prioritize their specific preferences over that of the broader collective.

I do think, however, that associational corporate lobbying can be encouraged and possibly enforced more by both policymakers and journalists. These two groups have an important role here. First, journalists could ensure that the voices of business umbrella organizations are heard more often and more elaborately as compared to individual businesses when it comes to discussions on politics and coverage on policy

issues. Second, policymakers could encourage associational corporate lobbying by inviting business associations to the negotiating table by default, and more often as compared to individual corporations, when important policies are discussed that affect the members of the business community.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, corporations should not forget that for a group to be truly powerful, solely having resources is not sufficient; it needs to have a high level of unity as well (Dahl, 1958 and see Mizruchi, 2013 for a similar argument). While the business community could potentially form a bigger threat to democracy and society when using their power as a unitary actor as compared to fragmented actors, hopefully throughout the process of becoming a unitary actor, corporations will focus more on long-term and collective ambitions that might not only be beneficial to them but to society in the long run as well. Both CEOs of corporations and the management of business associations could fulfill an important role here, where they claim a leading role in actively aggregating the interests of the community. For CEOs, that entails setting the right example to the community, and business associations could engage in both external and internal campaigns that promote and incentivize members to participate in associational lobbying and to focus on broader collective goals.

## **7.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND PATHS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Now that this study is completed, it becomes apparent that there are a number of questions remaining about the access of corporations and their lobbying behavior. In this section, I will elaborate on these whilst discussing promising avenues for future research. This allows me to also highlight some of the limitations of this dissertation.

First, while this endeavor started with the question on the degree to which corporations lobby alone, throughout chapters 2, 3 and 4 it measured degrees of access that corporations gained as compared to other types of organized interests. In doing so, it only measured the outcome of a two-way process that results in access to political arenas. That is, both the organized interest and policymaker/journalist have an active role in this process. Where the corporation aims to generate access through its lobbying activity, policymakers and journalists function as gatekeepers which are in turn keen to learn about informational input that they might have on policies and current topics (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). This study therefore measured the result of lobbying activity in these chapters and not necessarily the degree to which corporations lobby alone.

Obviously, this can be seen as an important limitation of this study, yet it would not have allowed me to rely on observational data and gain insight into the empirical world of the past. As it was, this thesis provided a unique insight into how relative corporate access to different political arenas developed over time. Still, it would be interesting to tap into degrees of actual individual lobbying activity as compared to associational lobbying activity by mapping this across countries and systems through a survey design.

Second, this thesis aimed to explore access of corporations and lobbying behavior beyond pluralist contexts. It did so by focusing on the Netherlands and Germany as compared to the United Kingdom. Yet, employing two countries as corporatist cases is perhaps too limited to be able to widely generalize to the corporatist context. What is more, it would be insightful to include other countries characterized by such arrangements as different countries are characterized by varying degrees of corporatism (Lijphart & Crepaz, 1991). To add to studies such those conducted by Flöthe and Rasmussen (2019), Fraussen and colleagues (2015), Grant and colleagues (1989) and the current scholarly endeavor, including a wide range of corporatist arrangements in work that focuses on corporations as individual political actors would be an interesting path to pursue.

Third, the current study provided important knowledge on explanatory factors of access and corporate lobbying. In doing so, it also opened up new questions concerning the underlying mechanisms of these factors. The finding on conflict for example raises questions about how conflictual mechanisms arise among members of business associations and how this exactly works. If conflict arises, how do members and associations typically respond? Do corporations aim to mobilize like-minded members within an association to increase internal consensus or do they prefer to lobby alone without informing the association? Do business associations usually follow the larger members or is it more important to them to accommodate the interests of the majority? In-depth interviews and experimental designs could help us to open up this black box and to illustrate what these mechanisms look like. Moreover, such methods could help to capture other mechanisms and decisions behind corporate lobbying strategies among both corporations and business associations. They can provide an understanding of mechanisms of interest accommodation as well as of which events trigger corporations to exit and which tend to make business associations step back. I hope that the current study has made other scholars keen to engage in these important questions in future studies.

A last promising avenue for future research that I would like to outline focuses on the other part of the two-way process of access. In order to fully understand why corporations are getting their voices heard on such a scale as compared to other types of organized interests, especially business umbrella organizations, it is important to grasp the conditions under which policymakers and journalists grant access to different types of organized interests. More specifically, I would be interested in finding out whether information type plays a role when gatekeepers decide which groups to consult. This study has shown that corporations are more likely to appear in coverage with a technical nature as compared to other organized interests. While there is theory on the side of organized interests regarding the appropriate strategy and target group (Beyers, 2004), less is known about which organized interest is preferred by these gatekeepers when they are in need of information. Does the type of information matter in general? Or does it differ per policy phase or newspaper outlet?

## 7.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, I would like to refer back to the example on dividend tax that I used to introduce the topic of this thesis as well as the overarching questions of this study. Until now, such examples have solely provided anecdotal evidence of the strong involvement of corporations as individual actors in politics in corporatist contexts. This thesis showed for the first time that corporations have increased their access to politics and are nowadays key players in politics in corporatist systems as well. It provided some first insights into how these patterns of access and behavior can be explained. More research is needed to uncover the motivations of corporations to lobby alone and those of associations to step back or to lobby in concert with corporations. Studies should also look into circumstances under which corporations are granted access by both policymakers and journalists. Only then, can we come closer to an understanding of why the business community seems to be so fragmented when it comes to their political activity in both pluralist and corporatist contexts. In the meantime, we can only hope that somehow the business community will come to understand that while they can probably move faster when going alone, they can achieve more as a collective for both themselves and society.





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# Appendices.

## APPENDIX CHAPTER 2

Table A2.2 Variables, operationalization and measurement

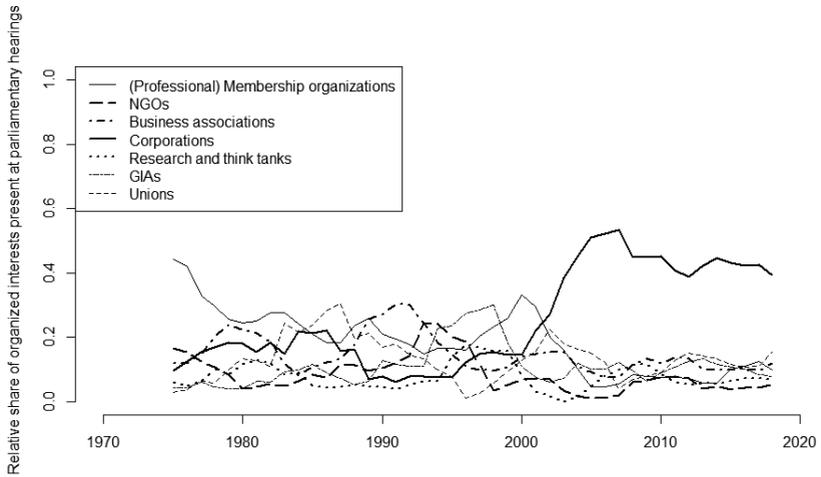
Variable	Operationalization	Mean	Min	Max
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Relative corporate access	Number of individual corporations that were or are active relative to the number of (business) associations and NGOs that were or are active and present in parliamentary hearings between 1970 and 2017.	0.29	0.03	0.71
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Tendencies in the economy (H1)	Annual growth rate in percentages of the gross domestic product (GDP).	2.39	-3.77	5.7
Degree of political opportunities and constraints due to European integration (H2)	Signed European treaties over the time frame of 1970 to date (ordinal score).	2.11	0	5
Government size (H3)	Percentage change of actual government expenditure in mln euros compared to the GDP in mln euros.	0.39	-17	27
Government alignment (H4)	Cabinet composition using the Schmidt index that has a 5-point scale where 1 stands for hegemony of right-wing (and center) parties and 5 stands for hegemony of social-democratic and other left parties.	2.15	1	4

*Note: all variables are aggregated to year level*

Table A2.3 Scheme manual coding of results automated query

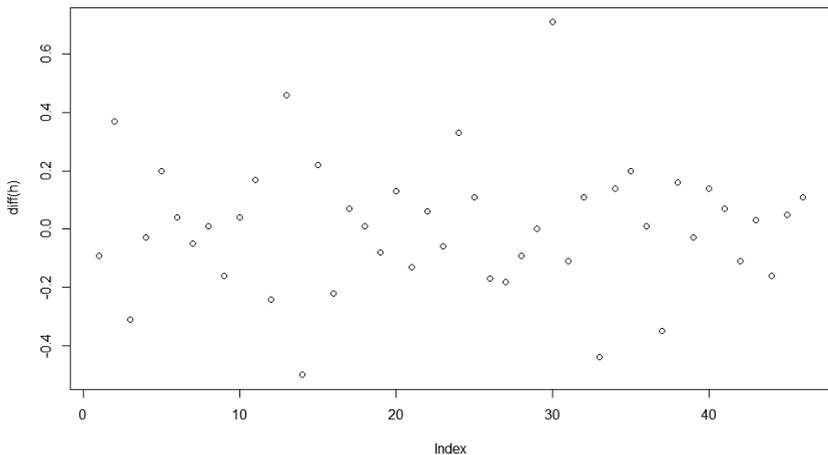
Variable	Measurement
Number of organizations identified from query	Absolute number
Number of organizations missed from query	Absolute number
Number of organizations in query	Absolute number
Number of double organizations identified	Absolute number
Numbers of errors made within one document	Absolute number

*Note: 50 documents and 245 organizations were coded. Reasons for why there are missing, doubles or errors are discussed in method section.*



**Figure A2.2 Moving average of relative share of all organized interests present at parliamentary hearings over time in the Netherlands**

*Note: Moving average is calculated as the means of nonoverlapping groups of five*



**Figure A2.3. First differenced dependent variable**

*Note: the variable is first order differenced to ensure stationarity.*

## APPENDIX CHAPTER 3

### Appendix 3.1.

Table A3.1. Descriptive statistics of appearances of organized interests in the United Kingdom (top) and the Netherlands (bottom)

	Absolute numbers			Relative share		
	Mean	Min	Max	Mean	Min	Max
Corporations	191.29	100	454	0.39	0.34	0.46
Business associations	28.36	8	83	0.06	0.02	0.11
NGOs	171.14	75	437	0.34	0.28	0.41
(Professional)membership organizations	49.11	21	123	0.10	0.05	0.17
Research and think tanks	19.21	7	42	0.04	0.2	0.06
Groups of institutions and authorities	34.14	10	112	0.06	0.03	0.11
Unions	1.57	0	7	0.005	0	0.02
Corporations	422.28	151	713	0.59	0.37	0.71
Business associations	47.54	27	99	0.07	0.03	0.14
NGOs	23.29	6	48	0.03	0.01	0.07
(Professional)membership organizations	48.71	21	80	0.07	0.03	0.11
Research and think tanks	13.43	3	25	0.02	0.004	0.04
Groups of institutions and authorities	35.43	14	67	0.05	0.02	0.12
Unions	108.36	52	248	0.16	0.08	0.38

Note: numbers are aggregated at year level

## Appendix 3.2.

To enhance the robustness of our findings, we ran a time series analysis with macro developments as predictors in order to control for whether change in business appearance is dependent on these variables. In order to generate the best possible model fit several tests were conducted, including the KPSS-test and Dickey Fuller Test. For the Netherlands a model with 1 AR term, differencing and 0 MA terms has the best model fit. The variables of the United Kingdom are modeled with 2 AR terms, differencing and 0 MA terms.

**Table A3.2. Time series model of degree of business interest appearances in the Netherlands as dependent variable**

	Univariate model			Model 1		
	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC
Univariate model	-0.09	0.19	-85.08	-0.34	0.19	-80.58
Economy – GDP growth rate				0.01	0.005	-80.58
Political alignment of government				0.02†	0.01	-80.58
Government expenditure as percentage of GDP				-0.005	0.005	-80.58
Globalization – export in goods and services as percentage of GDP				0.002	0.003	-80.58

† p < 0.1; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001 (two-tailed test).

**Table A3.3. Time series model of degree of business interest appearances in the United Kingdom as dependent variable**

	Univariate model			Model 1		
	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC	Coeff.	S.E.	AIC
Univariate model	-0.86	0.19	-100.63	-0.99***	0.18	-96.19
Economy – GDP growth rate				-0.002	0.18	-96.19
Political alignment of government				0.003	0.004	-96.19
Government expenditure as percentage of GDP				0.001	0.002	-96.19
Globalization – export in goods and services as percentage of GDP				-0.003	0.004	-96.19

† p < 0.1; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001 (two-tailed test).

Appendix 3.3.

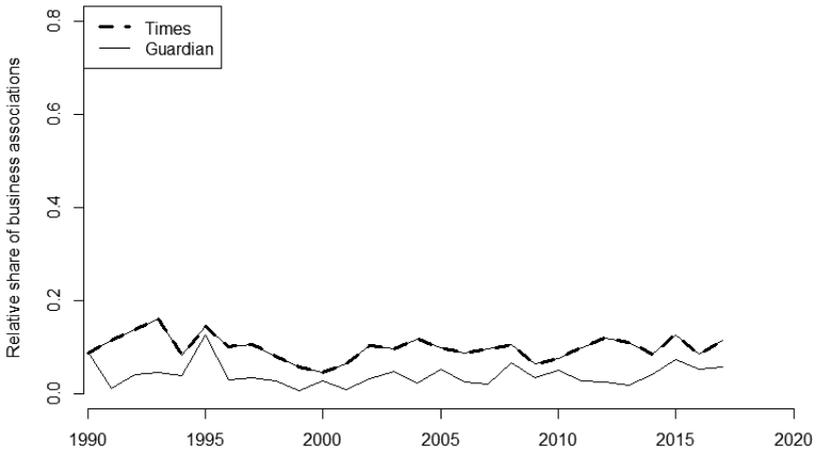


Figure A3.1. Relative share of appearances of business associations in political news coverage in The Guardian and The Times

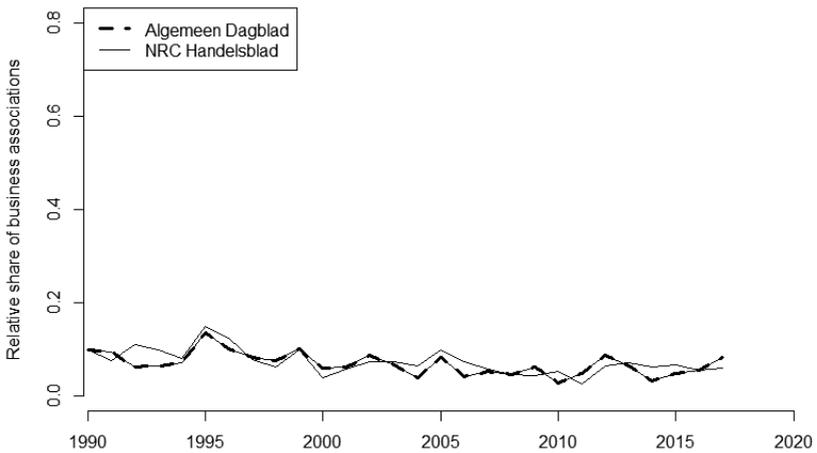
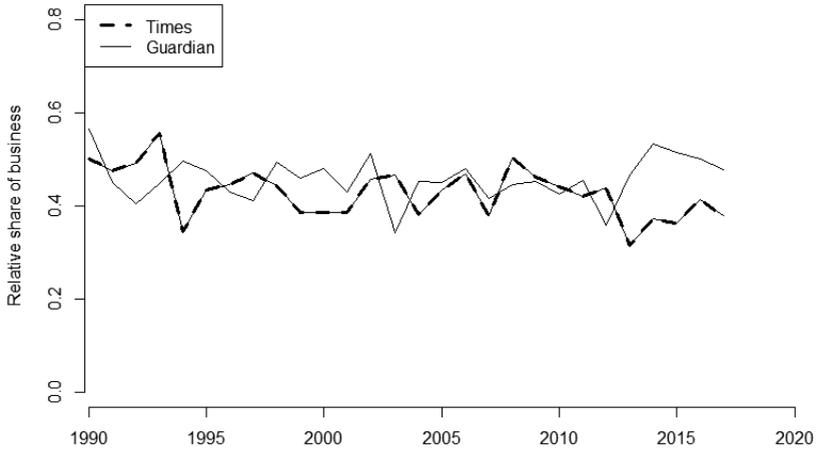
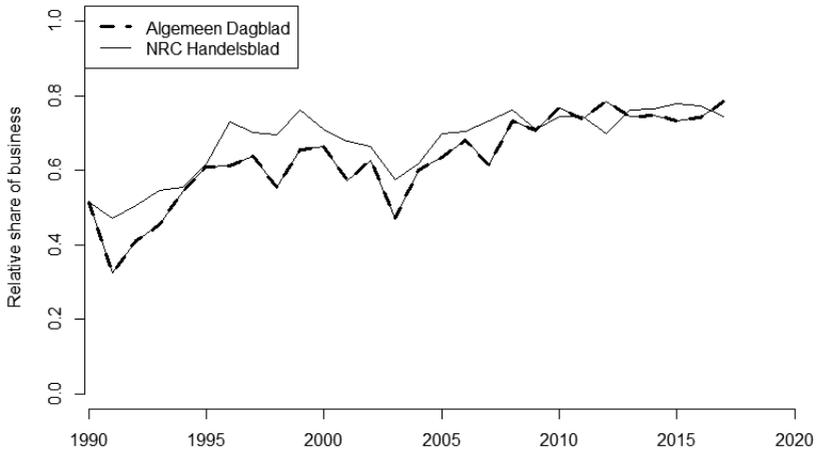


Figure A3.2. Relative share of appearances of business associations in political news coverage in Algemeen Dagblad and NRC Handelsblad

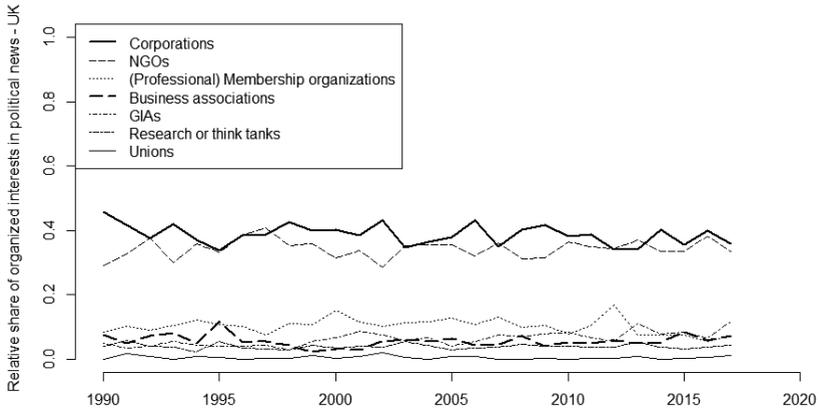


**Figure A3.3. Relative share of appearances of business interests in political news coverage in The Guardian and The Times**

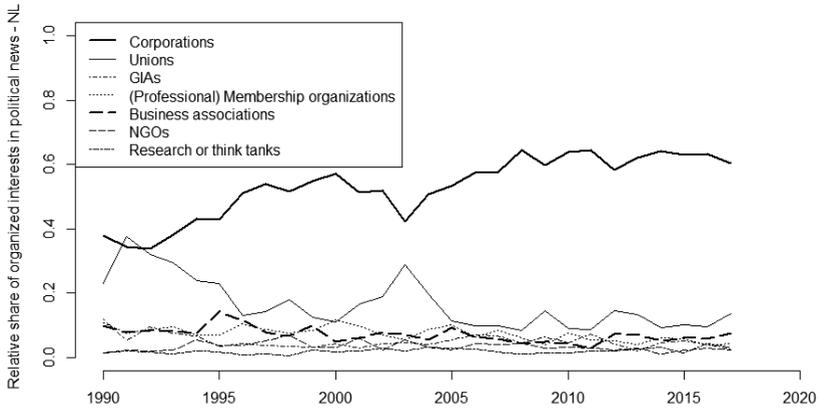


**Figure A3.4. Relative share of appearances of business interests in political news coverage in Algemeen Dagblad and NRC Handelsblad**

## Appendices



**Figure A3.5. Relative share of appearances of all organized interests in political newspaper coverage in the UK**



**Figure A3.6. Relative share of appearances of all organized interests in political newspaper coverage in the Netherlands**

### **Appendix 3.4.**

#### **Download filters\***

**UK** ATL2("Whitehall" OR "Parliament" OR "House of Commons" OR "House of Lords" OR "Conservative Party" OR "Labour Party" OR "Liberal Democrats" OR "Libdems" OR "Scottish National Party" OR "Plaid Cymru" OR "UK Independence Party" OR "UKIP" OR "Green Party" OR "Ulster Unionist Party" OR "Nationalist Party" OR "Democratic Unionist Party" OR "DUP" OR "Vanguard Unionist Party" OR "Sinn Fein" OR "Social Democratic and Labour Party")

**NL** ATL2("Binnenhof" OR "Parlement" OR "Tweede Kamer" OR "Eerste Kamer" OR "Partij van de Arbeid" OR PvdA OR "Christen-Democratisch Appel " OR "CDA" OR "Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie" OR "VVD" OR "Democraten 66" OR "D66" OR "GroenLinks" OR "Socialistische Partij" OR "Lijst Pim Fortuyn" OR "LPF" OR "Partij voor de Vrijheid" OR "PVV" OR "ChristenUnie")

\*It is important to note here that the query was kept very strict by including as few words as possible. This was done to limit the chances of non-political news articles ending up in the dataset. We furthermore controlled for articles that include random usage of parties or venues by including articles with at least two or more political words. The filter was validated by manually coding a sample of 200 articles (50 from each newspaper) of the selected political news articles generated by the query. In this way we verified whether the concerned articles indeed contained political news. In 90% of the cases both coders agreed that the random sample contained substantial political news articles. To estimate the reliability of the coding, two sets were independently coded, yielding a Krippendorff's alpha of .83. The set of articles consists of 150,136 Dutch and 200,577 British articles.

#### **Information on databases and on cut-off points of number of employees of organized interests**

The cut-off point for corporations was set at 250 staff, as large corporations are more inclined to represent themselves compared to smaller corporations; the odds that smaller corporations are ignored are therefore small. Also, this set represents a broad range of companies from different sectors. The cut-off point for the other organized interests was set at 50 to ensure that, on the one hand, these groups, which usually have lower numbers of employees, are captured, and on the other hand, to still have a relatively comparable set of organizations.

In both countries, it is required by law to register at these institutions when starting

## Appendices

a company or group. Universities, colleges, museums, news outlets and broadcasters were excluded from the study, as including these could lead to bias in the results, since these actors can be mentioned as a source of information even if they do not necessarily speak on their own behalf

**Table A3.4. Scheme manual coding of context**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>NL</b>
<b>Source/activity</b>	Yes=1, no=0	1=84%	1=77%
<b>Statement/claim</b>	Yes=1, no=0	1=26.9%	1=33.6%
<b>Prominence</b>	First paragraph=0, middle=1, last paragraph=2	0=1.9%, 1=90.8%, 1=7.3%	0=24.2%, 1=70.1%, 1=5.7%
<b>Prominence I</b>	Number of words of statement/claim.	Mean=80.5, min=2, max=333	Mean=114.7, min=2, max=1588
<b>Sentiment*</b>	Negative=-1, neutral=0, positive=1	-1=1.9%, 0=95.3%, 1=2.8%	-1=1.7%, 0=93.9%, 1=4.4%

Note: N= 1,568. To ensure the reliability of the coding scheme, two coders independently coded an identical set of 20 articles yielding Krippendorff's alphas from .77 to 1.

### ***Results of manual coding and discussion***

To make sure our results are robust, as mentioned previously, we manually coded a random sample of 600 news items. This is important, because it could be that political actors or journalists do not refer to business organizations as their source of information. Information provision is an important prerequisite to be considered as a lobby activity (see De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). The results indicate, however, that most of the business groups appear in the political news as the source of information or when they are actively engaging in an activity within a political context. More precisely, in 84% of the cases in the UK, corporations were the source of information that was discussed or were actively engaging in an activity in a political context. In the Netherlands, this holds for 77% of the instances. A claim had been put forward in 26.9% of the cases in the UK, and in 33.6% of the instances in the Netherlands.

Also, we checked whether business organizations might have been the object of scrutiny, which would also not necessarily be associated with their lobbying activities. However, the sentiment of the coverage was neutral in 95% of the cases in the UK and in 93.9% of the instances in the Netherlands. In short, these results indicate that if business organizations are mentioned in the political news sections, they are employed as the sources of information of either a journalist or a political actor also mentioned in the article, or they are mentioned as engaging in an activity in a political context. In other words, most of

the presence of business groups in our sample can be interpreted as forms of (outsider) lobbying by interest organizations, a key assumption underlying our arguments.

***\*Examples of sentiment coding***

*Negative*

“ Take the association between the arms maker Heckler & Kock, which was criticised for arming Indonesia’s Suharto dictatorship, and Blackwater, the US mercenary troupe lambasted after last year’s Baghdad gunfight in which 17 civilians were killed.”

Published in The Guardian on February 28, 2008

*Positive*

“ There are isolated examples of successful lobbying, such as Capital Corporation’s employment of Bell Pottinger to challenge the Budget casino tax increase.”

Published in The Times on July 10, 1998

*Neutral*

“ Microsoft is offering to send schools a free copy of its CD-Rom, Communications Tools For Schools, and is sponsoring a competition for the most inventive use of its products in election projects”

Published in The Times on March 18, 1997

**Table A3.5. Scheme manual coding of results of automated query**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Measurement</b>
Number of organizations identified from query	Absolute number
Number of organizations missed from query	Absolute number
Number of organizations in query	Absolute number
Number of double organizations identified	Absolute number
Numbers of errors made within one document	Absolute number

*Note: 150 documents and 387 organizations were coded. The reasons why there are missing, doubles or errors are discussed in the method section.*

This endeavor indicated that the automated query missed 5.8% of the actors, often due to a different spelling used in the article compared to the register. 4.9% of the actors were identified twice, for example when a merger between two different companies happened over time. In 3.8% of the cases, an error occurred, for example when the name of an actor has a different meaning as well. In total, an error of 14.5% occurred.

## APPENDIX CHAPTER 4

### 4.A: Overview of descriptive statistics

	n	mean	sd	min	max	Q0.25	Q0.75
Share of corporations amongst total mentions of organizations	35674	0.35	0.43	0	1	0	1
CTTR (text technicality)	35674	10.65	2.88	2.70	35.47	8.70	11.95
Coleman-Liau index (text readability)	35674	11.56	1.65	-4.48	25.38	10.63	12.34
Density	35674	1.40	0.80	1	7	1	2
Diversity (Shannon's H)	35674	0.21	0.38	0	1.83	0	0.56

Note: Categorical variables: Newspaper outlet, policy area

### 4.B: Search strings

*Search strings policy areas*

energy#ATL2(energy OR nuclear OR electricity OR (natural AND (gas OR oil)) OR coal OR (energy AND (alternative OR renewable)) OR (energy AND conservation))

environment# ATL2(environment AND ((drinking AND water) OR (waste AND disposal) OR recycl\* OR species OR forest OR conservation))

education# ATL2(education AND (higher OR elementary OR secondary OR underprivileged OR vocational OR special OR excellence)) OR education)

transport#ATL2(highways OR aviation OR aeroplan\* OR maritim\* OR infrastructur\*) OR (transport\* AND (mass OR public))

community# ATL2("community development" OR housing OR (rural AND (housing OR development)) OR (low-income AND assistance) OR veterans OR elderl\* OR homeless) lawcrimeandfamilyissues# ATL2((law AND crime) OR (crime AND 'white collar' OR juvenile OR control) OR drugs OR 'court administration' OR prison\* OR (child AND abuse) OR police OR (family AND issues))

### 4.C: Validity and reliability of search strings

Two independent coders coded 30 articles, which were randomly sampled from each policy data set. For energy at least 60% of the articles is energy-related, for education the relevance level of the articles is 86.7%, for transport 63.3%, for community and housing

93.3%, for law, crime and family issues 76.7%, and for environment 93.3% of the articles are relevant. We acknowledge that the precision of selecting two of the policy areas has been low (energy at 60% and transport at 63.3%). This is mostly due to the fact that in these policy areas, only small parts of the articles discuss transport or energy policy related issues (typically as part of broader policy discussions). As discussed earlier, this has to do with the selection threshold: While the query approach has a low selection threshold, we conducted the manual coding with a more conservative (i.e. high selection threshold) approach and only counted articles as true positive if the majority of the article discusses the policy issue in question.

In order to ensure the reliability of the coding, the `irr` package in `r` was used to calculate Kappa-squared, which calculates the Cohen's Kappa and weighted Kappa as an index of intercoder agreement between two different raters on categorical or ordinal data.<sup>1</sup> The Kappa scores are: 0.93 for energy, 0.84 for education, 0.86 for transport, 1 for community and housing, 0.71 for law, crime and family issues, and 0.65 for environment.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the query approach of selecting articles delivers high sensitivity (true positive rate), but also can also deliver a high false positive rate, depending on the selection threshold. To illustrate: if an article is counted as a true positive even when just one or two sentences of the article discuss one of the target policy issues (i.e. low selection threshold), the false positive rate of a query approach is quite low. However, if the selection threshold is set higher (e.g. an article is only a true positive if a majority of the article discusses the target policy issue), the false positive rate of any query approach will inevitably rise. This tradeoff between sensitivity and false positive rate is acceptable for this research, as the intention was to look at broader policy issue categories (e.g. energy policy) rather than highly specific issues (e.g. interest rate increases at a national central bank).

#### ***4.D: Specifics of query approach***

The query approach makes sense from a theoretical perspective: By using the list of meetings, we can ensure that the mentioned organizations (1) are already active advocates within a policy area, (2) employ insider strategies to represent their interests by meeting public officials and politicians, and (3) use media appearances as an outsider strategy to gain further influence on the policy outcomes. Furthermore, by sampling from policy-specific news, we make sure that we do not include news stories that cover organization-specific events such as corporate scandals or changes in an organization's

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/irr/irr.pdf> for more information on the package and the measure.

## Appendices

leadership, which could have potentially impacted our findings.

### 4.E: Overview of differences in appearances per policy area

Corporations dominate the news in the areas of education, energy, transport, and housing, whilst NGOs dominate environmental news stories and articles on law, crime, and family issues (see Figure 1). Public institutions are comparatively more present in the areas of energy, housing, and transport.

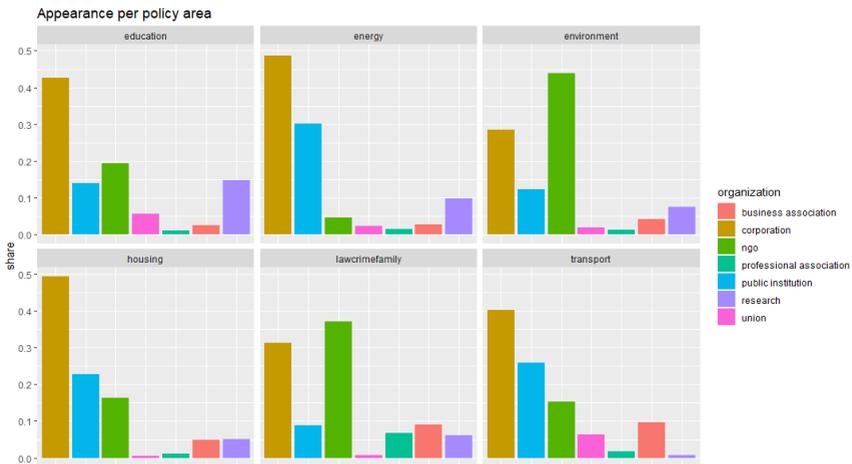


Figure A4.2. Relative share of groups mentioned in the news articles per policy area

### 4.F: Robustness checks

To evaluate the robustness of our key independent variables (text technicality and readability), the authors conducted intercoder reliability checks based on a subsample of 40 hand-coded newspaper articles and the predictions stemming from our measures (CTTR and Coleman-Liau index). Since both independent variables are based on a continuous scale that was difficult to match with manual hand-coding, a decision was made to use a subsampling method. The authors randomly subsampled 10 articles each from the top and bottom 15% of both CTTR and Coleman-Liau index distributions within our newspaper database, resulting in two datasets for technicality and readability that consisted of either high- or low-scoring newspaper articles. They were subsequently hand-coded by two coders according to whether they thought that the articles belonged into either the high or low scoring category. Cohen's Kappa

was calculated between both coders (treating the automated measures as ‘a coder’), resulting in the following two tables:

**Cohen’s Kappa: Readability (Coleman-Liau index)**

Coder	1	2	Coleman-Liau index
1		0.694	0.694
2	0.694		0.798
Coleman-Liau index	0.694	0.798	

**Cohen’s Kappa: Technicality (CTTR)**

Coder	1	2	CTTR
1		0.9	0.9
2	0.9		1
CTTR	0.9	1	

All values are within the acceptable ranges, with intercoder reliability being relatively worse for readability in comparison to technicality. This shows that the chosen measures of readability and technicality are suitable to be included in this research.

**4.G.: Regression models without controls for policy area**

To test whether the observed effects of text readability and text complexity hold across policy areas, we ran two additional models that do not control for the policy area. The models show very similar effects and coefficients, proving that the effects are still present when looking at all policy related news in our sample.

**Table A4.2.: Regression results**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Share of corporations in articles	
	(1)	(2)
CTTR (complexity)	0.088** (0.004)	
Coleman-Liau index (readability)		-0.066*** (0.009)
Density	0.117** (0.048)	0.348*** (0.049)
Diversity (Shannon’s H)	-0.567*** (0.100)	-0.825*** (0.102)
Medium ref: The Times	0.006 (0.027)	-0.171*** (0.026)
Constant	-1.234*** (0.065)	0.298*** (0.103)
Observations	13,463	13,463
R <sup>2</sup>	0.051	0.017
Log Likelihood	65,427.440	65,276.440

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

### ***4.H.: Reflection on newspaper selection***

Newspapers with a specific target audience such as the Financial Times aims to reach and serve a readership that comprises of companies, executives and elites interested in international politics. We believe therefore that the content of their coverage is tailored to these audiences and this matters for the main concepts under study: complexity and accessibility. First, we expect the baseline or point of departure of the coverage to be different as the reader is expected to either work in or have prior knowledge in the fields that are of focus in the newspaper. This allows the coverage to discuss the topics more in-depth and more in detail. We expect that including such a newspaper would therefore only strengthen the finding on complexity. Second, thresholds of readability are expected to be higher for this specific audience as compared to that of newspapers that have a more general audience such as the Times. For more information about the target audience of the newspaper, see: <https://commercial.ft.com/audience/>

### ***4.I.: Further model specification***

Unlike other linear and non-linear models, the regression method used in this study assumes a beta distribution of the predictor variable, thereby accommodating data skewness, heteroscedasticity, and absence of symmetry around the mean—all features that are common in proportions data (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2010). This type of regression model has therefore become a much-used tool in various scientific fields for this kind of data (e.g. Plag et al. 2017; Clark et al. 2018).

## APPENDIX CHAPTER 5

### 5.1. Stimulus material

You have reached the second part of this survey in which you are asked to answer questions on policy issues.

On the next page, a hypothetical scenario concerning a policy issue is presented. Please read through the scenario carefully and try to imagine the situation as if you are actually experiencing it. Subsequently, you are asked to answer some questions.

*Figure A5.1 Introduction scenarios – same for all respondents*

Last week, the Chancellor of HM Treasury presented a **new tax proposal** through which corporate tax will be raised gradually during the coming years. The proposal will affect the financial situation of your company substantially. Hence, the company is keen to change the content of the proposal or would like to prevent the bill from passing. In order to do so, your company has decided internally to lobby on this issue.

In the meantime, the main business association within your industry has put out a statement to its members in which it announces its stance on the tax proposal and its intended lobbying strategy. As a member, you **disagree** with the general stance on this issue of the association and the lobbying initiatives that the association is planning to undertake. So far, the tax proposal **has not received** a great deal of attention in the media and public debate.

- I have carefully read the scenario that is presented above.

*Figure A5.2 Scenario – high conflict, low salience*

Last week, the Chancellor of HM Treasury presented a **new tax proposal** through which corporate tax will be raised gradually during the coming years. The proposal will affect the financial situation of your company substantially. Hence, the company is keen to change the content of the proposal or would like to prevent the bill from passing. In order to do so, your company has decided internally to lobby on this issue.

In the meantime, the main business association within your industry has put out a statement to its members in which it announces its stance on the tax proposal and its intended lobbying strategy. As a member, you **disagree** with the general stance on this issue of the association and the lobbying initiatives that the association is planning to undertake. So far, the tax proposal **has received** a great deal of attention in the media and public debate.

- I have carefully read the scenario that is presented above

*Figure A5.3 Scenario – high conflict, high salience*

## Appendices

Last week, the Chancellor of HM Treasury presented a **new tax proposal** through which corporate tax will be raised gradually during the coming years. The proposal will affect the financial situation of your company substantially. Hence, the company is keen to change the content of the proposal or would like to prevent the bill from passing. In order to do so, your company has decided internally to lobby on this issue.

In the meantime, the main business association within your industry has put out a statement to its members in which it announces its stance on the tax proposal and its intended lobbying strategy. As a member, you **agree** with the general stance on this issue of the association and the lobbying initiatives that the association is planning to undertake. So far, the tax proposal **has received** a great deal of attention in the media and public debate.

I have carefully read the scenario that is presented above.

*Figure A5.4 Scenario – low conflict, high salience*

Based on the scenario that was just presented, how likely would it be for you to choose below lobby strategies?

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Likely
Representation via business association	<input type="radio"/>						
Representation on own behalf	<input type="radio"/>						

*Figure A5.5 Scenario – low conflict, low salience*

Based on the scenario that was just presented, how likely would it be for you to choose below lobby strategies?

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neutral	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Likely
Representation via business association	<input type="radio"/>						
Representation on own behalf	<input type="radio"/>						

*Figure A5.6 Question dependent variables*





**English summary.**

## RATIONALE

Corporations that lobby individually are seen as illegitimate actors within the political process. When businesses lobby through an association, their interests tend to have a focus on concerns that are shared by a broad collective. Instead, when corporations lobby alone, the interests of a membership are not central. Rather, the judgment of the leaders of corporations about what is important for the company to survive is key. Their individual lobbying behavior is therefore associated with activity that is less moderate, narrower and more focused on the self in comparison to associational representation. Democracies flourish when business exercises its power in a moderate manner with a focus on interests of the broader business community and society. When corporations lobby alone, it is difficult to engage in interest representation that moves beyond the interests of the corporation and to focus on long-term interests that benefit the business community and society. The involvement of corporations as individual actors therefore poses a serious threat to the functioning of our democracies.

Empirical examples highlight that corporations are widely involved in decision-making processes in both the United States (U.S.) and Europe. Corporations are acknowledged and studied as key players in politics in the context of the U.S. In the European context, these actors are studied to a limited extent, mostly focusing on the institutions of the European Union. Despite the severe normative apprehensions regarding corporate lobbying, research on this phenomenon focuses on pluralist contexts, leaving us with limited knowledge on this phenomenon outside of such contexts. This dissertation speaks to this void and sheds light on this phenomenon in a corporatist European context.

## THE DISSERTATION AND FINDINGS

This dissertation studied the extent of individual corporate lobbying compared to associational corporate lobbying, and how far individual corporations are granted access to political systems in comparison to other organized interests. It also investigated which explanatory factors account for corporate access and lobbying behavior at the macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. In order to engage with these questions, I studied the patterns and the nature of corporate access to different political venues, across countries and with a longitudinal perspective, and addressed drivers of these patterns and lobbying behavior with original data. This involved employing text collection and analysis methods as well as an experimental design.

This study illustrates for the first time that, in comparison to several decades ago, corporations have managed to increase their access to the political system in a corporatist context. What is more, it highlights that corporations are currently the actors that gain most access to the political system as compared to other types of actors. A similar picture is seen in the media venue. That is, while the access of business associations to the political media debate has decreased, corporations have increased their degree of access. This dissertation also explored the nature of such media access. It showed that corporations are more likely to be involved in media coverage that has a technical nature compared to other interest groups. This finding thereby illustrates for the first time that the nature of news coverage in which corporations appear is different from the coverage in which other interest groups appear. And contrary to what was expected, such coverage is not necessarily less accessible to the general reader. What is more, corporations are more likely to appear in news coverage that is more accessible to the general reader compared to the coverage in which other organized interests appear.

In addition to patterns of access and the nature of these patterns, this study provides important insights into how structural explanatory factors could account for individual lobbying endeavors. This study illustrates that when the economy of a country experiences a downturn, an increase occurs in individual corporate access, which indicates that such trigger events could affect increased levels of interaction between individual corporations and politicians. Within the literature, this is referred to as the 'economic stress' mechanism. In a nutshell, this mechanism describes how business associations have the difficult task of accommodating and channeling the interests of members. When economic conditions are poor, the task for such organizations to accommodate the interests of their members might become more difficult, leading institutions to increasingly lobby on their own behalf.

A second structural explanatory factor revolves around political opportunities and constraints that are associated with increased access of corporations to the political system. When new opportunities or constraints arise, corporations are expected to be more inclined to start lobbying and as a net result manage to increase their access to political decision-making processes. The thesis applied this logic to several political constraints and opportunities that emerged through the process of European integration. The findings indicate that throughout this process, and due to trigger events such as treaties that were signed, there was an increased degree of access observable for individual corporations. This process created a new reality in which national business associations became less important, which in turn put pressure on

## English summary

the relationship between national business associations and their members. The urge for corporations to collectively bargain with an association decreased, which enabled corporations to employ multiple lobbying strategies at both the national and EU levels to secure benefits for their own gain as much as possible.

This dissertation also assessed whether issue characteristics affect the decision for corporations to lobby alone or via an association. It was found that salience does not affect corporate lobbying behavior. That is, corporations do not necessarily aim to lobby under the radar when salience is low. However, conflict does seem to matter and it does so in two ways: when there is conflict between corporations and their business associations, corporations tend to be more inclined to engage in solo lobbying endeavors. Vice versa, when such conflict is absent, corporations prefer to delegate the representation of their interests to their business association. This finding is striking, because if conflict triggers individual lobbying behavior, this indicates that when business associations fail to accommodate the interests of their members in a sufficient manner, this is likely to affect the relationship between the business association and its members. As a result, corporations might be more inclined to engage in individual lobbying endeavors. Importantly, they might be eager to do so even in contexts with arrangements in which they are not incentivized to lobby alone.

## CONCLUSIONS

Moreover, the findings on the patterns and nature of access illustrate that although corporations and other organized interests operate within the same political venues, their patterns of and nature of this access diverge, which may lead us to believe that both actor types engage in interest representation in a varying way. The explanatory factors that are identified through this thesis contribute to our theoretical knowledge and understanding of access and individual lobbying behavior by corporations in two overarching ways. First, this thesis provides a theoretical framework for structural drivers of individual corporate lobbying and tests these empirically. It shows that in addition to organizational factors, political-institutional and economic factors affect corporate lobbying activity. Second, this thesis shows that issue-level factors not only matter for the behavior of interest groups, but also drive corporate lobbying behavior.

Based on these theoretical insights, I argue that in order to fully understand interest group politics, interest group scholars need to conceptually situate corporations as part of the interest system, instead of studying them separately, or not acknowledging them

as part of the interest system at all, as they perhaps do not fit the common definition of an interest group with members. What is more, this thesis indicates that drivers which matter for organized interests with members, matter for corporations and their lobbying behavior as well, such as issues. Therefore, I do not entirely agree with political scientists that argue that there is a complete mismatch between theory on interest groups and theory on corporations. However, I acknowledge that there are different dynamics at play that could be explained by the differences in nature between corporations and interest groups with members. That is, their nature affects how their lobbying activity is triggered when it comes to mobilization and preference formation. This implies that in order to understand the role of corporations in the interest system, interest group theory can be fruitful but needs to be adjusted accordingly when studying corporations and their political activity.



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Corporations that lobby individually are seen as illegitimate actors within the political process as they do not represent membership constituencies. When corporations lobby alone instead of via a business association, it is difficult to engage in interest representation that moves beyond the interests of the corporation and to focus on interests of the broader business community and society. The involvement of corporations as individual actors in politics therefore forms a severe threat to the functioning of our democracies.

Empirical examples highlight that corporations are widely involved in decision-making processes in both the United States (US) and Europe. Corporations are studied as key players in politics in the context of the US. In a European context, these actors are studied to a limited extent. Despite severe normative apprehensions, research on this phenomenon focuses on pluralist contexts. This dissertation speaks to this void and sheds light on this phenomenon in a European and corporatist context by studying the extent of individual corporate lobbying and assessing drivers of this phenomenon.

Ellis Aizenberg conducted research for this dissertation at the Political Science Department of the University of Amsterdam. She was affiliated with the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) and the Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam (DIA). Ellis currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam.