Evelien Willems

How and the extent to which interest groups impact public policy is a core controversy in political science. On the one hand, interest groups hold the potential to function as intermediaries between citizens and policymakers thereby advancing policies closely connected to societal concerns. On the other hand, many groups are considered to bias public policy in favor of the happy few and to detract from the public interest. Lobbying scandals making news headlines invigorate concerns on the negative impact of interest group involvement in public policymaking.

This dissertation addresses this controversy by examining when and how interest groups connect the policy preferences of the general public with the policymaking process in each step of the influence production process. Specifically, I analyze the extent to which interest groups' positions align with citizen preferences (mobilization stage), how groups' alignment with public opinion affects access to advisory councils and news media prominence (advocacy activities and access stage) and how the prospects of advocacy success depend on public support (influence stage). The dissertation hereby aims at enhancing our understanding of the role of interest groups for strengthening or weakening the connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes.

Walking a tightrope between representing organizational constituencies and the general public

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Analyzing interest groups functioning as intermediaries between citizens and public policymaking

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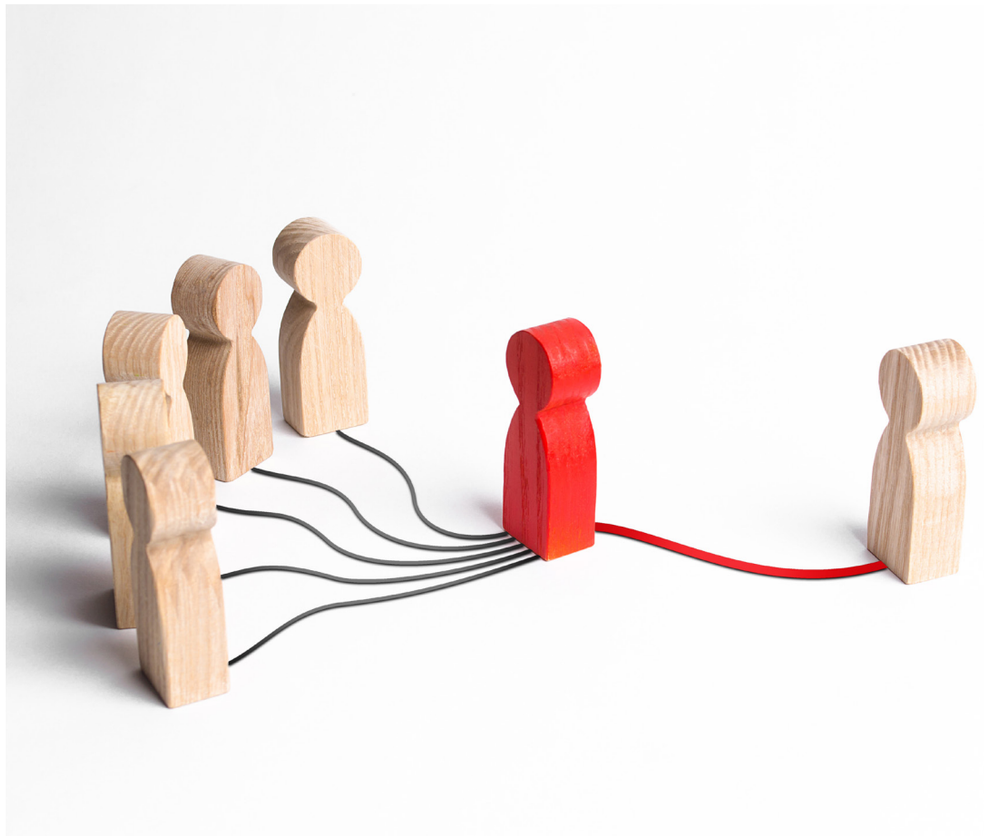

Promotoren **prof. dr. Jan Beyers | prof. dr. Iskander De Bruycker**

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van graad van doctor in de sociale wetenschappen: politieke wetenschappen
Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen | Departement Politieke Wetenschappen | Antwerpen, 2021

Universiteit Antwerpen

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Doctor in de sociale wetenschappen: politieke wetenschappen

aan de Universiteit Antwerpen te verdedigen door

Evelien Willems

Promotoren: *Prof. dr. Jan Beyers*

Prof. dr. Iskander De Bruycker

Antwerpen, 2021

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This dissertation was written as part of the ERC-funded iBias project (ERC-2013-CoG 616702-iBias) awarded to Prof. dr. Jan Beyers.

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Preface

Almost exactly ten years ago, when finishing the first semester of my bachelor's degree here at the university, I could never have imagined writing and defending a PhD. Yet, here I am. While I first got excited about doing research when writing my bachelor's and master's theses, I rather accidentally started a PhD. I was just lucky enough that my enthusiasm for research was picked up by my professors, whereas I myself had not considered such a career prospect. Looking back, I am glad that they hired me as a research assistant and later offered me the opportunity to write a dissertation. My PhD-trajectory has been extremely challenging and has pushed me to my limits, but I discovered insights and developed skills that will last for a lifetime. There is no better way to develop a critical mind and data analytical acumen than by doing a PhD. This I cherish deeply.

Though, this dissertation would not have been possible without the help, support, and inspiration of many colleagues, friends, and family. First, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Jan Beyers for his unwavering faith in my academic abilities and guidance during my PhD trajectory. Jan has been the one who pushed me to take on an ambitious research agenda, to independently develop my research and project management skills, to explore new literatures, and to strive for excellence across the board. His 'track changes' have always been instructive, from the early moments onwards when hardly a single word was left untouched to the very end when only editing here and there. Despite his own challenges, he continued to cheer for me all along the way. Similarly, I would like to thank my co-supervisor Iskander De Bruycker who has always been a superb mentor and has set an aspiring example in building an academic career. His clear, simple writing style, well-placed questions and suggestions have lifted each of my papers to the next level. He constantly pushed me to sharpen my arguments and to plainly formulate them. I learned tremendously while writing our joint paper and thanks to his excellent feedback, several of my other papers got published. I am also grateful for having had the

opportunity to teach guest lectures in his courses and for having him to take me in tow at conferences. It has been an honor to have Jan and Iskander as my supervisors.

Next to my supervisors, I had the privilege of having two leading scholars, Anne Rasmussen and Stefaan Walgrave, to be part of my doctoral committee. Anne, for sure, has been the toughest critic of my work and challenged me to develop rigorous theory and analyses. She and her GovLis-team have been invaluable exchange partners and enabled me to significantly strengthen my work. Stefaan provided the necessary grounding and provoked me to develop an 'exciting' theoretical puzzle for every paper. Finally, I wish to thank Beth Leech and Wouter Van Dooren for taking on the task of assessing this dissertation and to join the jury. I highly value their expertise and thank them both for being such positive spirits.

When writing this dissertation, I have also benefited from the stimulating research environment that is the Department of Political Science at the University of Antwerp. It was a pleasure to have so many great (ex-)colleagues. In particular, I would like to thank Inger Baller, Kathleen Beckers, Sharon Belli, Dorothy Duchatelet, Babette Gommers, Margaux Kersschot, Shirley Kempeneer, Pauline Ketelaars, Bjorn Kleizen, Kirsten Lucas, Bas Redert, Julie Sevenans, Karoline Soontjens, Brecht Volders, Patrick Van Erkel, Matti Van Hecke, Annelien Van Remoortere, and Eva Wolf for all the useful feedback, thought-provoking suggestions, conference adventures, and especially for the coffee breaks, lunches, quizzes, and fun times in bars, at countless parties and during ski holidays. Above all, I am grateful to Frederik Heylen for our endless hours of discussions on theories and hypotheses, for exploring datasets, doing statistical analyses in R, writing and publishing together, for exchanging office gossip and for his invaluable friendship. My gratitude also goes to Peter Aspeslagh, Irena De Greef, dozens of student assistants, and Jens Bosman for helping with data collection and management.

A special mention goes to Peter Bursens and Dirk De Bièvre, for hiring me as a research assistant after graduating in 2014 and introducing me to the wonders of scientific research, for giving me teaching opportunities, and for conversations on research and beyond. I wish to thank Koen Verhoest for the chance to conduct a small research project, but with great responsibilities, nevertheless. Last but certainly not least,

I am eternally grateful to Stefaan and the entire M²P-research group for adopting me as one of their own and offering such a vibrant and inspiring environment. I would have been lost without this group of colleagues.

All of this was of course only possible because of friends and family. I am blessed with an awesome group of friends—Anne, Apoline, Dorien and Marielaure—who are always up for drinks, dinners, parties, holidays, and conversations ranging from the profound to the silly. I would like to thank my parents—Erna and Ronny, my brothers—Domien, Simon and Jarne, and 'the village' of (in-law) family members who always offered me the much-needed escape from academia. Finally and most importantly, I thank Christophe for his love, encouragement and (nearly) endless patience. Without his support throughout the ups and downs of this academic endeavor, I could not have finished this dissertation. I have never been happier than with him in my life.

Thank you all,

Evelien

Antwerp, 14 December 2020

Introduction

1 The role of interest groups for representative democracy

The extent to which the policy preferences of citizens are reflected in the policies adopted by the government is a central concern of various normative and empirical theories of representative democracy (Arnold & Franklin 2012; Burstein 2003; Dahl 1961; Miller & Stokes 1963; Page & Shapiro 1983; Powell 2004; Sabl 2015). Policies should correspond with citizen preferences so that no persistent and systematic discrepancy between public opinion and public policy arises (Arnold & Franklin 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2019). Policies that reflect citizens' preferences provide legitimacy to representative democracies; it affects citizens' overall satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, democratic trust and support (Armingeon & Guthmann 2014; Ezrow & Xezonakis 2011; Linde & Peters 2020; Mayne & Hakhverdian 2017; Reher 2015, 2016). This is not to say that policies should always and blindly follow the opinion of public majorities. That would be decidedly 'populist' in nature and could harm the protection of minorities, erode fundamental human and civil rights, and put improper constraints on policymakers that need to 'act responsibly' towards international commitments or future generations (Bardi et al. 2014; Hänni 2017; Linde & Peters 2020; Mair 2009). Policies unreflective of the preferences of broad public segments might at times be democratically desired, but a minimal overlap between citizens' preferences and policies ought to be present for political representation to function and can create leeway for the acceptance of 'unpopular' decisions (Linde & Peters 2020).

The extent to which citizens' preferences are reflected in policy outputs has received widespread scholarly attention in the past six decades, both in the form of responsiveness and congruence research. While congruence studies have analyzed the correspondence between citizens' preferences in terms of priorities as well as positions *and* government priorities and policies at a given point in time, responsiveness studies examined the dynamic relationship between changes in public opinion and the subsequent changes in policies. Analyzing responsiveness and congruence, many

scholars have posited that 'democracy works' because citizen preferences most of the time, and especially when salient, are reflected in policy outcomes—regardless of the operationalizations and measurements used in these studies (see for instance Brooks & Manza 2008; Costello et al. 2012; Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Lax & Phillips 2012; Page & Shapiro 1983; Rasmussen et al. 2019; Shapiro 2011; Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 2017). However, the impact of interest groups on this relationship has rarely been considered in these empirical works, despite the close intertwining of organized interests with politics (for a discussion see Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Burstein 2014). As Burstein (2020) has put it: *"Interest groups, it is feared, may have more impact on policy than the public does. To ascertain the relative power of interest groups and public opinion, research must include both. Yet it seldom does."*

Even after nearly sixty years of empirical political science research into representation, there is still much controversy about how interest groups affect the linkage between citizen preferences and public policy (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Burstein 2014, 2020; Halpin 2013; Rasmussen et al. 2018a; Rasmussen & Reher 2019). While political parties have traditionally served as key channels of representation—converting citizens' preferences into policy outputs through electoral mechanisms–, interest groups can also act as intermediaries and transmit citizens' preferences to policymakers. In contrast to political parties, interest groups do not put themselves up for elections, but operate through collective action on behalf of specific segments of society and try to shape public policy through formal and/or informal engagements with policymakers (Beyers et al. 2008; Burstein 1998; Jordan et al. 2004).

In the last two decades, one important reason for the increased academic attention for the role of interest groups as intermediaries between citizens and public policymaking is the assessment of many scholars that political parties no longer constitute a powerful linkage between the mass public and government. Party identification and membership has declined, voter turnout dropped, electoral volatility has considerably risen and parties are increasingly professionalized and elite-led (Dalton & Wattenberg 2002; Dassonneville 2012; Mair 2009; Van Biezen et al. 2012; Van Biezen & Poguntke 2014). And whereas political parties were previously strongly

embedded in civil society, this connection has weakened and 'parties moved towards the state'—becoming dependent on government funding for their survival. This has fundamentally impacted party competition and governing, raising doubts about parties' representative functioning (Katz & Mair 2009; Mair 2009)—although this presumption has been nuanced in later work (Dalton et al. 2011). To be clear, the factors outlined above are no prove for parties diminished capacities to pick up signals from public opinion. It merely denotes that political representation via parties operates less through the bottom-up aggregation of members' policy preferences and more through accountability mechanisms that especially come into effect during elections (Andeweg 2019; Dalton et al. 2011). Still, the notion that interest groups might remedy the 'decline of parties' and can function as an additional channel for the political representation of citizens' preferences has flourished among academics as well as politicians and civil servants (European Commission 2001; Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 2007; Kohler-Koch 2010; Rasmussen 2019). This notion rests in part on the presumption that groups can offer more effective representation, compared to political parties, and hence secure public policy that better fits citizens' preferences (Jordan & Maloney 2007).

In this vein, politicians and civil servants have been keen to systematically involve interest groups in policymaking in an effort to increase legitimacy and to strengthen representative democracy (Arras & Braun 2018; European Commission 2001; Kohler-Koch 2010). Acknowledging that groups can be a 'partner in governance', policymakers expect of interest groups to voice the diversity of viewpoints in society and to bring expert knowledge and the experiences of citizens into the policymaking process (Ibid.). Especially, the opening up of decision-making processes to a wider, diverse set of citizen groups is seen as an effective channeling of public demands into policies (Jordan & Maloney 2007). To this end, many governments provide funding for interest groups (Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire 2017; Crepaz & Hanegraaff 2020; Heylen & Willems 2019; Sanchez Salgado 2014) and many even helped to establish groups in order to redress the lack of representation of a certain viewpoint (e.g., consumer organization Finance Watch at the European level).[i]

Yet, this positive image of interest groups for the well-functioning of representative democracy has been repeatedly called into question. Not in the least due to lobbying scandals making news headlines such as 'Dieselgate' or the financial sector's capture over EU policy and reports on the undue influence of special interests by multiple advocacy groups dedicated to lobbying transparency and countering corruption.[ii] Such lobbying excesses paint a negative picture of interest groups' involvement in political decision-making and evoke concerns on policies not corresponding with the preferences of ordinary citizens and/or detracting from the public interest.

The goal of this dissertation is to enhance our understanding of the role of interest groups for strengthening or weakening the connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes. To assess whether interest groups—next to political parties—strengthen or weaken the linkage between citizens and government, academics have put two criteria center stage: (1) the ability of group communities to voice the diversity of interests and viewpoints in society before government and (2) groups' internal democratic processes (Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Kohler-Koch 2010; Warleigh 2001). Both aspects have evoked a lively scholarly debate.

Interest groups' representation of a diverse set of societal segments

First, the ability of interest groups to voice the diversity of interests and viewpoints in society has been mainly tackled by group scholars from a population perspective and studies analyzing the access of different group types to decision-making venues and public debates. On the one hand, the classic pluralist account holds that groups in society will collectively mobilize and take political action whenever it is in their best interests, leading to the presence of a wide diversity of groups reflecting the issues of concern for the public as a whole (Dahl 1961; Truman 1951). Group affiliation often springs from an intensely held concern or a specific desire of citizens that becomes the object of collective action due to its intersection with public policy (Gray et al. 2005; Jordan & Maloney 2007). Therefore, in contrast to political parties who are generalists and take policy positions on nearly everything, members and supporters' identification with

interest organizations is usually stronger because its goals are narrower and more directly tied to the specific concerns citizens have. Indeed, political/policy threats such as large infrastructure projects or nuclear power plants, or issues to which citizens attach great importance such as LGBTQ-rights or animal protection are often the catalysts of group formation and sustained interest mobilization (McCarthy & Zald 1977; Nownes 2004). In this regard, research has documented an ever-growing myriad of organizations representing the (diffuse) preferences of broad societal segments and these organizations' active participation in policy-making processes and public debates (see for instance Agnone 2007; Binderkrantz et al. 2016; Binderkrantz 2012; Dür & Mateo 2013; Gray & Lowery 1993; Hanegraaff et al. 2011; Leech et al. 2005; Wonka et al. 2010). Nowadays, interest group membership and volunteering surpass that of most political parties in many European countries. In countries like Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia or Sweden, the number of citizens affiliated to environmental associations or labor unions vastly exceeds the number of citizens being a member of a political party (EVS 2020). Interest groups might thus present citizens with an additional channel of representation within an electoral system for transmitting their preferences into policymaking processes.

On the other hand, a persistent view among interest group scholars—which can be traced back to Olson's *'The Logic of Collective Action'* (1965)—is that narrowly delineated and concentrated business interests that for instance advocate on behalf of asset managers, petrochemical companies or the medical devices industry consistently mobilize at a higher rate than groups mobilizing diffuse interests affecting more encompassing societal segments. In this regard, research has also documented that the policymaking process is dominated by only a small core of frequently active interest groups—often being business interests—across multiple issues and domains, surrounded by less frequent players in the periphery—more likely to be citizen groups (Fraussen et al. 2015; Halpin & Binderkrantz 2011; Hanegraaff & Berkhout 2019; LaPira et al. 2014; Maloney et al. 1994; Rasmussen & Carroll 2014). Moreover, even groups that advocate on behalf of broad societal segments such as commuters or women are not necessarily representative of the general public. Members and supporters of such groups are often

affluent and highly educated, and groups that defend the interests of disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society such as migrants or disabled people have been found to prioritize the issues and concerns of their more affluent and more educated constituents (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Schlozman et al. 2012; Strolovitch 2008). A strong tenet in interest group literature is thus that not all potential interests are equal in their capacity to mobilize and the organizational landscape does not necessarily reflect society as a whole. This bias considerably reduces the ability of group communities to voice the diversity of interests and viewpoints in society before government (Lowery et al. 2015b; Lowery & Gray 2016). As Schattschneider (1960) famously posited: "*the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent"*. Accordingly, many scholars posit that the unchecked involvement of interest groups in public policymaking might result in undue influence and policies that do not correspond with the preferences of ordinary citizens and/or the public interest (for a discussion see Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Lowery 2007; Lowery et al. 2015a).

Remarkably, interest group research has mostly left public opinion out of the equation when assessing interest groups' advocacy strategies, access to policymaking venues and public debates, and advocacy success. Instead scholars commonly rely on the assumption that well-endowed and concentrated business interests are less aligned with public opinion, while more encompassing citizen groups defend viewpoints more closely aligned with the general public's preferences (see for instance Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Dür & Mateo 2013). Though, public opinion is a factor to be reckoned with; certainly in light of the evidence provided by congruence and responsiveness scholars that public opinion can have a strong impact on policy outputs and given one of the key conclusions in interest group research itself that lobbying efforts and success strongly depend on the issue-specific policy characteristics such as salience and groups' alignment with the preferences of other actors involved (Bunea 2013; Dür et al. 2015; Junk 2019; Klüver 2011; Mahoney & Baumgartner 2015). Yet, overall, little is known about the role of interest groups' alignment with public opinion and how the involvement of interest groups in public policymaking impacts the representation of citizen preferences in policy outcomes.

Interest groups' active engagement with their constituencies

Second, interest groups' role—next to political parties—in strengthening the connection between citizens' preferences and public policy is often bestowed on their direct engagement with their members and supporters. Contrary to political parties who cannot possibly directly engage with the entire citizenry, many interest groups can directly and regularly engage the constituency they aim to represent. However, one prominent concern in interest group literature is that, during the past decades, the status of members is increasingly marginalized and that advocacy work is largely carried out by professional staff without the active consultation and endorsement of members and supporters (Eikenberry & Kluver 2004; Maier et al. 2016; Skocpol 2004; Warleigh 2001). Some organizations can even be characterized as 'protest businesses' in which the limited internal involvement of members and supporters is seen as an attractive quality for generating large-scale public support (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Organized interests that lack or only have limited internal democratic processes in place are often considered to not function as true intermediaries between citizens and government; to connect their members and broader societal segments only loosely with political elites.

Yet, it are precisely those interest groups acting on behalf of their members and supporters, after being endorsed via internal consultations and which makes the leadership accountable to those members, that demonstrate their substantive 'representativeness' and are often perceived as more legitimate by policymakers (Halpin 2006; Johansson & Lee 2014; Kohler-Koch 2010). While many interest group scholars hold bleak prospects on interest groups' potential to provide a strong connection between society and government, recent research points to the persistence of many groups characterized by extensive constituency involvement structures and procedures (Albareda 2018; Albareda & Braun 2019; Grömping & Halpin 2019; Walker et al. 2011).

Though, it remains an empirical question whether interest groups actively engaging their members and supporters are in fact 'representative' and provide a strong connection between citizens and policymakers in the sense that they defend policy positions reflecting the preferences of broader societal segments. Precisely because

groups can directly engage with their members and supporters (i.e. their constituency) they are often considered to be able to strengthen the well-functioning of representative democracy, but constituency involvement does not necessarily entail that interest groups offer *broad* societal support. Similar to political parties that face a trade-off between maximizing their votes and insisting on particular policy preferences of the party members (Strøm & Müller 1999); interest groups experience a tension between the need to engage with their constituency and the need to adopt positions that resonate broadly with the general public (Fraussen & Halpin 2018; Halpin et al. 2018; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007). When constituents are actively involved in establishing the positions an interest group pursues, constituency support is generally secured but the group's alignment with the broader public may be constrained. This alignment with the broader public may nonetheless be crucial for groups as it can increase their prospects of advocacy success (Dür & Mateo 2014; Kollman 1998; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Congruence and responsiveness studies have clearly demonstrated that policymakers motivated by electoral concerns are sensitive to the general public's signals. Interest groups might thus experience a tension similar to political parties that often also face a dual constituency (i.e. voters and members) and policy-seeking parties with strong intraparty democracy that are less flexible in adjusting their policy views to the median voter (see Strøm and Müller 1999). This tension might then considerably determine the mobilization, access, and success of interest groups in policy processes.

All in all, while some interest groups represent concentrated and narrowly delineated societal segments and/or are more likely to steer policies away from the preferences of ordinary citizens and the public interest, other groups advocate on behalf of broad societal segments and/or are more likely to be propagators of public opinion. What is more, interest groups' active engagement with their constituents might result in groups providing a strong connection between the general public and policymakers, but constituency involvement might also result in the supply of narrow societal support. Hence, as posited by Baumgartner & Leech (1998): *"Many have noted the paradox inherent in the group system: the group system is seen simultaneously to be a route for popular representation and a threat to good government because of the biases that it*

allows". Interest groups can be beneficial *and* at times be detrimental for representative democracy.

To advance our understanding of the role of interest groups in strengthening or weakening the connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes, this dissertation makes two specific contributions to the literature. Firstly, in analyzing the extent to which groups may function as an additional channel of political representation for citizen preferences in the policymaking process, this dissertation—in line with recent research—takes public opinion as a benchmark (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). Rather than making implicit assumptions based on group type (e.g., type of members, narrow or encompassing scope of interest representation), this dissertation provides an empirical test of whether and to what extent variation in membership scope explains the *overlap between public opinion and interest groups' actual policy positions*. Subsequently, the dissertation assesses how the public support groups enjoy for their policy positions affects policy access, media prominence and advocacy success. The dissertation thus directly assesses the extent to which interest groups voice citizen preferences before government and in public debates (i.e. criterium 1). Secondly, I explicitly incorporate *the impact of constituency involvement on interest groups' alignment with public opinion* and how this might vary depending on group type (i.e. criterium 2). Central to the dissertation is the inherent tension between actively engaging members and supporters *and* aligning policy positions with public opinion. The overarching expectation of the dissertation is that this entails substantial consequences for interest groups' policy access, media prominence and advocacy success. Many scholars deem the extensive engagement with members and supporters as a crucial factor for interest groups' potential to serve as an additional channel of political representation (Albareda 2018; Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 2007). Though, the effects of constituency involvement on the extent to which interest groups represent citizen preferences, how this subsequently affects groups' access to the policy process and the news media, and how it shapes advocacy success are largely underexposed in current literature.

How and to what extent interest groups (dis)aligned with public opinion participate in policymaking can affect the translation of citizens' policy preferences into

policy outputs. The observation that (at least some) organized interests have the potential to function as so-called *'transmission belts'*—i.e. to function as intermediaries by aggregating and transmitting citizen preferences to policymakers—has recently sparked a vibrant body of research. The next section provides an overview of the current state-of-the-art in the literature that considers both interest groups' lobbying efforts and public opinion to analyze public policy; and identifies some of the more detailed scientific gaps this dissertation seeks to address. Subsequently, I present my overarching framework that connects the scientific articles that make up the dissertation and explicate the scientific contributions of each of these articles.

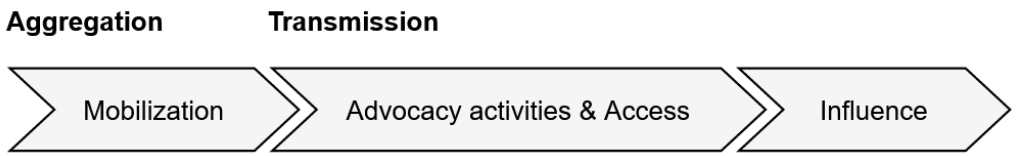
2 Public opinion and interest groups: An overview of an emerging body of research

This dissertation relies on the *influence production process* of interest representation (Lowery & Brasher 2004; Lowery & Gray 2004b) to examine when and how interest groups aggregate and transmit citizen preferences across the multiple steps required for organized interests to eventually influence policy outcomes. It allows me to disentangle when and how interest groups come to voice citizens' preferences before government. Accordingly, each step of the influence production process is operationalized as a dependent variable in one of the scientific articles and for which in this section the overarching literature is discussed. For each step in the process, I connect the extant literature with the two criteria—namely, whether interest groups voice citizen preferences (1) and how this is affected by groups' active engagement with their constituents (2)—put forward to assess the role of interest groups for representative democracy.

Figure 1 visualizes the influence production process. First, the mobilization stage is concerned with how 'interests' come to be represented by interest groups. In this step, interest groups are preoccupied with developing core policy programs, defining priorities, and formulating specific policy positions. The second stage deals with the advocacy activities of interest groups and the possible access they gain to the policymaking process and public debates. The last step in the process pertains to whether

organized interests can exert influence on public policy. Hence, while the first stage deals with the aggregation of preferences by interest groups, the two latter steps concern the transmission of these preferences into the policymaking process. Looking at each of these steps individually can be fruitful to unravel the relationship between interest representation and final policy decisions. Together, these three steps of the influence production process elucidate when and how the involvement of interest groups in public policymaking strengthens or weakens the connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes.

Figure 1. Influence production process



Recently, a modest literature has emerged analyzing the factors affecting interest groups' alignment with public opinion; and that examines if and how policy outcomes are affected by public opinion and interest groups' lobbying efforts. Two research lines can be distinguished and linked to the influence production process. A first line of research focuses on the extent to which organized interests align with the policy positions and priorities of the general public—both on an organizational level and on the interest group community-level. These studies thus focus on the first step in the influence production process, namely interest mobilization and aggregation. A second research strand addresses how the link between public opinion and public policy is affected by interest groups' advocacy; or inversely, how advocacy success is affected by public opinion. These latter studies thus focus on the final influence stage by analyzing how the interest transmission by interest groups—(dis)aligned with public opinion—affects policy outcomes. What will become apparent is that interest groups' (dis)alignment with public opinion and its effect on advocacy activities and access to policymaking venues and public debates—the second stage in the influence production—is underexposed in current literature. Herein lies an important contribution of this dissertation.

Interest mobilization and aggregation

First, I discuss extant research dealing with the aggregation of preferences by organized interests—i.e. the first step of interest mobilization—in relation to public opinion. A few studies have focused on the direct relationship between the general public and organized interests, i.e. the congruence between interest groups' policy priorities and/or positions and the preferences of the general public. Some have examined this relationship in the aggregate, studying how the density and diversity of *interest group communities* reflects public priorities or whether lobbying efforts are directed at public priorities. One of the first to do so were Rasmussen et al. (2014)—analyzing interest groups' contributions to European Commission consultations—and who demonstrated that interest groups tend to mobilize on issues that are regarded as salient by the public. Similarly, Klüver (2015)—taking a longitudinal approach—provides evidence of the driving force of public priorities for interest group's issue prioritization registered at the German Bundestag. The results in Flöthe & Rasmussen (2019) study of 50 policy issues in five European countries are somewhat more mixed and indicate that having a diverse set of groups active on an issue is no guarantee for the policy positions promoted to be reflective of public opinion.

Studies analyzing *individual interest groups'* linkage with public opinion have delved deeper into organizational characteristics and contextual features that might affect groups' congruence with the general public. Regarding organizational characteristics, group type is consistently put forward to impact the accordance of interest groups with the general public—but has rarely been tested (for discussions of this presumption, see Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Binderkrantz & Krøyer 2012). Presenting one of the few empirical tests, Flöthe & Rasmussen (2019) found that, overall, groups representing diffuse constituencies are slightly more congruent with public opinion than groups that represent narrow, concentrated constituencies. They also determined that issue salience is a predictor of interest groups' congruence with public opinion. Similarly, Fraussen et al. (2020) found that public salience (among other salience measurements) affects interest groups' issue prioritization. Thus, these studies

demonstrate the potential of groups to not only act on behalf of their own constituents' interests, but also address the issues and positions shared by the general public.

The aforementioned studies have made important contributions towards understanding the link between the general public and organized interests' issue prioritization and policy positions (i.e. criterium 1). Though, what is missing in these empirical studies is a thorough discussion of the mechanisms of political representation traditionally considered to link citizens with their representatives—namely, electoral turnover and rational anticipation. Theoretical expectations in these studies usually lead to tests of how variation in group type and the scope of the represented interests shapes the linkage between public opinion, interest groups and public policy. However, focusing on group type does not explicitly address the internal organizational processes (i.e. criterium 2). For instance, how does the involvement of members and supporters matter for the degree to which interest groups' positions correspond with public opinion? And are groups that mobilize encompassing societal segments such as citizen groups more likely to adopt policy positions aligned with the policy preferences of the general public?

Hence, the dissertation aims to gain further insight into the *mechanisms of representation* that bring about the connection between public opinion and organized interests' political demands and will examine *the conditions* under which these mechanisms might play out differently. Specifically, I will further disentangle the inherent tension in interest representation; namely many interest organizations might find themselves in a balancing act between actively engaging their members and supporters *and* aligning their policy objectives with public opinion. Indeed, although interest groups are established to represent their constituency, their prospects of influencing public policy increase when their positions are aligned with public opinion (Dür & Mateo 2014; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). At the same time, the 'substantive' link between interest groups' constituency and the organizational leadership might come under strain when groups prioritize issues on which their positions resonate broadly with the general public but to which its own constituency does not attach much importance (Fraussen et al. 2020; Halpin et al. 2018). Interest groups must manage this

organizational tension, but little is known about how internal processes and strategic considerations—the mechanisms of representation—affect this balancing act between acting on behalf of organizational constituencies and groups' positioning versus public opinion. This dissertation seeks to address this scientific gap by incorporating insights from studies addressing the internal organizational processes of constituency involvement and groups' organizational capacities to function as intermediaries (see for instance Albareda 2018; Binderkrantz 2009; Halpin et al. 2018; Johansson & Lee 2014; Warleigh 2001).

Interest transmission: advocacy activities, access & influence

To assess whether interest groups function as intermediaries voicing citizen preferences to policymakers, we need to know how the representation of citizen preferences in policy outcomes is affected by interest groups' lobbying efforts. While several studies have assessed the impact of public opinion and interest groups on public policy separately (e.g., Burstein 2014; Gilens & Page 2014; Jacoby & Schneider 2001; Olzak & Soule 2009; Olzak et al. 2016; Rasmussen et al. 2018b; Soule & King 2006; Soule & Olzak 2004), the interaction between both has rarely been analyzed. Though, a second set of studies investigated exactly this interaction. These studies can be attributed to the final stage of the influence production process. While some studies have theoretically conceived interest groups' lobbying efforts as a moderator on the relationship between public opinion and public policy, other studies have considered public opinion as a moderator for the relationship between interest groups' lobbying and public policy. Theoretical arguments on the impact of interest groups and public opinion on public policy, often boil down to the fact that public support gives strength and credibility to the interest groups' political demands because it allows groups to appeal to the electoral sensitivities that many policymakers face, or vice versa because interest groups amplify public opinion signals and thereby put policymakers under pressure.

Gray et al. (2004) present one of the earliest studies addressing the impact of organized interests on the relationship between public opinion and public policy. Their results indicate that business biases in US *interest group communities* modestly weaken

policy liberalism responsiveness. Agnone (2007) provides evidence that the number of environmental protests can amplify public opinion and positively affect the passage of legislation. Gilens (2012) probes even deeper into the public opinion-interest group-policy relational triangle by analyzing a high number of US policy issues instead of looking at broad policy moods, government spending or specific policy areas. His results indicate that policy change is more likely when interest groups—or at least the most powerful groups—and public opinion—or at least the more affluent societal segments—are aligned in their political demands, while policy change is usually prevented when their preferences collide. Moreover, Lax & Phillips (2012) study of 39 policies within eight issue areas in the U.S. states details that having a powerful interest group on the same side as the public opinion majority increases the chance of congruence between citizen preferences and policy outcomes. Though, when powerful interest groups are opposed to public opinion, the likelihood of citizen preferences being represented in policy outcomes decreases. Similarly, Bevan & Rasmussen (2020) demonstrated that the number of voluntary organizations in a policy area has a positive conditioning effect on the link between public priorities and attention for these priorities in the president's State of the Union Address. However, this effect gets diluted in later decision-making stages. Going beyond the US context, a series of contributions by Klüver and colleagues details how the type of organized interests that lobbies policymakers conditions the take up of citizen preferences in policy outputs as measured in parliamentarians' votes as well as government spending (Giger & Klüver 2016; Hopkins et al. 2019; Klüver & Pickup 2019). While a higher share of lobbying from citizen groups strengthens the public opinion-policy linkage, a negative effect is found when a larger proportion of business interests lobbies policymakers—although results differ across countries. In the European context, Rasmussen & Reher (2019) demonstrated that on issues crowded by interest groups that experience a high level of associational engagement a stronger relationship between public opinion and policy exists.

The conditional effect of public support on advocacy success for *individual interest groups* as measured by the attainment of specific policy positions in outcomes has been most convincingly demonstrated by Rasmussen et al. (2018a) who found that

especially citizen groups depend on public support to attain advocacy success, while this does not hold for business interests. Furthermore, Dür & Mateo (2014) illustrated in their case study of the ratification process of the ACTA-agreement in the EU Member States how interest groups could successfully reverse the political course of action by increasing public salience, generating public opposition and an ever-growing scope of interest groups advocating against its implementation. While in the ACTA-case, citizen groups prevailed largely because their political demands were in accordance with mainstream public opinion, the opposite might also occur. Analyzing lobbying activities of business associations through case studies related to European post-crisis banking reforms and the financial transaction tax, Keller (2018) and Kastner (2018) describe how, thanks to the use of frames that resonated positively with the broader public, business groups were able to achieve their policy goals. All in all, these studies have found that the lobbying efforts of interest groups might both facilitate and hamper the impact of public opinion on policy outcomes—or inversely that public support can, but not necessarily, have a positive impact on groups' advocacy success.

When examining how the involvement of interest groups in public policymaking impacts the representation of citizen preferences in policy outcomes, this dissertation seeks to address two scientific gaps. Firstly, this study will take a step back and assesses to what extent and when groups more or less aligned with the preferences of broad societal segments gain access to various political and public advocacy arenas—i.e. the second step in the influence production process. In order to gain influence on public policy, a crucial, though not sufficient, step is for organized interests to gain access to the policy-making process and public debates (Binderkrantz et al. 2017b; Dür 2008). Hence, if and how organized interests can function as an intermediary for citizen preferences importantly depends on the extent to which groups with policy access have the potential to transmit the preferences of broad societal segments and/or effectively enjoy broad public support (i.e. criterium 1). Finding that access is predominantly given to groups not or less representative for the general public, will considerably decrease the potential of interest groups to operate as a so-called transmission belt for citizen preferences. Conversely, finding that access is often also given to groups more

representative of the preferences of broad societal segments, increases interest groups' potential to strengthen the connection between public opinion and public policy. As such, the dissertation aims to gain further insight into the *dynamics* that shape access to the policymaking process and public debates and examines *the conditions* affecting the role of broad public support therein. In this regard, I explicitly account for groups' active engagement with their constituents and its effects on groups' advocacy activities and access (i.e. criterium 2). Comparing inside and outside venues, I can shed further light on how the impact of public support on interest group access varies due to issue-specific factors such as media/public salience, overall interest group mobilization, and the specific institutional context.

Secondly, given the mixed results in current literature and because access to the news media or more institutionalized and covert venues such as advisory councils is no guarantee for influence, this dissertation examines the role of public opinion support for advocacy success. More specifically and while (implicitly) emphasized in the aforementioned studies, one underexposed aspect is that the extent of public support that groups enjoy for their political demands might result in distinct lobbying outcomes depending on the specific stage in the policymaking process. While the sequential nature of the policy process and its consequences for policy change or status quo maintenance have been widely recognized by scholars studying the agenda-setting effects of public opinion on policy and by social movement scholars (e.g., Bevan & Jennings 2014 on agenda-setting and Soule & King 2006 on social movements), it has only occasionally come to the fore in interest group research (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Binderkrantz & Pedersen 2019; Jourdain et al. 2017; Varone et al. 2020; Varone et al. 2017). Scholars studying the role of public opinion for advocacy success, have usually measured interest groups' positions to match these to specific policy outputs at one (repeated) point in time (e.g., Klüver & Pickup 2019; Rasmussen et al. 2018a); but have not taken into account the complex nature of the policymaking process. If an issue is put on the legislative agenda this might be considered as an advocacy success, but this issue prioritization can also be the result of a symbolic action and not result in any substantive policy change. And while an initial legislative proposal might reflect a group's preference, the proposal

might considerably be amended and as a result no longer reflect its position. Hence, integrating conventional agenda-setting research and social movement literature into the study of advocacy success, makes it possible to go beyond the 'all or nothing' assessment of advocacy success at a given point in time and allows to address the sequential nature of policymaking. As such, this dissertation aims at examining the unique *conjunction of conditions* that result in interest groups successful preference attainment and the role of public opinion therein *throughout distinct stages in the policy process*. Ultimately, interest groups must be successful at multiple stages of a legislative process, and each stage has its own subset of relevant political actors—more or less sensitive to pressure exerted by interest groups backed by public opinion—that decides upon a course of action.

The following section details the overarching framework adopted, as well as the overall conceptual set-up of the different scientific articles, to answer the following three research questions that arose from the literature review: (1) how we can explain the extent to which interest groups take up the policy preferences of the general public in their advocacy work and policy positions; (2) how does the extent to which interest groups align with citizen preferences explains access to the policy-making process and the news media; (3) how does public support affect advocacy success throughout different stages in the policymaking process.

3 Overarching framework and dissertation overview

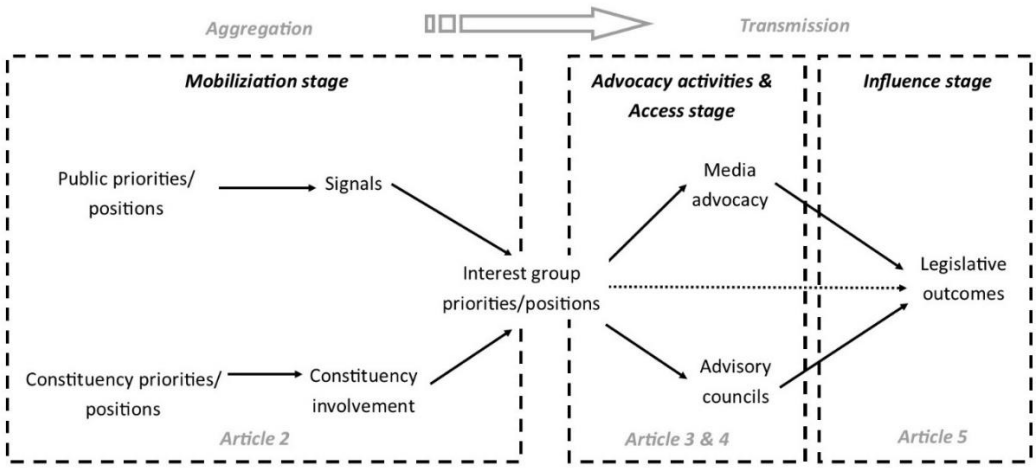
Ultimately, this dissertation is preoccupied with 'substantive representation' by organized interests or in other words *"representing here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them"* (Pitkin 1967: 209). The approach towards representation in this dissertation resembles this *'acting in the interest of'* view. Empirical political science research analyzing the 'substantive' link between represented and representatives, developed two different strategies to operationalize and measure how 'representation' comes about in the realm of party-politics. Each of these strategies is to specific mechanisms that allow political parties to function as intermediaries between citizens and the government (for an excellent review and discussion see Beyer

& Hänni 2018; Wlezien 2017). Hence, in assessing the functioning of interest groups as intermediaries, it is fruitful to borrow insights from this literature.

First, the concept of congruence statically examines the correspondence between constituents' preferences and their representatives' ideologies, issue priorities and positions or policy outcomes at any given point in time. In theorizing upon the mechanisms through which congruence takes shape, scholars have mostly pointed toward the mechanism of 'electoral turnover' which implies that congruence is the result of citizens who vote for the party that represents their preferred policy views (i.e. prospective voting). Victorious political parties then implement these policies, reducing the gap between what voters want and what the government provides, hereby increasing congruence (Hakhverdian 2010; Powell 2004). Second, the concept of responsiveness dynamically assesses the causal relationship between representatives and their constituency. Responsiveness requires that a change in constituent preferences precedes a change in the same direction of representatives' preferences, behavior, and policy outcomes. Thus, while studies analyzing congruence remain ambivalent on the exact causal direction, scholars using the concept of responsiveness have a clear and testable causal path in mind (Beyer & Hänni 2018).[iii] The mechanism through which responsiveness comes about has been labelled 'rational anticipation'. Because voters can control policymakers by evaluating their past performance and choosing whether to re-elect them or not (i.e. retrospective voting), policymakers who are currently in office will try to strategically anticipate citizen preferences to avoid electoral retribution (Hakhverdian 2010; Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Stimson et al. 1995). Yet, responsiveness might not result in congruence with public majorities when ideologies or policy positions are changed in the direction of the public opinion change, but ultimately still not align with the preferences of these public majorities (Beyer & Hänni 2018; Wlezien 2017). Congruence therefore is harder to achieve and comes closer to the basic premises of 'representative democracy', namely the correspondence between preferences of the public and the representatives' ideologies, issue priorities and/or policy positions. Nevertheless, responsiveness is the 'other side of the same coin'—as the concept details the causal link between represented and representative. Hence, for 'substantive' political

representation to be present, congruence must be the result of responsiveness (Beyer & Hänni 2018; Wlezien 2017). Therefore, this dissertation empirically assesses the linkage between public opinion and interest groups' preferences in terms of congruence. Congruence is regarded as a continuum and entails the extent to which interest groups are aligned with the general public on specific issues (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019).

Figure 2. The aggregation and transmission of citizen preferences by organized interests across the influence production process



Following the suggestion by Beyer & Hänni (2018) to come to a more integrated theoretical-empirical approach, I further theorize upon and examine the role of interest groups for the representation of citizen preferences in policy outcomes by conceiving the 'substantive representation' by organized interests as a *three-step influence production process* (Lowery & Brasher 2004; Lowery & Gray 2004b). Each step of the influence production process is operationalized as a dependent variable in one of the scientific articles. First, regarding the mobilization stage—concerned with how 'interests' come to be represented and preferences are aggregated—I examined interest groups' congruence with public opinion. The second stage deals with the advocacy activities and the possible access groups gain to policymaking venues and public debates. The last step in the process pertains to whether interest groups exert influence on public policy. Specifically, for these two latter preference transmission steps, I analyzed the

consequences of interest groups' congruence with public opinion in terms of their access to policy-making venues and the news media; and their advocacy success. This process is visualized in Figure 2 (inspired by Kohler-Koch 2010), which gives an overview of the steps of the aggregation of citizen preferences by organized interests and its transmission into policymaking processes via advisory councils, media advocacy and eventually into policy outcomes. The arrows schematically represent the connections between the four scientific articles.

In a first step, I analyze *how* and the extent to which organized interests adopt *congruent* policy positions with public opinion. Stressing the 'how', enables me to unpack and apply the mechanisms of representation—namely, electoral turnover and rational anticipation—to organized interests. These mechanisms allow me to generate testable expectations on the degree of congruence interest groups have with public opinion. Although, compared to political parties, these mechanisms manifest themselves differently for interest organizations, they are in many respects relevant for understanding how interest groups can be congruent with public opinion. I argue that the mechanism of 'electoral turnover'—when applied to interest groups—is closely related to processes of *constituency involvement.* Interest groups may seek positional congruence with broader public segments in a bottom-up fashion by actively engaging with their constituency before becoming active on specific policy dossiers. Groups then pursue political positions that help them consolidate and strengthen the connection with their constituency and avoid retribution from members or supporters. In addition to constituency involvement, interest groups can detect signals from the public by closely monitoring its mood—for instance by relying on public opinion polls and the news media. In this regard, the groups' strategic behavior becomes crucial and reflects *'rational anticipation'*. In short, rational anticipation means that interest groups attempt to cater to public opinion and strategically decide to lobby on issues for which their policy positions correspond with views that gain widespread public support.

Article 2 (co-authored with Iskander De Bruycker) further details the exact nature of these mechanisms when applied to organized interests and how these mechanisms can play out differently depending on group type and issue salience. The

core argument being that, in the end, constituency involvement and congruence might be driven by countervailing mechanisms and hence result in an important tension that organized interests must manage. We posit that this tension plays out differently depending on whether an interest group represents a narrow and clearly delineated membership base of companies, institutions or professionals that are formally affiliated members (i.e. concentrated representative); whether the group has a diffuse constituency and a formal membership base consisting of (associations of) individual citizens mobilized around a public interest or cause (i.e. diffuse representative); or whether a group has a diffuse constituency of loosely affiliated donors or supporters, but no formal members (i.e. solidarity). This distinction of group types relates to Pitkin's conceptualization of attached and unattached interests (Pitkin 1967; for a useful discussion see Halpin 2006). Whereas the former two group types have an organizational constituency that can be consulted about the correspondence between their interests and the way in which their interests are represented, solidarity interests are not attributable to a particular constituency that can be consulted to assess whether their interests are adequately represented. As such, in **Article 2**, we empirically put to the test whether the narrower (more encompassing) a groups' constituency, the more likely it is that its degree of congruence with the broader public is lower (higher) *because of extensive constituency involvement*. Intense membership involvement in advocacy activities shifts concentrated interest groups towards the more particular interests of their members and away from positions that resonate strongly with the general public, while diffuse interest groups intensely engaging their constituency can learn about the policy preferences from broad societal segments. While our cross-sectional research design does not allow to assess the effect of 'rational anticipation', we connect this mechanism to the salience issues attract in the news. Salience is a key condition for interest groups to detect signals from the public. The results in Article 2 demonstrate that diffuse groups with formal members are more prone to share the position of the broader public compared to concentrated interest groups, especially if they involve their members in advocacy activities and when issues are salient in the news. The opposite holds for concentrated interests, while interest groups with an informal supporter base—solidarity interests—

have the overall highest degree of congruence with public opinion. Solidarity interests have much leeway to strategically cater to public opinion as the organizational leadership is more detached from the supporter base.

While Article 2 deals with the aggregation of preferences by organized interests, the subsequent articles concern the transmission of preferences by organized interests into the policy-making process and public debates. Interest groups not only need to aggregate preferences, they also need to seek access to various political arenas to have a chance at influencing public policy. Notably, in a second step, I focus on the consequences of interest groups' congruence with public opinion in terms of (1) their access to policy-making venues and the news media; and (2) their advocacy success in various stages of the legislative process. And while not incorporating a longitudinal element in the design, the three-step approach allows to tentatively unravel the sequential nature of interest groups' role in the representation of citizen preferences in public policy. By focusing on the crucial step of 'access', I contribute to existing literature by studying the role of public support for organized interests in what goes on between the moment a group has taken position and becomes politically active *and* the moment the group achieves its policy goals or not. Finally, this sequential nature of interest representation is further stressed by examining advocacy success in relation to public opinion support at three distinct stages in the legislative decision-making process.

Both the second and third article take the insurmountable role of gatekeepers as a starting point for theorizing upon interest groups' access to political-administrative venues such as advisory councils and the news media. Access to advisory councils and the news media is often conceived of as the result of a resource-exchange relationship in which interest groups supply valuable resources—technical expertise, political information, or any other organizational attribute or ability—to policymakers and/or journalists who act as gatekeepers (Berkhout 2013; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a). While static supply-side explanations of access are central to many of the applications of the exchange-perspective (Berkhout 2013); this dissertation explicitly aims to account for the demand-side incentives of gatekeepers, and theorizes about how both interest groups' incentives to seek access and gatekeepers' incentives to grant access depend on the issue-

specific context. When seeking access, interest groups are being constrained or will have opportunities contingent on the—often context-specific—demands made by gatekeepers and/or their organizational constituency's preferences (Berkhout 2013). These context-specific supply- and demand-side explanations of access are then applied to the role of broad societal/public support.

Concretely, **Article 3** examines interest groups' access to advisory councils and the role of broad societal support therein. The core argument is that the capacity of interest groups to supply broad societal support is decisive for gaining access in politicized policy domains. When policy domains are highly politicized—meaning that a domain is publicly salient, attracts high levels of interest mobilization and is characterized by considerable political contestation—it is expected that policymakers' incentives to grant access to organized interests that can supply broad societal support will increase. Broad societal support entails that interest groups signal to policymakers that policies are widely accepted and perceived as legitimate, while a narrow scope of support entails that only a specific subset of society is backing the policy. Specifically, I test whether more politicization—making that policymakers' electoral sensitivities are heightened and political compromises are in need of legitimacy and acceptance in the eyes of the public—results in a higher likelihood of access for interest groups that represent encompassing constituencies and/or are characterized by a higher intensity with which organizational constituencies are consulted. In this way, I provide an empirical test of how the scope of societal support an interest group could potentially supply (broad or narrow) affects groups' policy access. The results presented in Article 3 confirm that organized interests are more likely to gain access in politicized policy domains, but that this effect is moderated by the scope of societal support that interest groups can signal. Interest groups that signal a rather narrow scope of support gain less access in highly politicized domains.

Article 4 analyzes the extent to which interest groups that are very prominent in the news enjoy widespread public support for the policy positions they defend. The key argument being that interest groups' use of media-oriented strategies and hence their degree of media prominence depends on what proportion of the public supports a specific

policy and how salient a specific policy issue is in the news and for the general public. Interest groups can strategically seek to increase their media prominence on policy issues for which they enjoy broad public support because prominence increases their prospects of advocacy success, but their degree of prominence also depends on the level of salience the policy issue attracts in the news and journalists selecting relevant voices to cover. Like policymakers that act as gatekeepers for membership in advisory councils, journalists ultimately decide whose voices get covered in the news. This asymmetrical dependency makes that issue salience and journalistic selection mechanisms based on news values and routines are more decisive for explaining media prominence compared to interest groups' own incentives to seek high prominence when enjoying broad public support. These assertions are put to the test by analyzing the effects of public support and issue salience on media prominence, while controlling for groups use of media-oriented strategies. The results presented in Article 4 demonstrate that interest groups in the news often enjoy considerable levels of public support. However, on highly salient issues, a small set of interest groups defending more unpopular positions also features highly prominent in the news. While enjoying broad public support pushes interest groups to pursue extensive news coverage, high levels of issue salience pulls organized interests into the news despite defending a more unpopular position.

Central to both articles is the balancing act between organized interests' acting on behalf of the interests of their organizational constituencies and the potential access benefits that arise for groups thanks to enjoying broad public support. The consequences of this tension become palpable when theorizing upon the downside of extensive constituency involvement when policy domains and/or issues are salient, many interests get mobilized and more political conflict is present. While each of these elements of politicization heighten the access benefits of enjoying broad support, these factors simultaneously invoke constraints for many interest groups in their lobbying activities. On the one hand, the findings in **Article 3** indicate that extensive constituency involvement—often denoting the supply of more narrow societal support—results in a lower likelihood of access to advisory councils in politicized policy domains. While constituency involvement might be crucial to appease members and supporters when

reaching a political compromise, extensive internal consultations might result in the supply of narrow support at times when policymakers are in demand of broad societal support. On the other hand, in **Article 4**, the possible drawbacks of constituency involvement for groups' lobbying activities are palpable for interest groups featuring prominently in the news but that do not enjoy broad support. A group's media prominence is not the sole result of its own actions and an important dynamic to account for is a group's need to react to external policy threats or to counteract adversaries that successfully gained media prominence, despite defending a more unpopular position. Under these circumstances, media prominence does not directly aid the group in influencing public policy—the group cannot use public support to corroborate its political demands—but rather helps the organization to secure its ties with its members and supporters. These groups then also get 'pulled' into the news because they are deemed newsworthy. Their viewpoints and actions appeal to news values such as conflict and negativity and it allows journalists to provide a balance of viewpoints.

In essence, these two articles shed further light on the classic two-edged sword that defines interest representation in many regards, namely the 'logic of membership' versus the 'logic of influence' as described by Schmitter & Streeck (1999); in particular by taking into account the important factor of public opinion in relation to the 'logic of influence'. Acting when enjoying broad public support may be beneficial to put pressure on policymakers in advisory councils or through the news media, but when combined with low levels of constituency involvement holds the risk of alienating members and supporters. As will become clear in the articles, interest groups must constantly manage this tightrope and the multiple examples provided to support the statistical analyses demonstrate the nuanced and sometimes conflicting function of interest groups in connecting the general public and policymakers.

The final article of the dissertation, **Article 5** (co-authored with Jan Beyers), examines when and how interest groups are successful representatives of the general public throughout the policy process. We argue that the impact of public support for policy positions on advocacy success, varies across distinct stages of the policy process; ranging from the coalition negotiations, the introduction of legislation in parliament, to

the final legislative outcome. We posit that the relationship between public support and advocacy success resembles a parabola; public support for interest groups' positions will be key in the initial stage of the policy process, its effect will weaken in the middle of the process, to become again stronger in the final stages of the legislative process. The central thrust of our analysis is that distinct stages in the policy process are characterized by varying levels of institutional friction—i.e. each stage in the policy process is characterized by a set of decisionmakers, a 'winning coalition', that must align with the group's preferences and a degree of policy anchoring. While during the initial stage of government formation a large 'winning coalition' is needed, smaller 'winning coalitions' are needed in the middle of the process for introducing legislation, but for the final vote a large 'winning coalition' of decisionmakers is again needed to overcome friction and adopt legislation. For instance, to have legislation introduced that reflects group preferences, only a few politicians need to pay attention and be favorably disposed toward the interest group's political demands. At this stage, policies are not yet deeply enshrined, and actions taken by politicians are less consequential compared to the later decision-making stages. Consequently, public support will matter less, while the relative importance of alignment with political parties and other organized interests is more important. Additionally, we account for legislators varying electoral sensitivities across the policy process to theorize upon the role of public support for advocacy success; namely a heightened electoral sensitivity during coalition negotiations and when adopting legislation (rational anticipation of electoral retributions), but less top-of-mind when legislation gets first introduced in parliament.

Conceptualizing the legislative process in this way allows to further elucidate the mixed results in previous research regarding public support and advocacy success. The timing of the measurement of advocacy success—i.e. the stage of the policy process—is likely to matter for the results obtained and affects the conclusions drawn on the role of interest groups for the public opinion-public policy linkage. The results in Article 5 indicate that public support is key for advocacy success during coalition negotiations. Yet once negotiations are over, especially groups that did not attain their position resort to the news media to challenge the government. These groups are especially successful

in signaling their views via opposition parties when enjoying broad public support but fail to attain their preferences in final legislative outcomes. Still, interest groups that attain their legislative preferences, on average, enjoy considerable levels of public support and throughout the policy process the relative importance of support from the governing parties and other mobilized interests grows.

Together, these four articles provide insight in the controversies concerning interest groups' functioning as intermediaries between citizen preferences and public policymaking. Each of these four articles highlights the specific aspects and conditions affecting the degree to which organized interests may strengthen or weaken the connection between citizen preferences and public policy. The conclusion summarizes the findings, connects these findings to the broader implications for interest groups' functioning as intermediaries, explicates the possible generalizations but also limitations of the study, and suggests avenues for future research. In the next chapter, I give an overview of the data collection efforts. In order to address the particularities of the Belgian system of interest representation, **Article 1** (co-authored with Jan Beyers and Frederik Heylen) describes its key contextual features: its neo-corporatist nature, its consociationalist legacy, and the existence of multiple communities of organized interests at each government level. Accordingly, this article provides a baseline for interest representation in Belgium and facilitates the discussion of the generalizability of the findings in the conclusion.

Methodological approach

Having discussed the substantive contributions of the dissertation, I will now touch upon the methodological innovations and data-gathering efforts undertaken to conduct the study. First, the overall data collection strategy is presented. Second, I provide a descriptive overview of the issue sample and I discuss the representativeness of the interest group sample.

1 Data collection strategy

Studying the relationship between public opinion, interest groups and public policy is no easy task. Many research designs used in responsiveness and congruence research rely on broad measures of policies such as policy moods (Stimson et al. 1995), welfare state effort (Brooks & Manza 2006a, b) or government spending (Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 1995). Typically, these broad policy measures are matched with public opinion data regarding ideological preferences or 'most important problem' prioritizations. While these analyzes have generated valuable insights in the functioning of democracy, using these kind of measures when studying interest group representation would inevitably lead to a mismatch between what interest groups attempt to influence and what is actually being analyzed (Burstein 2020). Organized interests direct their lobbying efforts to specific policy issues. Thus, issue-specific measurements of policies and public opinion are needed; i.e. data on the concrete policy directions and positions favored.

However, sampling specific policy issues to study interest representation is often demanding. There is no readily available dataset listing all issues on which interest groups were active. Therefore, interest group scholars have relied on legislative databases (Beyers et al. 2014a; Beyers et al. 2014c; Burstein 2014), have asked groups themselves on which issues they work (Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Mahoney 2008; the Agendas and Interest Groups project), or used the news media to identify the issues groups mobilize on (Bernhagen & Trani 2012). Though, given the goal of this

dissertation—namely, to analyze the role of interest groups for the representation of citizen preferences in public policy—the availability of issue-specific public opinion data is vital. Without such public opinion data neither an assessment of the degree of congruence between interest groups and the general public on the issue-specific level would be possible, nor would it allow to examine the effect of public salience and/or support for interest groups' access to advisory councils, prominence in the news, and lobbying success.

1.1 The selection of policy issues

The starting point of the empirical analyzes is a sample of 110 specific policy issues, which were included in an online representative voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters (Flanders n=1,053, Wallonia n=1,028). The voter survey was conducted in the run-up to the Belgian sub(national) and European elections of 25 May 2014 and resulted in an average response rate of 17%.

Survey respondents were presented with several issue statements with which they could either agree or disagree, thereby indicating their preferred policy direction. Respondents were sampled based on gender, age, education level, language, and region. For generalization purposes, oversampling was done for specific types of voters who are usually underrepresented in public opinion surveys (Lesschaeve 2017b).[iv] Respondents were approached in two waves to avoid survey fatigue (each wave lasted on average 15 minutes). The statements on the national level were the same in both parts of the country, but each survey also contained custom-made statements for each subnational level. Consequently, while both surveys have some statements on subnational policy issues that are similar, they also contain a substantial number of statements that have no counterpart in the other region. Voters could either agree or disagree with a policy statement (Lesschaeve 2017b). The statements were developed through consultation with political journalists from De Standaard, La Dernière Heure, La Libre Belgique (newspapers), VRT and RTBF (television) to guarantee resonance among voters and political parties, and were refined by holding focus groups with potential respondents.

Moreover, the number of statements per policy domain reflects the budgetary weight of the policy domain in each of the (sub)national governments' budgets.

All of the 110 sampled policy issues—of which 37 national issues, 34 Flemish issues and 39 Walloon/Francophone issues—meet the following criteria: uni-dimensionality, specificity, attributable to a dominant government level, and deal with substantive policies instead of administrative acts (e.g., accumulation of political mandates) or budgetary allocations (e.g., subsidies for cultural policy). Examples include: '*The retirement age should not rise', 'Nuclear plants should remain open'* and *'More technical courses should be taught in high school'*. It should be mentioned that the sampling approach was strongly inspired by the GovLis-project led by Anne Rasmussen (for more details, see Rasmussen et al. 2018a). The issue-specific public opinion data were gathered within the 2014 Benchmark survey for the Voting Advice Application conducted by Stefaan Walgrave and project collaborators (for more details, see Lefevere & Walgrave 2014; Lesschaeve 2017b). This dataset provides the backbone on which several other data collection efforts of the dissertation rely.

The use of this issue-specific public opinion dataset for sampling policy issues comes with several advantages. First, in contrast to sampling approaches that start from legislative databases, this sample includes policy issues that both have and have not entered the legislative agenda in one of four Belgian parliaments after the elections. Looking into the issues that do not make it onto the legislative agenda but on which lobbying took place, can thus considerably contribute to our understanding of why lobbying efforts fail (Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Second, the issue-centered sampling allows to account for the contextualized nature of lobbying (one of the primary goals of the sampling approach adopted in the INTEREURO-project, for more details, see Beyers et al. 2014a; Beyers et al. 2014c). Findings and conclusions regarding lobbying efforts and success are largely determined by the specific features of a policy issue; using several independent and control variables, this is accounted for in the regression analyses. The issue sample accounts for variation in terms of policy domains, legislative initiatives introduced, interest group mobilization and media prominence of specific issues.

Nevertheless, each sampling approach has its drawbacks; the approach adopted is a convenience sample of policy issues. For instance, starting from a voter survey entails that the issues included are thought to pertain to peoples' concerns and/or relate well to the current party-political debate; implying that the issue selection by the survey designers might be driven by the saliency of these issues (Burstein 2014; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Still, to analyze how lobbying affects policymaking, cases with at least some lobbying must be analyzed. Here, a random sample of policy issues would result in large number of lowly salient issues on which little to no lobbying could be detected (Beyers et al. 2014c). Moreover, studying issues that are somewhat salient may ensure that the public might have an informed opinion about the issues, which benefits the validity of the data (Gilens 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). This means that a potentially large set of issues on which lobbying might have taken place, is not accounted for when assessing the effect of public opinion for gaining access to advisory councils, becoming prominent in the news or lobbying success. Still, the issue sample is varied enough to control for several issue-specific characteristics and does not permit tentative generalizations beyond the sampling scope. Importantly, the issue sample accounted for substantial variation in terms of policy domains covered, news salience, interest mobilization, political conflict and legislative proposals introduced in parliament. All this strengthens the external validity of the data and allows for tentative generalizations to a broader universe of policy issues. To summarize, the sample of policy issues used in this dissertation can be contextualized with the following matrix:

Table 1. The sample of policy issues: what is included/excluded?

		Legislative initiatives		
Public opinion data		*Yes*	*No*	*Sample*
	Yes	Issues with a match between legislative initiatives and public opinion data. n=72	Issues with public opinion data (meaning that they are considered relevant), but no legislative initiatives were introduced. n=38	Included n=110
	No	No public opinion data, but legislative initiatives were introduced.	No legislative initiatives were introduced and no public opinion data: this is the dark matter of non-decisions and non-issues.	Excluded

This set of 110 specific policy issues is complemented by four big data collection efforts undertaken (partly) within the framework of the European Research Council funded iBias-project led by Jan Beyers. The dissertation makes use of both top-down and bottom-up sampling approaches to collect data on interest groups' lobbying activities, internal functioning, access to different political-administrative venues and the news media, and lobbying success (Berkhout et al. 2018). On the one hand, a bottom-up sampling approach is frequently used by scholars interested in the features of interest group communities and start from directories and encyclopedia of organizations; the extent to which groups are politically active is not a central criterion. On the other hand, a top-down sampling approach is mostly used by scholars interested in interest groups' participation in various policy processes and public debates; a central criterion for the inclusion of groups in the sample are their visible advocacy efforts. I will highlight the main data collection efforts within the iBias-project and their sampling outcomes. Combined, these datasets assess interest group mobilization, involvement (i.e. seeking contact), access (i.e. granted contact) and prominence (or pre-eminence) across different political arenas and government levels (for a detailed conceptual discussion, see Halpin & Fraussen 2017).

1.2 Comparative Interest Group survey

For data on interest groups' lobbying activities and internal functioning, the dissertation relies on a representative survey of Belgian 1,687 interest groups performed in 2016. The organizations were surveyed on their organizational characteristics, internal functioning, and their advocacy strategies; the survey delivered a response rate of 45% (n=759 organizations that responded to >50% of questions). This survey is part of the Comparative Interest Groups-project (see Article 1, Beyers et al. 2020 and cigsurvey.eu).

1.3 Mapping interest group access to advisory councils

The top-down mapping of Belgian interest groups began by identifying all advisory councils and their members at the national, Flemish and Walloon/Francophone level of government and have to deal with the consultancy of non-governmental stakeholders within the framework of policy formulation and evaluation, and implementation. Yet,

these councils are not easily detectable and not one data source is available in Belgium. Therefore, the identification procedure of the population of advisory councils in Belgium rests on three data sources in order to come to the most complete picture possible: a website search of all the ministries at the national, Flemish, and Walloon/Francophone level; a consultation of Politiek Zakboekje/Mémento Politique 2016; and several parliamentary questions. Furthermore, we also identified a substantial amount of councils while coding (often being sub-councils). At this stage, no distinction was made regarding the tasks, nor the type of members of the identified advisory councils. The complete identification procedure was done June – September 2016. In total 1136 advisory councils were identified (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of advisory councils by source of identification

Data source of identification	Number of advisory councils	Level of government	Number of advisory councils
Website	463	National	711
Politiek Zakboekje/Mémento Politique	170	Flemish	174
Parliamentary questions	389	Walloon/Francophone	202
Identified while coding	114	Brussels	30
		German-speaking	15
		Local level	4
Total	**1136**	**Total**	**1136**

Though, this general mapping of advisory councils resulted in a high number of councils that was not relevant for the purpose of this study. To filter these advisory councils out, four sampling criteria were used, and Table 3 gives an overview of the number of councils excluded based on each criterion. The criteria are put in hierarchical order, which means criterion one is the most determinant criterion. To assess the four criteria, three data sources were used: the own website of the advisory council or the dedicated webpages of a ministry or agency to that advisory council, Politiek Zakboekje/Mémento Politique 2016, and Het Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge. Het Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge is a useful data source as in the founding law of each advisory council the functions and tasks

are precisely listed. This delivers us with the most complete picture as to check the following criteria.

Table 3. Overview of the selection criteria and excluded councils

	Exclusion criterion	Number of excluded advisory councils
1.	***No sufficient information availability***	26
2.	***Administrative acts***	
	Accreditation	73
	Arbitration, appeal, and disciplinary bodies	88
	Examination, appointment/selection and promotion procedures (including internships)	84
	Approval, control, and evaluation of projects	13
	Retributions in individual cases	31
	Licenses and permits	7
	Management	48
	Social dialogue: employee–employer relationship and negotiations on labor conditions within specific ministries or government agencies	41
	Subsidies	40
	Other	17
	TOTAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTS	441
3.	***Temporal or dead***	23
4.	***Only government members*** dependent on the level on which the advisory council is established	26
		Total
	Removed from sample	520
	Remaining in sample	616

First, sufficient information needs to be available to assess the subsequent criteria. Second, the advisory body should concern consultancy within the framework of general policy formulation and policy evaluation, or the guidance and monitoring of policy implementation. The policy advice concerning implementation can also be directed at institutions or professionals responsible for the implementation. All advisory bodies concerned with only the advice for the purpose of the adoption of individual administrative acts are excluded. Third, the advisory body must be permanently established/active and thus advisory bodies that are temporal or ad hoc in character are excluded. In addition, all advisory councils that were abolished during previous legislatures were excluded from the sample. Finally, at least one member in the advisory

council must be a non-governmental actor (e.g., interest group, expert organisation) or be a government representative not dependent on the governmental level on which the advisory council is established.

Finally, a detailed coding of the 616 advisory councils in the sample was conducted. This involved evidence on the jurisdictional level of political activity (e.g., federal or subnational), some basic legal information (e.g., year of foundation, type of founding law, amendments), the policy domain, and evidence on the day-to-day functioning of the council (e.g., staff, meetings, annual budget, gender quota, tasks). At the same time, we mapped and coded all the members of these 616 advisory councils. These members were classified in five categories: interest organizations (1), expert organizations (2), government representatives (3), political party representatives (4), and members of other advisory councils (5). Effective, alternate (i.e. having voting rights), as well as members that have a consultative voice and observers (i.e. having no voting rights) were mapped according to the number of seats they hold. In the end, 2372 unique members were mapped (excluding individuals). The mapping of members of advisory councils was facilitated by the bottom-up population mapping within the CIG-survey project of 1,687 Belgian organized interests.

Coders were instructed to consult three data sources: the own website of the advisory council or the dedicated webpages of a ministry or government agency to that advisory council, Politiek Zakboekje/Mémento Politique 2016, and Het Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge. In Het Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge, every time the composition of an advisory council is changed, the list of members is published here. Of the 1,687 organizations in the bottom-up mapping, 608 organizations (36%) were found to enjoy access. Additionally, 642 interest groups were newly identified through their council membership.

1.4 Content analysis of newspaper articles

An extensive news-content analysis on each specific policy issue was conducted to identify interest organizations and their policy positions (for a similar approach see De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). In a first step, a computer-automated

Boolean keyword search in four news media outlets was applied for the period June 2013-December 2017. This resulted in 26,512 newspaper articles.

Next, interest organizations were computer-automated identified in these articles based on a curated dictionary containing the names and abbreviations of 2,320 Belgian interest organizations (i.e. a combination of the group register and of council membership). To facilitate the computer-automated identification of interest groups mentioned in the news media, additional coding was done so that different variations of the name or acronym of an interest group could be stored in a curated dictionary. In total, up to five Dutch and five French full names could be coded for each interest organization in the dictionary, and four Dutch and four French acronyms could be coded. Data sources used to create the curated dictionary include the website of the interest group as well as the Crossroads Bank for Enterprises. Occasionally, we also manually checked how the interest group was usually mentioned in by the media by performing a quick search in GoPress (e.g., ACV, but also 'Christelijke vakbond'). Furthermore, in the computer-automated identification script we accounted for the possibility that an interest group name or acronym may be directly followed by a punctuation mark or is preceded by an apostrophe.

Many interest groups are identified multiple times within and across different issues. To keep the coding of all media claims by interest groups expressing policy positions feasible, we used a multi-stage stratified sampling approach. First, for interest groups that appeared in up to three articles on a specific issue we sampled all the articles linked to that interest group. Second, if an organization was mentioned more than three times in relation to an issue, a maximum of three of these articles from both the Flemish and Francophone media were randomly included in the sample. Third, to account for the limitations of the computer-automated identification, coders could also manually add organizations that made relevant claims. In total, we had a sample of 2,306 newspaper articles in which an interest group was identified and that were retained for manual coding.

Specifically, we coded for whether the identified interest group made a relevant claim on the specific policy issue at hand. A claim was defined as a quotation or

paraphrase that can be connected to a specific interest organization (De Bruycker 2017; Koopmans & Statham 1999). In total, 256 unique interest organizations made 1073 claims on 84 issues (leaving 26 issues with no relevant interest group identification and/or claim). Based on these claims we coded the organizations' positions in favor of and against the policy statements as posed to the respondents in the voter survey. Issue statements were formulated both from the perspective of supporting the status quo as well as proposing policy change. In addition, we coded any political action regarding a policy issue taken by an interest group. These activities range from demonstrations, to judicial action, to social dialogue, to direct contact with politicians. Table 2 presents the distribution of coded policy positions. In addition to interest groups' policy positions, the news media data allow to measure interest groups' media prominence, the level of news salience issues attract and overall interest mobilization.

Table 4. Distribution of media claims according to policy position

Policy position	Number of claims (%)
Unclear/neutral	162 (15.1%)
Agree with statement	470 (43.8%)
Disagree with statement	441 (41.1%)
Total	1073

This coding was performed by one of the authors, a research assistant and two student assistants. The reliability for coding media claim relevance and issue position was assessed in two consecutive steps. First, checks performed on 382 double-coded articles verifying claim relevance resulted in a 71.49% agreement (expected agreement of 35.39%), a kappa of 0.56 and Krippendorff's alpha of 0.55. Second, intercoder reliability checks performed on 285 double-coded articles verifying issue positions resulted in a 76.6% agreement (expected agreement of 40%), a kappa of 0.61 and Krippendorff's alpha of 0.60. Discrepancies were addressed by the author.

1.5 Legislative content analysis

Finally, an extensive legislative content analysis on each issue was conducted covering the coalition agreements of the national, Flemish, Walloon Region and Francophone Community governments and 224 bills introduced in each parliament during the legislature 2014-2019 linked to one or multiple of the 110 issues. The coalition agreements of all governments are online available and can easily be searched by keyword to detect relevant passages connected to one of the 110 issues. In total, the coalition agreements contained policy plans pertaining to 61 issues.

Next, to identify legislation related to one to the 110 issues, we performed keyword searches in the online parliamentary databases. Initially, we casted a wide net so that also legislation tackling the broader theme of an issue was retained. We included executive initiated proposals, legislation originating from parliamentarians belonging to the governing parties, and legislative proposals from opposition parliamentarians. This entails that some but not all issues have multiple connected legislative proposals and include issues that were not initially covered in one of the coalition agreements. In a second step, student assistants—trained to be specialized in policy dossiers—filtered out the legislative proposals directly linked to the issue at hand. Finally, a detailed content analysis was performed by these same student assistants to code the proposed policy directions in proposals vis-à-vis the issue statement included in the voter survey and the policy status quo, to map who initiated the proposal, to count the number of amendments introduced, and to indicate whether the proposal was adopted. Coders were instructed to consult the often-provided summary and the explanatory memorandum to establish the policy direction of a legislative proposal. Table 5 presents an overview of the legislation introduced by government level, average number of amendments and adoption rate.

In the end, it is the combination of these various data collection efforts that allows me to analyze the research problem stated and theoretical framework. Table 6 gives an overview of the data sources. An all-encompassing relational database (with SQL Server) with the help of a data-manager and three IT-consultants was set-up to manage all datasets and to facilitate tailor-made compositions of data needed to perform the analysis at hand.

Table 5. Legislation by government level, average number of amendments and adoption rate

	Number of bills introduced	*Number of bills by majority*	*Average number of amendments*	*Number of adopted bills*
National	150	72	8.11	31
- *Executive initiative*	24	24	46.38	24
- *Parliamentary initiative*	126	48	0.82	7
Flemish	34	31	10.53	31
- *Executive initiative*	25	25	11.96	25
- *Parliamentary initiative*	9	6	6.55	6
Walloon/Francophone	40	28	5.15	28
- *Executive initiative*	26	26	7.65	26
- *Parliamentary initiative*	14	2	0.5	2

However expansive and comprehensive these datasets are, some limitations must be noted when combining these data. One important drawback of this study is that while group's positions and news media prominence, and the legislative data and thus the measurement of groups' lobbying success are issue-specific; the interest group survey and hence the measurements it delivers with regard to advocacy strategies and internal functioning are not. Hence, any attempt to explain access to advisory councils, news media prominence or lobbying success, cannot be supported by a measure of targeted and issue-specific advocacy strategies. To partly resolve this problem, a policy-domain specific measurement of advocacy strategies was developed. This allowed me to control for the average inside and outside advocacy intensity directed at policy issues within a policy domain. Specifically, interest groups got attributed a frequency score of engagement from 'never' to 'once a week' in inside and outside advocacy. These scores were recoded to reflect the number of times, per policy domain and linked to the 110 issues, a certain activity was performed per year, to then sum these values for each organization and divide this by 52 (weeks in a year). This measurement, based on the work of Boräng & Naurin (2016), is further detailed in each of the articles in which it is used.

Table 6. Overview of datasets

Dataset	*Sampling approach*	*Sampling outcome*	*Time period covered*	*Key variables*	*Executors*
Registered interest groups	Bottom-up	1687 IGs	2015	- Group type	www.cigsurvey.eu
Survey of interest groups	Bottom-up	759 survey respondents that answered >50% of questions	2016	- Internal functioning - Advocacy strategies --- - IG mobilization - IG policy area priorities	www.cigsurvey.eu
Interest groups in advisory councils	Top-down	616 advisory councils with 1250 IGs	2016-2017	- Access to AC	Within own project
Public opinion on policy issues	Convenient	110 policy issues	2014	- Public opinion - Party positions	Benchmark Survey Belgian VAA
Interest groups in news media	Top-down	83 policy issues with 256 IGs	2014-2017/18	- News media prominence - IG issue positions --- - Media salience - Contestation - IG mobilization	Within own project
Coalition agreements & legislative initiatives in four Belgian parliaments	Top-down	72 policy issues with 224 legislative initiatives	2014-2019	- Policy outcomes	Within own project

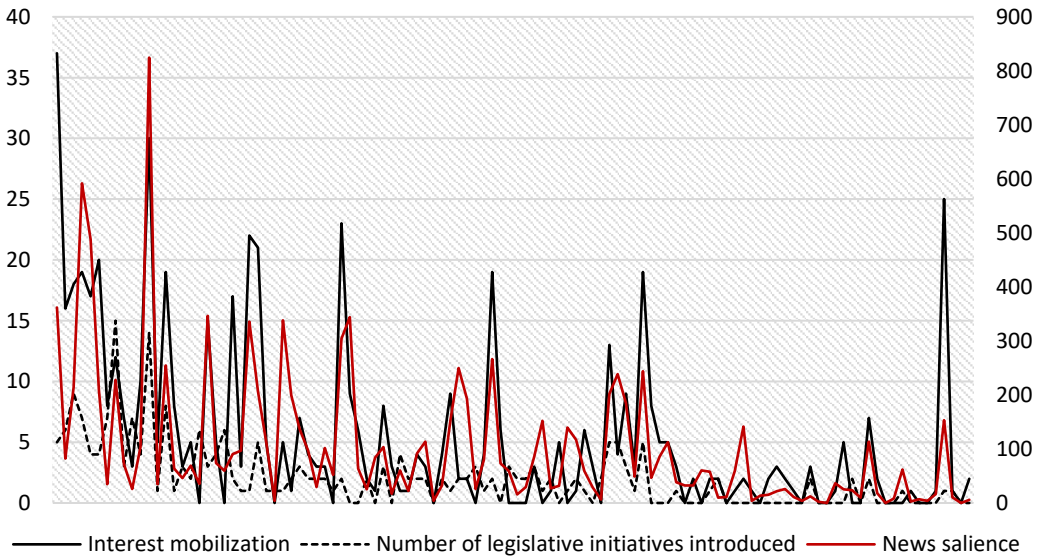
Another limitation of this mix of issue-specific and general sampling approaches, is that when combining data, one often must struggle for enough observations to perform regression analyses. The root of this problem is that survey respondents not necessarily appear in the news media or serve on advisory councils; and inversely that many groups identified in the news media or advisory councils did not necessarily fill in the survey.

Nevertheless, the sample of organizations in each of the regression analyses is sufficiently representative of the overall Belgian interest group population (see point 1.3 of this chapter) and Article 1 provides an important benchmark to contextualize the findings of each article.

2 Descriptive overview of policy issues

Figure 1 presents the distribution of salience, interest mobilization and introduced legislative initiatives across policy issues. First, the distribution of sampled policy issues clearly indicates variation regarding media salience. Overall, the distribution of media salience is skewed. Some issues received a lot of media attention, while other issues received no media attention whatsoever.

Figure 1. Media salience, interest mobilization and number of legislative initiatives per policy issue

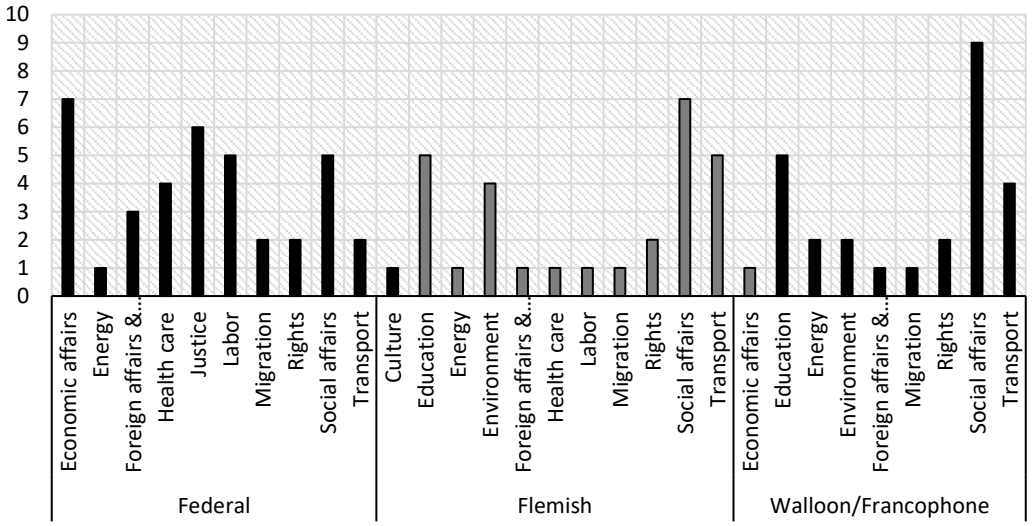


At the national level, the three most salient policy issues were wealth/capital taxation, the indexation of wages and the pension age. In Flanders, these were the Oosterweel highway connection, child benefits and the introduction of a kilometer charge for trucks/cars were the most salient issues. In Wallonia, these issues were the introduction of a kilometer charge for trucks/cars, child benefits and the export of weapons. The rank

order of issues only minimally deviates from the news salience ranking when considering how much interest mobilization a policy issue attracts. There is a strong correlation between news salience and interest mobilization. Policy issues that receive a lot of media attention are also subject to a higher degree of interest mobilization (Spearman's rho=.95).

Importantly, the policy issues in our sample include both cases for which legislative initiatives were tabled in parliament as well as those for which no initiative has yet been taken. For each of the 110 selected policy issues an assessment was made as to whether legislative initiatives introduced in the (sub)national parliaments could be matched. Media salience and interest mobilization are moderately correlated to the number of legislative initiatives introduced (Spearman's rho of 0.53 and 0.56, respectively).

Figure 2. Distribution of sampled policy issues across policy domains by level of government



Another source of variation in the sample of policy issues are the policy domains included and the competent level of government to which they can be attributed. Figure 2 illustrates the categorization of policy issues in policy domains based on CAP-major topic codes by level of government (see comparativeagendas.net). The sampled policy

issues are thus situated in different policy areas and results derived from the analyses are not specific to one policy area or one level of government.

3 Representativeness of the sample of interest groups

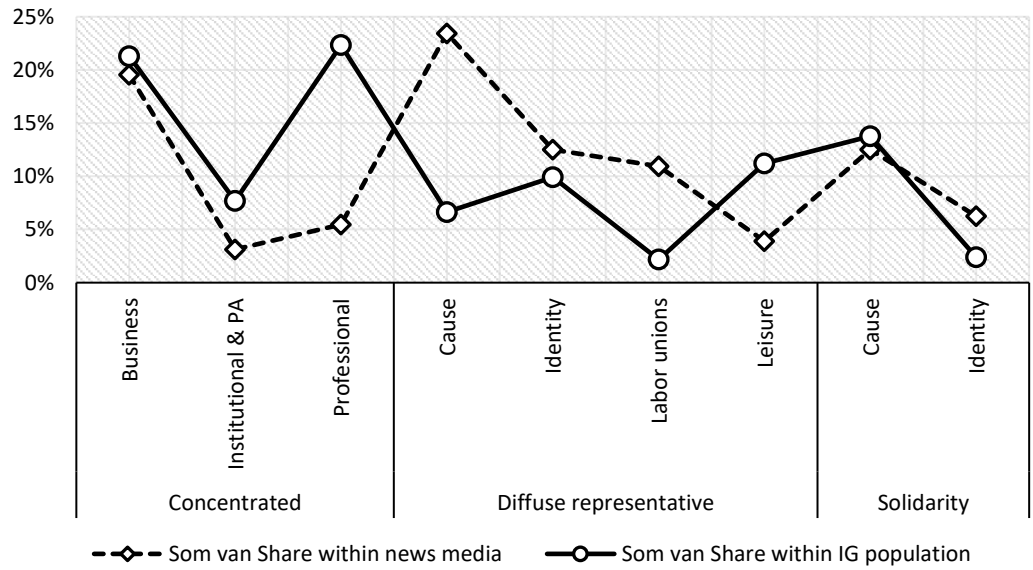
Table 5 demonstrates that across the different datasets used, the relative share of each group type vis-à-vis the other types of groups remains fairly consistent. This indicates that the sample of interest groups in the analyses is representative of the general population, with the caveat that representative diffuse organizations are more prominent in the news media compared to their share in the population mapping and survey, which is in line with Binderkrantz et al. (2017b).

Table 7. Distribution of group type in different datasets (excluding hybrid group types)

Group type	***CIG-Survey (%)***		***Media claims (%)***	
Concentrated	436	46.88%	228	37.50%
Representative diffuse	298	32.04%	301	49.51%
Solidarity	196	21.08%	79	12.99%
Total	930	100%	608	100%

To assess this further, I compared the sample of identified groups in the news media across group types compared to their total share of the population in a fine-grained manner. Labor unions are the group type with the most media appearances compared to their overall share within the population. Cause groups, identity groups also enjoy a substantial level of media prominence in the sample of issues. In contrast, all types of concentrated organized interests gained less media attention compared to their share in the population. The same pattern can be observed for leisure associations. We can thus conclude that, compared to their overall share in the population, diffuse groups are slightly more likely than concentrated groups to appear in the news with respect to the issues in the sample.

Figure 3. Comparison of identified interest organizations in the news media with the group population, at least one media hit



All this suggests that the analyzed sample of interest groups in the news is representative for the broader Belgian interest group population. For the results presented in this dissertation, this implies that, although I solely relied on data derived from a sample of newspaper articles, the results should still apply to the broader population of Belgian interest groups.

Article 1. Interest representation in Belgium

Mapping the size and diversity of an interest group population in a multi-layered neo-corporatist polity

Evelien Willems, Jan Beyers & Frederik Heylen (2020). Interest representation in Belgium: Mapping the size and diversity of an interest group population in a multi-layered neo-corporatist polity. *Politics of the Low Countries.*

Abstract. This paper assesses the size and diversity of Belgium's interest group population by triangulating four data sources. Combining different sources allows us to describe which societal interests get mobilized, which interest organizations become politically active, and who gains access to the policy process and obtains news media attention. Unique about the project is the systematic data collection, enabling us to compare interest representation at the national, Flemish and Francophone-Walloon government levels. We find that: (1) the national government level remains an important venue for interest groups, despite the continuous transfer of competences to the subnational and European levels, (2) neo-corporatist mobilization patterns are a persistent feature of interest representation, despite substantial interest group diversity, and (3) interest mobilization substantially varies across government levels and political-administrative arenas.

Keywords: interest groups, advocacy, policy access, advisory councils, media attention

Introduction

Interest groups are important players in democracies, as they provide crucial linkages between the state and society. Basic questions on interest groups concern who gets mobilized, who is politically active and who enjoys access to the policy process and/or gains media attention. These questions all pertain to whether systems of interest representation are biased or rather diverse. Interest group scholars usually conceive of a biased system of interest representation as lacking diversity and where access and influence are skewed towards a small number of well-resourced interests, especially economic interests (Lowery et al. 2015). Many domestic systems, as well as the European system of interest representation, have been found to be characterized by bias in various policymaking arenas and the news media (Binderkrantz 2012; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bunea 2017; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Lowery & Gray 2004a; Rasmussen & Gross 2015; Schlozman et al. 2012). Similarly, in Belgium, scholars have observed a bias towards a limited number of privileged, mostly economic, interests that gain regular access to the policy process and receive media attention, while many interest groups enjoy no or only limitedly access. In short, interest representation in Belgium is characterized by a strong core-periphery dynamic (Beyers et al. 2014b; Fraussen et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015; Verschuere & De Corte 2014).

Although representational bias in Belgium is often linked to neo-corporatism and consociationalism, various recent developments, including federalization, the politicization of domains such as migration and the environment, and growing contestation of elitist neo-corporatist practices, have challenged traditional patterns of interest representation (Beyers et al. 2014b; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Fraussen et al. 2017; Hooghe 1995, 1998; Van Den Bulck 1992). These developments may have resulted in a larger, more diverse, fragmented and competitive interest group system. Hence, it is doubtful whether traditional concepts of Belgian interest representation, such as consociationalism and neo-corporatism, still adequately characterize the overall pattern of state-society relations. After all, similar developments have also affected the Belgian party-political landscape and the overall political-administrative system (De

Winter et al. 2006; Deschouwer 2012; van der Meer et al. 2019; Van Haute & Wauters 2019).

Studying the size and diversity of the Belgian interest group community allows us to assess the extent to which neo-corporatist patterns – such as the privileged status of economic interest organizations as core policy insiders compared to the more peripheral role of citizen groups – are still prevalent. Although the size and diversity of interest group systems at the national as well as European and international levels have been long-time concerns in the literature (for an overview, see Halpin & Jordan 2012), we know relatively little about the overall system of interest representation in Belgium. In Belgium, efforts mainly focused on Flanders, while systematic research on national and Francophone organized interests has been limited (Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Verschuere & De Corte 2014). Moreover, while providing empirical depth and rigor, analyzing a small set of well-known organized interests – or 'usual suspects' – in one specific arena or region does not capture the overall nature of Belgian interest group politics (Bouteca et al. 2013).

In the first section of this article, we highlight three macro-concepts characterizing Belgian politics and its system of interest representation, namely neo-corporatism, consociationalism and federalism. We also discuss two factors – the politicization of policy domains such as the environment, migration and the growing contestation of neo-corporatist practices – challenging traditional patterns of interest representation. Next, we elaborate conceptual and methodological issues concerning the mapping of interest group populations and present our datasets on Belgian organized interests. We combine data sources on mobilization in four arenas: parliament, the executive branch, advisory councils and the news media. The third part provides a first analysis of the size and diversity of the Belgian interest group system. We find that: (1) the national government level continues to be an important venue for interest mobilization, despite the continuous transfer of competences to the subnational and European levels; (2) neo-corporatism remains a persistent feature of interest representation, despite substantial interest group diversity; and (3) mobilization patterns differ across government levels and political-administrative arenas. The concluding

section offers some general reflections on how the systematic combination of different data sources delivers important insights into the nature of the Belgian system of interest representation.

Interest representation in Belgium

The Belgian system of interest representation is traditionally characterized as neo-corporatist with a consociational legacy (Siaroff 1999; Van Den Bulck 1992). Belgian neo-corporatism entails extensive institutionalized concertation processes (i.e. social dialogue and advisory councils) between the government and a few business associations, labor unions and/or institutional associations (e.g., schools, hospitals, health insurance providers). Since the 1970s, neo-corporatist practices have spilled over from socio-economic policies to other policy domains such as environmental protection (Hooghe 1995, 1998; Kriesi et al. 1995). These domains are also characterized by privileged access for a limited number of prominent interest groups, albeit not in the classic tripartite way of business associations and labor unions as government interlocutors (Fraussen, 2014). In other domains such as justice, foreign affairs or migration and even within the aforementioned domains, various arrangements for interest representation exist that are not or quasi-neo-corporatist in nature (van den Bulck 1992). Hence, it might not be appropriate to characterize an entire system as neo-corporatist; instead, we need to analyze sectorial/policy domain variation in interest representation and go beyond the traditional areas of welfare state policies.

Moreover, the neo-corporatist nature of the Belgian system of interest representation is inseparable from consociationalism (Beyers et al. 2014b; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Van Den Bulck 1992). This implies a cultural/religious and socio-economic ideological segmentation into so-called ‘pillars’, pacifying Belgium’s main political cleavages. The Christian, socialist and liberal pillars represent(ed) dense organizational networks, with strong ties to their respective political parties. The combination of neo-corporatism and consociationalism often involves reaching consensus on policies between the various peak associations, each tied to a pillar. This

pillarization has coincided with extensive government patronage since pillar organizations were and still are strongly involved in the formulation and implementation of welfare state policies (i.e. providing unemployment benefits and health care reimbursements).

However, consociational practices gradually declined since the 1990s due to decreasing representativeness of peak associations – because of declining membership, internal heterogeneity – and/or the delaying effect on public policymaking that extensive consultation of peak associations produces. Whereas in the heyday of corporatism, interest intermediation relied on the peak associations' ability to align and appease their members in exchange for political concessions and/or funding, this has shifted as members of peak associations increasingly bypass their organisation and lobby the government directly (Grote et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2006). Moreover, multiple more specialized interest organizations which focus on issues more closely tied to narrow constituencies have been established. In sum, the tension between acting upon the membership interests and reaching political compromises is nowadays much more prevalent; this has put corporatist and consociational practices under strain.

Currently, consociationalism is predominantly applied to pacify the language cleavage, for instance through language parity requirements and the devolution of competences from the national to the subnational entities. Devolution has resulted in substantial interest group communities at different government levels (Fraussen, 2014; Keating & Wilson, 2014). On the one hand, the growing scope and volume of regional government activities triggered organized interests to mobilize at the subnational level. On the other hand, regional governments themselves actively stimulated a system of interest representation by subsidizing regionally based organizations and establishing a system of advisory councils. The devolution dynamic also resulted in organized interests splitting up along linguistic lines and/or creating separate 'branches' in each subnational entity (Celis et al. 2012; Fobé et al. 2010; Fraussen 2014; Heylen & Willems 2019; Keating & Wilson 2014; Verschuere & De Corte 2014). At the same time, neo-corporatism and consociationalism have impacted subnational interest representation profoundly; neo-corporatist practices, initially applied at the national level, were

mimicked at the regional level, making peak associations to still play a prominent role at the regional level.

However, traditional modes of interest representation are increasingly put under pressure. More specifically, the 'permanent conflicts of interest' frequently deadlock concertation at the national level, especially in a context of social policy retrenchment (Arcq et al. 2010; Van Gyes et al. 2017). This has fueled, as in other countries, political contestation over presumably 'elitist' (neo-corporatist and consociational) practices; populist discourses using an anti-establishment rhetoric found its way into Belgian party politics (Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Pauwels 2011; van den Berg et al. 2014). The de-politicization of (old socio-economic, linguistic and religious) cleavages by institutionalizing them into the political system and applying principles of 'grand coalitions' and power sharing ultimately fed the emergence of populist criticism (Deschouwer 2012). Regarding interest representation, this has induced a shift from behind-the-door corporatism to the 'primacy of politics'. In recent years, for instance, parties at all government levels have tried to decrease the involvement of organized interests in various policy domains, sought to limit the proliferation of advisory councils and implemented budget cuts in various subsidy programs (Fobé et al. 2013; Heylen & Willems 2019). Moreover, the 'mediatization' of public policymaking constrains corporatist interlocutors to negotiate and produce compromises behind 'closed doors' (Häusermann et al. 2004; Kriesi 2006).

Finally, due to the politicization – i.e. increased public salience and intensified party–political conflict – and the widening scope of interest mobilization tied to policy domains such as migration, justice and the environment, patterns of interest representation have changed (Fraussen 2014; Hooghe 1998; Kriesi et al. 1995). As in other European countries, multiple citizen groups became mobilized on 'new politics' issues not covered by the traditional corporatist interlocutors (see also Binderkrantz et al. 2016; Kriesi et al. 1995). This has resulted in a more diverse and fragmented set of organized interests seeking access to policymaking processes and the news media. Hence, business associations and labor unions, the principal interlocutors of

governments in neo-corporatist systems, might no longer be each other's sole competitors to gain access and influence.

In short, as in other small European neo-corporatist countries, corporatist and consociational patterns of interest representation are increasingly put under pressure (Binderkrantz & Christiansen 2015; Christiansen et al. 2018; Häusermann et al. 2004; Rommetvedt et al. 2013). However, at this moment we lack systematic data on the extent to which the composition of the Belgian interest group population still corresponds with these traditional patterns of interest representation, or that, due to federalization, societal and political constraints (such as anti-elitist attitudes) or opportunities (such as growing politicization of certain policy areas), the overall pattern of interest representation has become more diverse and fragmented.

Defining and mapping interest group populations

One important challenge for answering these questions concerns the conceptualization of interest groups and its implications for mapping group populations. A commonly used definition of organized interests includes three criteria: (1) being organized, (2) aiming to influence public policy and (3) achieving political goals through informal and formal political engagements outside the electoral arena (Beyers et al. 2008). The latter component sets interest groups apart from parties; typically, interest groups do not seek office through elections like parties but try to achieve their goals through formal (e.g., advisory councils) or informal engagements with policymakers.

Next, 'organized' refers to a minimal level of structural association, thus excluding broad societal movements and waves of public opinion. Some scholars emphasize the membership component or collective, constituency-based features interest organizations must have (Jordan et al. 2004). Hence, organized interests include organizations with formal members – individuals or other organizations such as firms or institutions – as well as organizations with more informal constituencies – donors or supporters (Jordan & Maloney 2007). These organizations advocate for enfranchised (e.g., the self-interest of affiliates such as companies or professional groups) and

disenfranchised (e.g., the poor, the environment, animal rights, child protection) constituencies (Halpin 2006).

Finally, interest organizations should show some level of political activity and articulate a collective interest; they potentially aim to influence public policies (Jordan et al. 2004). However, this criterion entails that many civil society organizations, often labelled 'service/non-profit organizations', would not be characterized as interest organizations simply because they demonstrate limited or no political activities. For instance, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) primarily focusing on development aid or national sports federations, becoming only occasionally politically active, would not be included (Halpin 2006; Jordan et al. 2004). Yet, these organizations can play a key role in the policy process because they deliver public services (e.g., social welfare, youth work). As such, these latter organizations are often involved in less visible instances of advocacy, while social movement organizations (SMOs), labor unions, business associations and citizen groups are often pursuing policy influence through more visible advocacy tactics.

Depending on which conceptual component is emphasized, interest group scholars tend to apply two kinds of data collection strategies for mapping interest group populations, focusing either on behavioral (advocacy or lobbying for policy influence) or on organizational aspects (mobilizing a constituency) (Berkhout et al. 2018). First, a frequently used approach by scholars emphasizing organizational aspects is called 'bottom-up mapping'. These scholars are mostly interested in varying levels of collective action, the density and diversity of interest group communities and how organizational entities are established. Typical data sources are directories and encyclopedia of organizations. This approach has been used for mapping transnational advocacy, as well as interest group communities at the national level (Berkhout et al. 2015, 2017; Fraussen & Halpin 2016; Hanegraaff et al. 2011, 2015; Wonka et al. 2010, 2018). The extent to which groups are politically active is not a central criterion for mapping a community. Irrespective of their involvement (and interest) in policymaking processes, all organizations having a collective supporter or membership component are included in the mapping effort. This inclusive and broad mapping is occasionally followed by a

survey among the identified interest groups focusing on organizational characteristics and general tendencies in advocacy strategies and/or influence (Hanegraaff et al. 2016; Heylen et al. 2018).

Second, studies focusing on the behavioral component of interest representation tend to prefer a top-down mapping strategy. Interest organizations are identified through their participation in specific policymaking processes. Examples are studies using the US state lobby registration rolls or all interest groups registered at the German Bundestag (Klüver & Zeidler 2019; Lowery & Gray 1995, 2004a), lists of organizations attending political events such as global diplomatic conferences (Hanegraaff et al. 2015), organizations participating in public consultations, parliamentary hearings, advisory bodies (Bunea 2017; Fraussen et al. 2015; Pedersen et al. 2015; Rasmussen 2015) and organizations appearing in the news media (Binderkrantz 2012; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015). These data sources are particularly suited to study advocacy strategies and influence tied to specific policy dossiers (Berkhout et al. 2018; Beyers et al. 2014c). Compared to bottom-up mapping, the threshold for inclusion is relatively high, as organizations only weakly or not involved in policymaking processes or engaged with policymakers through other or less visible venues and channels, are usually filtered out. Hence, a top-down mapping mostly identifies organizations visibly advocating on specific policies, but it does not necessarily lead to a valid and comprehensive estimate of the extent to which particular societal segments have been able to establish interest organizations and overcome their collective action problems.

This distinction affects the conceptual boundaries of interest group populations. A behavioral focus might underestimate the size of an interest group population, as scholars mostly focus on groups demonstrating significant political activities. An organizational approach, by comparison, focusing on the mobilization of constituencies, also has some limits, as it is not immediately clear to what extent organizations effectively seek to influence public policy. Hence, the emphasized component of the definition – political activities or organizational constituencies – strongly shapes the nature of the studied organizational population.

Our mapping of the Belgian interest group community relies on an extensive scrutiny and triangulation of multiple data sources. By combining a top-down and a bottom-up approach we seek to account for the potential limitations each specific method entails. We relied on a bottom-up registration of organizations and a survey implemented among high-level representatives (such as the director, chair, president or secretary-general) of these organizations (see Online Appendix). A distinction was made between concentrated groups representing the self-interests of well-circumscribed constituencies and diffuse groups representing broader societal segments. The former set of organizations includes professional associations (e.g., lawyers), business associations (e.g., the chemical industry) and associations representing institutions and (semi-)public authorities (e.g., hospitals), while the latter set of organizations includes citizen groups such as cause groups (e.g., consumer rights, environmental protection) and identity groups (e.g., youth, patients, the LGBT community, migrants), as well as constituency-based service/non-profit organizations (e.g., social welfare) (Baroni et al. 2014; Beyers et al. 2008, 2014c; Binderkrantz et al. 2015).

Table 1. Overview of datasets

Dataset	Sampling approach	Outcome	Period	Data repository
Registered interest organizations in the KBO	Bottom-up	1,678 organizations	2015	www.cigsurvey.eu
Survey of interest organizations	Bottom-up	771 survey responses	2015	www.cigsurvey.eu
Interest organizations as members of advisory councils	Top-down	616 advisory councils with 1,154 organizations	2016-2017	www.ibias.eu
Interest organizations in the news media	Top-down	110 policy issues with 247 organizations	2014-2018	www.ibias.eu

These data are combined with two top-down maps. First, we identified interest groups gaining news coverage through a content analysis related to 110 policy issues included in a 2014 voter survey (see also Methodological chapter). Second, we identified

groups with access to 616 advisory councils at the national and subnational levels. The latter two datasets thus include groups demonstrating a substantial level of political activity. Table 1 gives an overview of the data sources, and each of them will be discussed in the following sections in relation to some key findings. Combined, these datasets assess interest group mobilization, involvement (i.e. seeking contact), access (i.e. granted contact) and prominence (or pre-eminence) across different political arenas and government levels (for a detailed conceptual discussion, see Halpin & Fraussen 2017).

Density and diversity of the Belgian system of interest representation

A Bottom-Up Census of Belgian Interest Groups

First, we describe the demography of the Belgian interest group population based on a bottom-up mapping. The bottom-up census was primarily drawn from the Kruispuntbank voor Ondernemingen (Crossroads Bank for Enterprises, CBE), the official federal government register documenting the legal statuses of enterprises and organizations in Belgium. Through multiple semi-automated processes based on the NACE classification code S94 and manual operations aimed at grouping organizational conglomerates, we identified 1,461 Belgian interest organizations.[v] We supplemented this list with organizations identified through SectorLink and Filantropie.be.[vi] This resulted in a set of 1,678 interest organizations. Table 2 presents this demography by group type across government levels.

First, the census delineates not one but three distinct systems of interest representation, namely at the national level, the Flemish level and the Walloon/Francophone government level.[vii] Some 41% of groups are mobilized nationwide, while 35% and 24% of the groups limit their activities, respectively, to the Flemish and Walloon/Francophone government level. Second, considering the distribution of group types, an obvious observation is not only the prominence of economic interests, but also the considerable presence of non-business interests. Although business and professional groups account for 50% of the entire Belgian interest

group community, a considerable share of 30% are cause groups and identity groups. The distinctiveness of the interest group communities at each government level is substantial. As Table 2 demonstrates, business interests are strongly mobilized at the national level (42% of identified groups represent business interests), while the prevalence of business is less outspoken at the subnational level (18% of Flemish organizations and 13% of Walloon/Francophone groups represent business interests). Vice versa, cause groups and identity groups are especially mobilized at the subnational levels. Respectively, 18% and 15% of the organizations active in Flanders, and 18% and 24% of Francophone groups represent an identity or cause group. Hence, when looking systematically at a wide range of groups, the enormous diversity of interest groups across government levels is remarkable, which reflects the division of policy competencies in a federal setting (Fraussen 2014; Heylen & Willems 2019; Keating & Wilson 2014).

Table 2. Demography by group type across government levels

	***National* (%)**	***Flemish* (%)**	***Francophone* (%)**	***Total* (%)**
Business	42	18	13	26
Professional	25	25	21	24
Labor unions	3	1	2	2
Identity groups	8	18	18	14
Cause groups	12	15	24	16
Leisure	8	19	16	14
Associations of institutions	2	4	6	4
Total (%)	**41**	**35**	**24**	**100**

Note: Percentages based on N = 1,678 from bottom-up mapping

To explore this diversity further, Table 3 reports the mean year of foundation, the mean staff size and the median level of financial resources across group types. The figures corroborate that the Belgian system of interest representation is characterized by substantial diversity between and within group types. For instance, labor unions are few in number (less than 5% of the population), but they mobilize a huge number of individuals (more than three million Belgian citizens are labor union members), and they trump all other group types in terms of staff and financial resources. By contrast, while

business associations make up the largest share of the population and have mostly corporate members, they are characterized by relatively lower staffing levels. Interestingly, although business groups have a reputation of being well-resourced (Dür & Mateo 2013), we also observe non-business interests possessing substantial resources. Compared to business associations, cause groups and identity groups have on average the same or an even larger capacity in terms of financial resources and staff.

To summarize, traditional neo-corporatist organizations such as business associations and labor unions are still prominent, but the contemporary Belgian interest group community also exhibits substantial diversity and signs of a more pluralist system of interest representation – i.e. having many different interest groups competing to get their voices heard by policymakers.

Table 3. Basic organizational features by organisation type

Group type	Number of groups	Foundation (mean)	Staff (mean FTE)	Budget (median category)
Business associations	235	1973	9	€100,000-500,000
Professional associations	199	1970	44	€50,000-100,000
Labor unions	20	1947	58	€5,000,000-10,000,000
Identity groups	144	1976	26	€100,000-500,000
Cause groups	205	1985	15	€100,000-500,000
Leisure associations	145	1974	7	€100,000-500,000
Associations of institutions	36	1986	8	€100,000-500,000
Number of observations	n=984	n=947	n=768	n=851

Note: Numbers based on survey responses

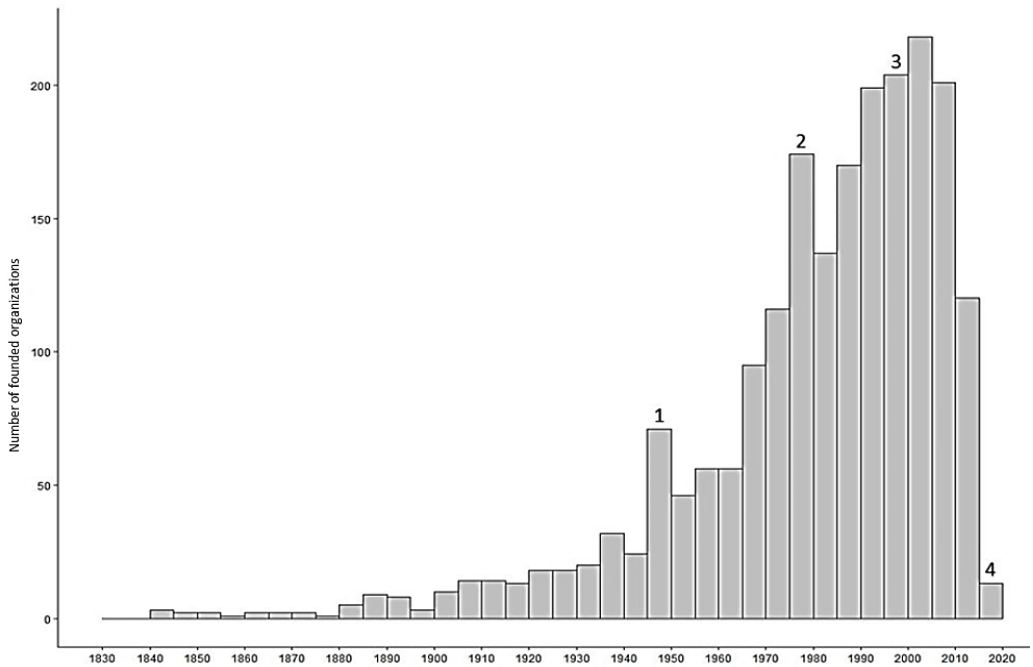
Figure 1 takes a closer look at the founding dates of the organized interests that exist today. This overview allows us to tentatively discuss the impact of major institutional and societal changes on the contemporary interest group community.[viii] A first peak in the establishment of organizations is situated in the post-war period (1). This is the time the welfare state was established, incentivizing the founding and growth of socio-economic interest groups playing a key role in developing and implementing welfare state policies (Deschouwer 2012). The founding dates by group type – shown in the Appendix (Figure 2A) – confirm that especially business groups and professional

associations were established during the post-war period, together with labor unions. Further growth peaks manifest in the late 1970s, the period after the enactment of the first state reform (2), and in the late 1990s, marked by the continuous devolution of competences from the national to the subnational level (3). First, devolution stimulated existing organizations to split up their nationwide structure into Flemish and Francophone branches. For instance, one of the largest environmental associations in Belgium (i.e. Bond Beter Leefmilieu/Inter-Environnement) was first established as a nationwide organisation in 1971, consisting of four regional branches (Fraussen 2014). However, due to the increasingly outspoken claims of the nationwide association on nuclear energy, several important private sponsors withdrew their funds, and this incentivized the association to foster more structural ties with policymakers. As a consequence of these intensified interactions with policymakers, the association had to deal with growing cultural-linguistic tensions between its Flemish and Francophone strands. This eventually led to the disbandment of the association along subnational lines in 1979. Moreover, instead of adopting a nationwide structure, many new organizations established themselves immediately at the subnational level. The Flemish and Francophone governments increasingly provided financial resources and policy access, especially in areas of important competencies, creating incentives for organizations to have a clear subnational territorial focus (Celis et al. 2012; Keating & Wilson 2014).

The growing number of new interest organizations should also be seen in the context of post-materialist issues supplementing – from the late 1960s/early 1970s onwards – the left–right socio-economic cleavage (2 and 3). An assessment of the disaggregated founding dates by group type confirms that the founding of cause and identity groups exploded from the 1970s onwards (Figure 2A in the Appendix). Many of these social movements are today well-established organizations, as illustrated by their formal recognition as members of several advisory bodies (Defourny et al. 2005; Dewachter 1995; Fobé et al. 2010). This rise of citizen groups thus reflects growing public concerns with topics such as the environment, climate change and human rights (Hooghe 1995, 1998; Kriesi et al. 1995).

Overall, the devolution of policy competences and the territorial fragmentation along linguistic lines has resulted in distinct interest group communities with little interaction between them. Many socio-economic policies remain the prerogative of the national level and this is reflected in the prominence of traditional neo-corporatist associations at the national level, while most social movements/citizen groups active in the field of the environment, transportation or culture operate at the subnational level. These interest group communities have developed separately, and few groups have incentives to organize at the national level. Only those groups – the so-called 'social partners' consisting of the peak business associations and labor unions – for which key policy interests are still determined by the national government maintain their nationwide organizational structure and resist the devolution of competences in areas such as social security and labor market policy (Bouteca et al. 2013).

Figure 1. Founding dates of Belgian interest organizations



Notes: 1=post-war period; 2=late 1970s; 3=1990s; 4=recent era

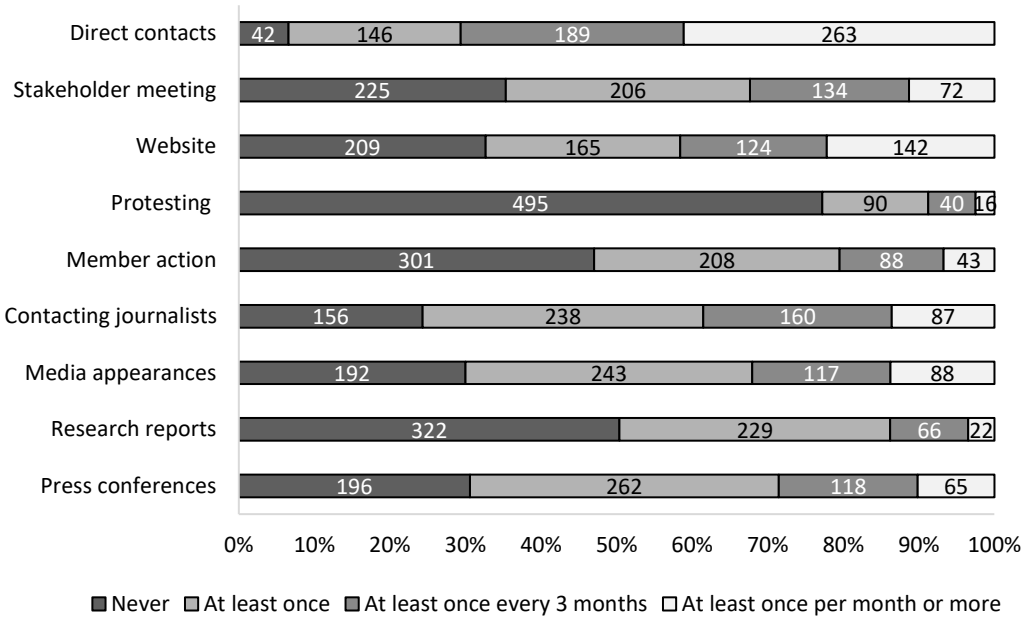
Bottom-Up Mapping of Seeking and Gaining Access to Policymakers

In this section, we map the extent to which different group types are insiders to the policymaking process. We rely on two data sources, the survey data and the dataset on advisory councils, to assess who is seeking and gaining access to the policy process. First, to assess inside tactics – the seeking of direct contact to policymakers – we use the survey data (Beyers et al. 2016). These contacts are initiated at the discretion of interest organizations – respondents in the survey – themselves and do not warrant an invitation by policymakers (Halpin & Fraussen 2017). Of all interest organizations in our sample, 41% at least once per month or more directly contact a policymaker, 30% do so at least once every three months and 23% do so at least once a year. These observations signify the importance of inside advocacy tactics for Belgian interest organizations.

When it comes to advocacy strategies, most interest groups prefer inside strategies – directly contacting policymakers – over outside strategies – reaching out to the broader public and members – to affect public policies (Figure 2). When engaging in outside activities, Belgian interest organizations mainly use media-oriented strategies such as contacting journalists and organizing press conferences. Activities involving members such as signing petitions and staging protests are less frequently used. Compared to these media-oriented tactics, the least used outside tactics – such as developing research reports, publishing opinions online and organizing stakeholder meetings – are also strategies with a smaller target audience.

Interest groups can choose to directly address policymakers located within various political arenas – ranging from the legislative to the executive and administrative branches of government – when they seek to influence public policy. The survey included questions probing the frequency of contacts with government officials initiated with the purpose to 'influence public policy'. Figure 3 compares the prevalence of contacts initiated across government levels with the executive branch of government (ministers and cabinets), the administration (civil servants within ministerial departments and agencies) and the parliament.

Figure 2. Inside and outside advocacy tactics (n=641)

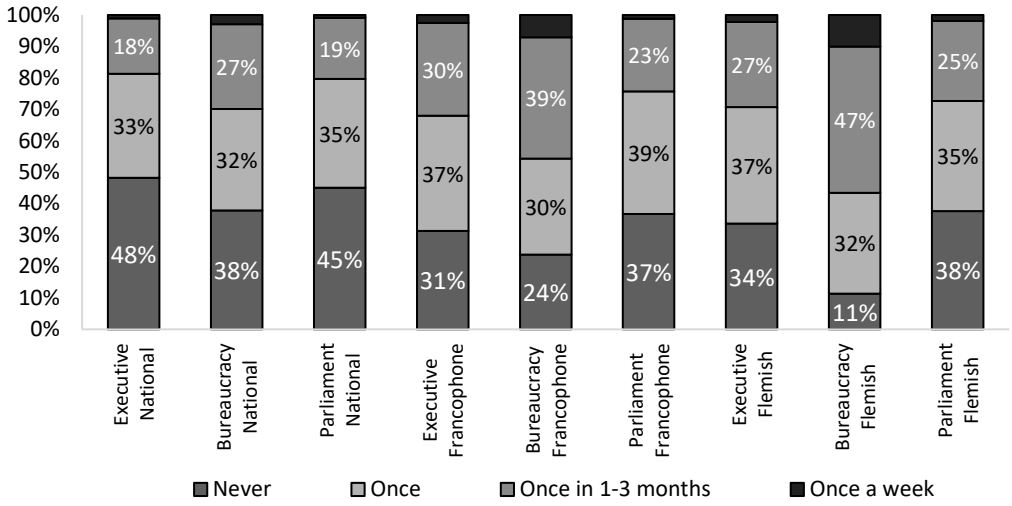


We can draw three conclusions by comparing these results. First, in each jurisdiction, the parliament is least contacted compared to the administration and the executive branch. When we consider weekly and monthly contacts together, we observe, depending on the jurisdiction, less than 30% of interest groups developing regular contacts with parliamentarians. While some longitudinal research conducted in other neo-corporatist European countries found that the parliament as a lobbying target has gained substantial importance since the heyday of corporatism (Gava et al., 2017; Rommetvedt et al., 2013), this seems to be less markedly the case in Belgium. Belgium is still characterized by a weak parliament, 'politicized' government administrations and large personal cabinets of ministers (van den Berg et al. 2014; van der Meer et al. 2019).

Second, most contacts are initiated with the administration, especially at the subnational level. While the joint 'weekly', 'monthly' and 'once every three months' contacts with the national administration sum to 62%, this comes to 76% for the Walloon/Francophone administration and 69% for the Flemish administration. One reason for the differences between the subnational and national levels could be the extent

to which groups depend on subnational subsidies (Celis et al. 2012; Heylen & Willems 2019). Third, the executive branch in Flanders and Wallonia is contacted on a more regular basis by interest groups – respectively 33% and 29% of groups seek contacts at least once every three months or more frequently – compared to groups seeking contact with the national government – at this level only 19% seek contacts 'at least once every three months' or more frequently with ministers and cabinet members.

Figure 3. Seeking access to different governmental branches by government level



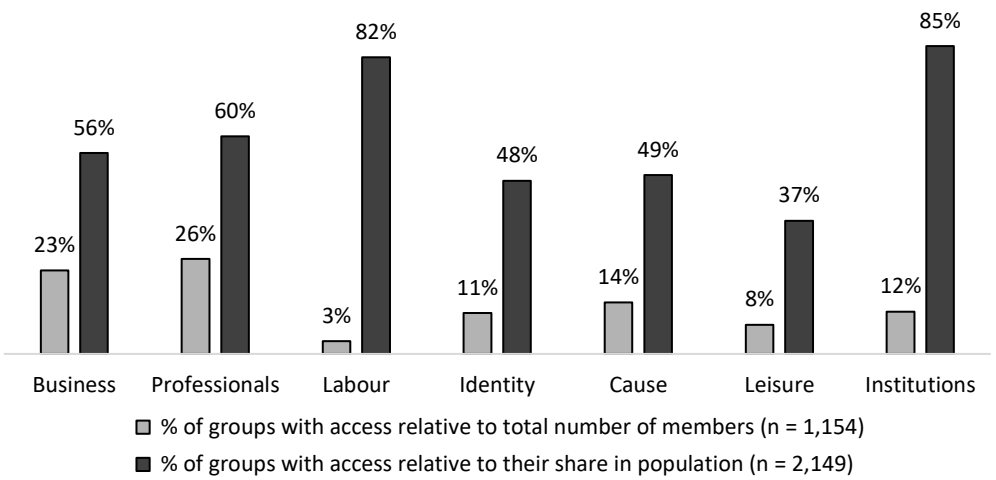
In short, while interest mobilization differs across government levels, also the variation in lobbying strategies reflects the multi-level structure of the Belgian polity. Moreover, the clear prominence of the administration as a lobbying target seems to be a persistent feature of neo-corporatist and consensual policymaking in Belgium (see also van den Berg et al. 2014; van der Meer et al. 2019). This finding matches the assessment of 'corporatist resilience' observed in other small European countries (Binderkrantz & Christiansen 2015; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Christiansen et al. 2018).

Top-Down Mapping of Gaining Access to Advisory Councils

Advisory councils, and their composition, are one of the foremost formal and institutional expressions of neo-corporatist practices (Christiansen et al. 2010). Moreover, access, more specifically obtaining seats in advisory councils, can be seen as

a lobbying success; it reflects the effectiveness of an interest organisation in passing a certain threshold that is beyond their own discretion and gaining recognition by policymakers (Binderkrantz et al. 2017b; Halpin & Fraussen 2017). We mapped interest group membership in 616 advisory councils at the national (n = 290), Flemish (n = 116) and Walloon/Francophone (n = 167) government levels. Three information sources were used: councils' own websites and dedicated government webpages, Politiek Zakboekje/Mémento Politique 2016 and Moniteur Belge (see also Methodological chapter). This allowed us to check the following criteria: (1) sufficient information availability, (2) dealing with policy formulation or implementation, not individual administrative acts or management tasks such as hiring and selection or awarding project funding, (3) permanently established and active during the legislature 2014-2019 and (4) at least one member is a non-governmental stakeholder. Finally, we conducted a detailed coding of these 616 advisory councils and mapped a total of 1,154 interest groups being council members.

Figure 4. Comparing access of different group types to advisory councils



Of the entire interest group population, 41% of national organizations, 38% of Flemish organizations and 45% of Francophone organizations have access to at least one of these 616 advisory councils. The somewhat higher percentage of Francophone organizations having access – compared to Flemish organizations – might be due to the overall higher

number of Francophone advisory councils. Across group types enjoying access (i.e. light grey bars in Figure 4), business and professional associations make up the largest category. Respectively 23% and 26% of groups having access are business and professional associations, illustrating a clear prominence compared to other group types. Associations of public authorities and institutions (12%), cause groups (14%) and identity groups (11%) also make up quite a substantial portion in the system of advisory councils. Compared to other group types, labor unions (3%) constitute only a small portion of all groups having access. Economic interests are core policy insiders compared to the more peripheral position of citizen groups.

To assess this representational bias further, we compared access across group types relative to their total share in the population (i.e. dark grey bars in Figure 4). If certain group types dominate the population, it would be no surprise that these types enjoy higher levels of access. Or by contrast, if some group types, for instance labor unions, are less numerous, this could affect their access. A total of 85% of all associations of (semi-)public authorities and institutions and 82% of all labor unions have access to at least one advisory council. While the overall portion of labor unions is small compared to the total number of interest groups having access to at least one council, the overwhelming majority of Belgian labor unions does gain access. Also, business associations, professional associations, identity groups and cause groups enjoy substantial access. Respectively, between 48% and 60% of all these groups have access to at least one advisory council. However, we need to be careful as these conclusions concern access to at least one advisory council and not the absolute number of seats these organizations hold across multiple councils. In this regard, we can clearly detect a core-periphery dynamic. Few groups have seats in a high number of advisory councils. Of all groups with access (n = 1,154), the overwhelming majority (n = 719 or 58%) has access to only one council, and most of these (n = 375 or 52%) have only one seat per council.

Table 4, presenting the top 20 organizations with the most seats, illustrates this skewed access pattern. This list consists mostly of labor unions, peak business associations and (professional) associations in the health care sector. No identity groups (e.g., youth, patients, gender and migrants) or cause groups (e.g., environment, human

rights, traffic safety) are among this set of core insiders. The centralization of the interest group system around a few business, labor and professional groups is a typical feature of consociationalism and neo-corporatist systems (Grote et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2006). Policymaking and implementation – especially in welfare state domains – is still a matter of concertation among organizations representing key socio-economic segments (Beyers et al. 2014b; Deschouwer 2012; Van Den Bulck 1992).

These top 20 interest organizations, for instance, have a strong presence in influential socio-economic advisory councils (*i.e.* the National Labor Council and the Central Economic Council, at the national level, SERV in Flanders and CESE in Francophone Belgium). Moreover, the reach of these core insiders is much wider than traditional welfare state domains. The fact that they also enjoy substantial access to advisory councils in other domains such as environment, transport and cultural policy clearly demonstrates the prominence of these actors among policymakers. It illustrates the pre-eminence or 'taken-for-grantedness' of these groups and their viewpoints among policymakers, despite the presence of other groups that represent similar constituencies (Halpin & Fraussen 2017). However, in these domains also citizen groups gain substantial access. Citizen groups' rise in numbers following the increased politicization of certain policy domains is to a certain extent matched by these organizations' successful entry into the system of advisory councils. Although neo-corporatist patterns of interest representation still rule the system of advisory councils, the years since the economic and financial crisis are characterized by increasing political and public contestation for these 'elitist' closed-door decision-making structures and more frequent deadlocks of social dialogue because of retrenchment (Van Gyes et al. 2017). Neo-corporatist practices have increasingly been put under pressure and the traditional interlocutors of government face more competition from other types of interest groups to gain access to the system of advisory councils.

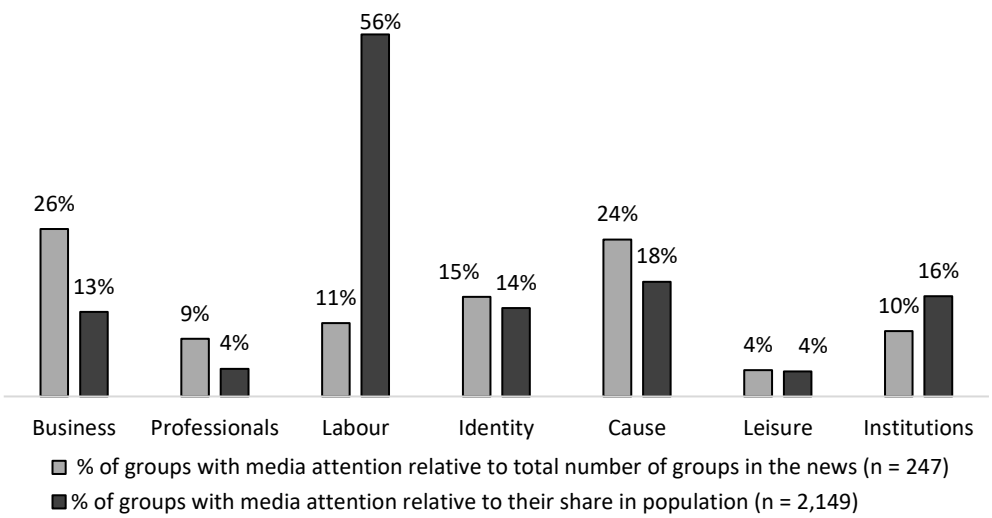
Table 4. List of top 20 advisers

1.	**ACV/CSC**	**2.**	**FGTB/ABVV**	**3.**	**ACLVB/CGSLB**	**4.**	**Landsbond der Christelijke Mutualiteiten Alliance Nationale des Mutualités Chrétiennes**
-	422 seats	-	373 seats	-	201 seats	-	190 seats
-	Christian labour union	-	Socialist labour union	-	Liberal labour union	-	Health care association
-	National	-	National	-	National	-	National
5.	**Union des Classes Moyeness**	**6.**	**Union Nationale de Mutualités Socialistes Landsbond der Socialistische Mutualiteiten**	**7.**	**Belgische Vereniging van Artsensyndicaten Association Belge des Syndicates Médicaux**	**8.**	**Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers**
-	170 seats	-	164 seats	-	161 seats	-	157 seats
-	Business association: small and medium enterprises	-	Health care association	-	Professional association: doctors	-	Business association: small and medium enterprises
-	Francophone	-	National	-	National	-	Flemish
9.	**Vlaams Netwerk van Ondernemingen**	**10.**	**Brussels Enterprise and Commerce**	**11.**	**Union Wallon des Entreprises**	**12.**	**Zorgnet-Icuro**
-	126 seats	-	114 seats	-	111 seats	-	95 seats
-	Business association	-	Business association	-	Business association	-	Association of health care facilities
-	Flemish	-	Brussels	-	Francophone	-	Flemish
13.	**Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique**	**14.**	**Fédération Wallonne de l'Agriculture**	**15.**	**Landsbond van de Onafhankelijke Ziekenfondsen Union nationale des Mutualités Libres**	**16.**	**Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie**
-	90 seats	-	86 seats	-	78 seats	-	78 seats
-	Business association	-	Professional association: farmers	-	Health care association	-	Association of municipalities and cities
-	National	-	Francophone	-	National	-	Francophone
17.	**Boerenbond**	**18.**	**ACOD/CGSP**	**19.**	**AXXON Physical Therapy**	**20.**	**Landsbond der Liberale Mutualiteiten Union Nationale des Mutualités Libérales**
-	69 seats	-	67 seats	-	67 seats	-	62 seats
-	Professional association: farmers	-	Socialist labour union: public sector	-	Professional association of physiotherapists	-	Health care association
-	Flemish	-	National	-	National	-	National

Top-Down Mapping of Interest Groups in the News Media

For assessing media attention, we rely on a content analysis of various news media outlets for a sample of 110 specific policy issues included in a 2014 voter survey, comprising 37 federal issues, 34 Flemish issues and 39 Walloon/Francophone issues (see also Methodological chapter). First, the relevant media coverage from June 2013 to December 2017 in four media outlets was automatically scraped from GoPress.[ix] To identify relevant articles, we applied a computer-automated Boolean search with up to six keywords – in both Dutch and French for national issues – closely related to the policy issues.[x] This resulted in 26,512 unique newspaper articles. Next, we automatically identified interest organizations active on these issues based on a curated dictionary containing 2,340 organisation names and abbreviations.[xi] The advantage of a curated dictionary is that it allowed us to quickly sift through a substantial number of newspaper articles. However, to account for the limitations of the computer-automated identification, coders manually added organizations making relevant claims in the selected articles and excluded those newspaper articles containing irrelevant claims. A manual coding was opted for because the claims interest groups made in the news are often complex and multi-faceted. In total, we sampled 2,740 newspaper articles in which interest groups were identified (for an overview, see Methodological chapter).

Figure 5. Comparing media attention for different group types



Although outside strategies are usually deployed by groups to gain news coverage, media coverage could also be due to the fact that journalists (or policy advocates) disclose hidden lobbying activities and/or publicly challenge some organized interests (i.e. some groups cannot escape media attention due to being a policy insider and/or the need for counteractive lobbying). The overall media attention groups gain is rather limited and also in the media arena considerable bias is present. Across the 110 policy issues, we identified 247 unique interest organizations making relevant claims on these issues in the sampled newspaper articles, which is only 11% of all mapped organizations.

Across all group types appearing in news coverage (see Figure 5), business associations (26%) and cause groups (24%) make up the largest categories (i.e. light grey bars in Figure 5). Also, identity groups (15%), associations of (semi-)public authorities and institutions (15%) and labor unions (11%) make up quite substantial portions. Professional associations (9%) and leisure associations (4%) gain comparatively less attention. However, when comparing media attention across group types relative to their total share in the population, a different picture emerges. Of all labor unions, 56% appears at least once in the news, making them the group type with the most attention. Cause groups also enjoy substantial levels of attention; 18% of these groups appears in the news – which is slightly more than business associations (13%). Nonetheless, compared to the population – except for the labor unions – the vast majority of groups does not appear in the news. The scarce media attention for interest groups might be due to the overall harsh competition to gain news coverage, not only among interest groups themselves, but especially with parties and politicians (Tresch & Fischer 2015).

Similar to the access interest groups enjoy to advisory councils, media attention also displays a profound core-periphery dynamic (Fraussen & Wouters 2015). Of all groups attracting media attention, a high number (n = 95 or 40%) appears in only one article. Looking at the distribution across group types (Table 5), business associations attract more media attention – exemplified by their higher mean and maximum values – compared to identity groups and cause groups. For instance, while the top 25% of business associations appears 7.25 times in the news (Q4), the top 25% of identity groups appears only four times in the news. Cause groups are more on par with business

associations; the top 25% of them appeared six times in newspaper articles related to one of the 110 policy issues. Again, labor unions are successful when it comes to media attention, as the median labor union appears in six newspaper articles on the same policy issue and the top 25% of them appears in 15.5 articles (Q4).

Table 5. The distribution of media attention by group type, at least one media hit

Number of media hits	*n*	*Min.*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Q1*	*Median*	*Q4*	*Max.*
Business	64	1	7.62	13.7	1	3	7.25	88
Professionals	22	1	2.59	2.77	1	2	2.75	13
Labor unions	28	1	16.64	26.48	1.75	6	15.5	106
Identity groups	38	1	4.21	5.53	1	2	4	24
Cause groups	60	1	4.53	4.58	1	3	6	21
Leisure associations	10	1	2.9	2.9	1	1	1.75	11
Associations of	25	1	4.32	6.64	1	2	4	27
Total	247	1						106

Note: Numbers based on the media data

The clear prominence of business associations and labor unions in the news indicates that – although every arena has its own logic – some characteristics, such as the core-periphery structure of interest representation in advisory councils, are also reflected in the media arena. As some research demonstrates, the news media often attribute news value to powerful political insiders and pay less attention to outsiders. This has led authors to characterize the – Belgian as well as Scandinavian – news media as an arena of 'privileged pluralism' (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015; Tresch & Fischer 2015). However, some groups with less inside access do seem to be able, at least to some extent, to make up for this through the news media. For instance, many cause groups gain substantial news coverage.

Conclusion

The descriptive analyses presented in this article give some tentative insights into some key features of Belgian interest representation. We find that: (1) neo-corporatist core-periphery structures continue to be a persistent feature, (2) the national government level remains an important venue for interest groups, despite the continuous transfer of policy

competences to the subnational and European levels, but (3) patterns of interest representation vary across government levels and policymaking arenas. First, our descriptive overview demonstrates that neo-corporatist mobilization patterns are quite persistent. As in other European countries, the traditional neo-corporatist interlocutors of government – labor unions, peak business and professional associations – tend to dominate in absolute numbers (Dür & Mateo 2013; Wonka et al. 2010). However, while in absolute numbers labor unions and business associations are achieving more political voice, cause groups and identity groups may shout as loudly – for instance because of their resource endowment and substantial media attention – and therefore have considerable chances to influence public policymaking.

Still, the (peak) business associations and labor unions enjoy more access to traditional neo-corporatist venues such as advisory councils compared to citizen groups – an outspoken core-periphery dynamic is present. Although these traditional neo-corporatist practices are mostly present at the national level, they also prevail at the subnational level, exemplified by the multitude of advisory councils established by subnational governments and these councils' composition, in which the traditional peak business associations and labor unions are also prominent (Fobé et al. 2013; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Keating & Wilson 2014). A rather small set of groups – mostly business associations and labor unions – has access to a large number of councils and gains substantial media attention. Hence, the media arena resonates the political power of insider groups, and, in the case of Belgium, this perpetuates traditional neo-corporatist patterns of interest representation.

Second, one important consequence of the Belgian federal state structure is the presence of different interest group communities at the national and subnational levels. Drivers for these diverging patterns of mobilization and the emergence of a multi-layered interest group system are multiple. On the one hand, many organized interests have – confronted with the continuous devolution of competencies – rescaled their organizational structure and activities towards the subnational level and new interest organizations are mostly established at the subnational level (Fraussen 2014; Keating & Wilson 2014). This is especially the case for identity groups, cause groups and

associations of institutions and public authorities – all are predominantly mobilized at the subnational level. By contrast, business interests, professional associations and labor unions are still primarily mobilized at the national level. On the other hand, the Belgian governments have themselves actively developed distinct systems of interest intermediation, for example, by awarding subsidies or setting up consultation venues (Celis et al. 2012; Fraussen 2014; Heylen & Willems 2019). As a result, Belgium offers an excellent case to assess how multi-layered political institutions shape the mobilization of societal interests and their interaction with public authorities. It enables an analysis of how institutions and political elites can provide incentives for the formation of subnational interest communities with distinct features and dynamics, as well as (possibly) constrain the establishment or maintenance of nationwide groups bridging territorial interests. In short, devolution has created an incentive to 'abandon' the center, but it has, in the case of Belgium, not resulted in the hollowing out of the national interest group community.

This brings us to the third conclusion, namely that interest mobilization varies profoundly across political arenas and branches of government. For instance, while the media arena resonates the core-periphery structure of the political–administrative arena of advisory councils, it does not provide a perfect mirror. In this regard, the media arena is somewhat more inclusive of citizen groups (compared to advisory councils). This can be framed in the context of increased public attention and interest mobilization on issues such as the environment and human rights (see Binderkrantz 2012). In addition, while the traditional neo-corporatist actors have maintained their core position in advisory councils dealing with welfare state policies, in other 'new' domains also citizen groups have gained substantial access (Willems 2020). The growing number of citizen groups is to a certain extent matched with these organizations' successful entry into the system of advisory councils. At the same time, the system of advisory councils and social dialogue is increasingly criticized and contested by political and public actors (Van Gyes et al. 2017). In addition, substantial variation can be observed across government branches. The evidence reveals that, compared to the administration and the executive branch, Belgian organized interests least contact parliamentarians.

An important limitation of our characterization of interest representation in Belgium is that we only focused on organized interests, while excluding other actors such as companies and semi-public authorities such as universities or hospitals – often referred to as 'pressure participants' – from our analyses (Jordan et al. 2004). These entities have no intermediary function; they do not represent a constituency or membership, and their potential political activities are usually a by-product of their core business – if their interests are threatened, they mobilize politically. The expertise these actors have at their disposal, as well as their economic significance (in terms of employment and/or investments) means that they play a crucial role in any political system (Salisbury 1984; see also Lowery 2007). Some results – such as the prominence of business interests and the importance of inside lobbying – might even be more pronounced if we would have included these actors in our analyses (see for instance Aizenberg & Hanegraaff 2020); follow-up research could investigate the role of these 'pressure participants' more closely.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the federalization of Belgium, the politicization of issues such as migration and the environment and growing political contestation towards elitist neo-corporatist practices put pressure on traditional patterns of neo-corporatism. These developments have nourished a more competitive interest group system, larger in size as well as more diverse and fragmented. Hence, traditional concepts of Belgian interest representation, such as consociationalism or neo-corporatism, can no longer adequately characterize the overall pattern of state–society relations in Belgium. The Belgian system of interest representation has become considerably segmented and characterized by distinct constellations of organized interests at each government level and distinct mobilization patterns across political and public arenas. Nonetheless, the neo-corporatist legacy has proven to be resilient, as the prevailing prominence of labor unions and peak business associations demonstrates. In essence, when it comes to interest mobilization, we observe on top of the persistent neo-corporatist patterns substantial ingredients of a more pluralist system of interest representation.

Article 2. Balancing constituency and congruence

How constituency involvement affects positional congruence between organized interests and the general public

Evelien Willems & Iskander De Bruycker (2019). Balancing constituency and congruence: How constituency involvement affects positional congruence between organized interests and the general public. *Governance*.

Abstract. This article asks to what extent and under which conditions interest groups are congruent with public opinion. We argue that interest groups can be caught in a balancing act between engaging with their constituency on the one hand and aligning their position with the broader public on the other hand. We contribute to previous studies by arguing that the effect of interest group type on congruence is moderated by the degree to which constituencies are involved in advocacy processes and the salience of policy issues. We test these expectations by analyzing 314 media claims made by Belgian interest groups regarding 58 policy issues. The results demonstrate that citizen groups with formal members are more prone to share the position of the broader public compared to concentrated interest groups such as business associations, especially if they involve their members in advocacy activities and when issues are salient in the media.

Keywords: interest groups, public opinion, congruence

Introduction

In May 2017, the Belgian government proposed a law to guarantee a minimum staff occupancy for operating public railway trains during strikes. Belgian public opinion overwhelmingly supported this measure. Railway employees opposed it, arguing that operating trains while understaffed would lead to chaos and pose safety risks for both personnel and passengers. On the one hand, labor unions representing train personnel consulted a large portion of their members, who strongly opposed the policy measure. On the other hand, the labor unions knew that their mobilization efforts were somewhat futile, as the government felt bolstered by the public's support for the proposed measure. This example illustrates that the policy position of an interest group's constituency may collide with public opinion. A tension may arise between the need to adopt positions that resonate broadly with the general public and the need for interest groups to engage with their constituencies (Halpin et al. 2018; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007). Although interest groups are established to represent their constituents' interests, their prospects of influencing public policy increase when their position is aligned with public opinion (Dür & Mateo 2014; Kollman 1998; Rasmussen et al. 2018a).

The presumption that public support is important for influence has led to a number of empirical studies focusing on the congruence between interest groups' policy positions and public opinion (Burstein 2014; Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Gilens 2012; Gilens & Page 2014; Lax & Phillips 2012). These studies demonstrated that congruence can be explained by the type of constituency a group represents and found that citizen groups are slightly more likely to be congruent with public opinion than business associations (see for instance Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). We contribute to these studies by considering under which conditions different types of interest groups are congruent with public opinion, specifically by examining the role of constituency involvement and issue salience. Interest groups may strategically select policy issues for which they enjoy broad public support, but they can also win (or lose) public support through close interactions with their constituents. Indeed, the classic pluralist perspective emphasizes the 'transmission belt' function of interest groups (Dahl 1961; Truman 1951), i.e. to act

as intermediaries by closely engaging with their constituents and maintaining strong ties with policymakers (Albareda 2018; Albareda & Braun 2019; Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Grömping & Halpin 2019).

Though, the image of interest groups as transmission belts does not fully align with the fact that organized interests tend to represent concentrated or narrow segments of society (Olson 1965). Some groups represent broad societal segments such as workers or consumers, but interest groups often also represent narrow constituencies such as farmers or the chemical industry. Moreover, organized interests substantially vary in their capacity to connect with their members and supporters (Albareda 2018; Binderkrantz 2009; Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 2007), and consequently also in their ability to act as intermediaries between society and policymakers.

On the one hand, interest groups can learn about key societal challenges and grievances from interactions with their constituents (Halpin et al. 2018; Minkoff & Powell 2006), which may strengthen congruence with the public. For instance, consumer groups that consult their members are presumed to provide strong linkages between the general public and policymakers as these groups' membership encompasses broad societal segments (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Giger & Klüver 2016). On the other hand, interest groups' engagement with their constituencies can also incentivize them to circumvent public opinion in order to realize the constituents' (opposing) policy objectives (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007). For example, the association of construction companies represents a narrow societal segment and hence intensely involving their constituents may restrain public approval.

This paper argues that different types of interest groups enjoy varying levels of congruence with the general public depending on the extent to which they involve their constituents and the salience of policy issues. The empirical analysis is based on a large-scale content analysis of 314 media claims from Belgian interest groups on 58 specific policy issues situated across a wide range of policy domains. Responses regarding public opinion on these policy issues were collected via an online voter survey in March 2014. We combine this data with a survey with a representative sample of the Belgian interest group population (Beyers et al. 2016). The Belgian system of interest representation

presents a representative case for other neo-corporatist systems, especially with a consociationalist legacy (e.g., Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Austria). In these systems, the relations between societal constituencies and interest groups are deeply ingrained and structured according to socio-economic, ideological and cultural cleavages, which makes a tension between constituency involvement and congruence with the general public more likely (Beyers et al. 2014b; Deschouwer 2012).

The results demonstrate that interest organizations with highly engaged constituents in advocacy activities are not necessarily less or more congruent with public opinion; much depends on the type of constituents represented. In addition, the level of media salience that policy issues attract, affects interest groups' congruence with public opinion. When diffuse interests are active on policy issues that attract high levels of media salience, they are significantly more congruent with the general public. These findings have implications for our understanding of the functioning of organized interests as transmission belts between the general public and policymakers.

Congruence through constituency involvement?

Congruence is conceptualized as the extent to which interest groups are aligned with the general public on specific issues (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). To explain variation in congruence, previous studies have highlighted the diverse constituencies that interest groups represent (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Giger & Klüver 2016). A classic distinction can be made between diffuse and concentrated constituencies (Olson 1965). Interest groups such as the brewers association and the association of physiotherapists have a more concentrated and clearly delineated support base (Olson 1965; Salisbury 1969). Diffuse interest groups, such as environmental associations and women's organizations, typically represent broader societal segments that endorse specific causes, values, or the interests of disenfranchised constituencies (Salisbury 1969). Recent research by Flöthe & Rasmussen (2019) demonstrated that groups representing diffuse constituencies are slightly more prone to be congruent with public opinion than groups representing concentrated constituencies.

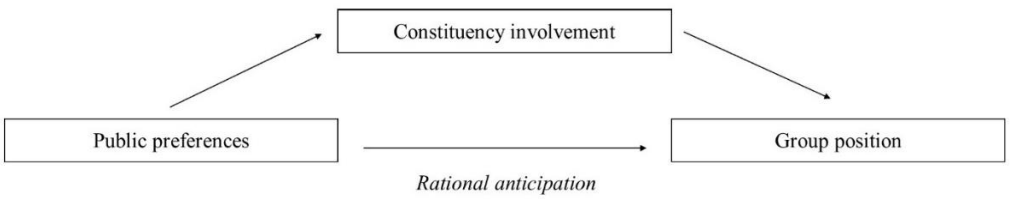
We extend these insights by arguing that the extent to which different types of groups involve their constituency in advocacy activities affects congruence. Constituency involvement indicates the capacity of interest groups to be accountable to and act on behalf of their members and supporters after receiving their endorsement through internal consultation procedures (Halpin 2006; Johansson & Lee 2014; Kohler-Koch 2010). Next to constituency involvement, interest groups' abilities to be congruent with public opinion are affected by issue salience—one of the most important moderators in studies analyzing public opinion-policy congruence (Burstein 2014; Page & Shapiro 1983; Shapiro 2011). When policy issues attract low levels of salience, interest groups that represent specific business interests have more leeway in catering towards the demands of their members and supporters (Culpepper 2010). Conversely, when issues are highly salient, public approval becomes decisive and interest groups that represent concentrated interests in society may be confronted with a situation where acting on behalf of their members implies openly opposing a vigilant public (see also Lax & Phillips 2012).

To theorize the relationship between interest groups and public opinion, we borrow insights from party politics literature. Specifically, we apply two mechanisms of political representation from party-politics literature to interest representation, i.e. electoral turnover and rational anticipation (Achen & Bartels 2017; Dalton et al. 2011; Mansbridge 2003; Powell 2004; Stimson et al. 1995; Thomassen & Schmitt 1997). Although, compared to political parties, these mechanisms manifest themselves differently for interest organizations, they are in many respects relevant for understanding how interest groups can be congruent with the general public. In short, the mechanism of electoral turnover implies that congruence is the result of citizens who vote for the party that represents their preferred policy views (i.e. prospective voting). Victorious political parties implement these policies, reducing the gap between what voters want and what the government provides, hereby increasing congruence. Alternatively, voters can also control policymakers by evaluating their past performance and choosing whether to re-elect them or not (i.e. retrospective voting). Here, rational anticipation allows policymakers who are currently in office to strategically anticipate

public preferences to avoid electoral retribution. Figure 1 visualizes these two pathways to congruence.

When applying the mechanism of electoral turnover to interest groups, three aspects are key. First, interest groups compete with each other by supplying their potential supporters with the policy options they want to pursue, much like political parties present their party manifestos to the electorate (Dalton et al. 2011; Hakhverdian 2010; Klüver 2015). Second, while parties need to mobilize voters, interest organizations must mobilize members and supporters, for instance through donations or subscriptions (Dalton et al. 2011; Hakhverdian 2010; Klüver 2015). Third, whereas political parties gain authorization from their voters through elections and promise to follow the voters' expressed policy views (Dalton et al. 2011; Hakhverdian 2010; Mansbridge 2003; Stimson et al. 1995), citizens as well as actors such as firms and institutions, can authorize interest groups to act on their policy views and hold the groups' leaders accountable.

Figure 1. Two pathways to congruence (adapted from Hakhverdian 2010)



The key difference between political parties and interest groups is that authorization and accountability are not attributed through electoral processes, but rather through processes of constituency involvement (Johansson & Lee 2014). For instance, members can take part in various activities such as developing and executing lobbying strategies, meeting in working groups to discuss policy objectives, selecting the organizational leadership, or ultimately abandon the group and withdraw their support (Albareda 2018; Johansson & Lee 2014). The mechanism of 'electoral turnover' is thus closely related to constituency involvement. Interest groups may seek positional congruence with broader public segments in a bottom-up fashion by actively engaging with their constituency

before becoming active on specific policy dossiers. Groups then pursue political positions that help them consolidate and strengthen the connection with their constituency and avoid retribution from members or supporters (Strolovitch 2006).

In addition to constituency involvement, interest groups can detect signals from the public by closely monitoring its mood—for instance by relying on public opinion polls and the news media (Kingdon 1984; Stimson et al. 1995). An important condition for interest groups to be able to detect such signals from the general public is issue salience (Burstein 2014). Higher levels of salience entail that the general public has more crystalized preferences on specific policy issues due to higher exposure rates to issue-specific information (Ciuk & Yost, 2016). If issues are highly salient, public preferences are activated and more easily detectable by organized interest; conversely, if issues attract low levels of salience, public preferences remain latent (Zaller, 1992). Moreover, the organizational leadership can anticipate, based on prior experiences and beliefs, their constituency's preferences and/or reactions to certain policy positions. Here, the groups' strategic behavior becomes crucial and reflects what has been called 'rational anticipation' (Mansbridge 2003; Stimson et al. 1995). Even when interest groups themselves aim to impact the saliency and preferences of the broader public on specific policy issues, they will anticipate whether or not their policy positions resonate with the general public (Dür & Mateo 2013). Public opinion on specific policy issues is determined by multiple factors beyond the control of individual interest groups including political parties, real-world events, the mass media and other interest groups mobilizing on the issue (Burstein 2014; Klüver et al. 2015). Advocating on highly visible issues can thus easily backfire in the absence of public support. In sum, rational anticipation means that interest groups attempt to cater to public opinion and strategically decide to lobby on issues for which their policy positions correspond with views that gain widespread public support.

To be clear, rational anticipation does not entail that interest groups will radically change their policy positions in order to be more congruent with the public. Each interest group has some defining core identity which may change over time, but on which the group cannot easily compromise (Minkoff & Powell 2006; Halpin & Daugbjerg, 2015).

Rather, rational anticipation implies that groups are sensitive to public support and that they will try to select issues for which their policy positions correspond with prevailing public opinion—which is easier when issues are salient (Kollman, 1998). Rational anticipation, however, may not be perceived as substantive representation of the constituency and could lead to a loss of credibility and a decline of membership support as groups lobby on issues which are less prioritized by their constituencies (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007).

Political parties often also face a dual constituency (i.e. voters and members) and policy-seeking parties with strong intraparty democracy are less flexible in adjusting their policy views to the median voter (see Strøm and Müller 1999). Similar to political parties that face a trade-off between maximizing their votes and insisting on particular policy preferences of the party members (Strøm & Müller 1999); interest groups experience a tension between the need to engage with their constituency and the need to adopt positions that resonate broadly with the general public (Fraussen & Halpin 2018; Halpin et al. 2018; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007). When constituents are actively involved in establishing the positions an interest group pursues, constituency support is generally secured but the group's alignment with the broader public may be constrained, diminishing its chances of lobbying success (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Lowery 2007). A group's constituency may hold policy positions opposed to (or in line with) prevailing public opinion on an issue. Moreover, internal processes of constituency involvement are complex and time-consuming, sometimes limiting a group's flexibility to prioritize certain issues and adapt to the political context (Grömping & Halpin 2019; Halpin et al. 2018). For instance, members and supporters who agreed on the overall organizational policy objectives, may disagree on concrete objectives when the saliency of policy issues increases (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Jordan & Maloney 2007).

In sum, constituency involvement and congruence may be driven by countervailing mechanisms, exemplifying an important tension in interest representation. As a result, some organizations tend to focus on only one representation mechanism, prioritizing either constituency involvement or strategically anticipating

public opinion. We do not intend to empirically test these mechanisms, but rather rely on them in the subsequent section for informing our theoretical expectations.

Hypotheses: the nexus between group type and constituency involvement

We anticipate that a more intense engagement with constituents and issue salience affect congruence with the general public, depending on the type of constituency groups represent. We distinguish between three types: representative concentrated, representative diffuse, and solidarity organizations (Halpin 2006).

First, *representative concentrated organizations* typically have a narrow and clearly delineated membership base of companies, institutions or professionals that are formally affiliated members (Olson 1965; Salisbury 1969). Examples include associations of chemical companies, hospital associations, and associations of lawyers. For these interest groups, authorization and accountability for advocacy activities comes directly from the members—making them 'representative' due to their formal membership structures and processes of membership involvement (Halpin 2006). The members of these organizations are often not interested in passive involvement and want to express themselves when policy positions are formulated, as their economic self-interest is directly at stake (Binderkrantz 2009; Halpin 2006). When concentrated interest groups involve their members in internal processes, it may secure them with membership allegiance and support for their advocacy activities. However, such involvement can also entail that these organizations have less flexibility in selecting issues and adopting positions that resonate with the general public (Halpin et al. 2018; Minkoff & Powell 2006). Since concentrated interests typically represent more narrow societal segments, their policy objectives could differ substantially from the objectives of the general public (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Giger & Klüver 2016). Intense membership involvement in advocacy activities is expected to shift concentrated interest organizations towards the more particular interests of their members and away from positions that resonate strongly with the general public (Halpin et al. 2018; Minkoff & Powell 2006).

Second, *representative diffuse organizations* typically have a diffuse constituency and a formal membership base consisting of (associations of) individual citizens mobilized around a public interest or cause (Halpin 2006). Examples include women's organizations and consumer organizations. Typically, the scope of these organizations' membership base is more encompassing and representative of broader societal segments compared to the membership of concentrated interests. Moreover, these organizations are labelled 'representative' due to their formal membership structures through which they can directly involve their constituents in advocacy activities (Halpin 2006). Representative diffuse organizations can learn about the societal grievances from broad societal segments through close interactions with their constituents (Halpin et al. 2018; Minkoff & Powell 2006).This enables them to secure higher levels of congruence in comparison to concentrated interests organizations (Binderkrantz & Krøyer 2012; Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Giger & Klüver 2016). While representative diffuse organizations also face constraints when involving their members in advocacy activities, these constraining forces do not weigh up against the strengthening societal embeddedness which results from such membership engagement. Hence, in contrast to representative concentrated organizations, we expect constituency involvement to strengthen congruence for representative diffuse organizations.

Third, *solidarity organizations* typically have a diffuse constituency of loosely affiliated donors or supporters, but no formal members (Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Examples include animal rights groups and development NGOs. Many advocate for certain causes, values or the interests of disenfranchised groups (such as children, the poor, future generations, animals) that do not necessarily coincide with supporters' own self-interests (Halpin 2006; Warleigh 2001). The constituencies of these organizations are often satisfied with expressing themselves through paying annual fees and may even consider a low level of participation—or no participation at all—to be an attractive quality (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Even if solidarity organizations closely involve their constituents in advocacy activities, these organizations still experience considerable flexibility in aligning their advocacy priorities with public opinion. The constituents of solidarity organizations typically do not occupy decision-

making or financial veto player roles, and usually their own private self-interest is not at stake (Binderkrantz 2009; Warleigh 2001). This gives the leadership of solidarity organizations more opportunities to seize strategic policy momentum and to lobby on issues where public opinion is on their side (Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007), regardless of whether they involve their supporters. Therefore, we expect that constituency involvement will not meaningfully impact congruence for solidarity organizations. Our expectations are summarized in Hypothesis 1: Constituency involvement will impede congruence with the broader public for (a) representative concentrated organizations and (b) strengthen congruence for representative diffuse organizations, while (c) it will not affect congruence for solidarity organizations.

While concentrated interest organizations may see their congruence with the public diminished when they actively involve their constituents, they can still enjoy considerable levels of public support if they anticipate the public mood and adjust their policy objectives accordingly. For the mechanism of rational anticipation to function and for interest groups to be able to detect signals from the public, a key condition is that policy issues are salient. Salience can be understood as the relative importance and visibility of certain policy issues in the media, on the government agenda, or among the public (Beyers et al. 2018; Burstein 2014; Wlezien 2005). Here, we focus on media attention for specific policy issues, as this likely captures the government agenda as well as the public agenda at least to some extent and thus provides important incentives for interest groups to prioritize particular issues (Halpin et al. 2018). The more media salience issues enjoy, the more the public will be informed about these issues, meaning that citizens will be more likely to adopt policy positions in favor or against particular policy outcomes (Ciuk & Yost 2016; Zaller 1992). Hence, media salience enables interest groups to strategically anticipate public opinion, i.e. they can more easily determine what the public wants on salient issues and anticipate public (dis)approval before mobilizing on issues. On issues that attract little to no salience, it is more difficult for groups to estimate whether public opinion is on their side, as they lack information on the general public's policy views (Burstein 2014; De Bruycker 2017).

The effect of salience, however, is not equal for every interest group. Depending on the type of constituency, interest groups experience more or less flexibility in rationally anticipating public opinion and adjusting their issue priorities accordingly. Concentrated interests typically represent well-circumscribed constituencies, and therefore these groups have less discretion in anticipating and accommodating public opinion into their issue priorities. These groups will therefore not necessarily find themselves more congruent with public opinion on salient issues. To the contrary, their constituents can more closely monitor the organization's activities on visible dossiers and are more eager to see their specific interests defended in the face of public contestation (De Bruycker et al. 2018).

Representative diffuse organizations and solidarity organizations, in contrast, have a broader societal support base and therefore have more freedom in anticipating and incorporating public opinion in their policy objectives. Media salience allows these groups to more accurately estimate public preferences and incorporate these into their issue priorities, which increases congruence with public opinion. This is summarized in Hypothesis 2: *The more media salience issues attract, (a) the more congruent the positions of solidarity interests and (b) representative diffuse interests, while salience affects congruence negatively for (c) representative concentrated organizations.*

Data and research design

The empirical analysis relies on a sample of 110 specific policy issues, which were included in an online voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters (Flanders n=1,053, Wallonia n=1,028). This sampling approach provides data on public opinion, which is necessary to capture our main dependent variable 'congruence' (see also Rasmussen et al. 2018a). The voter survey was conducted in the run-up to the sub(national) and European elections of 25 May 2014, and resulted in an average response rate of 17%. Respondents could either agree or disagree with issue statements (Lesschaeve 2017b). All of the 110 sampled policy issues—of which 37 national issues, 34 Flemish issues and 39 Walloon/Francophone issues—meet the following criteria: uni-dimensionality,

specificity, attributable to a dominant government level, and deal with substantive policies instead of administrative acts (e.g., accumulation of political mandates) or budgetary allocations (e.g., subsidies for cultural policy). The sample accounted for variation across policy issues in terms of policy domains, legislative initiatives introduced, interest group mobilization and media prominence of specific issues (see Figure A.1 in Appendix).

To identify interest organizations and their positions on the sampled policy issues, we relied on an extensive news-content analysis for each specific policy issue (see also De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). First, we applied computer-automated Boolean keyword searches in four news media outlets for the period June 2013-December 2017. This resulted in 26,512 unique newspaper articles. Next, we automatically identified interest organizations in these articles based on a curated dictionary containing the names and abbreviations of 2,340 Belgian interest organizations (Beyers et al. 2016). Subsequently, we used a multi-stage stratified sampling approach to ensure the coding of interest groups' policy positions would be feasible (see Methodological chapter for an overview of this procedure). This resulted in a sample of 2,740 articles that were manually coded. We coded whether or not the identified interest groups made relevant claims about the specific policy issue at hand. Claims were defined as quotations or paraphrases in the news that can be connected to specific interest organizations (De Bruycker 2017; Koopmans & Statham 1999). In total, 239 unique interest organizations made 986 claims on 83 issues (leaving 27 issues with no relevant interest group identification and/or claim). Coded claims are made both before (n=133 in 2013) and after (n=853 in 2014-2017) the public opinion measurement (March 2014).

Based on these claims we coded the organizations' positions in favor and against the issue statements included in the voter survey. The coding was conducted by one of the authors, a research assistant and two student assistants; inter-coder reliability checks were performed and found to be satisfactory (see Methodological chapter). Subsequently, interest groups' claims could be linked to the share of the public that adopted the same position as the group, which constitutes our measure of congruence.

The share of the public in favor and against a specific policy issue was measured based on the percentage of respondents that 'agreed' or 'disagreed' with the issue statement. For example, on the issue 'The retirement age should not rise', 72% of the public agrees, while 22% disagrees with the statement. In this case, all interest organizations that agreed were given the value of 0.72, while all organizations that disagreed were given the value of 0.22. This coding was performed for each organization that made a claim on one of the issues in our sample and resulted in a continuous variable (min=0.10; μ=0.48; α=0.19; max=0.83). The percentages for national issues were calculated by taking the respective averages between the percentages of Flemings and Francophones holding each position, since both publics were surveyed separately on these issues. Alternatively, we created a dichotomous variable measuring whether the position of the largest share of the public coincides with the position adopted by each interest group. For example, on the issue of the retirement age, groups holding a position in favor of the statement, receive the value '1' because the share of public that agrees is larger than the share of the public that disagrees with the statement. In sum, linking public opinion to interest groups their media claims on specific issues created a dataset with repeated measures, i.e. interest groups making claims nested in several policy issues.

While our study does not enquire about interest groups gaining media attention, it should be noted that the news media have their own rules of engagement and consequently do not include all interest groups active on a particular issue. Previous studies on interest groups' media attention demonstrated that well-endowed organizations, business groups, and organizations that seek to change the status quo attract relatively more prominence in the news. Moreover, our focus on the news media makes us more likely to capture groups expressing positions that resonate with the broader public compared to other more secluded advocacy arenas (Kollman 1998). Even if media claims offer only part of the picture, news media still constitute an important arena for interest groups to make their voices heard (Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Claims can reach the largest audiences through the media, and media coverage is generally not limited to one side of a political conflict, as journalists are expected to offer balanced reporting (Hopmann et al. 2012).

To measure our independent variables, we relied on a survey of the population of Belgian interest groups and linked this to the 239 interest groups making media claims. The survey of 1,678 organizations had a response rate of 43%, and 68 of these surveyed organizations could be linked to our media dataset (which constitutes 29% of the identified organizations in the media). This resulted in 314 organization-media claim dyads on 58 policy issues, providing us with the unique opportunity to connect key organizational traits to the extent to which interest groups align with public opinion on specific policy issues. The representativeness of this sample is further discussed in the Methodological chapter.

First, we created a variable categorizing organizations into: (1) representative concentrated interests, including business associations, professional associations, and associations of institutions and (semi-)public authorities (n=144 dyads); (2) representative diffuse organizations, including labor unions, cause and identity groups with formal members (n=129 dyads) and (3) solidarity organizations, including cause and identity groups without formal members (n=40 dyads) (Binderkrantz 2008; Halpin 2006). Although labor unions can also be viewed as concentrated (economic) interests due to their association with specific professions, they differ significantly from the other organizations in this category. Belgian labor unions all have comprehensive individual membership bases and specific occupational branches are part of large organizational conglomerates active on a wide range of policy issues (Faniel 2012). These conglomerates coordinate the political and organizational strategies of the smaller branches.

Second, to measure constituency involvement we constructed an index based on the following item-response question (Heylen et al. 2018): 'How important are your members for the following activities?'. These activities included: (1) 'helping to influence public policy', (2) 'providing ideas about your organization's campaigning strategies', (3) 'identifying problems or providing ideas about your organization's activities', (4) 'providing evidence of support from affected members or concerned citizens' and (5) 'running local groups or branches'. Respondents could indicate the intensity of constituency involvement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from

'unimportant' to 'very important'. These responses were then summed to create a scale of constituency involvement ranging from 5-25 with a mean of 21 (α=4.02, Cronbach's alpha=.71). Alternatively, we created a dummy variable measuring whether the constituency or the staff/board exclusively formulates policy positions.

Third, media salience was measured through the number of newspaper articles that addresses a policy issue directly or discusses the broader policy theme. The measure is right-skewed; only a few issues are highly salient. The variable was therefore logarithmically transformed (min= -0.68; μ=0.49; α=0.45; max=1.08). More information on the distribution of the key independent variables can be found in Appendix.

We also included a set of organizational control variables. First, we controlled for the number of staff organizations employ. Organizations with a larger staff have more capacity to involve their members and supporters, and are better able to monitor policy issues, hence being better equipped to anticipate public opinion. To gauge the number of staff, we asked 'How many paid staff (full time equivalent), does your organization employ?'. The variable was logarithmically transformed due to the distribution being right-skewed (min=0; μ=4; α=1.77; max=8.52). Next, we controlled for the degree to which interest groups depend on government funding, as this might make groups more sensitive to the preferences of the government rather than the preferences of their constituencies or the broader public (Heylen & Willems 2019; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). To capture dependencies on government funding, respondents indicated the percentage of (sub)national subsidies within their 2015 budget. This measure is right-skewed. The variable was therefore recoded as a categorical variable: no subsidies (n=168 dyads), 0.01-50% of the budget consisting of government subsidies (n=87 dyads) and 51%-100% of the budget consisting of government subsidies (n=58 dyads). Third, we created a categorical measure distinguishing between interest groups that seek to change the status quo (n=196 dyads) and groups that defend the status quo (n=117 dyads). Finally, we controlled for the cultural-linguistic origin of the constituency based on a survey question. We created a categorical variable distinguishing between Flemish (n=92 dyads), Walloon/Francophone (n=39 dyads) and nationwide organizations (n=182 dyads).

A second set of control variables was used to account for the issue context. First, we controlled for subnational or national government authority over the respective policy issues, as public opinion may vary across regions. We created a categorical variable, distinguishing between Flemish issues (n=43 dyads), Francophone/Walloon issues (n=42 dyads) and national issues (n=228 dyads). Second, we controlled for the number of months interest groups' media claims are distanced from the public opinion measurement (March 2014). This measure is slightly left-skewed (min=-8; μ=16.34; α=15.67; max=46).

Analysis

We first present a bivariate analysis of the relationship between group type and congruence. We performed a one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) to determine if the mean positional congruence is significantly different for the three group types, representative concentrated (n=145), representative diffuse (n=129) and solidarity groups (n=40). Here, a statistically significant difference is observed between groups ($F(2,311)=5.90$, $p=.003$). A Tukey post-hoc test indicates that the mean positional congruence is not significantly higher for representative diffuse groups compared to representative concentrated interests, which is used as the control group (0.025 ± 0.02 percentage points, $p=.513$). In contrast, solidarity groups significantly differ from concentrated interests (0.116 ± 0.03 percentage points, $p=.002$) and from representative diffuse groups (0.091 ± 0.03 percentage points, $p=.023$).

To test our hypotheses, we ran mixed effects ordinary least squares (OLS) models with a random intercept for policy issues to account for repeated observations, i.e. the nesting of organizations within policy issues. Given the hierarchical data structure, the assumptions of independence and homoscedasticity are violated. Therefore, we used a two-level model that allowed the intercept for policy issues to vary. Numeric predictors are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing this by two times the standard deviation (Gelman 2008). This allows for an interpretation analogous to a dichotomous variable. Moving one unit of analysis, corresponds to moving one standard deviation below the mean, to one standard deviation above the mean.

Table 1.Ordinary least-squares mixed effects models with a random intercept for policy issues

	Model 1: Group type	Model 2: Constituency involvement	Model 3: Media salience	Model 4: Interactions	Model 5: Interactions
Group type (ref. cat=concentrated)	-	-	-	-	-
- Representative diffuse	0.047*	0.051**	0.057**	0.036	-0.080**
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.031)
- Solidarity	0.177***	0.190***	0.195***	0.173***	0.059
	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.052)
Constituency involvement (index)		0.024	0.023	-0.062	-0.024
		(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.038)	(0.036)
Control variables: organizational					
Staff (log)	0.059***	0.061***	0.059***	0.093***	0.059**
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Government subsidies (ref.cat=0%)	-	-	-	-	-
- 0.01 – 50%	-0.055*	-0.051*	-0.046	-0.055*	-0.021
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.028)
- 51 -100%	-0.098***	-0.097**	-0.089**	-0.076**	-0.038
	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.037)
Membership origin (ref.cat=national)	-	-	-	-	-
- Flemish membership	0.015	0.021	0.019	-0.004	-0.014
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.027)
- Walloon/Francophone membership	0.030	0.029	0.033	0.040	0.017
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.039)
Group position (ref.cat= change status quo)	-0.024	-0.024	-0.027	-0.036*	-0.050***
- Supports status quo	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Issue context					
Media salience (log)			0.065	0.052	-0.113**
			(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.056)

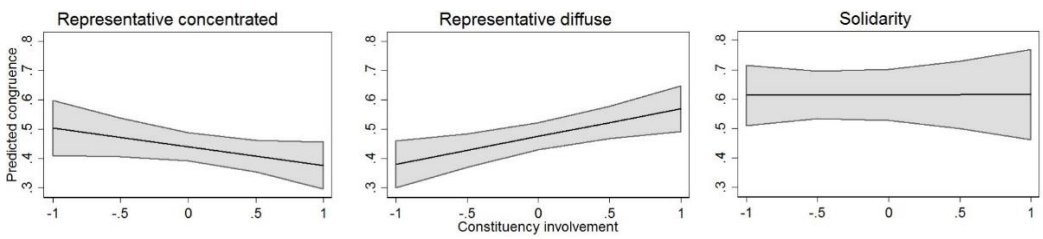
Control variables: issue context					
Political level of competence (ref.cat=Nat.)	-	-	-	-	-
- Flemish issue	-0.006	-0.006	0.023	0.020	0.019
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.054)
- Walloon/Francophone issue	0.016	0.022	0.056	0.056	0.053
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.058)
Months from public opinion measurement	0.019	0.018	0.018	0.018	0.017
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Interactions					
Group type x Constituency involvement				-	-
- Representative diffuse x involvement				0.158***	0.080*
				(0.050)	(0.049)
- Diffuse solidarity x involvement				0.062	0.029
				(0.063)	(0.060)
Group type x Media salience					-
- Diffuse representative x salience					0.289***
					(0.048)
- Diffuse solidarity x salience					0.113
					(0.090)
Constant					
Fixed effects intercept	0.455***	0.449***	0.422***	0.449***	0.534***
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.042)
Random effects intercept	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Number of media claims	314	314	314	314	314
Number of issues	58	58	58	58	58
Model fit statistics					
Log Likelihood	78.220	75.895	74.697	75.607	89.498
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-128.441	-121.791	-117.394	-115.215	-138.995
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-75.949	-65.550	-57.404	-47.726	-64.008

*Note: Coefficients are presented with standard errors in parentheses and significance level indicated by *p≤0.1; **p≤0.05; ***p≤0.001*

Table 1 presents our regression analyses. In Model 1, we test for group type, taking representative concentrated organizations as the reference category. Compared to representative concentrated organizations, diffuse representative organizations and solidarity organizations are more likely to be congruent with the positions held by larger shares of the public. The control for staff has a positive effect—the more employees organizations have, the more congruent they become with public opinion. Regarding government funding, we found that interest groups relying on subsidies are less likely to have a congruent position with larger shares of the public. Finally, it does not matter if issues address national, Flemish or Walloon/Francophone policies. We also observe no significant difference between interest groups supporting or opposing the status quo. In Model 2, we include our measure of constituency involvement and find no significant direct effect on congruence. In Model 3, we add our measure of media salience which does not have a direct effect on the congruence of interest groups.

In Model 4, we include the interaction terms for group type and constituency involvement to assess Hypothesis 1. Figure 2 displays the predicted probabilities for congruence moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean for the intensity of constituency involvement. The average marginal effects are presented in the Appendix.

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of congruence for different levels of constituency involvement by group type with 95% CIs



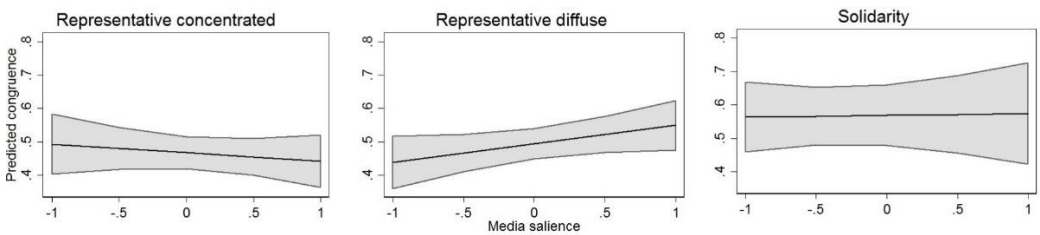
In line with expectations, representative diffuse interests are more congruent, the more they involve their constituents, while we observe the opposite effect for representative concentrated groups. For example, Figure 2 shows that the predicted congruence for representative diffuse organizations is, on average, 20% higher than representative

concentrated organizations when both intensely involve their constituencies. In contrast, when involving their constituents to a limited extent, representative concentrated groups are significantly more congruent (50%) than representative diffuse groups (38%). Representative concentrated organizations see their congruence with the general public diminished when they more closely engage their constituents. This suggests that these groups' constituencies are more prone to disagree with the public majority position on an issue. We observe no significant effect of constituency involvement for solidarity organizations. Regardless of the degree of constituency involvement, their congruence with public opinion is consistently higher (61%) compared to the other two group types. This confirms our first hypothesis, i.e. constituency involvement impedes congruence with the positions held by the broader public for representative concentrated organizations and it does not constrain congruence between solidarity organizations and the broader public. When representative diffuse organizations more closely involve their constituents, they see their congruence with public opinion improved. Arguably, because these organizations are able to learn about the societal grievances from broad societal segments through close interactions with their constituencies. This is exemplified by organizations including polling results from their members in their media claims. For instance, Touring—a Belgian automobile drivers association—opposed the introduction of driver's licenses with penalty points and justified its position by relying on an internal opinion poll indicating that most of their members opposed the policy measure. If the federation of driving schools would communicate such a poll, it would be less representative of the general public as their members constitute a narrow set of corporate interests. Overall, the findings from our regression analyses hold when using alternative measurements for the dependent and key independent variables (see Table A3 and A.4 in Appendix).

Model 5 also includes the interaction terms between group type and media salience, for which the predicted probabilities are presented in Figure 3. We find that when representative diffuse organizations experience higher levels of media salience, they are more congruent with larger shares of the public. For example, on policy issues that receive little media attention, the predicted congruence for representative diffuse

organizations is on average 25%, while congruence jumps to 60% when issues are discussed in a high number of articles. This is in line with hypothesis 2b, media salience positively affects congruence for representative diffuse organizations. These organizations have broader societal support bases and therefore seem to have more freedom in anticipating and incorporating public opinion in their policy objectives when issues grow salient. The results indicate that these groups might especially prioritize highly salient issues for which their preferences align with public opinion (Kollman 1998).

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of congruence for different levels of media salience by group type with 95% CIs



In addition and as anticipated (H2a), media salience has a negative effect on representative concentrated organizations. The predicted congruence for these organizations moves from 62% at one standard deviation below the mean of salience to 40% of congruence at one standard deviation above the mean of salience. Concentrated interest organizations, having a more narrow and well-circumscribed membership base, seem to experience less discretion in rationally anticipating and accommodating public opinion into their policy objectives. Salience makes the costs and benefits of particular policy outcomes exceedingly visible to the members. Our results suggest that under these circumstances concentrated organizations side with their members to the detriment of being congruent with public opinion. This is, for example, clearly the case when looking at the Federation of Belgian Enterprises that is almost exclusively active on highly salient issues (n=14/15 issues) and on half of these salient issues the organization defends an 'unpopular' position (n=8/14 issues).

Finally, contrary to expectations (H2c), we find no mediating effect of issue salience for solidarity organizations. When examining our descriptive results, we can identify two possible reasons for this non-finding. First, it appears that solidarity groups especially prioritize issues for which their positions correspond with prevailing public opinion, irrespective of the levels of salience policy issues attract (Kollman 1998). For example, solidarity groups defending popular positions on highly salient issues such as *'All nuclear weapons should be removed from the Belgian territory'* can benefit from this public visibility to put pressure on policymakers (n=11/28 organizations). Conversely, solidarity groups defending popular positions on issues of low salience such as *'The rules for the export of weapons and military components must become stricter'* might perceive their congruence with public opinion as an opportunity to seek media attention and stimulate public debate (n=9/28 organizations). Second, in the rare occasion that solidarity organizations advocate for 'unpopular' causes such as issues affecting minority interests, they do so irrespective of the levels of salience policy issues attract. For instance, contrary to popular opinion and regardless of the relatively higher levels of salience, most solidarity groups in Belgium believed that '*Municipal administrative sanctions'* had to be abolished.

A note of caution is appropriate with respect to potential endogeneity problems. Media salience may be endogenous to interest mobilization by particular group types and congruence. Namely, different types of interest groups can *increase* (or decrease) the salience of policy dossiers, rather than only react to it, when holding congruent positions with public opinion. Applied to our results, this means that representative diffuse groups are particularly successful in increasing the salience of policy issues when they enjoy broad public support. The observational nature of our data implies that this alternative causal relationship cannot be entirely ruled out. However, previous studies demonstrated that the outside lobbying efforts of a single interest group do not significantly affect the salience of policy issues (Klüver et al. 2015; Tresch & Fischer 2015). Moreover, media attention is determined by multiple factors beyond the control of interest groups, including political parties, real-world events, journalists and editorial lines. Hence, the interaction effects are unlikely to be caused by reversed causation.

Nonetheless, future research adopting longitudinal research designs is warranted to further substantiate the causal relationship of the presented results and rule out concerns of endogeneity.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explain the congruence between interest groups and public opinion on specific policy issues in Belgium. Not only the type of the represented constituency, but also the extent to which constituents are involved in advocacy activities and issue salience affect congruence. We introduced two pathways to congruence for interest groups by borrowing insights from party politics literature. As such, our study answers recent calls for further cross-fertilization between interest group and party politics literatures (Allern & Bale 2012; Fraussen & Halpin 2018). On the one hand, interest groups may see their congruence with the public affected by the extent to which their members and supporters are involved in endorsing advocacy activities and holding the organizational leadership accountable (electoral turnover). Since the objectives of organizations their constituencies and the general public can and do at times diverge, interest organizations can find themselves forced to strike a balance between closely engaging their members and supporters and aligning their policy objectives with public opinion. On the other hand, groups may anticipate and incorporate public opinion in their advocacy objectives by observing direct signals from the public, if these become apparent (rational anticipation). In short, the outcome of this balancing act between constituency involvement and congruence varies according to the type of constituents represented and the salience of policy issues.

The findings demonstrated that interest groups with formal membership bases are less congruent with the general public compared to groups with more informal supporter bases. Namely, concentrated interests that represent well-circumscribed business interests experience significantly lower levels of public support. Organizations that lack a formal membership base and represent certain diffuse interests related to norms and values in society, or disenfranchised constituencies enjoy the highest rates of public support. However, these differences between group types are contingent on the

extent to which the organization's constituency is engaged in advocacy activities and the level of salience policy issues attract. In short, organizations that have a diffuse membership base can more easily align their position with public opinion when they involve their constituents and when media salience is high, while the opposite holds for concentrated interests. Hereby, this paper empirically demonstrates the explanatory value of distinguishing between 'representative' and 'solidarity' organizations when analyzing interest groups' practices (Halpin 2006). Although higher levels of congruence for 'solidarity' organizations might be especially due to these groups' issue prioritizations—i.e. selecting issues for which their pre-existing preferences already align with prevailing public opinion when mobilizing (Kollman 1998)—the involvement of constituents is a determining factor for 'representative' organizations to be congruent with prevailing public opinion.

Our findings unveil an important tension in interest representation and highlight the dual, sometimes conflicting function of interest groups in connecting the general public and policymakers (Albareda 2018; Halpin et al. 2018; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007; Lowery 2007). The results indicate that we should not overestimate the transmission belt function of interest groups in the sense that they are always processing and articulating their constituents' preferences in a bottom-up and pro-active fashion. Some organizations are characterized by high levels of public support simply because they are formally detached from their membership and/or engage less with their constituency when determining their policy positions. Public support then results from a strategic decision rather than a form of aggregation and transmission of constituency preferences. At the same time, we should not overestimate the constraining effects of constituency involvement on congruence. Although concentrated interest organizations with closely engaged members, are less congruent with public opinion, these groups still have, on average, substantial levels of congruence with the public (see also Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). Moreover, constituency involvement has a positive effect on congruence for representative diffuse groups. These findings therefore highlight the contingent effects of constituency involvement on congruence. Depending on their

membership base—concentrated or diffuse—'representative' organizations see their congruence with the public decrease or increase.

Future studies could further disentangle this tension in interest representation by considering the preferences of specific socio-economic strata of public opinion and by integrating additional indicators of constituency support and involvement (e.g., by surveying actual constituencies). At present, we cannot generalize our findings beyond the Belgian case and the media arena, even though our theory is not country- or arena-specific. Comparative research could further clarify the external validity of our findings by exploring relevant inter-polity variation and testing our arguments in other advocacy arenas. As previously mentioned, we considered Belgium as a representative case for other neo-corporatist systems of interest representation in which a tension is likely to emerge between congruence and constituency involvement due to well-ingrained ties between societal constituencies and interest groups. Consequently, we expect that interest groups in pluralist systems experience less tensions between their constituents' preferences and the preferences of the broader public and are—as a result—more congruent with public opinion (see Rasmussen et al. 2019). In sum, our study shows that public concerns are echoed by interest groups' voices depending on who their constituents are, whether constituents are actively involved and whether issues are debated in the public spotlight.

Article 3. Politicized policy access

The effect of politicization on interest group access to advisory councils

Evelien Willems (2020). Politicized policy access: The effect of politicization on interest group access to advisory councils. *Public Administration*.

Abstract. Current scholarship often concludes that technical expertise is one of the most important commodities for interest groups wishing to gain access to political-administrative venues. Less attention has been given to politicization and the scope of societal support that interest groups bring to bear. Specifically, I hypothesize that the capacity of interest groups to supply broad societal support is decisive for gaining access in highly politicized policy domains. To test this expectation, the paper combines a mapping of interest group membership in 616 Belgian advisory councils with survey data from more than 400 organized interests. The empirical analyses demonstrate that interest groups with broad support are more likely to gain access to advisory councils in highly politicized policy domains, but this effect is negatively moderated when interest groups intensely involve their constituencies in advocacy processes.

Keywords. interest groups, policy access, politicization, resource-exchange theory, advisory councils

Introduction

In 2017-2018, the Walloon government, the executive branch of one of Belgium's subnational entities, decreed that environmental associations would become members of its most important socio-economic advisory council, the Conseil économique et social de Wallonie. Specifically, the government changed the council's composition in response to the ongoing politicization of environmental policy. This is exemplified by the government's Regional Policy Declaration of July 2017 which stated that 'given the evolution of society and the importance of climate issues and sustainable development, social dialogue will be strengthened by […] environmental stakeholders' (Walloon Government 2017). However, labor unions and employer associations contested the proposed change; they alleged that inclusion of environmental associations would threaten a balanced composition, increase the representation of 'narrow sectional interests', and incentivize other interest groups to claim membership of this and other advisory councils (L'Echo 12/07/2018). The example illustrates that the politicization of particular policy domains may profoundly impact the access organized interests enjoy to political-administrative venues.

Access to political-administrative venues such as advisory councils provides interest groups with important opportunities to monitor policy processes and to shape public policies. Drawing on resource-exchange theory, many interest group studies demonstrated that supplying technical expertise and signaling the scope of societal support for particular policies leads to access (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). In this article, I relate interest groups' capacities to provide technical expertise and societal support with the politicization of particular policy domains. Policy domains differ extensively in the levels of politicization they attract, and the three dimensions of politicization—the degree of political contestation, public salience, and interest mobilization—are presumed to affect advocacy strategies and lobbying success (Hutter & Grande 2014; Klüver et al. 2015). However, few empirical studies have examined how politicization affects the access organized interests enjoy to advisory councils because these venues are commonly perceived as technocratic and apolitical (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). A closer look at

politicization may thus render novel insights into interest group access to political-administrative venues across policy domains.

Contemporary research provides indications on how politicization affects access. Scholars, for instance, highlighted the impact of increased citizen group mobilization since the 1970s on the access interest groups enjoy to advisory councils (Binderkrantz & Christiansen 2015; Christiansen et al. 2018). Nevertheless, bureaucratic access is commonly considered as being dominated by business interests, while citizen groups gain more access to the parliamentary arena. These differences across arenas are related to parliamentarians' susceptibility to broad public appeals made by citizen groups, whereas bureaucrats—being more insulated from electoral politics—especially grant access based on the technical expertise (business) groups supply (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Pedersen et al. 2014). Still, these studies often do not take into account variation across policy domains and focus on only one dimension of politicization, namely the extent of interest group mobilization.

Politicization is usually associated with a shift from technocratic and expertise-based policymaking to 'pressure politics' when policymakers are sensitive to electoral and legitimacy concerns (De Bruycker 2016, 2017; De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). Public policies crafted in highly politicized domains are more likely to be the result of public evaluations and to be subject to controversial compromises among politicians as well as between policymakers and affected interest groups (Smith, 2000; Rauh, 2019). Therefore, in politicized domains, policymakers' susceptibility to the scope of societal support signaled by organized interests is expected to increase relative to their demand for technical expertise (for similar views: Albareda & Braun 2019; Beyers & Kerremans 2004; Grömping & Halpin 2019; Rauh 2019).

The article focuses on the Belgian system of interest representation, which presents a representative case for other neo-corporatist systems (e.g., Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Austria). These systems are characterized by extensive systems of advisory councils, and interest group membership of such councils can be used as an indicator of formal access to the policymaking process (Christiansen et al. 2010; van den Berg et al. 2014). Moreover, decision-making in neo-corporatist systems tends to be

consensual in nature—political compromises need to be reached across socio-economic and cultural societal segments (Christiansen et al. 2010; van den Berg et al. 2014). This latter feature exemplifies the relevance of societal support in relation to politicization; when societal support is supplied, policymakers more easily reach cross-cutting political compromises in politicized domains.

The empirical analysis combines a mapping of the members of 616 Belgian advisory councils with survey data from more than 400 organized interests. Although the consultation of interest groups in advisory committees is often considered to be depoliticized in nature (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; van den Berg et al. 2014; Weiler et al. 2019), the results demonstrate that access is determined by the extent to which policy domains are politicized. Organized interests are more likely to gain access in politicized policy domains, but this effect is moderated by the scope of societal support that interest groups are able to signal. While some groups can provide broad societal support because of their encompassing constituency base, others represent concentrated constituencies and/or closely interact with their members and supporters, resulting in the provision of more narrow support. The results point to an important tension for groups between closely engaging with their constituencies and signaling broad societal support. Interest groups that signal a rather narrow scope of support gain less access in highly politicized domains.

Politicization and access

Access to political-administrative venues such as advisory councils is often conceived of as the result of a resource-exchange relationship in which interest groups supply valuable resources such as technical expertise and societal support to policymakers (Binderkrantz et al. 2015, 2017b; Bouwen 2002; Braun 2012; Fraussen et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). These studies linked organizational characteristics to varying resource dependencies; while some interest groups—such as professional associations—possess more technical expertise, others—such as citizen groups—are better able to supply societal support. In this regard, the scope of support signaled by organized interests can be tied to broad societal segments such as consumers and environmentalists

or tied to rather narrow societal segments such as farmers and the financial services industry (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; Flöthe 2019). Notably, the signaled scope of societal support is not restricted to the support of formally affiliated members; additionally, it includes the support for particular public policies by the constituencies affected such as patients or youngsters (Flöthe 2019). Interest groups providing broad societal support signal to policymakers that policies are widely accepted and perceived as legitimate, while a narrow scope of support entails that a specific subset of society is backing the policy. Conversely, technical expertise entails specialized and scientific information as well as the capacity to translate this information into public policy (Beyers & Kerremans 2004). Many scholars concluded that technical expertise and organizational capacities are the most important factors in explaining access to political-administrative venues such as advisory councils, while broad societal support is deemed to be less decisive (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019).

I add to this burgeoning literature that the resource-exchange relationship between interest groups and policymakers is moderated by the politicization of the domain in which advisory councils operate. Policymaking in advisory councils is usually perceived as technocratic because such venues are more insulated from electoral processes (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). Moreover, in neo-corporatist and consociational systems, advisory councils were historically established to depoliticize socio-economic and cultural cleavages (Christiansen et al. 2010; Deschouwer 2012; van den Berg et al. 2014). However, insulation from electoral politics and the historical background of many advisory councils does not imply that policymaking in these venues is devoid of politicization. Interest groups with core positions in advisory councils regularly appear in the news, and the policy recommendations produced in these venues affect policies for which elected politicians can be held accountable (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fobé et al. 2013; Fraussen & Wouters 2015).

Overall, interest group scholars have acknowledged the impact of politicization on interest representation as well as on the susceptibility of policymakers to the scope of

societal support signaled by organized interests (Klüver et al. 2015). Higher levels of politicization entail that policymakers face electoral retributions if they fail to take into account the extent to which policies are supported by broad societal segments (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; De Bruycker 2016). Therefore, in highly politicized domains, policymakers' susceptibility to broad societal support supplied by interest groups will increase relative to their demand for technical expertise. In contrast, in contexts with limited politicization, consulting groups providing credible signals of broad societal support is less relevant because policymakers face less direct electoral retributions. The goal of effective and feasible policies for which narrow support suffices will prevail, leading to expertise-based exchanges between policymakers and interest groups (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; De Bruycker 2016).

Politicization is commonly conceptualized along three dimensions, namely, public salience, interest mobilization, and political contestation (De Bruycker 2017; De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014; Rauh 2019). Each of these factors increases the importance of broad societal support for policymakers and, consequently, affects access. First, public salience is understood as the importance the general public attributes to specific policy domains or issues (Wlezien 2005). Only a few policy domains or issues can be simultaneously salient, and the public thus prioritizes the topics to which it pays attention (Kingdon 1984). For these salient domains, electoral consequences are more apparent; the cost and benefits of policies are more visible to the broader public, crystallizing public opinion and placing pressure on policymakers (De Bruycker 2017; Rauh 2019; Smith 2000). Therefore, neglecting the support or opposition from broad societal segments when granting access will backfire when the public cares deeply about the policy domain.

Second, the degree of interest mobilization pertains to the number of mobilized groups in each domain that are potentially seeking access and challenging the composition of political-administrative venues (Binderkrantz & Christiansen 2015; Kriesi et al. 1995; Weiler et al. 2019). Or as Schattschneider (1960, p.10) put it: 'The controversy has been to a very large degree about who can get into the fight and who is excluded'. Moreover, if many interest groups are active in a policy domain,

policymakers become more sensitive to the scope of societal support signaled by groups. Multiple studies found that the density and diversity of group mobilization varies across domains. While domains such as financial regulation are characterized by a high concentration of a few business interests, other domains such as healthcare demonstrate more diversification of mobilized interests (Berkhout et al. 2017; Coen & Katsaitis 2013). Therefore, if many interests groups are mobilized, the likelihood increases that multiple and contrasting policy demands will be voiced and that conflict expands. Conversely, if only a few groups are mobilized—even those with a large number of members or supporters—the range of policy positions pitched against each other is smaller and conflict is less likely to expand (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). Higher levels of mobilization then also serve as an amplification mechanism of public salience because political debates intensify; and policymakers are pressured to grant access to interest groups signaling broad societal support (Agnone 2007; De Wilde 2011; Kollman 1998; Kriesi et al. 1995).

Third, political contestation is determined by the degree to which political parties' positions diverge on specific policies (De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). 'The most polarizing constellation can be found when two camps advocate completely opposing issue positions with about the same intensity' (Hutter & Grande 2014, p.1004). When policy domains are characterized by conflict or disagreement, policymakers face a greater need to justify and legitimize their policies because citizens pay more attention to the decision-making process and, consequently, form clearer opinions (De Bruycker 2017; Smith 2000; Rauh, 2019). Moreover, in domains marked by politically contested issues, granting access to interest groups supplying broad societal support can strengthen policymakers' policy positions (Fobé et al. 2017). In contrast, in domains attracting little political controversy, broad societal support is less necessary to tip the balance towards specific political compromises, leading to expertise-based exchanges (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; De Bruycker 2016).

All three dimensions are considered to be mutually reinforcing and to affect the value that policymakers attribute to the scope of societal support signaled by interest groups.. Policy domains are considered to be politicized only if they are publicly salient,

many organized interests are mobilized, and political contestation is present (De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). However, domains characterized by political conflict and/or a high number of mobilized interests, but without public resonance, cannot be considered to be strongly politicized (De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014).

Hypotheses: the role of societal support in politicized policy domains

In this section, the relationship between politicization and the scope of support is further disentangled. Although organizational capacities, such as financial and human resources, are important predictors of access, such factors may both facilitate the production of technical expertise and contribute to the ability to supply support (Albareda & Braun 2019; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). Therefore, greater organizational capacities are expected to lead to more access regardless of the (de)politicized nature of policy domains. Rather, the ability to provide broad societal support or more narrow support is expected to be a function of the represented constituency and the intensity with which constituencies are involved in advocacy activities (Albareda & Braun 2019; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Grömping & Halpin 2019).

First, the type of the represented constituency indicates the scope of societal support that interest groups can offer. I distinguish among three types: concentrated, representative diffuse, and solidarity organizations (Halpin 2006). Concentrated interest groups—such as business associations, professional associations, and associations of institutions—typically have a formally affiliated and well-circumscribed membership (Olson 1965; Salisbury 1969). Examples include associations of construction companies, associations of pharmacists, and associations of universities. Due to their formally affiliated and specialist members, concentrated groups are especially able to provide technical and sectorial information pertaining to the (economic) self-interest of their members (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen et al. 2015). Concentrated groups consequently provide policymakers with support narrowly tied to the interests of their membership. Moreover, these groups often do not need to capture the attention of the general public to reach their policy objectives or maintain their membership base (De Bruycker et al. 2018). Hence, they can invest resources in the

production of technical expertise and can prioritize insider strategies (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Dür & Mateo 2013). Concentrated groups therefore thrive on issues of low salience, when conflict is contained and less ideological (Dür & Mateo 2013; Schattschneider 1960; Smith 2000). On such issues, public opinion is less articulated and policymakers face fewer electoral incentives to be responsive to the broader public (Smith 2000). Therefore, in a less politicized context, the demand for technical expertise prevails, improving the odds of access for concentrated groups.

In contrast, diffuse groups are typically more encompassing of broader societal segments compared to the narrowly focused membership of concentrated groups (Salisbury 1969); and have been found to be slightly more congruent with public opinion than concentrated interests (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). Furthermore, these groups often engage in outside lobbying activities aimed at the broader public to achieve their policy objectives and maintain their supportive constituency (Dür & Mateo 2013; Kollman, 1998). A common presumption is that these groups seek to expand the scope of conflict and increase the public salience of issues, and thus may contribute to politicization (Dür & Mateo 2013; Kollman 1998; Schattschneider 1960). Diffuse groups thrive in a politicized context in which policymakers are susceptible to political pressure. Granting access to diffuse groups then constitutes a way for policymakers to institutionalize broadly endorsed societal grievances into policymaking processes (Bouwen 2002; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Fraussen et al. 2015; Kriesi et al. 1995).

Building on Halpin (2006), an additional distinction among diffuse groups is made between representative organizations and solidarity groups. Representative diffuse groups typically have an encompassing and formally affiliated membership base consisting of (associations of) individual citizens; these groups then advocate for their members' self-interests (Halpin 2006). Examples include labor unions, cause groups such as parents' associations advocating for traffic safety, and identity groups such as youth associations. These organizations are labelled as 'representative' because of their formal membership structures, allowing the leadership to gain insights into the grievances of broader societal segments (Halpin 2006; Halpin et al. 2018). Representative diffuse organizations therefore have the capacity to credibly signal

societal support for policy decisions tied to the interests of broader constituencies, which is expected to result in higher levels of access in politicized domains.

Solidarity groups, in contrast, have an encompassing but rather loose informal supporter base of citizens acting as financial contributors or sponsors. These organizations typically advocate for public causes or disenfranchised constituencies (Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Examples include anti-poverty associations, animal rights groups, and development NGOs. Solidarity groups are thus characterized by policy objectives that do not necessarily overlap with the self-interest of their supporters (Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Many solidarity groups therefore lack formal membership structures and their constituents usually do not occupy decision-making or financial veto player roles within the organisation. This absence of a strong and direct link between the supported constituencies and the group's activities makes them less able to credibly signal broad support for proposed policies (Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). In highly politicized domains, solidarity groups are therefore expected to enjoy less access compared to representative diffuse groups. The expectations are summarized in Hypothesis 1: *The more a policy domain is politicized, the higher the likelihood that representative diffuse groups gain access compared to concentrated groups, while solidarity groups are expected to have the lowest levels of access.*

Second, constituency involvement allows organized interests to produce credible signals of societal support (Albareda & Braun 2019; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Grömping & Halpin 2019). Constituency involvement is related to the substantive representation by the organizational leadership acting on behalf of their constituency after being endorsed via internal consultation procedures and being held accountable by those constituents (Halpin 2006; Johansson & Lee 2014). Interest groups that intensely involve their constituencies can ensure policymakers that they rely on internal alignment and consensus. This could strengthen the credibility of claims made by organized interests; these groups provide support for policy decisions based on their constituents' interests (Albareda & Braun 2019; Grömping & Halpin 2019). At the same time, constituency involvement signals a group's ability to control and mediate the

opinions of the members and supporters (Öberg et al. 2011). This feedback loop can become especially important when policy decisions are controversial, and when the costs and benefits of policies are highly visible for members and supporters. For instance, labor unions that negotiated a deal with the government are expected to appease their members (Öberg et al. 2011). Granting access to interest groups with engaged constituencies therefore allows policymakers to institutionalize narrow as well as broader societal support into the policymaking process. Recent research confirmed that interest groups with more engaged members and supporters gain higher levels of access to political-administrative venues (Albareda & Braun 2019; Grömping & Halpin 2019).

Nevertheless, constituency involvement does not necessarily entail that interest groups offer broad societal support. Those interest groups that operate in highly politicized domains may feel tension between the need to provide broad societal support and the need to engage with their constituencies (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Grömping & Halpin 2019; Halpin et al. 2018). In highly politicized domains, organized interests must demonstrate that their policy views are widely accepted by broad segments of society because policymakers are more sensitive to electoral and legitimacy concerns (De Bruycker 2016, 2017; De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). However, extensive internal consultations could make interest groups less effective in accommodating policymakers' political demands. For example, constituents who agreed on the group's overall policy objectives, may disagree on concrete objectives when issues become politicized (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Halpin et al. 2018). Interest groups are not equally responsive to all constituents' grievances and are likely to focus on issues promoted by members and supporters who are more vocal and demonstrate intense, caring interest (Strolovitch 2006). Politicization might then accentuate differences within (heterogeneous) organizational constituencies. When the costs and benefits of policies become highly visible to the members and supporters due to politicization, the organizational leadership may face more difficulties in reaching internal consensus and accepting political compromises (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Grömping & Halpin 2019; Halpin et al. 2018). Under these circumstances, close engagement with constituents may become a liability for gaining access because it drives the group towards the more

narrowly focused interests of their members and supporters. Taken to the extreme, internal dissent might also prevent the group from seeking to affect public policy altogether (Strolovitch 2006).

Furthermore, internal processes of constituency involvement can be complex and time-consuming (Grömping & Halpin 2019). Constituency involvement can decrease organizational flexibility to select issues or to adopt strategies and positions that enjoy broad societal resonance (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Halpin et al. 2018; Minkoff & Powell 2006). Interest groups do not want to alienate their members and supporters—who are crucial to their survival—and therefore will not take action on policies that are not supported by their constituencies (Strolovitch 2006). Meanwhile, in highly politicized domains, policymakers also rely on many other information sources such as the news media, experts, and organized interests that more flexibly adapt to a politicized environment (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2016). In contrast, in less politicized domains—where narrow societal support is sufficient for effective and feasible policy outcomes—are characterized by expertise-based exchanges between policymakers and interest groups (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; De Bruycker 2016). To summarize, the value attributed by policymakers to the provision of (narrow) societal support through interest groups' constituency involvement is expected to decrease in highly politicized domains, while it increases in less politicized domains. This leads to Hypothesis 2: *The more a policy domain is politicized, the lower the likelihood of access for interest groups with intensely involved constituencies.*

Data and research design

The empirical analysis combines a bottom-up mapping of the Belgian interest group population and a top-down mapping of access to advisory councils (details in the Methodological chapter). First, the bottom-up population mapping of 1,678 Belgian organized interests—mobilized at the (sub)national government level—was performed in 2015 (Beyers et al., 2016). These identified organizations were surveyed in January-May 2016 on their organizational characteristics and their advocacy strategies; the

survey delivered a response rate of 42% (n=727 organizations that responded to >50% of questions).

Second, the top-down assessment of access is based on a mapping in 2016-2017 of interest group membership in 616 Belgian advisory councils. To differentiate interest groups with access from those without access, all 1,678 interest organizations identified through the bottom-up mapping were coded to assess whether they had access to one of 616 advisory councils clustered in 12 possible policy domains. Of the 1,678 organizations in the bottom-up mapping, 608 organizations (36%) were found to enjoy access. As such, the dependent variable distinguishes, per policy domain, groups without access (0) from those with access (1). Thus, the dataset consists of 12 repeated observations per group, meaning that the unit of analysis is a group having (no) access-policy domain dyad. Connecting the groups that responded to the survey with the advisory council data and omitting missing values resulted in 473*12=5,676 dyads.

The first independent variable categorizes interest organizations based on information available on their websites into (1) concentrated organizations, including business associations, professional associations, and associations of institutions and (semi-)public authorities (n=233); (2) representative diffuse organizations, including labor unions, cause groups, and identity groups with formal members (n=148); and (3) solidarity organizations, including cause groups and identity groups without formal members (n=92) (Binderkrantz 2008; Halpin 2006).

Second, to measure constituency involvement, an index based on the following question was created: *'How important are your members for the following activities?'* These activities included (1) 'helping to influence public policy', (2) 'providing ideas about your organization's campaigning strategies', (3) 'identifying problems or providing ideas about your organization's activities', (4) 'providing evidence of support from affected members or concerned citizens', and (5) 'running local groups or branches'. Respondents could indicate the intensity of constituency involvement on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'unimportant' to 'very important'. These responses were summarized to create a scale ranging from 5 to 25 with a mean of 17.92 (α=4.17), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.66 and a polychoric ordinal alpha of 0.71. Conceptually, it is

important that this measurement is independent from the group type variable as some group types—for instance, those with a formal or concentrated membership—might be more likely to involve their members (De Bruycker et al. 2018). Figure A.3 in the Appendix describes the co-variation of constituency involvement with group type.

The three dimensions of politicization were operationalized as follows (De Bruycker 2017; De Wilde 2011; Hutter & Grande 2014). First, public salience is measured by scoring each policy domain according to the number of respondents in the 2014 European Election Survey who indicated a domain as the first or second 'most important problem' facing the domestic government (Schmitt et al. 2015). The 148 topics coded by the survey conductors were matched with the 22 domains included in the interest group survey and the 19 coded policy domains for advisory councils. This recoding process and the merging of small and closely related domains (such as foreign affairs and defense) resulted in a categorization of 12 domains. The measure was logarithmically transformed because of its skewed distribution. In Belgium, the 2014 European Parliament elections coincided with the (sub)national elections, which benefits the validity of the data due the proximity in time of the various data collections.

Second, to determine the degree of interest mobilization per policy domain, each interest group was individually scored, based on survey responses, for its inside and outside advocacy intensity per week in each domain. Subsequently, the overall advocacy intensity each organisation developed per domain was summed across all organizations to create an aggregate measure of interest mobilization per policy domain (Boräng & Naurin 2016).

Third, political contestation was measured based on a set of 110 policy issues included in the 2014 Benchmark Survey for the national voting advice application and for which the political parties indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with the issue statements (Lesschaeve 2017b). The dispersion of party positions was calculated by taking the ratio of the number of parties that agreed over the number of parties that disagreed, so each statement received a score ranging from 0 (unified) to 1 (completely polarized). Subsequently, each statement was attributed to a specific policy domain to calculate the average dispersion of political parties' positions per domain.

Finally, the three measures were combined into one index according to the formula of Hutter and Grande (2014): *politicization=public salience*(interest mobilization+contestation)*. Politicization requires the presence of all three dimensions; while political contestation and interest mobilization are considered to be additive, public salience amplifies the impact of these two components (Agnone 2007; Hutter & Grande 2014). Given the negative but non-significant correlations between the three variables (shown in the Appendix), I opted to use the politicization index and to include each variable—as a robustness check—separately in the models. A control variable measuring the percentage of advisory councils in each domain relative to the total set of councils was also included; the more councils established per domain, the higher the probability that interest groups who seek access will effectively gain access. Table A.4 in the Appendix provides an overview of the variables measuring politicization and details the distribution of councils across domains.

A set of organizational control variables was also included. First, to gauge the propensity to share technical and scientific information—often considered to be an important explanation for access (Beyers & Kerremans 2004; Bouwen 2002)—each organisation indicated how frequently they did so during the past 12 months on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'once a week' (min.=1/never; μ=2.25; α=1.02; max.=5/once a week).

Second, policymakers might be interested in groups knowledgeable about a broad set of policy issues and, consequently, are able to supply advice on complex, overarching issues. Such groups are often more generalist in nature and cover many policy areas (Halpin & Binderkrantz 2011). Alternatively, specialist/niche groups can supply detailed information on specific industries and signal preferences of well-circumscribed societal segments. To differentiate specialists from generalists, the number of domains in which groups are active was measured based on a list containing 22 policy domains for which respondents were invited to tick multiple boxes. This measure was right-skewed and therefore logarithmically transformed (min.=0.69; μ=1.23; α=0.53; max.=2.71).

Additionally, the number of employees affects the capacity to produce technical expertise (e.g., monitoring politics, conducting research) and societal support (e.g., engaging and mobilizing members and supporters) (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). In this regard, the number of full-time employees, which has a right-skewed distribution, was used to create a logarithmically transformed variable (min=0; μ=1.61; α=1.36; max=8.7).

Furthermore, a control for the dependency on government funding was included. Interest representation in Belgium is characterized by generous government funding schemes. Receiving subsidies may signal to policymakers that an interest group is a credible and legitimate interlocutor. Funded organizations are also more inclined to seek access to their beneficiary government (Heylen & Willems 2019). Respondents indicated the percentage of government funding within their 2015 budget, which resulted in a right-skewed distribution. Considering that the survey question was intended as an ordinal measure, a categorical variable was created: no subsidies (n=190), government subsidies contributing 0.01% to 50% of the budget (n=115), and government subsidies contributing 51% to 100% of the budget (n=168).

Finally, the development of a wide range of advocacy inside and outside tactics within advisory councils' policy domains indicates the latent interest of groups to gain access to the policymaking process. *Individual advocacy intensity* was operationalized following Boräng and Naurin (2016) and the full operationalization of this variable can be found in the Appendix. The variance inflation factors (VIF) indicate no multicollinearity problems between advocacy intensity and the number of staff nor with any other variables (mean VIF models=1.66).

Analysis

Advisory councils are widely present at all government levels in Belgium. Framework legislation provides the backbone for the overall design and functioning of the Flemish and Walloon advisory councils; such encompassing legislation is absent at the national level. Changes in the composition of advisory councils (also at the national level) were often subject to extensive political debate and the politicization of particular domains

affecting the composition of councils is a long and incremental process. The design of individual advisory councils—composition, thematic scope, government funding, and support staff—and day-to-day functioning is usually regulated by law/decree (56%) or executive order (39%). Typically, ministers are required to solicit non-binding policy recommendations on initiated legislation from the relevant advisory councils in their domain(s). Furthermore, many advisory councils (e.g., those associated with government agencies) are tasked with providing recommendations for policy implementation. While it is a less frequent occurrence, advisory councils can also initiate policy recommendations of their own accord. Neo-corporatism and Belgium's consociational legacy entail that preference is afforded to interest group representatives—traditionally, prominent business associations and labor unions—over (academic) experts when policymakers decide on the composition of councils (Fraussen et al. 2015; Fobé et al. 2017). However, due to reforms by the Flemish and Walloon governments during the past decade, membership of advisory councils has expanded to include other organized interests besides the traditional government interlocutors (Fobé et al. 2017).

Figure 1. Access of different group types across policy domains by levels of politicization (n=606 organizations with access – absolute count indicated per bar)

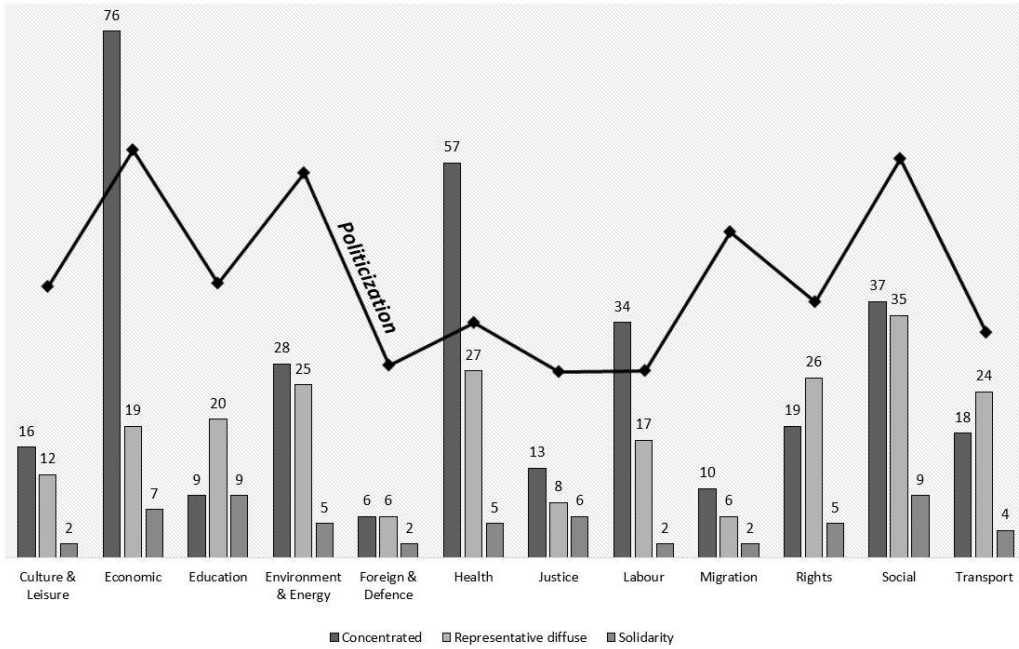


Figure 1 presents a descriptive analysis of the relationship between the number of interest groups with access to advisory councils across policy domains, by levels of politicization. Considerable variation exists in the extent to which different group types gain access across domains. Concentrated interests such as business and professional associations are dominant in economic affairs (of those with access in these domains, 74.5% are concentrated interests), healthcare (64%), and labor market policy (64%). These domains are relatively more politicized and can be characterized as welfare state domains in which the traditional neo-corporatist interlocutors of government—prominent business associations and labor unions—have maintained their core insider positions (Beyers et al. 2014b; Deschouwer 2012).

In the policy domains education, transportation, human/civil rights, representative diffuse groups have more access than concentrated interests—on average, 52% of those with access are representative diffuse groups in these domains. Regarding environmental policy, social affairs, and cultural policy, representative diffuse groups are almost on par with concentrated interests—on average, 42% of those with access in these domains are representative diffuse groups. These domains are also relatively highly politicized. By contrast, in less politicized domains such as justice or foreign affairs, all group types enjoy lower levels of access. Hence, three patterns emerge: (1) highly politicized welfare state domains in which concentrated interests are most prominent, (2) highly politicized domains in which representative diffuse groups are on par with concentrated interests, and (3) domains with limited politicization to which all types of interest groups enjoy low levels of access.

To test the hypotheses, Table 1 presents logistic regression models. The dependent variable captures whether a group gained access to advisory councils nested in 12 domains. To account for this nesting of the data, clustered standard errors were estimated. Numeric variables are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing this by two times the standard deviation; this facilitates the comparison between the various measures of politicization and aids the interpretation of the interaction parameters (Gelman 2008). Moving one unit of analysis corresponds to moving one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.

Table 1. Logistic regression models for access

	Direct effects	Interactions
Independent variables		
Group type (reference=concentrated interests)	-	-
- Representative citizen groups	-0.319	-0.256
	(0.21)	(0.24)
- Solidarity groups	-1.316***	-1.252***
	(0.27)	(0.33)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.347†	0.465**
	(0.21)	(0.15)
Organizational controls		
Intensity of advocacy activities (ref.cat.=no activities)	-	-
- Below median	0.849***	0.836**
	(0.25)	(0.27)
- Above median	1.702***	1.686***
	(0.21)	(0.24)
Propensity to share technical information	0.307***	0.305***
	(0.07)	(0.07)
Generalist vs. Specialist	0.178†	0.179†
	(0.10)	(0.11)
Staff (log)	0.931***	0.942***
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Government funding (ref.cat.=no subsidies)	-	-
- 0.001% to 50% of the budget	0.193	0.193
	(0.18)	(0.18)
- 51%-100% of the budget	-0.004	-0.007
	(0.31)	(0.31)
Politicization		
Politicization (index)	0.636*	1.076**
	(0.26)	(0.33)
Contextual control		
Number of advisory councils	0.822***	0.830***
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Interactions		
Representative citizen groups*Politicization		-0.634
		(0.52)
Solidarity groups*Politicization		-0.590
		(0.54)
Constituency involvement*Politicization		-0.846***
		(0.23)
Constant	-3.927***	-4.000***
	(0.33)	(0.31)
Model fit statistics		
Observations	5676	5676
Log Likelihood	-1460.093	-1447.858
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2942.186	2917.717
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	3015.270	2990.801

*Note: clustered standard errors in parenthesis; † p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

The first model presents the direct effects of group type, constituency involvement, and politicization on access. First, compared to concentrated interests, representative diffuse organizations are as likely to be members of advisory councils, while solidarity groups have a lower likelihood of gaining access. These results are in line with previous research on interest group access which found that organized interests with informal constituencies of supporters enjoy less access compared to groups with formally affiliated members (Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Fraussen et al. 2015; Junk 2019b). Second, the extent to which organizations involve their constituencies has a positive effect on access. This corroborates recent research demonstrating that policymakers value organizations functioning as transmission belts between their constituencies and policymakers (Albareda & Braun 2019; Grömping & Halpin 2019; Junk 2019b). Finally, politicization has a positive effect on the likelihood of gaining access for all group types, which confirms that access of organized interests to advisory councils is not predominantly depoliticized and technocratic in nature.

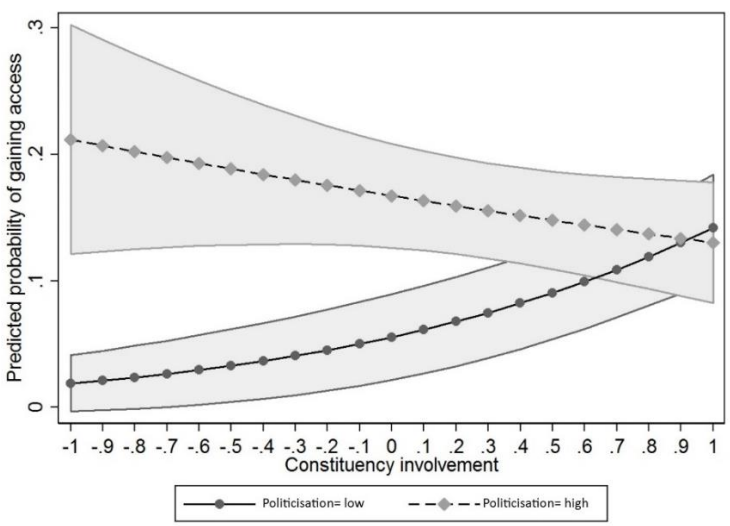
The control variables—in line with existing research—point to the importance of supply-side factors (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Dür & Mateo 2013). The more advocacy activities developed in particular domains, the higher the likelihood that interest groups gain access. The propensity to supply technical information and staff size also positively affect access.

The second model assesses whether representative diffuse groups enjoy more access in highly politicized domains. The interaction term for group type and politicization does not have a significant effect, which comes as no surprise given the descriptive results. To further flesh out this result, models controlling for the moderating effect of 'welfare state domain' on the relationship between group type and politicization are presented in the Appendix. In line with Hypothesis 1, these models demonstrate that the politicization of policy domains affects which particular group types gain access across different domains. More precisely, policymakers are more susceptible to broad societal support supplied by interest groups in politicized domains. The caveat is that this holds only for less traditional domains such as the environment, human/civil rights, and cultural affairs. In these, generally highly politicized domains, diffuse representative

groups are as likely to gain access as concentrated groups are. In traditional welfare state domains, the neo-corporatist interlocutors of government—prominent business associations and labor unions—maintain their core insider positions (see also Fraussen et al. 2015). Nevertheless, politicization, for instance due to interest mobilization, also positively affects the access diffuse representative groups enjoy in welfare state domains (see Figure A.7 in the Appendix). One example is the composition of a new Flemish consultation body in healthcare, established in 2015. Although the traditional labor unions and healthcare providers gained access, much emphasis was placed on the inclusion of patient groups and associations of elderly. While healthcare is somewhat less publicly salient, especially the ongoing and strong mobilization by these diffuse representative groups ultimately resulted in their formal membership of the council (De Tijd 07/04/2015).

The second model confirms Hypothesis 2, which reasons that the more politicized a domain, the lower the likelihood of interest groups intensely involving their constituencies to gain access. This is further illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the predicted probabilities for the interaction term between constituency involvement and politicization (Figure A.6 in the Appendix presents the marginal effects).

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of gaining access for different values of constituency involvement by levels of politicization (with 95% CIs)



For highly politicized domains (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean), moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean for constituency involvement corresponds with an 8% decrease in the likelihood of gaining access. Conversely, when a domain features limited politicization (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean), moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean for constituency involvement corresponds with a 12.3% increase in the likelihood of gaining access.

These findings confirm that as the level of politicization of the advisory councils' policy domains increases, interest group access decreases, conditional on the level of constituency involvement. Groups with closely engaged members and supporters are more narrowly focused on their constituencies' interests. High levels of politicization accentuate the costs and benefits of particular policies to the members and supporters, thereby making organized interests more likely to experience internal disagreement and encounter difficulty in overcoming veto points within the organisation (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Grömping & Halpin 2019). The results suggest that politicization may amplify the 'inefficiency costs' of constituency involvement (Grömping & Halpin 2019). These findings are robust to controlling for the effect of constituency involvement and public salience, interest mobilization, and political contestation as separate interaction terms in the analyses (presented in the Appendix), thereby demonstrating the mutually reinforcing impact of the three dimensions of politicization.

Conclusion

This article aimed to explain how politicization affects interest groups' access to advisory councils. Although scholars often conclude that supplying technical expertise is one of the most important factors in gaining access to political-administrative venues (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Bouwen 2002; Fraussen & Beyers 2015; Weiler et al. 2019), this study demonstrates that the scope of societal support that interest groups are able to supply moderates the likelihood of access, depending on the level of politicization. The empirical analyses—based on a mapping of access to 616 advisory councils, combined

with survey data from more than 400 organized interests—illustrate that in politicized policy domains, (1) diffuse groups are often on par with concentrated groups in gaining access and (2) interest groups with closely engaged constituencies gain less access.

First, in politicized domains, all group types demonstrate a higher likelihood of gaining access. Still, the Belgian advisory council system is characterized by distinct constellations of organized interests in each domain. Representative diffuse groups that are able to send credible signals of broad societal support—because they represent wide societal segments such as consumers or workers (see also Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019)—gain ample access to politicized policy domains such as environmental and cultural policy. In welfare state domains, the neo-corporatist interlocutors of government maintained their core insider positions, despite, or maybe thanks to, high levels of politicization. These findings demonstrate that, next to providing technical expertise, the ability to signal broad societal support by having an encompassing constituency is a valuable commodity for organized interests to gain access in politicized domains—which entails some important implications for public policymaking. When only one particular set of interest groups is relied on for information, these groups are more likely to shape public policy (Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Yackee & Yackee 2006). However, politicization proves to be an important driver in diversifying the overall composition of advisory councils, resulting in the inclusion of groups other than the traditional neo-corporatist interlocutors. In 'newer' and politicized domains, policymakers are more likely to be confronted with multiple perspectives and thus less likely to be persuaded by one-sided information. Furthermore, if broad consensus is reached across a diverse set of groups, or these groups can politicize specific issues when drafting policy recommendations, a stronger message is sent to policymakers to shape legislation in a particular direction (Fobé et al. 2017; Yackee 2005). In this regard, future studies might adopt a longitudinal design to analyze whether changes in politicization precede changes in the composition of advisory councils and how such changes affect public policy.

Second, the results highlight an important tension for the functioning of interest groups as intermediaries between society and policymakers (De Bruycker et al. 2018; Halpin 2006; Jordan & Maloney 1997, 2007). Constituency involvement reaps results,

especially in policy domains with limited politicization, but it constrains the access of interest groups to more politicized domains as intensely engaged members and supporters might inhibit groups from signaling broader societal support. While Grömping and Halpin (2019) demonstrated that constituency involvement accrues to a 'beneficial inefficiency' for organized interests to gain access, this study highlights some restrictive scope conditions of constituency involvement. Close engagement with members and supporters might correspond with more narrow societal support, which suppresses the inclination of policymakers to supply access in politicized domains. In such domains, policymakers need widespread support to adopt policies, and broad and encompassing societal support is a valuable commodity. Qualitative case-study research could further disentangle the tension between constituency involvement and signaling broad societal support by analyzing additional indicators of constituency support and involvement (e.g., surveying group constituencies). Moreover, future research might explore more closely whether policymakers grant access on the basis of the scope of societal support signaled by organized interests and/or how politicization affects how policymakers select interlocutors.

Interest groups' inclusion in advisory councils is often prompted by their functioning as intermediaries between government and society (Fobé et al. 2017). Therefore, when close constituency engagement results in less access in highly politicized domains, public policies might become less grounded in the support of possibly key but narrow affected constituencies (e.g., regulated industry). Moreover, although politicization positively affects the diversification of advisory councils, too much politicization might lead to a deadlock in concertation. For example, in Belgium, deadlock often ensues on socio-economic councils because of the exceedingly visible costs for affected constituencies when highly politicized issues such as social policy retrenchment are at stake (Van Gyes et al. 2017). Interest groups' constituencies then constrain their leadership to such an extent that advisory councils fail to produce policy recommendations. Follow-up research could further clarify how groups' constituencies constrain or facilitate the deliberation within councils, and how this affects policy

recommendations and outcomes (see for instance Arras & Braun 2018; Beyers & Arras 2019; Yackee & Yackee 2006; Yackee 2005).

At present, findings cannot be easily generalized beyond the Belgian system of interest representation, although the tested hypotheses were not country- nor arena-specific. As previously mentioned, Belgium can be considered as a representative case for other neo-corporatist systems of interest representation with deeply ingrained ties between societal constituencies and interest groups, such as the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Austria. Comparative research could further clarify the external validity of the results by exploring relevant inter-polity variation (e.g., between the Belgian government levels and between various countries) and testing the hypotheses for other political arenas such as the parliament. Recent research on consultations in national and European parliamentary committees, for example, focused on variation in access due to institutional set-up and procedural constraints (Coen & Katsaitis 2019; Pedersen et al. 2015). However, it can be expected that the varying politicization of policy domains will have an even stronger impact on access in the parliamentary arena due to the greater prominence of electoral sensitivities. To summarize, this study reveals that rather than being technocratic and apolitical in nature, interest group access to political-administrative venues can be a distinctly politicized endeavor.

Article 4. No escape from the media gates?

How public support and issue salience shape interest groups' prominence in the news

Evelien Willems (2020). Working paper.

Abstract. Media prominence can be crucial for interest groups that wish to exert influence on public policies and to maintain ties with members and supporters. Previous studies stressed organizational characteristics such as resources to explain the overall propensity of interest groups to appear in the news. This paper adopts an issue-specific approach and proposes that the degree of public support interest groups enjoy for their policy positions affects their media prominence, contingent upon issue salience. I test these expectations through a news content-analysis of 199 positions expressed by 68 Belgian interest groups on 56 policy issues for which public opinion data were available. The findings indicate that interest groups in the news often enjoy considerable levels of public support. However, on highly salient issues, a small subset of interest groups defending more unpopular positions also features highly prominent in the news. While appearing highly prominent in the news when facing public opposition does not help groups to exert pressure on policymakers, the viewpoints expressed by these groups serve to secure ties with members and supporters. This result qualifies the classic presumption that interest groups confronted with public opposition invariably try to escape the public spotlight.

Keywords. Interest groups, media prominence, public support, issue salience, newspaper coverage

Introduction

Media prominence can be of strategic importance to interest groups. The more prominent in the news, the more interest groups can connect their policy positions to a wider audience and exert pressure on policymakers. Moreover, through media prominence, interest groups can visibly demonstrate to their constituencies that the group was actively engaged (Andrews & Caren 2010; De Bruycker 2017, 2019; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Kollman 1998; Thrall 2006). Many interest groups thus frequently adopt media-oriented advocacy strategies such as issuing press releases, organizing press conferences, staging protests or contacting journalists (Binderkrantz 2005; Dür & Mateo 2013; Kollman 1998). However, a consistent finding in interest group research is that only a few groups enjoy high levels of media prominence, while most interest groups never or only occasionally feature in the news (Binderkrantz 2012; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a; Thrall 2006).

To explain varying levels of media prominence, previous studies mainly focused on organizational characteristics and demonstrated that news coverage is skewed towards well-endowed groups, business associations and political insiders (Andrews & Caren 2010; Binderkrantz 2012; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a; Danielian & Page 1994; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Thrall 2006; Tresch & Fischer 2015). These studies all concur that organizational features such as resources, group type, and 'insider status' increase media prominence because such features signal newsworthiness and correspond with a greater capacity to pursue news coverage. Notwithstanding these important insights about which interest groups pass the media gates on an aggregate level, scholars devoted less attention to issue-specific media prominence and the concrete positions groups defend. Though, as argued by De Bruycker & Beyers (2015), 'the focus on diversity in group type could be somewhat misleading as groups of the same type do not necessarily adopt similar policy positions'. Indeed, it is not only about *who* gains media prominence, but also about *how prominence varies* among those interest groups deemed as newsworthy and *what viewpoints* are expressed on issues in the news. Ultimately, it is not interest groups' ability to speak in the news, but groups' issue-specific viewpoints and the extent to which these resonate among a wider audience and politicians that are

key in shaping public debate and triggering legislative action (De Bruycker 2017, 2019; Rafail et al. 2019; Vliegenthart et al. 2016). Therefore, this paper, argues that next to examining organizational characteristics, it is crucial to analyze which specific group positions culminate in high media prominence and which positions gain low degrees of prominence.

To generate expectations on how interest groups' issue-specific media prominence differs, I draw on push-pull dynamics characterizing the relationship between interest groups and journalists (Binderkrantz et al. 2017a). Specifically, the degree of public support interest groups enjoy for their policy positions is expected to affect their media prominence (i.e. push), but prominence is also contingent upon issue salience and journalists who select relevant groups (i.e. pull). Although many aspects of an interest group's position might be studied (e.g., defending or challenging the status quo), a focus on public support is warranted given that the news media constitute a prime arena in which interest groups can connect their political demands to the broader public's preferences, thereby amplifying public opinion (Agnone 2007; De Bruycker 2017, 2019; Dür & Mateo 2014). When signaling broad public support in a highly visible manner, interest groups appeal to the electoral sensitivities many policymakers face and incentivize policymakers to respond to the group's demands (De Bruycker 2017, 2019; Kollman 1998; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Hence, gaining media prominence when enjoying broad public support might be a solid route to lobbying success, whereas interest groups lacking public support may be perceived as unconstructive actors by policymakers when pursuing unpopular stances in public debates and are expected to avoid the public spotlight (Culpepper 2011; Dür & Mateo 2014; Rasmussen et al. 2018a).

However, media prominence is not only a matter of a group's propensity to seek news coverage but heavily guided by the media's own logic. Next to a preference for political insiders as sources, journalists rely on news values such as negativity and conflict; and adhere to routines and professional norms such as offering a balance of opinions when opening the media gates (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O'neill 2001; Hopmann et al. 2012; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). As such, I argue that journalistic selection mechanisms can also result in a high degree of prominence for groups

prompted to circumvent public opinion to realize their policy objectives. While high levels of issue salience might deter lobbying by groups defending unpopular positions, high salience also entails that policy debates shift, conflict is more likely to expand and consequently interest groups confronted with public opposition might get pulled into the news to counteract their political adversaries and to appease their members and supporters (De Bruycker 2019; Schattschneider 1960; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). Under these circumstances, media prominence does not aid groups in putting pressure on policymakers, but helps them to secure ties with their organizational constituencies (Hanegraaff et al. 2016). Especially on highly salient issues, organized interests, even when defending a position running counter to prevailing public opinion, cannot avoid demonstrating their active engagement in the public debate to their members and supporters.

This study aims to provide further insight in the interplay between interest groups' incentives to strive for high levels of media prominence when enjoying broad public support (i.e. push) and the journalistic selection mechanisms (i.e. pull) affecting which viewpoints gain high degrees of prominence in the news. The empirical analysis relies on a news content analysis of 199 positions expressed by 68 Belgian interest groups on 56 issues situated across a wide range of policy domains and for which public opinion data were available. These data are combined with a representative survey of Belgian interest groups (Beyers et al. 2020). The results indicate that while enjoying broad public support can push interest groups to pursue extensive news coverage, high levels of issue salience pull organized interests into the news despite defending a more unpopular position. This finding runs counter to the classic presumption that interest groups faced with public opposition predominantly rely on inside lobbying and eschew extensive news coverage (Culpepper 2011; Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014; Kollman 1998; Schattschneider 1960). The news media constitute less of an arena in which the propagators of public opinion prevail and the lobbying efforts of interest groups defending unpopular positions are not necessarily restricted to more covert advocacy arenas. The results further illustrate that, especially on highly salient issues, a groups'

status as a political insider, 'counteractive lobbying' and/or having members and supporters who intensely care about the issue, result in high media prominence.

Interest groups' news media prominence: an uneven playing field

News coverage is scarce and interest groups compete among each other and with politicians to gain media prominence; resulting in only a few groups that feature prominently in the news (Andrews & Caren 2010; Binderkrantz 2012; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a; Thrall 2006; Tresch & Fischer 2015; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). Most studies conceptualize and measure news coverage simply by assessing whether the interest group appeared in the news across a multitude of policy issues (e.g., Binderkrantz et al. 2017a). Though, a focus on *issue-specific prominence* in the news—how visibly a group appears in the news on concrete issues—is warranted given that the specific voices and viewpoints expressed in the news can shape public debates and spark legislative action (Vliegenthart et al. 2016). The more prominent interest groups are in the news, the more opportunities they have to address their preferred issue and to explain their position to a wider audience and their own constituencies, and the more they can pressurize policymakers (Andrews & Caren 2010; Koopmans 2004; Tresch 2009). As such, media prominence is conceptualized as the number of times interest groups appear in the news on the same policy issue. Thus, I specifically analyze how groups deemed as newsworthy, vary in the degree of prominence they gain.

Media prominence is often conceived of as the result of interest groups seeking news coverage (i.e. push) and journalists acting as gatekeepers who select information they deem as newsworthy (i.e. pull) (Binderkrantz et al. 2017b; Koopmans 2004; Shoemaker et al. 2009). Moreover, while push-pull dynamics can simultaneously work to benefit interest groups, groups face an uphill battle to gain media prominence because the relationship between organized interests and journalists is characterized by asymmetrical dependency (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993); interest groups need news coverage to a far greater extent than journalists need input from interest groups. Hence, while interest groups may strategically seek extensive news coverage, they often struggle to gain such news coverage and strongly depend on journalistic selection mechanisms.

On the one hand, interest groups try to increase their media prominence by using media-oriented advocacy strategies such as organizing press conferences, issuing press releases, staging protest activities and contacting journalists (Binderkrantz 2005; Dür & Mateo 2013). By developing media strategies, interest groups aim to provide journalists with relevant input ('information subsidies') that matches news routines and which appeals to news values such as unexpectedness or negativity; groups adapt to the media logic to maximize their chances to feature highly prominent in the news (Kollman 1998; Tresch & Fischer 2015; Thrall 2006).

On the other hand, whether interest groups gain high degrees of media prominence ultimately depends on journalists deciding which groups are deemed newsworthy (Binderkrantz et al. 2017b; Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993; Koopmans 2004). Journalists rely on news values such as 'elite status', negativity or conflict and adhere to routines and professional norms such as ensuring impartiality by balancing their coverage of political opinions (Andrews & Caren 2010; Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O'neill 2001; Helfer & Aelst 2016; Hopmann et al. 2012). Hence, interest groups that pursue viewpoints and/or act in ways that resonate well with established news values and routines will gain more media prominence. Though, journalistic news values and routines may also result in undesired news coverage, for example when groups attract negative coverage—e.g., lobbying scandals—or when news reports focus on advocacy tactics instead of on substantive claims—e.g., event-oriented reporting of protest (Danielian & Page 1994; Wouters 2015). Moreover, the news media are characterized by an 'issue-attention cycle'—denoting that some issues receive more news coverage than others (Djerf-Pierre 2012; Downs 1972; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). While some groups advocate on issues that attract much news coverage, for instance socio-economic issues, and are therefore more likely to gain media prominence, other groups advocate on issues not or hardly picked up by journalists, for instance migration issues, and hence are less likely to gain news coverage (Beckers & Van Aelst 2019a).

Although some research portrays news coverage as a 'weapon of the weak' mainly used by social movements and citizen groups (Dür & Mateo 2013; Kriesi et al. 2007), many studies confirm that news coverage is skewed towards organizations well-

endowed with human and financial resources, business associations and insiders to the political system—those with the capacity to develop extensive media strategies and those having an 'elite status' (Andrews & Caren 2010; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Danielian & Page 1994; Grömping 2019; Thrall 2006). However, previous work only limitedly theorized upon the drivers of interest groups' *issue-specific* media prominence nor did scholars delve deep into how interest groups' positions explain media prominence. Most studies focused on aggregate patterns of interest groups in the news, which inhibits an analysis of the *selectivity* with which interest groups seek to increase their media prominence and obfuscates how issue-specific features and concrete policy positions affect journalistic selection mechanisms.

Research has demonstrated that policy positions and the issue context affect interest groups' choice of advocacy strategies, making some groups more inclined to use media strategies, whereas others prefer insider strategies (Binderkrantz 2005; Dür & Mateo 2013). For instance, organized interests challenging the status quo can benefit from bolstering their media prominence because public awareness increases and conflict expands, while those supporting the status quo avoid the public spotlight (Baumgartner et al. 2009a; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Dür & Mateo 2014). Moreover, many news values pertain to the positions championed by political actors. For instance, conflict and negativity are often identified as important news values making that those who voice criticism or negatively sketch policy outcomes gain higher degrees of prominence (Andrews & Caren 2010; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Helfer & Van Aelst 2016).

I contribute to this burgeoning literature that the *degree of public support* interest groups enjoy, and the *level of salience issues* attract in the news are key factors explaining interest groups' media prominence. As argued by Kollman (1998: pp. 78-100, p. 156), the use of media strategies [and hence their degree of media prominence] depends on what proportion of the public supports a specific policy (degree of popularity) and how important a policy issue is in the news and for the general public (degree of salience).

Hypotheses: public support and issue salience as drivers of media prominence

Juxtaposing interest groups' own propensity to boost their media prominence depending on their degree of public support *and* the impact of journalistic selection mechanisms—the 'media logic'—can shed further light on the drivers of issue-specific prominence in the news. While enjoying broad public support might push interest groups to pursue extensive news coverage, high levels of issue salience are expected to pull organized interests into the news despite defending a more unpopular position.

First, the proportion of the public supporting or opposing specific policy positions may affect interest groups' propensity to seek media prominence (Kollman 1998). Depending on the degree of public support that interest groups enjoy, the incentives to use media strategies vary (Dür & Mateo 2014; Kollman 1998). When groups enjoy widespread public support, they can use public opinion as a 'resource' to corroborate their political demands and reinforce their status as representatives for the constituencies they claim to represent (Amenta et al. 2009; Vliegenthart et al. 2005). Seeking media prominence then enables groups to pressurize policymakers and appeal to their electoral sensitivities, as high prominence entails that the groups' political demands reach wider audiences (Agnone 2007; De Bruycker 2019). It is then cost- and time-efficient for groups with broad public support to invest in media prominence, as this may increase the prospects of advocacy success (Rasmussen et al. 2018a, 2018b). From a journalists' perspective, widespread public support also makes interest organizations more newsworthy because their message is potentially impactful—it demonstrates that the group might affect the political course of action (Meyer et al. 2017; Vliegenthart et al. 2005). Moreover, gaining high prominence while advocating broadly endorsed positions allows interest groups to maintain their relationship with their organizational constituencies and to recruit new members and (financial) supporters (e.g., Hanegraaff et al. 2016).

Conversely, the more the public opposes a policy position, the less incentives the group will have to pursue high degrees of prominence. Under these circumstances, extensive news coverage might work counterproductive (De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993; Kollman 1998). Interest groups facing public opposition

cannot use public opinion as a 'resource' to corroborate their claims and put pressure on policymakers. Being highly prominent in the news can trigger adversaries to join the political debate and provoke further conflict expansion (De Bruycker 2019; Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014). As such, when lacking public support, interest groups will not be able to shift the debate towards their preferred outcome and consequently the prospect of advocacy success decreases (Rasmussen et al. 2018a, 2018b). Moreover, in the face of increasing public opposition, high prominence might result in the loss of organizational support—members and supporters do not want to be associated with unpopular positions (Dür & Mateo 2013; Kollman 1998). Interest groups without ample public support are therefore commonly expected to limit themselves to monitoring legislative initiatives and the activities of other advocates; these groups mostly focus on inside lobbying (Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014; Kollman 1998). Hypothesis 1 summarizes this expectation: *Interest groups with higher degrees of public support are more prominent in the news, compared to interest groups with lower degrees of public support.*

Second, media prominence is not only a function of groups seeking news coverage when enjoying broad public support, it is also heavily guided by the media's own logic and affected by issue-specific factors inherent to the news media. In this regard, one important issue-specific factor is the level of salience an issue attracts in the news. Only a few policy domains or issues can be simultaneously salient; due to time and editorial constraints, journalists prioritize the topics to which they pay attention. As mentioned above, the news media are characterized by an 'issue-attention cycle'—denoting that some issues receive more coverage than others (Downs 1972; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). The level of salience issues attract, thus affects the newsworthiness of interest groups promoting political demands regarding these issues (Andrews & Caren 2010; Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993; Kollman 1998). Since groups are often active on only a few issues at the same time, the prevalence of interest groups active in a policy area is likely to be reflected in news coverage related to that area (Binderkrantz et al. 2020a; Danielian & Page 1994). Interest groups prioritizing issues that resonate well with the issues already on the media agenda are deemed as more newsworthy, while interest groups prioritizing issues that attract low levels of salience are deemed as less

newsworthy and thus less likely to be prominent (Andrews & Caren 2010; Grömping 2019; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). Although groups themselves may aim to affect issue salience through the news media, salience itself is largely beyond an individual interest group's control and is affected by multiple factors such as politicians, sudden events (e.g., terrorist attacks, natural disasters, migration or economic crises), other interest groups, and journalists themselves (Boydstun et al. 2014; Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014). Individual interest groups are either constrained or facilitated by the level of news salience to gain more media prominence. Hypothesis 2 summarizes this expectation: *Interest groups active on highly salient issues are more prominent in the news, compared to interest groups active on less salient issues.*

Though, the relationship between organized interests and journalists is characterized by asymmetrical dependency (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993); news salience is therefore expected to be more decisive for explaining media prominence compared to the degree of public support interest groups enjoy (Kollman 1998).While interest groups may strategically seek extensive news coverage when enjoying widespread public support, they ultimately depend on journalists to gain high degrees of prominence. This asymmetrical dependency between interest groups and journalists, may result in two opposite outcomes.

On the one hand, when issues are highly salient, the likelihood that interest groups defending positions that enjoy widespread public support, are more prominent in the news, is expected to increase. Those groups can benefit from being in sync with the "issue attention cycle" to gain higher degrees of media prominence (Van Santen et al. 2015; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer 2006). Conversely, high issue salience deters interest groups that defend positions attracting public opposition from seeking media prominence (Dür & Mateo, 2014). On such issues, the public has more crystalized preferences due to higher exposure rates to issue-specific information, decreasing the political leverage these groups might exploit from raising public awareness (Ciuk & Yost 2016; McCombs 2004). High levels of news salience limit opportunities to spell out underexposed policy alternatives and sway unreached segments of the public (Kollman 1998; Vliegenthart et al. 2005). Moreover, groups do not want to be associated with highly visible but

unpopular policy positions as they might lose members and supporters (Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014). In sum, high issue saliency can facilitate the media prominence of interest groups enjoying widespread public support and suppresses the prominence of groups with less public support. Hypothesis 3a summarizes this expectation: *If issues are highly salient, interest groups with higher degrees of public support gain more media prominence, compared to groups with lower degrees of public support.*

On the other hand, some interest groups, despite defending an unpopular policy position, might gain high degrees of media prominence on highly salient issues. The high news saliency makes an issue politically relevant and for interest groups dealing with such issues it is almost impossible to ignore the public debate. I briefly touch upon three reasons. First, high issue saliency may incentivize groups to publicly confront opponents (i.e. counteractive lobbying), while they could ignore these adversaries when issues are less salient (Austen-Smith & Wright 1994; Baumgartner & Leech 1996). For instance, recent research demonstrated that business interests usually prefer 'quiet politics' and lobbying outside the public spotlight, but that high issue saliency—such as during the aftermath of the financial crisis—induced business interests to conduct 'noisy politics' by seeking to counteract their policy adversaries in public debates (Culpepper 2011; Kastner 2018; Keller 2018). Despite defending an unpopular position, high issue saliency pulls these groups into news.

Second, high issue saliency can invoke groups to seek media prominence because their constituents intensely care about the issue; inducing the group to visibly demonstrate its advocacy efforts, despite enjoying less public support (Kollman 1998). Labor unions are a classic example in this regard, confronted with a threat to acquired social rights, their intensely caring members want the union to take visible action. Similarly, organized business interests, especially when unsuccessful in inside venues, might revert to the news media in an attempt to harness their economic strength and signal to policymakers and the general public various undesired policy effects such as an increase in consumer costs or a decline in economic growth (Kastner 2018). Social movements that want to accomplish societal change, to mention a final example, also receive more prominent news coverage when their protests coincide with salient issues

or events (Rafail et al. 2019). Hence, even when defending unpopular positions on highly salient issues, these interest groups might want high degrees of media prominence to signal their advocacy efforts to their own constituency facing a (policy) threat, to demonstrate to policymakers that ignoring their political demands can lead to a significant electoral loss and/or various negative socio-economic effects or to exploit issue salience to raise awareness for their cause (Kollman 1998). Media prominence then does not aid groups in putting pressure on policymakers but helps them to secure the ties with their organizational constituencies (Hanegraaff et al. 2016).

From a journalistic perspective, both 'counteractive lobbying' and 'intensely caring organizational constituencies' invoking interest groups to seek media prominence when issues are highly salient, entail that journalists are confronted with conflict among interest groups or between interest groups and other political opponents (e.g., politicians, civil servants, experts), which makes for good news stories as criticism is being voiced towards government policies and/or among various societal stakeholders (Meyer et al. 2017; Van Santen et al. 2015). Moreover, journalists may select interest groups to balance the viewpoints reported in their news stories, regardless of whether the group wishes to increase its media prominence (Hopmann et al. 2012). For instance, when interviewing labor union officials on an issue, journalists may also report the perspective of business interests. Especially on highly salient issues—like election news coverage of political parties—journalists will be concerned with achieving a more balanced news coverage by including interest groups with opposing positions or different viewpoints of 'elite' sources (Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2009). Under these circumstances, political actors themselves will also be alert to news media bias.

In sum, high saliency can also constrain the media prominence of interest groups enjoying widespread public support and result in substantial media prominence for interest groups defending more unpopular positions. Hypothesis 3b summarizes this expectation: *If issues are highly salient, interest groups with higher degrees of public support are **as or less** prominent in the news, compared to groups with lower degrees of public support.*

Data and research design

The empirical analysis relies on a sample of 110 policy issues, stemming from an online voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters (Flanders n=1,053, Wallonia n=1,028). This sampling approach provides data on public opinion, which is necessary to construct the variable measuring the 'degree of public support'. The voter survey was conducted in the run-up to the (sub)national and European elections of 25 May 2014 and resulted in a 17% average response rate. Respondents could either agree or disagree with a policy statement (Lesschaeve 2017b). All 110 policy issues—of which 37 national, 34 Flemish and 39 Walloon/Francophone issues—meet the following criteria: unidirectionality, specificity, attributable to a dominant government level and deal with substantive regulatory and/or (re)distributive policies. Administrative acts or detailed budgetary allocations were excluded from the sample. The sample accounts for considerable variation across issues in terms of policy domains, legislative initiatives introduced, interest group mobilization and news salience. The Methodological chapter gives more background on sample construction and representativeness, the measurement of dependent, independent and control variables.

An extensive news-content analysis on each issue was conducted to identify interest organizations and their positions (for a similar approach see De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). In a first step, a computer-automated Boolean keyword search in four news media outlets was applied for the period June 2013-December 2017. This resulted in 26,512 newspaper articles. Next, interest organizations were computer-automated identified in these articles based on a curated dictionary containing the names and abbreviations of 2,320 Belgian interest organizations (see Beyers et al. 2020 for more details). Subsequently, a multi-stage stratified sample of 2,306 articles was manually coded. Coders indicated whether the identified interest groups made relevant claims about the issue at hand. A claim was defined as a quotation or paraphrase in the news directly connected to a specific interest group (De Bruycker 2017; Koopmans & Statham 1999). In total, 256 unique interest organizations made

1073 claims on 84 issues (leaving 26 issues with no relevant interest group identification and/or claim).

To assess media prominence—the dependent variable—the number of times an interest group appeared in the news per policy issue was counted. I created an ordinal measure distinguishing interest groups appearing once in the news (i.e. low degree of prominence) from those groups appearing two times and those appearing three or more times per policy issue in the news (i.e. high degree of prominence). These groups are matched with a representative survey sample of 1,687 Belgian interest groups (Beyers et al. 2020). The identified organizations were surveyed on their organizational characteristics as well as general tendencies in advocacy strategies. The web-survey was conducted in January-May 2016 and delivered a 45% response rate (n=759 organizations responded to >50% of questions). Connecting the interest group survey respondents with the news media data and omitting missing values, resulted in a dataset with 199 observations of media prominence based on claims by 68 interest groups on 56 policy issues. Several issues (but not all) have multiple interest groups gaining media prominence *and* some interest groups (but not all) appear across multiple issues. A drawback of this sampling method is the absence of the measurement of 'zero' prominence. Therefore, and to create a benchmark, an additional ordinal dependent variable was constructed including the interest groups without news coverage and for which we did not code any policy position. Specifically, I assessed whether interest groups developing media strategies in each policy domain also featured in newspaper articles connected to the policy domain (to enable this analysis, issues were clustered in 12 domains). This resulted 1290 observations of media prominence, based on 400 group appearances across 12 domains. Table 1 presents the distribution of media prominence in these two samples; the first sample presents a count of media prominence per issue, the second a count of media prominence at the domain level.

The measurement of the independent variables is based on the coding of organizations' positions in favor or against each policy statement as presented in the voter survey. The coding was conducted by the author, a research assistant and two student assistants; inter-coder reliability checks were found to be satisfactory.

Table 1. Distribution of media prominence

	No media prominence (0)	Low media prominence (1)	Moderate media prominence (2)	High media prominence (3+)
Sample size = 199 (68 org. & 56 issues)	/	108 54.27%	38 19.10%	53 26.63%
Sample size = 1290 (with media effort) (400 org. & 12 policy domains)	1160 89.92%	68 0.05%	17 0.01%	45 0.03%

First, to measure the degree of public support, each interest group claim was linked to the share of the public that adopted the same position as the group. A continuous variable was created ranging from 0 (opposing public) to 100 (supportive public). For example, on the issue *'The retirement age should not rise'*, 72% of the public agrees, while 22% disagrees with the statement. So, when a group holds a position in favor of the statement, the group gets a value of 72. The distribution of this variable has a mean of 47.68 (α=21.25), a minimum value of 9.53 and a maximum value of 87.07.

In addition, news salience was measured through the number of newspaper articles web-scraped per issue; on average, the sampled issues were covered in 219.6 articles (α=183.6; min=17.25; max=824.56). The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its left-skewed distribution (μ=5.07; α=0.86; min=2.9; max=6.72).

Next, a set of potentially impactful issue-specific context variables was operationalized. First, whether an issue belongs to a policy domain considered as a public priority is measured by scoring each issue according to the number of respondents in the 2014 European Election Survey who indicated a domain as the first or second 'most important problem' facing the domestic government (Schmitt et al., 2015). The recoding process of the 148 topics coded by the survey conductors and merging small and closely related domains (such as foreign affairs and defense) resulted in a match between issues clustered within 12 domains. The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its skewed distribution (μ=3.89; α=2.17; min=0; max=5.99). Second, the share of interest groups in the news per issue can signal issue importance and suggest cue-taking among

groups to pursue media prominence (Baumgartner et al. 2009a). Therefore, all groups making the news on a given issue were counted (μ=15.16; α=8.65; min=1; max=37). Third, the extent to which an issue is politically contested affects its newsworthiness (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O'neill 2001) which might result in more news coverage and a higher amount of actors and viewpoints being reported. Political contestation was calculated for each of the 110 issues based on the proportion of parliamentary seats per party through the following formula: 100–(abs(Seat share of parties Agree–Seat share of parties Disagree)). This resulted in a variable with a mean of 58.68 (α=30.81; min=2.2; max=99.8). Fourth, while SQ-challengers may benefit from expanding their media prominence, SQ-defenders usually try to eschew the public spotlight (i.e. Baumgartner et al. 2009a). A dichotomous measure distinguishes between SQ-challengers (n=132 dyads) and SQ-defenders (n=67 dyads) based on a legislative assessment. Fifth, as the nature of issues, including the propensity to gain news coverage, may vary across the different government levels in Belgium (Beckers & Van Aelst 2019a), a categorical variable was created that differentiates national issues (n=130 dyads) from Flemish (n=39 dyads) and Francophone/Walloon (n=30 dyads) issues.

Finally, I included a set of organizational control variables. First, I categorized organizations into: (1) concentrated interests, including business associations, professional associations, and associations of institutions and (semi-)public authorities (n=69 dyads); (2) representative diffuse organizations, including labor unions, cause and identity groups with formal members (n=99 dyads) and (3) solidarity organizations, including cause and identity groups without formal members (n=31 dyads) (e.g., Binderkrantz 2005; Halpin 2006).

Second, as more staff implies a greater capacity to seek media prominence (Andrews & Caren 2010; Thrall 2006), the number of staff an organization employs was controlled for. The survey asked respondents *'How many paid staff (full time equivalent), does your organization employ?'.* The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its right-skewed distribution (μ=3.89; α=1.7; min=0; max=7.44).

Third, constituency involvement is measured through an index including the following activities: (1) 'helping to influence public policy', (2) 'providing ideas about

your organization's campaigning strategies', (3) 'identifying problems or providing ideas about your organization's activities', (4) 'providing evidence of support from affected members or concerned citizens', and (5) 'running local groups or branches'. Respondents indicated their intensity of constituency involvement on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'unimportant' to 'very important' (Cronbach's α=0.71; ordinal α=0.78). These responses were summarized to create a scale ranging from 5 to 25 with a mean of 20.56 (α=3.95).

Fourth, groups developing media tactics may gain higher degrees of media prominence compared to those limitedly active (Grömping 2019; Tresch & Fischer 2015). This variable operationalizes interest groups' propensity to seek media prominence following Boräng and Naurin (2016). Each organization indicated on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'once a week' whether they: 'organized press conferences and/or issued press releases' (1), 'gave interviews and/or wrote opinion pieces' (2), 'contacted journalists directly' (3) or 'staged protests' (4). The responses were recoded to reflect the number of times, per policy domain, each activity was performed per year, to sum these values for each organization and divide this by 52 (weeks in a year). Thus, a response indicating that an interest group wrote an opinion piece once a year (1/52), staged protest every three months (4.3/52), contacted a journalist once a month (13/52), and organized press conferences or issued press releases once a week (52/52) would add up to a score of 1.35 advocacy intensity per week. The mean value for media-oriented advocacy intensity is 0.39 (α=0.49; min=0; max=2.25).

Finally, political insiders may gain more media prominence because they often possess pertinent policy information which signals newsworthiness to journalists and might want to reinforce their own position vis-à-vis policymakers and other stakeholders through news coverage (i.e. Binderkrantz et al. 2015). To differentiate insiders from more peripheral groups, I created a categorical variable distinguishing interest groups without access to one of 616 Belgian advisory councils (n=19 dyads) from groups with limited access (below the median number of seats; n=84 dyads) and insiders (above the median number of seats; n=96 dyads).

Analysis

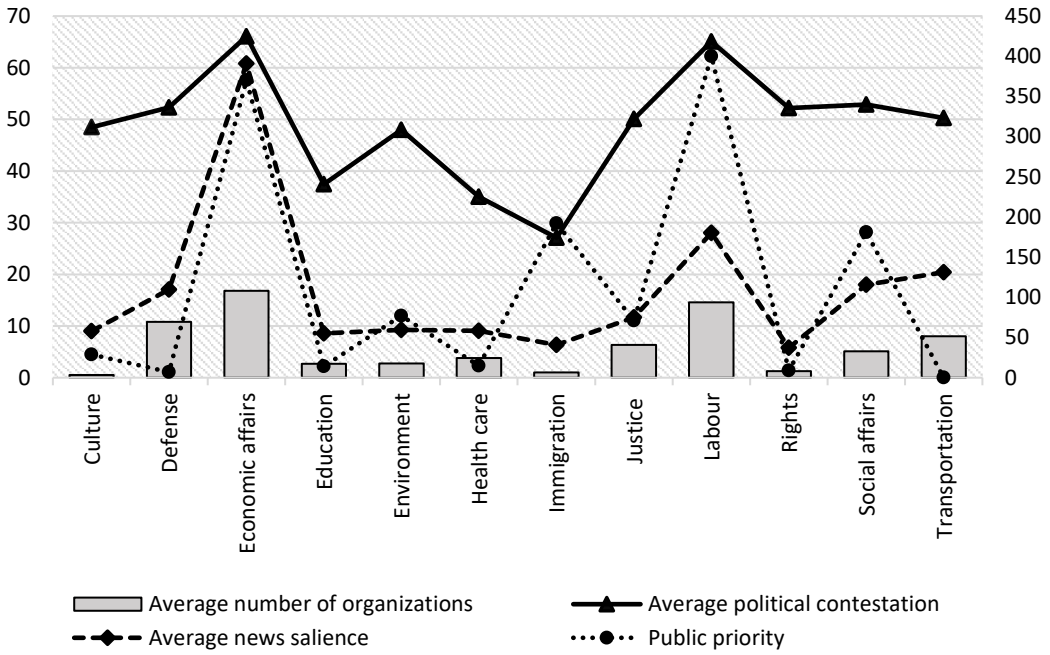
The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, I descriptively present the push-pull dynamic characterizing the relationship between interest groups and the news media. Next, I present ordinal regression models analyzing the relationship between groups' media prominence *and* the degree to which the policy area of activity is a public priority and the level of news salience issues in that area attract—while controlling for organizational capacities, the intensity of media strategies deployed and other context-dependent variables. This analysis serves as a benchmark before assessing the hypotheses on public support and news salience. These latter results are further contextualized by providing some examples from the data.

Figure 1 depicts the prevalence with which interest groups appear in the news across policy domains. Interest groups are particularly prominent in news items reporting on labor market policy, economic affairs, and social affairs (see also Beckers & Van Aelst 2019a; Fraussen & Wouters 2015). Prominent groups in these domains include large Belgian business associations such as the Federation of Belgian Enterprises and labor unions such as the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions. Typical for all these organizations is their central position within Belgium's neo-corporatist system of interest representation, which is reproduced in the news.

Compared to other domains, many groups also appear in the news on issues related to foreign affairs and defense. Groups making claims on foreign affairs and defense issues are business associations such as Agoria (defending the Belgian defense industry), peace associations such as Pax Christi and human rights groups such as Amnesty International. Also, in the domains of transport/mobility and justice, a substantial number of interest groups gains news coverage (see also Beckers & Van Aelst 2019a). Examples of interest groups gaining prominence are 'identity' groups such as associations of automobile drivers, cyclists, or commuters; cause groups such as consumer groups, human rights groups, environmental associations; and encompassing business associations and labor unions. Notably, Figure 1 illustrates that issues on which many interest groups appear in the news are generally characterized by higher levels of news salience and are often subject to more political contestation. The prevalence of

interest groups in the news thus clearly follows a 'media logic', driven by news value criteria (i.e. pull). Also remarkable, while migration is a priority for large segments of the public, the overall issue salience and the number of interest groups appearing in the news remains low (see also Beckers & Van Aelst 2019a).

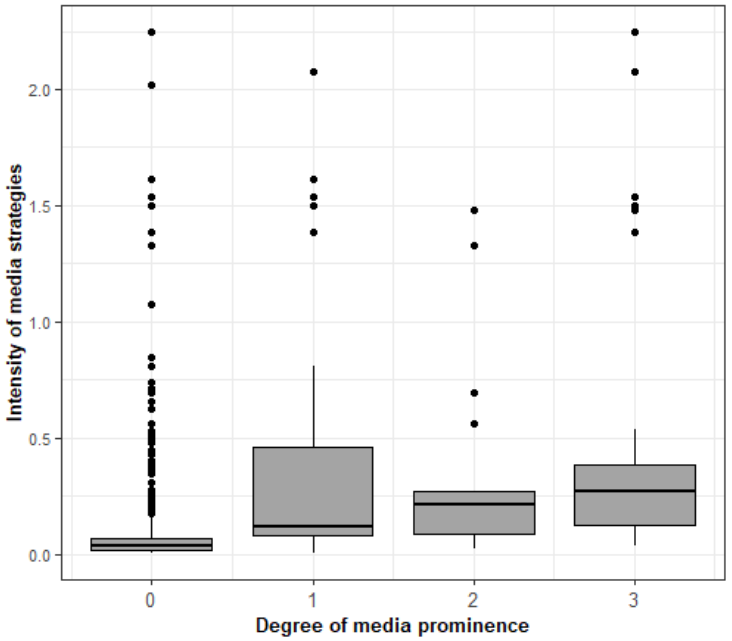
Figure 1. Average number of interest groups in the news (left y-axis) across policy domains by levels of news salience, public salience (right y-axis) and political contestation (left y-axis) (n=110 issues)



Turning to groups' incentives to seek media prominence (i.e. push), Figure 2 describes the relationship between groups' use of media strategies and prominence. First, most interest groups (n=1160, 90%) seeking media prominence within a given area do not gain media prominence on any of the issues within this area. Nevertheless, the boxplots in Figure 2 indicate that the intense use of media strategies correlates with a higher media prominence. This confirms the results by Binderkrantz et al. (2020a) who have shown that even when the analysis of media appearances is narrowed down to the active groups in a policy area, media prominence is concentrated on a small number of interest groups. The positive effect of intensely deploying media strategies such as organizing press conferences, issuing press releases, staging protest activities, and contacting journalists

on gaining media prominence highlights that interest groups can successfully increase their media prominence. However, a one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) and its Tukey post-hoc test reveal that groups are limited in expanding their media prominence through media strategies. While a statistically significant difference for the mean intensity of deployed media strategies is observed between groups appearing once or multiple times in the news and groups without media attention, no significant differences are observed between groups deemed as newsworthy (see Table 1 and Appendix).

Figure 2. Boxplots presenting the degree of media prominence by intensity of deployed media strategies (n=1290, 400 org. across 12 domains)



In sum, Figure 2 demonstrates that news coverage is scarce and difficult to expand even when groups deploy substantial media strategies. In combination with Figure 1, the descriptive results suggest that journalistic selection mechanisms and the issue attention cycle are decisive to explain the degree of media prominence groups gain. Groups are limited in the extent to which they can strategically increase their media prominence.

To better understand how push and pull dynamics relate to each other and to assess how these dynamics affect the prominence of groups with(out) broad public

support, Table 2 presents ordinal regression models analyzing media prominence. Given the repeated measures—several issues (but not all) have multiple interest groups gaining media prominence *and* some interest groups (but not all) appear across multiple issues—the assumptions of independence and homoscedasticity are violated, and a pooled ordinal regression might overestimate the magnitude of the predictors. Therefore, I used models that corrected standard errors for observations clustered within organizations.[xii] Numeric variables are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing this by two times the standard deviation; this facilitates the interpretation of the interaction parameters (Gelman 2008). Moving one unit of analysis corresponds to moving one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.

Comparing the benchmark model with the issue-level models, it becomes clear that typical variables such as staff and media strategies are vital for passing the media gates. However, these variables do not explain the *degree* of media prominence groups gain. First, the more media-oriented activities developed in an area, the higher the likelihood of high prominence on issues situated within that area. More staff also positively affects media prominence. These results indicate that it is important to account for how interest groups use their human and financial resources (i.e. Grömping 2019). Being well-endowed does not equal an intense use of media strategies and the media efforts groups bring to bear are strong predictors for gaining higher degrees of media prominence. Furthermore, diffuse representative interests and solidarity interests do not gain more media prominence compared to concentrated business interests. And being a political insider (i.e. having seats in advisory councils) or extensively engaging members and supporters in advocacy activities have no direct significant effect on attaining media prominence.

To assess Hypotheses 1 and 2, Model 1 presents the direct effects of public support and news salience on media prominence. Hypothesis 1, which states that interest groups enjoying broader public support are more prominent in the news, compared to interest groups with less public support, is not confirmed. Rather, the opposite is found. The higher the degree of public support an interest group enjoys, the lower the likelihood the group appears multiple times in the news per policy issue.

Table 2. Ordinal regression models analyzing degree of media prominence

	Policy domain	Issue level	
	Benchmark Model	Model 1	Model 2
Organizational variables			
Group type (ref.cat.=concentrated)	-	-	-
- Representative diffuse	0.409	-0.551	-0.511
	(0.29)	(0.64)	(0.65)
- Solidarity	0.220	-1.336⊥	-1.301⊥
	(0.35)	(0.75)	(0.75)
Access to AC (ref.cat.=no access)	0.577	-	-
	(0.37)		
- Below median seats	/	-0.953	-0.960
		(0.70)	(0.70)
- Above median seats	/	-0.508	-0.556
		(0.91)	(0.93)
Staff (log)	1.309***	-0.287	-0.259
	(0.22)	(0.55)	(0.55)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.441	0.199	0.217
	(0.29)	(0.48)	(0.48)
Media strategies intensity (ref.cat.=below median)	-	-	-
- Above median	1.600***	0.659⊥	0.644⊥
	(0.25)	(0.42)	(0.42)
Context variables			
Public support	/	-0.532**	-0.504*
		(0.20)	(0.22)
News salience (log)	0.926***	1.083*	1.111*
	(0.25)	(0.53)	(0.55)
Public priority (log)	-0.590*	-0.757	-0.721
	(0.28)	(0.62)	(0.61)
Status quo (ref.cat.=challenger)	/	-	-
- SQ-defender	/	0.634⊥	0.637⊥
		(0.33)	(0.33)
Political contestation	1.252**	-0.207	-0.177
	(0.45)	(0.31)	(0.34)
Interest mobilization	-0.020	-0.118	-0.120
	(0.24)	(0.56)	(0.56)
Issue jurisdiction (ref.cat.=national)		-	-
- Flemish	/	-1.495*	-1.451*
		(0.64)	(0.61)
- Walloon	/	-0.958*	-0.937*
		(0.48)	(0.48)
Interaction effects			
Public support*News salience			-0.471
			(0.70)

Constants			
0 | 1	4.240***	/	/
	(0.34)		
1 | 2	5.283***	-0.848	-0.847
	(0.37)	(0.89)	(0.89)
2 | 3	5.692***	0.205	0.209
	(0.38)	(0.87)	(0.86)
Model fit statistics			
N	1290	199	199
df	10	15	16
Loglikelihood	-415.807	-172.423	-172.171
AIC	857.614	378.845	380.343
BIC	924.725	434.832	439.622

*Note: clustered standard errors within parentheses and significance levels indicated by ⊥ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

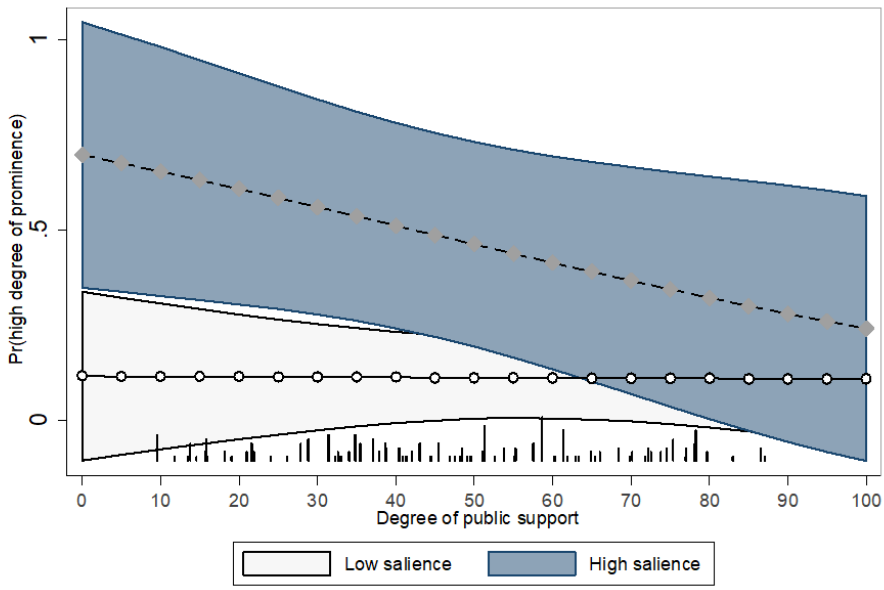
The predicted probability of attaining high prominence (i.e. outcome 3+) decreases by 17% when moving from low degrees of public support (i.e. 10% support) to high degrees of public support (i.e. 90% of support). Nevertheless, interest groups appearing in the news (n=199 dyads), on average, have 48% of the public on their side.

Hypothesis 2, which reasons that interest groups active on highly salient issues gain more media prominence, compared to interest groups active on lowly salient issues, is confirmed. The predicted probability of high media prominence (i.e. outcome 3+) increases by 35% when moving from one standard deviation below the mean of salience (i.e. low salience) to one standard deviation above the mean of salience (i.e. high salience). These findings highlight the role specific issues play in explaining media prominence. The high salience of issues in the areas of economic affairs, labor market policy and social affairs propels interest groups active in these domains to higher degrees of media prominence.

To assess Hypotheses 3a/b, Model 2 includes the interaction terms between the degree of public support and news salience. To examine this relation further, Figure 3 presents how the predicted probabilities change for attaining high media prominence (Y-axis) depending on the degree of public support (X-axis; ranging from 10=low support to 100=full support) across distinct levels of salience. On issues attracting low levels of news salience, no matter the degree of public support, the predicted probabilities of appearing multiple times in the news per issue (i.e. outcome 3+) are low across the board. However, on highly salient issues the predicted probability of attaining high degrees of prominence decreases by 37% when moving from public opposition (i.e. 10% support) to widespread public support (i.e. 90% support). Differences between lowly and highly salient issues are significant for positions on which interest groups enjoy less than 45% of public support. This confirms Hypothesis 3b, namely if issues are highly salient in the news, interest groups with little public support have as or even more media prominence, compared to groups enjoying widespread public support. This also indicates that while organizational capacities and media strategies benefit interest groups in passing the media gates, once groups appear in the news, their media prominence is largely determined by the political context of the issues on which they are active.

Three reasons explain why interest groups with less public support, gain more media prominence when issues are highly salient: 'counteractive' lobbying processes, pressures by 'intensely caring' organizational constituencies and journalistic selection mechanisms. I illustrate each of these underlying drivers by providing examples from the data. While each of these drivers can separately affect media prominence, they can also mutually reinforce each other.

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of media prominence by degree of public support across levels of salience (with 95% CIs)



First, on highly salient issues, interest groups oftentimes seek the public spotlight to counteract the dominant discourse put forward by their policy adversaries, even when they enjoy, compared to their opponents, much less public support (Austen-Smith & Wright 1994; Dür & Mateo 2014). The highly salient issue of *"maintaining/closing nuclear power plants"* is telling for the occurrence of counteractive lobbying processes. On the one hand, several business associations such as the Federation of Belgian Industrial Energy Consumers saw their position in favor of maintaining nuclear power plants corroborated by public opinion; 53% of the public was aligned with them. These business associations benefitted from a context in which Belgium experienced a threat

to its energy security, in part (and paradoxically) due to the shutdown of several nuclear reactors because of hairline fractures in reactor walls, to convincingly argue in favor of prolonging the life of the youngest nuclear power plants. On the other hand, environmental associations such as Greenpeace also gained substantial media prominence, despite only having 29% of the public at their side. These organizations needed to counteract the arguments made by their adversaries in the news. Given that the topic addresses a core ingredient of their policy platform—namely, the shift towards renewable energy to achieve energy security and the closure of all nuclear power plants—they could not afford to remain absent from the media debate. Having nearly a third of the public on their side, which is still quite substantial, can also bolster organizations such as Greenpeace to seek public attention.

Second, interest groups might have members and supporters who intensely care about the policy issue and want the group to seek media prominence, despite defending an unpopular position. This is nicely illustrated when examining the highly salient issue of implementing *'a guaranteed minimum service in case of public railway strikes'.* Both business associations and associations of commuters were in favor of limiting the right to strike in order to guarantee minimum public services and gained media prominence. However, especially the three main Belgian labor unions representing public sector employees gained high media prominence. The labor unions—despite being confronted with overwhelming public opposition against their position (86% favored minimum services)—staged massive protest manifestations and organized strikes to challenge the government proposal aimed at limiting the right to strike. News coverage was used to signal a (policy) threat to the affected constituency.

Third, news values such as conflict and negativity advance how journalists select interest groups that pursue counteractive lobbying and/or act on the pressures of their organizational constituents in response to a 'policy threat'. Journalists may select interest groups to balance the viewpoints reported in their news stories, regardless of whether the group actively sought media prominence in the first place (Hopmann et al. 2012). In this regard, my results demonstrate that especially policy insiders—those having a high number of seats in advisory councils—are unable to escape media prominence when

issues are highly salient, even when these groups lack widespread public support. For example, The Federation of Belgian Enterprises is mainly featured in newspaper articles on highly salient issues, although the organization defended unpopular positions on more than half of these issues (i.e. making claims on 9 issues with <50% support and on 7 issues with >50% support). This finding is in line with research demonstrating the positive effect of 'elite' status on media prominence (Binderkrantz et al. 2017a, 2015; Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2009; Fraussen & Wouters 2015). In short, various journalistic selection mechanisms contribute to interest groups gaining high media prominence, despite defending more unpopular positions.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explain how the public support interest groups enjoy for their positions and news salience affect media prominence. Although interest group scholars have predominantly focused on organizational characteristics to explain media prominence, this paper demonstrates that, contingent upon news salience, the positions interest groups adopt vis-à-vis prevailing public opinion is an important explanatory factor for media prominence. The results confirm that public opinion matters for media prominence, albeit in ways nuancing the classic presumption that interest groups faced with public opposition eschew the public spotlight (Dür & Mateo 2013, 2014; Kollman 1998; Schattschneider 1960).

The findings suggest that interest groups regularly attain media prominence, despite facing public opposition for their positions, when engaging in counteractive lobbying against their political adversaries and/or seek to publicly demonstrate to their members and supporters that they act on a perceived policy threat (Austen-Smith & Wright 1994; Baumgartner & Leech 1996; Dür & Mateo 2014; Kollman, 1998). While appearing prominent in the news when facing public opposition does not help groups to exert pressure on policymakers, the viewpoints expressed by these groups serve to secure ties with members and supporters. The results thus demonstrate that groups are constrained by the issue-specific context in which they operate to strategically increase

their media prominence when enjoying broad public support. Some interest groups defending more unpopular positions get pulled into the news on highly salient issues, whereas they could have avoided the public spotlight on limitedly salient issues.

The results also underscore that systems of interest representation tend to be skewed to the advantage of a few privileged interest groups. News coverage is distributed unequally and especially interest groups with insider positions gain high media prominence, indicating that center-periphery dynamics in more covert advocacy arenas are reproduced in the news (see also Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015). Still, stark differences exist between policy areas in the number of groups gaining prominence in the news. Interest groups are especially prominent in the areas of economic affairs, labor market policy and social affairs, while groups active in other policy areas are less prominent. And, the intensity with which organized interest use media-oriented strategies proves to be a remarkable predictor of media prominence. Interest groups that regularly provide journalists with relevant input see their media prominence increased. These results demonstrate that interest group research should go beyond the sheer counting of financial and human resources and consider how groups deploy their resources. Interest groups can get 'more bang for their buck' by developing rigorous media strategies (Grömping 2019: pp.467-468).

Normatively, this entails that policymakers relying on the news media for information, receive only signals from a selected set of organizations. News coverage is tilted against interest groups active in policy areas attracting low saliency and echoes existing power balances. Some interest groups have acquired a status of 'preeminence' within the decision-making process—in Belgium mostly business associations and labor unions—and are go-to sources for journalists (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015). While in many instances the positions these groups defend are aligned with large segments of the public, there are also many cases in which interest groups feature prominently in the news and make claims going against prevailing public opinion. This latter dynamic contributes to the 'democratic function' of the news media as a 'marketplace of ideas'—denoting that news coverage should include a diverse range of actors and viewpoints (Masini et al. 2018). Journalists seem to select interest groups

with divergent viewpoints, to give a voice to organizations expressing a wide range of policy perspectives.

The empirical analysis on the effect of interest groups' position on media prominence remained limited to the interest groups that appeared at least once in the news. Hence, future research analyzing the relation between media prominence, policy positions and issue characteristics, could distinguish between interest groups that sought media attention but did not make into the news and those that gained news coverage. Moreover, although the research design allowed to control for the supply-side effect of media-oriented advocacy intensity, no direct measurement was available to effectively capture demand-side factors like news values and journalistic routines. Therefore, it would be valuable to survey and/or interview journalists themselves to uncover whether and how particular interest groups get selected for news coverage.

Although the analyzed hypotheses were not country-specific, caution is needed when generalizing the results beyond the Belgian system of interest representation and its news media arena. Nevertheless, I expect the findings to travel well to countries with similar systems of interest representation and news media (i.e. neo-corporatist) such as the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Austria (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Comparative research could further clarify the external validity of the findings by analyzing relevant inter- and intra-polity variation. Still, the results suggest that issue-level variation is key in explaining media prominence, which makes that across a wide variety of countries the impact of news salience on gaining media prominence and groups' struggle when having to publicly defend unpopular positions will be highly similar to my findings when one studies issues with similar features.

In sum, this study proves that news salience and the public support interest groups enjoy are key factors in explaining media prominence. Even in the face of widespread public opposition, some interest groups—especially active on highly salient issues—have no escape from the media gates.

Article 5. Public opinion as an ally of interest groups?

How the alignment of interest groups with public opinion explains advocacy success across the policy process

Evelien Willems & Jan Beyers (2020). Working paper.

Abstract. This paper examines how public support affects the advocacy success of interest groups operating through the news media across three distinct stages in the legislative process. We hypothesize that public support is key for advocacy success when coalition agreements are negotiated, has a weaker effect when policy proposals are introduced in parliament, to become again stronger for attaining success in the final outcome. We assess these expectations for 110 Belgian policy issues for which we combine public opinion data with the positions interest groups voice in the news media and legislative outcomes. The results indicate that public support is key for advocacy success during coalition negotiations. Yet once negotiations are over, especially groups that did not attain their position resort to the news media to challenge the government. These groups are especially successful in signaling their views via opposition parties when enjoying broad public support, but fail to attain their preferences in final legislative outcomes. Still, interest groups that attain their legislative preferences, on average, enjoy considerable levels of public support.

Keywords. media advocacy, interest groups, public opinion, legislative politics, influence

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, business interest groups' use of abundant financial and human resources does not automatically result in advocacy success and non-business interests such as environmental and consumer groups are regularly identified as successful advocates (Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Dür et al. 2015; Smith 2000). Rather than group type and resources, recent empirical studies have demonstrated that contextual factors such as issue salience, the mobilization of opposing or supporting advocacy coalitions, and the specific positions groups defend are key in shaping advocacy success (Baumgartner et al. 2009a; De Bruycker & Beyers 2019; Dür et al. 2015; Junk 2019a; Klüver 2011). Although interest groups scholars recognize that interest groups do not operate in a political vacuum, one underexposed aspect in current literature is how public support matters for interest groups' advocacy success.

This is surprising given the normatively motivated controversy in the political science literature on whether organized interests' involvement in policymaking processes strengthens or weakens the connection between the general public and policy outcomes (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Burstein 2014; Kohler-Koch 2010; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). On the one hand, according to the pluralist account, organized interests can function as intermediaries—as a so-called 'transmission belt'—between the general public and policymakers (Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Dahl 1961; Klüver & Pickup 2019; Rasmussen et al. 2018a; Truman 1951). On the other hand, critics of the pluralist view argue that interest groups may systematically shift public policy away from citizens preferences due to the unequal distribution of mobilized interests that tends to disadvantage non-business interests (Gilens 2012; Olson 1965; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman et al. 2012). .

While previous interest group studies have mainly tackled this controversy from an interest group population perspective and studied bias in access to political-administrative venues and public debates (Lowery et al. 2015), scholars have recently started to analyze whether or not and how lobbying aligns with public opinion (Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Dür & Mateo 2014; Giger & Klüver 2016; Gilens & Page 2014; Klüver 2018; Klüver & Pickup 2019; Lax & Phillips 2012; Rasmussen et al. 2014;

Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Although several of these studies have demonstrated that public support can positively impact advocacy success—or inversely—that lobbying can amplify the impact of public opinion on policies, other studies did not find clear-cut effects on policies (e.g., Rasmussen et al. 2018b).

This paper aspires to contribute to this emerging literature by examining to what extent and under which conditions advocacy successes across three distinct stages in the policymaking process are shaped by the public support interest groups enjoy when operating through the news media. The news media constitute an arena through which interest groups are especially likely to target politicians when enjoying broad public support. Through the news, interest groups reach wider audiences and can appeal to electoral sensitivities, thereby putting pressure on policymakers to act according to broadly endorsed demands (see also De Bruycker 2019). For instance, protests staged by labor unions or environmental organizations covered in the news can provide powerful signals to politicians of public support or opposition for policies (Bremer et al. 2020; Hutter & Vliegenthart 2018). Hence, instances of media advocacy—the visible media presence of interest groups—are critical for studying how the alignment of interest groups with public opinion affects advocacy success.

Specifically, we analyze how public support in conjunction with the presence of other (competing or allied) interest groups and partisan support affects advocacy success and examine how these effects vary across distinct stages in the policy process. Successful groups—i.e. those whose policy preferences are reflected in final outcomes—need to build a cascade of intermittent successes during the entire policy process. Most extant research analyzes one policy stage, for instance consultations in government committees or agency rule-making (Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Yackee & Yackee 2006); or assesses advocacy success compared to the final legislative outcome while black-boxing the overall policy process (Dür et al. 2015; Hojnacki et al. 2015). Although these studies have improved our insights, the fact that policies are not passed in one fell swoop is often ignored (exceptions include Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Binderkrantz & Pedersen 2019; Varone et al. 2020; Varone et al. 2017).

Putting the overall policy process center stage, our core expectation reasons that impact of public support for groups' positions on policy outcomes resembles a parabola. Public support is key in the initial stage of the policy process when the coalition agreement is negotiated, its effect weakens when legislation gets introduced in parliament, to become again stronger for advocacy success in the final legislative outcome. Our theoretical framework is grounded in agenda-setting studies which demonstrate that the priorities addressed by political elites correspond to a higher degree with public priorities during the agenda-setting stage than at the later decision-making stage, and that this correspondence is inversely related to institutional friction (Bernardi et al. 2020; Bevan & Jennings 2014; Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Bonafont-Chaqués & Palau 2011). The central thrust of our analysis is that institutional friction—i.e. the particular transaction costs associated with specific decision-making stages—entails different stages which are characterized by specific constellations of winning coalitions (larger or smaller) needed to overcome friction and secure policy wins (Jones & Baumgartner 2005, Jones et al. 2009).

To assess our hypotheses, we analyze 110 specific Belgian policy issues for which we combine data on interest group positions, public opinion, and the policy outcomes at three stages in the policymaking process. Belgium is a parliamentary democracy with a proportional representation system, is governed by coalition governments and can be considered as a typical partocracy (Deschouwer 2012). As such, legislative politics in Belgium resembles the process found in several other European democracies. Our analyses indicate that public support positively affects success in the coalition agreement, while variables traditionally seen as important such as resources or group type, have no significant impact. As hypothesized, the alignment of interest groups with other groups and political parties becomes more important for advocacy success in later legislative stages. Interestingly, our results also suggest that media advocacy can be used in a variety of ways as a weapon of influence. On the one hand, public support for media advocates helps to attain preferences in the coalition agreement and the subsequent legislative process. On the other hand, interest groups that see their priorities addressed but were unsuccessful during the coalition negotiation stage, often engaged in

counteractive lobbying through the news media during the subsequent legislative process and received the support from opposition parties.

Advocacy success across the policy process

Our main objective lies in connecting interest groups' degree of public support when advocating through the news media with their advocacy success across three distinct stages in the policy process. We conceptualize advocacy success as the accumulation of intermittent successes across the policy process. Specifically, we distinguish between two types of success, namely whether groups have attracted attention for their policy priorities and whether they have realized their policy positions. Attention precedes outcomes, but attention itself is no guarantee for the successful attainment of policy goals, which entails that attention is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for preference attainment (Baumgartner et al. 2009a). On the contrary, some interest groups may see their priorities addressed but fail to attain their policy goals in an early stage of the policy process, potentially leading these groups to engage in lobbying efforts to counteract the successes of other interest groups at later stages (Austen-Smith & Wright 1994; Jourdain et al. 2017).

In line with recent research, we conceive advocacy success as highly contingent upon contextual factors and less as a direct result of high lobbying expenditures or depending on group type (Bunea 2013; De Bruycker & Beyers 2019; Dür et al. 2015; Junk 2019a; Klüver 2011; Mahoney 2007a; Mahoney & Baumgartner 2015). Interest groups operate in a complex policy space in which a wide range of policy issues compete for attention and each issue is characterized by a distinct context in terms of the political attention received and the specific set of relevant political actors that affects the policy outcome. So, rather than assuming interest group influence as a function of resources or group type, we examine the unique conjunction of conditions that results in successful preference attainment. More specifically, we believe that two considerations are especially relevant when analyzing advocacy success, namely 1) the issue-specific actor constellation—including the alignments among interest groups, public opinion and political parties and 2) the cumulative nature of the legislative process, which often

requires interest groups to build a cascade of successes during the agenda- and decision-making stages.

The cumulative nature of the legislative process and its consequences for advocacy success

Before policies are enacted various hurdles associated with distinct stages in the policymaking process must be overcome. Hence, to see their preferences reflected in policy, interest groups often must be successful at multiple stages of the policy process. Each stage provides groups with different opportunities for access and influence (Binderkrantz & Pedersen 2019; King et al. 2005). Distinct stages in the policy process are characterized by varying levels of institutional friction. Institutional friction affects the transactions costs associated with policy change; the more friction, the higher the transaction costs, and the more difficult to change policy (Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Jones et al. 2009).

Institutional friction consists of two dimensions: (1) the size of the set of political veto-players and procedural rules governing the relation between those political actors, and (2) the degree of anchoring of policy. First, each stage in the policy process involves specific rules and sets of policymakers constituting a 'winning coalition' needed to advance policies. The supportive alignments of policymakers (i.e. key veto-players) with the interest group's preferences are crucial to make advocacy a success. Though, the size of the 'winning coalition' of policymakers needed to secure policy wins varies across the policy process. For instance, during the parliamentary stage each parliamentarian can introduce legislation and at this point policy priorities and directions are not yet deeply enshrined. Once bills move forward, varying policy views need to be reconciled and politicians belonging to different parties need to be convinced so that a bill eventually can be presented to the floor for its final passage (Baumgartner et al. 2009b; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019). Consequently, *larger* winning coalitions—i.e. more encompassing sets of policymakers—are needed with each succeeding legislative stage (King et al. 2005). Indeed, while one parliamentarian can introduce legislation, a majority of parliamentarians needs to support legislation in committee, and an overall favorably aligned parliamentary majority is needed to adopt legislation.

Second, institutional friction is not just a matter of the number of policymakers needed to secure policy wins, but also relates to how policies get anchored over the course of a policy process. When a proposal moves forward, political controversies get settled, technical and legal details are fleshed out, hence with each succeeding stage in the process it becomes more difficult to change the direction of policies (Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019; Soule & King 2006). It implies that to attain advocacy success by reversing the course of the policy process, interest groups must garner more and more support during each successive stage of the policy process because of the path dependent nature of the policy process (Soule & King 2006).

Generally, friction is low, if only a limited number of political actors needs to be favorably aligned with the interest group position and if many options are still on the table. This is usually the case earlier in a policy process, while friction increases in later stages when the number of favorably aligned policymakers needed to secure a policy win grows and many details have been settled. Since decisions taken in initial stages affect future decision-making and because institutional friction increases throughout the legislative process, it becomes more difficult to reverse the course of action once a bill has reached later decision-making stages. A wide array of studies points toward the necessity to secure policy wins in the early stages of a policy process, to attain preferences in later decision-making stages. The importance of the cumulative nature of the policy process is widely illustrated in studies on both social movements and organized interests in the US and Europe (e.g., Binderkrantz & Pedersen 2019; King et al. 2005; Olzak et al. 2016; Soule & King 2006; Soule & Olzak 2004). In short, while earlier agenda-setting success might not be an absolute prerequisite for groups to attain their preferences in the final outcome, earlier position successes increase substantially the chances of policy wins in later stages. This expectation is summarized in **Hypothesis 1**: *Interest groups attaining their preferences during the initial stages, have more success during later decision-making stages.*

We use institutional friction in relation to three distinct legislative stages, namely the coalition negotiations, the introduction and processing of legislative proposals in parliament and the adoption of legislation. Dividing the overall legislative

process in different stages characterized by varying levels of institutional friction, allows us to theorize on how the alignment of interest groups with public opinion, as well as the alignment among groups and political parties, shapes policy outcomes. These three 'sources of support' can ensure that friction can be overcome by (1) convincing enough decisionmakers—i.e. a winning coalition of veto-players—and (2) determining policy directions. Before we discuss how these three alignments affect advocacy success in the three distinct stages of the policy process, the next section clarifies how public support, support from allied interest groups and partisan support affect advocacy success.

Three favorable actor alignments

First, lobbying has repeatedly been characterized as a 'collective enterprise'; for a single group to attain its preferences, its alignment with a lobbying coalition and/or side is repeatedly found to be a facilitating factor (Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019; Bunea 2013; Junk & Rasmussen 2019; Klüver 2013; Mahoney 2007a; Mahoney & Baumgartner 2015; Nelson & Yackee 2012; Smith 2000). Junk (2020) nicely summarizes multiple benefits of such alignments; namely, an increase and strengthening of the technical and political information provided to politicians, the possible coordination of strategies, and the signaling of widespread support for a particular policy direction (see also Baumgartner et al. 2009a; Mahoney 2007b; Mahoney & Baumgartner 2015; Nelson & Yackee 2012). Hence, the more groups favor a particular policy, the stronger the signal to politicians and the more information is provided that may persuade previously ambivalent parliamentarians and convince a sufficient number of politicians to take action in line with group preferences (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019; Junk & Rasmussen 2019; Mahoney & Baumgartner 2015; Nelson & Yackee 2012). In this regard, our expectation is summarized in **Hypothesis 2**: *The higher the proportion of groups that supports the position of an interest group, the higher the likelihood of advocacy success.*

Second, recent studies have demonstrated that a supportive public opinion can be a powerful interest group ally (Dür & Mateo 2014; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). Public support is conceptualized as the extent to which interest groups' priorities and positions

are congruent with the public (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019). Politicians can be assumed to be cautious to promote legislation with which large segments of the public disagree because they lack a 'mandate' from the public and out of fear of electoral retributions, or inversely, have clear electoral incentives to respond to public opinion signals (Bevan & Jennings 2014; De Bruycker 2019; Giger & Klüver 2016; Hopkins et al. 2019). For interest groups involved in media advocacy, this implies that the higher the public support, the more these groups can use public opinion as a 'resource' to corroborate their demands. Through media advocacy, groups can reinforce their status as representatives for their constituency and can connect their political demands to the public's preferences in a highly visible manner, thereby putting pressure on policymakers (De Bruycker 2019; Dür & Mateo 2014). Hence, public support increases the likelihood of advocacy success. Or, inversely, media advocacy might amplify public opinion signals and thereby strengthen the impact of public opinion on policy outcomes (Agnone 2007; Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Giger & Klüver 2016). However, public support is not sufficient on its own, issues must be publicly salient. Public salience is understood as the importance the public attributes to certain domains or issues (Beyers et al. 2018; Wlezien 2017). As the public's carrying capacity is limited, only a few policy domains or issues can be simultaneously salient. The media visibility of salient issues makes that the public is better aware of potential costs and benefits, and that electoral consequences are more apparent (Ciuk & Yost 2016; De Bruycker 2019; Smith 2000). Conversely, if issues attract low salience, public preferences remain latent (Zaller 1992). Consequently, without elevated levels of salience, it is much harder for organized interests to use public support to reinforce their political claims. This results in **Hypothesis 3**: *The more salient issues are, the higher the likelihood of advocacy success for groups enjoying public support.*

Third, advocates depend on a favorable partisan context to see their views reflected in adopted policy (Allern & Bale 2012; Olzak et al. 2016). As interest groups are not elected in office, they ultimately rely on politicians who take binding decisions and, at each stage, a particular 'winning coalition' of politicians must back the interest group. The importance of favorable alignments between interest groups and politicians

has been demonstrated repeatedly. For instance, Beyers et al. (2015) found that, legislative proposals stemming from business-friendly Directorate Generals (DGs) of the EC resulted in a closer alignment with business groups and rightist parties, while a closer alignment was observed between environmental associations, labor unions or consumer groups and leftist parties (see also Bernhagen et al. 2015). Especially in case studies focusing on (landmark) legislation in the US context, the importance for interest groups' priorities and positions to be aligned with the preferences of the politicians who initiate and adopt legislation has been extensively studied and found to be a determining factor for advocacy success (Amenta et al. 2005; Andrews 2001; Holyoke 2019; King et al. 2005; Olzak et al. 2016; Soule & King 2006; Soule & Olzak 2004). Romeijn (2020b) presents one of the most large-n tests in the European context of the effect of partisan support on advocacy success; interest groups whose positions are aligned with the positions held by negotiating parties during coalition formation are more likely to attain their preferences. Without favorably disposed politicians, no political action will be taken that furthers the group's interests. Partisan allies are important because party politicians can introduce and adopt legislation that is favorable to interest groups (Amenta et al. 2010; Olzak et al. 2016). **Hypothesis 4** summarizes our expectation: *The more support from the governing parties groups enjoy, the higher the likelihood of advocacy success.*

Advocacy success throughout the policy process

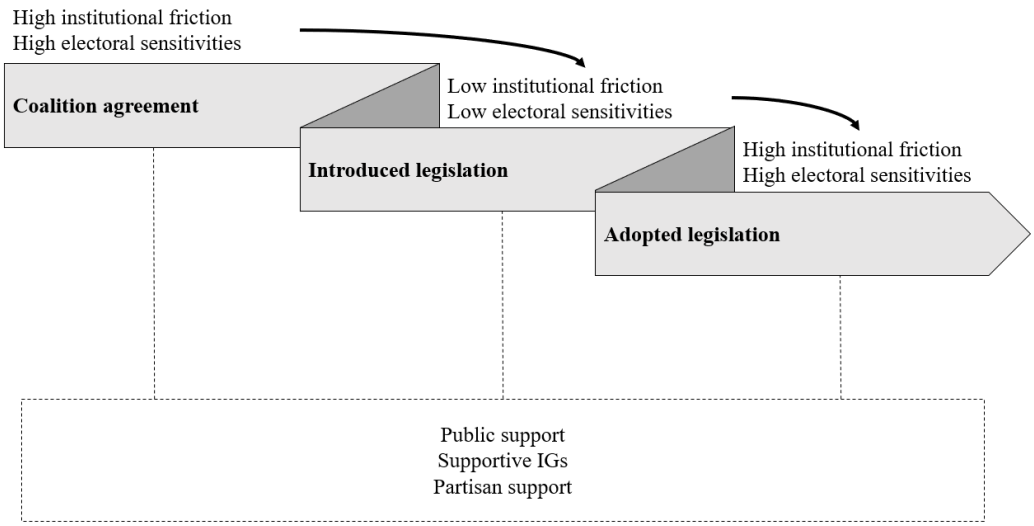
The fifth hypothesis combines our expectations for the three alignments—public opinion, other groups, and political parties—with our cumulative understanding of the policymaking process. Advocacy successes are expected to be contingent on the extent to which an interest group is favorably aligned with public opinion, other groups and political parties. Support from these three 'sources' can help interest groups to overcome institutional friction, yet the extent to which each of these 'sources of support' help to overcome friction depends on the specific stage in the policy process.

Additionally, based on responsiveness and congruence studies, we posit that electoral sensitivities vary across the policy process and this variation affects the extent

to which the alignment of interest groups with public opinion affects preference attainment. Our core expectation reasons that the impact of public support for groups' positions on advocacy success resembles a parabola: public support is key in the initial stage (i.e. coalition agreement), its effect weakens when the legislative process takes off (i.e. introduction of legislation in parliament), to become again stronger for advocacy success in the final stage (i.e. adoption of legislation). During later stages, alignment with other groups and governing parties are expected to be significant explanatory factors for success. Figure 1 visualizes our core expectation.

First, when the coalition agreement is negotiated, interest groups enjoying broad public support are expected to be more successful (compared to groups faced with public opposition) because of their appeal to legislators' electoral sensitivities (Bernardi et al. 2020; Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Bremer et al. 2020; De Bruycker 2019; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). After all, elections were just held—the outcome of which reflects the general public's preferences—and politicians, more specifically party leaders, are tasked with finding a governing majority which translates the electoral result into public policy. Institutional friction is also quite high. Several parties need to find an agreement, each party can veto the agreement, and the coalition agreement needs to be ratified by the party membership; which constrains decision-making. Yet, the early stage of the policy process makes party leaders somewhat less constrained as policy options are not strongly anchored and many details still need to be fleshed out. Hence, in terms of policy substance, policymakers have, compared to other stages, more room to maneuver. During coalition negotiations, politicians need to make decisions on a wide range of issues, but they face uncertainty about which of their policy priorities and positions would be faced with public support or opposition. Therefore, and despite coalition negotiations usually taking place behind closed doors, politicians might strategically rely on interest groups for expertise and societal support (Romeijn 2020b). Specifically, interest groups enjoying broad public support can incentivize negotiating parties to earmark issues for legislative action given the prospective risks and rewards at the ballot box for failing or succeeding to respond to public concerns.

Figure 1. Overview of theoretical framework



Second, typical for the subsequent parliamentary stage is the lower institutional friction compared to the coalition negotiations. On the one hand, a wide range of politicians belonging to different parties may propose legislation and the actions taken by politicians are less consequential compared to the coalition negotiations or later decision-making stages (King et al. 2005; Soule & King 2006). Only a few politicians need to pay attention and be favorably disposed to the group's demands, for the media advocate to see its preferences reflected in introduced legislation. These might well be politicians from opposition parties or parliamentarians specialized in a particular topic, who are not necessarily preoccupied with electoral concerns. Moreover, the politicians' initiatives could stimulate media advocacy and/or could be a response to media advocacy efforts. One other hand, some friction is present that affects the impact of advocacy. The leeway of parliamentarians of governing parties is constrained by the content of the coalition agreement that shapes the overall legislative issue attention for the coming legislative term (Moury 2011), which emphases the importance of advocacy success during the coalition negotiating stage. Hence, once the legislative agenda is set, politicians have fewer policy proposals competing for their attention and thus more time to analyze policy implications.

These changes during the second stage have important implications for organized interests. More precisely, the relative importance of alignment with public opinion will decrease, while alignment with political parties and other organized interests becomes more important. First, groups successful in the coalition negotiation stage need persistent support from the governing parties to see their preferences reflected in introduced legislation. However, the lower institutional friction presents opportunities to interest groups that were unsuccessful during the coalition negotiation stage (Jourdain et al. (2017). Here, when interest groups broadly supported political demands align with the policy stances of opposition parties, the introduction of legislation by these parties might help to draw attention to their concerns. Second, during this stage, the alignment with other mobilized groups becomes key. The switch towards more fine-grained legislative work implies that a group lobbying on a specific issue that is supported by many other mobilized interests serves as strong signal to parliamentarians and ministers to introduce legislation (or an amendment) in line with the preferences of these groups. To vet the details, often a large range of interest groups and policy experts are consulted to acquire technical and political information on those affected by the proposed legislation (Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Cross et al. 2019; Pedersen et al. 2014). Hence, the broader the range of advocates on the same side, the more likely that the defended position will gain political support (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019; Junk 2019a).

Finally, once a bill moves forward, various positions need to be reconciled and politicians belonging to different parties need to be convinced so that a bill eventually can be presented to the floor for its final passage. Consequently, compared to the previous stages, institutional friction is highest in the final stage. To begin with, the final adoption involves the support of one *large* winning coalition. Moreover, when a proposal moves forward, political controversies get settled, technical and legal details are fleshed out, making that with each succeeding stage it becomes more difficult to change the direction of policies (Bevan & Rasmussen 2020; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2019; King et al. 2005; Soule & King 2006). In short, the high institutional friction makes it difficult for interest groups to attain advocacy success and especially groups that failed during the earlier stages will face an uphill struggle. While electoral incentives were relatively

less important during the second stage, it can be assumed that the governing majority will be cautious to adopt legislation with which a large portion of the public disagrees out of fear of electoral retributions (Bevan & Jennings 2014; Giger & Klüver 2016; Hopkins et al. 2019).

To summarize, we hypothesize that interest groups enjoying broad public support are successful in the first stage. However, the extent to which group positions were reflected in the legislative debate (second stage) may affect whether their views are incorporated in the final legislative outcome (third stage). Here, the legislative work of opposition and majority parties and/or interest group lobbying might attenuate the effect of public opinion support. This results in our final **Hypothesis 5**: *Public support has a stronger positive effect on success in (1) the coalition agreement, its effect weakens when (2) legislative proposals are introduced in parliament, but the effect of public support is again stronger for attaining success in (3) the final legislative outcome. In addition, in later stages, partisan support and support from other mobilized interests become significant for advocacy success.*

Data and research design

The analysis relies on a sample of 110 policy issues, stemming from an online voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters (Flanders n=1,053, Wallonia n=1,028). This sample provides data on public opinion necessary to construct the variable measuring the 'degree of public support or opposition'. The voter survey was conducted in the run-up to the (sub)national and European elections of 25 May 2014 and resulted in an average response rate of 17%. Respondents could either agree or disagree with a policy statement (Lesschaeve 2017b). All of the 110 sampled policy issues—of which 37 national, 34 Flemish and 39 Walloon/Francophone issues—meet the following criteria: unidirectionality, specificity, attributable to one dominant level of government and deal substantive regulatory and/or (re)distributive policies. Administrative acts or detailed budgetary allocations were excluded from the sample. The sample accounted for considerable variation across issues in terms of policy domains, legislative initiatives introduced, interest group mobilization and media prominence of specific issues. This

section describes the dependent, independent and control variables. Further details about the sample representativeness, the distributions and validity of each variable and robustness checks of the regression models can be found in the Appendix.

To construct our dependent variable—advocacy success at three stages of the legislative process—we rely on the preference attainment method (Dür 2008). The measurement of success, according to this method, entails that we match interest groups' issue positions (in the news media) with the respective policy outcomes on the issue in three legislative stages. First, to assess interest group positions, a news-content analysis on each issue was conducted (for similar approaches see De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Rasmussen et al. 2018a). In a first step, a computer-automated Boolean keyword search in four news media outlets was applied for the period June 2013-December 2017. This resulted in 26,512 newspaper articles. Next, interest organizations were computer-automated identified in these articles based on a curated dictionary containing the names and abbreviations of 2,320 Belgian interest organizations (see Beyers et al. 2020). Subsequently, a multi-stage stratified sample of 2,306 articles was manually coded. Coders indicated whether the identified interest groups made relevant claims about the issue at hand. A claim was defined as a quotation or paraphrase in the news directly connected to a specific interest group (De Bruycker 2017; Koopmans & Statham 1999). In total, 256 unique interest organizations made 1073 claims on 84 issues (leaving 26 issues with no relevant interest group identification and/or claim) and each position was coded in favor or against the policy statements as presented in the voter survey. Unclear policy positions were excluded. The coding was conducted by the authors, a research assistant and three student assistants; inter-coder reliability checks were performed and found to be satisfactory (see Methodological chapter).

Second, we assessed whether issue positions are in line with decisions taken in (1) the coalition agreement, (2) legislation introduced in parliament, and (4) the final adopted legislation. An extensive legislative content analysis on each issue was conducted covering the coalition agreements of the national, Flemish, Walloon Region and Francophone Community governments and 224 bills introduced in each parliament during the legislature 2014-2019 linked to one or multiple of the 110 issues. Specifically,

we paired each identified interest group position with the respective policy outcome in each of the three policy stages. A such, after omitting missing values, for the coalition negotiation stage we analyze position-issue dyads (n=296 unique combinations), for introduced legislation we assess position-issue-proposal dyads (n=283 unique combinations), and for adopted legislation we evaluate position-issue-bill dyads (n=205 unique combinations). Spearman's rank-order correlations between advocacy successes in the three stages are presented in Appendix.

To measure the degree of public support, each interest group's claim was linked to the share of the public that adopted the same position as the group. A continuous variable was created ranging from 0 (opposing public) to 100 (supportive public). For example, on the issue *'The retirement age should not rise'*, 72% of the public agrees, while 22% disagrees with the statement. So, when a group holds a position in favor of the statement, the group gets a value of 72 (models presented in Appendix). Alternatively, we created a dichotomous variable measuring whether the position of the *largest share of the public* coincides with the position adopted by each interest group. For example, on the issue of the retirement age, groups holding a position in favor of the statement, receive the value '1' because the share of public that agrees is larger than the share of the public that disagrees with the statement (models presented in main text). Public opinion was measured right before the 2014 elections but interest groups' claims in the media were collected for the period June 2013-December 2017. Therefore, we control for the timing of the identified media claims and distinguish between claims made before the 2014 elections, claims made during the federal coalition formation and claims made after coalition formation ended.

Media salience was measured through the number of newspaper articles web-scraped per issue. The variable was logarithmically transformed due to being left-skewed. Additionally, public salience is measured by scoring each issue according to the number of respondents in the 2014 European Election Survey (EES) who indicated a domain as the first or second 'most important problem' facing the domestic government (Schmitt et al. 2015). The recoding process of the 148 topics coded by the EES-survey conductors and merging small and closely related domains (such as foreign affairs and

defense) resulted in a match between issues clustered within 12 domains. The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its skewed distribution.

The measurement of lobbying sides is captured by the proportion of all interest groups on an issue expressing a position either in agreement or disagreement with the statement, which is respectively assigned to each group holding the same position. Thus, if three groups agree and one group disagrees with the issue statement, the groups that agree have the support of two-thirds of the other interest groups active on the issue, while the group that disagrees has no support. Additionally, we control for the total number of groups active in the news per issue.

To measure the degree of partisan support for each position, a continuous variable was created capturing the support from governing parties—expressed in seat share—having the same position as the interest group. Political parties' positions are based on the same set of 110 issues included in the voter survey and for which the parties, in a separate survey among party officials, indicated whether the party agreed or disagreed with the issue statements (for more details see Lesschaeve 2017b). Spearman's rank-order correlations between the three sources of support are presented in Appendix.

Our models control for several variables situated at the issue-level. First, we control whether interest groups defend or challenge the policy status quo (SQ), each claim was assessed against the legislation in place before the elections and consulted through Moniteur Belge (the official bulletin of all legislative acts). This is an important control variable given that much research has indicated a status quo bias (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009a). A dichotomous measure distinguishes between SQ-challengers and SQ-defenders. Third, in Belgium regional governments have distinct policy competencies and these are ruled by different political parties during the 2014-2019 legislature (i.e. Flanders center-right, Wallonia center-left, and the national government is composed of center-right parties). A categorical control variable was created, distinguishing between national, Flemish and Francophone/Walloon issues. In addition, we control for the legislative context when modelling advocacy success. Regarding the second stage, we control whether a proposal is a government or opposition initiative as this captures an important dimension of the political game (see below).

Next, a set of organizational control variables is included. All these measures are derived from a representative survey performed in 2016 among 1,687 Belgian organized interests (see Beyers et al. 2020). First, we control for group type and categorized organizations into: (1) concentrated interests, including business associations, professional associations, and associations of institutions and (semi-)public authorities; (2) representative diffuse organizations, including labor unions, cause and identity groups with formal members and (3) solidarity organizations, including cause and identity groups without formal members (Binderkrantz 2008; Halpin 2006). Second, we controlled for the number of employed staff as organizations with more staff have greater capacity to develop advocacy efforts. To gauge staff size, respondents were asked *'How many paid staff (full time equivalent), does your organization employ?'.* The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its right-skewed distribution. Third, groups developing rigorous advocacy tactics might gain more access and influence compared to those limitedly active. A variable measuring the intensity of inside and outside advocacy tactics per policy domain was operationalized based on the interest groups (in)direct targeting of politicians across multiple venues following Boräng and Naurin (2016). Each respondent indicated on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'once a week' how frequently they engaged in inside and outside advocacy. The responses were recoded to reflect the number of times, per policy domain and linked to the 110 issues, a certain activity was performed per year, to then sum these values for each organization and divide this by 52 (weeks in a year). Finally, to differentiate insiders from outsiders, we mapped for each of the 1,687 groups interest organizations whether they had access to one of 616 Belgian advisory councils (Willems 2020). In the end, out of the 1,687 organizations in the bottom-up mapping, 608 organizations enjoy access to advisory councils (36%). As such, a variable measuring access was created counting the number of seats each interest group has across advisory councils. The variable was logarithmically transformed due to its right-skewed distribution.

Lobbying and the Belgian legislative process

In Belgium, similar to other European countries, the government is the dominant agenda-setter in legislative politics (see also Pedersen et al. 2014), making that the legislative process follows predictable patterns across all Belgian government levels. In this regard, Table 1 presents the trickle-down features of our dependent variable, advocacy success, in earlier stages on to the next legislative stages. In short, the overview illustrates that success in an earlier stage strongly determines success in a later stage (Hypothesis 1). First, through the coalition agreement, the (sub)national governments outline their policy plans for the coming term in office and these programmatic directions strongly shape future legislative action (Moury 2011; Zubek & Klüver 2015). Based on the coalition agreement, cabinet members initiate legislation and present their proposals to parliament. While coalition agreements in Belgium are comprehensive and detailed, they do not cover each and every topic on which the governing parties will draft legislation in the coming term (Moury 2011). Moreover, issues on which the governing parties hold conflicting positions can hamper the introduction and adoption of legislation on these issues, despite having addressed such issues in the coalition agreement (Zubek & Klüver 2015). This entails that interest groups attaining their preferences in the coalition agreement do not always see their preferences translated into (adopted) legislation and leaves room for interest groups to seek preference attainment in later decision-making stages. And groups that do not attain their preferences in the coalition agreement, might attain advocacy success when legislation is introduced in parliament addressing issues untouched in the coalition agreement or that oppose the position of the governing parties. Indeed, the strong agenda-setting role of government does not entail that parliament has no influence on legislation. Parliamentarians themselves can also function as agenda-setters and introduce new legislation. Groups advocating on issues not mentioned in the coalition agreement can thus rectify this situation when legislation is initiated in parliament by opposition or majority parties.

Table 1 indicates that also opposition parliamentarians regularly take on such agenda-setting role, which can benefit interest groups to attain advocacy success. Although, proposals from opposition parties are rarely enacted as these are usually

vetoed by majority parties, such proposals can be part of a strategy to initiate debate or challenge the governing coalition. Proposals initiated by opposition parties reflect, at least to some extent, the political attention for issues of high public concern as well as the alignment of politicians with some interests (Vliegenthart & Walgrave 2011). Nevertheless, in all cases, position attainment in legislation initiated by the majority parties is a precondition for position attainment in adopted legislation; about half of the proposals initiated by majority parties are adopted, while none of the opposition parties initiatives is adopted.[1] Proposals initiated by the governing parties often concern issues ensuing from the coalition agreement and due to strong party discipline these proposals are more easily adopted—especially when they originate from the executive.

Table 1. Advocacy successes across the policy process (n=321 dyads)

Coalition Agreement ➔		***Introduced legislation*** ➔		***Adopted legislation***	
No attention for issue priority	77	No success	3	No success	3
		Attention for issue priority	29	Not adopted	50
		Position attainment in opposition initiatives	21		
		Position attainment in majority initiatives	24	Not adopted	11
				Adopted	13
Attention for issue priority	116	No success	3	No success	3
		Attention for issue priority	48	Not adopted	95
		Position attainment in opposition initiatives	47		
		Position attainment in majority initiatives	18	Not adopted	6
				Adopted	12
Position attainment	128	No success	16	No success	16
		Attention for issue priority	26	Not adopted	41
		Position attainment in opposition initiatives	15		
		Position attainment in majority initiatives	71	Not adopted	26
				Adopted	45

Analyses

To test the hypotheses, Table 2 presents logistic regression analyses modelling lobbying success. For this purpose, we combined the success outcomes so that 0 signifies that a

group has no success and 1 signifies position attainment. Given the repeated measures—several issues (but not all) have multiple mobilized interest groups *and* some interest groups (but not all) lobby across multiple issues—the assumptions of independence and homoscedasticity might be violated, and a pooled logistic regression might overestimate the magnitude of the predictors. Therefore, we used models that corrected standard errors for observations clustered within organizations.[xiii] Model 3 and 4 account for the cumulative nature of the policymaking process by including the success outcome of the coalition agreement as an independent variable. For the final voting stage (Model 5 and 6), success in introduced legislation perfectly predicts the success outcome in adopted legislation, hence this variable is not included. Numeric variables are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing this by two times the standard deviation; this facilitates the interpretation of the interaction parameters (Gelman 2008). Moving one unit of analysis corresponds to moving one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.

Across all models the coefficients for the organizational control variables deliver some interesting findings. First, SQ-defenders have a lower likelihood of attaining their preferences. This is not surprising, our sample inherently deals with initiatives of (attempted) policy change by legislators, hence SQ-defenders are at a disadvantage in terms of preference attainment. Moreover, occupying an insider position significantly increases the likelihood of preference attainment in adopted legislation. Those who are more central to the system of advisory councils, attain more lobbying success. This is a relevant result as it demonstrates that access is related to advocacy success. Furthermore, in terms of media advocacy and although effects differ across models, we tentatively conclude that diffuse representative interests and solidarity interests are not more likely to attain their preferences compared to concentrated business interests. While business might be more successful in the coalition agreement, citizen groups—through media advocacy—seem to make up for this initial set-back once legislation reaches the parliamentary arena, albeit largely through proposals by the opposition parties (see below). Finally, higher levels of staff do not affect preference attainment, but advocacy intensity has a positive effect. Overall, these results indicate that it is not just

organizational capacity and resources that affect success, but rather *when* and *how* groups deploy their resources – in relation to which issue – that matters for advocacy success.

To assess our hypotheses, we turn to the direct effects of public support, the proportional size of the favorably aligned lobby side and the support from the governing parties. Hypothesis 3, which reasons that lobbying success depends of the public support an interest group gains, is confirmed for the first phase. Figure 2 demonstrates that the predicted probability of preference attainment in the coalition agreement is 14% higher for interest groups aligned with the largest share of the public. Moreover, the positive effect of being aligned with the public is heightened when issues are more salient (see interaction effect in Model 2). If interest groups enjoy support from the largest share of the public, their predicted probability of preference attainment in the coalition agreement increases by 61% when moving from low levels of news salience to high levels of news salience. Conversely, broad public support does not wield a significant direct effect on legislation introduced in the second stage and it even has a negative effect on adopted legislation. To make sense of the absence (in Model 3) and reversed effect of public support on advocacy success (in Model 5 and Model 6), we turn to our next hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2, which states that success increases, the larger the relative size of the supportive lobby side, is confirmed for the parliamentary arena, but not for first phase of coalition negotiations. Figure 2 demonstrates that the predicted probability of preference attainment increases by 35% for introduced legislation and by 22% for adopted legislation when moving from a low proportion of supportive groups to a high proportion of supportive groups aligned with the interest group's issue position. The results furthermore confirm Hypothesis 4 which states that the more support a group enjoys from the governing parties, the higher the likelihood of advocacy success. As is depicted in Figure 2, except for the coalition agreement, the more support from the governing parties interest groups enjoy for their position, the higher the likelihood of attaining their preference in introduced and adopted legislation.

Table 2. Logistic regression analyses modelling advocacy success

	Coalition agreement		Introduced legislation		Adopted legislation	
Organizational variables	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
Group type (ref.cat.=concentrated)	-	-	-	-	-	-
- Representative diffuse	-0.63*	-0.91***	0.25	0.45	-0.44	-0.40
	(0.37)	(0.33)	(0.22)	(0.29)	(0.41)	(0.42)
- Solidarity	-1.13	-1.37**	1.46***	1.82***	-0.33	-0.26
	(0.70)	(0.67)	(0.51)	(0.60)	(0.61)	(0.62)
Staff (log)	0.22	0.30	-0.31	-0.37	0.05	0.08
	(0.38)	(0.41)	(0.45)	(0.45)	(0.40)	(0.39)
Seats in AC (log)	0.60	0.49	0.53	0.69	1.33**	1.34**
	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.41)	(0.44)	(0.59)	(0.60)
Advocacy intensity (log)	0.66*	0.73**	-0.28	-0.30	0.82**	0.76**
	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.38)
Position variables						
Support from largest share of the public (ref.cat.=not)	0.87***	0.89***	0.32	1.84***	-1.06**	-0.96*
	(0.33)	(0.27)	(0.30)	(0.60)	(0.52)	(0.53)
Proportion of supportive IGs	-0.14	-0.14	1.11***	0.27	1.03**	1.04**
	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.22)	(0.34)	(0.51)	(0.51)
Support from governing parties (proportion of seats)	0.04	-0.19	2.41***	2.67***	2.52***	2.63***
	(0.59)	(0.52)	(0.33)	(0.36)	(0.53)	(0.55)
Position vs. SQ (ref.cat.=SQ-defender)						
- SQ-challenger	1.83***	1.90***	1.53***	1.37***	2.41***	2.40***
	(0.54)	(0.62)	(0.30)	(0.33)	(0.65)	(0.67)
Political context variables						
News salience (log)	0.82	-0.26	-0.92**	-1.61***	1.98***	2.60*
	(0.64)	(0.79)	(0.44)	(0.50)	(0.72)	(1.38)
Public salience (log)	1.01	0.84	0.30	0.44	-0.42	-0.30
	(0.71)	(0.73)	(0.36)	(0.48)	(0.45)	(0.42)
Number of IGs in the news	0.23	0.24	0.93*	0.55	0.72	0.69
	(0.40)	(0.42)	(0.55)	(0.55)	(0.62)	(0.61)
Timing of media claim (ref.cat.=before elections)	-	-	-	-	-	-
- During coalition formation	-0.83	-0.75	-0.31	-0.31	-0.31	-0.31
	(0.55)	(0.53)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.70)	(0.66)
- After coalition formation	-0.45	-0.47	-0.29	-0.44*	0.02	0.05
	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.38)	(0.38)
Competent government level (ref.cat.=national)						
- Flanders	2.07**	1.96**	0.20	0.26	0.21	0.41
	(0.85)	(0.91)	(0.65)	(0.76)	(0.72)	(0.75)
- Walloon/Francophone	-0.42	-0.35	-0.65	-0.50	-0.92	-0.91
	(1.01)	(1.09)	(0.53)	(0.57)	(0.81)	(0.79)
Legislative context variables						

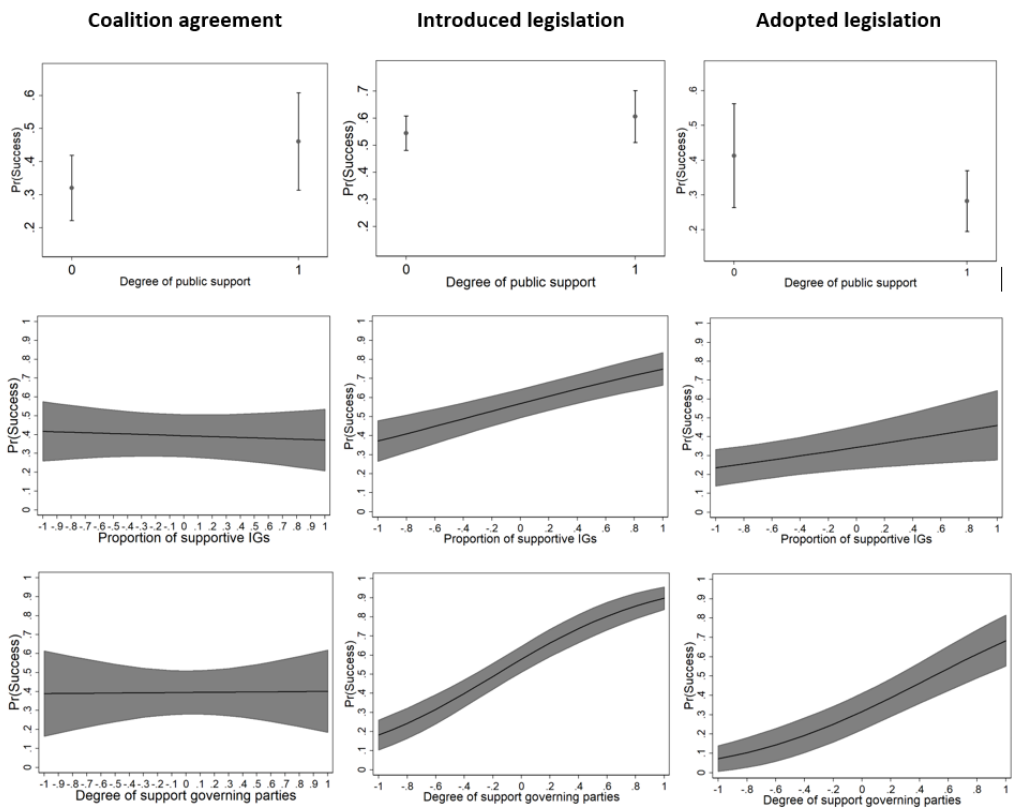
Majority proposal (ref.cat.=opposition proposal)			-0.28	0.66		
			(0.56)	(0.81)		
Success in coalition agreement (ref.cat.=No attention for issue priority)			-	-		
- Attention for issue priority			0.81**	1.25***		
			(0.33)	(0.39)		
- Position attainment			1.09**	2.09***		
			(0.47)	(0.65)		
Interaction terms						
Support largest share of public*News salience		1.91**		1.11		-1.00
		(0.87)		(0.68)		(1.29)
Majority proposal*Support largest share of public				-2.88***		
				(0.80)		
Support largest share of public*Proportion of supportive IGs				1.93**		
				(0.85)		
Constant	-1.66***	-1.52**	-1.30**	-2.32***	-1.91**	-2.05**
	(0.62)	(0.61)	(0.53)	(0.73)	(0.77)	(0.95)
Model fit statistics						
Number of Observations	296	296	283	283	205	205
Loglikelihood	-146.348	-141.935	-135.961	-125.284	-81.777	-81.198
AIC	327	320	312	297	198	198
BIC	389	386	385	380	254	258

*Note: clustered standard errors in parentheses and significance levels indicated by * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01*

The predicted probability of success moving from 10% seat share of backing from governing parties to 55% seat share (scale ranges between 0 and 60%), results in an increase of 52% in the predicted probability of success in introduced legislation and an increase of 37% for adopted legislation.

Overall, the different results for the three stages thus confirm Hypothesis 5; the alignment with other groups and political parties becomes relatively more important to attain advocacy success in stage two and three compared to stage one. Moreover, as hypothesized, public support has a positive effect on success during coalition negotiations, its effect weakens when legislative proposals are introduced in parliament, but the effect of public support is again stronger for attaining success in the final outcome.

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of preference attainment across the legislative stages for three key explanatory variables



To further analyze the evidence, we included two interaction terms in Model 4. First, we assessed whether interest groups enjoying support from the largest share of the public have a higher (or lower) likelihood to attain their position in either proposals initiated by majority or opposition parties. Here, the results indicate that groups aligned with the public majority, have a relatively lower likelihood of attaining their position in proposals initiated by the majority parties. The predicted probability of position attainment in introduced legislation by the governing majority 15% lower for groups enjoying support from the largest share of the public compared to groups facing public opposition. Conversely, for legislation by the opposition, the predicted probability of success is 27% higher for groups enjoying support from the largest share of the public compared to groups facing public opposition. The alignment of interest groups with public majorities can thus result in two success outcomes. On the one hand, public support makes that some groups are successful during the coalition negotiation stage. On the other hand, during the second stage other groups, in particular those who failed to attain their preferences in the coalition negotiation stage, are successful among opposition parties which bandwagon on the strong public support these groups enjoy (see also Romeijn 2020a).

Second, we tested whether interest groups aligned with public majorities have a higher (or lower) likelihood to attain their preferences depending on the proportion of supportive groups lobbying on their side. Here, we find a positive effect, which is in line with research by Rasmussen et al. (2018a). When the proportion of supportive groups is high, the predicted probability of position attainment in introduced legislation is 26% higher for groups aligned with the public. Conversely, if the proportion of supportive interest groups is low, the predicted probability of preference attainment is 21% lower for groups aligned with the public. Overall, these results indicate that groups enjoying higher levels of public support, often attain their preferences in opposition proposals and especially when these groups receive support from many other interest groups. These findings again confirm the bandwagon-mechanism in the interaction process between public opinion, media advocacy and political parties. Opposition parties introduce

favorable proposals in response to interest groups enjoying broad public support and on issues where many groups are mobilized in favor of these proposals.

These results also explicate why we find a negative effect of public opinion support on position attainment in adopted legislation. During the second stage, majority parties are bound by the coalition agreement, making them—compared to the opposition parties—less able to respond to issues of high importance to mobilized interests (see also Romeijn 2020a). Moreover, as none of the opposition's bills are adopted, groups whose preferences are reflected in these bills loose in the final voting stage. During the 2014-2019 term, the Belgian (federal) government introduced wide range of unpopular austerity policies and policies aimed at increasing the number of citizens in the working force. Examples of such issues are the 'rise of the retirement age', 'increased value added taxes', 'indexation stop on wages', 'wage moderations' and the 'community service for the long-term unemployed'. It is especially after coalition negotiations ended that these policies provoked large-scale and enduring counteractive lobbying efforts—by labor unions, anti-poverty networks, youth and women organizations, social welfare advocates and human rights associations—that were able to mobilize large segments of the public (see also De Vydt & Ketelaars 2020). In sum, while much of the adopted legislation enjoys public support, also from interest groups (49%), in a substantial number of cases, especially on those where mobilization emerged during the second stage, public support is rather low.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explain how the public support that interest groups enjoy for their policy positions and groups' favorable alignment with other mobilized interest groups and political parties shapes advocacy success. Our core expectation reasoned that the relationship between public opinion support and advocacy success resembles a parabola; public support for interest groups' positions will be key in the initial stage of the policy process (i.e. coalition agreement), its effect weakens in the middle of the process (i.e. introduction of legislation in parliament), to become again stronger in the final stages of the legislative process (i.e. adopted legislation). Additionally, during the later stages,

support from other interest groups and governing parties were expected to be key explanatory factors for advocacy success.

Overall, when comparing the varying significance of our key independent variables across all models, we can conclude that our core expectations are confirmed. More precisely, public support matters for the success of interest groups in each stage of the policy process, but the precise directionality varies across the stages and in complex ways. As hypothesized, public support positively affects position attainment in the coalition agreement, but when legislation is introduced in parliament, public support is especially helpful for those interest groups that previously failed to attain their position. And while public support results in a negative effect on advocacy success in adopted legislation, interest groups that attain their preferences in the final stage of the legislative process still enjoy considerable levels of public support. Hence, the negative coefficients in Model 5 and 6 point at lower importance of alignment with the public during the third stage *relative* to the importance of this alignment in the first and the second stage. It is important to note that also in the third stage a substantial set of interest groups aligned with the public (49% public support) are successful in attaining their positions in adopted legislation. However, in a substantial number of cases, interest groups aligned with broad public segments also fail to reach their position.

Another important finding is that, as expected, the relative importance of alignments with other interest groups and political parties increases in the second and third stage of the policy process (compared to the first stage). Distinguishing distinct stages and separating opposition and governing parties also allowed us to better characterize the multifaceted nature of media advocacy. As such, the results demonstrate that advocacy can be used in a variety of ways as a weapon of influence. While a substantial part of media advocacy is initiated by 'winners' who are successful during the coalition negotiation stage, the 'losers' of the coalition negotiations become active in later stages. Opposition parties play a key bandwagoning role in this process as they support these losers, especially when these organizations mobilize in large numbers and gain considerable public support, by initiating legislation. Nonetheless, especially in the

parliamentary arena, support from the governing parties is crucial for interest groups to attain their issue position.

Normatively, these results entail that interest group lobbying does not systematically weaken the connection between the general public and policy outcomes. On the contrary, interest groups—through media advocacy—can amplify public opinion. Interestingly, variables traditionally seen as important such as resources or group type (for instance business versus non-business), have no significant impact on advocacy success. Yet, widespread public support is no absolute guarantee for advocacy success in adopted legislation, even when interest groups are supported by large scale interest mobilization. Political elites still hold the ultimate key to policy outcomes, which becomes apparent when considering the trickle-down effects of advocacy success from the coalition agreement onwards. Many interest groups are unsuccessful on the issues they seek to influence and even advocates who were successful in the coalition negotiations may lose the battle during later stages of the policy process.

Two other implications are worth highlighting. First, much research on advocacy success focused on one policy stage such as coalition negotiations, consultations in parliamentary committees, government committees or agency rule-making, or highlights only the final legislative outcome (Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Yackee & Yackee 2006). Our results show that we should be careful with generalizing from these studies and that an assessment of advocacy successes is highly affected by the analyzed venues. Second, our analysis also confirms the importance of politicization for advocacy and public opinion. One interesting result from our analysis is that issue level salience generates much more explanatory power than domain level salience. This is an important finding as it urges us to be cautious when analyzing representation processes at the policy domain. Our results suggest that issue-level variation is much more relevant than domain-level variation which means that policy domains that are generally viewed as less salient might embody a significant set of highly salient policy issues.

One implication is that we need more large-N-issue-level instead of domain-level analyses, in addition to research designs that consider the sequential nature of the policy process. Future research can also broaden the scope from media advocacy to other

lobbying channels such as advisory councils and parliamentary hearings. We would expect the effect of public support on advocacy success to be clearer for groups having formal access to the policymaking process, especially when issues are salient. It might also be fruitful to further disentangle the effect of public support for advocacy success comparing regulatory, distributive, and redistributive policy issues. For now, our results indicate that media advocacy can and does lead to advocacy success, especially when enjoying broad public support and when a group is backed by many other groups lobbying along its side. Yet, policy advocates depend crucially on the partisan support from the governing parties for achieving policy change.

Conclusion

This dissertation analyzed interest groups' functioning as intermediaries between citizens and public policy; and whether interest groups strengthen or weaken the well-functioning of representative democracy. The involvement of interest groups in public policymaking provokes much controversy. On the one hand, the unchecked political involvement of special interests might bias policymaking in favor of the happy few (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Lowery et al. 2015; Schlozman et al. 2012; Strolovitch 2008). The lobbying scandals making news headlines invigorate such concerns. On the other hand, some interest groups can strengthen the connection between citizens' preferences and public policy. For instance, through media advocacy, groups often amplify public concerns and thereby put pressure on policymakers (Agnone 2007; Bernardi et al. 2020; De Bruycker 2019).

This dissertation addressed this controversy by examining when and how interest groups connect the general public and policymakers in each step of the *influence production process* (Lowery & Brasher 2004; Lowery & Gray 2004b). Specifically, I analyzed the extent to which interest groups incorporate the policy preferences of the general public in their positions (article 2: mobilization), how groups' alignment with public opinion affects access to advisory councils (article 3: access), news media prominence (article 4: advocacy activities and access) and advocacy success (article 5: influence).

The take-away conclusion is that interest representation is characterized by an inherent tension between actively engaging members and supporters on the on hand *and* aligning policy objectives with public opinion on the other hand. This tension entails substantial consequences for interest groups' policy access, media prominence and advocacy success. While broad public support helps interest groups to influence public policy, securing ties with members and supporters is vital for interest group maintenance and survival. This dissertation demonstrates that close constituency involvement combined with low levels of public support hampers groups' access to advisory councils,

limits the benefits of media prominence and decreases the chances of advocacy success. These constraining effects of close constituency engagement in advocacy activities are especially pronounced for salient and conflictual issues on which many other interest groups mobilized (i.e. on politicized issues). Hence, the active engagement of members and supporters is especially an asset to gain policy access and exert influence when policy issues are decided upon out of the public spotlight and the scope of conflict remains limited. Interest groups that do enjoy broad public support, in contrast, can more easily put pressure on policymakers in a politicized context.

In sum, interest groups constantly walk a tightrope between acting on their members and supporters' preferences and trying to influence public policy through the strategic alignment with public opinion. Overall, interest groups' issue positions voiced in the news enjoy substantial degrees of public support and the close engagement with members and supporters can result in the supply of societal support to policymakers. However, politicization and the strong involvement of constituencies can also put interest groups' intermediary function under strain. In this regard, interest groups often have a dual and conflicting function in connecting the general public and policymakers.

These main conclusions are based on a large-scale data collection effort centered around a sample of 110 specific policy issues for which public opinion data were available. This set of 110 issues is connected to (1) a media content-analysis to identify groups' positions, measure groups' media prominence and detect the level of salience issues attracted in the news; (2) a mapping of groups' access to advisory councils; (3) a legislative content-analysis to capture policy outcomes and (4) a representative survey of Belgian interest groups.

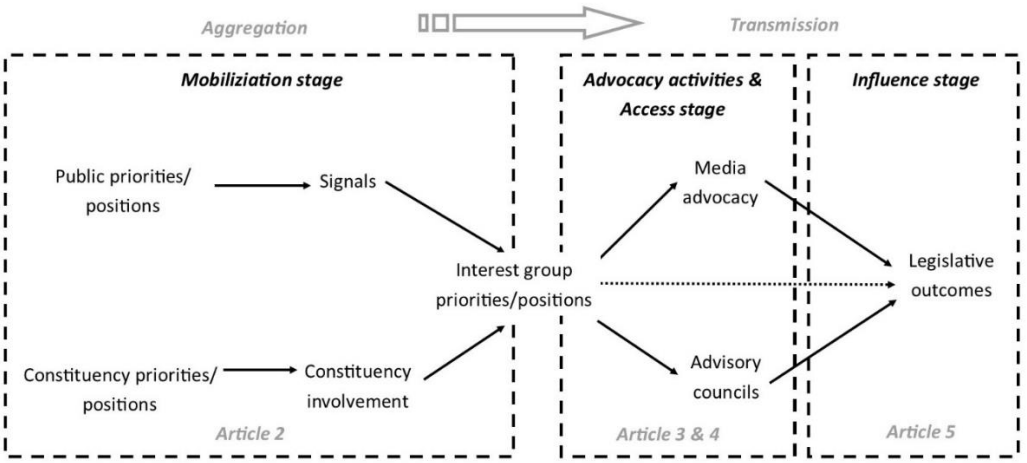
This concluding chapter summarizes the key findings per stage in the influence production process. I discuss how these stages are related to each other and how interest groups' representation of citizen preferences in one stage affects and feeds into the next steps. Next, the broader normative implications for representative democracy of these results on the role of interest groups in representing citizen preferences in policy outcomes are discussed. I reflect on the extent and the conditions under which interest groups complement political parties in functioning as an additional channel for the

political representation of citizens' preferences in public policy. And, I present some basic recommendations, possible remedies and/or policy tools to guard the functioning of representative democracy against the undue influence of special interests. Subsequently, I elaborate on the limitations of my dissertation and possible avenues for further research. Finally, I put all the pieces of the puzzle together and conclude: interest groups walk a tightrope between representing their own constituency's policy preferences and handling pressures from the general public.

1 Key findings: interest groups' representation of citizen preferences

This dissertation theorized upon and examined when and how interest groups represent citizen preferences. I used Lowery and Brasher's (2004) concept of the influence production process as a heuristic device to structure my argument. The first step in the influence production process concerns interest mobilization and deals with how interest groups aggregate preferences. This first step was the focus of Article 2, namely interest groups' aggregation of citizen preferences into issue positions through constituency involvement and/or detecting signals from the general public. Next, I distinguished advocacy strategies and access, on the one hand, and the influence stage, on the other hand. These two latter steps concern the transmission of preferences into the policymaking process. Article 3 and 4 analyzed the transmission of preferences through advisory councils and the news media. Specifically, I examined the consequences of interest groups' degree of (un)congruence with public opinion for access to policymaking venues and presence in public debates. By focusing on 'access', I contributed to existing literature by studying the role of public support for organized interests in what goes on between the moment a group has taken position and becomes politically active *and* the moment the group achieves its policy goals or not. Finally, Article 5 analyzed how advocacy efforts affect policy outcomes and the role of public support therein. Figure 1 depicts how the overall set-up of the dissertation is related to the influence production process.

Figure 1. The aggregation and transmission of citizen preferences by organized interests across the influence production process



First, in Article 2, to understand the role of interest groups in representing citizens' concerns in public policy, I analyzed (with Iskander De Bruycker) to what extent and under which circumstances interest groups and citizens share similar positions on specific policy issues. Indeed, the first step of the influence production process—i.e. mobilization—is largely concerned with how preferences come to be represented by interest groups. During this step, groups are thus preoccupied with developing core policy programs, defining priorities, and formulating specific positions. To do so, the organizational leadership needs to aggregate the preferences of members and supporters, taking the public's signals into account. By putting the mechanisms of representation center stage—i.e. electoral turnover and rational anticipation—I developed testable expectations on interest groups' congruence with public opinion. The results demonstrate that the extent to which constituents are engaged in advocacy work and issue salience affect congruence. First, interest groups with strongly engaged constituents in advocacy activities are not necessarily less or more congruent with public opinion; much depends on the type of constituents represented. Interest groups with formal and concentrated membership bases (such as business interests) are less congruent with the general public due to their extensive internal consultations with their narrow and well-circumscribed constituencies that can hold the organizational

leadership accountable. Conversely, interest groups with formal but diffuse membership bases (such as women's associations) usually have a more encompassing scope and are representative of broader societal segments, hence when they intensely engage their members, these groups are more congruent with public opinion.

Next to constituency involvement, groups may incorporate public opinion in their advocacy objectives by observing direct signals from the public, if these become apparent (rational anticipation). Especially, the higher levels of congruence for 'solidarity' organizations—i.e. organizations that lack a formal membership base and represent interests related to diffuse societal norms and values, or disenfranchised constituencies—might be due to how these groups prioritize issues. Solidarity interests seem to strategically select issues for which their pre-existing preferences already align with prevailing public opinion when publicly mobilizing (Kollman 1998). For groups with a formal membership base, their degree of congruence is affected by the salience issues attract. Especially when issues grow salient, diffuse interest organizations characterized by a formal but broader societal support bases have more leeway in anticipating and incorporating public opinion signals in their policy objectives. Concentrated interest organizations, in contrast, experience less discretion in anticipating and accommodating public opinion into their policy objectives. Salience makes the costs and benefits of policy outcomes exceedingly visible to the members. The results suggest that, on salient issues, concentrated organizations side with their members to the detriment of being congruent with public opinion.

While this article thus details how interest groups' aggregate citizen preferences, the next two articles analyze whether and how these preferences are transmitted to policymakers. In Article 3, I examined interest groups' access to advisory councils and the role of societal support therein. The results indicate that, next to providing technical expertise, the ability to signal broad societal support by having an encompassing constituency is a valuable commodity for organized interests to gain access to advisory councils in politicized policy domains. Yet, while some groups can provide societal support because of their encompassing constituency, others represent concentrated constituencies and/or closely interact with their members and supporters, resulting in the

provision of more narrow support. When close engagement with members and supporters corresponds with the supply of more narrow societal support, the inclination of policymakers to supply access to these organized interests in politicized domains is suppressed. In such domains, policymakers need widespread support to adopt policies, and hence supplying more narrow societal support is a less attractive resource for policymakers facing heightened electoral and legitimacy concerns. Public policies crafted in politicized domains are more likely to be subject to public evaluations and controversial political compromises spurring the demand for broad societal support among policymakers. Yet, such politicized contexts often tie interest groups more closely to their constituents because the cost and benefits of policies are visible to their members and supporters, making internal organizational consensus harder to achieve. As such, constituency involvement especially reaps results in policy domains with limited politicization, while the (potential to) supply of broad societal support helps to gain access to advisory councils in more politicized domains. Moreover, the results of Article 3 demonstrate that politicization promotes a greater and more diverse member composition of advisory councils.

While close constituency involvement can put the provision of broad societal support under strain and thereby hinder access to advisory councils in politicized policy domains, extensive engagement with members and supporters on salient issues can also constrain interest groups' benefits of gaining high degrees of media prominence. In Article 4, I analyzed the extent to which groups that gain high prominence in the news defend positions for which they enjoy broad public support. Interest groups have clear incentives to strive for high media prominence when enjoying broad public support, but journalists ultimately determine which actors and viewpoints gain high prominence in the news. The news media constitute a prime arena through which interest groups can connect their political demands to the broader public's preferences in a highly visible manner. Interest groups thereby appeal to the electoral sensitivities many policymakers face. In this way, they incentivize policymakers to respond to their demands. The results indicate that interest groups in the news often enjoy considerable levels of public support; suggesting that interest groups prioritize issues for which their preferences align

with public opinion. However, on highly salient issues, a small but prominent set of interest groups defended more unpopular positions. While appearing prominent in the news when facing public opposition does not help groups to exert pressure on policymakers, the viewpoints expressed by these groups serve to secure ties with members and supporters. For highly salient issues, the results demonstrate that some groups engage in counteractive lobbying and/or seek to publicly demonstrate to their members and supporters that they acted on a perceived policy threat despite defending an unpopular position. These groups could have avoided the public spotlight on limitedly salient issues, whereas on more salient issues they are pressed to be present in the media despite not being able to use public opinion as a tool to put pressure on policymakers. Thus, these groups get 'pulled' into the news due to the issue-specific context in which they operate. Moreover, interest groups active on salient issues that go against prevailing public opinion and/or publicly come into conflict with their political adversaries (be it with opposing interest groups or government), signal newsworthiness to journalists and results in high media prominence. As such, the results demonstrate that the issue-specific context in which groups operate (i.e. news salience) and journalistic selection mechanisms are key to explain interest groups' media prominence.

These two articles demonstrate that while close constituency involvement secures membership allegiance and support for advocacy activities, it de-aligns groups from public opinion and such de-alignment can be disadvantageous when issues are politicized and policymakers are particularly sensitive to electoral and legitimacy concerns. Especially in politicized policy contexts, groups enjoying widespread public support might reap the benefits of gaining access to advisory councils and media prominence. This implies that interest groups act more as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers when issues are salient, many other groups mobilize, and political conflict gets intensified. Such circumstances make that policymakers demand broader public support. However, politicization simultaneously accentuates the tension interest groups experience between acting on constituency preferences and aligning policy positions with prevailing public opinion. This results in a difficult balancing act when engaging in advocacy work; at times when broader public support is

in demand by policymakers, many groups find themselves in a situation in which their members and supporters want them to take (visible) action while not renouncing their core viewpoints. Interest groups which actively engage their members and supporters therefore at times defend unpopular positions in the news or see their prospects for access to advisory councils decline.

Finally, Article 5 analyzed advocacy success in relation to the degree of public support groups enjoy throughout three distinct stages in the legislative process. The results indicate that public support is key for position attainment during the coalition negotiation stage, especially when it concerns salient issues. Yet, once legislative proposals enter the parliamentary arena, public support becomes less important while support from the governing parties and other mobilized interest groups become stronger predictors for advocacy success. The results furthermore demonstrate that media advocacy in combination with enjoying broad public support is often a 'weapon of the losers'. Those who were unsuccessful during the coalition negotiations resort to the news media to challenge government. They are especially successful in putting their position on the table via the opposition. Nevertheless, groups that gain support from opposition parties, still fail as none of them see their position reflected in adopted legislation. Hence while adopted legislation enjoys, on average, considerable public support; this is not necessarily the result of media advocacy by interest groups defending popular positions. But it can be, groups—championing broadly endorsed positions—that are successful early during the coalition negotiations, have a higher likelihood of being successful in later decision-making stages. In conclusion, advocacy success for groups enjoying broad public support is highly context dependent and determined by early successes during coalition negotiations, while interest groups often fail to attain their positions because they defend policy views that run counter to prevailing public opinion or lack support from the governing parties.

To summarize, how and the extent to which interest groups throughout the multiple steps in the *influence production process* aggregate and transmit citizen preferences to policymakers, is highly context-specific and depends in part on 'gatekeepers' granting access. No simple and straightforward assessment of interest

groups functioning as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers can be made. Interest groups' intermediary function differs strongly on a case by case basis. On some policy issues, a group with intensely engaged members and supporters finds itself aligned with public opinion thereby able to put pressure on policymakers, but the same group might find itself on another issue opposed to prevailing public opinion while defending a position that reflects its constituency's (unpopular) interests. In other words, groups functioning as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers on one issue, might not do so on other issues.

Still, two dynamics can be discerned affecting interest groups functioning as intermediaries for citizens' preferences. Firstly, understanding when and how interest groups strengthen the link between citizens and public policy, is to recognize the grip constituencies can hold over the organization and how this can constrain interest groups' alignment with public opinion. The results suggest that, in general, diffuse interest groups such as women's organizations, environmental associations and consumer groups are more likely to defend a position aligned with broad public segments, especially when closely engaging their encompassing constituency and when being active on salient issues. These groups have substantial leeway to incorporate the preferences of broad societal segments into their advocacy work, which puts them at an advantage to gain access to advisory councils and helps them to put pressure on policymakers via media advocacy. This mechanism is particularly strong when these groups operate in a more politicized context. Though, diffuse interests are not exempt of having to balance constituency interests vis-à-vis prevailing public opinion. This makes that some of these groups voice unpopular policy stances in the news media on salient issues and entails that their prospects on advocacy success decrease. When issues are politicized, many diffuse interests—in particular, groups advocating on behalf of minority and/or disenfranchised societal segments—must visibly defend unpopular but strongly held viewpoints of their members and supporters. Conversely, concentrated interest such as business associations experience more tension between actively engaging their members and aligning their positions with public opinion. Due to their close ties with a more concentrated constituency these groups are more likely to defend unpopular positions,

which might gain considerable news coverage when issues are politicized and decrease their likelihood of access to advisory councils in politicized policy domains. Consequently, their prospects on advocacy success also decrease.

Secondly, understanding when and how interest groups strengthen the connection between citizens and public policy, is to recognize the key role policymakers play in this regard: policymakers' demand for broad societal support can create its supply by interest groups. Interest groups are either constrained or have opportunities contingent on the—often context-specific—demands made by gatekeepers. Many interest groups scholars view access—for instance to advisory councils and the news media—as the result of a resource-exchange relationship in which interest groups supply valuable resources to policymakers and/or journalists who act as gatekeepers (for reviews see Berkhout 2013; Binderkrantz et al. 2017a). This dissertation explicitly theorized upon the demand-side incentives of gatekeepers to grant access. The degree to which policies are decided upon in a politicized context is presumed to affect the value attributed by policymakers to the supply of broad societal support by interest groups. In essence, because politicization—and most importantly media and public salience—is usually associated with a shift from technocratic and expertise-based policymaking to 'pressure politics' characterized by heightened electoral and legitimacy concerns among policymakers (Braun 2012; De Bruycker 2017; Rauh 2019), the demand of broad societal support is presumed to increase in politicized domains/issues. As such, when policymakers are in demand of broad societal support, interest groups will function more as transmitters of prevailing public opinion as this increases their prospects of advocacy success. Conversely, on limitedly politicized issues, interest groups function less as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers because the strategic benefits of aligning with public opinion are absent. Under these circumstances, the active engagement with members and supporters might be an asset to generate technical expertise, to supply specialized support (e.g., from the regulated industry), and thereby exerting influence on public policy.

2 Broader implications: interest groups and representative democracy

The results of this dissertation also evoke some broader normative considerations regarding the role of organized interests and the functioning of representative democracy. Two criteria were put upfront in the introduction to assess whether and when interest groups strengthen or weaken the connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes, namely (1) the ability of group communities to voice the diversity of interests and viewpoints in society before government and (2) groups' internal democratic processes. The first criterion has been given a more specific interpretation in this dissertation, namely for the well-functioning of representative democracy, a sufficient presence of interest groups that can function as intermediaries between citizens and government by representing positions aligned with broad societal segments is desirable. The second criterion mostly pertains to the strength of the connection between an interest groups' constituency and its leadership, and how this impacts a groups' functioning as an intermediary. In this section I tackle three key considerations, informed by these two criteria.

Politicization: benefits and risks for the representation of citizens' preferences by interest groups

Interest groups can amplify public opinion and thereby strengthen the connection between the public and policy outcomes. The results of this dissertation indicate that groups are most likely to function as a mouthpiece for public opinion when issues are politicized; despite the heightened organizational tension between defending constituency preferences and aligning with prevailing public opinion. Politicization elevates electoral and legitimacy concerns among policymakers, and this creates incentives for interest groups to strategically align their positions with prevailing public opinion. Politicization also proved to be an important driver in diversifying the overall composition of advisory councils. While in Belgium traditional neo-corporatist interests maintained their insider positions in welfare state domains, diffuse interest groups representing an encompassing constituency, especially those that supply broad public

support, have gained ample access to politicized policy domains such as environmental policy. What is more, when issues are politicized, interest groups defending an unpopular position, often have no escape from the public debate. A key dynamic of politicization involves the publicly visible expansion of conflict (Hutter & Grande 2014). The results in this dissertation demonstrate that issue salience entails that policy debates shift, that conflict is more likely to expand and that consequently also interest groups confronted with public opposition get pulled into the news to counteract their adversaries and to appease their members and supporters. Notable politicized policy dossiers in Belgium (part of the issue sample) were/are the Oosterweel infrastructure project, the closure of nuclear power plants, and various austerity measures and the raise of the pension age that sparked the so-called 'Hot Autumn' of protest manifestations. All these issues are characterized by counteractive lobbying dynamics and hence on all these issues a diversity of interests and viewpoints were voiced by interest groups before government. Interest groups active on these issues frequently invoked public support as a key corroboration of their policy positions and thereby successfully exerted pressure on policymakers.

Politicization can increase responsiveness to public concerns among interest groups as well as policymakers (see also De Bruycker 2017; Rauh 2019). Politicization makes it less likely that policy outcomes are the result of shady backroom deals whereby no or only a few interest groups were consulted. For these reasons, I believe that policymakers should not shy away from politicized decision-making. In many instances, policymakers prefer insulated, technocratic decision-making and have the tendency to avoid politicization because of political costs like a loss in time-efficiency or reputational damage. Though, by valuing politicization (i.e. public salience, mobilization of multiple organized interests and a broad scope of conflict), policymakers can more strongly connect with the public—often through interest groups enjoying broad public support—and take-up as many actors and viewpoints as possible into decision-making, thereby strengthening representative democracy (see also Wolf & Van Dooren 2017).

Still, too much politicization entails the risk of deadlock and a drop in decision-making efficiency. For example, in Belgium, deadlock often ensues on socio-economic

advisory councils because of the exceedingly visible costs for affected constituencies when politicized issues such as social policy retrenchment are at stake (Van Gyes et al. 2017). Interest groups' constituencies then constrain their leadership to such an extent that advisory councils fail to produce policy recommendations. Or, groups fail to reach internal consensus and hence cannot put forward a joint position. Politicization might highlight differences within (heterogeneous) organizational constituencies. When, due to politicization, the costs and benefits of policies become visible to the members and supporters, the organizational leadership may face more difficulties in reaching internal consensus and accepting political compromises. This assertion fits the results that intense engagement with members and supporters—resulting in a slightly lower degree of congruence with public opinion for concentrated interests—leads to a lower likelihood of access to advisory councils in more politicized policy domains. What is more, if politicization results in deadlock, it might hinder the impact of groups enjoying broad public support on public policy.

Furthermore, politicization might be threatening to representative democracy when only those organized interests have a voice that are well-endowed and political insiders—perhaps especially when they defend issue positions for which they enjoy widespread public support—and as such perpetuates existing power balances. The results suggest that to a certain extent a core-periphery dynamic is present in Belgium's system of interest representation, albeit distinct constellations of organized interests gain access to advisory councils across policy domains and the news media are more open to diffuse interests. Politicization can make it more difficult for less well-off interest groups and political outsiders to gain access to policymakers and/or get news coverage due to the 'noise' generated.

Based on the results of my dissertation, I believe that politicization is desirable, but not sufficient to advance the incorporation of citizens' preferences in public policy via organized interest representation. Policymakers as well as journalists should remain vigilant and foster the inclusion of a diverse set of groups and viewpoints in the public debate and in political-administrative venues (such as consultation bodies), including

both those groups that align with public opinion and those that champion more unpopular views or defend underexposed policy alternatives.

Affirmative advocacy: the role of interest groups defending unpopular positions

Although some interest groups (regularly) defend issue positions for which they do not enjoy broad public support, their contribution to representative democracy might still be invaluable. This is the case for groups advocating on behalf of disadvantaged/disenfranchised societal segments such as migrants, prisoners, the poor or public causes such as nature conservation. To put it in the words of Strolovitch (2008)*: "Advocacy organizations have presented historically marginalized groups with an alternative mode of representation within an electoral system that provides insufficient means for transmitting the preferences and interests of those citizens"*. Recent research has confirmed that when societal segments have diverging views, political party preferences and policy outcomes align more with the preferences of privileged societal segments (Bartels 2008; Giger et al. 2012; Gilens 2012; Lesschaeve 2017a; Peters & Ensink 2015). Such diverging positions can be mostly attributed to issues regarding redistribution (e.g., minimum subsistence benefits, progressive taxation) or minority issues for which the preferences of prevailing privileged societal segments run counter to the preferences of marginalized societal segments. To illustrate with an example from the data: 76% of Flemings thinks that schools should oblige pupils to speak Dutch on the playground. A requirement contested by Minderhedenforum (Minorities Forum), the umbrella above many ethnic-cultural associations; instead, the organization advocates for the greater recognition of the benefits of multilingualism.[xiv]

The active involvement of members and supporters by groups advocating on behalf of marginalized societal segments leads them to adopt positions more narrowly tied to their own constituents' interests. Consequently, their positions correspond less with the preferences of the broader (and often more privileged) public. Nonetheless, such close constituency involvement as well as the representation of marginalized groups should be encouraged. Generally, disadvantaged societal segments have less financial resources, low political participation and hence a more difficult time making their voices

heard (Giger et al. 2012; Schlozman et al. 2012; Strolovitch 2008). Intense engagement with their disadvantaged constituents can thus bring to the fore and crystallize their specific policy preferences. This is vital since these are the societal segments that are least well-represented through electoral politics. The role of interest groups advocating on behalf of marginalized societal segments might thus be especially important for political decision-making on issues for which the preferences of marginalized citizens diverge from the—prevailing—policy preferences of privileged citizens.

Currently though, most of the interest groups advocating on behalf of marginalized societal segments or representing solidarity interests have a peripheral position in the Belgian system of interest representation. This hampers the functioning of representative democracy as the concentration of interest representation onto a few insider groups entails that not all societal preferences are equally heard. Hence, policymakers should more consciously and actively include these organizations when drafting policies. One way forward, would be for policymakers to not frame organizations advocating on behalf of disadvantaged societal segments as narrow and particularistic, but as defending a common interest with broad impact (Strolovitch 2008). Another way to strengthen their involvement in public policymaking is to provide them with ample government funding so that these groups have sufficient organizational capacities to develop a professional structure, acquire policy expertise, can systematically reach out to their constituencies and have the human and financial resources to set up comprehensive advocacy campaigns (Sanchez Salgado 2014). The Flemish government casting doubt on the functioning of the Minderhedenforum and thoroughly reviewing its subsidy policy from the perspective that organizations advocating on behalf of ethnic-cultural minorities are too particularistic is worrisome in this regard.[xv] Finally, policymakers can design consultation instruments that lower the threshold of access for those advocating on behalf of disadvantaged societal segments, to go beyond the inclusion of the 'usual suspects' (Arras & Beyers 2020; Binderkrantz et al. 2020b; Kohler-Koch 2010). When there is no level playing field, policymakers can create a more equal one.

Moreover, news coverage often only includes only a limited number of voices and viewpoints and also in the news media groups representing disenfranchised or minority segments are no frequent sources (Beckers & Van Aelst 2019b; Binderkrantz et al. 2020a; Danielian & Page 1994; De Bruycker & Beyers 2015; Masini et al. 2018). As such, journalists reporting the viewpoints of these organizations contribute to the 'democratic function' of the news media as a 'marketplace of ideas'—denoting that news coverage should include a diverse range of actors and viewpoints (Masini et al. 2018). Journalist can thus play a vital role in strengthening representative democracy by reporting on the view and activities of a diverse array of interest groups, by giving a voice to organizations expressing a wide range of policy perspectives, including those that defend commonly underexposed viewpoints of disadvantaged societal segments.

Quiet politics: when the undue influence of special interests is most likely to materialize

Finally, I wish to address the other side of the coin of decision-making in politicized contexts, namely 'quiet politics'. Quiet politics denotes that decision-making takes place behind closed doors without much political conflict and involves only a limited set of interest groups that usually engage in expertise-based exchanges with policymakers (Culpepper 2011; De Bruycker 2016). The results in this dissertation, in line with previous studies, underscore that many policy issues are uncontested, attract little or no interest mobilization and receive limited public salience (Beyers et al. 2018; Culpepper 2011; LaPira et al. 2014; Wonka et al. 2018). Therefore, it might be worrisome that my findings suggest that interest groups are least likely to function as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers when issues are not or limitedly politicized.

Various tendencies contribute to the diminished representation of citizens' preferences by interest groups when quiet inside politics occurs. First, under these circumstances, policymakers are less sensitive to electoral and legitimacy concerns, decreasing their demand for societal support. Consequently, interest groups themselves experience less tension between defending the preferences of their members and supporters *and* aligning their position with prevailing public opinion. As such, groups are not externally constrained to defend their own constituency and can more easily do

so without taking into consideration the broader public's signals. Second, 'quiet politics' increase the reliance of policymakers on only a handful (set of) interest group(s) for information. Indeed, the undue influence of special interests is generally seen to hinge upon their privileged and unchecked access to policymakers (Culpepper 2011). This fits my finding that in the least politicized policy domains/issues, all types of interest groups have significantly lower chances of gaining access to advisory councils and/or to gain media prominence. Access to advisory councils and news coverage is tilted against interest groups active in policy areas attracting low saliency. What is more, my findings indicate that some interest groups have acquired a status of 'preeminence' within the decision-making process—in Belgium mostly business associations and labor unions—and occupy core positions in advisory councils and are go-to sources for journalists (see also Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015). This entails that policymakers relying on information from only a selected set of organizations—of which the chances are much higher for depoliticized issues—might act upon one-sided signals from society making that policies correspond less well with the public interest.

Overall, quiet politics thus entails that interest groups themselves may be less mindful of the preferences of broad societal segments and that multiple potentially affected groups and their viewpoints are neglected, putting representative democracy under strain. Nevertheless, the strength of political parties—demonstrated by the strong impact of governing parties on advocacy success—implies that even privileged organized interests are not likely to completely nullify the impact of public opinion on public policy.

Therefore, I argue that the real danger to the representation of citizens' preferences in policy outcomes, is the structural power some organized interests—usually special business interests—have acquired. Structural power is less tied to concrete advocacy activities, policy access and eventual advocacy success, but is more related to the group's ascribed status and/or reputation among political elites, journalists and the general public (Bernhagen & Bräuninger 2005; Beyers 2020; Busemeyer & Thelen 2020; Halpin & Fraussen 2017). It captures *"the situation whereby some groups are simply assumed to be relevant to the issue at hand"* and signifies *"the taken-for-*

grantedness of a group as the voice for a particular constituency or viewpoint" (Halpin & Fraussen 2017, p.726). In contrast to developing advocacy activities and gaining access, the recognition of an interest group as insurmountable and its renowned influence status among political elites, journalists and the general public is the result of a long-term process. In Belgium, for example, the chemical sector represented by Essenscia has structural power due to its economic strong hold. Structural business power is often connected to these interests' privileged position originating from their private investment decisions (Busemeyer & Thelen 2020). It are these groups that are most likely to not only shape policy outcomes, but which also have the ability to shape the issue prioritizations of policymakers (Bernhagen & Bräuninger 2005; Gilens & Page 2014). These are the groups that are able to secure favorable policy outcomes even if they abstain from actively advocating on a policy issue (Bernhagen & Bräuninger 2005; Beyers 2020). Hence, especially on depoliticized policy issues, such preeminent interest groups might go unchallenged by both other interest groups and policymakers, while also escaping public scrutiny. An example of structural power at play might be found in the awarding of environmental permits by the Flemish government to chemical giant Ineos in the Port of Antwerp, allowing it to build two chemical plants for which it will cut 49 hectares of forest. The prospects of job creation and an investment of 5 billion euro were decisive justifications for the Flemish government.

'Quiet politics', in the absence of deliberation and participation by various societal interests, thus contains the seeds for lobbying scandals, for undue influence and for outcomes that do not correspond with ordinary citizens' preferences and/or to detract from the public interest. Such systematic bias in favor of interest groups with structural power, is normatively bad news for representative democracy. Still, while quiet politics entails a strong potential for the undue influence of specialized business interests, this does not mean that specialized business interests always win when articulated public opinion is absent. Policymakers still have their own ideological convictions, are supposed to critically assess the information they receive, and usually act according to the policy directions prescribed in their party's manifesto.

Moreover, to counter such bias and to strengthen the well-functioning of representative democracy, policymakers and journalists should dedicate considerable efforts to providing greater decision-making transparency. Transparency instruments such as the European Transparency Register and the US Lobbying Disclosure Act can prevent corruption, increase legitimacy and improve accountability (Bunea 2018; Chari et al. 2020; Greenwood & Dreger 2013; Holman & Luneburg 2012; LaPira & Thomas 2020). Several advocacy groups dedicated to transparency use these instruments to make information on lobbying and interest groups more broadly and easily available. Yet, transparency instruments are no miracle cure for closing the information gap between citizens and public policymaking. Several criteria such as their voluntary or mandatory nature, the scope of registrants and the exact information provided might strengthen or weaken their effectiveness (see Bunea 2018; Holman & Luneburg 2012).

Next to transparency, policymakers should create equal and formal access opportunities. Having an institutionalized counterweight might curb the structural power by certain special interests and prevent policy outcomes to consistently deviate from the public interests. More inclusiveness of a variety of interest groups during consultation may stimulate deliberation among groups and can ensure that alternative viewpoints are heard by policymakers (Arras & Braun 2018; Braun 2012; Rasmussen & Carroll 2014). Several studies have also demonstrated that a balanced consultation of interest groups increases the perceived fairness of the decision-making procedure thereby positively affecting the propensity among citizens to accept and view a policy outcome as legitimate (see for instance Beyers & Arras 2020).

These reflections on politicization, affirmative advocacy and quiet politics, lead me to conclude that it is normatively desirable for the well-functioning of representative democracy that policymakers as much as possible try to create a level playing field so that a diversity of interests and viewpoints in society can be voiced before government. Interest groups will always and foremost be preoccupied with representing their constituency's preferences, and only if possible, will take signals of the general public into account. Moreover, the representation of members and supporters by interest groups that defend disadvantaged societal segments is vital for representative democracy

because such people are the least-well represented through electoral mechanisms and party politics. However, it would be undesirable when *all* interest groups all the time represent the preferences of their constituents in a manner detrimental to the representation of citizen preferences in public policy. For the well-functioning of representative democracy and the creation of a more equal playing field, politicization should be cherished and not eschewed. Not only does politicization stimulate interest groups to align their policy objectives with prevailing public opinion, it also entails that a larger set of interest groups is usually involved in policymaking and public debates. Hence, the connection between citizens and public policy is strengthened. When quiet politics occurs, policymakers should remain vigilant, and lobbying transparency instruments and formal access opportunities for a diverse set of interest groups can provide the necessary checks and balances against the undue influence of special interests. Overall, interest groups can strengthen representative democracy, but politicians should set the necessary scope conditions to make this happen.

3 Limitations and avenues for future research

In this section I discuss the limitations of the dissertation and the implications they may have for the results. Doing scientific research implies making choices and these choices set limits to what can be claimed based on the results, yet these limitations provide possible avenues for future research. I first discuss the generalizability of the findings in this dissertation. Subsequently, I turn to the limitations of observational data for studying the social mechanisms underlying interest groups' issue prioritizations, position formation and strategy development. Finally, I reflect on the possible unexplored explanations of my findings.

Generalizability

To understand how interest groups affect the correspondence between citizens' preferences and public policy, my dissertation focused on the case of Belgium. More specifically, I studied a representative sample of Belgian interest groups' advocacy activities, their policy access, media prominence and advocacy success on a sample of

110 policy issues for which public opinion data were available during the 2014-2019 legislature. This raises questions about the generalizability of the findings to (1) other countries, (2) the broader universe of interest groups, (3) the broader universe of policy issues, (4) interest representation via different advocacy strategies and venues and (5) in relation to public opinion.

First, Belgium has a federal structure and can be considered as a neo-corporatist system of interest representation, characterized by a legacy of consociationalism. Article 1 which describes the Belgian system of interest representation and provides the necessary background to put my findings in context. For one, Belgium's legacy of consociationalism entails that the relations between societal constituencies and interest groups are historically deeply ingrained and structured according to socio-economic, ideological and cultural cleavages (Beyers et al. 2014b; Deschouwer 2012). Another core feature of neo-corporatism is that interest groups are able to appease their members and supporters when a political compromise has been reached (Öberg et al. 2011). These features may accentuate the tension between constituency involvement and congruence with the general public. Moreover, the neo-corporatist core-periphery structures continue to be a persistent feature of Belgian interest representation (Fraussen et al. 2015; Fraussen & Wouters 2015), despite the ongoing politicization of new policy domains and a spike in the mobilization of citizen groups in recent decades (Hooghe 1995). A small set of groups—mostly business associations and labor unions—enjoys formal and institutionalized access to many advisory councils and gains substantial media attention.

Though, interest mobilization varies profoundly across policy domains, political arenas, and branches of government. For instance, the media arena is more inclusive of citizen groups compared to advisory councils (Article 1). This dissertation also demonstrated that interest group access to advisory councils is impacted by politicization (Article 3). Moreover, the specific issue-context—i.e. news salience—profoundly shapes media prominence, while it does not invariably benefit the traditionally privileged interlocutors of government (Article 4). In this regard, Belgium resembles other countries for which neo-corporatist patterns of interest intermediation have been found

to be especially resilient in the administrative arena, but less so in other political and public arenas (Binderkrantz & Christiansen 2015; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2019). Nevertheless, the weakness of Belgian parliaments vis-à-vis the executive branch of government and the high membership rates for labor unions makes that neo-corporatist practices might be more prevalent in Belgium compared to, for instance, the Scandinavian countries or Switzerland (Rommetvedt et al. 2013; Weiler et al. 2019). In sum, on top of persistent neo-corporatism, substantial ingredients of more pluralist practices can be detected. This entails that, in Belgium, the positive as well as negative impact of interest on the connection between citizens and public policy might be particularly strong in welfare state areas and areas such as environment and transport/mobility. The strong politicization of these domains makes that diffuse citizen groups, next to concentrated business interests, have been granted substantial access to advisory councils and are frequent players in the news media. In contrast, in policy domains such as migration, culture, human and civil rights and justice the impact of interest groups is much weaker.

Comparative research could further clarify the external validity of the findings by exploring relevant inter-polity variation. Given the typical institutional and political features of Belgium, the findings might be confirmed and regained in other neo-corporatist systems of interest representation such as the Scandinavian countries, Slovenia, Switzerland, Austria, or the Netherlands. In contrast, I would expect that interest groups in pluralist systems—which are more open and competitive—such as the United Kingdom experience less tensions between their constituents' preferences and the preferences of the broader public. Hence, one could hypothesize that interest groups in pluralist systems have more leeway to strategically align their preferences with prevailing public opinion (Flöthe & Rasmussen 2019; Jordan & Maloney 2007). Moreover, in pluralist systems, I expect the impact of interest groups on the correspondence between citizens' preferences and policy outcomes to be low for most groups and high for the few 'elite' groups that belong to the core in their policy area. Indeed, also pluralist systems are characterized by profound core-periphery dynamics (see for instance LaPira et al. 2014) on the United States), but in contrast to neo-

corporatist systems, interactions with these 'elite' interest groups are not formally institutionalized into consultation venues. This entails that, in pluralist systems the likelihood of undue influence by interest groups shifting public policy away from public opinion is much higher on particular issues—for instance, cases of quiet politics—due to the weak institutionalized counter-weight to special interests. Overall, generalizations of my findings are most safe to make when applied to other European neo-corporatist systems. Still, given the strong conditioning of the issue-specific context, I expect that across a wide variety of countries the impact of public support for gaining policy access, media prominence and advocacy success will be highly similar to my findings when one studies issues with similar features.

Second, I studied interest representation in a subset of the political-administrative and public venues interest groups can be active in, namely advisory councils and the news media. This begs the question of generalizability towards interest representation via other advocacy activities and venues. As the demand by policymakers for broad public support and the tension groups experience between aligning their position with public opinion and defending their constituents' preferences are expected to depend on the issue-specific context, it would be interesting to see if the same results were to be found if other advocacy activities or venues were studied. Access to advisory councils or the media differs from interest groups presence in parliamentary hearings. Future research should investigate how the issue-specific context shapes access in other arenas. For instance, previous studies have mainly examined how the institutional set-up and procedural rules affect interest groups' access to parliamentary hearings (Coen & Katsaitis 2019; Pedersen et al. 2015). New work could analyze whether the varying politicization of policy domains will have an even stronger impact on access in the parliamentary arena due to the greater prominence of electoral sensitivities which increases politicians demand for widespread societal support. Importantly, the focus on the news media makes it more likely to capture groups expressing positions that resonate with the broader public compared to other more secluded advocacy arenas (Kollman 1998). Still, the data in this dissertation demonstrate substantial variation, even among interest groups prominent in the news. The content-analysis of newspaper articles

demonstrated that a considerable number of groups were found to defend unpopular policies (Article 4). Moreover, it is implausible to expect groups to defend completely different positions in the news as compared to more covert advocacy arenas such as advisory councils or personal contacts with policymakers. Such inconsistency would negatively affect their credibility vis-à-vis policymakers and thereby constrain their advocacy success. Still, future research could examine whether groups that are solely lobbying via inside channels defend positions for which they enjoy less public support compared to groups that advocate through the news media.

Finally, while I studied interest groups' alignment with public opinion in an issue-specific manner, I did not account for socio-economic, ethnic or any other societal divisions within public opinion. Yet, a growing body of research hints at the importance of such societal divisions when assessing the correspondence between public opinion, interest groups and public policy. The central tenet being that if the preferences of one societal segment are significantly better represented than another societal segment, there is unequal representation (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Schlozman et al. 2012; Strolovitch 2008). Research has indicated that such opinion divergence between disadvantaged and advantaged societal segments are most prevalent in the domain of social welfare policy, while on other topics preferences of different societal segments are more convergent (Lesschaeve 2017a). Still, several studies have found that public policy and political elites are more responsive to advantaged societal segments compared to disadvantaged segments (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012). In this regard, future research should analyze interest groups representation of disadvantaged societal segments and whether and when such groups have an impact on public policy, controlling for their alignment with public opinion. Most research on this matter has been conducted in the United States (see Kimball et al. 2012; Marchetti 2014; Phinney 2016; Strolovitch 2008; Weldon 2011), leaving much room to analyze the representation of disadvantaged societal segments in other political systems. The US system might be, given its weaker social welfare system and the large socio-economic inequalities, an outlier among established democracies. The US might therefore be particularly prone to inequality in political representation.

Moreover, a crucial empirical reality to consider when making generalizations concerns the fact many citizens hold no meaningful opinion on many issues (Achen & Bartels 2017; Zaller 1992). On highly technical, mostly non-salient, issues, where the public has less articulated preferences, policymakers and interest groups might not be reasonably able to take citizen preferences into account simply because on such issues the public has no clear opinions (Burstein 2014). This underscores this dissertation's findings that interest groups are most likely to function as intermediaries between citizens and policymakers on politicized issues. It is especially under such circumstances that the public will have more articulated preferences. The absence of a crystallized public opinion on many depoliticized issues also implies that 'quiet politics' could more easily lead to policy outcomes that result from the undue influence of special interests. Especially when the public does not have crystallized opinions on the issues at hand entails that groups with structural power might promote policies that correspond less with citizens' preferences because it diminishes policymakers' critical reflections on the role groups with structural power play in public policymaking. One possible avenue for future research to capture structural power is to complement preference attainment measurements tied to observational data on advocacy activities with measures of self-perceived and attributed influence (Beyers 2020). Ascribed status and structural power may then be detected by comparing groups' lobbying efforts in relation to preference attainment and attributed influence: if a group scores high on the attributed influence scale, developed only limited advocacy activities (e.g., not or only one meeting instead of multiple meetings with policymakers) and attained its policy preferences, despite its low level of lobbying, this might be a signal of structural power. Pedersen (2013) presents such comparison of measurements and assesses how strong agenda-setting influence and legislative influence are correlated. Another promising avenue has been developed by Ibenskas & Bunea (2020) who assessed MEP's recognition of interest groups by making use of social media data.

The social mechanisms behind observational data

The issue-specific analyses in this dissertation are based on observational data. Measuring interest groups' policy positions and media prominence through a content analysis of newspaper articles and relating them to actual policy outcomes, and mapping access to advisory councils based on extensive desk research, entailed that I did not need to rely on perceptions of advocacy efforts and influence by groups or policymakers themselves (see also Rasmussen et al. 2018a). One disadvantage of such unobtrusive data is that it does not disclose the issue-specific social mechanisms underlying interest groups' issue prioritizations, position formation and strategy development.

Future research may therefore more closely examine these issue-specific mechanisms and more precisely the internal and external trade-offs interest groups must manage. First, this dissertation suggests a trade-off at the micro-level processes of position formation. For instance, how do groups internally manage the tension between acting on their own constituents' preferences versus strategically aligning with prevailing public opinion? Does the organizational leadership, for example, try to convince members and supporters with the aim to align them more closely with public opinion? Or, how is the expertise of members aggregated and processed by the organizational leadership and how does this impact the group's alignment with public opinion? And, to what extent does politicization entail that groups cannot reach internal consensus, resulting in members bypassing the organization? Second, other important trade-offs need te be made when developing and executing an advocacy strategy. For instance, which dimensions of politicization—i.e. salience, conflict, interest mobilization—are more consequential for groups when making decisions on which issues to prioritize and to develop an advocacy campaign? How does politicization and public opinion inform interest groups' issue prioritizations and mix of inside and outside tactics? How are these choices different across group types and what role is there for members and supporters? Third, given the gatekeeping role of policymakers and journalists, a better understanding of how issue positions and the mix of advocacy tactics persuades policymakers, leads to news coverage, or impacts public opinion is warranted.

Currently, the interest group literature does not bring enough clarity regarding the specific processes determining interest groups' issue prioritization, position formation and advocacy strategies and how this results in success outcomes. One of the reasons is that scholars foremost focus on 'outcomes' such as interest groups' media prominence, policy access, or the actual adopted advocacy strategies. Much less theoretical and empirical attention is devoted to the issue-specific internal organizational decision-making processes or the issue-specific mechanisms underlying the persuasiveness of advocacy strategies and positions vis-à-vis policymakers and the broader public. Issue-centered interviewing and survey experiments can be well-suited methods for unpacking the black-box of these underlying social mechanisms.

Unexplored explanations

This dissertation theorized upon the role of interest groups for the representation of citizens preferences starting from one specific assumption, namely I treated public opinion and the politicized nature of issues as exogeneous to the activities of interest groups. I worked under the assumption that interest groups are confronted with particular public opinion majorities and with various degrees of politicization. Groups must *react* and *adapt* to the issue-specific context when setting-up advocacy activities. However, interest groups may also *shape* public opinion and *cause* politicization. Hence, a note of caution is appropriate with respect to potential endogeneity problems.

First, politicization—i.e. news salience, scope of conflict, expansion of interest mobilization—might be endogenous to interest mobilization by particular groups (enjoying widespread public support). Namely, different interest group types can increase (or decrease) the salience of policy dossiers, expand the scope of conflict, and incentivize other interest groups to join the public debate rather than only react to it. Applied to the results, this means that representative diffuse groups might be particularly successful in increasing the issue salience, especially when they enjoy broad public support (Article 2). The observational nature of the data black-boxes this alternative causal relationship. However, previous studies have demonstrated that the outside lobbying efforts of a single interest group do not significantly affect the politicization of

policy issues (Dür & Mateo 2014; Klüver et al. 2015; Tresch & Fischer 2015). Moreover, the media salience of policy issues is determined by multiple factors, of which many are beyond the control of interest groups, including political parties, real-world events, journalists, and editorial lines (Article 4). Hence, given that the units of analysis are set on individual organizations, my findings in relation to politicization are unlikely to be caused by reversed causation. In contrast, I expect that the reversed causal relationship is more likely to be observed when taking the aggregate lobbying efforts of interest group camps active on a policy issue as the units of analysis.

Nonetheless, future research adopting longitudinal research designs or medium-N case study designs (e.g., qualitative comparative analyses (QCA) in combination with process-tracing techniques) is warranted to further substantiate the causal mechanisms that drive some of the presented results and rule out concerns of endogeneity. Longitudinal designs would allow, while relying on observational data, to establish causal direction by measuring whether processes of politicization *preceded* advocacy activities and which lobbying strategies could be detected *prior* or at the *origin* of politicization processes. It would also allow to disentangle how politicization and the role of interest groups therein impact party politics and government policies. Recently, progress has been made in this regard within the social movement literature (see for instance Bremer et al. 2020; Hutter & Kriesi 2019; Kriesi et al. 2019). Regarding public opinion, the studies of Klüver (2015) and Bevan & Rasmussen (2020) are notable for applying a time series analysis to investigate whether interest groups adjust their advocacy activities in response to public opinion and how this affects the policy agenda. Though, it might be particularly fruitful to look at the impact of interest groups on public opinion taking a long-term perspective. Interest groups might have the short-term goal to influence policy outcomes, but in the long-term their objective might be more effectively reached through accomplishing societal change, by constructing a favorable public opinion (Banaszak & Ondercin 2016).

The benefits of medium-N case study designs are that such designs allow to grasp *complexity* and detect the *combination of conditions* under which interest groups are more likely to react to politicization and/or whether they are the instigators of

politicization. Such designs would also allow to unravel these action-reaction dynamics and relate this to how groups defend their constituencies preferences vis-à-vis public opinion, how it results in media prominence, access to policymakers and advocacy success. In this regard, I expect interest groups enjoying widespread public support to be more likely to be at the origin of politicization. Conversely, groups facing public opposition are expected to predominantly react to politicization. Such groups must engage in counteractive lobbying when confronted with successful political opponents. These expectations are supported by the findings in Article 4. Although action-reaction dynamics were not an explicit part of the regression analyses, the examples presented to corroborate the regression results suggest such dynamics to occur. Moreover, an interesting question that can be tackled with case study research would be to ask through which micro-level mechanisms interest groups adapt their strategies and issue positions in relation to prevailing public opinion and politicization.

Second, interest groups may shape public opinion rather than only respond and adapt to prevailing public opinion (see Dür 2019; Kollman 1998). Since public support can be a key 'resource' to persuade policymakers, interest groups have clear incentives to try to increase public awareness and shape public opinion in order to secure policy wins (Dür & Mateo 2014). Interest groups may explicitly set out to raise public awareness for new and previously underexposed viewpoints, to act as an opinion leader so that the broader public shifts its opinion and becomes favorably aligned to the policy goals of the group (Banaszak & Ondercin 2016). One promising avenue for future research in this regard are survey experiments among citizens. Survey experiments—in particular conjoint analyses—enable to tease out the specific mechanisms, for instance the specific intervention of interest group lobbying, which shape public attitudes on policy issues. While the literature on political elites' impact on the policy preferences of voters is comprehensive (see Boudreau & MacKenzie 2014; Brader et al. 2013; Ciuk & Yost 2016; Slothuus 2010; Slothuus & De Vreese 2010), the potential impact of interest groups on public opinion has rarely been tested. While some studies have studied interest groups' influence on support for political candidates through experiments (e.g., Arceneaux & Kolodny 2009; Neddenriep & Nownes 2014; Weber et al. 2012), very few

scholars examined the impact of interest groups on public opinion (but see Dür 2019; Dür & Mateo 2014; McEntire et al. 2015). Hence, this leaves much to explore in future scientific endeavors.

4 Concluding remarks: interest groups walking a tightrope

Reflecting on all findings, one key conclusion comes to the front: interest groups constantly need to walk a tightrope between acting on their members and supporters' preferences and trying to influence public policy by considering the general public's signals. Especially lobbying on politicized issues when enjoying broad public support can be beneficial for groups to put pressure on policymakers. However, under these circumstances, close constituency involvement frequently entails that groups only supply narrow societal support and/or are forced to publicly stand up for unpopular policy positions. Consequently, on politicized issues, groups characterized by an intense engagement with their members and supporters combined with low degrees of public support, see their access to advisory councils decline, cannot exert much political pressure when they are prominent in the news and have lower prospects of advocacy success. The issue-specific context and core viewpoints of a group's constituency can thus put the functioning of interest groups as intermediaries between the public and policymakers under strain. As much depends on the issue-specific context, there is not one simple and straightforward assessment of interest groups functioning as intermediaries between the general public and policymakers. On some issues, groups with intensely engaged members and supporters find themselves aligned with public opinion, thereby able to put pressure on policymakers. However, on another issue the same group might find itself opposed to public opinion while having to defend a position reflecting its constituency's interests. Interest groups' functioning as intermediaries is contingent on the extent to which concrete issues are politicized and the alignment of groups with public opinion. In this regard, interest groups often have a dual and conflicting function in connecting the general public and policymakers.

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Appendices

List of policy issues

ID	*Statement*	*Jurisdiction*	*Policy domain*
2	De pensioenleeftijd mag niet stijgen	National	Social affairs
3	Leefloners moeten verplicht kunnen worden gemeenschapswerk te verrichten	National	Social affairs
5	Wie nog nooit heeft gewerkt, mag geen werkloosheidsuitkering krijgen	National	Labor
6	De lonen moeten bevroren worden als ze sneller stijgen dan in de buurlanden	National	Economic affairs
7	In tijden van crisis mogen lonen niet automatisch worden aangepast aan prijsstijgingen	National	Economic affairs
8	Als er bij de NMBS wordt gestaakt, moet er een minimumdienst zijn	National	Labor
9	De verplichte sluitingsdag voor winkels moet worden afgeschaft	National	Economic affairs
10	Het moet makkelijker worden om werknemers te ontslaan	National	Labor
11	Er mag geen alcohol in drankautomaten zitten	National	Health care
12	Alle veroordeelden moeten hun straf volledig uitzitten.	National	Justice
13	De GAS-boetes moeten worden afgeschaft	National	Justice
14	Grote vermogens moeten meer worden belast	National	Economic affairs
15	Klanten van prostituees moeten worden beboet	National	Justice
16	Het stakingsrecht mag niet worden ingeperkt	National	Labor
17	Er moet een rijbewijs met punten komen	National	Justice
18	Draagmoederschap voor homokoppels moet worden toegestaan	National	Rights
19	De federale overheid moet haar aandelen in Belgacom verkopen	National	Economic affairs
21	Er moeten kerncentrales openblijven	National	Energy
22	Een asielzoeker die hier als minderjarige is binnengekomen mag niet meer worden teruggestuurd	National	Migration
23	Jongeren die naar Syrië vertrekken om deel te nemen aan de strijd moeten hun recht op uitkeringen verliezen	National	Rights
27	Alle kernwapens die op Belgisch grondgebied opgeslagen zijn, moeten worden verwijderd	National	Foreign affairs & Defense
28	Het Belgische leger moet minder deelnemen aan buitenlandse interventies	National	Foreign affairs & Defense
29	Mensen moeten meer belastingen (BTW) betalen op wat ze kopen dan op wat ze verdienen	National	Economic affairs
30	Bedrijfswagens moeten zwaarder worden belast	National	Economic affairs

31	Het Belgische leger moet investeren in een opvolger van het F-16 gevechtsvliegtuig	National	Foreign affairs & Defense
34	Een gezin moet voor ieder kind evenveel kinderbijslag krijgen	Flemish	Social affairs
35	Voor hoge inkomens moet de kinderbijslag naar omlaag, voor lage inkomens naar omhoog	Flemish	Social affairs
36	De regels om een privé-crèche uit te baten moeten worden versoepeld.	Flemish	Social affairs
37	De regels voor de uitvoer van wapens en militaire onderdelen moeten strenger worden	Flemish	Foreign affairs & Defense
38	Er moeten meer technische vakken gegeven worden in het secundair onderwijs	Flemish	Education
39	Pas na de eerste twee jaren van het secundair onderwijs zouden leerlingen een studierichting moeten kiezen	Flemish	Education
41	In plaats van een verkeersbelasting, moeten autobestuurders betalen volgens het aantal kilometers dat ze rijden	Flemish	Transportation
42	De aanleg van de Oosterweelverbinding moet worden stopgezet	Flemish	Transportation
43	Ook werkloze ouderen boven de 60 jaar moeten verplicht begeleid worden naar een nieuwe job	Flemish	Labor
44	Wie meer verdient, moet meer betalen voor de zorgverzekering wie minder verdient, moet minder betalen	Flemish	Health care
45	Leerkrachten in moeilijke scholen moeten een financiële bonus krijgen	Flemish	Education
46	Ook bus- en tramlijnen met weinig passagiers moeten blijven	Flemish	Transportation
47	65-plussers moeten gratis kunnen blijven reizen met bus of tram	Flemish	Social affairs
49	Nederlands kennen mag geen voorwaarde zijn om in aanmerking te komen voor een sociale woning	Flemish	Social affairs
50	De Antwerpse haven mag niet verder uitbreiden	Flemish	Transportation
51	L'organisation de certains cours dans une autre langue en humanités (immersion) doit être rendue plus facile	Francophone	Education
52	Un examen d'entrée doit être mis en place à l'université, dans chaque Faculté	Francophone	Education
54	Les écoles à public défavorisé doivent recevoir davantage de moyens	Francophone	Education
55	Le décret inscriptions (qui organise l'accès des élèves aux écoles) doit être supprime	Francophone	Education
57	Chaque enfant dans une famille doit recevoir le même montant d'allocations familiales	Walloon	Social affairs
58	Les allocations familiales doivent diminuer pour les hauts revenus et augmenter pour les bas revenus	Walloon	Social affairs
61	Les TEC doivent être privatises	Walloon	Transportation
63	Le port du foulard doit être interdit pour les élèves dans l'enseignement officiel	Francophone	Rights
65	Au lieu de la taxe de roulage, les automobilistes devraient payer en fonction du nombre de kilomètres parcourus	Walloon	Transportation

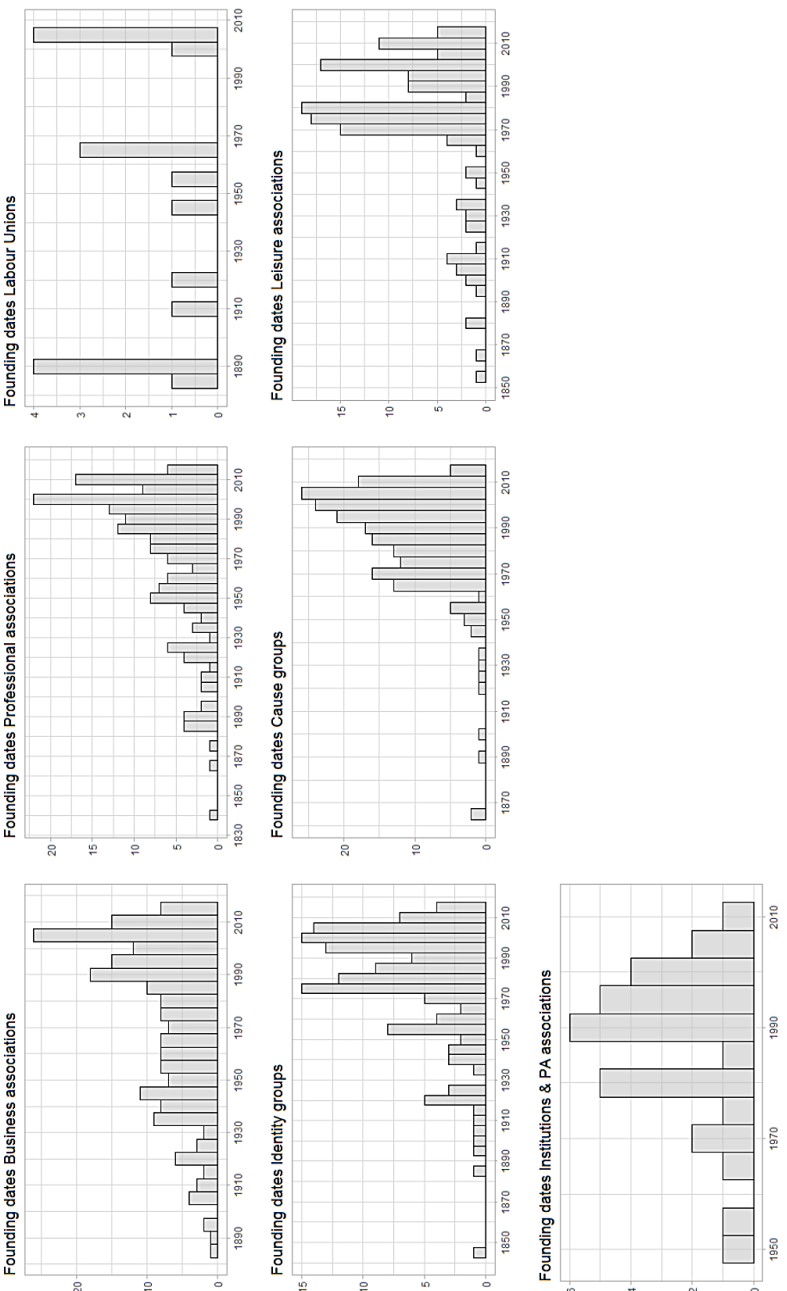
66	La vignette autoroutière doit être mise en place en Wallonie	Walloon	Transportation
71	Un quota de 10% de logements sociaux doit être obligatoire dans toutes les communes	Walloon	Social affairs
72	Les nouveaux immigres doivent suivre obligatoirement un parcours d'intégration	Walloon	Migration
76	La production d'énergie via des panneaux solaires ne doit plus être subsidiée	Walloon	Energy
77	Les allocations de rentrée scolaire doivent être augmentées pour les revenus les plus faibles	Walloon	Social affairs
82	Zodra sociale huurders voldoende verdienen, moeten ze hun sociale woning afstaan	Flemish	Social affairs
83	Vooral een lening voor de renovatie van een oude woning moet fiscaal voordelig zijn	Flemish	Energy
84	Wie een auto ouder dan 10 jaar vervangt door een zuiniger automodel, moet een premie krijgen	Flemish	Environment
85	Alle nieuwkomers moeten deelnemen aan een inburgeringsexamen	Flemish	Migration
86	De overheid moet pensioensparen fiscaal meer aanmoedigen	National	Economic affairs
87	Het leefloon moet stijgen	National	Social affairs
88	Het gebruik van cannabis moet volledig worden verboden	National	Justice
89	Mensen met een hoog inkomen moeten minder geld van de ziekteverzekering terugkrijgen	National	Social affairs
91	Werklozen moeten hun uitkering na een tijd verliezen	National	Social affairs
92	Werkgevers moeten worden verplicht om een bepaald aandeel mensen van vreemde origine in dienst te hebben	National	Labor
93	De treinstations die door weinig reizigers gebruikt worden, moeten ook openblijven	National	Transportation
94	Het rookverbod in de horeca moet worden versoepeld	National	Health care
95	De minimumleeftijd voor GAS-boetes moet hoger liggen dan de huidige leeftijd van 14 jaar	National	Justice
96	Een ouder die thuisblijft met de kinderen moet een inkomen krijgen	National	Social affairs
97	Mensen met een ongezonde levensstijl moeten minder geld van de ziekteverzekering terugkrijgen	National	Health care
98	Asielzoekers die te lang op een beslissing moeten wachten, moeten automatisch een verblijfsvergunning krijgen	National	Migration
99	Er moet een hoofddoekenverbod komen voor leerkrachten in het gemeenschapsonderwijs	Flemish	Education
100	Ouders van kinderen die spijbelen moeten tijdelijk hun kinderbijslag verliezen	Flemish	Social affairs
101	Scholen moeten halalmaaltijden aanbieden aan hun moslimleerlingen	Flemish	Migration
102	Bij smogalarm moeten de beperkingen op het gebruik van de wagen worden verstrengd	Flemish	Environment
103	Straten die opnieuw aangelegd worden, moeten een fietspad hebben	Flemish	Transportation

104	Tijdens spitsuren moet er op de autosnelwegen een rijstrook voorbehouden worden voor carpooling	Flemish	Transportation
106	Scholen moeten kinderen verplichten om ook op de speelplaats Nederlands te praten	Flemish	Education
107	Middelbare scholen mogen geen dure schoolreizen meer organiseren	Flemish	Education
108	Er moeten meer mensen van vreemde afkomst te zien zijn op de openbare omroep	Flemish	Culture
109	Wonen in de stad moet fiscaal aangemoedigd worden	Flemish	Environment
111	Les allocations familiales doivent être liées à la fréquentation scolaire	Walloon	Social affairs
112	Le montant maximal demande par les crèches privées doit être plafonne	Walloon	Social affairs
114	A partir du moment où les locataires sociaux gagnent suffisamment, ils doivent quitter leur logement social	Walloon	Social affairs
115	Seuls les prêts pour la rénovation de vieilles habitations doivent être fiscalement avantageux	Walloon	Economic affairs
116	Les propriétaires de plusieurs biens immobiliers doivent être davantage taxes	Walloon	Economic affairs
117	Il faut imposer des normes d'isolation pour les vieilles habitations	Walloon	Energy
118	En cas d'alerte à la pollution de l'air, les limitations d'utilisation des voitures doivent être renforcées	Walloon	Environment
119	Pendant les heures de pointe, une bande de circulation doit être réservée au covoiturage	Walloon	Transportation
123	Les écoles doivent offrir des repas halal à leurs élèves musulmans	Walloon	Migration
126	La Wallonie doit créer une ville nouvelle pour absorber la population croissante	Walloon	Environment
127	Les règles liées à l'exportation d'armes doivent être assouplies	Walloon	Foreign affairs & Defense
128	Les voyages scolaires couteux pour les parents doivent être interdits	Walloon	Education
130	Les parents d'enfants qui brossent les cours doivent temporairement perdre leurs allocations familiales	Walloon	Social affairs

Article 1 – Interest representation in Belgium

1.1 Data visualizations

Figure 2A. Founding dates by group



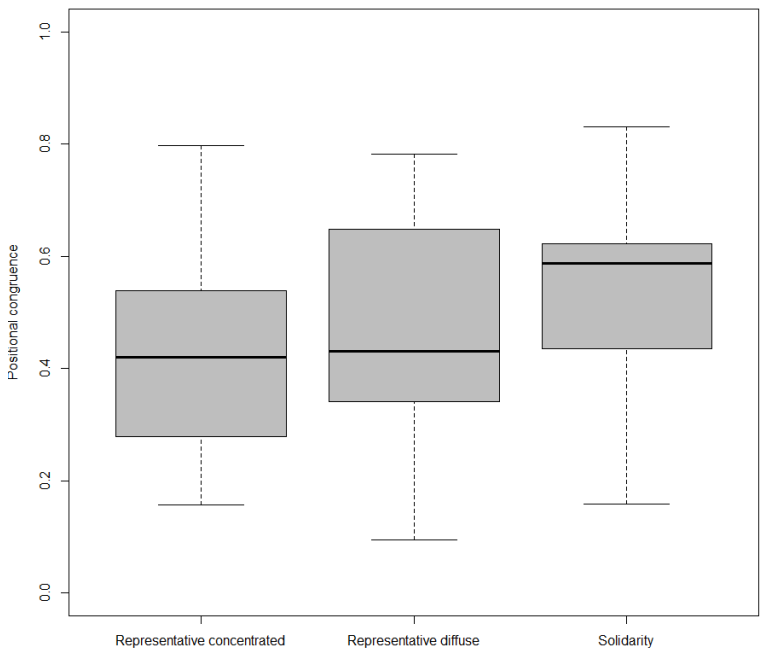
Article 2 – Balancing constituency and congruence

1.2 Descriptive overview of dependent and independent variables

1.2.1 Positional congruence

Figure A.4 presents our main dependent variable 'congruence with public opinion' by group type. The median for solidarity organizations is 57% congruence (α=17%), while this is 45% (α=18%) for representative concentrated groups and 46% (α=20%) for representative diffuse groups. Compared to concentrated interests, we observe a much higher variation in congruence of representative diffuse organizations with the public. In contrast, the boxplot for solidarity interests is relatively shorter, meaning that these types of organizations are on average more congruent with public opinion. In general, diffuse interests show a higher degree of congruence with public opinion compared to concentrated interests.

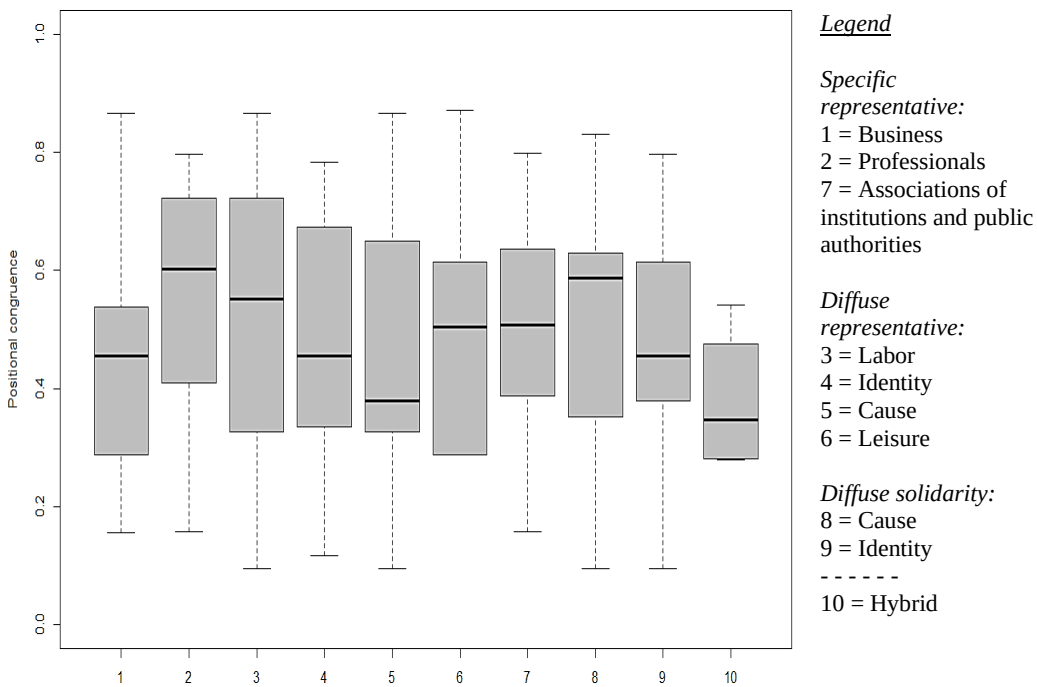
Figure A.4. Boxplots of positional congruence with public opinion by group type



In Figure A.5, we display the boxplots describing congruence with public opinion by group type in a more detailed categorization. This figure shows that while congruence varies substantially across group types, the median value of congruence falls between

40% and 60%. Indeed, an important observation is that there is still quite some variation between group types within our categorization of specific representative, diffuse representative and solidarity diffuse organizations. For instance, while the median levels of congruence for business associations (n=298) and associations of public authorities and institutions (n=51) are fairly close, the median congruence with public opinion for professional associations (n=29) is remarkably higher. Furthermore, labor unions (n=256) enjoy the highest level of congruence of all group types (60%). Finally, Figure A.5 shows that cause groups (n=79) and identity groups (n=74) with formal members have lower congruence with public opinion compared to cause groups (n=100) and identity groups (n=17) without formally affiliated members.

Figure A.5. Boxplots describing congruence with public opinion by group type (n = 986 dyads)

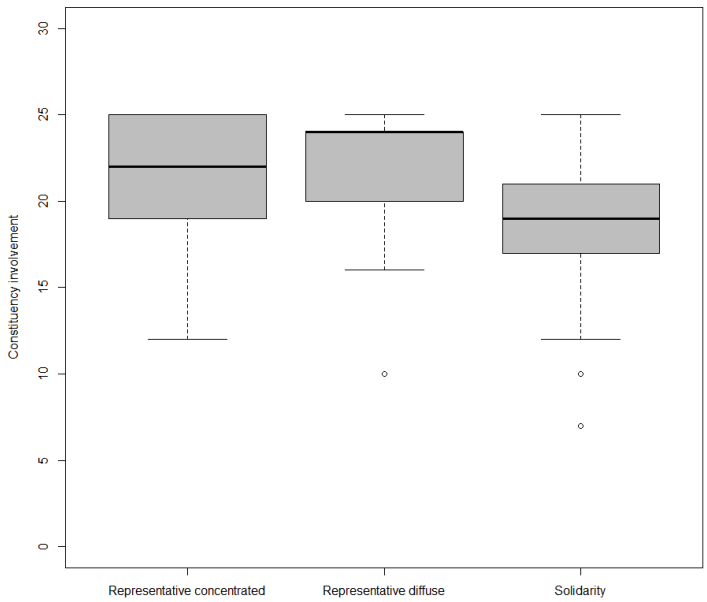


1.2.2 Constituency involvement

Figure A.6 presents the boxplots for constituency involvement by group type. The mean for solidarity organizations is a score of 18.7 (α=4.37), while this is 21.43 (α=3.42) for representative concentrated groups and 21.16 (α=4.35) for representative diffuse groups.

The relatively larger boxplot for solidarity organizations compared to the other group types, but also the range of the boxplots for constituency involvement for representative concentrated and representative diffuse organizations, highlights the substantial variation in constituency involvement between and within group types.

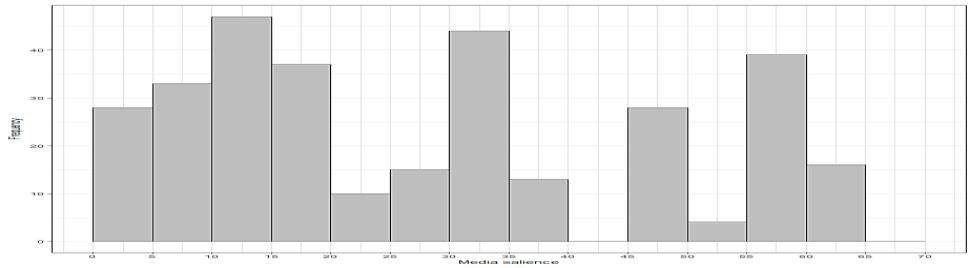
Figure A.6. Boxplots of constituency involvement by group type



A one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) to determine if the mean intensity of constituency involvement is significantly different across group types; representative concentrated (n=144). representative diffuse (n=129) and solidarity organizations (n=40) reveals a statistically significant difference between groups ($F(2.310)=7.78$. $p<.001$). A Tukey post-hoc test shows that the mean intensity of constituency involvement does not significantly differ between representative diffuse groups and representative concentrated interests (-0.289 ± 0.48 percentage points. $p=.818$). In contrast, there is a significant difference between the solidarity groups and representative concentrated groups (-2.744 ± 0.71 percentage points. $p<.001$) and between solidarity and representative diffuse groups (-2.455 ± 0.72 percentage points. $p=.002$).

1.2.3 Media salience

Figure A.7. Histogram of media salience



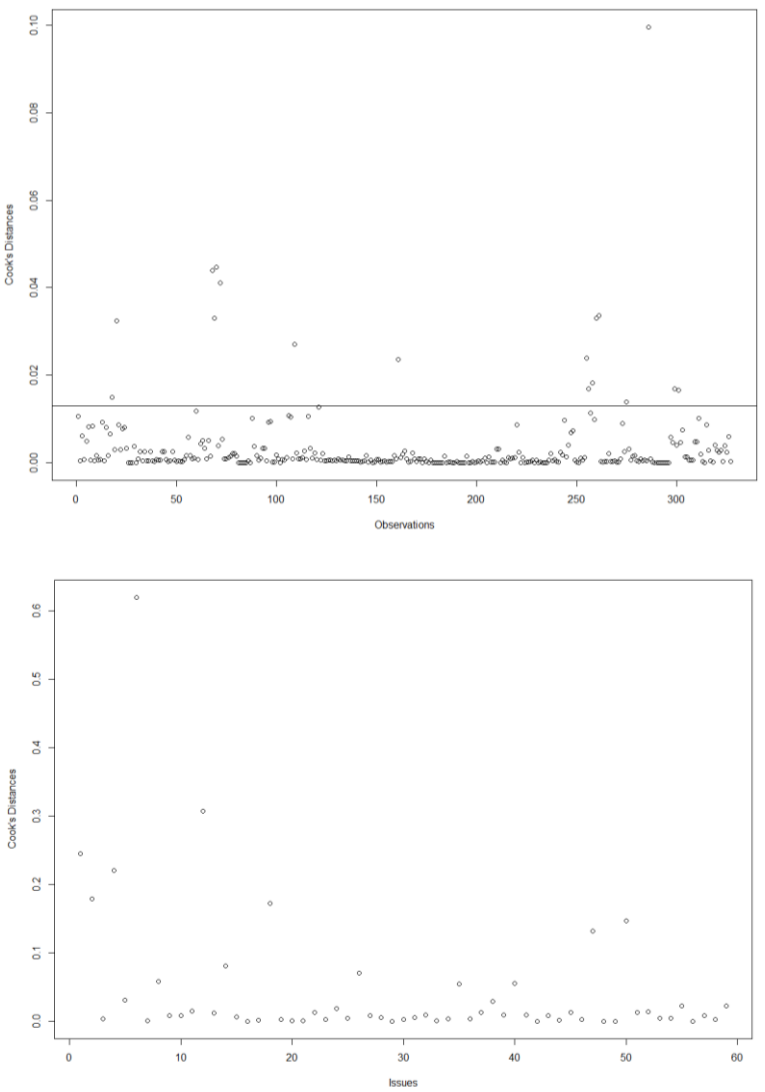
1.3 Model diagnostics, post-estimation and robustness checks of the multivariate statistical analyses

1.3.1 Model diagnostics: exclusion of influential data points

On the basis of a mixed effects OLS-model with a random intercept for each policy issue including group type and all control variables (n=327, issues=59), we created a variable measuring the Cook's Distance. This is calculated for each observation and is the difference between the predicted values from regression with and without this individual observation. A large Cook's Distance indicates an influential observation on the parameter estimates in the regression analysis. To identify a large Cook's Distance. we examined 5% of the most extreme values and relied on the general rule of thumb proposing that observations with a Cook's Distance of more than $4/(n - k -1)$ can be considered large (Van der Meer et al. 2010). The cut-off point based on this rule of thumb is 0.013. i.e. all observations plotted in the top pane of Figure A.8. above the horizontal line. Second. we assessed the Cook's Distance at the issue level. In particular, the policy issue of *implementing a minimum service in case of train strikes* distinguishes itself (circled issue in the bottom pane of Figure A.8). Further examination of this issue revealed that all interest groups active regarding this particular policy had the most extreme values regarding either the maximum value of congruence with public opinion (86% congruence), or the minimum value of congruence (9.53%). In addition. six of the individual observations within the top 5% of the largest Cook's Distances are clustered within this policy issue, whereas the other observations with a Cook's Distance above the cut-off point are not clustered within one issue. Moreover, on this particular policy issue, labor unions confronted with real consequences to their own survival, acted as

specific interest groups instead of as diffuse representative interest groups. Hence, although the data are valid, the observations within this policy issue are too influential. As stated by Van der Meer et al. (2010). *'An analysis in which a small number of cases determine the outcomes does not offer a satisfactory test of a theory – especially when […] influential cases are grouped [within an issue], as is the case here'.* Therefore, this careful examination resulted in the exclusion all observations clustered within this policy issue (4.3% of all dyads) in further analyses.

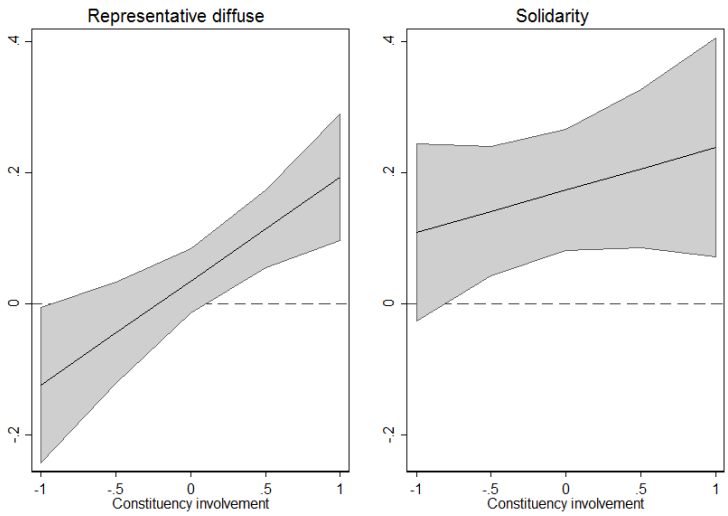
Figure A.8. Plot of Cook's Distance for each individual observation and for each policy issue



1.3.2 Post-estimation: average marginal effects plots

These marginal effect plots are based on Model 4 and Model 5 (presented in the main text) and allow us to interpret for which combinations of values our interactions significantly differ. Figure A.9 indicates the predicted difference in congruence (Y-axis) for different levels of constituency involvement (X-axis). Marginal effects are shown for representative diffuse and solidarity groups. respectively. and predicted changes in congruence (Y-axis) should be interpreted vis-à-vis concentrated groups (i.e. the reference category). The measure of constituency involvement is standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing this by two times the standard deviation (Gelman 2008). Moving one unit of analysis. corresponds to moving one standard deviation below the mean. to one standard deviation above the mean. Figure A.9 shows that representative diffuse groups have lower levels of congruence compared to representative concentrated groups, but this difference declines the more constituencies are involved in advocacy processes and these groups become more congruent at higher levels of constituency involvement (>0).

Figure A.9. Average marginal effects of group type for different levels of constituency involvement with 95% CIs

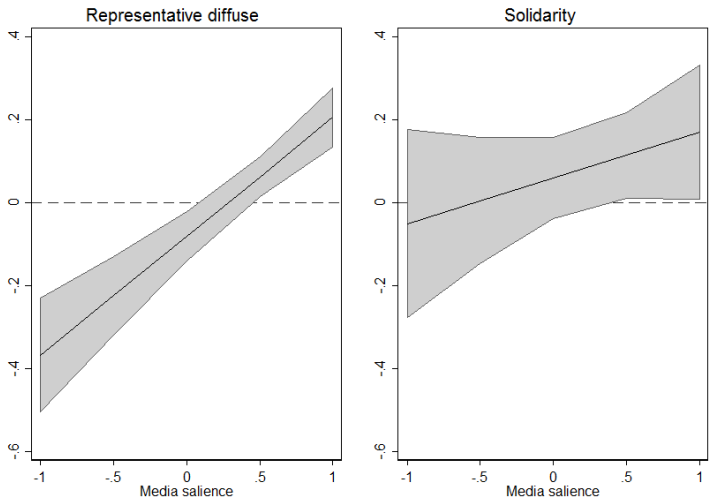


Differences in congruence between concentrated and representative diffuse groups are significant for higher levels of constituency involvement. The same holds true for differences between concentrated interest groups and solidarity groups, where

differences are significant when constituency involvement is high (>0). As expected (H2), concentrated groups are significantly less congruent than diffuse groups when constituency involvement is high.

Figure A.10 indicates the predicted difference in congruence (Y-axis) for different levels of media salience (X-axis). Marginal effects are shown for representative diffuse and solidarity groups and predicted changes in congruence (Y-axis) should be interpreted with respect to representative concentrated groups (i.e. the reference category). Figure A.10 shows that representative diffuse groups have lower levels of congruence compared to concentrated interest groups, but this difference reduces the more salient policy issues become in the media. At high levels of salience. representative diffuse groups become more congruent (>0.5). The left side of the figure shows strong significant differences between concentrated and representative diffuse groups for different levels of salience. As hypothesized (H3) representative concentrated groups are relatively more congruent with the public for issues that receive scarce attention from the mass media, while representative diffuse groups are relatively more congruent when issues are highly salient. The right side of the figure shows that the differences are less pronounced for solidarity groups. Differences between solidarity groups and concentrated interest groups are only significant for highly salient issues (>0.5).

Figure A.10. Average marginal effects of group type for different levels of media salience with 95% CIs



1.3.3 Robustness checks: alternative models

As an alternative to our index of constituency involvement, we established a measure of whether decision-making on policy positions belongs to the constituents (1) or the staff/board (0). Models including this alternative operationalization of constituency involvement are presented in Table A.3.

As an alternative to our continuous measure of congruence we established a dichotomous outcome variable capturing whether or not the position of the largest share of the public coincides with the position adopted by an interest group. Models including this alternative operationalization of congruence as their dependent variable are presented in Table A.4.

Table A.3. OLS-mixed effects models with a random intercept for policy issues: dummy variable measuring whether or not the constituency decides on policy positions

	Model 1 Group type	Model 2 Constituency involvement	Model 3 Media salience	Model 4 Interactions	Model 5 Interactions
Group type (ref. cat=concentrated)	-	-	-	-	-
Representative diffuse	0.047*	0.054*	0.059**	0.004	-0.125***
	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.036)
Solidarity	0.177***	0.183***	0.188***	0.158***	0.021
	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.053)
Constituency involvement					
Constituency decides position (ref.cat= no)	-	-	-	-	-
- Constituency decides		-0.014	-0.013	-0.271***	-0.317***
		(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.077)	(0.071)
Controls: organizational					
Staff (log)	0.059***	0.057**	0.055**	0.059***	0.034
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.021)
Government subsidies (ref.cat=0%)	-	-	-	-	
- 0.01 – 50%	-0.055*	-0.056*	-0.051*	-0.059**	-0.030
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.027)
- 51 -100%	-0.098***	-0.099***	-0.091**	-0.093**	-0.049
	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.036)
Membership origin (ref.cat=national)	-	-	-	-	
- Flemish membership	0.015	0.012	0.011	0.016	-0.011
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.026)
- Walloon/Francophone membership	0.030	0.029	0.033	0.071*	0.048
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.039)
Group position (ref.cat= change status quo)	-0.024	-0.023	-0.026	-0.014	-0.031
- Supports status quo	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Issue context					
Media salience (log)			0.065	0.047	-0.149**
			(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.059)
Controls: issue context					
Political level of competence (ref.cat=Nat.)	-	-	-	-	-
- Flemish issue	-0.006	-0.007	0.023	0.020	0.012
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.057)
- Walloon/Francophone issue	0.016	0.017	0.051	0.051	0.052
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.063)	(0.062)
Months from PO measurement (log)	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.026	0.026
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Interactions					
Group type x Constituency decides				-	-
Representative diffuse x const. decides				0.307***	0.321***
				(0.082)	(0.076)
Solidarity x const. decides				0.246***	0.287***
				(0.092)	(0.086)

Group type x Media salience					-
Representative diffuse x salience					0.323***
					(0.045)
Solidarity x salience					0.112
					(0.089)
Constant					
Fixed effects intercept	0.455***	0.457***	0.430***	0.449***	0.565***
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.043)
Random effects intercept	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Number of media claims	314	314	314	314	314
Number of issues	58	58	58	58	58
Log Likelihood	78.220	75.694	74.499	77.507	97.820
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-128.441	-121.388	-116.997	-119.015	-155.641
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-75.949	-65.147	-57.007	-51.526	-80.653

Table A.4. Logistic mixed effects models with a random intercept for policy issues

	Model 1 Group type	Model 2 Constituency involvement	Model 3 Media salience	Model 4 Interactions	Model 5 Interactions
Group type (ref. cat=concentrated)	-	-	-	-	-
Representative diffuse	0.446	0.590	0.632	0.339	-1.745**
	(0.385)	(0.402)	(0.404)	(0.428)	(0.694)
Solidarity	2.496***	2.903***	2.969***	2.653***	0.730
	(0.799)	(0.865)	(0.874)	(0.955)	(1.114)
Constituency involvement					
Constituency involvement (index)		0.603	0.596	-0.807	-0.510
		(0.388)	(0.388)	(0.619)	(0.654)
Controls: organizational					
Staff (log)	1.006***	1.116***	1.097***	1.803***	1.475***
	(0.365)	(0.375)	(0.377)	(0.463)	(0.487)
Government subsidies (ref.cat=0%)	-	-	-	-	-
- 0.01 – 50%	-0.924**	-0.857*	-0.810*	-0.992**	-0.796
	(0.457)	(0.468)	(0.470)	(0.490)	(0.532)
- 51 -100%	-1.371**	-1.383**	-1.302*	-1.117	-0.712
	(0.655)	(0.667)	(0.674)	(0.694)	(0.760)
Membership origin (ref.cat=national)	-	-	-	-	-
- Flemish membership	0.307	0.492	0.484	0.036	-0.066
	(0.439)	(0.465)	(0.464)	(0.493)	(0.534)
- Walloon/Francophone membership	0.731	0.764	0.805	0.978	1.114
	(0.714)	(0.740)	(0.742)	(0.793)	(0.905)
Group position (ref.cat= change status quo)	0.275	0.283	0.260	0.057	-0.292
- Supports status quo	(0.323)	(0.326)	(0.327)	(0.340)	(0.374)
Issue context					
Media salience (log)			0.661	0.472	-2.138*
			(0.775)	(0.827)	(1.194)
Controls: issue context					
Political level of competence (ref.cat=Nat.)	-	-	-	-	-
- Flemish issue	-0.292	-0.318	-0.026	-0.041	-0.101
	(0.810)	(0.846)	(0.907)	(0.969)	(1.105)
- Walloon/Francophone issue	0.705	0.885	1.243	1.359	1.563
	(0.859)	(0.906)	(1.000)	(1.072)	(1.213)
Months from PO measurement (log)	0.547	0.526	0.515	0.494	0.613
	(0.371)	(0.379)	(0.379)	(0.391)	(0.427)
Interactions					
Group type x Constituency involvement				-	-
Representative diffuse x involvement				2.700***	1.970**
				(0.855)	(0.917)
Solidarity x involvement				0.683	0.038
				(1.255)	(1.320)
Group type x Media salience					-
Representative diffuse x salience					4.838***
					(1.133)
Solidarity x salience					0.819
					(1.882)

Constant					
Fixed effects intercept	-0.287	-0.464	-0.746	-0.323	1.221
	(0.510)	(0.542)	(0.640)	(0.690)	(0.877)
Random effects intercept	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Number of media claims	314	314	314	314	314
Number of issues	58	58	58	58	58
Log Likelihood	-184.502	-183.219	-182.848	-177.236	-164.298
Akaike Inf. Crit.	395.003	394.439	395.696	388.472	366.596
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	443.745	446.930	451.937	452.211	437.835

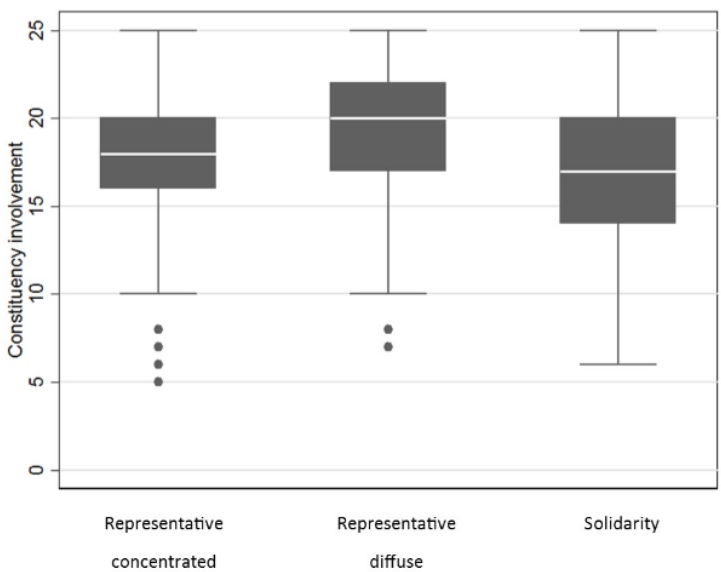
Article 3 – Politicized policy access

1.4 Measurement of variables

1.4.1 Independent variable: Constituency involvement across group types

Figure A.3 presents the boxplots for constituency involvement by group type. The mean for solidarity organizations is a score of 16.8 (α=4.42), while this is 17.7 (α=3.68) for specific representative groups and 19.2 (α=3.77) for diffuse representative groups. The relatively larger boxplot for solidarity organizations compared to the other group types, but also the range of the boxplots for constituency involvement for representative concentrated and representative diffuse organizations, highlights the substantial variation in constituency involvement between and within group types.

Figure A.3. Boxplots of constituency involvement by group type



A one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) to determine if the mean intensity of constituency involvement is significantly different across group types—representative concentrated (n=144), representative diffuse (n=129) and solidarity organizations (n=40)—confirms a statistically significant difference between groups ($F(2,5613)=150.31$, $p<.001$). A Tukey post-hoc test showed that the mean intensity of constituency involvement significantly differs between representative diffuse groups and representative concentrated interests (1.503 ± 0.12 percentage points, $p<.001$).

Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the solidarity groups and representative concentrated groups (-0.938 ± 0.14 percentage points, p<.001) and between solidarity and representative diffuse groups (-2.441 ± 0.15 percentage points, p<.001).

1.4.2 Measuring politicization per policy domain

First, to determine the scope of interest mobilization in each domain, the overall advocacy intensity each organisation develops per policy domain was summed across all organizations to create an aggregate measure of interest mobilization per policy domain (Boräng & Naurin 2016). For instance, if 20 interest groups indicate that they are active in education policy, all of their individual scores for advocacy intensity per week in this policy domain are summed.

Second, public salience is measured by scoring each policy domain according to the number of Belgian voters in the European Election Survey of 2014 that indicated a domain as the first and second 'most important problem' faced by the domestic governments (Schmitt et al. 2015). The 148 policy topics coded by the survey conductors[1] were matched with the policy areas included in the interest group survey and coded policy areas for each advisory council. The EES was conducted in 2014 which overlaps with the timeframe of the national and subnational elections in Belgium. This strengthens the validity of the data; Belgian voters were primarily focused on domestic topics. The measure was logarithmically transformed because of its skewed distribution (see Table A.4).

Third, political contestation is measured by calculating the dispersion of policy positions taken by each political party on a set of policy issues attributed to each policy domain. For a set of 110 policy issues included in the 2014 Benchmark Survey for the Belgian Voting Advice Application (Lesschaeve, 2017), each political party indicated whether it agreed or disagreed with the statement. For each of these 110 statements the dispersion of positions between parties was calculating by taking the ratio of the number of parties that agreed over the number of parties that disagreed, so that each statement

[1] https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=5160&db=e&doi=10.4232/1.12628

gets a score ranging between 0 (unified) and 1 (completely polarized). This score was multiplied by 100 to create percentages. Subsequently, each statement was attributed to a specific policy domain in order to calculate the average dispersion of the positions of political parties per domain.

Table A.4. Politicization of different policy domains and distribution of advisory councils

Policy domain	**Interest mobilization** (scale)	**Public salience** (absolute numbers)	**Public salience** (logged)	**Political contestation** (average dispersion in %)	**Politicization** (index)	**Advisory councils** (%)
Environment/ Spatial planning/ Energy	60,5	56	4,04	44,2	422,99	0,05
Health care	53,63	15	2,77	10,7	178,19	0,29
Social affairs	52,82	181	5,20	41,7	491,50	0,07
Rights & Liberties	51,87	9	2,30	37,2	204,86	0,03
Economic affairs	48,23	370	5,92	42,4	536,53	0,15
Education	46,89	14	2,71	33	216,50	0,08
Culture/Media/ Leisure	42,52	29	3,40	43,8	293,49	0,08
(Public) Transport/ Mobility	39,13	0	0,001	51	0,01	0,05
Foreign affairs & defense	28,38	7	2,08	45,9	154,50	0,01
Labor	27,99	400	5,99	43,3	427,03	0,03
Migration	20,1	215	5,38	25,9	247,48	0,001
Justice	2,44	71	4,28	44,3	200,05	0,03

Finally, the three measures are combined in one index according to the formula of Hutter and Grande (2014): *politicization=public salience*(interest mobilization+contestation)*. The correlation matrix of these three variables is presented in Table A.5.

Table A.5. Spearman-correlation matrix of measures of politicization

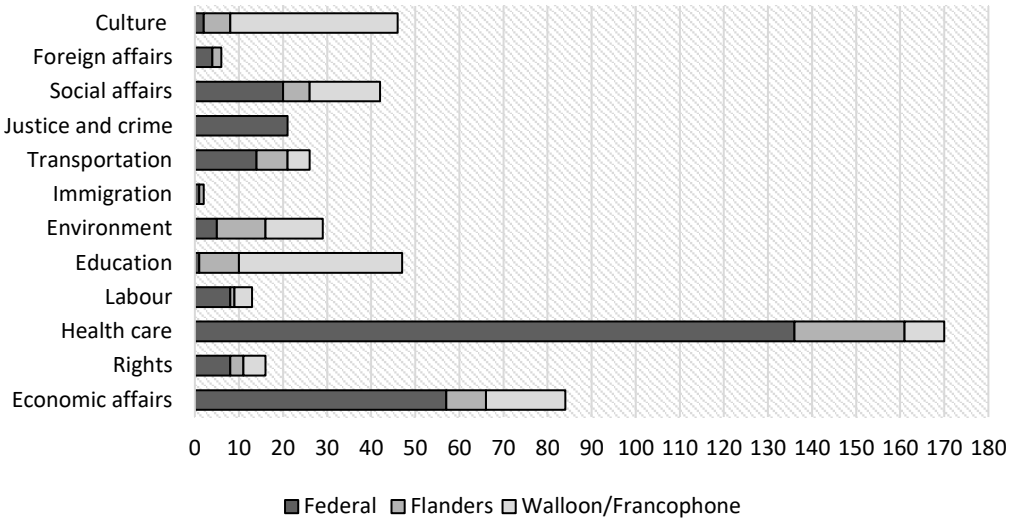
	Interest mobilization	Public salience	Political contestation
Interest mobilization	1.00	-0.06	-0.32
		(0.8629)	(0.3079)
Public salience		1.00	-0.33
			(0.2969)
Political contestation			1.00

n=12 policy domains

While these correlations are not significant, Table A.4. in Appendix does illustrate the mutually reinforcing effect of all three dimensions of politicization. For instance, migration currently attracts high levels of public salience, but the domain is marked by relatively less political contestation and lower levels of interest mobilization. As a result, migration scores relatively higher on the politicization index (5.38*(25.9+20.1)=247.48) compared to for instance justice (4.28*(44.3+2.44)=200.05), but it is not as politicized as environmental policy—for which all three factors are present to a great extent (4.04*(44.2+60.5)= 422.99).

Finally, setting up advisory councils is a widespread practice at all levels of government in Belgium (Fobé et al., 2013; Fraussen & Beyers, 2015; van den Berg et al., 2014). Figure A.4 shows that most advisory councils are established at the national level (n=290). Specifically, health care, economic affairs, social affairs, justice, transportation, and labor policy are characterized by a high number of advisory councils. At the Walloon/Francophone level, 167 councils are established: with a high number of advisory in the policy domains culture, education, environment, social affairs, and economic affairs. Flanders clearly distinguishes itself by having fewer advisory councils (n=116) across all policy domains.

Figure A.4. Number of advisory councils by levels of government across policy domains



1.4.3 Control variable: advocacy intensity per policy domain

To gauge the advocacy intensity with regard to inside tactics, each organisation indicated how frequently they sought access to specific governmental actors during the past 12 months on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from never to once a week. These contacts included policymakers of the legislative branch, the executive, and the administrative branch at the (sub)national levels of government. Governmental actors included for executive branch ministers and cabinet staff; for the legislative branch majority and opposition parliamentarians, and for the administrative branch staff in the various ministries and departments. In separate batteries, the contacts initiated with (1) the federal government, (2) the Flemish Region, (3) the French-speaking Community Government, and (4) the Walloon Regional Government, were gauged across these three branches of government. To check the validity of summing the frequency with which each interest group initiates contacts with policymakers across these four levels of government, a Cronbach's Alpha was calculated (α=.88).

To gauge the advocacy intensity with regard to outside tactics, each organisation indicated on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from never to once a week whether they used: press conferences and press releases (1), involvement in media debates by giving interviews or writing opinion pieces (2), advertising in newspapers (3), contacting

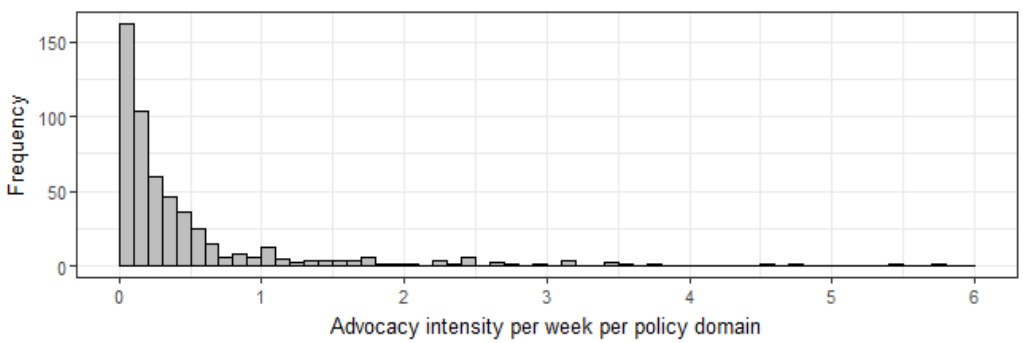
journalists (4), mobilizing members and supporters to participate in advocacy activities (5), staging protests (6), publishing position papers (7).

Next, the measure of the overall advocacy intensity was calculated by summing all activities per week of that organization per policy domain. The answer options were subsequently recoded in such a way that they reflected the number of times a certain activity was performed per year, to then sum these values for each organisation and divide this by 52 (weeks in a year). After this, the values for inside and outside activities were summed. Thus, a response indicating that an interest group published a research report once a year (1/52), staged a protest once every three months (4.3/52), contacted a ministry once a month (13/52), and would organize press conferences or issue press releases once a week (52/52) would add up to a score of 1.35 advocacy intensity per week.

As groups can be active in multiple policy domains at the same time, this overall score was divided by the number of policy domains in which an organisation is active. For instance, if an interest group would indicate that is was active in three policy domains, the total amount of advocacy intensity per week would be divided by three. Thus, taking the above example, this would result in a score of 0.45 advocacy intensity per week per policy domain (1.35/3).

This measure is very left-skewed with a mean of 0.46 (α=0.74), a median of 0.2, a minimum of 0 and a maximum score of 5.7. Therefore, a categorical variable distinguishing between below median intensity of lobbying activities (n=270) and above median intensity of lobbying activities (n=261) was created.

Figure A.5. Histogram of advocacy intensity per week per policy domain

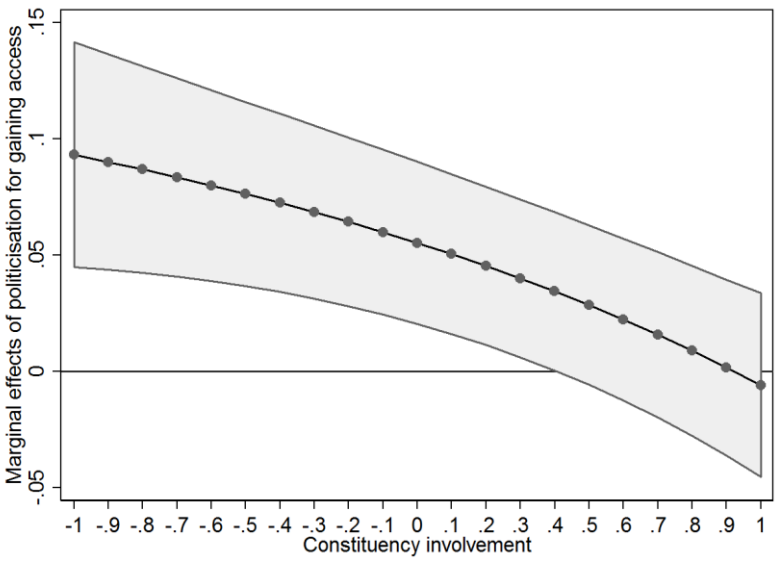


1.5 Post-estimation and robustness checks

1.5.1 Marginal effects plot

Figure A.6. presents the marginal effects for the interaction term between constituency involvement and politicization (based on the second model in the main body). The marginal effects plot demonstrates that the predicted difference in gaining access (Y-axis) by levels of politicization co-varies with levels of constituency involvement (X-axis). Marginal effects are shown for high levels of politicization and predicted changes in gaining access should be interpreted vis-à-vis low levels of politicization (the reference category). Figure A.6. shows that the predicted change in gaining access moves from 9% for low levels of involvement to only 3% for higher levels of constituency involvement.

Figure A.6. Marginal effects on gaining access for different values of constituency involvement by levels of politicization (with 95% CIs)



1.5.2 Modelling access to advisory councils: robustness checks

Table A.6. Logistic regression models with separate measures for three dimensions of politicization and clustered standard errors modelling access to advisory councils

	Direct effects	Group type * politicization	Consti. Invo. * politicization
INDEPENT VARIABLES			
Group type (ref. cat. = specific interests)	-	-	-
- 'Representative' citizen groups	-0.314	-0.277	-0.314
	(0.22)	(0.15)	(0.22)
- Solidarity groups	-1.311***	-1.173***	-1.321***
	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.27)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.315	0.312	0.430***
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.13)
Organizational CONTROLS			
Intensity of advocacy activities (ref.cat. = no activities)	-	-	-
- Below median	0.818**	0.787**	0.827**
	(0.25)	(0.27)	(0.25)
- Above median	1.669***	1.660***	1.675***
	(0.21)	(0.25)	(0.22)
Propensity to share technical information	0.305***	0.307***	0.302***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Generalist vs. Specialist	0.191	0.209	0.186
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Staff (log)	1.146***	1.158***	1.156***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Government funding (ref.cat. = no subsidies)	-	-	-
- 0.001% to 50%	0.189	0.189	0.188
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
- 51%-100%	-0.006	-0.009	-0.009
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)
POLITICIZATION			
Public salience	0.482*	1.014**	0.617*
	(0.22)	(0.34)	(0.25)
Interest mobilization	0.357	0.352	0.463*
	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Political contestation	0.584*	0.295	0.650*
	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.27)
Number of advisory councils	1.134***	1.123***	1.121***
	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.25)
INTERACTIONS			
'Representative' citizen groups * public salience		-1.123**	
		(0.39)	
Solidarity groups * public salience		-0.779	
		(0.48)	
'Representative' citizen groups * mobilization		0.278	
		(0.29)	
Solidarity groups * mobilization		-0.514	
		(0.42)	
'Representative' citizen groups * contestation		0.564*	
		(0.25)	
Solidarity groups * contestation		0.504	
		(0.35)	
Constituency involvement * public salience			-0.766**
			(0.28)

Constituency involvement * mobilization			-0.583*
			(0.23)
Constituency involvement * contestation			-0.476**
			(0.18)
Constant	-3.507***	-3.573***	-3.538***
	(0.32)	(0.27)	(0.32)
Observations	5616	5616	5616
Log Likelihood	-1451.243	-1434.996	-1443.296
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2938.487	2923.992	2932.591
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-853.813	-886.308	-869.708

*Note: standard errors in parenthesis; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A.7. Logistic regression models with a control for welfare state policy domains and clustered standard errors modelling access to advisory councils

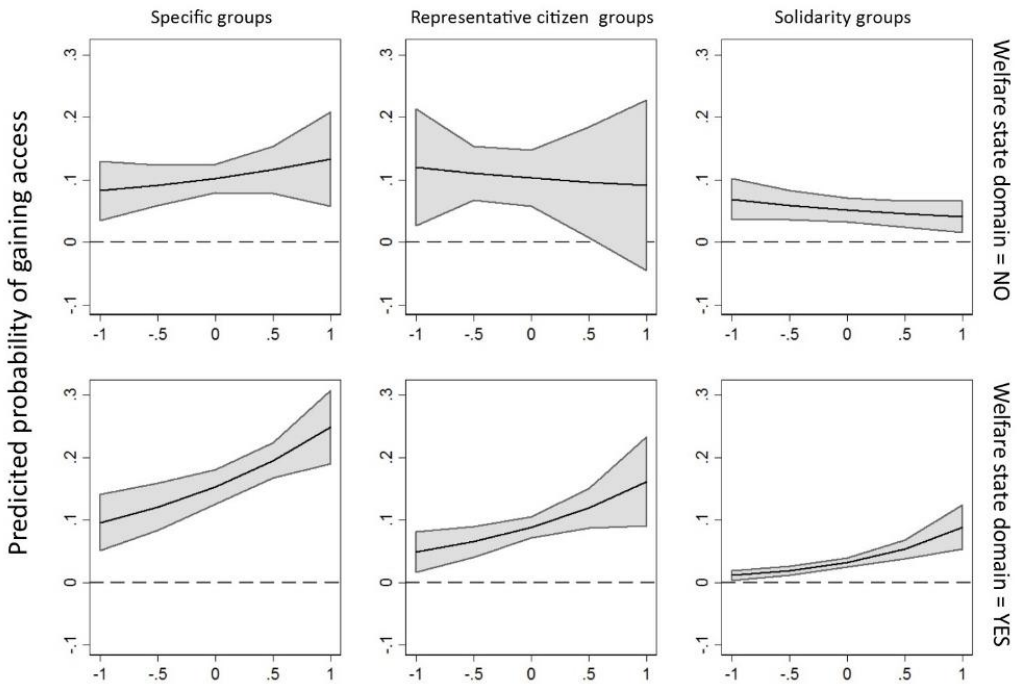
	Direct effects	Two-way Interactions	Three-way Interactions
INDEPENT VARIABLES			
Group type (ref. cat. = specific interests)	-	-	-
- 'Representative' citizen groups	-0.315	-0.255	-0.813***
	(0.21)	(0.24)	(0.17)
- Solidarity groups	-1.318***	-1.257***	-2.136***
	(0.26)	(0.33)	(0.16)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.319	0.434**	0.429*
	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Organizational CONTROLS			
Intensity of advocacy activities (ref.cat. = no activities)	-	-	-
- Below median	0.860***	0.848**	0.840**
	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.26)
- Above median	1.701***	1.685***	1.685***
	(0.21)	(0.24)	(0.25)
Propensity to share technical information	0.304***	0.301***	0.301***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Generalist vs. Specialist	0.172	0.173	0.181
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Staff (log)	1.146***	1.161***	1.168***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Government funding (ref.cat. = no subsidies)	-	-	-
- 0.001% to 50%	0.188	0.187	0.194
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
- 51%-100%	-0.010	-0.014	-0.009
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.31)
POLITICIZATION			
Politicization (index)	0.356	0.800	0.875***
	(0.35)	(0.42)	(0.24)
Number of advisory councils	0.552*	0.568**	0.823***
	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.15)
Welfare state domain (ref.cat.=yes)	-0.474	-0.463	-0.601**
	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.23)
INTERACTIONS			
Representative citizen groups*politicization		-0.612	0.118
		(0.50)	(0.54)
Solidarity groups*politicization		-0.582	0.579
		(0.53)	(0.44)
Constituency involvement* politicization		-0.871**	-0.818**
		(0.30)	(0.32)
Representative citizen groups*not welfare state			0.820**
			(0.29)
Solidarity groups*not welfare state			1.220***
			(0.34)
Welfare state* politicization			-0.382
			(0.47)
Representative citizen groups*politicization*not welfare state			-0.660
			(0.72)
Solidarity groups* politicization*not welfare state			-1.240*
			(0.56)

Constant	-3.183***	-3.255***	-3.275***
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.30)
Observations	5616	5616	5616
Log Likelihood	-1452.664	-1440.214	-1429.019
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2941.328	2926.427	2932.039
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-850.971	-875.872	-898.261

*Note: standard errors in parenthesis; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

The predicted probabilities presented in Figure A.7 are based on the model including the three-way interaction terms. Figure A.7 indicates the predicted likelihood of access (Y-axis) for different levels of politicization (X-axis) split up by group type and the nature of the policy domain. The predicted probability of gaining access for representative citizen organizations is on average 9% in a highly politicized context that do not belong to the traditional welfare state domains, while specific organizations in a highly politicized policy context have a predicted probability of 13%. This does not significantly differ from each other. In contrast, when both types of groups intensely involve their constituents within policy domains that belong to the traditional welfare state domains, specific interest groups are more likely to gain access (25%) than representative citizen groups (16%).

Figure A.7. Predicted probabilities of gaining access for group type by levels of politicization, controlled for policy domain (with 95% CIs)



The marginal effect plots presented in Figure A.8 are based on the model including the three-way interaction terms and allow to interpret for which combinations of values these interactions significantly differ. Figure A.8 indicates the predicted difference in gaining access (Y-axis) for different levels of politicization (X-axis) split up by whether or not it is a welfare state domain. Marginal effects are shown for representative citizen groups and solidarity groups, respectively, and predicted changes in gaining access (Y-axis) should be interpreted vis-à-vis specific interest groups (the reference group type). Figure A.8 shows that representative citizen groups have rather equal chances of gaining access compared to specific interest groups, but this effect is most outspoken in policy domains that do not belong the traditional welfare state domains. Differences in gaining access between specific interest groups and representative citizen groups are only significant for average levels of politicization in welfare state domains. Significant differences between specific interest groups and solidarity groups negatively increase the more politicized a policy domain becomes. This holds across both types of policy domains.

Figure A.8. Marginal effects for gaining access for different levels of politicization by group type, controlled for type of policy domain (with 95% CIs)

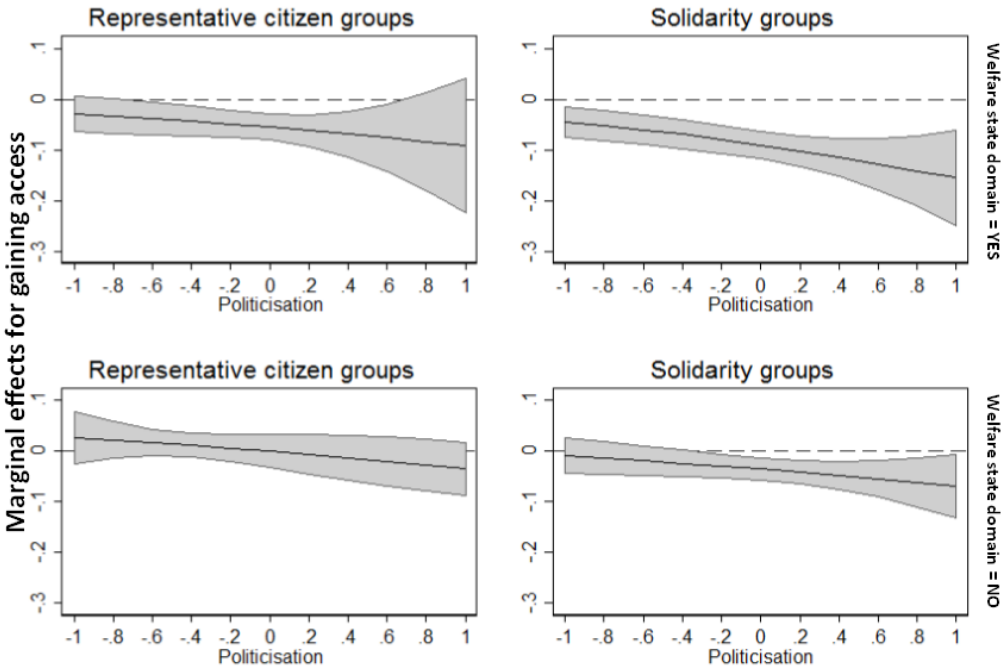


Table A.8. Mixed effects logistic regression models with two random intercepts modelling access to advisory councils

	Direct effects	Interaction effects	Direct effects-Politicization (3 dim.)	Group type* politicization (3 dim.)	Consti.Invo.* politicization (3 dim.)
INDEPENT VARIABLES					
Group type (ref. cat. = specific interests)	-	-			
- 'Representative' citizen groups	-0.460**	-0.395*	-0.459**	-0.363	-0.467**
	(0.212)	(0.215)	(0.211)	(0.221)	(0.213)
- Solidarity groups	-1.476***	-1.403***	-1.474***	-1.260***	-1.484***
	(0.275)	(0.280)	(0.275)	(0.282)	(0.277)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.363*	0.492**	0.363*	0.367*	0.535**
	(0.205)	(0.213)	(0.205)	(0.207)	(0.221)
Organizational CONTROLS					
Intensity of advocacy activities (ref.cat. = no activities)	-	-			
- Below median	0.985***	0.970***	0.971***	0.911***	0.977***
	(0.195)	(0.197)	(0.195)	(0.197)	(0.196)
- Above median	1.779***	1.763***	1.767***	1.727***	1.774***
	(0.135)	(0.136)	(0.136)	(0.137)	(0.136)
Propensity to share technical information	0.662***	0.660***	0.663***	0.666***	0.661***
	(0.176)	(0.178)	(0.176)	(0.179)	(0.178)
Generalist vs. Specialist	0.035	0.040	0.041	0.072	0.040
	(0.176)	(0.178)	(0.176)	(0.178)	(0.178)
Staff (log)	1.075***	1.081***	1.075***	1.087***	1.076***
	(0.132)	(0.134)	(0.132)	(0.134)	(0.133)
Government funding (ref.cat. = no subsidies)	-	-			
- 0.001% to 50%	0.203	0.211	0.202	0.207	0.211
	(0.214)	(0.216)	(0.214)	(0.217)	(0.215)
- 51%-100%	-0.032	-0.027	-0.033	-0.030	-0.025
	(0.218)	(0.220)	(0.218)	(0.221)	(0.219)
POLITICIZATION					
Politicization (index)	0.635**	1.082***			
	(0.268)	(0.284)			
Public salience			0.637***	1.184***	0.737***
			(0.210)	(0.245)	(0.215)
Interest mobilization			0.458*	0.523*	0.602**
			(0.253)	(0.302)	(0.267)
Political contestation			0.412	0.057	0.486
			(0.292)	(0.324)	(0.299)
Number of advisory councils	0.940***	0.950***	1.061***	1.049***	1.056***
	(0.266)	(0.261)	(0.316)	(0.334)	(0.317)
INTERACTIONS					
'Representative' citizen groups * politicization		-0.677***			
		(0.229)			
Solidarity groups * politicization		-0.603*			
		(0.335)			

'Representative' citizen groups * public salience				-1.215***	
				(0.239)	
Solidarity groups * public salience				-1.023***	
				(0.347)	
'Representative' citizen groups * mobilization				0.147	
				(0.289)	
Solidarity groups * mobilization				-0.688*	
				(0.383)	
'Representative' citizen groups * contestation				0.698***	
				(0.229)	
Solidarity groups * contestation				0.640*	
				(0.339)	
Constituency involvement * politicization		-0.792***			
		(0.262)			
Constituency involvement * public salience					-0.656***
					(0.254)
Constituency involvement * mobilization					-0.707**
					(0.342)
Constituency involvement * contestation					-0.449*
					(0.265)
Constant	-3.574***	-3.662***	-3.571***	-3.678***	-3.628***
	(0.197)	(0.199)	(0.178)	(0.187)	(0.181)
Observations *(473 groups * 12 policy domains)*	5,676	5,676	5,676	5,676	5,676
Log Likelihood	-1,375.312	-1,363.140	-1,372.496	-1,351.815	-1,364.921
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,780.624	2,762.279	2,778.992	2,749.631	2,769.842
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2,880.284	2,881.871	2,891.940	2,902.443	2,902.722

*Note: standard errors in parenthesis; *p<0.1; **p<0.05;***p<0.01*

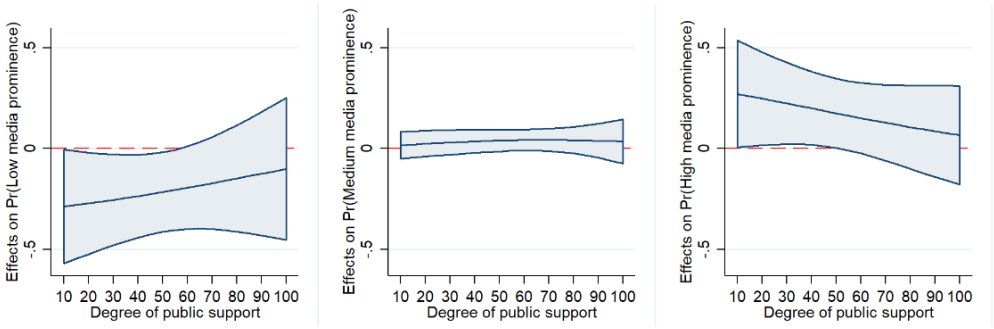
Article 4 – No escape from the media gates

1.6 Post-estimation and robustness checks of the multivariate statistical analyses

1.6.1 Post-estimation: average marginal effects plots

The marginal effect plots are based on Model 2 (presented in the main text) and allow to interpret for which combinations of values the interaction significantly differs. Figure A.4 indicates the predicted difference in media prominence (Y-axis) for different degrees of public support (X-axis). Marginal effects are shown for each outcome value of the dependent variable. Figure A.4, as expected, shows that a unit increase in the value of issue salience, on average leads to a decrease in the probability of the dependent variable to take the value of 'high prominence' if the public becomes more opposed to the position of the interest group. Conversely, a unit increase in the value of issue salience, on average leads to an increase in the probability of the dependent variable to take the value of 'low prominence' if a group enjoys higher levels of public support.

Figure A.4. Average marginal effects of issue salience across degrees of public support with 95% CIs



1.6.2 Robustness checks: Zero-inflated Poisson regression analyses

The degree of media prominence that groups gain can also be measured as a count-variable. Therefore, I ran a zero-inflated Poisson regression model with clustered standard errors at the level of interest groups (n=400 groups) to model these count data and to account for the possible excess of zero counts due to groups' limited use of media strategies. The inflate coefficient for media strategies suggests that compared to groups with a below median intensity of media strategies, groups with an above median use of media strategies, the log odds of an inflated zero decrease by 1.2.

Table A1. Zero-inflated Poisson regression analyses modelling media prominence

	Policy domain Benchmark Model
Organizational variables	
Group type (ref.cat.=concentrated)	-
- Representative diffuse	0.107
	(0.21)
- Solidarity	0.167
	(0.30)
Access to AC (ref.cat.=no access)	0.729*
	(0.37)
Staff (log)	0.635***
	(0.18)
Constituency involvement (index)	0.219
	(0.21)
Media strategies intensity (ref.cat.=below median)	0.612*
- Above median	(0.31)
Context variables	
News salience (log)	0.499**
	(0.17)
Public priority (log)	-0.245
	(0.19)
Political contestation	0.830*
	(0.36)
Interest mobilization	-0.047
	(0.19)
Zero-Inflation	
Media strategies intensity (ref.cat.=below median)	-1.571**
- Above median	(0.53)
Constant	1.200*
	(0.53)
Model fit statistics	
N	1290
df	10
Loglikelihood	-490.855
AIC	1003.709
BIC	1060.496

*Note: clustered standard errors within parentheses and significance levels indicated by ⊥ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Article 5 – Public opinion as an ally of interest groups?

Table A.1. Spearman rank-correlation coefficients success in three stages (n=321)

Preference attainment	Coalition agreement	Bills introduced in parliament	Bills adopted
Coalition agreement	1	0.10 p=0.067	0.27 p<0.001
Bills introduced in parliament		1	0.42 p<0.001
Bills adopted			1

Table A.2. Spearman rank-correlation coefficients three sources of support (n=321)

	Public support	Proportion of supportive IGs	Support governing parties	Support opposition parties
Public support	1	0.28 p<0.001	0.30 p<0.001	0.42 p<0.001
Proportion of supportive IGs		1	-0.01 p=0.849	0.48 p<0.001
Support governing parties			1	0.13 p=0.019
Support opposition parties				1

Figure A.1. Predicted probabilities of advocacy success by degree of public support for opposition and majority legislative initiatives with 95% CIs (Model 4)

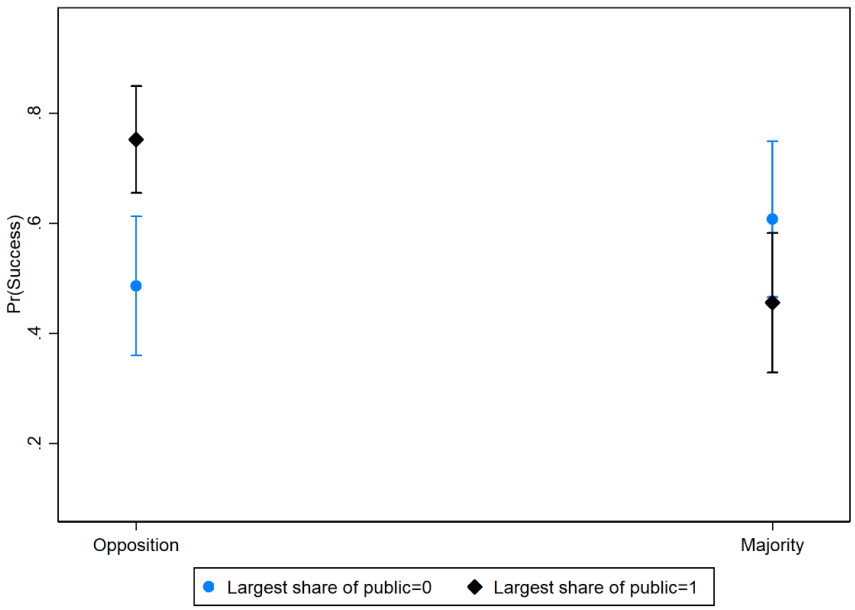


Table A.3 Logistic regression analyses modelling advocacy success

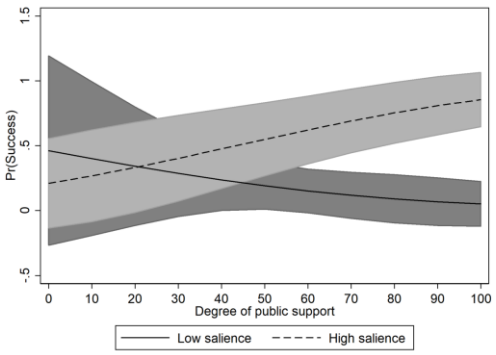
	Coalition agreement		Introduced legislation		Adopted legislation	
Organizational variables	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
Group type (ref.cat.=concentrated)	-	-	-	-	-	-
- Representative diffuse	-0.57	-0.77**	0.22	0.26	-0.41	-0.39
	(0.36)	(0.32)	(0.23)	(0.29)	(0.41)	(0.41)
- Solidarity	-0.93	-1.08	1.27**	1.66**	-0.46	-0.42
	(0.70)	(0.67)	(0.51)	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.67)
Staff (log)	0.22	0.19	-0.37	-0.51	0.09	0.10
	(0.37)	(0.39)	(0.42)	(0.47)	(0.38)	(0.36)
Seats in AC (log)	0.67	0.66	0.54	0.80*	1.25**	1.25**
	(0.44)	-0.77**	(0.39)	(0.47)	(0.58)	(0.59)
Advocacy intensity (log)	0.58*	0.57*	-0.30	-0.23	0.84**	0.83**
	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Position variables						
Public support	0.50	0.46	0.83***	3.50***	-0.53	-0.48
	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.29)	(1.03)	(0.50)	(0.64)
Proportion of supportive IGs	-0.18	-0.19	0.89***	0.87***	0.85*	0.86*
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.46)	(0.45)
Support from governing parties (proportion of seats)	0.10	0.05	0.05***	2.61***	0.06***	2.37***
	(0.60)	(0.56)	(0.01)	(0.37)	(0.01)	(0.51)
Position vs. SQ (ref.cat.=SQ-defender)						
- SQ-challenger	1.74***	1.73***	1.45***	1.62***	2.29***	2.29***
	(0.52)	(0.55)	(0.29)	(0.40)	(0.62)	(0.62)
Political context variables						
News salience (log)	0.82	0.78	-1.04**	-1.34***	1.88***	1.92**
	(0.62)	(0.61)	(0.42)	(0.41)	(0.71)	(0.81)
Public salience (log)	0.90	0.78	0.15	-0.01	-0.30	-0.27
	(0.71)	(0.68)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.45)	(0.42)
Number of IGs in the news	0.17	0.11	0.91*	0.61	0.65	0.65
	(0.40)	(0.38)	(0.52)	(0.48)	(0.63)	(0.62)
Timing of media claim (ref.cat.=before elections)	-	-	-	-	-	-
- During coalition formation	-0.76	-0.66	-0.24	-0.13	-0.36	-0.37
	(0.56)	(0.53)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.72)	(0.70)
- After coalition formation	-0.36	-0.35	-0.31	-0.56**	-0.10	-0.10
	(0.37)	(0.35)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.36)	(0.35)
Competent government level (ref.cat.=national)						
- Flanders	1.88**	1.83**	-0.04	-0.06	0.39	0.45
	(0.83)	(0.87)	(0.58)	(0.58)	(0.69)	(0.79)
- Walloon/Francophone	-0.36	-0.29	-0.64	-0.63	-0.90	-0.90
	(1.01)	(1.05)	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.76)	(0.76)
Legislative context variables						
Majority proposal (ref.cat.=opposition proposal)			-0.28	-0.77		
			(0.57)	(0.54)		
Success in coalition agreement (ref.cat.=No attention for issue priority)			-	-		
- Attention for issue priority			0.97***	1.55***		
			(0.31)	(0.35)		
- Position attainment			1.25***	2.47***		
			(0.43)	(0.49)		

Interaction terms						
Public support*News salience		1.26		2.44***		-0.27
		(0.92)		(0.65)		(1.35)
Majority proposal*Public support				-4.23***		
				(1.37)		
Public support*Proportion of supportive IGs				2.16***		
				(0.53)		
Constant	-1.23**	-1.11*	-2.57***	-1.61**	-3.89***	-2.28***
	(0.59)	(0.58)	(0.61)	(0.65)	(0.79)	(0.78)
Model fit statistics						
Number of Observations	296	296	283	283	205	205
Loglikelihood	-148.899	-146.913	-134.143	-116.216	-83.804	-83.759
AIC	332	330	308	278	202	204
BIC	395	396	381	362	258	263

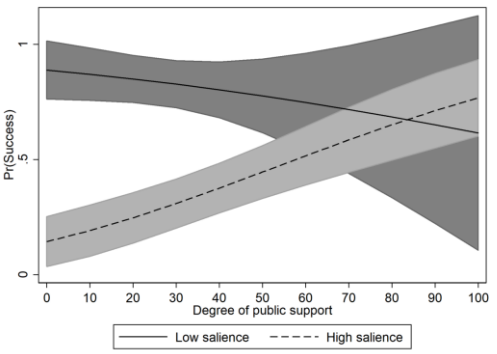
*Note: clustered standard errors in parentheses and significance levels indicated by * p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01*

Figure A.2. Predicted probabilities of preference attainment across the legislative stages for the degree of public support by high and low levels of media salience (based on models in Table A.3)

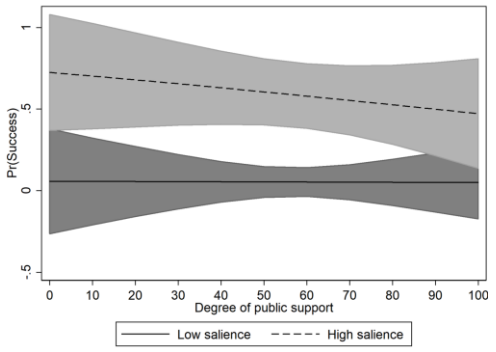
Coalition agreement



Introduced legislation



Adopted legislation



Note on author contributions

The first authorship of all scientific articles included in this dissertation entails the conception, initial and final draft of all parts of the paper—including the theoretical framework, data gathering and methods section, data analysis, and discussion of results. The writing of all papers was characterized by iterative processes between all authors, with each co-author contributing to all parts of the paper. The overall data collection efforts were part of the ERC-funded iBias-project awarded to Prof. dr. Jan Beyers, who coordinated these efforts. The table below gives an accurate overview of author contributions per article.

Table. Author contributions per article

Articles	***Contribution of co-authors***
Article 1 – Interest representation in Belgium	Evelien Willems: theory development, data gathering and cleaning, data analyses, discussion of results, revising the manuscript and reviewer responses Jan Beyers: theory development, data gathering, discussion of results, revising the manuscript and reviewer responses Frederik Heylen: theory development, data gathering and cleaning, preliminary data analyses
Article 2 – Balancing constituency and congruence	Evelien Willems: theory development, data gathering and cleaning, data analyses, discussion of results, revising the manuscript and reviewer responses Iskander De Bruycker: theory development, discussion of results, revising the manuscript and reviewer responses
Article 3 – Politicized policy access	Single authored
Article 4 – No escape from the media gates?	Single authored
Article 5 – Public opinion as an ally of interest groups?	Evelien Willems: theory development, data gathering and cleaning, data analysis, discussion of results Jan Beyers: theory development, data gathering, discussion of results

Summary

This dissertation analyzes interest groups' functioning as intermediaries between citizens and public policymaking. I assess whether interest groups strengthen or weaken the connection between citizen preferences and public policy. The involvement of interest groups in public policymaking provokes much controversy. On the one hand, the unchecked involvement of special interests might bias policymaking in favor of the happy few. The lobbying scandals making news headlines invigorate such concerns. On the other hand, some interest groups may strengthen the connection between citizens' preferences and public policy. For instance, media advocacy allows interest groups to amplify public concerns and to put pressure on policymakers. This dissertation addressed this controversy. Specifically, I analyze when and how interest groups connect the general public and policymakers in each step of the influence production process. I assess the extent to which and how interest groups incorporate the policy preferences of the general public in their positions (mobilization stage), how groups' alignment with public opinion affects access to advisory councils, news media prominence (advocacy activities and access stage) and advocacy success (influence stage).

The analyses are based on a large-scale data collection effort centered around a sample of 110 specific policy issues for which public opinion data are available. This set of 110 issues is connected to (1) a media content-analysis to identify group positions, measure groups' media prominence and detect the media salience of issues; (2) a mapping of groups' access to advisory councils; (3) a legislative content-analysis to capture policy outcomes, and (4) a representative survey of Belgian interest groups.

The conclusion from this dissertation is that interest representation is characterized by an inherent tension between actively engaging members and supporters, on the on hand, and aligning policy objectives with public opinion, on the other hand. This tension entails substantial consequences for policy access, media prominence and advocacy success. Securing ties with members and supporters is vital for interest group maintenance and survival. Tough, this dissertation demonstrates that close constituency involvement combined with little public support hampers groups' access to advisory

councils, limits the benefits of media prominence, and decreases the chances of advocacy success. These constraining effects of close constituency engagement in advocacy activities are especially pronounced on politicized issues; on salient and conflictual issues on which many other interest groups are mobilized. Indeed, interest groups enjoying broad public support can more easily put pressure on policymakers in a politicized context. Close constituency involvement, in contrast, often results in defending positions with scant public support; and consequently, diminished prospects of advocacy success. Hence, the active engagement of members and supporters is especially an asset to gain policy access and exert influence when policy issues are decided upon out of the public spotlight and when the scope of conflict remains limited.

In sum, interest groups constantly walk a tightrope between acting on constituency preferences and trying to influence public policy through a strategic alignment with public opinion. Overall, issue positions voiced in the news enjoy substantial public support and the close engagement with constituencies can result in the supply of societal support to policymakers. However, politicization and the strong involvement of constituencies can put interest groups' intermediary function under strain.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift analyseert het functioneren van belangengroepen als intermediair tussen burgers en beleidsvorming; meer bepaald of belangengroepen de connectie tussen burgers hun beleidsvoorkeuren en beleidsuitkomsten versterken of verzwakken. De betrokkenheid van belangengroepen bij de beleidsvorming leidt tot veel controverse. Enerzijds kan de ongecontroleerde betrokkenheid van specifieke belangen de beleidsvorming beïnvloeden ten gunste van een kleine groep geprivilegieerden. De lobbyschandalen die de krantenkoppen halen, versterken deze bezorgdheid. Anderzijds kunnen sommige belangengroepen de connectie tussen burgers en het overheidsbeleid juist versterken. Zo stelt belangenbehartiging via de nieuwsmedia belangengroepen vaak in staat bekommernissen die bij het brede publiek leven onder de aandacht te brengen en beleidsmakers onder druk te zetten. Dit proefschrift gaat in op deze controverse. Specifiek analyseer ik wanneer en hoe belangengroepen het grote publiek en beleidsmakers verbinden in elke stap van het zogenaamde invloeds-productieproces. Ik onderzoek in hoeverre en hoe belangengroepen de beleidsvoorkeuren van het grote publiek in hun standpunten opnemen (mobilisatiefase), hoe steun van de publieke opinie de toegang tot adviesraden en prominentie in nieuwsmedia kan verklaren (belangenbehartiging en toegangsfase) en het uiteindelijke succes van belangenbehartiging beïnvloedt (invloedsfase).

De analyses zijn gebaseerd op een grootschalige gegevensverzameling aan de hand van een steekproef van 110 specifieke beleidskwesties waarvoor publieke opinie gegevens beschikbaar zijn. Deze 110 kwesties werden verbonden met (1) een media-inhoudsanalyse om de posities van groepen te identificeren, de prominentie van groepen in het nieuws te meten, en de mate van media-aandacht voor beleidskwesties te detecteren; (2) het in kaart brengen van toegang van belangengroepen tot adviesraden; (3) een wetgevende inhoudsanalyse om beleidsresultaten te bepalen, en (4) een representatieve enquête onder Belgische belangengroepen.

De conclusie uit dit proefschrift is dat belangenvertegenwoordiging wordt gekenmerkt door een inherente spanning tussen het actief betrekken van leden en

supporters, enerzijds, en het afstemmen van beleidsdoelstellingen op de publieke opinie, anderzijds. Deze spanning heeft aanzienlijke gevolgen voor de toegang van belangengroepen tot het beleid, hun media-prominentie en hun succes inzake het beïnvloeden van beleidsuitkomsten. Terwijl brede publieke steun belangengroepen kan helpen beleid te beïnvloeden, is het onderhouden van de band met de achterban essentieel voor het voortbestaan van belangengroepen. Dit proefschrift toont aan dat een nauwe betrokkenheid van de achterban in combinatie met weinig publieke steun een belemmering is voor de toegang tot adviesraden, de strategische voordelen van media-prominentie beperkt, en verkleint de kans op het beïnvloeden van de beleidsuitkomsten. Deze beperkende effecten van nauwe betrokkenheid van de achterban bij belangenbehartigingsactiviteiten zijn vooral uitgesproken bij gepolitiseerde kwesties, met namen daar waar kwesties veel aandacht genereren, veel conflict aanwezig is, en veel andere belangengroepen mobiliseren. In een gepolitiseerde context vergroot een breed maatschappelijk draagvlak immers het gemak waarmee belangengroepen druk kunnen uitoefenen op beleidsmakers. Een nauwe betrokkenheid van de achterban leidt daarentegen vaak tot het verdedigen van posities met minder publieke steun en bijgevolg vermindert de kans op belangenbehartigingssucces. Daarom is de actieve betrokkenheid van de achterban vooral een troef wanneer kwesties buiten de publieke schijnwerpers worden beslist en wanneer de omvang van het conflict beperkt blijft.

Kortom, belangengroepen balanceren voortdurend tussen het handelen naar de voorkeuren van hun achterban en proberen het overheidsbeleid te beïnvloeden door middel van strategisch af te stemmen met de publieke opinie. Over het algemeen genieten de in de media geuite standpunten van belangengroepen substantiële publieke steun en de nauwe betrokkenheid met de achterban kan resulteren in het aanleveren van maatschappelijke steun voor beleidsmakers. Politisering en de nauwe betrokkenheid van de achterban kunnen echter de intermediaire rol van belangengroepen onder druk zetten.

Endnotes

[i] This direct quote from the website of the organization is illuminating: *"Finance Watch is a European NGO founded in reaction to the last financial crisis, when policymakers realized that there was no counter-power to the lobby of finance".* For more information, see https://www.finance-watch.org/who-we-are/.

[ii] Examples of some big advocacy organizations are Transparency International (https://transparency.eu/priority/eu-money-politics/), Corporate Europe Observatory (https://corporateeurope.org/en/lobbying-the-eu), Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU) (https://www.alter-eu.org/stop-corporate-capture), or the Center for Responsive Politics (https://www.opensecrets.org/)

[iii] The conceptualizations and operationalizations of congruence and responsiveness are often ambiguous and vary from study to study. In this regard, clear literature reviews can be consulted in Beyer & Hänni (2018) and Golder & Stramski (2010). Accounts on congruence and responsiveness conceptualize the connection between citizens' and elites' viewpoints from the perspective of a one-to-one relationship to a many-to-many relationship, using broad measurements such as policy moods to issue-specific operationalizations.

[iv] Further discussion of the sample of voters can be found in the online appendix of Lesschaeve, C., van Erkel, P. F. & Meulewaeter, C. (2018). Thinking alike: two pathways to leadership-candidate opinion congruence. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*: 1-28.

[v] NACE is the abbreviation of the French *Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*. This European industry classification system consists of a six-digit code and is systematically used in most national statistical data systems (*see* http://goo.gl/8NLquM). The full definition of S94 reads as follows: *This division includes activities of organizations representing interests of special groups or promoting ideas to the general public. These organizations usually have a constituency of members, but their activities may involve and benefit non-members as well. The primary breakdown of this division is determined by the purpose that these organizations serve, namely interests of employers, self-employed individuals and the scientific community (group 94.1), interests of employees (group 94.2) or promotion of religious, political, cultural, educational or recreational ideas and activities (group 94.9).*

[vi] SectorLink (currently www.bsae.be) provides an overview of Belgian professional associations, industry groups and business federations. It includes organizations recognized as professional associations by the 'Hoge Raad van de Middenstand', as well as the member organizations of the main peak business associations. Filantropie.be (currently www.goededoelen.be) is a voluntary register with mostly non-profit organizations and encompasses organizations active at the national, subnational and local level (n=2,904 on 15 December 2014). It is an online platform developed through a cooperation between the Koning Boudewijnstichting and the National Bank of Belgium.

[vii] Also, the Brussels Capital Region and the German-speaking community have their own interest group community. Due to the strongly locally based nature of the latter and the considerable overlap with the Flemish and Francophone/Walloon interest group communities, we decided not to include these smaller communities in our bottom-up mapping.

[viii] There are two important aspects to be aware of when considering Figure 1. First, the evidence only concerns founding dates of groups that currently exist, which are all survivors. It tells us little about the composition of the groups' system in previous eras and the dynamics associated with organizational mortality and survival in the past. Second, the strong decline in recent founding rates (4) should be dealt with cautiously. Although a possible explanation for this is the financial crisis starting in 2008 and government austerity suppressing organizational establishment and survival (Heylen et al., 2018), an entry lag in public directories for several years must be taken into account (Bevan et al., 2013; Fraussen & Halpin, 2016).

[ix] GoPress is the online press database and monitoring service for all Belgian newspapers and magazine publishers (www.gopress.academic.be). In Flanders, the news media outlets selected were De Standaard (715,100 daily readers) and De Morgen (448,500 daily readers). In Wallonia, the media outlets were Le Soir

(639,400 daily readers) and La Libre Belgique (339,700 daily readers). For more information, see https://www.cim.be/nl/pers/bereik-resultaten.

[x] Keywords were carefully selected based on the name of the policy issue in the online voter survey and extensive desk research including legislative initiatives on the policy issue. The saturation point for identifying key words was inductively determined by checking the number of (new) relevant articles that could be found by entering a new keyword in the GoPress search tool.

[xi] This list of 2,340 organizations resulted from a combination of identified organized interests through the bottom-up mapping and the mapping of advisory councils' members. Additional coding was done so that different variations on the name and acronym of an interest group could be stored in the curated dictionary.

[xii] The intra-class correlation is highest at the level of individual interest groups (ICC=0.437) and lower for issues (ICC=0.179). Given the partially cross-nested data structure, I estimated models with standard errors corrected for the clustering of observations within organizations. This is warranted given the concentration of high degrees of media prominence in only a few organizations. Fully fledged models including random intercepts for both organizations and issues are not recommended given the small number of observations in some of the random-effect levels (i.e. <5) and would result in singularity.

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[xiv] The policy position of the Minderhedenforum can be consulted via the following link (in Dutch): https://www.minderhedenforum.be/wat-zeggen-wij/onderwijs/meertaligheid

[xv] The response of the Minderhedenforum to the Flemish government decision regarding the granting of subsidies can be consulted via the following link (in Dutch): https://www.minderhedenforum.be/actua/detail/minderhedenforum-reageert-op-het-regeerakkoord