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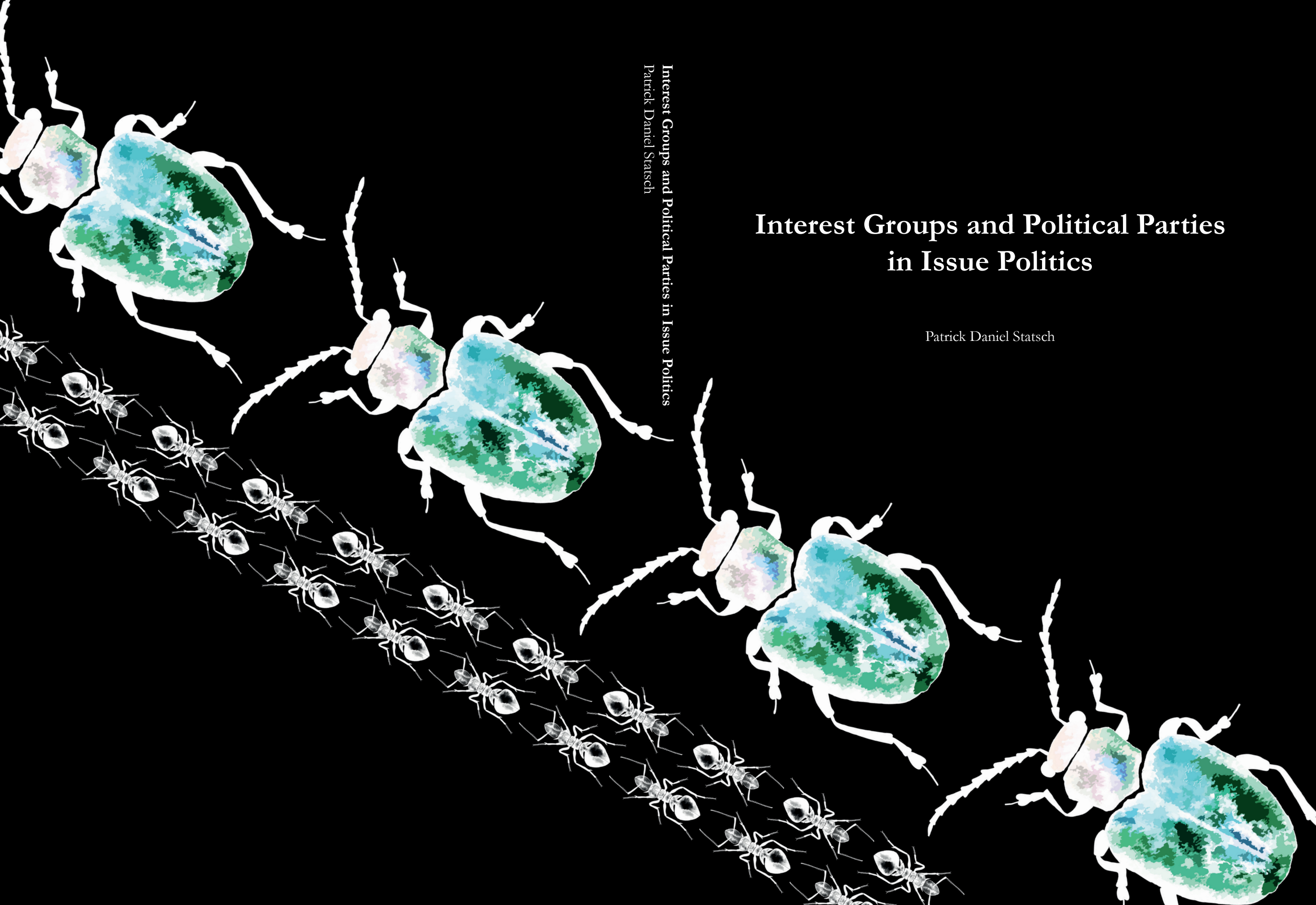
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Patrick Daniel Statsch

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Interest Groups and Political Parties in Issue Politics

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

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

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geboren te Hamburg

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Co-Authorship

Chapter 2 is based on an unpublished single-authored article.

Chapter 3 is based on an unpublished co-authored article with Joost Berkhout and Jean Tillie. Together with Joost Berkhout I developed the idea for the article. I prepared and analyzed the data and wrote the majority of the text. Both Joost Berkhout and Jean Tillie contributed to the text.

Chapter 4 is based on a co-authored article with Joost Berkhout and was published in *Interest Groups & Advocacy* (Statsch, P. & Berkhout, J. (2020). Lobbying and policy conflict: explaining interest groups' promiscuous relationships to political parties. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 9(1), 1–20). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-019-00072-x>. I developed the idea for the article, collected, prepared, and analyzed the data and wrote much of the text. Joost Berkhout contributed to the text.

Chapter 5 is based on an unpublished single-authored article.

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In boxing, “going the distance” means completing all rounds of a match without getting knocked out. It does not say anything about the question whether one emerges victorious from the fight, nor about one’s state of mind after twelve tiresome rounds. It simply means that one has managed to remain on one’s feet. I am no boxing enthusiast and I have never been in or close to a boxing ring, but I think that upon completing this book I have gained a fair idea about what it means to have gone the distance. There are a couple of people who have helped me tremendously, and in very different manners, along the way. I want to thank them here.

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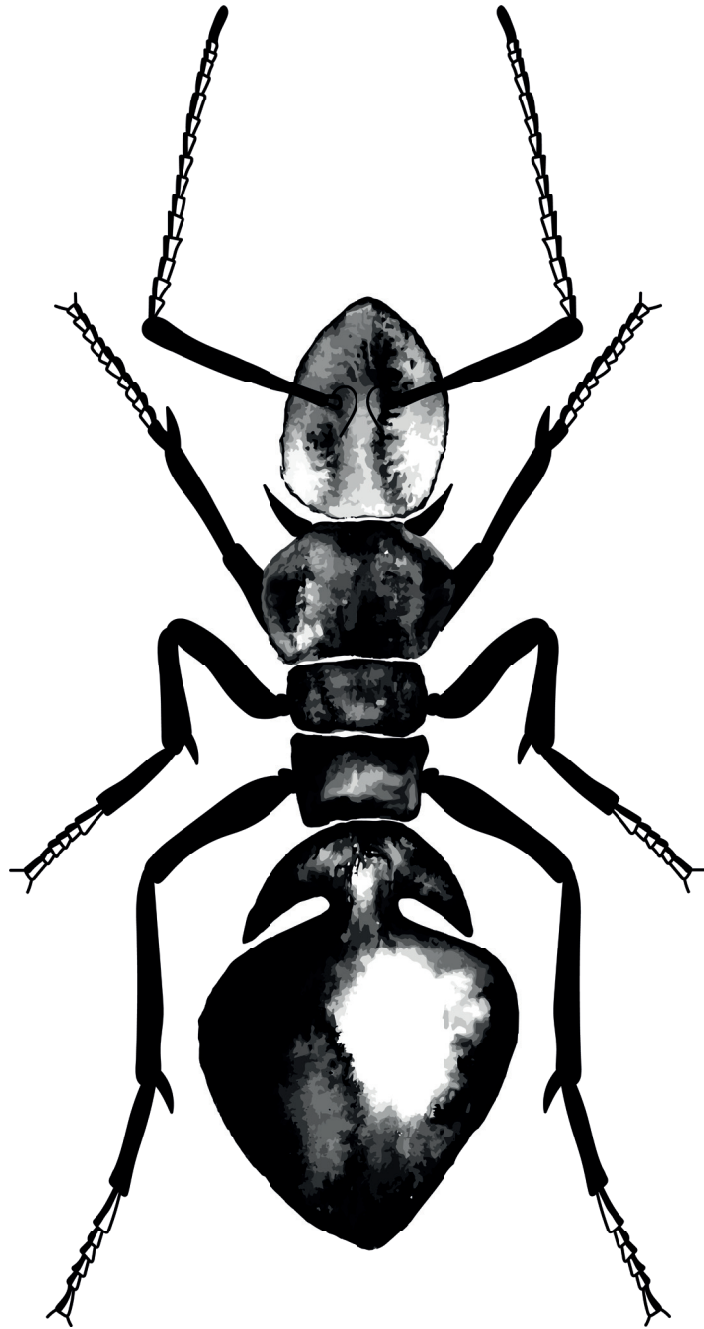
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Chapter 1

Introduction

On October 10, 2017, the designated Dutch four-party government coalition under the lead of Prime Minister Mark Rutte presented their coalition agreement. In the agreement, they announced the abolishment of the “dividend tax” as part of an extensive proposal to strengthen the Dutch business climate. This tax cut, estimated to cost the government €1.4 billion annually, was deemed necessary to compel large corporations such as Unilever and Shell to maintain their engagement in the Netherlands. While the policy was initially attacked by opposition parties as being a gift to multinational corporations and foreign investors, the focal point of public discussion quickly focused on the question of from where the policy had initially originated. Neither Rutte’s People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), nor any of the other parties involved in the formation of the new cabinet, had so much as even hinted at their intention to include it into the coalition agreement. Corporate tax reform had not played a major role in the preceding election campaigns, and none of the parties had mentioned the issue in their election programs. Journalistic research quickly discovered that the “dividend tax” proposal had been included in the coalition agreement on the initiative of Rutte, and soon thereafter it became clear that the idea was born out of a persistent lobbying campaign undertaken by a coalition of business associations and multinational firms. To the sobering apprehension of many commentators, and in keeping with the public myth on lobbying practices, it seemed that big business got its way in politics once again.

Soon, however, criticism to the plan mounted from both within and without the government coalition. In particular, the manner in which the “dividend tax” had found its way into the coalition agreement aroused considerable public attention, and rifts among the coalition parties became conspicuous. When Unilever announced that it would not move its headquarters to the Netherlands in October 2018—despite the promised tax cut—the measure was taken off the table and the status quo prevailed.

On page 14 of the same coalition agreement that featured the “dividend tax” proposal, the incoming cabinet also stated its intention to conclude a new framework agreement on curative care, geared at realizing an annual revenue of €1.9 billion. This pledge had found its way into the coalition agreement from the party manifesto of Rutte’s VVD, who described previous agreements as successful tools to curb exceeding growth in health care services and expenditure. On October 11, one day after the presentation of the coalition agreement, ActiZ,

a trade association representing almost 400 organizations active in the elderly-, health-, and youth-care sectors, issued a statement warning about the effects of the framework agreement. In particular, the neighborhood nursing sector, responsible for the essential care services provided to many elderly people, would be hit with a hard-to-digest €100 million budget cut. There is a realistic prospect that this budget cut, being dwarfed by countless other contentious topics, would not have gained much attention, were it not for ActiZ's warning. It was buried in the fiscal appendix to the coalition agreement, and not even coalition politicians seemed to be entirely sure of its consequences. However, with the care sector stirring, opposition parties swiftly took up the call and urged the incoming cabinet to retract the budget cut for neighborhood nurses. Amidst growing public attention, the opposition parties were eventually successful and, on November 2, the Dutch parliament unanimously adopted a motion to exempt neighborhood nurses from financial cutbacks.

Despite beginning with examples regarding the dividend tax proposal and the intended budget cut for neighborhood nurses, this dissertation is not about the development of these policies. Nor is it about Dutch coalition governance or the formidable resilience of the status quo. Rather, this book commences with these two examples as they illustrate the kind of phenomena I try to understand: politics and policy making at the juncture of the activities of interest groups and political parties. What is crucial about both the dividend tax and the neighborhood nurses episode is that they highlight that a comprehensive understanding of politics, in other words, endeavors related to the “authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, 1953), requires *joint* attention to two central political organizations: interest groups and political parties.

When analyzing the developments around the dividend tax from an archetypical party politics perspective—focusing on voters, supporters, members and leaders, party organization, and the primacy of winning elections (e.g., akin to Downs, 1957; Harmel & Janda, 1994; Klingemann et al., 1994; McDonald & Budge, 2005; Panebianco, 1988)—the emergence of the issue on the government's agenda is surprising. Most strikingly, because elections had been conducted, a new cabinet was in the making, and there is no evidence suggesting that the dividend tax was a make-or-break proposal during the coalition's formation. Sure enough, the conditions under which parties respond to organized interests at the expense of unorganized voters have been comprehensively addressed in the party politics literature (e.g., Bawn & Thies, 2003; Denzau & Munger, 1986), and the emergence of “special interest issues” on a governmental agenda can, from a party politics perspective, be both expected and, indeed,

predicted. However, such predictions would typically be based on electoral incentives, which are hard to find in the current case.

The development of the episode is less surprising, at least initially, from a similarly rough-sketched interest group perspective that focuses on differences between interests, resources, and strategies. Easily organized business groups (Olson, 1965), in their role as political insiders, well-endowed with relevant resources, apt in their use of strategies (Dür & Mateo, 2016), and structurally advantaged in market economies (Culpepper, 2010; Lindblom, 1977, 1982), are the usual suspects of getting what they want in politics (Schattschneider, 1960; Schlozman, 1984). If they do not, the status quo was simply too strong (Baumgartner et al., 2009). On closer examination, however, the issue is puzzling from an interest group perspective as well. Why, for instance, did the groups involved in the episode decide to take an apparent detour and lobby during uncertain coalition negotiations rather than act earlier? Alternatively, why did they not wait and appeal directly to the parties that eventually came to control the “whole power of the government” (Schattschneider, 1948, p. 17)? After all, their interests had been aroused for a considerable time. More importantly, though, the issue highlights the fact that interest groups’ battle for policy influence is not decided on a playing field occupied by interest groups alone. Outcomes are not decided based on what happens between interest groups, but are instead conditioned—leaving structural factors aside for the moment—by the interactions of interest groups among each other and with other political actors, the most relevant of which being political parties. Billiard balls can come with considerable thrust; but their force is dwarfed by that of even the smallest bowling ball. Thus, even when the balance of power among interest groups is heavily tilted toward one side, perhaps because opposing interests have not (yet) mobilized, the possibility of failure is very real.

The retraction of the budget cut for neighborhood nurses is similarly instructive regarding the importance of including both interest groups and parties in analyses of policy making and politics. The episode probably hardly raised an eyebrow among party politics scholars. Within their dominant theoretical perspective, the policymaking role of political parties has been relegated to the sidelines (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). While the emergence of the issue is unsurprising from a party politics perspective, it is of only minor significance—politicians are generalists, after all, and compete on broad ideological programs in which policy details may be overlooked and trade-offs are inevitable. However, the fact that the

Dutch parties did respond to interest group pressure and adjusted their policymaking activity demonstrates that they care for policy, just as they care for winning office and votes.

The episode is more amenable to analysis from an interest group perspective, but it reveals that interest group scholars have, to an extent, lost touch with their roots. As a matter of fact, the issue can serve as a prime example of how the pluralist political process (Truman, 1951) should work: by proposing the budget cut, the Dutch coalition parties created a disturbance in the neighborhood care sector. Finding their private preference and values affected by public policy, the political interests of the care sector were aroused (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Salisbury, 1992), and groups whose interests are triggered mobilize to defend or promote them (Leech et al., 2005). By drawing attention to the consequences of the proposed policy, ActiZ managed to push the issue higher onto the political agenda, provided the parties with the information necessary to act, and eventually succeeded in averting unfavorable policy change. Equilibrium was thereby restored. Though it is obvious in this episode, Truman's (1951, pp. 66, 105) idea that (government) parties can be a considerable source of disturbance while simultaneously being, due to the unrivaled power of government, also a pronounced potential stabilizer of societal relations, is not always treated prominently in contemporary interest group studies.

Just as interest group politics interfere in party politics (for example, by bringing issues to the surface that have been of no prior interest to the parties), party interference can drastically change the outcomes of interest group strife. To understand more about which issues make it onto the political agenda and become the content of actual decision-making, and determine who benefits from these decisions, we must consider the activities and interactions of interest groups and political parties (Bernhagen et al., 2021; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Green-Pedersen & Walgrave, 2014). By analyzing various forms of interaction and mutually influential activities of these two types of political organizations, this dissertation attempts to increase our understanding of their joint role in democratic politics and its normative implications.

What is at stake?

The outcomes of struggles around each and every political problem democratic societies may face are affected by the activities of political organizations. Most essential in that regard are political parties and interest groups. Just as with the dividend tax or the budget cut for

neighborhood nurses, solutions to issues ranging from the regulation of stainless steel usage in public swimming pools, to climate change, retirement ages, or healthcare reforms affecting the lives of millions of people, will always be centered around the actions and interactions of these two political organizations. This is not to disregard the role played by other actors involved in various steps of the policy process. Voters, activists, social movements, or bureaucrats play a vital part in democratic politics. Similarly important are the political, historical, or social institutions that guide the behavior of organizations and individuals (e.g. Hall & Taylor, 1996). However, the influence wielded by interest groups and parties is exceptional in deciding which issues receive political attention, at the expense of other potential issues, and how conflicts around these issues evolve. The questions of whose organized voices are heard, by whom, over which specific topic, and under which circumstances are crucial to policymaking outcomes (McKay et al., 2021). Focusing on political parties and interest groups and their day-to-day interactions on concrete, *ordinary* policy issues thus allows us to analyze and understand important empirical regularities. This focus also adds important nuance to recent endeavors to study the interrelations between citizen, interest group, and government agendas (McKay et al., 2021, 2018), by zooming in on the two most relevant, potential intermediary actors between citizens and governments, interest groups and parties. Furthermore, this focus stimulates the party politics literature by emphasizing the policymaking role played by political parties and their legislators, a factor often neglected by party scholars. When “policy is the main price” (Hacker & Pierson, 2014, p. 645) interest groups and political parties take center stage.

This idea is not new. Since the inception of modern political science, the roles of both interest groups and political parties have been considered profound. Interest groups have been seen as the “basic social units” (Truman, 1951, p. 23) of the political system, and it has been stated that “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties” (Schattschneider, 1942, p. 1). Many scholars perceive these two actors and their relation to one another as central features of democracy that need to be analyzed in order to explain, understand, and evaluate the democratic political process (Almond, 1958; Easton, 1953; Katz & Mair, 1995; Key, 1942; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Merkl & Lawson, 1988; Schattschneider, 1942, 1948, 1960; Thomas, 2001; Truman, 1951; Zeller, 1954).

For several of these authors, the functioning of democracies is directly related to the position that both types of actors hold vis-à-vis each other in aggregate terms, because their engagement in politics is not based on the same level of legitimacy. “Who is stronger, interest

groups or political parties?” is therefore a crucial question to ask. Schattschneider (1942, p. 193, 1948, 1960) is clear in his assessment that a functioning democracy requires political parties that are strong, and certainly stronger than interest groups: “party government is better than government by irresponsible organized minorities and special interest. The parties are superior because they must consider the problems of government broadly, they submit their fate to an election, and are responsible to the public.” Similar ideas are found in the work of Peter Mair (Mair, 2009, 2013b, 2013a), who argues that only parties are (or once were) able to combine representativeness and responsibility, and thus to govern legitimately. Interest groups, in his assessment, once aided parties in being representative but have ceased doing so and increasingly place additional demands on them to act responsibly. They are thus at least co-responsible for governing parties’ retreat from their representative role and the “hollowing out of democracy.”

For others, the relationship between groups and parties is not so much of a zero-sum relationship in which, when parties fail, interest groups rise and democracy declines. Rather, groups and parties are seen to be able to compensate for each other’s weaknesses: when parties fail to provide linkage between citizens and the state (i.e. to act representatively and responsibly in Mair’s terms), interest groups can intercede and take over these roles (Bolleyer, 2013; Key, 1942; Merkl & Lawson, 1988; Rasmussen et al., 2014; Rasmussen & Reher, 2019; Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 403). As long as citizens are represented in the policy process and governments act responsibly—irrespective of the fact that these tasks may be divided between groups and parties—then democracy, according to this perspective, still “works.”

The problem with both perspectives is that they are notoriously difficult to assess in empirical terms. How do we recognize whether parties or interest groups are “stronger” (for an attempt, see work in the tradition of Zeller, 1954)? When are parties failing, rather than just changing? Moreover, if interest groups take over the representative role of parties, how can we know the extent to which they actually represent societal interests, descriptively or substantively, if we lack an assessment of the interests present in society?

As a possible solution that somewhat circumvents answering these questions, we can examine more specific and narrow features of the relationship between both actors in the context of concrete policy issues. Assuming that both are differently predisposed to playing distinct parts in the democratic process—and they can deliver these parts for better or worse—I propose to pay particular attention to the way in which either type of these two political organizations can attenuate or exacerbate the failures and flaws of the other. This

argument is based on the assumption that interest groups and political parties typically organize different kinds of issues into politics, but that they are nonetheless heavily involved in each other's affairs. The act of "organizing issues into politics," as I understand it here, concerns the choices political actors make with regard to allocating attention and activity to certain political issues at the expense of others. Furthermore, since "*organization is itself a mobilization of bias*" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 30, *emphasis in original*), the organization of issues into politics is of considerable significance to the outcomes we can expect.

Interest groups and parties as imperfect organizers of issues into politics

There are issues that are primarily dealt with by political parties and that develop according to the rules of the party game. Parties formulate issues broadly and in an all-encompassing manner because they compete in elections and must therefore appeal to the preferences of large parts of the demos. They compete over issues such as redistribution, the welfare state, migration, European integration, or the environment, and large pluralities or majorities in society are needed in order to move them. This focus on big issues also means that party competition tends to take place along a very limited number of dimensions of conflict, which introduces great bias into the party system (as argued by Berkhout in Lowery et al., 2015). Voters whose preferences are unaligned with the main dimension(s) of party conflict, might lack *party*-political representation (e.g., van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009). Furthermore, even if these voters (and others) are eventually represented through new or realigned political parties, this does not mean that their voice necessarily finds its way into government. The bifurcation in party systems "between parties which claim to represent but don't govern and those which govern but no longer represent," as attested by Mair (2009, p. 17), is at the root of this problem. Moreover, even if parties are still representative and attempt to govern responsibly, strong ideological polarization might thwart their efforts to do so successfully (Fiorina & Abrams, 2009).

Then there are issues that are primarily addressed by interest groups and that follow the rules of the interest group game. Interest groups typically engage in politics around narrow issues of considerable concern to their constituencies. They possess (often private) information on the political and technical consequences of policies and use this knowledge to affect public policies in their interests. By acting as service bureaus (Bauer et al., 1963) and providing their information in the form of legislative subsidies to policy makers (Hall &

Deardorff, 2006), interest groups help them decide on the developments of public policy. Moreover, since the threshold for organizing narrow issues into politics is much lower than that of broadly-scoped issues, many more issues can be organized through interest groups than through political parties. This is substantiated by the fact that, in most areas, there are sufficient organizational resources available to allow for the mobilization and survival of at least some interest groups (e.g. Lowery & Gray, 1995), and collective action problems do not *inhibit* the creation of new groups (Lowery, 2015).

The well-known malaise of the interest group system is, of course, that it can lead to economic inefficiencies (Olson, 1982) and that it is imbued with multiple forms of bias: as regards the total population of interest organizations in a political system, groups representing the interests of business, of institutions, and of citizens with higher socioeconomic status have an easier time mobilizing (Olson, 1965) and are clearly overrepresented (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Schattschneider, 1960; Schlozman, 1984; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986; Schlozman et al., 2012). Furthermore, the picture does not look much different in terms of the segment of interest organizations actively engaged in advocating and lobbying for their interests (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Rasmussen & Carroll, 2014; Schlozman et al., 2012).

It should become clear that, if one were to evaluate the functioning of democracy based solely on either of these perspectives, while ignoring the other, one might quickly be drawn to rather daunting conclusions. In an “interest group democracy” information is king and policy tailored to the needs of those affected, but the “chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent” (Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 34–35). In a “party democracy” elections ensure that policy is encompassing and that broad sentiments rule, but those governing no longer represent the demos (Mair, 2013). To develop a nuanced picture of the functioning of the democratic process, it is therefore essential to consider both interest groups and parties and to evaluate the extent to which their respective flaws can be balanced out by the involvement of the other.

Interest groups and parties: balancing out each other’s flaws?

An obvious starting point for such an evaluation is to identify the issues on which only one of the two types of political organizations is active at the moment. These are the issues that are organized into politics by one of these two actors exclusively, either because an issue has newly emerged and conflict has not (yet) spilled over from one domain to the other, or

because some actors have become dissatisfied with the institutional arrangements created to freeze old conflicts (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 1997). While it is theoretically possible that this set of issues encompasses both interest group and party issues, empirically it will almost exclusively be composed of the former. The reason for this is twofold: first, as argued above, the threshold for organizing issues into politics is lower if they are narrow rather than encompassing, which favors the proliferation of interest group issues. Second, when parties, through their control of government intend to enact or change policy programs, groups' political interests get aroused (Heinz et al., 1993, p. 24; Salisbury, 1992, p. 37) and they will react to this disturbance. Thus, on each issue organized into politics by political parties, except perhaps internal party concerns, at least some groups will also be active, whereas the reverse is most likely not true.

Identifying the issues that are organized only by interest groups is vital for assessing the severity and consequences of the bias introduced into political systems by the dimensionality of party conflict. Interest groups can lessen the severity of this flaw by drawing attention to issues that fall outside the scope of harmless politics, as accepted by political parties (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Cobb & Elder, 1983; see also Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 403). Doing so, they can act on behalf of interests that lack party-political representation (Bernhagen et al., 2021). At the same time, we need to be particularly aware of the interest group bias(es) that might manifest on these issues, since parties will not partake in conflicts around them, and therefore cannot dampen the consequences of interest group bias. For instance, we might find that some interest groups, as mentioned above, attempt to influence public policy on the regulation of stainless steel usage in swimming pools, and thereby give voice to an interest that is disregarded in party politics. However, the value of this representative act should not be determined without taking into consideration the possibility that only some interests are organized on this issue, whereas others with similarly legitimate reasons to do so are not. In such a case, interest group mobilization bias might translate directly into biased policy outcomes because unengaged parties cannot throw in their weight and change the balance of interest group power. Chapter 2 engages directly with these concerns by analyzing the extent and conditions under which interest group issues are present on the party system agenda.

Patterns of interaction on issues that *do* involve both groups and parties are similarly important for an assessment of the functioning of the democratic process. While parties frame their issues broadly, and try to appeal to the sentiments of the public by doing so, the issues

they compete on can often be broken down into many smaller issues over which interest groups compete. Partisan conflict over the environment, for instance, is reified in conflicts between interest groups over issues such as sodium in groundwater, the use of pesticides, or measures of CO₂ reduction. In their competition to win elections, parties typically do not emphasize these smaller issues, but they do pay attention to many of them, take positions (and change them, as investigated in Chapter 5) and, in their day-to-day legislative work, decide how they get turned into public policy. Parties thus connect with interest group politics in an important way that is often overlooked by party scholars. One can put this in the words of Schattschneider (1960, p. 65), for whom “every major conflict overwhelms, subordinates, and blots out a multitude of lesser ones.” However, one can also describe this more positively by emphasizing that, through this combination of conflicts, interest group and party systems interact and can combine each other’s strengths and weaknesses—for better or worse.

Three points of discussion stand out in relation to this. First, regarding the role of political parties, a central question is whether they act to balance out, or reinforce, interest group biases that manifest on issues on which both types of organizations are active. Do parties act on behalf of the poor, the lower educated, and those with an interest in issues that would benefit diffuse groups in society, when all these are potentially disadvantaged in the interest group system? Or are party- and interest group biases aligned, combining the worst of both worlds by systematically excluding certain interests from organizing for political influence? Second, following Mair’s diagnosis of bifurcated party systems in Europe, can interest groups play a role in mitigating the tension between responsibility and responsiveness among and within parties, and help them regain (or retain) their ability to combine them? Can they aid governing parties in becoming more responsive, for example by signaling the preferences of important constituencies to parties that have to decide on public policy (as argued in Chapter 3)? Can they contribute to responsive parties becoming more responsible, or take over the role of challenger parties altogether by creating space for popular issues in the realm of interest group politics? Or are they, as Mair (2013, pp. 145, 160) suggests, part of the problem by increasingly interfering in the chain of delegation between voters and parties, and demanding responsible government? Third, increasing ideological and affective polarization has characterized (at least) the US party system in recent years, greatly complicating policymaking and leading to deadlock under divided government (e.g. Fiorina & Abrams, 2009). Can interest groups bridge the gap between polarized opponents and enable compromise by maintaining cross-party policy networks and channels of communication with

all sides? Or will interest group systems polarize in similar ways and exacerbate party-political antagonism? To provide insights into these questions, Chapter 4 analyzes patterns of contact between interest groups and parties, and the conditions under which groups reach out to both policy supporters and opponents.

The foregoing discussion has clarified that there are numerous ways in which interest groups and parties can amplify or attenuate each other's flaws through their political activities around concrete policy issues, or as I label it: *issue-level politics*. To what extent do interest groups organize issues into politics that are avoided by political parties, and how do groups and parties act and interact on issues that are part of each of their agendas? An evaluation of the functioning of democracies must consider these questions. In the next section, I outline how previous literature has incorporated this call thus far.

The literature: re-arriving at the group basis of politics?

It is unsurprising that the interactions between interest groups and parties have been a central theme in the political science literature, given their importance for (evaluations of) the democratic process. For Truman (1951) and other group theorists (e.g. Bentley, 1908; Latham, 1952), parties and interest groups were manifestations of the same phenomenon: individuals associating to further their political interests. Both actors, by virtue of their nature as groups, formed the *basis of politics* (Latham, 1952). For Schattschneider (1942, p. 31), in contrast, groups and parties already transformed this basis; they “consist of two different syntheses of interests.” He emphasized their competitive relationship and the significant differences between the two, with parties structuring and competing in conflicts of broad scope, and interest groups avoiding these conflicts and instead engaging on narrow issues of substantial concern to their constituencies (Schattschneider, 1942, 1948, 1960).

Discussions concerning the joint role of interest groups and parties in democratic politics were not restricted to the US, though. Quite the contrary, their interaction was a focal point of much structural and institutional work on the politics of Western Europe. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) coined the notion of cleavages—so central for the development of Western European democracies—focusing on the shared ideological bases, but organizational division between parties and other political organizations. According to their view, parties compete along and structure the major dividing lines within societies, while interest groups help them connect to, represent, and mobilize their constituencies. Picking up on this division of labor,

the relation between left parties and labor unions has also received intense attention;¹ their close ties and the implications, particularly for the welfare state, have been the focus of inquiry in much scholarly work (Allern & Bale, 2017; Duverger, 1954, 1972; Korpi, 1983; Padgett & Paterson, 1991; Rawson, 1969).

Despite the strong sense of importance attached to the joint analysis of parties and groups in various strands of research, the bodies of literature on political parties and interest groups have long been segregated and have only recently begun to reconnect. For the largest part of the previous half-century and the beginning of this one, both fields have followed distinct and isolated paths. Scholars have recently identified this division as a major shortcoming in the literature (e.g. Fraussen & Halpin, 2016; Witko, 2009) and started reconnecting their enquiries into parties and groups.

In theoretical terms, recent US literature has produced innovative insights, viewing policies and policy-preferences as being at the core of the connections between interest groups and parties (e.g. Bawn et al., 2012; Hacker & Pierson, 2014; Karol, 2009). Bawn and colleagues (2012) rediscovered one of the foundational ideas of the group theory of politics, and propose to break down the theoretical and analytical distinctions between (US) parties and interest groups. Rather than treating parties as groups of individuals striving for the *mundane spoils of political office*, as assumed by scholars within the highly influential Downsian (1957) tradition, they depict parties as coalitions of policy-pursuing interest groups. Similarly, Hacker and Pierson (2014)—following Schattschneider’s (1935, p. 288) premise that “policy creates politics”—argue that interest group and party activity, especially in relation to one another, is structured by policies, which are the matter of politics writ large. In their perspective, parties become “vehicles for achieving groups’ intense demands.” At the same time, the question of whether interest groups and other organizations actually do achieve their policy goals is all but settled. As Burstein (2019, 2021) points out, studies that have tested theories of interest groups’ (and other organizations’) impact on public policy, though united in their assumption that electoral, party politics are a key mechanism, are largely disconnected from one another and frequently have to reject their hypotheses.

Other scholars have put considerable effort into developing and refining exchange theoretical frameworks useful for explaining more stable and ad-hoc forms of interaction between groups and parties (e.g. Berkhout, 2013; Bouwen, 2004; Witko, 2009). Connecting

¹ Systematic patterns of relations between other types of parties and other groups have not been ignored. They received, however, considerably less attention (see e.g. von Beyme, 1985).

strongly with the theoretical frameworks developed by this latter group of scholars, but also extending beyond, three somewhat coherent strands of the literature have recently started analyzing various aspects of the empirical relations and interactions between interest groups and parties. First, initially focusing on the US, numerous studies have analyzed the concrete patterns of lobbying contacts between interest groups and legislators in the context of specific legislative proposals or committee jurisdictions (e.g. Austen-Smith, 1993; Austen-Smith & Wright, 1992, 1994; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, 1999; Holyoke, 2003; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986; Wright, 1990). Arguments similar to those developed in the US context were soon applied and adjusted to the global (Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016), European (e.g., Berkhout et al., 2021; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017) and European Union contexts (Beyers et al., 2015; De Bruycker, 2016; Gullberg, 2008; Marshall, 2010, 2015; Wessels, 2004), with a clear focus on the contacts between interest groups and political parties rather than legislators. Second, recent research has begun analyzing the forms in which groups and parties form relationships outside their concrete lobbying encounters, putting their organizational ties and linkages center stage and emphasizing the various degrees of institutionalization of these ties (e.g., Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012, 2017; Allern et al., 2019; Allern et al., 2020; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Thomas, 2001). Third, a small number of studies has inquired into how groups and parties, either jointly or in competition, represent societal interests and how they influence each other along the way (Fagan et al., 2021; Farrer, 2014, 2017; Giger & Klüver, 2016; Klüver, 2018; Otjes & Green-Pedersen, 2021; Wright, 2000).

All these studies have advanced the literature tremendously, and the call to analyze politics by “examining both species of political organization at the same time” (Schattschneider, 1942, p. 31) reverberates in the empirical and theoretical contributions that have been made. Nevertheless, while this literature has provided important insights into and explanations of some of the empirical patterns of interest group and party interaction, much of the literature has stopped short of providing a more comprehensive answer to the two central questions that have always been present: how *do* interest groups and parties jointly shape democratic politics, and what does that mean for a *normative evaluation* of the functioning of democracy? To be clear, focusing on individual pieces of the interest group–party puzzle is likely the most effective means of arriving at partial answers—as attempted in the empirical chapters of this book—as one would otherwise soon be engaged in an endeavor to explain

everything with everything. However, an attempt should be made to combine several of the pieces as the overall picture that emerges might appear differently than expected.

What this book contributes

This dissertation intends to add to our understanding of the joint role of interest groups and political parties in the democratic process. By analyzing various forms of interaction between these two types of political organizations in the context of concrete policy issues, I aim to provide a more extensive perspective on the way how they individually and in combination contribute to democratic politics for better or worse, because these patterns of interaction have implications for the way they attenuate or aggravate each other's normative strengths and flaws. Thus, the research question guiding this book is as follows:

How do interest groups and political parties interact in several aspects of issue-level politics and why do they do so?

To arrive at an answer to this broad question, I engage with four individual research questions concerning distinct, selected aspects of their interactions. By tackling these questions, I aim to make individual empirical and theoretical contributions to various strands of the literature briefly introduced above. These contributions are important in their own right, but combining the insights gained through engaging with these questions enables me to attempt to formulate a more encompassing perspective on the broader implications of their interactions. The individual research questions answered in this book relate to two key aspects of issue-level politics that can be labeled the “issue-emergence” and “issue-processing” phases (see Figure 1.1). Whereas the former of these two phases is concerned with aspects of agenda-setting politics, the latter is concerned with politics around issues that are being processed in the political system. A third distinguishable “issue-outcome” phase and the potential feedback mechanisms between the stages fall outside the scope of this dissertation and remain an avenue for future research.

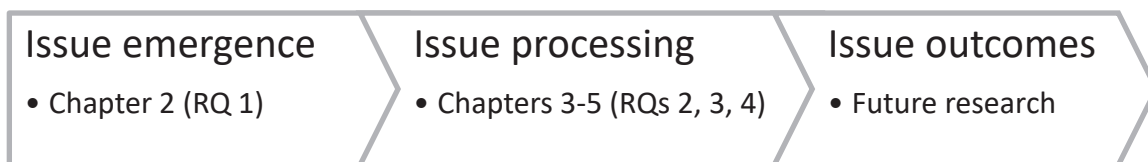


Figure 1.1: Research questions and phases of issue-level politics

The research questions investigated in the following empirical chapters are:

- 1. Under what conditions are the issues that constitute the interest group agenda present on the party system agenda and why is this the case?**
- 2. To what extent do interest groups react to political parties when deciding which issues to attend to, and why are some groups more likely to do so than others?**
- 3. Under what conditions and why do interest groups contact party-political supporters or opponents?**
- 4. Under what conditions and why do interest groups gain party support for their positions?**

In democratic political systems, before any public policy issue can be decided upon and policy shaped, the issue needs to find its way onto the government agenda. That is why, in Chapter 2, I examine the conditions under which the issues that constitute the interest group agenda are present on the party system agenda as well and why this is the case. This question directly relates to one of the important ways in which interest group politics has the potential to balance out party system bias, as outlined above. Do interest groups fulfill a positive role in democracy and represent interests that are disregarded by the parties? By investigating the level of overlap between interest group and party agendas, and thus the extent to which interest groups organize issues into politics alone, this chapter allows an empirical evaluation of this question for the first time. Furthermore, this chapter adds to the literature a description of the issues organized by groups alone, and thereby allows evaluating the potential for interest group bias to manifest itself when unchecked by the parties. In theoretical terms, the chapter makes an important contribution by highlighting that the conditions under which issues are jointly organized into politics by groups and parties are largely specific to the issues themselves. This argument adds an important nuance to previous theoretical frameworks that highlighted the role of differences between group types and group resources.

In Chapter 3, I move on to study the extent to which interest groups react to political parties when deciding which issues to attend to, and why some groups are more likely to do so than others. More concretely, in the chapter I analyze whether party-political conflict affects the issue attention of interest groups, and whether business and non-business groups react differently. Answering this question allows me to engage in the discussion around the strength of interest groups and parties vis-à-vis each other. Is party conflict contagious and do parties thereby have a tool for structuring the political agenda that interest groups do not possess? Or do interest groups dominate, interfere in the chain of delegation between voters

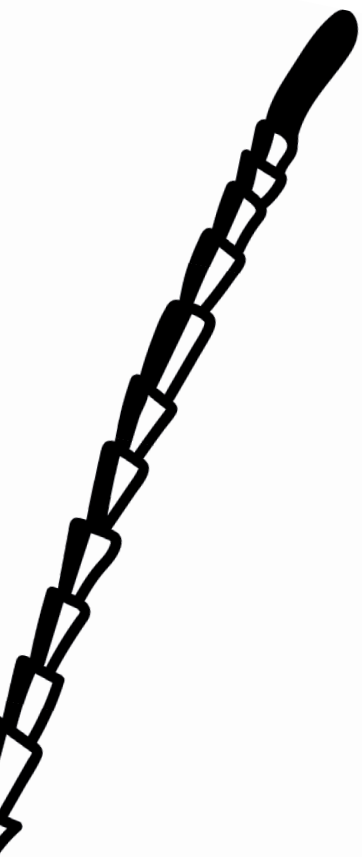
and parties, and strive based on their weakness, as Schattschneider feared? In addition to allowing me to delve into these normative questions, the chapter provides two important theoretical and empirical contributions to (neo-)pluralist theories of interest group activity. It specifies why interest groups can be expected to react to party conflict in addition to other well-known factors such as government activity. It also develops a theoretical argument regarding the differential reactivity of distinct types of groups that had only been hinted at in previous literature. Finally, I subject both of these arguments to an empirical test.

Chapter 4 engages with the question of under what conditions and why interest groups contact party-political supporters or opponents. While focused on the interest group perspective of issue-specific contacts between groups and parties, this chapter provides important insights into the potential role that interest groups can play in mitigating the consequences of bifurcated and polarized party systems. In theoretical terms, this chapter adds to the literature on patterns of contacts between interest groups and parties by arguing and demonstrating that interest groups' decisions concerning whom to contact—even in the context of highly specific policy issues—is not necessarily determined by their endeavor to affect public policy in the short term. Rather, in many instances, considerations related to gaining or maintaining prominence in specific policy subsystems shape their lobby targeting behavior. These considerations, I argue, are in turn affected by the conflict dynamics around the issues they are working on.

In the final empirical chapter (Chapter 5) I inquire which groups are more likely to gain party support for their positions on specific policy questions and why. Given the supreme role of political parties in legislative policymaking, interest groups are more likely to be successful in attaining their preferences when political parties support them. The question of which groups gain this support is thus not only empirically relevant in illuminating who is more likely to win or lose in concrete policy battles, but also normatively important because it reveals whether inequalities in the interest group system may be moderated—for better or worse—by the party system. Furthermore, the chapter helps to evaluate interest groups' normatively important role as information providers (Lindblom, 1968) that might make them conducive to efficient, effective, and responsive government (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). In the chapter, I develop two partially complementary explanations for why certain groups should gain support by certain parties. These explanations predict a business-group advantage in gaining party support or an even playing field between business and non-business groups

respectively, and they provide important nuances to previous accounts that potentially overemphasized the stability of interest groups' and parties' alignments.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize the main argument of this dissertation and the findings of the empirical chapters, and discuss the limitations of this work, as well as avenues for future research. After that, I discuss the empirical chapters' joint theoretical, societal, and political implications, and offer my perspective on several of the fundamental questions related to the interplay of interest groups and political parties in democratic politics.



A cup half full: Agenda congruence between interest groups and parties in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US

Introduction²

Before an issue can be decided upon, values be allocated, and winners and losers determined, it needs to find its way onto the government agenda. Political parties and interest groups are key actors for performing this task, and their agenda setting activities bear direct consequences on policy and political outcomes (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Green-Pedersen & Walgrave, 2014). Parties and legislators represent their electoral constituencies, usually consisting of large groups within the population, and interest groups act on behalf of their membership, which consists, in most cases, of much smaller factions of the *body politique*. Both are thought of as alternative transmission belts for societal concerns (Albareda, 2018; Easton, 1953; Rasmussen et al., 2014; Truman, 1951), with interest groups becoming especially important when parties fail (Merkl & Lawson, 1988). More importantly, interest groups can draw attention to issues that fall outside the scope of ‘harmless politics’, as accepted by political parties (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Cobb & Elder, 1983). Thus, they have the potential to play a positive role in representative democracy by voicing interests that are not represented through political parties. But to what extent do they actually live up to this promise? And to what extent do parties and interest groups attend to the same issues, thereby undermining the latter’s potential to contribute positively to representative democracy, at the agenda setting stage of the policy process?³

Despite these urgent questions, the extent to which interest groups and parties represent and act upon the same issues is largely unknown. So are the circumstances under which agenda congruence – that is, the degree to which both interest organizations and parties “attend to the same issues at the same time” (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 258) – is more or less likely. It is the purpose of this paper to address this gap and explain agenda congruence

² This chapter is based on an unpublished single-authored article.

³ This does not mean that, in these and other instances, they cannot contribute differently, e.g. by providing information that enables good policy making or by representing *positions* on certain issues that are not voiced through the party system. For evaluations of interest groups’ contributions at later stages of the policy making process see e.g. Giger and Klüver (2016); Gilens and Page (2014).

between interest groups and political parties. Under what conditions are the issues that constitute the interest group agenda present on the party agenda as well, and why is this the case?

By explaining agenda congruence between interest groups and parties, I contribute to the literature studying this pair of organizations, the relations between them, and their joint role in shaping the nature of democratic policy making (e.g. Allern and Bale 2012; Fraussen and Halpin 2016). Are they “substitutable influence mechanisms” (Farrer, 2014) engaging in conflicts over a similar set of political questions, or do interest groups bring issues into politics that are otherwise ignored by political parties? Analyzing the congruence between the agendas of interest groups and parties can help us assess this question. If we observe that interest groups and parties predominantly attend to the same issues, this finding might diminish the groups’ representational appeal as alternative voices of societal concerns. By understanding how many and what kind of issues interest groups do organize solitarily, and which groups operate alone more often, we are better able to evaluate their democratic contribution at this stage of the policy process.

At the same time, a strong decoupling of interest group and party agendas might indicate that interest group and party systems operate largely disconnected from one another. This might be normatively undesirable. On the one hand, issues organized by interest groups alone might suffer from biases in favor of business, the wealthy, and the highly educated (e.g. Schlozman et al. 2012) and lead to suboptimal economic outcomes (Olson, 1982). On the other hand, when parties exclusively attend to an issue, they may lack the issue-specific expert knowledge of interest groups needed to develop effective and efficient policy (Austen-Smith, 1993; Bouwen, 2004). Therefore, normatively appealing levels of agenda congruence are probably found somewhere in-between high and low levels of overlap.

Whereas previous research has mostly sought to explain aspects of the relationships between interest groups and parties from an exchange-theoretical perspective that emphasizes organization-level explanatory factors (e.g. Wright 2000), I develop a novel theoretical argument, stressing issue-level determinants instead. Assuming that “policy creates politics” (Schattschneider, 1935), I argue that characteristics of the issues themselves influence the likelihood of shared attention. Building on politicization literature (Hutter and Grande 2014; de Wilde et al. 2016), I hypothesize that the number of interest groups active on an issue (density), the polarization of interest group positions, and public salience help to explain agenda congruence.

While issue- or policy-centered theoretical frameworks are all but new to the study of interest groups and parties, research design difficulties largely prohibited systematic empirical testing of their implications. To overcome this obstacle, I make use of a novel dataset that provides detailed information on more than 1,700 issues attended to by more than 320 interest groups active at the national level in the US, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. I combine this data with information on the policy agendas of the relevant national political parties in these four countries.

Based on this data, I provide the first empirical assessment of agenda congruence in these countries and find broad support for the issue-level explanation: more crowded, more polarized, and more salient issues are more likely to be represented through both the party- and interest group system. Moreover, my analyses show that interest groups work on issues that do not receive any party attention slightly less than half of the time. This result implies that they can make a positive contribution to democratic policy making by raising attention to interests that are ignored by political parties. However, the finding that it is mostly business groups that can work on issues unique to their own agenda taints this otherwise positive outlook. It implies that groups that are advantaged in many other aspects in the political process, and that more often work on issues with concentrated costs and benefits (Olson, 1965), are also privileged in their ability to voice interests that might not make it onto the political agenda otherwise.

Previous research on agenda congruence between interest groups and parties

While political agendas have been at the focus of scholarly attention for quite some time (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Kingdon, 1984), we have recently witnessed a surge in empirical research into the statics and dynamics of issue attention by various political actors (e.g. Bevan and Jennings 2014; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). The relationships between different agendas have been a focal point of study, and we increasingly know more about how public, government, and party agendas relate to one another (Fagan 2018; Froio et al. 2017; Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016; Walgrave et al. 2006). The initial steps have been made to integrate the interest group agenda into this picture (Bevan & Rasmussen, 2017; Kimball et al., 2012; McKay et al., 2021, 2018; Rasmussen et al., 2014), but we still know surprisingly little about the relations between interest group and party agendas (noteworthy exceptions include Fagan et al. 2021; Farrer

2017; Klüver 2018).

For Truman (1951) and other group theorists parties and interest groups were manifestations of the same phenomenon – individuals associating to further their political interests –implying that both work on the same kind of issues. Schattschneider (1948; 1960), in contrast, emphasized their competitive relationship and the significant differences between the two, with parties structuring and competing in conflicts of largest scope while interest groups avoid these conflicts and instead engage in narrow issues of large concern to their constituencies.

More recently, the analytical distinction between interest groups and parties as competing and separate organizations has been blurred, especially in the US. Koger and colleagues (2009, p. 636), for example, argued that parties are “networks of co-operating actors” of which interest groups form an important part. In a similar vein, Bawn and colleagues (2012) theorize American parties to be coalitions of policy-pursuing interest groups, which develop “an agenda of mutually acceptable policies” (Bawn et al., 2012: 571; but see Grossmann and Hopkins, 2015). For Hacker and Pierson (2014: 640) parties are mere “vehicles for achieving groups’ intense demands.” According to this perspective, interest groups and parties, and their respective policy agendas become difficult to differentiate.

For parties outside of the US, no comparably far-reaching theoretical arguments have been made, but empirical research has shown that the organizational strength of political parties, particularly in Western Europe, is much higher (Bizzarro et al., 2018). This finding could mean that the perspective of parties as extended networks of interest groups is not applicable here. For Western European parties, however, their historically institutionalized relations with (certain) interest groups have been studied in much detail (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012, 2017; Duverger, 1972; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), which highlights their intricate relations and interdependence in this context.

When it comes to the rare empirical studies of the relationships between interest group and party agendas, Klüver (2018: 981) found that German “parties adjust their policy agendas in response to interest group mobilization [...] and that interest groups are more successful in shaping party policy when their priorities coincide with those of the electorate.” Fagan and colleagues (2021) show that American parties can expand the diversity of the agendas of aligned interest groups. Importantly, however, neither Klüver (2018), nor Fagan et al. (2021) did in fact measure the exact interest group agenda items, but – in their own right – relied on

mobilization patterns across 11 broader issue areas (Klüver), or broad *Comparative Agendas Project* categories (Fagan et al. 2021). Which issues interest groups were in fact working on, and whether these overlapped with the concrete policy issues of concern to the political parties, remains unknown. While greatly contributing to our knowledge on the relations between interest group and party agendas, their evidence of agenda congruence remains indirect.

Understanding agenda congruence between interest groups and parties: An issue-level explanation

In line with “policy-focused political science” (Hacker & Pierson, 2014), I argue that characteristics related to an issue at hand fundamentally shape group and party behavior, thereby affecting the likelihood of agenda congruence. Group-level factors embedded in exchange-theoretical frameworks (e.g. Berkhout 2013) are of secondary importance.

The arguments reviewed in the previous section would lead us to expect two empirical outcomes: first, as a consequence of strong interdependence or even organizational overlap, a high level of congruence between interest group and party system agendas in general – up to the point of being virtually the same. Second, one could anticipate largely overlapping agendas between certain parties and the interest groups belonging to *their* extended network, or with which they are entertaining structural relations. While the first notion serves as a baseline expectation in this study, analyzing the second conjecture is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead of asking why interest group issues are on the agendas of *specific* parties, I focus here on why they are on the *systemic national party agenda* – that is, the set of issues paid attention to by *any* of the relevant national political parties in a system. As the politics surrounding an issue can drastically change even if just one minor or niche party draws attention to it (Meguid, 2005; van de Wardt, 2015), the normative implications discussed above become relevant when interest group issues receive *any* party attention. For this reason, I leave questions regarding patterns of congruence between certain interest groups and certain parties for future research.

Importantly, my theoretical argument departs from the interest group agenda and focuses on why some of the issues that constitute it are also present on the party agenda. Starting from the party agenda instead would be largely meaningless, as it is likely that for each issue attended by political parties, at least some attending interest groups can be found (as substantiated e.g. by Gray and Lowery 1996). The reverse is much less likely. However,

this approach does not mean that I presume the interest group agenda to causally precede the party agenda. Rather, my argument here stresses the analytical and empirical distinctiveness of groups, parties, and their respective policy agendas and the fact that they are nonetheless interdependent and probably highly endogenous. Interest groups most likely do not simply determine the agenda of political parties but are influenced by them just as much. Aligned with this, I define interest groups and political parties as independent organizations that aim to influence public policy, with political parties trying to do so by running “candidates for office in competitive elections” (Bawn et al., 2012; Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 272) and interest groups without aspiring to hold elected office (Jordan et al. 2004).

Issue-level determinants of agenda congruence

In this section, I lay out the ways in which characteristics of an issue itself affect interest group and party behavior and thereby agenda congruence. I assume that a number of issue characteristics – outside of the discretion of individual groups – systematically affect whether both interest groups and parties pay attention to the same issues or not. These characteristics are a) the number of interest groups active on an issue, commonly referred to as *interest group density*; b) the *polarization of interest group positions*, indicating the dispersion of positions regarding an issue; and c) the level of *public salience*, that is, the importance attributed to an issue by the public (de Wilde et al. 2016). Importantly, while these three characteristics are frequently found to be empirically related – together they indicate the politicization of an issue (Hutter & Grande, 2014) – interest group issues empirically exhibit all possible combinations of these variables (see table A2.3 in the Appendix). Furthermore, the three characteristics relate to distinct theoretical concepts, linking to agenda congruence in different ways; it therefore makes sense to treat them separately.

Interest group density and agenda congruence

To begin with the interest group density of an issue, there are two ways in which the number of interest groups active may relate to party attention. Both predict high levels of agenda congruence for issues with high density, and importantly, they stress that both parties and groups can give impetus to this outcome. Firstly, Schattschneider (1948; 1960) argued that parties engage in conflicts of the largest scope, by which large proportions of the population are affected. Given their electoral motivation and the need to mobilize majorities of the electorate (individually or in coalition), these are the issues they thrive on. However, the scope of an issue – i.e., the size of the population affected – is not readily determined from

the outset and often changes over the life-cycle of an issue (Halpin, 2011, p. 216). One convenient, if flawed, way for parties to assess the scope of an issue at any given point in time is to observe the level of mobilization of interest groups, who can stand proxy for the individuals they represent. Parties, following the cue from the large number of interest groups involved, might infer the broad scope of an issue, leading them to pay attention to it. When only a few interest groups visibly dedicate resources to an issue, in contrast, its impact can be assumed to be insignificant, leaving parties with the option of ignoring it for the moment.

Secondly, a connection between the interest group density of an issue and agenda congruence can be made by focusing on information cascades and cue-taking of either interest groups or parties. Skewed distributions of interest group mobilization across issues exist in different political systems (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Halpin, 2011). Whereas a large majority of issues attract only some interest group activity, a small proportion of them draw in large numbers of groups.

Halpin (2011) argued that these policy bandwagons can best be explained with the presence of information cascades. Mimicry and cue-taking positively reinforce interest group mobilization; the attention of some leads many to follow. In my case, the fact that many groups are active on an issue implies the presence of such information cascades. Parties who engage in issue monitoring as much as interest groups do, will notice the bandwagoning behavior. Taking the cue that an “issue is ‘moving’” (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001, p. 1206), they are just as likely to jump on the train.

At the same time, party attention to an issue might be one of the very triggers of information cascades and interest group bandwagons. Due to their privileged role in legislative politics, parties may be the ones first in line, and others might follow. Party attention might be a cue for interest groups, signaling that something is about to change and triggering their attention. Either way, and while directions of causality may be unclear, issues with more interest groups active, may be more likely to be noticed by parties as well – as a cause or in consequence. Higher levels of agenda congruence for issues with a higher group density would be the observable implication, which leads to my first hypothesis:

Interest group density hypothesis: The higher the interest group density of an issue, the more likely is this issue to also be on party agendas.

Polarization of interest group positions and agenda congruence

Empirically, actor scope and polarization often are “aspects of the same tendency” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 34), with less polarized issues typically attracting smaller crowds, and vice-versa (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Baumgartner & Leech, 2001). In addition to this indirect effect, the polarization of interest group positions can be expected to affect agenda congruence directly. When all – or most – concerned interest groups agree on an issue, their positions align, and conflict among them is negligible. In these situations, they have little incentive to actively reach out to other actors that might introduce disagreement. Rather, working on an issue within the cozy environment of like-minded organizations promises a high degree of control over outcomes to the satisfaction of those involved. This outcome is more difficult to achieve when positions within the interest group community diverge and opposing camps exist among them. High levels of polarization within the interest group community – a large dispersion of positions leading to two similarly strong and opposing camps (Wonka et al., 2018) – indicate significant risk, and potential policy change will likely lead to clear winners and losers.

Facing the prospect of being on the losing side, some group(s) will want to alter the balance of power by expanding the conflict and involving more players. As “democratic government,” which in most cases boils down to political parties, “is the greatest single instrument for the socialization of conflict” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 13), groups have an incentive to directly appeal to parties and draw their attention to the issue at hand. After all, the involvement of parties promises to drastically alter the balance of power, thereby affecting the outcome of the strife. Parties, in turn, need to secure the support of interest groups to reach their electoral and policy-oriented goals (Allern & Bale, 2012; Wright, 2000). Being called to partake in a heated policy battle, they will be inclined to address these issues, as it promises the gratitude of (at least a part of) the interest group community. Ultimately, on issues with a high level of polarization in the interest group community, we should observe a higher likelihood of parties paying attention as well.

Interest group polarization hypothesis: Interest group issues with higher levels of interest group polarization are more likely to also be on party agendas than less polarized issues.

Public Salience and agenda congruence

Last in line of the issue-level determinants of agenda congruence is public salience, or the importance and awareness of an issue to the general public (for a recent discussion see Beyers et al. 2018). If interest group issues happen to be salient to the public, there is a high chance that these issues will feature on the party agenda as well. This outcome is due to the electoral motivations of political parties. To attract numerous votes by signaling responsiveness to voters, at least some parties will strategically campaign and act on issues the public cares about (Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2016). These are issues on which voters are more likely to know about positional or reputational differences, and they will therefore exert strong effects on vote choices. Parties, accordingly, will have strong incentives to devote some of their attention to these topics of discussion. It follows that when interest groups work on issues that attract significant public attention, parties should pay attention to them as well. Agenda congruence, as a result, can be expected to be higher on these issues.

Public salience hypothesis: Interest group issues that are more salient to the public are more likely to also be on party agendas than low-salient issues.

Alternative explanations

Recent research indicates that interest group positions in relation to the status quo might matter for explaining agenda congruence (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Dür & Mateo, 2016; Mahoney, 2008). Interest groups opposing policy change on an issue have a clear incentive to try and keep it off the party agenda in order to keep it outside the scope of issues open for decision making (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, 1963). Therefore, when opposing policy change, interest groups may attempt to draw as little attention to an issue as possible. If they are successful in this endeavor we can expect to see less agenda congruence for issues on which interest groups defend the status quo.

Whether interest groups are successful in diverting attention from an issue of concern is an empirical question though, which depends on whether interest groups can freely choose which battles (not) to fight. However, interest groups are frequently forced to react to the actions of others – competing advocates, government, the media, and so on – and in most cases their control of the political agenda might be negligible. Reacting to the action of others in order to defend the status quo means that they are essentially too late to prevent an issue

from making its way to the political agenda. This shows that an unambiguous relation between interest group positions regarding the status quo, and agenda congruence is unlikely to exist.

There is also the possibility that shared attention to an issue is not caused by issue, or group characteristics but that it is the result of interest groups and parties both reacting to external developments. The amount of attention an issue receives in the media may be crucial in this regard. If media attention were the driver of agenda congruence, the relationships found between issue characteristics and shared attention might be spurious. At the same time, it is just as likely that journalists, like interest groups and parties, follow cues to decide which topics to report on, and that they devote most of their attention to issues already receiving attention (by groups and parties). In this scenario, media salience does not necessarily stand in-between interest groups and parties, but rather it is part of the same, strongly interdependent and endogenous attention processes, in which causes and consequences are extremely hard to establish. Furthermore, a large part of the effect of media salience will probably be reflected in the salience the public attaches to an issue; after all, citizens' perceptions of politics are critically shaped by the media (Kepplinger, 2002). Therefore, I will not directly control for media salience in the following analyses.

Data and research design

To test the hypotheses spelled out in the previous section, I rely upon the data collected in the context of the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project (McKay et al., 2018) and combined it with information on party agendas based on party programs. The *Agendas and Interest Groups* project provides a unique dataset of interest group agendas in four different countries: the US, UK, Germany, and the Netherlands – two (neo-)corporatist and two pluralist countries; one presidential and three parliamentary; two first-past-the-post, one mixed, and one proportional representation system, which should increase the external validity of my findings.

In each of the countries, representatives of random samples of 100 interest groups were interviewed. The samples were stratified to include equal proportions of business and non-business groups, as well as highly active and less active groups (see Berkhout et al. 2018 on the advantages of combining top-down and bottom-up sampling approaches). While minor details of the sampling procedures varied slightly, in all four countries the samples of the

politically most active groups were based on publicly available information on group participation in parliamentary hearings and meetings with ministers (lobbying expenses from the Lobbying Disclosure data were used in the US). The bottom-up samples of less active groups are based on public directories of organizations active in each of the countries. The German, Dutch, and UK bottom-up samples are based on previous work by Berkhout (2015), while the US bottom-up sample is based on the Washington Representatives Directory (www.lobbyists.info).

During the interviews, respondents were asked about the issues their organizations had been working on over the past 6 months. To avoid bias in identifying the interest group agenda, it was highlighted that the issues we were looking for did not have to be associated with particular bills, rules, or regulations, and that it did not matter if they were receiving any media coverage or government attention. The issues ought to be something that the national government was or *could potentially be* working on. Per group, in-depth information on up to seven issues that featured more or less prominently on their agenda was obtained, including detailed descriptions of their background, the activities a group engaged in regarding the issue, and the representative's perception of some of its key features, such as the number of other organizations involved, or public awareness. For this paper, the data consist of the policy agendas of almost 330 groups, including 1,700 issues. These issues form the unit of analysis in the following analyses.

Dependent variable

My binary dependent variable *shared issue* indicates whether a given interest group issue is present on the systemic party agenda as well. It measures if any of the national political parties, being represented in parliament in a country, expressed an interest in the same issue. This binary measure of agenda congruence has been chosen because the normative and empirical implications of shared issue attention by groups and parties likely follow as soon as the threshold of *any* party attention is crossed. Once an issue receives attention by as little as one minor party, the politics surrounding this issue are likely to change. In the Appendix, I provide a number of analyses relying on alternative operationalizations of this variable.

To map the policy agendas of political parties, I relied on their most recent election or party programs⁴, which are commonly used to communicate a party's policy priorities over a legislative period (Budge, 2001). They can therefore be considered as “promissory agendas” (Froio et al. 2017) and contain the political issues that parties are paying attention to at the moment. Importantly, national elections in all four countries were held during, or in close proximity to, our period of investigation, reducing the chance that the interest group and party agendas differ or converge due to exogenous developments over time.

To measure whether an interest group issue is present on the systemic party agenda, two independent coders manually searched the programs of all relevant parties for statements regarding the same issue. To that end, all “*positional*” components from the brief issue descriptions as identified by the interest group representatives were removed (e.g. “lowering business rates” would be converted to “business rate”). The coders used contextual knowledge and desk research to account for interest groups and parties not always speaking the same “language of politics” (Mair, 1997, p. 949) and referring to the same issues in different terms. While political parties might talk about “tax burdens,” interest groups might refer to “enabling business” and substantially communicate about the same thing.

This coding procedure yielded a reliable measure of agenda congruence, with inter-coder reliability being above critical thresholds (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.81$). Conflicting coding decisions by the two coders were resolved by jointly revisiting the respective issues and coming to a shared conclusion. A list of example issues and coding decisions can be found in the Appendix.

Regarding the validity of this measure of agenda congruence, one might object that it measures the “actioned” lobbying agenda of interest groups (Halpin, 2015) but a “promissory agenda” (Froio et al. 2017) on the side of parties. This mismatch between an intended and acted agenda may systematically bias the findings. However, although I analyze different agendas for groups and parties, attention to issues is at the core of both, whether it manifests itself in action or rhetoric statements. This potential mismatch should therefore not pose a problem here.

Furthermore, there is a good reason to rely on party programs for measuring the party agenda and assessing agenda congruence in the context of this study: the party agenda measured via election programs comes close to constituting a least likely case for finding

⁴ A list of all party programs used can be found in the Appendix.

overlap with the interest group agenda. Election programs are policy documents typically endorsed by the whole party, and therefore, they can be seen as authoritative statements regarding a party's intended future agenda. Until the next election, parties typically do not change them; during the legislative term, parties should attempt to fulfill their mandate as much as possible. Because of this, we can assume that they are carefully put together through institutionalized processes within the parties (Froio et al. 2017).

Thus, they are not only extremely sticky, but they also reflect the long-term and deeply engrained preferences of a party. In consequence, the effects of often contingent and issue-specific factors should be small. Especially when compared to actioned party agendas – such as those based on parliamentary questions, for example – this difference should be visible. By analyzing party agendas and congruence based on party programs, I therefore measure congruence that is both substantially important and should be harder to achieve. Levels of congruence might be even more pronounced when considering other types of agendas.

Independent variables

My central independent variables are based on interest group respondents' perceptions of various issue characteristics, which were inquired about in a close-ended fashion at the end of each interview. Representatives were asked to indicate the number of other organizations active on an issue on a five-point scale ranging from “none” to “more than 100.”⁵ As the size of the national level interest group populations in the four countries differs, the categories have somewhat differing meanings in each of the countries. For example, while the activity of 20 groups might indicate a high density in a small country like the Netherlands, the same number of groups might be less exceptional in Germany. Therefore, I recoded this variable to indicate whether the country-specific median category was used, or a category below or above, and created the ordinal variable *IG density*. *Public salience* displays whether representatives perceived the public to be aware of an issue on a four-point scale ranging from “not aware” to “highly aware.”

Regarding the level of *interest group polarization*, I made use of a question regarding the amount of support within the interest group community. Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of groups in favor of their position on a given issue. Naturally, this

⁵ The respective categories are: 0; 1-5; 6-20; 21-100; more than 100 groups.

variable can range from 0 (all other interest groups involved oppose their position) to 100 (all other interest groups involved share their position). When interest groups face the opposition or support of a large majority of groups, the average distance between any given pair of them is small, and even the involvement of political parties in the conflict is unlikely to change the balance of power. When the supporting and opposing camps are more evenly distributed, though, the average distance of positions is larger, and I expect interest groups to do anything possible to tip the scale in their favor, leading to more effort on both sides and a more feverish battle over a given question. To measure the polarization of interest group positions, I rescaled the variable to indicate the absolute distance of support to the 50 per cent yardstick, inverted the resulting scale, and recoded it to range between zero and one. Higher values on this variable indicate a higher polarization of the interest group community.

Last, I controlled for interest group type, group resources, a group's position in relation to the status quo, and if an issue was a priority for a group. The type of interest a group represents (business vs. non-business) and the resources a group commands might affect both the type of issues a group chooses to work on, and the likelihood of that issue receiving party attention: business and more resourceful groups have more discretion regarding which issues to act on, and they tend to choose less crowded and salient ones (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001). At the same time, political parties should be especially attentive to business groups, as they can provide them with the financial means needed to achieve their re-election endeavors (Wright 2000; but see Berkhout 2013).

The dummy variable *business group* measures whether a group represents the interests of members that joined the organization in their role as individual professionals, individual employers, companies, or associations of business associations. Groups representing the interests of individuals in roles other than their profession, or their status as employer, and organizations whose aim is not to make profit are coded as non-business groups. To measure group resources, the variable *#Lobbyists* reports the logged number of lobbyists that work for an interest group.⁶ *Status quo change* measures whether an interest group is in favor of maintaining (0) or changing (1) the status quo on an issue. Finally, issues may be of greater or lesser priority to a group itself, and this may reflect how much work they put into it and how likely it is that an issue receives attention by other actors as well. I therefore included the variable *priority issue* that indicates whether an issue was reported to be of the highest priority

⁶ For groups from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, this is based on our interviews; for groups from the United States, we rely on lobbying disclosure data.

to a group (1) or not (0). Table A2.3 in the Appendix presents pairwise correlations between all variables.

Finally, I added country dummies (fixed effects) to control for different baseline probabilities of agenda congruence in the four countries under study. Due to my binary dependent variable, and the fact that my observations (issues) are nested within interest groups, and errors can therefore not be assumed to be independent, I calculate logistic regression models with random group intercepts. The inclusion of random group intercepts also helps me to establish that the (correlational) patterns found are not just due to certain groups selecting certain issues to work on, which also happen (not) to be part of the party agenda, by focusing the analysis on within-group differences, while allowing for the estimation of group-constant factors (e.g. group type or resources). More stringent models using group fixed effects lead to very similar conclusions and are reported in the Appendix.

Table 2.1. Summary statistics

Variable	Operationalization	Mean	SD	min	max
Shared Issue	0=not on party agenda; 1=on party agenda	0.58	0.49	0	1
IG density	0=below median; 1=median density; 2=above median	0.84	0.83	0	2
IG Polarization	$(50 - (50 - \text{Percentage Favor}_i))/50$	0.45	0.36	0	1
Public Salience	0=public is not aware; 1=somewhat aware; 2=moderately aware; 3=highly aware	1.30	0.95	0	3
Business Group	0=groups of individuals in roles other than their profession, or their status as employer, and organizations whose aim is not to make profit; 1=groups of professionals, employers, companies, or associations of business associations	0.49	0.50	0	1
Status Quo Change	0=group wants to maintain the status quo; 1=group wants to change the status quo	0.67	0.47	0	1
#Lobbyists	Logged number of lobbyists employed by a group	1.10	1.07	0	4.44
Priority Issue	Issue was mentioned as priority for the group	0.64	0.48	0	1

N Groups=327; N Issues=1,705

Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021)

Analysis

Descriptive analysis

To begin, I reviewed the descriptive patterns of agenda congruence between interest groups and parties. Figure 2.1 displays the level of agenda congruence in each of the four countries and shows that there are only minor differences between them. Interestingly, as there are theoretical reasons to expect a high level of congruence in the United States (Bawn et al., 2012; Hacker & Pierson, 2014), issue overlap is among the lowest here, with 57 per cent of the interest group issues also being present on party agendas. The minor differences between the countries are not significant. This result is surprising given the large institutional differences that exist between them: party organizations are stronger in the Western European countries, they have higher numbers of parties competing, and more of them attending to issues offside of the major line of conflict. These factors should lead a broader set of groups to find at least one sympathetic ally among the political parties, sharing their policy concerns. Systems of interest intermediation (pluralism vs. (neo-)corporatism) also do not seem to matter.

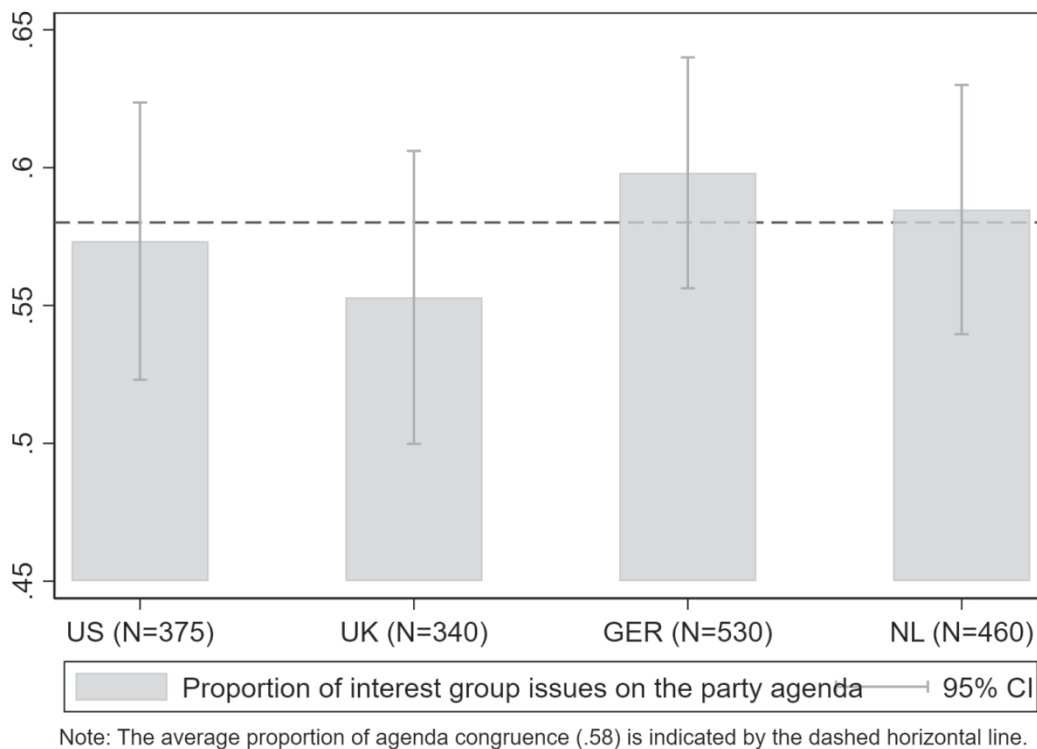


Figure 2.1. Agenda congruence per country; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021)

This null finding of country-level differences does not necessarily mean, however, that agenda congruence is achieved by the same mechanism in each of the four countries. For example, while it might be that extended party networks play a crucial role in connecting interest group and party agendas in the US, the involvement of interest groups in corporatist arrangements might do the same in the Netherlands or Germany. The absence of country-level differences in outcomes, therefore, sheds a new light on the discussion surrounding cross-country comparative interest group research (e.g. Lowery et al. 2008), which seems to be troubled less by institutional incompatibilities than previously assumed. Future research into the country-level differences and mechanisms leading to agenda congruence is clearly needed.

In any case, it is remarkable to observe that, overall, slightly more than half of the issues that interest groups attend to are also on the agendas of political parties. Contesting the perspective of zero-sum relationships between interest groups and parties (Merkl & Lawson, 1988; Schattschneider, 1948), this finding implies that groups and parties share many policy interests, to a large extent jointly organize issues into politics, and potentially represent significantly overlapping constituencies. At the same time, the fact that interest groups work individually almost half of the time, in highly proportional (Netherlands, Germany) and disproportional systems (UK, US), indicates that they can play a meaningful role in democratic politics by representing interests that are disregarded by political parties.

Multivariate analysis

Following the structure of the theoretical section, I tested the issue-level hypotheses of agenda congruence in a multivariate setting. Table 2.2 displays four mixed-effects logistic regression models estimating the effects of the issue-level characteristics respectively and in combination. Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of random group intercepts is appropriate for all models.

Table 2.2 provides evidence in favor of most developed hypotheses. Model 1 tests the interest group density hypotheses. It shows that it does seem to be the case that issues that mobilize large numbers of interest groups are also more likely to be part of the systemic party agenda. This finding matches the argument developed above, which stressed that agenda congruence in this case might be due to attention cascades and/or cue-taking on the part of parties and interest groups. When a median level of interest group attention is reached, party attention is significantly ($p < .05$) more likely. Interest group issues that stay under the radar of party attention, in contrast, are typically organized by smaller numbers of interest groups.

Table 2.2. Mixed-effects logistic regression models explaining agenda congruence: issue-level explanations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
<i>IG density (ref.: Density<Median)</i>				
Median Density	0.30** (0.13)			0.18 (0.13)
Density>Median	0.42*** (0.14)			0.21 (0.14)
IG Polarization		0.40*** (0.15)		0.29* (0.15)
<i>Public Salience (ref.: Public is unaware)</i>				
Somewhat aware			0.39*** (0.14)	0.36** (0.14)
Moderately aware			0.81*** (0.16)	0.74*** (0.16)
Highly aware			0.82*** (0.19)	0.73*** (0.20)
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Business Group	-0.32*** (0.12)	-0.31*** (0.12)	-0.26** (0.12)	-0.28** (0.12)
#Lobbyists	0.16*** (0.06)	0.17*** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.14** (0.06)
Status Quo Change	-0.011 (0.12)	-0.016 (0.12)	0.0006 (0.12)	-0.005 (0.12)
Priority Issue	0.18 (0.11)	0.18 (0.11)	0.15 (0.11)	0.14 (0.11)
<i>Country-Fixed Effects (reference: US)</i>				
United Kingdom	-0.24 (0.20)	-0.27 (0.20)	-0.28 (0.19)	-0.24 (0.19)
Germany	0.16 (0.18)	0.091 (0.17)	0.092 (0.17)	0.12 (0.17)
Netherlands	0.10 (0.18)	0.088 (0.18)	0.13 (0.17)	0.13 (0.17)
Intercept	-0.011 (0.19)	0.032 (0.19)	-0.27 (0.20)	-0.44** (0.21)
Group intercept variance	0.31*** (0.10)	0.29*** (0.10)	0.26*** (0.097)	0.25** (0.097)
<i>N issues</i>	1705	1705	1705	1705
<i>N groups</i>	327	327	327	327
<i>AIC</i>	2293.4	2295.3	2272.5	2271.1

Entries are logit coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$;
Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021)

Model 2 shows that polarization within the interest group community similarly affects if an issue is placed on both interest group and party agendas. Growing polarization among interest groups increases the likelihood of agenda congruence ($p < .01$). Issues over which the interest group community is more evenly divided are more likely to receive party attention. Direct attempts on the part of some interest group(s) to socialize a conflict in which much is at stake might be the mechanism at work.

Model 3 shows that – in line with my third hypothesis – public salience increases the likelihood of shared issue attention by interest groups and parties. The more aware the public is of an interest group issue, the more likely this issue will also feature on party agendas. This effect sets in once a small amount of public salience is reached, but it gets stronger when the public pays greater attention to an issue. The need of parties to attract voters, favoring their engagement on issues that are salient to the public, might be at the root of this outcome, but also a tendency of interest groups to flock to issues that the public cares about (Halpin, 2011). Issues that are organized into politics by interest groups only, receive much less public attention.

Do these findings hold up when the effects of issue characteristics are estimated simultaneously? Model 4 indicates that this is partly the case. While all of the individual effects become slightly weaker due to an expectable correlation between them, most of them remain substantially unchanged. Only the coefficients of the interest group density variables lose their significance. Assuming that “scope and bias are aspects of the same tendency” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 34), the direct impact of interest group density might be mediated by interest group polarization. Even when taking the effects of the other issue characteristics into account, however, issues with a more polarized interest group community, and with more public attention, are more likely to be on the agendas of both interest groups and parties.

What are the substantial effects that issue characteristics exert on agenda congruence between interest groups and parties? To get an idea of the substantial impact that the different issue characteristics have, Figure 2.2 displays marginal predicted means of agenda congruence over the range of values of the independent variables, based on Model 4.⁷

The top panel reveals that the probability of agenda congruence increases by roughly 5 percentage points for issues with a (more than) median density as compared to issues with a

⁷ R’s ‘ggeffects’ package was used to compute marginal predicted means. All plots display 84% confidence intervals, which allow me to draw conclusions regarding the significance of the observed differences with approximated p-values of .05 (MacGregor-Fors and Payton 2013).

less than median density. However, the confidence intervals of these estimates largely overlap, indicating the large uncertainty surrounding this difference. The middle panel shows that issues with the highest level of interest group polarization are 7 percentage points more likely to be on both party and interest group agendas than issues with no polarization. Lastly, the bottom panel demonstrates that public salience exerts the strongest effect among the issue characteristics. Agenda congruence is 17 percentage points more likely for issues with a moderate or high level of public salience compared to issues with no public attention.

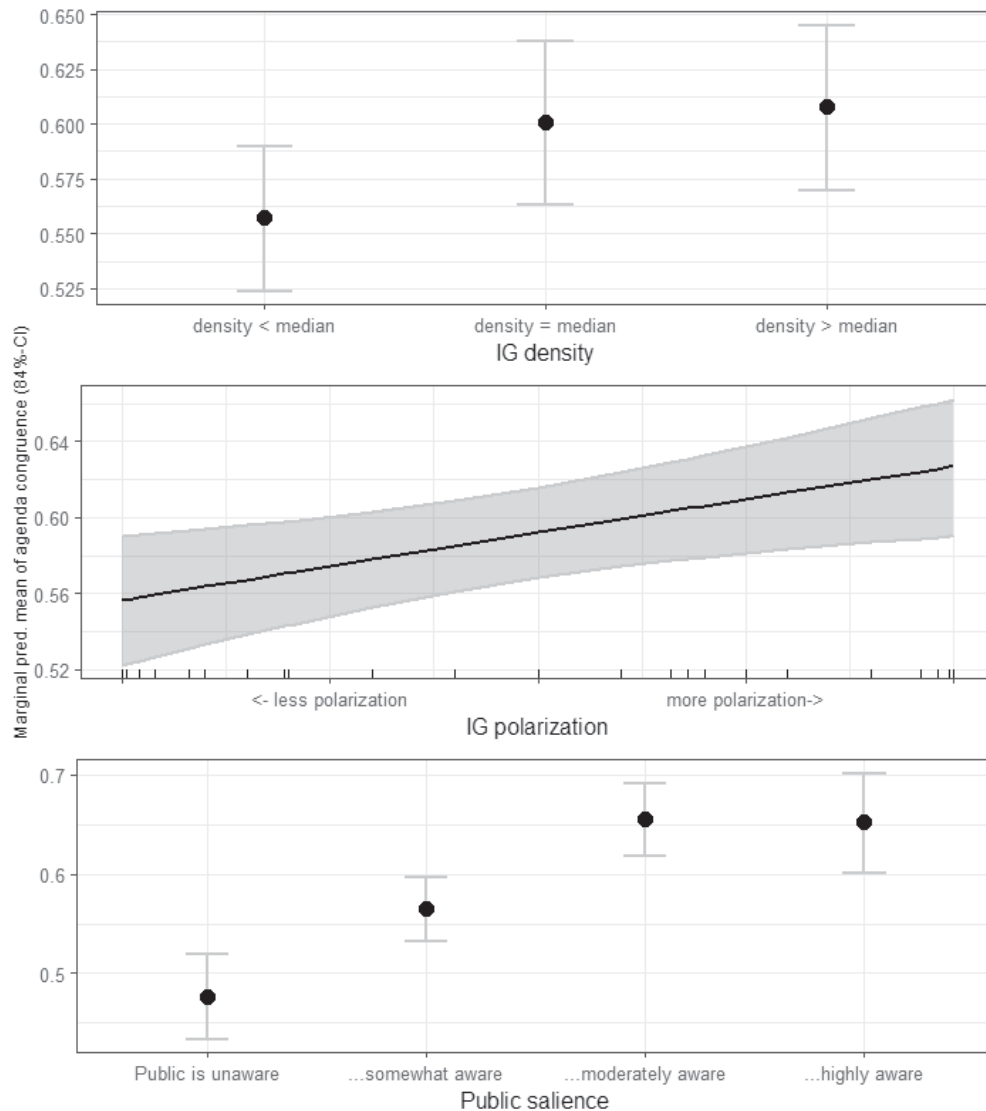


Figure 2.2. The effects of issue characteristics on agenda congruence (based on Model 4). All other covariates are set to their mean value. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021)

Previous research has shown that the issue characteristics investigated here frequently move together (Hutter & Grande, 2014). It therefore makes sense to investigate what their combined effect on agenda congruence is. Model 4 predicts that when all issue characteristics

are present at their maximum value, the predicted probability of agenda congruence is 70 per cent. Contrasting this with roughly 43 per cent when the issue characteristics are at their lowest value, this once more highlights the importance of the issue-level determinants of agenda congruence.

With regard to the control variables, only group type and resources seem to matter. Preferences regarding policy change, and the priority of an issue to a group, have no effect on agenda congruence. The positive effect of group resources is of a comparable magnitude to those of the issue characteristics. Issues attended by groups with the maximum number of lobbyists (85) in our sample are fourteen percentage points more likely to be on party agendas, than issues of groups with just one lobbyist. The negative business group effect highlights that business group issues are roughly six percentage points less likely to be on party agendas than non-business issues. This finding contrasts Wright's (2000) assertion that political parties, due to their dependence on campaign contributions, should be particularly attentive to business groups. Contrariwise, my analysis suggests that non-business groups display higher agenda congruence with political parties.

Given the central role of elections in democratic politics, it is understandable that parties are particularly attentive to the issues advocated by organizations that represent individual voters and might influence the (voting) behavior of potentially large parts of the electorate. At the same time, the finding of a negative relationship between business group issues and party attention is worrying news from a normative perspective. It shows that business groups, who enjoy advantages at the mobilization stage (e.g. Olson 1965) and are thought to be favored at the agenda setting stage (e.g. Lowery 2013, 8), are also more able to organize issues into politics that are ignored by political parties. Interest groups can act as alternative transmission belts and represent interests that fall out of the scope of party politics – but this is not to the benefit of commonly disadvantaged groups.

All these findings are robust to a number of additional tests, such as different operationalizations of the dependent variable, the inclusion of additional control variables, the iterative exclusion of groups from the analysis, the inclusion of group fixed effects, and the calculation of linear probability models as alternative to the logistic regression models specified above (see Appendix).

Conclusion and discussion

While the extent of agenda congruence between interest groups and political parties can be a yardstick for evaluating their normatively desirable role as alternative transmission belts of societal concerns, we know surprisingly little about the extent and conditions under which it occurs. To fill this gap, this article analyzed agenda congruence between interest groups and parties in the US, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, and tested a novel issue-level explanation. The analyses provided broad support for the theoretical argument that issue-level factors affect the likelihood of agenda congruence in important ways.

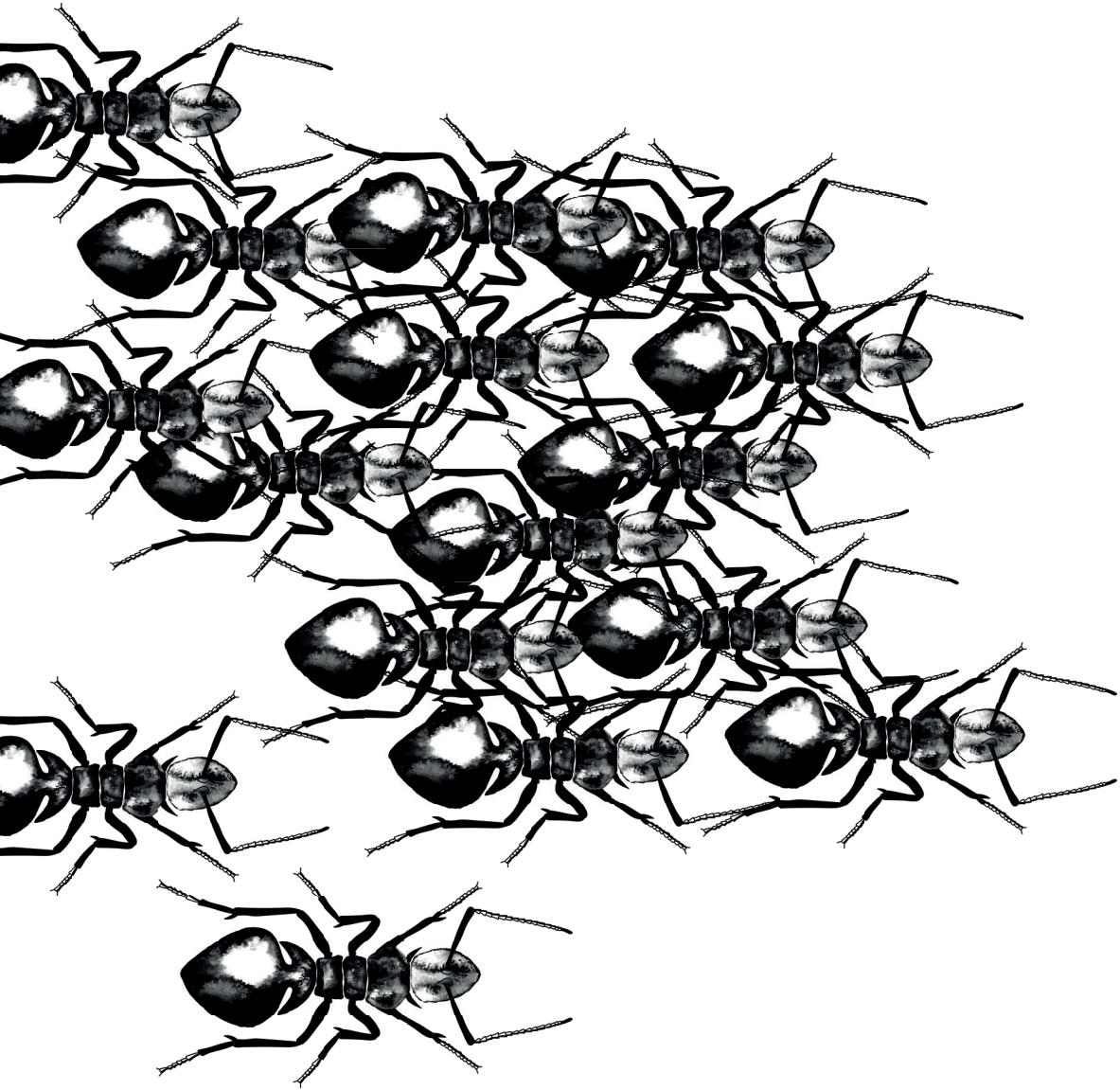
As regards the overall picture of agenda congruence, surprisingly similar and high levels of shared issue attention are found in all four countries. While agenda congruence is lowest in the US and the UK, it does not differ meaningfully from that in Germany or the Netherlands. This result is surprising given the large institutional differences between the countries under study and their assumed effects on the relationships between interest groups and parties (Lowery et al. 2008). The large absence of country-level differences in outcomes may be a powerful motivation for reconsidering the potential pitfalls of cross-country comparative interest group research; particularly as similar outcomes may nonetheless be caused by country-specific mechanisms.

Importantly, the levels of agenda congruence found imply that interest group and party politics are not as fundamentally different or of a zero-sum nature as some assume (e.g. Merkl and Lawson 1988), but also that interest groups do not primarily bring issues into politics that would not be there without their doing. Their potentially beneficial contribution to representative democracy, to organize issues that are ignored by political parties, is only partially fulfilled. Clearly, when acting on issues that have attracted party attention, interest groups can contribute positively to policy making by providing expert knowledge or political information and by representing alternative positions. But given the importance of agenda setting for policy outcomes (Cobb & Elder, 1983, p. 12), their greater potential contribution lies in their ability to introduce new issues to the political process.

My analyses showed that issues that mobilize fewer interest groups, display lower levels of polarization within the interest group community, and are less salient to the public are more likely to be organized into politics by interest groups alone. This finding suggests that interest groups can play a valuable role in representing interests that parties disregard. However, seeing that it is especially business groups that organize issues that do not receive

party attention, leaves a bitter taste: non-business groups, which are disadvantaged in a number of ways in most political systems (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Olson 1971; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman et al. 2012; but see Dür et al. 2015), are less willing or able to act as alternative transmission belts as well. In contrast, business groups seem better able to work on the issues that are particular to their specific interests.

Whether patterns of agenda congruence systematically differ for certain groups and certain parties, such as ideological friends or foes, government or opposition, mainstream or challenger parties, remains to be investigated in the future. So does the question if and how (the absence of) joint attention to an issue contributes to policy change, and how it relates to interest group success.



Like a moth to a flame? Interest group responses to party conflict

Introduction⁸

In the popular view, business lobbyists strategically focus on ‘quiet politics’ executed in the darker parts of the corridors of power and in safe distance from the heat of the flashy issues of party politics (Culpepper, 2010). Party politicians are particularly hospitable to lobbyists on issues with latent but no actual policy conflict, as this helps them ‘to combine symbolic responsiveness to voters and substantive responsiveness to interest groups’ (Hacker & Pierson, 2014, p. 651). In other words, interest groups, and especially business interest representatives, avoid issues that are conflictual in party politics, creating leeway to effectively get what they want on their core interests.

However, several (neo-)pluralist arguments and findings challenge this dynamic. Most classically, Truman (1951) notes that disturbances, such as those arising out of party conflict, trigger latent groups into action. Population-ecologists emphasize that the ‘energy’ of party conflict, such as in American ‘battleground’ states, forms a breeding ground for lobbyists (Lowery & Gray, 1995). And studies on the ‘demand’ for policy input on the part of policymakers demonstrate that interest groups are attracted to, rather than avoid, policy activity, and, plausibly, controversy (Gray et al., 2005; Leech et al., 2005). Such a focus of attention is potentially conducive to interest groups’ role as information providers (Lindblom, 1968) and as voices of minority interests (Dahl, 1956).

We contend that both views are insufficiently attentive to the nature of the interests represented. More specifically, we challenge the argument that business interest representatives are likely to avoid party conflict, whereas citizen groups may want to ‘ride the wave’ of issue conflict. This is why we, first, assess how interest groups respond to an increase in party-political polarization of issues, and, second, whether business interest representatives compared to other lobbyists are less likely to respond with a prioritization of polarized issues.

We thus make a two-fold contribution to the literature. Firstly, we focus on the relationship between interest groups’ attention to specific policy issues in reaction to party-

⁸ This chapter is based on an unpublished co-authored article with Joost Berkhout and Jean Tillie.

political conflict rather than the aggregate pattern of government and interest group attention (e.g. Toshkov et al., 2013).⁹ That is, aggregate differences between policy areas are likely to relate to relatively fundamental structural organizational characteristics rather than relatively minor, strategic re-ordering of issue-priorities. For instance, large amounts of public spending on health care may explain dense interest organizational communities on health, but not necessarily which specific health care issues are the focus of attention of lobbyists. Furthermore, party conflict comes prior to and is more volatile than sticky legislative agendas or general government activity (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). It should therefore act as an earlier trigger of change in interest group priorities than agendas further down the policy process.

Our second contribution follows from our attention to differences between business and non-business interests. We explicitly develop and test the argument, in contrast to the argument mentioned above, that party conflict leads to a strong reaction of business groups, but not of others, such as citizen, or cause groups (Leech et al., 2005, p. 20). This differentiated reactivity, we argue, is due to the nature of the mobilization of different interests: collective action by firms is underpinned by the provision of selective material incentives to members (Olson, 1965), whereas non-business collective action commonly includes the provision of expressive incentives associated with the fight for broader (ideological) causes, reducing the flexibility to react to changing political conditions (De Bruycker et al., 2019; Wilson, 1973, p. 47).

We assess our argument on the basis of a novel dataset in which interest group activities on specific policy issues are observed at two points in time. This allows us to assess *changes* in groups' issue priorities and *changes* in issue-specific conflict among parties. Concretely, we rely on interviews with leaders of 140 interest groups active at the national level in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands on almost 800 policy issues. Our group-issue level focus highlights important variation that might be lost when looking at population or guild-level mobilization patterns only. Our analyses reveal that, in contrast with important assumptions in the literature, business interest groups rather than citizen groups increase their attention to issues when party-political conflict intensifies.

⁹ Previous research, focusing on the relationship between interest group mobilization and government more generally has provided evidence suggesting that groups can both lag (Baumgartner et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2005; Leech et al., 2005; Messer et al., 2011) and lead (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Brasher et al., 1999) in political activity, or that the relationship is a contemporaneous or reciprocal one (Klüver & Zeidler, 2019; Toshkov et al., 2013).

Previous research: Parties, groups, and issue attention

Interest groups and political parties are organizations that aim to influence public policy, with political parties trying to do so by running “candidates for office in competitive elections” (Bawn et al., 2012; Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 272) and interest groups without aspiring to hold elected office (Jordan et al., 2004). There are three arguments to expect interest groups to prioritize issues when they become polarized among political parties: (1) potential government attention triggers interest group action, (2) action forces reaction which creates bandwagons of attention to particular issues, and (3) party polarization of issues contributes to the population ecological breeding ground for interest groups. We outline these arguments in turn and subsequently discuss the assumption that party conflict is a likely precursor for public policy change.

First, a number of studies have demonstrated that interest group activity is triggered directly or indirectly by government activity.¹⁰ Government action creates political interests (Salisbury, 1992, p. 37), and groups whose interests are aroused get active – to defend or promote them (Leech et al., 2005). Drawing on this argument, Leech, Baumgartner and colleagues (Baumgartner et al., 2011; Leech et al., 2005) find that government attention to specific issue areas positively affects interest group mobilization. Similarly, Gray, Lowery, and colleagues (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2005; Lowery and Gray, 1995) demonstrate that interest group guilds are more dense, when government exhibits higher levels of activity (but see Lowery & Gray, 1998; Messer et al., 2011). McKay and colleagues (2021) find that most groups most of the time react to what government is doing, rather than prompting government to work on the groups’ desired policy issues. Assuming a link between government agendas and activity, and party preferences (e.g. Fagan, 2018; Froio et al., 2017), this provides indirect evidence for the reactivity of groups to parties.

Second, the literature on distribution patterns of interest group attention (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Halpin, 2011; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005) suggests that political parties might be the kind of influential actors that could start attention cascades and trigger bandwagons of interest group activity. Parties might be the “visible, credible sources [that] have considerable influence in triggering and stopping cascades” (Jones, 2001, p. 114), which influence interest group activity so profoundly. When parties heave a topic onto the political agenda, interest groups observing this action might follow suit and free up space on their own

¹⁰ Even for Truman (1951: 104–106), who otherwise makes less of a distinction between groups, parties, and government, one particular important trigger for group activity is government, and the disturbances it creates for society, itself.

agenda for the issue at hand. In a recent study Fagan, McGee and Thomas (2021) add to this line of thinking by arguing that interest groups that are more aligned with political parties increase the diversity of their policy agenda, through various other mechanisms.

Last, the energy term of the Energy-Stability-Area model explaining interest group mobilization and population density (Lowery & Gray, 1995), is not only constituted by legislative and regulatory activity in an area of interest, but also by interest uncertainty due to party competition. Theorizing about the role of political parties in the US states, Lowery and Gray (1995) argue that interest uncertainty – prompting interest group activity – becomes higher, the more competitive the party system of a state is. When a change in partisan control of the legislature/government is more likely, so is the possibility of policy change across a broad range of topics. The need to be alert to such potential changes activates groups. In line with this argument, the authors provide evidence that groups react to party competition by increasing their activity, but they also estimate models that show no support for this hypothesis (Gray et al., 2005; Lowery & Gray, 1995; Messer et al., 2011). Thus, while there is evidence for an effect of party activity on group action, it is more indirect, and less strong than one would hope. Of similar importance is the fact that numerous studies suggest that the relationship might very well be reversed, namely that interest group activity leads that of parties (for an elegant overview of this debate see Toshkov et al., 2013; Klüver, 2018).

All these arguments rely on the assumption that party conflict is a relevant precursor to policy change. This is plausible for several reasons, but there are also reasons to doubt this assumption. Firstly, increasing party conflict over an issue could indicate that this issue newly emerged on the political agenda. No preexisting policy monopoly might be in place, and parties might battle over the question which initial policy image will prevail (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In this situation office-holding political parties will have to make a decision about how to deal with the question, and whether to deal with it at all (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963; Cobb & Elder, 1983). Interest groups, in turn, may form, or existing groups might react and increase their attention to the issue at hand, because they anticipate the arousal of their political interests. Secondly, increasing party conflict could signify that an existing policy monopoly is being challenged and that government might get active on an issue. Flares of conflict indicate that at least some parties want government to undertake action on a given issue, and this could be anticipated by monitoring groups. Thirdly, party conflict can directly indicate government action, for instance when it manifests itself in legislative procedures, such as parliamentary debates or committee hearings that are held in the context of the

legislative process. Party conflict, in this situation, is intricately linked to government action, which is – again – a direct trigger of interest group action.

In contrast, shedding doubt on the assumption of a link between party conflict and policy change, scholars of state politics in the United States, following Zeller (1954), note that there is an inverse relationship between the power of political parties and those of interest groups (Gray & Lowery, 2002, p. 396). In strong interest group systems, lobbyists can safely ignore conflict in the parallel ‘weak’ party system, because the sources of policy change are unlikely to be found among the parties. Furthermore, party conflict is likely to have different implications in consensus versus majoritarian party systems, with deadlock more likely in consensus systems (as coalition formation becomes more complicated), and policy change more likely in ‘pure’ winner-takes-all systems (especially on ‘battleground’ issues, when winners want to capitalize on their, potentially temporary, slight majority) (also see discussion in Baumgartner et al., 2009: 39).

These arguments also rely on the assumption that interest groups largely respond to their political environment rather than their membership base, or organizational constituencies in case of individual firms. Evidence for this assumption is inconclusive. For instance, Berkhout et al. (2015) find that the numbers of business lobbyists present in Brussels is largely driven by characteristics of particular economic sectors, such as their size or their cross-border production pattern, rather than immediate policy concerns in terms of legislative activity or aggregate levels of regulation.

In short, there are convincing theoretical arguments to expect interest groups to prioritize issues as party polarization increases. However, this general effect relies on the assumption that party polarization matters for public policy outcomes, and that interest groups actually care about such outcomes. This probably varies a great deal across interest representatives and issues, and we develop specific expectations on this in the next section.

Explaining changes in interest groups’ issue attention: Interest group reactions to party conflict

Party conflict as trigger of interest group activity

The central role played by political parties and their legislators in shaping policy outcomes (Hacker & Pierson, 2014; Hibbs, 1977) is an important reason why interest groups

adjust their attention to particular issues in reaction to political parties.¹¹ We argue that interest groups react to growing party conflict, i.e. an increasing intensity and salience of positional differences among parties on concrete policy issues¹², by increasing their attention to this issue, because conflict among parties indicates potential government activity and creates interest uncertainty. These two factors either create or tangent existing group interests, and activate groups to promote or defend them.

More specifically, interest groups spend a considerable amount of time monitoring their political and policy environment (Halpin, 2015; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017; Heinz et al., 1993). They do so in order to reduce the political and policy uncertainty with which they are confronted, and to “discover what their respective interests are as policy impinges or threatens to impinge upon group concerns” (Salisbury, 1992, pp. 99–100). Central in that regard is monitoring political parties, the media, bureaucratic institutions, and government actors (Baumgartner et al., 2011; Halpin, 2011). These monitoring activities are largely structured in terms of institutionalized partisan conflicts along the major ideological dividing lines within society, or those between government and opposition (e.g. Beyers et al., 2015; Otjes and Rasmussen, 2017). However, in a more issue-specific and fluctuating manner, interest group attention and activity is also triggered by *increasing* levels of party conflict over specific issues and topics. Party conflict over concrete policy issues is likely to impinge on groups’ interests and lead them to increase their activity on those issues. These policy-centered conflicts can be aligned with the macro-level dimensions of party competition, but they need not be. Rather, policy-centered party conflict can cross-cut these large scale dimensions, adding important variation (Berkhout et al., 2020).

Policy-specific party conflict triggers interest group reactions in two ways: conflict among political parties indicates (*potential*) *government activity*, and it leads to a *decrease of interest certainty*, i.e. a higher likelihood that policy and the provision of associated goods (Lowery & Gray, 1995, pp. 11–12) will change in the future. Party conflict – the intensity and salience of positional differences among parties on concrete policy questions – has implications for the likelihood and intensity of policy change on specific issues. The presence of party conflict indicates that change could occur, because it implies that there is at least some political party willing to alter a given policy and therefore contesting it. Furthermore, an

¹¹ There are other factors why interest groups and political parties interact, such as when competing for the engagement of activists (Richardson, 1995), due to organizational ties (e.g. Allern, 2010), or in the context of direct exchange of mutually valued resources (e.g. Berkhout, 2013).

¹² This means that our conceptualization of party conflict focuses on the importance of positional differences between parties rather than the overall party-political salience of an issue. We will discuss potential implications of this choice in our conclusion.

increasing polarization of party positions indicates that policy change would be more dramatic if it were to occur. That is, while party conflict does not necessarily imply that partisan majorities change regarding specific issues, it indicates that there is a potential for severe policy change. This possibility of potentially drastic change creates interest uncertainty and leads interest groups to increase their attention to an issue. In summary, the preceding arguments lead us to formulate our first hypothesis.

Party conflict hypothesis: Interest groups increase their attention to an issue when party conflict around this issue intensifies.

Party conflict and the differential reactivity of business and non-business groups

In the preceding section we have elaborated our general argument about the relationship between party conflict and interest groups' issue attention. In this section we further qualify this argument by developing the idea that not all interest groups react to party conflict to the same extent. Rather, we expect business groups to be more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups.

We argue that this is due to the *defensive* nature of business interests and the *promotional* interests of others (see terminology in Hague and Harrop, 2013: 151–53). Political interests arise at the intersection of public policy and some private value, preference, or position (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Salisbury, 1992). The differences between business and non-business interests follow from the process of their organization and the demands placed on government. Business relies on selective material incentives, and demands 'free' entrepreneurship or self-government; others make use of expressive incentives, and urge government attention and intervention. This creates a pattern of defensive political interests of businesses and promotional ones for other interest representatives.

To begin, business groups are more reactive to party conflict due to their reliance on the provision of material incentives to their members. This Olsonian view (1965) has two important implications: to start, it leads business interest associations to be narrow and mostly formed as collectives of concentrated interests (this makes them 'sectional' groups in Stewart's (1958) recently revived (Hopkins et al., 2019) terminology). Diffusely distributed interests are unlikely to successfully overcome the free-rider problem and will not be

mobilized into collective action organizations. Furthermore, for business groups, interest representation is a ‘by-product’ of the provision of selective benefits to members. Members of business associations will not make their membership decision on the basis of the function of ‘interest representation’ but on the basis of some other, explicitly *selective* benefit, such as market entry by means of accreditation. Leaders of business interest associations are thus likely to have substantial managerial discretion over the particular policy priorities and political tactics they employ.

At the same time, since business group members’ material interests are often directly affected by political developments, they expect their group to act whenever their interests might potentially be affected (Klüver, 2012, p. 1117). Business group leaders are thus highly active in monitoring their political environment to prevent their members from being negatively affected by surprising political and policy developments (Schlozman & Tierney, 1986). At the same time, this does not stop government from regulating group members’ fields of activity (Wilson, 1973), which forces groups to react to even the slightest possibility of government action and to take on a defensive role in politics (Dür et al., 2015).

Non-business groups, in contrast, often fight for broader (ideological) causes, the solutions of which do not directly tangent the material interests of their members. They aim to provide benefits that are not concentrated and exclusively enjoyed by their members, but that are available to broader segments of the population and often “expressive” in nature (Beyers & De Bruycker, 2018; De Bruycker et al., 2019). This combination of diffuse costs and benefits, while certainly no unsurmountable hurdle, greatly complicates groups’ organization for political action (Olson, 1965). And since they need to stay committed to their cause in order to reach their goal and to maintain their membership, they are less flexible to react to changing political conditions (Wilson, 1973, pp. 46–47). Furthermore, a change of government policy is often exactly what “promotional” non-business groups want (Hague & Harrop, 2013, p. 153), therefore not necessitating a defensive reaction to each and every potential government activity. Non-business group members are also much less likely to monitor the political developments around all the issues the group cares about (Klüver, 2012, p. 1117), and they therefore produce less pressure for group leaders to react to small political hiccups.

Last, an additional explanation offered for non-business groups’ lower inclination to react to party conflict is their resource endowment, which is generally thought to be lower than that of business groups (e.g. Leech et al., 2005: 29; but see Dür and Mateo, 2016). Groups need resources in order to be able to react to political developments, and to flexibly

adjust their attention to certain issues. When resources are limited, the decision of a group to pay attention to a given issue necessarily means that other issues will receive less of it (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001, p. 1204). Non-business groups that already are less flexible when choosing which issues to work on, might be less willing to sacrifice their ongoing activities for the sake of an uncertain future policy development. Groups that are well endowed with resources, in contrast, have the parallel processing capacity that allows them to take on additional issues as they appear. Either way, whether it is the nature of the interest around which groups mobilize, or their affluence, we expect business groups to be more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups. This is condensed in our second hypothesis.

Differential reactivity hypothesis: Business groups are more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups.

Research Design

A sample of interest group issues

To test our hypotheses we rely on data collected for the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project (McKay et al., 2018). Throughout the year 2017 we held interviews with representatives of nationally active interest groups in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In each of the countries, our samples consisted of 100 groups, composed in equal parts of business and non-business groups, and including both politically highly and less active groups (for more details on the sampling procedure see: McKay et al., 2018). During the interviews we collected structured information on up to seven issues the interest groups were working on during the previous six months. Our resulting dataset consists of more than 1,900 specific group-policy issues.

After a period of roughly one year, we contacted our initial interview respondents once more, by phone, and inquired about any developments regarding the policy issues they had mentioned to us during the first interview. In this second round of interviews we could gather information on roughly 800 of the originally collected issues, which form the units of observation in our analyses.

Variables

Our dependent variable *interest group issue attention* measures whether interest groups adjusted their attention to an issue as compared to when we first interviewed them about it. We asked our respondents whether they worked on this issue more than before, less than before, or about the same, and recoded this into dummy variables. In our analyses, we predict whether interest groups *increased their attention to an issue* (vs. they did not).

Our independent variable *party conflict* measures the extent to which our respondents perceive party conflict around an issue to have changed. To elicit information on this question, we asked respondents the following question: “Last time you said this issue was [not/ a little/ very] partisan. Is it still [not/ a little/ very] partisan, or has that changed?”¹³ Respondents could answer with the same three answer categories, and we recoded this information into dummy variables. In our theoretical section we focused on the positional dimension of party conflict and we think that our question taps well into this aspect, even though it does not explicitly address this question. Partisanship is typically associated with salient positional differences among parties, i.e. one (block of) party(ies) taking positions opposite to the other (block of) party(ies). To validate that this is indeed what our item measures, we analyzed the correlation between, on the one hand, the level of party conflict as measured through our initial question, with patterns of bi-partisan support in the UK, and patterns of left-right divided support in Germany and the Netherlands, and its level of party salience on the other hand. In all three countries answers to the question regarding party conflict correlate as expected with patterns of party support for an issue, and in Germany and the UK this correlation is stronger than that with party salience, while it is of similar magnitude in the Netherlands. This increases the confidence in the use of our measure.

To account for group type differences, we classified all groups as either *business*, or *non-business* groups. Business groups are those organizations that represent the interests of members that joined the organization in their role as individual professionals, commercial companies, or associations of companies, or individual firms. Groups representing the interests of individuals in roles other than their profession and organizations who have non-profit aims are coded as non-business groups. To test our second hypothesis, we created an interaction term between these two independent variables.

¹³ As the concept of ‘partisan’ does not travel well to multi-party, coalition dominated countries, we asked our Dutch respondents to indicate how controversial (‘omstreden’) an issue was among political parties, and our German respondents how conflictual (‘konfliktr chtig’) it was.

We control for a number of potentially confounding factors. To begin, while we have discussed *potential* government activity as part of the mechanism by which party conflict affects interest groups' issue attention, *actual* changes in government activity can be related to both changes in interest group attention and in party conflict. We therefore include a measure of *changes in government activity* (more, same, less), as reported by our respondents. We also control for interest group resources as an alternative explanation of variation in group reactivity, measured by the logged number of lobbyists employed by a group. To exclude the possibility that unobserved differences between countries drive our results, we include country dummies in all of our models. Descriptive statistics of all variables used are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Summary statistics (N=789 group issues)

	mean	sd	min	max
Δ IG attention				
Less IG attention	.23	.42	0	1
No change in IG attention	.46	.50	0	1
More IG attention	.32	.47	0	1
Δ party conflict				
Less party conflict	.18	.39	0	1
No change in party conflict	.71	.45	0	1
More party conflict	.11	.31	0	1
Business group	.51	.50	0	1
Δ government attention				
Less government attention	.22	.41	0	1
No change in government attention	.40	.49	0	1
More government attention	.38	.49	0	1
Resources (logged)	1.54	1.14	0	4.44

Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021)

Analysis

The relationship between party conflict and issue attention

To test our hypotheses, we begin by looking at the bivariate relationship between changes in party conflict and interest group issue attention. Figure 3.1 shows that for both party conflict and interest group issue attention stability is the most likely outcome. On a large majority of issues, party conflict has not changed in between our two points of observation. In roughly 18% of the cases it has seen a decrease, and only about 11% of the issues have become more conflictual among parties. Interest group attention is also stable on a plurality of

issues (~46%), but shows more volatility with 23% of the issues receiving less attention, and 31% receiving more attention than before.

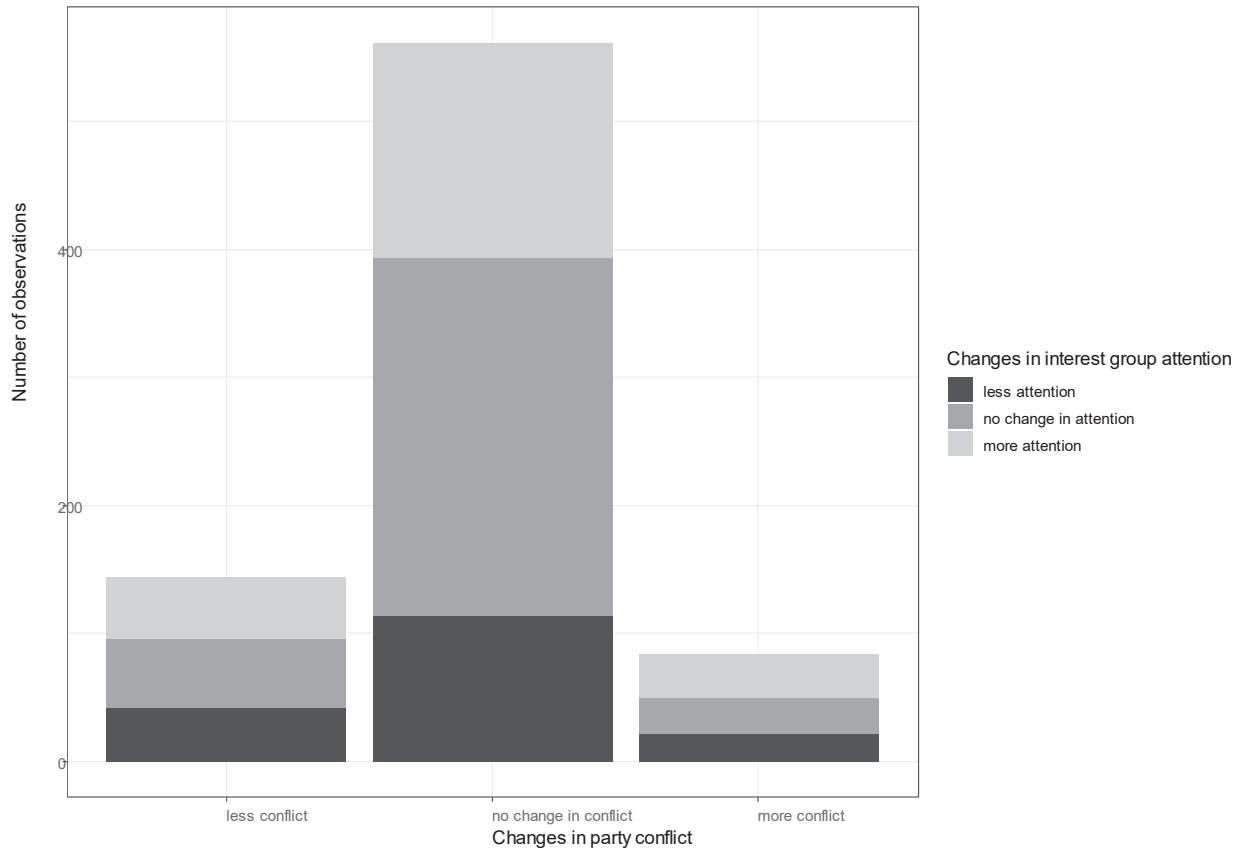


Figure 3.1. Bivariate relationship between changes in party conflict and interest group attention. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Interestingly, we do not observe a significant rank correlation between the two variables (Spearman's $\rho=0.04$; $p>.1$), but they are also not independent of one another ($\chi^2=14.15$; $df=4$; $p<.01$). The figure provides some evidence that interest groups increase their attention to an issue, on issues that became more conflictual among parties in the past: in 40% of the issues that saw an escalation of party conflict (right bar), interest groups increased their attention as well, making this the most likely outcome for that level of conflict. This is in line with our first hypothesis, but the evidence is not strong.

Multivariate analysis

Coming to our multivariate test, Table 3.2 displays two logistic regression models predicting increases in interest groups' issue attention. Due to the structure of our data, with issues being nested within groups, we include random group intercepts in both models. Likelihood ratio tests indicate that this modeling choice is justified.

Table 3.2. Mixed effects logistic regression explaining changes in interest group attention

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	More interest group attention (1)	(2)
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Business group	.06 (.20)	-.43 (.43)
Δ party conflict:		
Less... (ref.)		
No change...	-.21 (.24)	-.43 (.33)
More...	.42 (.35)	-.44 (.56)
Business group* No change in party conflict		.48 (.47)
Business group* More party conflict		1.44* (.72)
<i>Controls</i>		
Δ government attention:		
Less... (ref.)		
No change...	1.06** (.32)	1.05** (.32)
More...	2.73** (.31)	2.75** (.31)
Resources	.12 (.09)	.12 (.09)
NL (vs. GER)	-.15 (.40)	-.17 (.41)
UK (vs. GER)	.04 (.21)	.04 (.22)
Constant	-2.59** (.40)	-2.37** (.43)
Group intercept variance	.22	.25
N_{issues}	789	789
N_{groups}	143	143
AIC	845.7	845.6

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parenthesis; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Both models provide support for the hypothesized relationship between increases in party conflict and increases in interest group issue attention. Supporting our first hypothesis, model 1 shows that interest groups increase their attention to an issue, if this issue became more conflictual among parties compared to when its conflict intensity did not change. Even though the displayed coefficients indicate that differences between issues that got *less*

conflictual among parties and other issues are not significant, the model predicts that the difference between issues on which party conflict *increased* in the past and those on which it did not change is positive and significant ($p < .05$). It seems that increasing party conflict on specific issues indicates that interest groups' interests are at stake, mobilizing them to become more active in order to defend or promote them. Interestingly, we see no direct effect of group type or resources on changes in issue attention.¹⁴

The model also provides clear support for the idea that there is a strong relationship between government action and interest group attention. When government became more active on an issue in the time period following our initial interviews, interest groups increased their attention to the issue as well: their predicted probability of increasing attention to an issue rises by 37 percentage points when compared to issues that saw no change, and by 48 percentage points when compared to issues that witnessed a decrease in government activity. This is in line with studies on the 'demand-side' of lobbying (Leech et al., 2005). Country-level differences do not seem to matter.

Do we find differences in reactivity to party conflict between different types of groups? Model 2 shows that this is indeed the case. The positive and significant ($p < .05$) interaction effect between business groups and issues with increased party conflict indicates that business groups are more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups. This supports our second hypothesis. The model demonstrates that the reactivity to party conflict found in model 1 can be solely attributed to business groups. As Figure 3.2 shows, non-business groups (triangles) are no more or less likely to increase their attention to an issue irrespective of changes in party conflict. The overlapping confidence bounds make that abundantly clear.¹⁵

¹⁴ Since a potential line of argument could be developed in which resources mediate the relationship between group type and issue attention, we also calculated models with just one of these two factors included. The estimated effects remain both statistically and substantially insignificant (see Appendix).

¹⁵ We display 84% and 76% confidence intervals, as these allow us to draw conclusions regarding the significance of the observed differences with approximated p-values of .05 and .1 respectively (MacGregor-Fors & Payton, 2013).

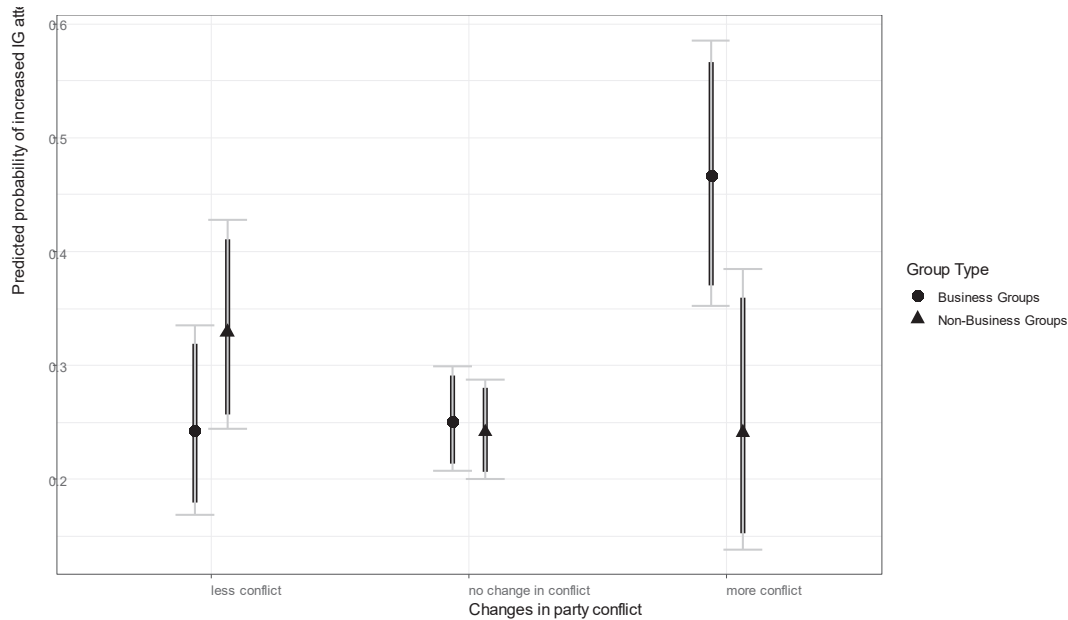


Figure 3.2. Interaction between group type and changes in party conflict. Note: The figure shows marginal predicted probabilities with 84% (grey) and 76% (black) confidence intervals, based on Model 2. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Business groups, in contrast, react to party conflict as expected (see point markers): they are 22 percentage points more likely to having increased their attention to an issue, when party conflict increased in the previous year as compared to when it did not change, or decreased ($p < .05$). On issues that witnessed an increase in party conflict, they are also significantly ($p < .1$) more likely to having increased their attention than non-business groups. It seems that group type differences are even starker than expected; business groups are not just gradually more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups, but the effect of party conflict is significant for business groups only. This finding merits further discussion in our conclusion. All of our findings are robust to a number of alternative model specifications that can be found in the Appendix.

Discussion and conclusion

Whether interest groups react to, or catalyze party activity is a question that is at the heart of political science and has fueled public discussion for decades. Do interest groups set the scene and get what they want in politics, or do they react to the actions of governments and political parties? In this paper we have provided evidence for the latter of these perspectives. While the relationship between the activities of political parties and issue attention by interest groups is a causally highly complex one, with issues of endogeneity looming large, we have

demonstrated that interest groups – at least sometimes – take a reactive role in politics, by increasing their attention to issues that have become more conflictual among parties in the past. Importantly, however, it is business groups in particular that react to party conflict. Non-business groups, in contrast, do not seem to be triggered by party strife.

The fact that business and non-business groups do not just gradually react differently, but that there seems to be a categorical difference between them merits further attention. The literature on interest group politics has always struggled with the immense variation of organizations and actors it considers the objects of its interest (Jordan et al., 2004). The fact that we observe starkly different behavior of business and non-business groups in their reaction to potential infringements on their interests speaks to that point (for a similar point see De Bruycker et al., 2019). Future research should delve deeper into the question why non-business groups apparently show no reaction to party conflict, whereas business groups do, and unearth the underlying causal mechanism. Rather than focusing on the resource endowment of groups, which will inevitably lead one to expect differences *in degree*, our categorical, interest-based explanation, is a step in the right direction. This differentiation is common in the literature. The main conceptual and empirical challenge relates to the specification of this blunt dichotomy; for instance, do these differences arise due to ‘insider’ status, the cause represented, tactical choices, or some organizational features?

Future research should also consider whether non-business interest groups react to other aspects of party conflict than business groups do. Here we have focused on the positional dimension of conflict among parties, but previous research has found that non-business groups, in various circumstances, primarily respond to the salience of issues (De Bruycker, 2020; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018). Perhaps non-business groups respond primarily to the salience dimension of party conflict? Answering this question was beyond the scope of this paper.

What are the normative and theoretical implications of our findings? This article started with a brief discussion of the different perspectives on how interest groups might be attracted to the heat created by party conflict. However, our findings also speak to more general questions regarding the role of interest groups vis-à-vis political parties. Though it is often feared that interest groups dominate, that they “strive on the weaknesses of the parties” (Schattschneider, 1948, p. 18), and that they interfere in the chain of delegation between voters and parties (Klüver, 2018), our study shows that political parties *can take the lead*. They seem more relevant for structuring the political agenda than interest groups, for friction between parties creates heat, which seems particularly attractive to business interest groups.

And since parties take on their role in politics based on the mandate they get through competing in general elections (e.g. Dalton et al., 2011), this direction of influence is normatively more appealing than if it were the other way around. Since parties chose which issues to compete on in order to win elections (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989), it ensures that voters have at least an indirect say about which topics are processed in the political system.

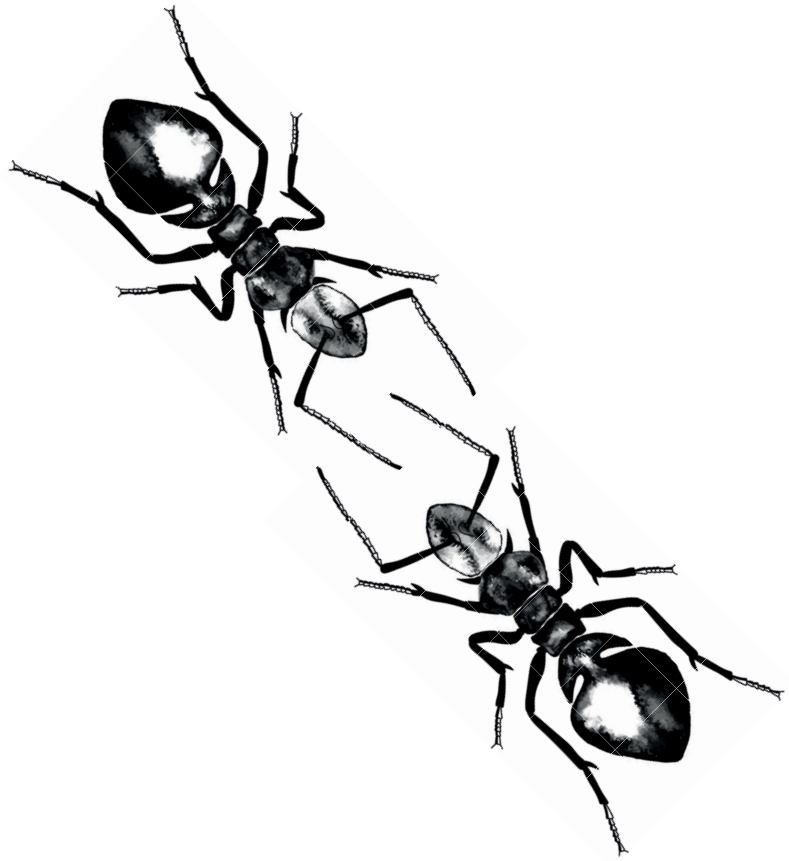
We are also optimistic about the apparent ‘principled’ policy involvement of non-business interest groups. Such groups seem married to a particular cause, and – unlike business group moths – they maintain their policy issue priorities relatively independent of their immediate political environment. We are not sure whether this contributes to their policy success, but we think it indicates that they are relatively sincere representatives of their supporter base rather than captured by parties, coopted by bureaucrats or freewheeling professional managers as other studies suggest (e.g. Jordan and Maloney, 1997).

Our analyses also indicate that the pluralist hopes of unbiased group mobilization in response to *any* disturbance is probably not true. Yes, groups do respond when they anticipate their interests to be getting aroused. They do not do so across the board though. Quite the contrary, it is particularly groups organized around the interests of business that react to party conflict. If this means that their voices have a greater chance of getting heard in the solution of a conflict, this might – on the one hand – lead to biased policy outcomes (Lindblom, 1968), and add on top of their mobilization advantages (Olson, 1965).

On the other hand, it might also be the case that non-business groups do not react to party conflict, because there is no need for them to do so. Perhaps, party conflict signals to non-business groups that everything is going their way. In support of this, others have argued that non-business groups often have public opinion on their side (Giger & Klüver, 2016, p. 193), which might mean that partisan conflict – tied to public opinion through elections – might be solved in the direction they prefer. Business groups, in contrast, might be reactive to party conflict because they fear losing something of value to them. In a regulatory environment, business group activity might not be indicative of an advantage in politics, but rather of an unfavorable defensive position (Dür et al., 2015). Business might be worse off than commonly assumed, and contact with a flame – as we all know – does not always end well for the moth.

However, there are two points to raise against this perspective. Firstly, even if we were to find that party conflict was leading to outcomes generally in favor of non-business groups, they should still get active, to drive home their point and ensure a favorable outcome. When

their interests are aroused, groups should react to defend *or promote* them (Leech et al., 2005, p. 21), and not hold still just because things are looking good momentarily. Secondly, the claim that non-business groups work in line with public opinion, while business groups do not, does not seem to be true. Rather, business groups have the public on their side on many issues as well (Flöthe & Rasmussen, 2019). We thus cannot assume that parties *a priori* work in non-business groups' interests but not in those of business groups. Ultimately then, the question whether business group reactivity to party conflict is a sign of weakness or of strength, requires further study that accounts for actual public policy agendas and the issue priorities of the public.



Lobbying and policy conflict: Explaining interest groups' promiscuous relationships to political parties

Introduction¹⁶

One of the perennial concerns about interest group politics relates to its narrow character: interest groups, by their nature, focus on particular issues, engage with only a select set of other actors, and favor or oppose individual policies rather than ideologically-based world views. The narrow defense of particular issues may lead to institutional sclerosis (Olson, 1982), and it attracts the representation of only relatively powerful groups at the cost of the interests of weaker groups in society (Schattschneider, 1960). In an otherwise pessimistic assessment of group politics, Schattschneider (1960, p. 42) optimistically notes that the interaction of political parties and interest groups is likely to incentivize (business) interest groups to avoid division and articulate political views that go beyond the specific interests of individual members. Others, also classically and optimistically, note that broad policy interaction between legislators and interest groups fosters the production of effective policy alternatives and the formation of political consensus (Lindblom, 1968).

For this to occur, interest groups are critically assumed to interact with legislators across the political spectrum rather than maintain contact within only a narrow policy subsystem of like-minded political parties. However, numerous studies note that this narrowness is likely to occur: interest groups lobby parties whose preferences align with their own, and preferably the most powerful of them (Marshall, 2015). This pattern follows from the idea that lobbying is an exchange of information in return for influence, essentially a 'legislative subsidy', and that changing one's opponent's preferences is unlikely and extremely costly (Hall & Deardorff, 2006). Especially in the United States, this pattern of party lobbying is observed repeatedly (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, 1999; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986). However, recent empirical research questions the generalizability of these findings outside the United States. Interest groups in the EU have been found to interact with policy opponents (e.g. De Bruycker, 2016) or balance their interaction with both party-

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political supporters and opponents. It may be that specific institutional contexts, such as the requirement for multi-party coalitions in the legislature, encourage interest groups to engage with their policy opponents (Marshall, 2015; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017), or that the salience of particular issues leads interest groups to interact with opponents (Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016).

In this paper, we examine why interest groups interact with party-political supporters or opponents. We contribute to existing studies by focusing on the differences between policy issues rather than differences among interests or institutional contexts and by paying particular attention to the causal mechanism potentially linking issue characteristics to party lobbying. Issues – i.e. topics of discussion within the political system – are fundamental and universal ingredients to politics. Their characteristics and their systematic effects on interest group behavior may plausibly occur relatively independently of the institutional context (e.g. Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2019). The specification of issue-level factors is needed to produce better specified models of interest group lobbying and add important nuances to our observations and conclusions. We argue that characteristics related to the conflict surrounding an issue, most notably its public salience, interest group activity, and party polarization, affect whether interest groups reach out to policy opponents in addition to their party-political supporters. In most circumstances, providing legislative subsidy to one's partisan allies promises the greatest chances of success. However, we hypothesize that under particular issue-specific circumstances, groups will *complement* this strategy by also lobbying opposing parties. We expect groups to do so to claim or maintain recognition and prominence (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017) in a policy subsystem rather than to persuade opponents of their position, as noted by Austen-Smith and others (Austen-Smith, 1993; Austen-Smith & Wright, 1992; Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016).

We rely on elite interview data from the Dutch component of the *Agendas and Interest Group* project (McKay et al., 2018) on the lobbying targets of 100 Dutch interest groups for more than 300 issues. The Dutch institutional context – strong proportionality in the electoral system, weak government-opposition dynamics, and center-oriented coalition politics – seems to encourage groups to follow a lobbying strategy targeted broadly across the political spectrum (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). This presumed institutional origin for the high level of broad interaction may make it less likely to find additional issue-level effects. In this sense, the Netherlands is a least likely case for finding our hypothesized relationship. Our analyses show that issue characteristics relate to the decision whom to lobby largely as expected: interest groups are more likely to lobby both supporters and opponents when issues are more

conflictual. We also illustrate that the reason they do so is probably related to their desire to become or remain prominent actors in the policy subsystems where they are active. In many instances, the need to retain prominence in the long term trumps the more immediate objective of persuading opponents to win a particular policy battle.

We continue with a discussion of existing studies and specify our hypotheses. We follow with the presentation of our data and subsequently present multivariate regression models and a qualitative empirical discussion of the plausibility of the distinct rationales for interaction with opponents (persuasion or long-term policy recognition). We conclude with a discussion of our findings and suggestions for future research.

Previous research: I get by with a little help from my friends... don't I?

A number of studies assess whether interest groups lobby actors who are undecided or taking opposing stances on an issue, or those supporting or sharing their position. Most studies conceive of lobbying as an exchange relationship, in which interest groups offer information to (party-political) policy makers in return for influence on public policy (Berkhout, 2013; Bouwen, 2004; Pappi & Henning, 1998). The literature is divided over which patterns of interaction we should typically observe, differently weighting the effects of ideology, power, and their institutional embedding.

First, a substantive body of studies demonstrate interest groups' tendency to lobby policy makers who are in agreement with their position (Brunell, 2005; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, 1999; Holyoke, 2003). Building upon the work of earlier scholars (e.g., Bauer et al., 1963; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986), Hall and Deardorff (2006, p. 69 emphasis in original) provided the broader theoretical argument underpinning these findings, namely the proposition that lobbying should be considered a form of 'legislative *subsidy* – a matching grant of costly policy information, political intelligence, and labor to the enterprises of strategically selected legislators.'¹⁷

Second, and in contrast, earlier US research argued that interest groups focus their lobbying activities on policymakers with opposed or undetermined preferences (Austen-Smith & Wright, 1992, 1994; Hansen, 1991). According to this view (e.g. Austen-Smith, 1993), lobbyists provide information to policy makers to persuade them to change their preferences

¹⁷ Additionally, the power of US policymakers has been identified as another factor shaping lobbying patterns in Congress (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, 1999; Kingdon, 1989; Wright, 1990). Legislators' power, however, is considered an additional – rather than a moderating or mediating – factor that leaves the initial relationship between positional alignment and lobbying activity intact.

in the direction desired by a group. Interest groups are inclined to target their policy making allies under specific circumstances only, such as to counteract the lobbying efforts of opposing groups (Austen-Smith & Wright, 1992) or in cases where policy makers are a-priori predisposed in their favor (Kollman, 1997).

More recent research, mostly outside of the United States, also questioned the exclusive and narrow allure of parties with shared preferences. Marshall's (2010) study of lobbying in the European Parliament (EP) committee system found that lobbyists frequently contact opponents. He noted that the formal and informal operating procedures of EP committees 'determine how legislative influence is distributed among committee members, which determines the structure of lobbying activity' (Marshall, 2010, p. 557). Power – and its institutional structuration, it seems – trumps positional proximity. In another study of lobbying in the EP, Marshall (2015) reported similar patterns: interest groups lobby both friends and foes (also see De Bruycker, 2016). He argued that this behavior is due to the uncertainty of the power of different actors – it is usually not clear which party will be part of a winning coalition on a given legislative proposal. Interest groups therefore spread their bets and lobby parties with differing positions.

In line with this, Gullberg (2008) demonstrated that interest groups lobby both like-minded and opposed policymakers on EU climate policy. More explicitly defining the interrelationship between power and positions, Otjes and Rasmussen (2017, p. 99) stressed that 'interest groups should be particularly keen to establish close relations with powerful parties.' Thus, in some situations, patterns of lobbying will not follow the friend-foe divide, because the incentives of power and position can mutually reinforce or counteract each other. Additionally, Beyers and Hanegraaff (2016) revealed that the level of public attention an issue receives also increases the likelihood of contacting opponents rather than supporters, further adding to the mixed picture of empirical findings.

With this exception (also see De Bruycker, 2016), implicitly or explicitly, most studies have devoted only little attention to how the motivation to lobby (powerful) supporters or opponents is affected by issue characteristics. Rather, the theoretical and empirical focus was on how lobbying patterns are determined by institutional contexts (Austen-Smith, 1993; Crombez, 2002; Holyoke, 2003; Marshall, 2010, 2015; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). However, given the notoriously difficult conditions for cross-country comparative interest group research (Beyers et al., 2008; Lowery et al., 2008), which would greatly improve tests of the external validity of institutional effects, evidence for their impact remains thin. In its current state, research of interest group party lobbying is facing a challenge: findings are mixed, and

the commonly pursued strategy to explain these differences – theorizing about the institutional context – is difficult to follow. We see this circumstance as a chance to reconsider common theoretical arguments and develop a research design able to test their implications.

An issue-level theory of interest group-party lobbying

Issues differ from one another in politically important ways. The *level of conflict* of issues is often seen as crucial in that regard.¹⁸ Here we draw on the politicization literature to determine which aspects of conflict to focus on. Typically, politicization captures the politics surrounding a given issue and involves (at least) three partially related dimensions (de Wilde et al., 2016): the *polarization* of positions, the level of *salience*, and the *expansion of involved actors* (de Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Van Der Brug et al., 2015). Here these three dimensions take on a more context-dependent meaning, given that this study is situated at the intersection of interest group and party politics. As we elaborate below, what matters most for interest group decisions on whom to lobby are the *polarization of party positions*, the *public salience*, and the involvement and *activity of other interest groups*. Importantly, we assume that changes on these dimensions are not at the discretion of individual political actors but are the result of the interaction of various actors in political contexts. Individual groups can have a marginal impact on some of the dimensions of politicization only, implying that, at any given point in time, groups make strategic choices in the context of issue characteristics that are externally given. As one of these choices, the decision of whom to lobby, and the resulting patterns of interest group party lobbying are shaped by these characteristics.

In the following section, we develop a baseline expectation that illustrates lobbying on ideal-typical nonconflictual issues. We subsequently specify how we expect changes in polarization, salience, and the number of other groups active to affect patterns of interaction between parties and interest groups.

¹⁸ Naturally, there are other characteristics that issues differ on, such as the distinction between distributive, redistributive, and regulatory issues (Lowi, 1964) or their technical complexity (Dür, 2008; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Klüver, 2013). However, we think that these distinctions are of secondary importance when explaining interest group decisions on whom to lobby, as their impact on the exchange relationship between groups and parties is unclear. For example, providing legislative subsidy is relevant irrespective of the type and complexity of an issue.

Lobbying on (non-)conflictual issues

On nonconflictual issues, few actors are involved, their positions largely align, and the public does not pay (much) attention. On these issues, policies are favorable to the actors involved and policy change is absent, it takes the form of (favorable) ‘policy drift’ (Hacker et al., 2015), or it remains incremental to the extent that is needed to avoid de-freezing the pre-existing policy conflict (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In the narrow and ‘cozy’ policy niches of unpoliticized issues, we should find only limited interaction between interest groups and political parties. Individual interest groups may only be in touch with particular bureaucratic actors or take a monitoring role and provide information to friendly parliamentarians and their parties. In this situation, lobbying will mostly appear as providing legislative subsidies to one’s supporters, if it occurs at all. Since the involved parties take positions similar to those of involved interest groups, there are little opportunities, and even less reasons, to lobby opposing parties.

This behavior changes when issues are politicized and more conflictual. On ideal-typical conflictual issues, the attention devoted to the issue by the public (salience) is higher, more interest groups and parties are involved, and the positions they take are more polarized. Under these circumstances, providing legislative subsidies to one’s friends is still interest groups’ default strategy. However, an additional need arises to complement it by contacting opposing parties as well. Here, we discuss how the three different dimensions of politicization influence the likelihood of contacting opponents in addition to supporters – thus, to engage in complementary lobbying – in turns.

First, as regards salience, previous studies noted that higher levels of public salience make interest groups more inclined to lobby their foes (Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016, p. 467; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 779). On highly salient issues, political parties – even if they were disinterested in an issue before – will be keen to respond in some way or another (e.g. Klüver, 2018; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2016) and will therefore be interested to hear a broad range of inputs. For interest groups, it makes sense to respond to the information demands of a broad set of parties to ensure that their voice is heard as much as possible. Additionally, when parties are thus pressured by electoral concerns and the stakes for interest groups are high, groups will be willing to invest more in an attempt to change their opponents’ positions. Reciprocal persuasion attempts will result in a pattern of group-party lobbying that includes contacts between opponents and supporters.

Public salience hypothesis (H1): The more salient an issue is to the public, the more likely interest groups are to lobby both supporting and opposing parties.

Second, salience and actor expansion are likely to move together. As noted by Schattschneider (1960, 34), 'scope and bias are aspects of the same tendency,' implying that when issue saliency goes up (conflicts are 'socialized'), additional actors are involved and the balance of forces on a given issue potentially changes. When the attention devoted to an issue increases, more and more actors become involved, especially when so-called 'cue-givers' trigger a bandwagon of attention to a particular issue (Halpin, 2011). Such a bandwagon effect assumes that there are sufficient numbers of interests organized that can potentially be drawn into the policy process. Population-ecological studies substantiate that, on most areas, there are sufficient organizational resources available to allow for the survival of at least some interest groups (this concept is the area or supply term of the Energy-Stability-Area model, e.g. see Gray & Lowery, 1996b, but see qualification: Berkhout et al., 2018). More involvement and activity by other interest groups – increasing interest group density – indicates that the policy subsystem in which the issue is dealt with becomes unstable, and that punctuated and long-term changes to the policy and the interests represented within the particular subsystem become more likely (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

This instability will start a battle over *prominence* rather than policy and persuasion. Halpin and Fraussen (2017, p. 726) define prominence as 'the taken-for-grantedness a group enjoys among a given audience', most notably political elites or particular subsections of policy makers, which results from the acknowledgement and perception of those external actors. It relates to the long-term credibility or reputation of policy participants (Berry, 1999, pp. 131–132), is of a more informal nature than the formal attribution of representative status, common in corporatist policy arrangements (Offe, 1981), and also matters more broadly as groups carefully cultivate a recognizable identity in order to occupy a particular issue niche (Browne, 1990). Critically, not all groups can be prominent and 'only a limited number of groups become placeholders for a constituency or issue perspective' (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017, p. 727). Interest groups compete among each other for prominence and this competition is likely to intensify when the policy subsystem of a given issue seems to change. They will increase their activities aimed at maintaining and establishing relations with a broad set of parties to ensure their long-term prominence. Reaching out to many parties is a way of ensuring that one will be recognized as a 'consequential actor' (Pappi & Henning, 1998).

Even worse than being momentarily on the losing side would be to lose the ability to affect policy change in the future. Being recognized as a relevant, prominent actor is crucial in that regard. To reach this goal, interest groups will lobby both supporting and opposing parties.

Interest group activity hypothesis (H2): The more other interest groups are active on an issue, the more likely interest groups are to lobby both supporting and opposing parties.

Third, two conflicting expectations can be formulated regarding the effect of polarization. They are based on the different assumptions regarding why interest groups lobby that we have already touched upon: to persuade their opponents or to ensure their prominence. To begin with the persuasion perspective, positions of political parties are likely to be sticky on polarized issues and malleable when there are only moderate differences (Austen-Smith & Wright, 1994; Hall & Deardorff, 2006, p. 78). Parties might be open to persuasion or to strategically adjusting their behavior when there are relatively minor differences among them. In contrast, when positions are farther apart, electoral concerns will make it more difficult for parties to adjust their positions. Interest groups are then less likely to spend scarce resources on cultivating contacts with opponents, as it is unlikely to pay-off. We would thus expect that interest groups are less likely to lobby both supporters and opponents when party positions are more polarized.

Polarization-persuasion hypothesis (H3): The more polarized party positions are on a given issue, the less likely interest groups are to lobby both supporters and opponents.

However, we would expect the exact opposite when taking on the ‘prominence perspective.’ When parties take strongly polarized positions on an issue, the likelihood of drastic policy change increases, creating uncertainty regarding future actor constellations. Siding with one side under these conditions might lead to policy success in the short term, but it might mean burning one’s bridges with parties that could be influential in the future. With an eye on their long-term ability to affect policy by maintaining their status as a prominent and relevant actor, interest groups would therefore not just focus on their supporters but contact their opponents as well.

Polarization-prominence hypothesis (H4): The more polarized party positions are on a given issue, the more likely interest groups are to lobby both supporters and opponents.

Research design, data, and operationalization

We use the Dutch data collected from the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project (McKay et al., 2018). We conducted semi-structured interviews with a stratified random sample of 100 Dutch interest groups over the course of 2017. The sample was stratified in two ways, ensuring that we would talk to equal proportions of business and non-business groups, as well as to politically more and less active groups. Our sampling frame for the highly active groups consisted of groups that participated in parliamentary hearings (2012-2016) or had meetings with Ministers or Secretaries of State (2012-2015), while our sampling frame for the less active groups was based on the Dutch *Pyttersen's Almanak*, a directory of associations, and the previous work of Berkhout (2015). Our overall response rate was 52%. Through the interviews, we gathered detailed information on groups' activities on up to seven issues, which they had worked on over the previous 6 months. In addition to their activities, groups revealed their perceptions of core features of these issues, such as the public's awareness or patterns of party-political support for their own positions.

Our dataset contains complete information on 360 issues (our unit of analysis) derived from 86 interviews. Thirty-four issues were dropped because none or all parties supported an interest group's position and interest groups therefore could not choose between supporters and opponents here. For each issue, we asked our interview partners to indicate which parliamentary parties supported or opposed their position and how often they had contacted these supporters and opponents. We recoded these variables into binary responses (no contact vs. any contact) and created our dependent variable *complementary lobbying*. It indicates whether interest groups contacted their supporters only (0) or both their supporters and opponents (1). A look at the cross tabulation of the original two contact variables indicates that this decision is appropriate. Table 4.1 shows that in 183 out of the 185 issues (99%) on which interest groups lobbied their opponents, they also lobbied their supporters. In contrast, when interest groups lobbied their supporters, in 40% (121 issues) of the cases, they did not also lobby their opponents. As is suggested in our theory, the choice for interest groups often is not whether to lobby supporters *or* opponents, but whether to lobby their supporters exclusively or not. Exclusively lobbying opponents happens so rarely that we collapsed this category into the 'complementary lobbying' category of our dependent variable.

Table 4.1. Lobbying supporters and opponents

		Opponents lobbied?		Total
		No	Yes	
Supporters lobbied?	No	54 (15.0)	2 (.6)	56 (15.6)
	Yes	121 (33.6)	183 (50.8)	304 (84.4)
Total		175 (48.6)	185 (51.4)	360 (100)

Note: Percentage of total displayed in parentheses.

Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Our main independent variables measure the three conflict-related issue characteristics as identified above. All three are based on the perceptions of our interview partners and were inquired about in a close-ended fashion at the end of each interview. *Party polarization* measures the degree to which an issue is seen as conflictual among political parties. Based on a three-point scale (0=not conflictual; 1=somewhat conflictual; 2=very conflictual) we created a dummy variable separating very conflictual (1) from somewhat or nonconflictual issues (0). While this variable falls short of measuring the actual (weighted) distribution of party positions on a given issue, it still captures the essence of the *polarization* concept: ‘the intensity of conflict related to an issue among the different actors’ (Hutter & Grande, 2014, p. 1004).¹⁹ *Interest group activity* is a dummy variable that indicates whether more than five other interest groups are active on an issue. It is based on an original five-point scale (0=none; 1=one to five; 2=six to twenty; 3=twenty-one to one hundred; 4=more than one hundred) but was recoded to reflect the uneven distribution of this scale. Last, *public salience* measures whether the public was very aware of an issue (1) or at most somewhat aware (0), recoded from an original four-point scale (0=unaware; 1=a little aware; 2=somewhat aware; 3=very aware).

We control for a number of potentially confounding factors. To begin, business groups might be more likely to lobby on less conflictual issues and, as they are ‘lobbying insiders’ to lobby a broader set of parties in general (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Dür et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2016; but see Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2019). Furthermore, the structural, institutionalized ideological alignment of interest groups and parties comes conceptually prior to our issue-specific patterns of interaction. Particularly, research has shown that business groups are typically aligned with right-of-center parties, while non-business groups are ideologically close with left-of-center parties (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Wessels, 2004).

¹⁹ We find that this measure is correlated with a number of alternative specifications of party polarization, more specifically, these are measurements based on linking our issues to party manifesto data following Klüver (2018), or on the (partial) information on party positions as provided by our interview respondents. However, we consider our measurement the most valid one, given that these alternative operationalizations bring a number of additional conceptual and empirical challenges, for instance related to the dimensionality of the policy conflict.

Interest groups might be more likely to stick with the parties that support them on an issue if these are also ideologically close, and to lobby supporters and opponents if they find their ideological allies on both sides of an issue. *Left friends* therefore measures the number of left-of-center parties (based on and the 'LRGEN' variable from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Polk et al., 2017) among the parties that share an interest group's position and is interacted with a dummy variable that indicates whether a group is a non-business group. We inquired about which parties shared an interest group's position on a given issue directly through our questionnaire.

As we have discussed above, interest groups should also pay attention to the distribution of power within parliament. In the context of this study and its group-issue-based research design it is not the power of individual parties that matters, but the power of those parties that share an interest group's position versus those that do not. When groups enjoy the support of a legislative majority on a given issue, they should be less likely to contact opponents. *Majority support* therefore indicates whether groups were supported by a legislative majority on an issue. Since more resourceful groups are less constrained in how much they can lobby, we control for the (logged) number of lobbyists a group employs (*staff*). It might also be that interest groups that are more frequently asked to participate in institutionalized forms of interaction with political parties – such as parliamentary hearings – are drawn to politicized issues and contact both supporters and opponents in this context. We therefore control for the (logged) number of times a group participated in parliamentary hearings during the period 2012–2016 (based on our sample data). The priority an individual group attaches to an issue might matter for how intensely and whom interest groups decide to lobby. *Priority issue* therefore indicates whether the given issue was a top priority for the interest group over the previous 6 months. Lastly, as a technical control we include the proportion of supporting parties in our model. Descriptive statistics of all variables can be found in the Appendix.

Analysis

Multivariate Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a number of logistic regression models explaining interest groups' decisions to engage in complementary lobbying rather than to focus on their supporters exclusively. As our units of observation (group-issues) and error terms are clustered within groups, we estimated all models with random intercepts at the group level. Likelihood-ratio tests indicate that doing so is appropriate for all models. Table 4.2 displays the results. Models 1–3 suggest that there is some evidence in favor of our hypotheses: when analyzing the bivariate relationships between each of the issue characteristics and complementary lobbying, we estimate significant effects for interest group activity and for public salience. Model 1 indicates that the likelihood of lobbying supporters and opponents increases when the public is perceived to be very aware of an issue ($p < .1$). Similarly, model 3 shows that higher levels of interest group activity lead to a higher likelihood of complementary lobbying ($p < .05$). The effect of increasing party polarization bears a positive sign, as predicted by our polarization-prominence hypothesis (H4), but turns out to be insignificant. However, given that logistic regression coefficients are affected by omitted variables, even if these *were* unrelated to the independent variables included in the model (Mood, 2010), we do not base our final conclusions on these bivariate tests. Rather we estimated a final model in which we include all three issue characteristics (Model 4).

This model provides more support for one of our theoretical expectations. First, and in contradiction to our first hypothesis, we see that the effect of public salience is not robust to the inclusion of the other variables. While it was weak in the first place, it loses significance in the final model. This finding suggests that the public salience of an issue is less influential for the decision of whom to lobby than previously assumed (e.g. Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016), at least when other aspects of the politicization of an issue are included as well. Second, in support of our second hypothesis, the effect of interest group activity remains significant. In line with our expectations, interest groups are more likely to lobby both supporters and opponents when a larger number of other groups is active on the same issue as well. As argued above, this behavior might be due to the desire to maintain their prominence, which could come under jeopardy when many other groups demand the parties' attention.

Table 4.2. Random intercept logistic regression explaining complementary lobbying

	(1) H1: Public Salience	(2) H2: IG Activity	(3) H3/H4: Party Polarization	(4) Full model
<i>Explanatory Variables</i>				
Public salience				
<i>Public is very aware (vs. public is at most somewhat aware)</i>	1.99* (1.19)			1.42 (1.13)
Interest group activity				
<i>>5 groups are active (vs. <6 groups are active)</i>		1.58** (0.65)		1.42** (0.66)
Party polarization				
<i>Issue is very conflictual among parties (vs. Issue is not or somewhat conflictual)</i>			0.87 (0.67)	0.67 (0.69)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Non-business group	-4.64** (1.93)	-4.79** (2.01)	-4.41** (1.93)	-4.61** (1.94)
Left supporters	0.002 (0.38)	-0.05 (0.38)	-0.005 (0.37)	-0.04 (0.37)
Non-business group*Left supporters	0.84 (0.54)	1.08* (0.57)	0.80 (0.54)	0.93* (0.56)
Majority support	-1.80** (0.88)	-2.13** (0.92)	-1.75** (0.88)	-2.05** (0.93)
Priority issue	0.51 (0.53)	0.40 (0.54)	0.62 (0.53)	0.47 (0.55)
Staff (log)	1.39 (1.01)	1.50 (1.02)	1.44 (1.01)	1.35 (1.00)
Hearings (log)	1.32 (0.84)	1.22 (0.84)	1.23 (0.83)	1.25 (0.82)
Supporting parties (proportion)	1.55 (2.61)	1.68 (2.68)	1.80 (2.57)	1.73 (2.68)
Intercept	-0.62 (1.60)	-1.34 (1.67)	-1.34 (1.71)	-1.89 (1.75)
Group intercept variance	23.6** (10.9)	24.8** (11.8)	23.7** (11.0)	23.3** (10.9)
N_{Issues}	306	306	306	306
N_{Groups}	80	80	80	80
AIC	266.6	263.3	268.0	264.3
Log-likelihood	-122.3	-120.7	-123.0	-119.2

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Third, we find no support for either of our *polarization hypotheses*. Model 4 shows that polarization of party positions on an issue is not systematically related to complementary lobbying. While the estimated effect retains its positive sign, it fails to reach an acceptable

level of significance. As argued above, polarization could conceivably be linked to complementary lobbying in two ways. It could either lead to a stronger focus on lobbying supporters due to lower chances of successfully persuading opponents, or it could induce interest groups to target both supporters and opponents to maintain their long-term prominence on a given issue. Perhaps both of these expectations are valid under certain circumstances only, canceling each other out in our models, which might be why we do not find clear support for either of them here. Future research should further investigate this question.

To illustrate the strength of the estimated effects, we plotted marginal predicted probabilities (based on Model 4) over the range of our independent variables (Figure 4.1). The figure shows that higher levels of interest group activity can be expected to increase the probability of complementary lobbying by 10 percentage points. The point-estimates also indicate that interest groups are 4 percentage points more likely to lobby supporters and opponents on issues that are very conflictual among political parties as compared to less conflictual issues, and 9 percentage points more likely to do so on issues that are highly salient to the public. However, the large and overlapping confidence intervals indicate that the relationships between public salience, party polarization and complementary lobbying are rather erratic.

Marginal predicted probability of lobbying both supporters and opponents
(95%-CI)

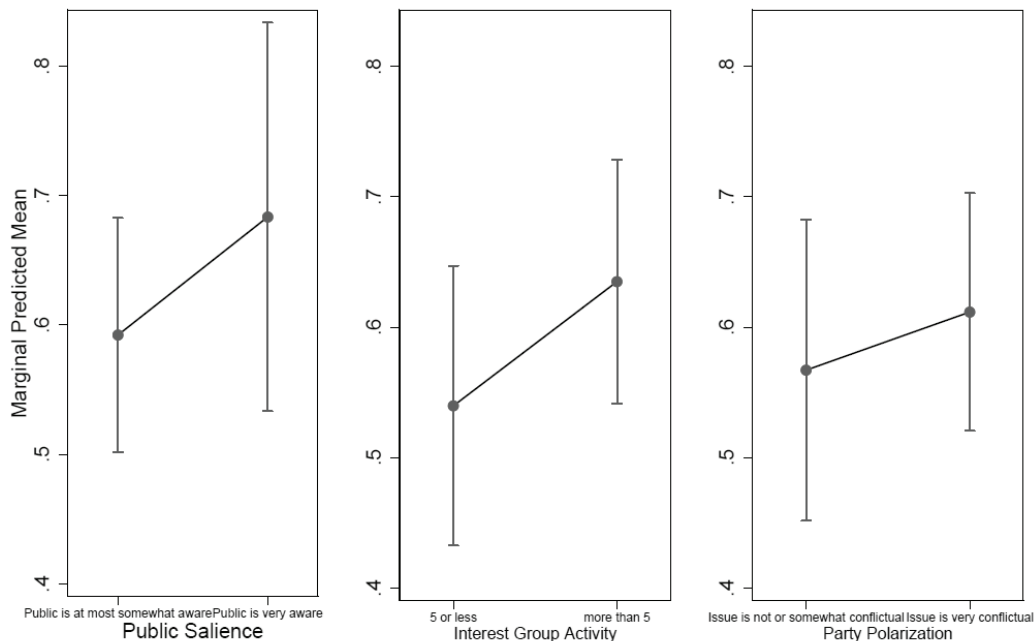


Figure 4.1. Average marginal predicted probabilities of lobbying both supporters and opponents based on Model 4. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Taken together, these findings provide sound evidence for one of our theoretical expectations: higher levels of interest group activity increase the likelihood of complementary lobbying. In contrast, we find no support for our expectation that the public salience of an issue, or the polarization of party positions exert the same kind of effect. These results are interesting as previous research has highlighted the exceptional role that public salience plays in politicization processes (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014). Apparently, when it comes to interest groups the behavior of other groups regarding a certain issue is more important than the public. With regard to party polarization we do not yet want to rule out that a potential relationship with interest groups' lobbying decisions exists. As mentioned above, perhaps the persuasion and the prominence mechanism operate alongside each other, effectively canceling each other out. At the same time, all our models consistently estimated a positive effect of polarization on the likelihood of complementary lobbying, and in a bivariate setting, without control variables it is even significant ($p < .05$; results not shown). Together this might speak for the prominence mechanism.

Last, when looking at the control variables, we see that non-business groups are indeed less likely to lobby both supporters and opponents than 'insider' business groups. Surprisingly, this difference is significant only when they receive no or very little support from their ideological allies, and both types of groups behave similarly when more left parties support their position. Throughout the models, we also find consistent support for the assertion that groups let their behavior be guided by power considerations: when their supporters enjoy a legislative majority, groups feel little need to contact opposing parties. We conducted a number of robustness checks, which are presented in the Appendix. All of them support our conclusions.

Illustrating the mechanism

The correlational evidence presented above provides some support for our theoretical argument that issue characteristics affect whom interest groups lobby. A weakness of our research design, however, is that we cannot provide conclusive evidence regarding which causal mechanism might connect these issue traits and interest group behavior. Remember that we identified two likely candidates: interest groups adjusting their attempts to *persuade* political parties or the desire to *maintain or enhance their prominence* on a given issue. While the lack of support for our *public salience hypothesis* – which was linked to the persuasion mechanism – indicates that the prominence mechanism is more likely to apply, our

quantitative results for the party polarization hypotheses are inconclusive. Therefore we want to go further and see what kind of qualitative evidence our interview data hold. The qualitative information gathered through our interviews illustrates that maintaining their prominence and being recognized as influential actor on an issue is what frequently drives interest group behavior.

To get to this conclusion, we systematically analyzed our interview data, searching for respondents' explanations for why they lobbied supporters and/or opponents. While we did not include an explicit question in that regard in our interview protocol, answers were frequently provided voluntarily or in response to probes. Thus, we cannot link the answers provided by our respondents to specific issues in all cases. However, our qualitative data do allow us to illustrate *generally* which kinds of explanations our respondents offered for their behavior.

On 79 occasions, respondents informed us explicitly on their lobbying targets, and in 22 instances, they provided explanations for why they lobbied both supporters and opponents. Theoretically, we can group these responses into four categories of evidence: evidence a) in favor of or b) against the persuasion mechanism, and evidence c) in favor of or d) against the prominence mechanism. Doing so leads to several relevant observations. First, we do see that a small minority of respondents explain their targeting behavior in a way that provides evidence for the persuasion mechanism. As the representative of an animal rights group described: 'I don't discriminate, I don't differentiate. [...] Yes, I do a lot with the Party for the Animals, but I don't need to convince them anymore. So most of my time I spend [...] on parties that simply think differently about the matter' (Interview, March 21, 2017).²⁰ Another respondent even more explicitly states that persuasion is the goal: 'With the other [parties] you can still start a conversation and try to convince them. We try that' (Interview, June 9, 2017).

Evidence contradicting the persuasion mechanism is more frequent, however. Many respondents are very clear on the futility of trying to persuade opposing parties. Statements such as the following are representative of many more: '[...] I don't differentiate between political parties, so I talk to all of them actually [...] whether it makes sense, I'm not sure, but I do keep them posted' (Interview January 20, 2017). Directly responding to the question whether it is possible to change opposing politicians' position, another lobbyist said: 'No. Sometimes you can sit at the table with people... and I can talk all I want, but it does not make any sense at all' (Interview February 23, 2018).

²⁰ The authors translated all quotes. The original quotes can be found in the appendix.

When it comes to evidence regarding the prominence mechanism, we find that a large number of respondents support our argument, whereas none of them explicitly contradict it. Interest groups lobby broadly so as to be recognized as relevant actors and maintain their prominence, especially when they fear that this role will come under jeopardy or they struggle for recognition to begin with. Thus, one lobbyist explained:

So the idea: I want to talk to that [supporting] party exclusively is very naïve [...] so I said, then I need to get in touch with [opposing parties] [...]; and not with negative intentions [...] but based on the idea: *do you understand who we are? And do we understand what is important for you?* [...] If you want to be heard, you have to listen [...].

(Interview June 22, 2017, emphasis added)

The statement of another respondent added to this idea: 'You talk with everyone [...], *you have to make sure that you talk with everyone* [...]. Because, eventually *you have to make sure that your message is recognizably present on the political stage* [...]' (Interview January 10, 2018, emphasis added). Yet another lobbyist stated: 'After elections [...] we immediately make the rounds, and *we stop by to explain: what is* [name of the organization] *actually?* And then we try to give as much objective information as possible. Because you know: they don't know anything' (Interview January 31, 2018, emphasis added).

These and many other interview responses seem to suggest that lobbying opposing parties is a means to ensure that one is being seen and recognized as a relevant actor in a given policy subsystem rather than an attempt to make parties change their position. We see this as a good indication that the prominence mechanism, as suggested by our theory, operates in many instances.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have investigated the question of whom interest groups lobby and why. Do they lobby their supporters or their opponents? While previous research has hinted at the importance of political institutional rules for explaining this question (Marshall, 2010, 2015; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017), our contribution to the literature was a systematic focus on issue-level factors. This emphasis on differences between issues is justified and relevant, because issue characteristics and their systematic effects on interest group behavior may plausibly

occur relatively independently of the institutional context (Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2019) and help us better understand patterns of interest group lobbying. Disregarding the issue level in explanations of interest group behavior risks missing important sources of variation and might lead to underspecified models. We argued that lobbying supporters is interest groups' preferred strategy, but that they complement it with lobbying opposing parties when the conflict surrounding an issue is high – not to persuade them, but to make sure that they are being recognized as consequential and prominent actors.

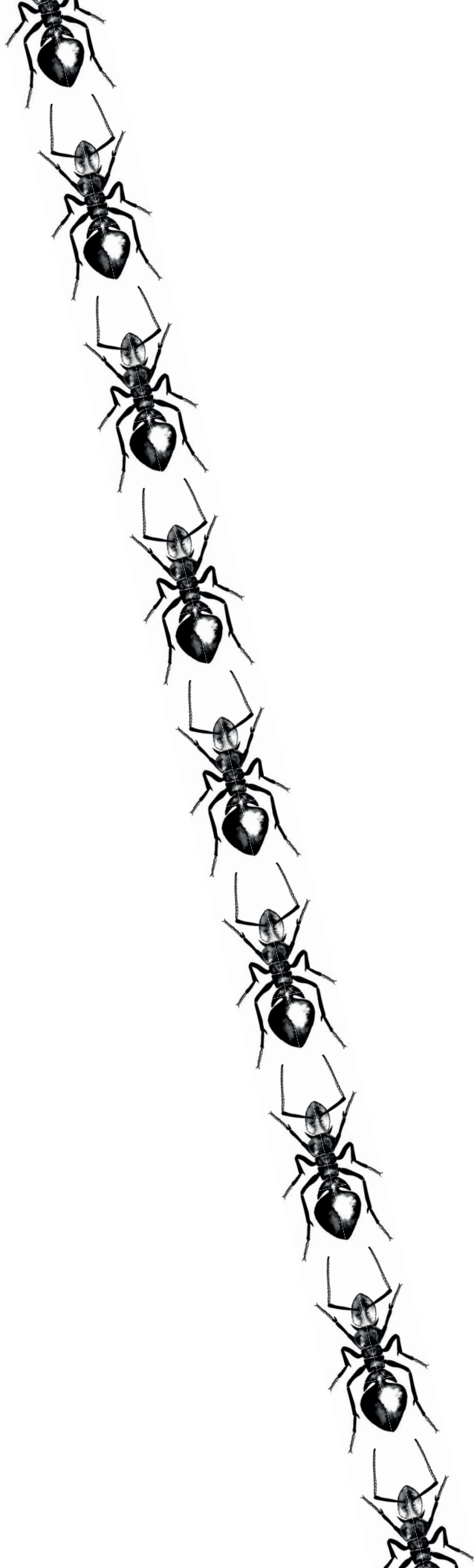
Based on our analysis of Dutch data from the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project (McKay et al., 2018), we demonstrated that groups' decisions on whom to lobby are affected by issue-level factors: they are more likely to lobby both supporters and opponents when the issue they are working on is more conflictual. In particular, the activity of other interest groups on a given issue seems to drive this behavior. Furthermore, we illustrated the causal mechanism that likely connects conflict and lobbying patterns. In contrast to claims made in previous literature (Beyers & Hanegraaff, 2016; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998), we showed that interest groups rarely lobby their opponents in an attempt to change their position. Rather, they target their foes to remain on their radar and to maintain their status as consequential actor in their respective policy subsystem. As we have argued, this behavior becomes particularly important when the subsystem they are a part of is likely to change, which, in turn, can be linked to the conflict surrounding an issue. Importantly, we think that it is likely that these conclusions are valid beyond the Dutch case that we studied, as our theoretical approach stresses issue-level factors that are unlikely to operate differently within other institutional contexts. Future research should test if this is indeed the case.

Our findings have implications for the literature on interest group party lobbying and for our understanding of interest groups in their (party) political context. First, our analysis shows that when interest groups decide whom to lobby, their decision is most likely not one between supporters *or* opponents, but between *an exclusive focus on their supporters and a complementary approach including opponents as well*. Future research should keep this result in mind when designing instruments to investigate lobbying patterns. Being predisposed to looking for an *either-or* pattern might bias findings and hinder future theorizing.

Second, this paper demonstrates the usefulness of a more completely specified issue-level theoretical framework for examining interest group lobbying. Issue-level factors, such as the ones specified here, clearly matter in interest group politics. General, issue-unspecific studies might miss important nuances and variation when it comes to various forms of interest

group activity. Issue-level factors, accordingly, should be more systematically included in research investigating interest group activities.

Third, we have shown that interest groups approach both supporting and opposing parties, particularly when the political climate gets rough, on specific issues or more generally. This result is good news in normative terms, as broad policy interaction between interest groups and a variety of different parties might foster the production of effective policy alternatives and the formation of political consensus (Lindblom, 1968). Therefore, even in times of increasing polarization and growing differences between (some) parties, interest groups maintain channels of communication with all sides. Interest group promiscuity might help mitigate some of the negative ramifications of a larger partisan divide, such as deadlock, by maintaining issue-specific policy networks and enabling compromise.



On the road to policy success: When and why do interest groups gain party support?

Introduction²¹

Interest groups are more likely to attain their policy preferences when political parties support them (Grossmann, 2014; Romeijn, 2021). Gaining party support is thus a valuable step on interest groups' road to policy success, and inequalities in interest groups' ability of taking that step shed light on the question who is more likely "to get what, when, how" (Lasswell, 1936) in politics, and win the 'policy prize' (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). Additionally, when interest groups deliver expert knowledge and signal constituency preferences to party-political policy makers, who might change their position as a result, this action corroborates their role as information providers in democratic politics (Lindblom, 1968). It shows how groups can enable parties to govern efficiently, effectively, and responsive (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). But which groups are more likely to gain support for their policy positions by political parties and why?

Despite the normative importance attached to this question, our knowledge of the presence or extent of unequal interest group success in gaining party support is limited. This seems to be the case because of the large emphasis placed on stability of party- and interest group positions in the literature. For instance, conflict-centered perspectives on (West European) politics paint a picture of the political world in which group and party positions are highly stable and structured along the major ideological dividing lines in society (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 1966; Allern, 2010; Allern and Bale, 2012, 2017), because of the structural alignment and organizational integration of interest group- and party systems (but see Katz and Mair, 1995). Given the supreme strength of political parties to control and freeze these patterns of conflict (Mair, 1997, pp. 951–952; Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 64–65), political influence in general, and that of interest groups in particular, might be dependent on party-political dynamics, following electoral cycles and patterns of government participation. In a given party-political environment, different kinds of groups may find support for their positions more or less often and their road to success open or closed. As Schattschneider (1948, p. 21) put it eloquently: "The parties establish the climate in which certain of the

²¹ This chapter is based on an unpublished single-authored article.

organized special interests find it relatively easy to get what they want and certain other minorities get less consideration.”

Similarly, actor-centered perspectives on (interest group) politics also emphasize that interest group-party alignments are highly stable, but trace this back to the agency of groups and parties. While classical pluralists such as Truman (1951) or Latham (1952) assumed that parties and their legislators – in a billiard ball model of politics – would adjust their positions in response to competing group pressures, neo-pluralists largely agree that lobbying in many circumstances neither aims to change party preferences (e.g. Statsch and Berkhout, 2020), nor leads to that result (e.g. Bronars and Lott, 1997). Legislator and party preferences are highly durable, according to this perspective (Hall & Deardorff, 2006), and interest groups attempt to change their positions under rare circumstances only (Ellis & Groll, 2020; Hall & Deardorff, 2006, pp. 78–80).

I contend that both of these perspectives are inattentive to changing patterns of alignment between interest groups and political parties, both on concrete policy questions and more generally (Allern et al., 2020; Allern et al., 2019; Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2021; De Bruycker, 2016). To begin, while conflict among parties serves as a great integrating force in structuring patterns of support and opposition in interest group systems, this influence is not absolute, and issue specific conflict frequently exhibits patterns of interest group-party coalitions that are unaligned with the major ideological dimensions of party competition (Berkhout et al., 2020; Beyers et al., 2015; Gray & Lowery, 1996a; Wonka et al., 2018). Secondly, although parties display remarkable stability in terms of their ideological profiles (e.g. Budge, 1994), they adjust their policy positions in response to a range of environmental and organizational factors (Adams, 2012; Schumacher & Giger, 2018; Schumacher et al., 2015), and they change their attention to issues as a result of interest group mobilization (Klüver, 2018). Thirdly, even though this is not the main purpose of their activities, interest groups *do* attempt to change their party-political environment in their favor and actively lobby political parties to adjust their positions to be in line with their own (Ellis & Groll, 2020; Hall & Deardorff, 2006, pp. 70–72, 78–80). And fourthly, these attempts often reach further than just trying to garner the support of ideologically close, but uncommitted parties, because in many instances broad coalitions are needed to move public policy (Grossmann, 2014). In combination, these factors highlight that positional alignments of political parties and interest groups may change, and that interest groups compete to gain party support. What makes some of them more successful in this endeavor than others?

This article develops two potential explanations for this question, which predict different distributions of success in gaining party support for business and non-business groups. Firstly, relying on literature on the advantage of business (groups) in politics, I argue that not all is equal when it comes to groups gaining party support. Rather, due to their privileged position in politics (Lindblom, 1977, 1982) business groups should be more successful in gaining party support than other types of groups. Arguments advanced by business groups are harder to ignore and contest for many political parties – particularly those in government – than interest group positions on non-economic issues, as they often relate directly or indirectly to macroeconomic developments and thus affect parties' electoral fortunes. In consequence, (government) parties should be more open to start supporting business groups.

Secondly, based on exchange theoretical work (e.g. Berkhout, 2013; Bouwen, 2004) I hypothesize that groups will gain support by parties they are ideologically aligned with. Given ideologically similar backgrounds, groups and parties are more likely to interact (Berkhout et al., 2021). The information provided by groups is also likely to be more valuable to the party, and the support offered by the party more valuable to the group (Røed, 2021). Furthermore, adjusting their position is less costly for a party in electoral terms, and resource exchange incurs less transaction costs for both. This argument highlights that all types of groups should be able to gain support by at least some (ideologically aligned) party and that success in gaining party support should thus be relatively evenly distributed, depending largely on the composition of the party system.

I test these hypotheses on a new dataset of changes in party support for interest group positions on specific policy issues. The data contain information on changing patterns of support by the nationally represented political parties concerning more than 1,900 policy issues on the agendas of 120 interest groups in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (550 group-party dyads) collected for the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project. By pooling information on multiple policy issues at the level of group-party combinations I create an innovative measure of interest group success in gaining party support that allows me to study patterns at the organizational level while accounting for some of the political differences between specific policy issues. My analyses provide evidence for a business group advantage in gaining party support that is due to their privileged position with government and their ability to interact successfully with parties across the ideological spectrum. Even when controlling for important alternative factors, such as party salience and public opinion, business groups are more likely to gain support irrespective of the ideological position of a

party. They also are more likely to gain support from government parties than from opposition parties. Non-business groups, in contrast, are neither privileged by government nor opposition parties, and strongly rely on their ideological alignment with left-of-center parties to gain party support.

Through the theoretical arguments developed here and the empirical findings, I make two important contributions. First, relevant for the interest group literature, I contribute to studies of interest group influence, by zooming in on one of the potential mechanisms – gaining party support – that might connect interest group activity with their potential policy influence. Much of the recent literature attempts to explain interest group influence or success with factors situated within the interest group system (Burstein & Linton, 2002; Flöthe, 2019; Junk & Rasmussen, 2019; Klüver, 2013), often in combination with public opinion (De Bruycker, 2019; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2019; Dür & Mateo, 2014; Junk, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2018) and produces a large array of findings. While it is understandable that many scholars search among the demos for a mechanism that explains interest group power, as it is normatively desirable that it is situated there (Dahl, 1956), I shift focus to the empirically more proximate political environment of interest groups. Given that “parties are gatekeepers to political power” (Allern & Bale, 2012, p. 8), the literature should pay more attention to the role played by political parties in creating or denying interest groups the environment to be successful (for a similar line of reasoning with regard to the role of government or individual legislators see: Ainsworth, 1997; Baumgartner et al., 2009: 208; Mahoney and Baumgartner, 2015; Woll, 2007). This also speaks to the long-lasting debate about the nature of the relationship between interest group and party systems (e.g. Merkl and Lawson, 1988; Schattschneider, 1948; Thomas, 2001; Zeller, 1954)

Secondly, relevant for the party politics literature, I contribute to the study of party position change (for an overview see Adams, 2012). Concretely, qualitative studies have hinted at the involvement of interest groups in processes of party position taking (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012), but interest groups are largely absent from quantitative studies of party position change (but see Klüver, 2018; Otjes and Green-Pedersen, 2019). The theoretical argument and empirical measures developed here can be incorporated into future studies of party position change to prevent problems resulting from omitted variable bias.

How groups gain party support

I assume that interest groups and political parties are organizations that aim to influence public policy, with political parties trying to do so by running “candidates for office in competitive elections” (Bawn et al., 2012; Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 272) and interest groups without aspiring to hold elected office (Jordan et al., 2004). Both are analytically and empirically distinct organizations with innate policy agendas and -positions (e.g. Halpin, 2015; for a diverging perspective see Bawn et al., 2012; Hacker and Pierson, 2014). Due to the fact that they are part of each other’s organizational environment and frequently interact with one another (e.g. Allern and Bale, 2012) they are nonetheless able to influence each other in these regards (Klüver, 2018; Otjes & Green-Pedersen, 2021).

Central for this article is the question how and why interest groups gain support for their positions by political parties. I understand interest groups to gain party support on a given policy issue – akin to the preference attainment approach focusing on “policy success” (e.g. Dür et al., 2015) – when a given party adjusts its position on this issue to be in line with the position of the interest group. For this to happen, parties can either change previously held positions, or take a position on an issue that they did not express a preference on before, and, importantly, groups do not need to *cause* the positional adjustment. They can merely be lucky, reap profit from the ‘influence-work’ of other organizations, or smartly select the issues they are working on, by focusing on issues on which they anticipate party shifts. This being said, there are factors that influence the likelihood of groups gaining party support which I will elaborate next.

The privileged position of business and party support

The literature provides ample reason to suspect that not all groups are equally likely to gain party support, but that one type of interest groups in particular, enjoys a competitive advantage in this regard: business groups. Many scholars, following Olson (1965, 1982), see mobilization- and resource advantages as the primary reason for disproportional business group influence in politics (e.g. Baumgartner and Leech, 2001; Klüver, 2012; Schlozman et al., 2012), and this could apply to the ability of gaining party support as well. However, as recent research demonstrates that ease of group mobilization and resource advantages do not inevitably lead to efficient and effective political action (De Bruycker et al., 2019; see also Dür et al., 2015) this is not the argument advanced here. Rather, here I stress the role of structural differences between interest group types and the resulting special connection

between business groups and government parties. I argue that business interest groups have a structural advantage in gaining party support stemming from their “privileged position” in politics (Lindblom, 1977, p. 5).

As Lindblom (1977: 173–175, 194, 1982: 328–30) argued, business representatives akin to “public officials” perform essential and consequential tasks within democratic systems. Decisions they take affect employment levels, prices, production, innovation, and growth, among others. And since government parties – if for electoral reasons only – care about these outcomes (Lewis-Beck, 1988), and by implication for the decisions at their bases, it becomes an inevitable task for government and those with “top authority” to enable business to performing these tasks well. Contrary to other groups, those organizing business interests “cannot be left knocking on the doors of the political system, they must be invited in” (Lindblom, 1977, p. 152). Moreover, business groups themselves are frequently found to approach decision-makers directly, acting as political insiders and capitalizing on their comparative advantage in providing policy-related information (Dür & Mateo, 2016). This implies that government parties – largely irrespective of their ideological leaning – should be more likely and open to interact with business groups, see them as more ‘prominent’ (Halpin & Fraussen, 2017), and should thus be more likely to listen to their arguments and adjust their positions accordingly.

There is no similar shared interest among opposition parties to the benefit of non-business groups that might offset this business group advantage, so that success in gaining party support will be biased towards business groups if this explanation holds. In summary, this leads to the following expectation.

Privileged position of business hypothesis (H1): Business groups are more likely to gain government party support than other groups.

Exchange, ideological alignment, and party support

From an exchange theoretical perspective (e.g. Berkhout, 2013), the phenomenon of a party changing its position to support an interest group on a specific policy question can be understood as the outcome of resource exchange between the two. Assuming that party support on a given issue is a valuable resource for groups that aim to affect public policy around it, they compete for it with other groups and offer various resources of their own (e.g.

political and technical information, electoral support) to induce parties to engage in an exchange relationship with them and lend them their support (for a similar argument see Klüver, 2018). To a large extent, the value of goods offered in these potential relationships, by both, is relational, and thus not all potential exchanges between groups and parties are equally likely (Allern et al., 2020, pp. 4–5). Exchanges that promise to be of most mutual value are most probable to see the light of day.

One central factor determining this mutual value, and thus the likelihood of actual exchange, is the ideological alignment or proximity, between groups and parties (Wonka, 2017). The goods exchanged between ideologically similar organizations should be more valuable to each other for four reasons. Firstly, the information provided by an interest group with a similar ideological background should be more compatible, and thus easier to integrate, with the broader ideological and policy program of a party (Røed, 2021). A Christian Democratic party will find it easier to consider the arguments of a Christian group on the issue of abortion, for instance, than those advanced by a liberal citizens' initiative. Secondly, given the importance of issue based voting, promises of electoral support by a group (in exchange for party support) are more credible, and thus valuable, when both organizations already share a similar, and potentially overlapping constituency (Allern et al., 2020, p. 5). Thirdly, due to the fact that close collaboration between groups and parties can be negatively perceived by voters (Binderkrantz, 2015), for parties the dangers of being responsive to interest groups are probably lowest, when this responsiveness is demonstrated towards ideologically similar groups. Lastly, since ideologically proximate groups and parties are more common to interact with one another in their day to day policy work (Berkhout et al., 2021), they are more likely to be acquainted with one another, and the transaction costs inherent in any interaction are likely smaller.

In following previous research (De Bruycker, 2016; Gava et al., 2017; Wonka, 2017), I assume that business groups hold ideologically similar positions to right-of-center parties, whereas non-business groups are aligned with left-of-center parties. Within the latter category, ideological alignment with left-of-center parties should be particularly strong for 'social groups', i.e. trade unions, and public interest groups (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017), but slightly weaker for some other groups that are contained in this category, for example institutional associations, hobby-, or identity groups. However, given the generally more redistributive policy agenda of left-wing parties, and the fact that many of these latter groups lobby for recognition and financial support from the state, they should still find their allies

among these parties. Taken together this leads me to formulate the ideological alignment hypothesis:

Ideological alignment hypothesis (H2): Interest groups are more likely to gain support by political parties they are ideologically aligned with, than by parties they are not.

If this hypothesis holds up after the empirical analysis, all types of groups should be able to gain support by at least some (ideologically aligned) party and success in gaining party support should thus be relatively evenly distributed, depending largely on the composition of the party system.

Research Design

Measuring (changes in) party support on a sample of interest group issues

I use data collected from the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project to test the hypotheses spelled out in the previous section. Throughout the year 2017 project members held interviews with representatives of nationally active interest groups in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In each of the countries, samples consisted of roughly 100 groups, composed in equal parts of business and non-business groups, and including both politically highly and less active groups (for more details on the sampling procedure see: McKay et al. 2018). During the interviews we collected structured information on up to seven concrete policy issues the interest groups were working on during the previous six months. This provides us with information on more than 1,900 specific group-policy issues. After a period of roughly one year, we re-contacted our initial interview respondents by phone, and inquired about any developments regarding the policy issues they had mentioned to us during the first interview. In the second round of interviews we were able to interview a total of 165 groups (52% response rate) of the initial 316.²²

During both rounds of interviews we asked our respondents to indicate which of the national political parties represented in parliament shared their group's position on a given issue. I assume that parties that have not been mentioned in response to this question, either take a neutral, or opposing position, unless respondents indicated not to possess information on party positions. By comparing responses between the two interviews I measure whether a

²² While being substantially smaller, the second round sample is remarkably similar to the first round in terms of group and issue characteristics (see Appendix for more information).

given party adjusted its position on a given issue to be in line with that of the group. When a party shared a group's position on a given issue that did not do that before, either because it had opposed the group or had held a neutral position, it scores a 1 on this issue.²³ It takes the value 0 when a party did not change its position, or when it ceased supporting the group. Issues on which a party already supported a group during the first round of interviews were excluded from the dataset at this point, as it is impossible that parties only started supporting a group on that issue in the period leading up to the second round of interviews. In a following step I restructured my data frame to use group-party dyads as units of analysis, in order to better reflect my group and party centered theoretical framework. In this data frame, the dependent variable *Gaining party support* indicates for each group-party pair the proportion of issues on which a group gained the support of that party. The variable takes values between 0 (a group did not gain support by a given party on any of their issues) and 1 (a group gained support by a given party on all of their issues). Restructuring my dataset in this way thus allows me to focus on the general organizational level patterns of interest group success in gaining party support, while considering the influence of issue-specific factors that might affect their relations as well. In combination with other relevant measures for my analyses, the dataset contains 550 group-party dyads as units of analysis.

Independent variables

All independent variables are based on information gathered during the first interview with a given organization. Beginning with group type differences, I classified all groups as either *business*, or *non-business* groups. Business groups are those organizations that represent the interests of members that joined the organization in their role as individual professionals, commercial companies, or associations of companies, or individual firms. Groups representing the interests of individuals in roles other than their profession, and organizations who have non-profit aims are coded as non-business groups.

Since the first hypothesis expects business groups to be advantaged when it comes to gaining party support, due to the privileged position they enjoy for government parties, the *government* variable identifies all parties that have been in office at the time of the first interview and distinguishes them from those that have been in opposition.²⁴ An interaction

²³ Arguably, this conflates two slightly different group-party-issue constellations, which might require alternative lobbying approaches and effort to gain party support. Ultimately the outcome is the same though. Future research should theorize and analyze whether and why these different starting points might matter for interest group success.

²⁴ Elections took place during our period of investigation in each of the countries I analyze. However, these led to remarkably little government turnover. The Dutch labor party (PvdA) is the only party within the dataset that went into

term between the *government* and the *business group* variable enables me to test the first hypothesis. Including government versus opposition status also helps me to account for the fact that government and opposition parties are unequally likely to adjust their positions in general (e.g. Schumacher et al., 2015).

In order to test the ideological alignment hypothesis, I follow previous research (De Bruycker, 2016; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017) and assume that business groups are aligned with right-wing parties, and non-business groups with left-wing parties. To capture ideological differences between parties, I measure parties' *left-right positions* on a 0-1 scale (based on the *LRGEN* variable in Polk et al., 2017). The interaction between party's left-right positions and group type enables me to assess the ideological alignment hypothesis.

Control variables

My models include a series of control variables at the party and interest group level, and issue characteristics that are aggregated at the level of group-party dyads. Most notably, I control for explanatory factors of party position change identified in the party politics literature (e.g. Adams, 2012). This is beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, controlling for party-level explanations of party position change, enables me to reduce the possibility of identifying spurious relationships between interest group factors and party position change that are actually caused by party-political dynamics. Secondly, if my analyses reveal that the party position changes measured through interest group perceptions – here in the direction of interest group preferences – follow the patterns we would expect based on the literature on party position change, this lends credibility to the interest group-based measure and is an indicator of its measurement validity.

Concretely, I control for changes in party seat share, because losing seats in an election incentivizes parties to change (Budge, 1994). Due to the fact that elections took place during the time of our investigations, changes in seat shares are readily available. I also control for the salience parties attach to the issues of a group, since parties might be more hesitant to change their positions on issues that are of importance to them, or alternatively, talk a lot about issues they are willing to change. To this end I counted the number of times an interest group's issues were mentioned in a party's election program (for more information on this procedure see chapter 2). The resulting measure is highly skewed, with many groups

opposition after the 2017 election, whereas the Dutch Christian Democrats (CDA), Christian Union (CU), and Democrats 66 are alone in changing their opposition- for government roles. The results of the analysis do not change meaningfully, when coding parties' government-opposition status at the time of the follow-up interviews.

receiving zero, or a only a few, mentions for their set of issues, and some groups receiving lots of attention for their issues. I therefore transformed it into two variables; one indicating the logged number of mentions in a program, when the issues of a group were mentioned at least one time (*log(party salience)*), the other indicating groups whose issues were not mentioned by a party at all (*not mentioned*). In combination, these variables allow me to estimate the effect of the (absent) salience of group issues to a given party. Last, since parties “listen to the(ir) public” (Romeijn, 2020), *public salience* measures the average level of public awareness for a group’s issues, and *public opposition* the average level of public opposition towards the interest group’s position on it.²⁵

At the interest group side of things I control for group resources (logged number of staff), since affluence has been associated with political influence (Dür & Mateo, 2016), and for the positions of an interest group towards policy change on their issues, in order to avoid my analyses from reflecting status quo bias (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Furthermore, as the alignment of a group with a larger proportion of other groups active on an issue has been shown to affect interest group success positively (Junk, 2019; Junk & Rasmussen, 2019; Klüver, 2013; Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2015; Nelson & Yackee, 2012), I control for the average relative size of the group’s positional camp or side on its issues. To measure a group’s *mean camp share*, I calculated the mean percentage of other active groups that favored a group’s positions on its issues, based on interview responses. I also include a measure of the average size of the population of other groups active on a group’s issues to account for the fact that with increasing population density, the potential “influence work” of other organizations, and thus the likelihood of party position change, changes as well. We asked respondents to indicate the number of other groups active on an issue in five categories: none, 1-5, 6-20, 21-100, or more than 100. To create the variable *density*, I calculated the median response of a group to this question. A summary table of all variables used can be found in the Appendix.

²⁵ *Public salience* is measured as the median response of a group to the question “How aware is the public of this issue? Not at all; a little; moderately; very aware.” for the issues it has been active on. *Public opposition* is measured as the median response to the question “How much public opposition exists? Non; a little; a moderate amount; a great deal.”

Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

From an interest group perspective, there are three ways how political parties can potentially change their position. They can either adjust a previously held position to become in line with that of the interest group, they can change and cease sharing a group's position, or, finally, they can stay put and not change their position at all. In line with previous research (Schumacher et al., 2015), the data show that parties hold stable positions on many issues, but that change is certainly no unknown phenomenon to them: on a large majority of issues (70%), our respondents observed stable party positions, but they also gained (24%) and lost party support (5%) on a substantial number of them. This indicates that patterns of party-interest group alignment are not as sticky as some research suggests (see discussion in Allern and Bale, 2012). Figure 5.1 shows that the dependent variable of this analysis, the proportion of issues on which a group gained the support of a party, is very unevenly distributed: success or failure in gaining party support in many cases is absolute, as is indicated by many values of zero and one. However, slightly less than one-third of the groups do see both successes and failures in gaining support for their issues by a given party. The data also demonstrate that business groups seem to be slightly more successful in gaining party support than non-business groups: whereas the former gain support on roughly 32% of their issues, on average, the latter gain support on 25% of their issues on average ($t=2.03$; $p<.05$). Does this finding hold in a multivariate setting and how can it be explained?

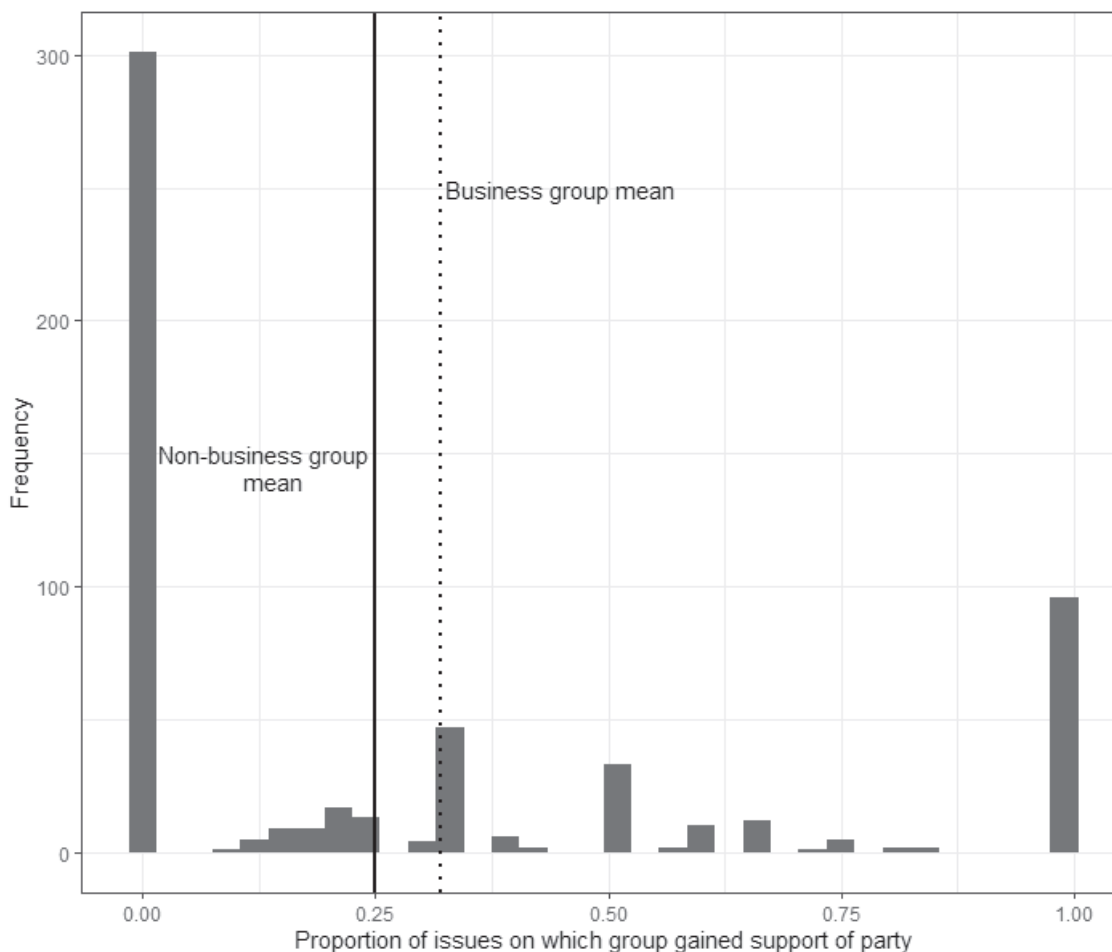


Figure 5.1. Distribution of dependent variable. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Multivariate Analysis

Table 5.1 presents 2 logistic mixed effects regression models explaining the proportion of issues on which a group gained support of a party for each group-party pair. The logistic regression specification has been chosen, given that the dependent variable of the analyses is a proportion with many values of zero and one. Due to the fact that my observations are interest group-party dyads, and my data are therefore cross-classified, the inclusion of random group-, and party intercepts needs to be considered. Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of random group intercepts provide the best fit of the data, whereas random party intercepts do not improve model fits any further. I have therefore chosen to include random group effects only. All results are robust to the inclusion of additional party-level random effects, and to alternative model specifications (see Appendix). Models 1 and 2 test the privileged position of business, and the ideological alignment hypotheses respectively.

Table 5.1. Explaining changes in party support

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> <i>Proportion of issues on which group_i gained support of party_j</i>	
	(1)	(2)
Business group	-.16 (.34)	-1.13** (.54)
Government party	-.20 (.48)	.54 (.41)
Party left-right position	-.96* (.57)	-2.72*** (.81)
Business group* Government party	1.52*** (.48)	
Business group* Party left-right position		3.13*** (.95)
<i>Control variables:</i>		
Party seat change	-.02 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
log(party salience)	.26* (.14)	.25* (.14)
Issues not mentioned	.11 (.35)	.07 (.35)
Mean issue camp share	2.15*** (.74)	2.29*** (.73)
Median issue population density	-.02 (.16)	.03 (.16)
Group resources	-.18 (.13)	-.21 (.13)
Status quo challenger	-.14 (.53)	-.07 (.53)
Median public opposition to issues	-.42 (.28)	-.47* (.27)
Public salience	.11 (.23)	.17 (.23)
Germany	.81* (.42)	.79* (.41)
Netherlands	2.12*** (.58)	2.20*** (.58)
Intercept	-2.50** (1.01)	-2.08** (1.02)
Group intercept variance	.74	.79
N _{dyads}		577
N _{groups}		125
Log Likelihood	-185.31	-184.88
AIC	404.61	403.75

*Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; standard errors in parentheses; source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).*

Coming to the test of the first hypothesis, are business groups more likely to gain support by government parties? Model 1 investigates this question. Central to the test is the interaction between interest group type and a party's government versus opposition status. The relevant question is, whether group type differences emerge, particularly for government parties. Model 1 shows that this is the case. To ease interpretation of the estimated coefficients I rely on plots of the predicted values of the dependent variable for relevant

configurations of the independent variables.²⁶ All plots display 84% confidence intervals, which allow me to draw conclusions regarding the significance of the observed differences with approximated p-values of .05 (MacGregor-Fors & Payton, 2013). As the overlapping confidence intervals in the ‘opposition’ panel in Figure 5.2 display, opposition parties do not tend to discriminate between business and non-business groups. Both types of groups are almost equally likely to gain support by opposition parties. The pattern looks different for government parties though: business groups are significantly (approximated $p < .05$) and substantially more successful in gaining support by them (48%), as compared to non-business groups (19%). In fact, the business group-government party combination produces a larger likelihood of success than all other possible combinations. This provides evidence in favor of the privileged position of business hypothesis.

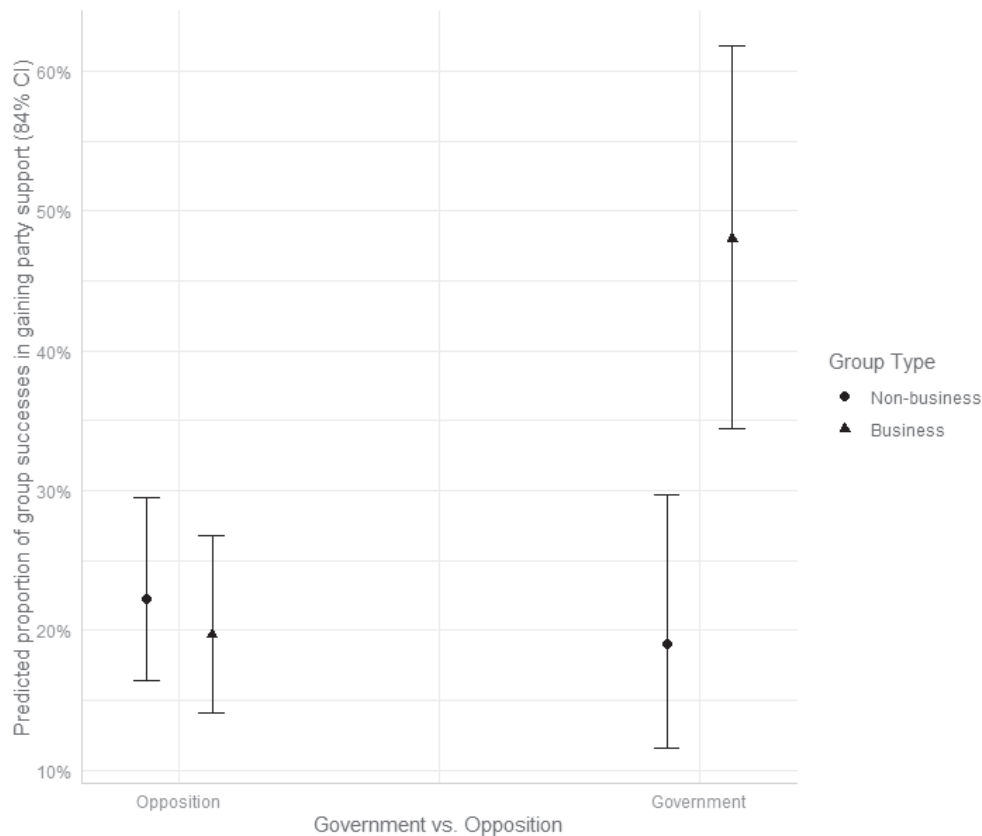


Figure 5.2. *The privileged position of business and party support.* Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

²⁶ Predicted probabilities were calculated with the ‘ggeffects’ package in R. All other co-variates are set to their mean value.

Model 2 tests the alternative, exchange-theory-based hypothesis that groups are more likely to gain support by parties they are ideologically aligned with. The model indicates that that is only partially the case: while the interaction term between the business group and the party ideology variable has a significant positive effect on the proportion of group successes in gaining party support ($p < 0.01$), both of the main effects are significantly below zero. As Figure 5.3 shows, this means that business groups' proportion of successes in gaining party support is virtually unaffected by party ideology. Business groups are just marginally less likely to gain support by left-wing parties (28%), than by right-wing ones (35%). For non-business groups, in contrast, the proportion of successes in gaining party support is strongly affected by party ideology: the more right a party is in ideological terms, the lower the probability that it will start supporting a non-business group. Furthermore, even the most left-wing parties in my dataset do not privilege non-business groups significantly over their business counterparts, whereas parties on the right of the ideological spectrum are significantly more likely to start supporting business than non-business groups. In combination this indicates that ideological alignment between interest groups and parties works asymmetrically against non-business groups; for business groups the probability of gaining support barely differs between their ideological allies and opponents. They seem to be able to engage in exchange relationships with parties across the ideological spectrum. Non-business groups, in contrast, rely heavily on their ideological alignment with left-wing parties to gain party support. This finding, thus, does not provide unequivocal support for the ideological alignment hypothesis, but indicates a business group advantage in gaining party support that is due to the asymmetrical importance of ideological alignment.

Importantly, the findings regarding both hypotheses emerge even when controlling for the main effect associated with the independent variable related to the alternative explanation. Government parties, irrespective of their ideological leaning, are more likely to lend support to business groups, and non-business groups rely on ideological proximity to gain support irrespective of a party's government or opposition status. Future research with more variation in terms of parties' combinations of government-opposition status and ideological positions should attempt to further disentangle the potentially interactive nature of the two proposed explanations.

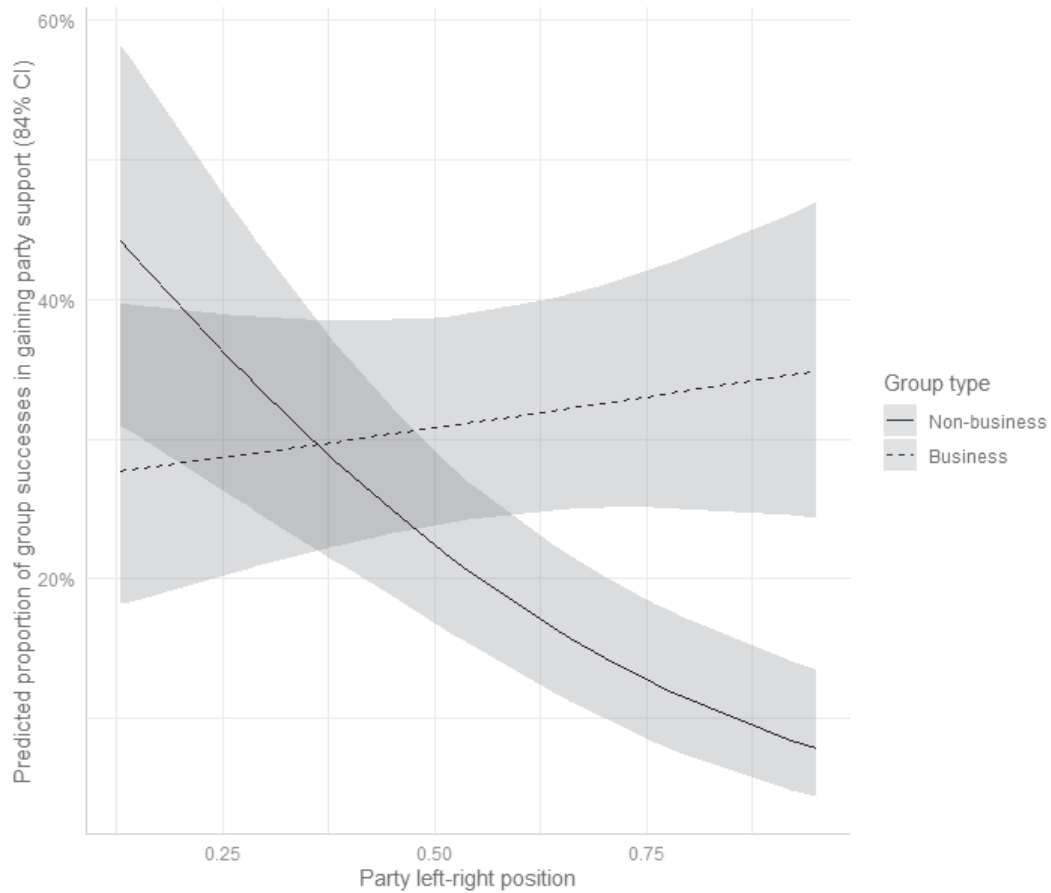


Figure 5.3. Ideological alignment and party support. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Lastly, a quick look at the control variables indicates that only three other factors consistently affect the proportion of issues on which a group gained support of a party: the salience of issues at the party side, a group's support within the broader interest group community (camp share), and country level differences. While the findings with regard to country level differences are interesting to consider, little can be said about the underlying mechanisms that lead to their existence, due to overdetermination: too many institutional, country-invariant factors can be thought of that could plausibly affect interest groups' likelihood of gaining party support (e.g. differences in electoral systems, party system sizes, party system fragmentation, or structures of interest mediation). Therefore, country level differences will not be discussed further here, but should be understood as calling for more cross-country comparative interest group research in general.

The positive effect of party salience is more interesting, as it indicates that at least some party-political dynamics help explain when interest groups gain party support. This

lends credibility to the interest group-based measure of party position change: party position changes observed by interest group representatives are related to independently measured differences in parties' issue salience. Political parties are more likely to change their positions in support of an interest group, if the issues a group works on receive more attention in their election programs.

Finally, the significant and positive effect of a group's mean camp share shows that groups that are supported by a larger proportion of other groups, on average, are more successful in gaining party support as well. This finding ties in neatly with research that finds that the strength of groups' sides or camps affects their likelihood of lobbying success (Junk, 2019; Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2015), as it shows that a group's camp share also positively affects a potential precondition for this success.

Conclusion

Which interest groups are more successful in gaining party support for the positions they advocate? This paper shows that business groups are more likely to gain party support than non-business groups. My analyses suggest that this is due to both their privileged position with government parties (Lindblom, 1977), and their ability to engage in exchange relationships with parties across the ideological spectrum. Non-business groups, in contrast, strongly rely on their alignment with left-wing parties to gain support. Ideological alignment thus seems to work asymmetrically against non-business interest groups: their probability of gaining support by a party decreases steeply the more to the right that party is ideologically. Business groups' abilities of gaining party support, in contrast, are largely unaffected by party ideology.

These findings should be further explored in future research. Firstly, the conclusion that business groups are clearly privileged by government parties, and are able to gain party support irrespective of party ideology, suggests that the privileged position of business groups in politics is even more structural and less confined to government parties than I have argued here. As proponents of theories of a structural dependence of the state on business (groups) argue (Swank, 1992, pp. 38–39), all '*state policymakers*' should be concerned with business group politics. Potentially, this includes all mainstream parties (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012) of the left *and* right, and not just current government participants. Future research should investigate this question further.

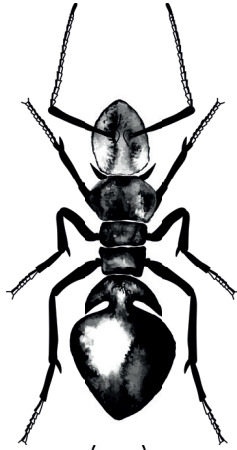
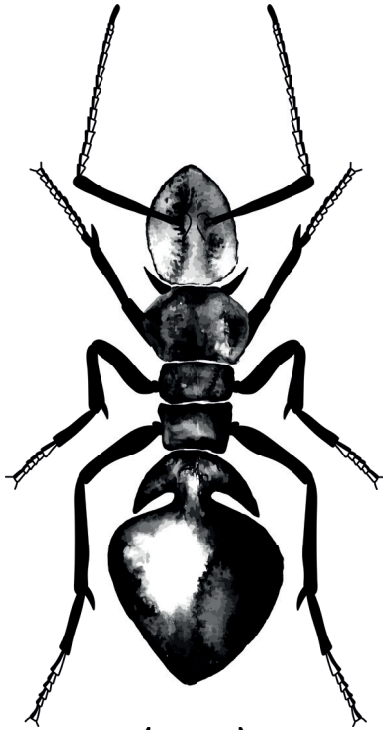
A second potential explanation for the profound business group advantage relates to the more fundamental difference between business and non-business groups as regards the nature of the mobilization of their interests. Collective action by firms often is based on the provision of selective material incentives to members (Olson, 1965), whereas non-business collective action commonly includes the provision of expressive incentives associated with the fight for broader (ideological) causes (De Bruycker et al., 2019; Wilson, 1973, p. 47). Because of the less-principled nature of business group interests, they might be more flexible and open in choosing their party-political allies, as long as it benefits the achievement of their goals. Many non-business groups, in contrast, have to tread carefully when interacting with political parties, as the reputation of a group as being a principled champion for a certain cause may well depend on the company they keep. Organizing for broader, ideological causes might reduce non-business groups' room to maneuver and their ability of gaining support by unaligned parties.

The findings of this study speak to several debates. To begin, they have important implications for longstanding discussions around the relationship between interest group and party systems (Allern & Bale, 2012; Schattschneider, 1948; Thomas, 2001; Zeller, 1954). The general finding that political parties adjust their positions on issues that interest groups are active on shows that interest groups can act as normatively important information providers in democratic politics (Lindblom, 1968). Signals about their (members') preferences, to some extent, are successfully transmitted to political parties, thereby enabling them to improve their government in various ways (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Furthermore, it indicates that the policy-centered relationships between groups and parties seem to be of a more complementary (e.g. Fraussen and Halpin, 2018; Witko, 2009), rather than a zero-sum or competitive nature (e.g. Merkl and Lawson, 1988; Schattschneider, 1942, 1948). Interest groups often require the support of political parties to be successful in winning the policy prize. Political parties need the input of interest groups to shape public policy and win elections, and provide their support in return. While the latter of these two points has been picked up by the literature already (e.g. Allern et al., 2020; Allern and Bale, 2012; Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2021), studies of interest group influence lag behind in incorporating the role of political parties (notable exceptions are Grossmann, 2014; Romeijn, 2021). Future research should pay more attention to the way in which interest groups' policy success is shaped by their (party) political environment.

The finding of a business group advantage in gaining party support also speaks to the debate around biases in interest group systems and the distribution of influence between

business and non-business groups (e.g. De Bruycker et al., 2019; Dür et al., 2015; Schlozman et al., 2012). According to the findings presented, business and non-business groups are similarly likely to find their positions taken over by left-of-center parties, whereas right-of-center parties clearly prefer business groups. Business groups thus find themselves in a more favorable position for achieving their preferences, in the context of center- or center-right leaning party systems. Non-business groups, in contrast, enjoy no similar advantage, as they are not more likely to gain party support even in left-leaning party systems. Clearly, gaining party support does not equal winning in policy battles. Nonetheless, it is an important step on the way to success. If business groups find it easier to gain support irrespective of party ideology, while non-business groups depend on their ideological allies to gain support, this might add to their mobilization and maintenance advantages, and bias policy outcomes in their favor. Findings of no business group advantage in policy success (e.g. Dür et al., 2015; Flöthe, 2019) should be reevaluated with this in mind. More generally, this calls on scholars to place findings of interest system bias more carefully into the context of party-political representation: for the phenomenon studied here a pro-business bias in interest group systems seems to remain unchecked or even amplified by political parties. For other phenomena (e.g. issue attention), however, it is conceivable that biases present in one system are balanced out by the other. Whether a given manifestation of bias in the interest group system is problematic for the political system as a whole, depends in part on the situation in the party system, and vice versa.

Lastly, the findings are relevant for scholars of party position change (e.g. Adams, 2012). While qualitative studies have hinted at the role played by interest groups in parties' decisions about changes of their policy positions (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012), my findings show that (business) interest group activity plays a role in explaining party position changes. Incorporating (business) group activity into their theoretical and empirical models, for instance by relying on measures of the business bias of interest groups' issue populations (e.g. Hanegraaff and Berkhout, 2018), might help these scholars avoid omitted variable bias. Furthermore, the findings are methodologically relevant, as they indicate that observations by interest group representatives might be used as measures of party position changes on highly specific policy questions, as alternatives to measures of shifts along broad ideological dimensions (cf. Schumacher et al., 2015: 1046).



Summary of the main argument

The activities of interest groups and political parties affect the outcomes of struggles around almost each and every political problem democratic societies may face. The actions and interactions of these two types of political organizations critically shape how conflicts transpire across a broad range of issues—from issues that are not yet on the government agenda, to small and technical ones buried in the appendices of larger policy programs to those that are highly contentious and visible, and have large distributional consequences. In their day-to-day interactions over specific policy questions, interest groups and parties jointly shape democratic policymaking, and patterns of conflict and cooperation on these specific policy questions are, importantly, not mere replicas of large-scale, ideology-driven politics. They are issue-level politics in their own right, following distinct dynamics and occasionally producing unexpected outcomes. Democratic politics and policy making—in a large majority of cases—are politics and policymaking by interest groups and political parties.

Despite the vital role that these two types of organizations jointly play in democratic politics, political observers and scholars tend to treat them as entities belonging to largely independent political subsystems. Public myths concerning interest group lobbying are pervasive, and group activities are rarely connected to party politics by means other than pointing out revolving doors, outright corruption, or the overwhelming power that “the lobby” holds over politicians. Although many more nuanced perspectives have been offered by political scientists, the current literature is, with notable exceptions, of course (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Allern et al., 2021; Fraussen & Halpin, 2018; Gava et al., 2017), largely divided into party and interest group scholars.

While there are indisputable benefits to research specialization, this divide is particularly problematic as it means that scholars are at risk of missing half the picture. This is empirically the case when they disregard the influence of one of these actors for processes and outcomes associated with the other. However, even more importantly, this is normatively so when scholars draw conclusions from empirical phenomena regarding broader democratic processes and outcomes without considering the role played by the other type of actor. As most things are, interest groups and political parties are imperfect devices for performing tasks in the political system. Each come with certain strengths and weaknesses. To evaluate

their joint role in democratic politics requires attention to the question to what extent they balance or aggravate each other's strengths and flaws. Ignoring this call, scholars of party politics might tell us that a crisis of political parties is inevitably a crisis of democracy. Interest group scholars, in turn, might claim that the biases present in the interest group system inescapably lead to biases in the broader political system. Clearly, both groups of scholars might be missing something.

Calling for attention to the joint role that interest groups and parties play in democratic politics is not new. Indeed, many scholars claim that group-party interaction is critical to shaping democratic politics. Many stop short of testing this assumption, though, or of elaborating on exactly how interest groups and parties fulfill this far-reaching role. With this dissertation, I intended to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the manners in which they individually and in combination contribute to democratic politics for better or worse. To do so, I analyzed various instances of interaction between interest groups and political parties in the context of concrete policy issues.

The questions of how and why interest groups and political parties interact in several aspects of issue-level politics guided my research because these patterns of interaction have implications for the way interest groups and political parties attenuate or aggravate each other's normative strengths and flaws. To answer these questions, I analyzed the behavior of a randomly selected sample of nationally active interest groups, and the nationally represented political parties in four established Western democracies: Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Depending on the particular research question at hand, not all of these countries were featured in each of the empirical chapters: Chapter 2 involved all four countries, Chapters 3 and 5 included the three Western European ones, and Chapter 4 was based on the case of the Netherlands. I employed quantitative methods of analyses in all empirical chapters, but also used qualitative methods to illustrate causal mechanisms (Chapter 4). All chapters extensively discussed the (normative) implications of the individual empirical findings, with particular attention given to the consequences of the joint and distinct roles of groups and parties in democratic politics. In this conclusion, I briefly summarize the empirical findings of the previous chapters, discuss strengths, weaknesses and avenues for future research, and consider the main theoretical, societal, and political implications of my findings.

Summary of empirical findings

To answer my research question, I analyzed various forms of interaction between interest groups and parties related to several key aspects of the politics surrounding concrete policy issues: from the agenda-setting stage to the effect of party conflict on interest group attention, the lobby-targeting practices of interest groups, and the positional adjustments of parties in response to interest group activity. In this section, I briefly summarize my primary empirical findings.

In democratic political systems, before an issue can be decided upon and policy shaped, the issue needs to find its way onto the government agenda. Political parties and interest groups are key actors in performing this task. Focusing on the agenda-setting potential of interest groups, I therefore began by analyzing the conditions under which interest groups and parties organize the same set of issues into the political system, and which issues get organized by interest groups alone (Chapter 2). My main theoretical argument stressed that characteristics related to the politicization of an issue affect whether an issue is on the agendas of both groups and parties. I hypothesized that issues that attract greater crowds of organizations, that are more polarized within the interest group community, and that are more salient to the public, are more likely to be found on both interest group and party agendas. My analyses revealed that interest groups have considerable potential to lend a voice to societal concerns that are not represented by viable political parties: almost half of the issues they work on do not feature on the agendas of any political party represented in parliament. Interestingly, these levels of agenda (in-)congruence between interest groups and parties do not differ meaningfully between the four countries under study, despite their vastly different institutional structures. In explaining under what conditions an issue will be part of both the interest group and the party agenda, I find two strands of explanations to be particularly important. First, and in support of my hypotheses, factors concerning the politicization of an issue are related to the likelihood of shared attention. Issues that attract greater crowds of organizations, polarize the interest group community, and are more salient to the public, are more likely to be found on the agendas of both interest groups and parties. Second, at the group level, not all types of groups are equally likely to be working on issues that also receive visible party attention. Groups representing the interests of capital and business more frequently work on issues that are unique to their own agenda. At the same time, more affluent groups are more likely to work on shared issues, which might moderate these group-type differences.

After having established that interest groups indeed introduce many issues into the political system on their own, but also spend a considerable amount of their time working on issues that are simultaneously processed by political parties, I moved on to study how interest groups react to party-political dynamics around the issues they are concerned with. More specifically, I analyzed whether party-political conflict affects interest groups' issue attention and whether it does so differently for business and non-business groups (Chapter 3). I hypothesized that interest groups react to party conflict because conflict among parties indicates potential government activity and creates interest uncertainty. Both factors either create or affect existing group interests and activate groups to promote or defend them. At the same time, due to the defensive nature of business interests and the promotional interests of non-business groups, the former can be expected to be more reactive to party conflict than the latter. I found support for these hypotheses, testing them for the three Western European parliamentary democracies. Irrespective of country context, interest groups indeed increase their attention on issues in which conflict among parties intensified. Importantly though, this general pattern is almost exclusively due to the reactivity of business groups. These members of the interest group community are not just gradually more reactive to party conflict than non-business groups but seem to be the sole drivers of interest group reactivity to partisan strife.

Once interest groups are politically active on an issue and lobby political parties in order to further their interests, they need to determine their optimal lobby-targeting strategy, irrespective of whether they were triggered into action by conflict among parties in the first place. Thus, the question of under what conditions and why interest groups contact party-political supporters or opponents took center stage (Chapter 4). There is a lively debate regarding the preferred targets of interest groups' lobbying efforts, to which this chapter contributed a conflict-centered perspective. While many scholars agree that interest groups should focus their lobbying efforts on their political allies, some maintain that their opponents should be their destination of choice. Contributing to this debate, I argued that interest groups' default strategy is indeed to target their friends, but that they contact their political opponents as well, particularly when issues are more contentious. I hypothesized that groups complement their default targeting strategy by contacting opponents on issues that are more salient to the public, that involve greater masses of other organizations, and that are more polarized among parties. I argued that the key mechanism connecting these aspects of issue-level conflict to complementary lobbying is interest groups' desire to gain or maintain prominence in specific policy subsystems. When conflict arises and, as a result, interest

groups face the prospect of losing influence on a specific policy outcome, the necessity of maintaining prominence, and thus the ability to participate in policy battles yet to come, leads groups to reach out to allies and opponents. In line with my expectations, Dutch interest groups are more likely to engage in complementary lobbying on issues that are more contentious: in particular, interest groups are more likely to lobby both supporters and opponents when many other groups are active on an issue as well. Interestingly, if somewhat peripheral to the argument, business groups are also more inclined to lobby friends and foes alike, confirming their role as politically well-connected insiders. Furthermore, qualitative evidence obtained from in-depth interviews with interest group representatives illustrated that the desire to maintain or gain prominence is indeed a plausible explanation for these findings.

I concluded this tour of several key aspects of the interest group and party politics surrounding concrete policy issues with an analysis of the conditions under which groups gain support for their positions from political parties. Given the supreme role of political parties in legislative policymaking, interest groups are more likely to be successful in attaining their preferences when political parties support them. Thus, I inquired which groups are more likely to gain party support for their positions on specific policy questions and why (Chapter 5). To answer this question, I developed two alternative hypotheses that predict different distributions of success in gaining party support for business and non-business groups. On the one hand, I argued that business groups are more likely to gain party support because of their privileged relationship with government parties. On the other hand, I developed the expectation that groups will gain support from the parties they are ideologically aligned with due to the groups' ability to engage in mutually beneficial exchange relationships with these parties. This second hypothesis thus predicts a more even distribution of success in gaining party support between business and non-business groups. My analyses demonstrated that business groups enjoy a slight advantage concerning gaining support from political parties. This advantage is due not only to their privileged relations with government parties but also their ability to gain support across the ideological spectrum. Non-business groups, in contrast, are privileged by neither government nor opposition, rely heavily on their ideological allies to gain support, and are therefore less likely to gain support overall.

Throughout the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I have demonstrated that interest groups and parties interact in various ways when they engage in politics around concrete, ordinary policy issues. When they execute their roles as policy makers, they are part of each other's immediate, policy-centered political environment. This issue-level perspective provides an important addition to the literature that focuses to a large extent on patterns of

interaction at a more general, organizational level (e.g., Allern et al., 2020; Berkhout et al., 2021). In this literature, organizational-level factors such as institutional ties, group resources, party power, or ideological and positional proximity between groups and parties, are key explanatory factors of group-party interaction. These factors also matter in an issue-centered context. However, in issue-level politics, the laws of large-scale ideological conflict, elections, or the need to survive as organizations, do not guide the behavior of groups and parties exclusively. Rather, in issue-level politics, interest groups and parties face additional incentives and constraints that are, to a considerable extent, dependent on context. Power, position, and organizational ties matter even in minute policy conflicts, but interest groups and parties look beyond these factors when the issue context demands them to do so. Therefore, demonstrating how groups and parties interact in issue-level politics was the primary empirical contribution of this dissertation.

Limitations and avenues for future research

It goes without saying that my findings and the conclusions I draw from them are not free of limitations and potential shortcomings. I want to take a brief moment here to discuss two such potential limitations and two suggestions for future research that go beyond the scope of this dissertation. As regards the potential limitations of my research, my discussion focuses on aspects of the external and internal validity of my empirical findings and the conclusions I based on them. The two most important avenues for future research, as I see them, concern adding other political and policy outcomes to the issue-level framework and developing a macro-, population-level perspective on the interactions between groups and parties. I will discuss these points in turn.

First, my findings and conclusions are based on analyses of interest groups and parties operating in just four countries at just one (extended) moment in time, so the external validity of some of my claims may be considered questionable. How well do they generalize to the broader population of established democracies and other periods in time? Fortunately, despite their substantially differing institutional setups, differences between the countries studied are negligible in two of the three comparative chapters. This similarity suggests that country-level political institutions might be of little relevance in understanding issue-level interactions between groups and parties, and that these interactions should look similar in other political contexts. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter 4, the universal nature of policy issues should provide for a much broader reference frame in both space and time. Even so, there is the

possibility that empirical patterns appear different elsewhere, and that my conclusions do not travel to other political contexts. Importantly however, this would not invalidate my findings and conclusions for the contexts they have been made in and would leave them valuable in and of themselves. Moreover, an inability to replicate my findings and redraw my conclusions in other contexts would, first and foremost, present an interesting puzzle, and a challenge to identify and integrate the salient conditions of the macro political context better into my issue- and organization-level theoretical framework.

Second, as regards the internal validity of my conclusions, a clear limitation of my research lies in the fact that many of the relationships I investigated could be endogenous or the result of reverse causality. Due to my primarily cross-sectional research designs, I was not able to rule out these possibilities. Establishing causality between the actions and reactions of interest groups and parties, and vice-versa, is clearly an important yardstick for both this and future research. Given this dissertation's more modest goal of investigating interactions between groups and parties in the context of concrete policy issues, being unable to firmly establish causality does not represent a major impediment. To me, it seems likely that the interactions between groups and parties are highly complex and possess contiguous directions of causality, and it therefore seems premature to focus on just one of these directions in the context of a strict causal research design. Interaction is occurring, irrespective of who initiates it. Having established correlations between several forms of interest group and party activity, and having theorized about the potentially causal nature of these relationships, in my view, suffices for the moment.

Leaving questions of validity concerning this research behind, future research within the issue-level perspective should focus on including alternative political and more concrete and "final" policy outcomes. Questions that are typically answered from within party- or group-centered perspectives should be revisited with a political-organization perspective in mind. In the previous chapters, changes in party positions and interest group attention have been studied as outcomes of interest group and party politics respectively, but there are other important political outcomes that future research should focus on. For instance, the polarization of parties' policy positions in response to interest group activity on these policies could be studied to provide insights into the consensual or conflictual orientations of political parties on these issues. Likewise, the effects of party-political developments on interest groups' choices of lobbying strategy could help explain variations in the success rate related to the application of these strategies. More straightforward though, would be the addition of policy outcomes to the models of issue-level politics developed here. In particular, questions

related to policy influence, the success of interest groups, or policy change more broadly, should be studied by referring to the interactive nature of interest group and party politics.

In addition to extending the issue-level perspective on the interaction between interest groups and parties, future research should turn to a macro-level perspective concerning their interactions as well. The core of this enterprise should be the development and application of a population-ecology perspective on the relationship between interest group and party populations. While an issue-level perspective provides important insights into the proceedings and outcomes of concrete policy battles, such a population-level perspective can add important observations and explanations for broader trends in a polity. Such a perspective may also help examine the assumption that population-level dynamics matter for the strategic choices of individual actors and, potentially, policy outcomes. Population-ecological models have been successfully applied to predict the population dynamics – entry, survival, and exit – of groups and parties respectively (e.g., Berkhout et al., 2015; Gray & Lowery, 1996c; van de Wardt et al., 2017). By doing so, they provide important insights into phenomena such as the number of electoral choices, party system fragmentation, or the processes that translate societal interests into organized interests. However, the insight that party and interest group systems stand in a mutualistic relationship (in which the attributes and actions of organizations within one system reverberate in the other) has not been incorporated into the literature.

Future research should therefore take on this task and develop a theoretical model of the relationship between group and party populations and investigate it empirically. Ideas found in population-ecological theories, such as models of interspecific interactions, appear to be a promising starting point for such a theory. Testing this theory in empirical terms requires mapping party and group populations over an extended period of time and modeling their relationship. While information on political parties is relatively easily available, the mapping of interest group populations is notoriously difficult and labor intensive. Fortunately, techniques of automated content analysis simplify this task to some extent and make it feasible to map post-1945 interest group populations in a number of countries in a reasonable amount of time. Dynamic regression models, such as error correction models, can then be used to determine the exact nature of the relationship between interest group and party populations.

Implications

As discussed in the previous sections, the studies that comprise this dissertation have produced a range of empirical observations that enrich scholarly perspectives on the interactions between interest groups and political parties. Beyond augmenting the descriptive canon of interest group and party politics, my findings add to, and potentially adjust, assessments on some of the major questions around the role of such actors in democratic politics. The following discussion of the theoretical, societal, and political implications of this research reflect my view on several of these grand debates. I will consider the theoretical and societal implications of my findings for our views concerning interest groups in democratic politics, the debate around the declining representativeness of political parties, and, finally, the way in which groups and parties can act to amplify or moderate each other's benefits and flaws. In closing this section, I discuss the political implications of these insights.

Theoretical and societal implications

Interest groups as blessing or curse in democratic politics?

The key motivating force behind most interest group research is the desire to establish whether groups, by and large, contribute positively to democracy or whether their presence and involvement in politics runs detrimental to democratic principles or puts them at risk. Unsurprisingly, many different perspectives on this have been offered, highlighting various aspects of interest group politics and their normative implications. Equally unsurprisingly, this dissertation speaks to only some of these perspectives: a) interest groups in their role as information providers on policies that are being processed in the political system; b) interest groups as organizers of unprocessed, or otherwise neglected societal concerns; and c) inequalities between different types of groups that might unduly advantage some types of interests over others. I will address each of these aspects in turn.

One of the most enduring ideas about how interest groups can contribute positively to democracy relates to their role as providers of information to policymakers and governments over currently processed policy issues. Central to this argument is the idea that interest groups strengthen democratic politics through this act, even though they may supply their information for selfish, or at least group-centered, reasons and their information provision can have negative (e.g., economic) externalities (e.g. Lohmann, 2003). By interacting broadly with policymakers and providing them with technical information and expertise concerning specific policy issues, interest groups can foster the production of effective policy alternatives

and political consensus (Lindblom, 1968). Moreover, by signaling constituency preferences on these policy questions, interest groups can help government and policy makers in strengthening their representative function (e.g. Hansen, 1991). Taken together, by providing information, interest groups can enable “efficient, effective, and responsive” (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015) and substantially representative government (Bernhagen et al., 2021).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 all lend credence to this normative claim. While none of the chapters of this dissertation investigate how governments utilize the information they receive from interest groups, and thus whether and how it affects the quality of governance, all the chapters substantiate that providing information to individual policy makers, political parties, and governments is one of the key activities of interest groups. By doing so, at the very least, they can facilitate better government. For instance, my finding that interest groups contact various and variously opposed political parties in many instances, suggests that parties, in and out of government and across the ideological spectrum, are exposed to a variety of different views on specific policy issues, which should add to their means to craft effective policy and find or maintain political consensus. Moreover, observing that interest groups’ issue priorities, and thus the topics they decide to potentially inform other actors about, are at least somewhat responsive to party-political developments suggests that groups are attuned to the demands of their immediate (party) political environment and provide information *where it is demanded*. The fear that interest groups might overload the political system with their requests thus seems unconvincing. Rather, by being in tune with their political environment, they allow for policymaking to be more efficient and effective. Furthermore, given that parties, at least sometimes, adjust their positions in response to interest group activity implies that the signals they send are received and taken seriously. Interest groups do have their flaws, but in their role as information providers on issues that are processed in the political system, they add ingredients to the political process that are necessary for good democratic government.

Another way how interest groups can improve democratic politics is by organizing and voicing societal concerns that are actively or unknowingly ignored by other representative organizations (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Cobb & Elder, 1983). As Schattschneider (1960, p. 71) put it, “all forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out.” According to Dahl (1989, p. 221), however, all citizens should have “adequate and equal opportunities to [...] place questions on the public agenda and [...] must have the opportunity to decide what political matters are and what should be brought up for deliberation.” Interest groups can help

achieve this goal by introducing issues into the political process that their membership or supporters, as part of the demos, care about and that are not being politically represented otherwise.

My finding that interest groups in all four countries devote more than half of their time to issues that are not visibly represented through the party system demonstrates that interest groups play an important part in this regard. Clearly, the fact that a group-organized issue is not (prominently) present on the party system agenda does not mean that it is necessarily *organized out* of the (formal) political system. It may be processed through bureaucratic politics, for instance. It is likely, however, that at least some of these issues would not be voiced discernibly if it were not for the activities of interest groups. Without them, many issues might never be recognized as political and treated as such. Again, a note of caution is appropriate, as I cannot discuss the extent to which these issues are reflective of citizens' priorities because I did not include citizen preferences in my analyses independently. Likewise, I cannot say much about the extent to which societal grievances remain unorganized by the interest group and party systems both. However, simply observing that interest groups are able and willing to dedicate attention to large numbers of issues that are seemingly disconnected from party politics indicates that they have the distinct potential to act as alternative transmission belts for societal concerns. Given that the issues interest groups organize alone are frequently of concern to few other organizations, and only narrow segments of the public, suggests that such groups can and do play such a role, particularly regarding minority interests.

Up until this point of the discussion I have treated interest groups as a homogenous group of actors, focusing on the ways in which the group system they comprise can, as a whole, contribute to democratic politics. A perennial concern with interest group politics, however, relates to the inequalities between groups; for instance, in terms of the types of interests represented, resource endowments, capabilities, or status as political in- and outsiders, all of which are feared to translate into unequal political influence for some interests over others. Clearly, the question of whether interest groups contribute to democratic politics for better or worse cannot be discussed without alluding to the inequalities present in the interest group system. The findings of this dissertation speak to one of these multifaceted inequalities in particular: the differences between business and non-business groups.

It has often been noted that groups organizing the interests of business have an easier time mobilizing (Olson, 1965), enjoy structural advantages in market economies (Lindblom, 1977; Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980), and constitute the largest parts of many group populations

(Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Schattschneider, 1960; Schlozman, 1984; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986; Schlozman et al., 2012). Concerning the segment of interest organizations actively engaged in advocating and lobbying for their interests, the picture does not look considerably different (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Rasmussen & Carroll, 2014; Schlozman et al., 2012). In addition to these and other advantages, my studies suggest that business groups enjoy an exceptional position in all of the aspects of issue-level politics investigated here. This means that the previously discussed positive contributions to democratic politics that interest groups as a whole can make need to be somewhat nuanced.

In relation to interest groups' role as both information providers and alternative transmission belts of societal concerns, it is striking that business groups as compared to non-business groups are more likely to react to party conflict by adjusting their issue priorities, are more likely to lobby both their partisan supporters and adversaries, are more likely to gain party support for their positions, and are more likely to introduce new issues into the political system. All these observations suggest that the process of information provision through interest groups, and the process of organizing and voicing otherwise ignored societal concerns, is dominated numerically by business groups. They seem to be more attuned to the information demands of political parties, spread their message more evenly among them, are more likely to find their message heard and translated into adjusted party positions, and are more likely to introduce new issues into the political system.

To be sure, it is not always clear from the outset whether these special positions in and of themselves signify an actual advantage for business groups over non-business groups, or whether their behavior is a defensive reaction resulting from an unfavorable regulatory environment (e.g., as suggested by Dür et al., 2015). For instance, business groups might be more responsive to party conflict because it poses a threat to their interests, which they then feverishly defend. However, if we think about an advantage in politics as the ability to act effectively and adequately in various political circumstances, then my findings indicate that this advantage is clearly on the side of business groups. They are the ones that overwhelmingly have the ability to adjust their behavior to the challenges of their political environment, and they are nearly always able to do so without giving up their preferred strategies in the meantime. Certainly, there are non-business groups that are able to play this game as well, but they are the exception among their kind. For business groups, strategic and behavioral flexibility seems to be the norm.

Irrespective of whether business groups' singular position in the circumstances discussed amounts to an individual political advantage over comparable non-business groups,

the differences between them calls into question the role of the interest group system as a whole in enabling consensus-oriented, effective, and responsive government. This is the case because even a purely numerical business dominance over ordinary issue-level politics poses a pronounced risk of crowding out the voices of non-business interests. This likely biases the responsiveness of governments in favor of business groups. Moreover, it diminishes the likelihood of effective and consensus-oriented policymaking because it lowers the diversity of input policymakers are exposed to. When party politicians are less likely to be contacted by opposing non-business groups, and non-business groups are less in tune with parties' informational demands, the information provision by non-business groups to a diverse set of policymakers cannot be expected to run smoothly. Moreover, observing that parties are less likely to change their positions in favor of non-business groups, as compared to business groups, may indicate the possibility that this impeded information provision might eventually be reflected in political and policy outcomes. Finally, we also cannot expect the introduction of new issues into the political system to balance out any inequalities found at later stages of the policy process, because, again, this process is dominated by business groups. On the contrary, if advantages early in the policymaking process lead to advantages at later stages, business groups' dominance in this regard seems only to reinforce the lack of diversity in the information provision function of the interest group system later on.

One can criticize this argument as painting too bleak a picture because a numerical business-group domination of the policymaking process, with little or no diversity in other participating group types, does not necessarily equate to little or no diversity in terms of the positions or preferences represented. On the contrary, homogeneity of preferences among the business groups active on a given policy question is not something one can presuppose. Rather, previous research has revealed that business-group preferences can diverge and that they can participate in opposing sides of a given policy battle (Hojnacki et al., 2015; Smith, 2000). Moreover, the preferences of some business groups can coincide with the preferences of other concerned, active or latent, groups. Furthermore, the exclusive activity of business groups on a policy issue might be considered unproblematic if this issue does not affect non-business interests.

Assuming that these kinds of purely business-related issues exist—which, while I cannot rule it out, I find questionable on the grounds that each business-related political decision eventually reaches non-business customers either directly or indirectly—I cannot object to this latter criticism. However, with regard to the former point of critique, I would argue that, even in situations in which the preferences of the business groups involved on an

issue happen to coincide with the preferences of other uninvolved groups, the direct involvement of these groups would still be preferable in many cases, both for the creation of effective policy and for the input legitimacy of the process as a whole (e.g., following Mansbridge, 1999). This implies at the very least that interest groups' role in fostering effective and responsive government by providing information and introducing new issues to the political agenda should not be discussed without alluding to the well-known inequalities present in the interest group system.

Without passing judgment on the legitimacy of business group interest representation in itself, or the nature of the interests they promote, their dominance of issue-level politics forms a problem for the value of the contributions interest groups can make to democratic government. A pro-business bias in the interest group system's information provision function and interest groups' role as alternative transmission belts, leads to a gap between what interest groups promise to deliver in terms of consensus-oriented, effective, and responsive policymaking and their actual contribution in this regard.

Declining representativeness of political parties?

One of the reasons for the oft-stated crisis of party democracy is seen in the declining representativeness of political parties, who increasingly struggle or fail to maintain their representative role in the face of the growing demands of responsible government (Mair, 2009). As the "combination of both these crucial roles into one was the unique contribution parties offered to the development and legitimation of modern democracy" (Mair, 2013b, p. 153), this shift in balance could pose a serious challenge to democracy. The findings of this dissertation suggest that the state of the representativeness of political parties may be less dire than assumed. When observing political parties through an issue-level perspective, it becomes clear that they are listening to societal concerns extensively and working to turn them into public policy. While parties may, to an extent, have ceased to aggregate and translate societal interests *from the bottom up* within their organizations, this does not mean that they have necessarily ceased to represent these interests.

Mair (2013b) argues that organizational changes toward less membership-oriented parties, and societal developments such as increasing particularization and individualization, among other reasons, have strained parties' representativeness. According to him, parties' ability to understand what voters want and to turn these wishes into public-policy proposals has suffered because they lost touch with their voters and are confronted with increasingly diffuse popular demands. This dissertation paints a somewhat different picture. Throughout

the previous chapters, I observed that parties are actively listening to and working with societal concerns.²⁷ They are almost constantly interacting and in conversation with countless organizations that supply them with information on societal preferences and help them bring structure to the potential cacophony of voices. Moreover, in their day-to-day engagement on concrete policy issues, they display concern with a broad yet highly specific policy agenda that reaches far beyond their purported focus on large and dramatic issues (tax cuts, the environment). When observing political parties through a policy-issue lens, they seem neither out of touch with society nor unwilling to process societal demands.

Admittedly, there is a difference between interacting directly with individual voters and interacting with already organized segments of society. I have not investigated the interactions between individual voters and political parties here and thus cannot say much about the degree to which parties are (descriptively) representative of these voters, and how this may have changed from the past. However, observing parties' close interaction with plentiful interest groups, who in their totality are probably (at least) substantively representative of a large majority of societal interests, suggests that parties are in the position to be substantively representative of these interests as well (on the difference between descriptive and substantive representation, see Pitkin, 1967); potentially, even more so than during the golden age of party democracy that Mair described. The representativeness of political parties may have changed toward a greater reliance on extra-party organizational channels to understand and pre-process societal concerns, but this change did not necessarily lead to a decline of the substantive representativeness of political parties. On the contrary, it may even have improved parties' ability to represent substantial societal concerns while acting responsibly in government as well.

Interest groups and parties: moderating each other's strengths and flaws?

As I have written above, evaluating the roles that interest groups and parties play in democratic politics in isolation is helpful, but risks missing important qualifications. What do we learn when assessing groups' and parties' joint role instead, and in particular the ways in which their strengths and weaknesses might interact? The results of this research and the experiences gained while conducting it lead me to conclude that their joint contribution to democracy is probably larger and better than individual perspectives sometimes imply. To be clear, there are aspects of the interplay between groups and parties that are worrying from a

²⁷ Interestingly, the parties that claim to be the true representatives of the people do so much less than the parties who are said to have lost their representativeness the most (Berkhout et al., 2021).

normative perspective, but overall groups and parties interact to the benefit of democracy. In important ways, groups and parties mitigate each other's weaknesses.

The preceding considerations should indicate that discussions concerning the question "Who is stronger, interest groups or parties?" as classically asked by Schattschneider (1942, 1948, 1960), are probably misplaced. Strength and being stronger imply domination or the power of one type of organization over another, but neither of these concepts seems to describe the relationships between groups and parties as I have observed them here. Rather, this dissertation provides support for a mutualistic perspective on interest groups and parties (e.g., Bolleyer, 2013; Key, 1942; Merkl & Lawson, 1988). Their actions and reactions are intricately linked and there cannot be talk of clear winners or losers as doing so would considerably simplify normative judgment.

For those who are unconvinced by this argument and fear that interest groups are too strong no matter how strong they are, I would point out one of the findings from Chapter 2 once more. In all of the four countries I studied, which differ substantially in terms of their institutional political structure and the shape and size of their interest group and party systems, interest groups' issue attention corresponds considerably to that of political parties. In each of the countries, interest groups, despite being able to choose from a myriad of issues to work on, devote more than half of their attention to issues that occupy the party system. In other words, there seems to be something commonly contagious about issues that are processed in the party system that interest groups cannot escape. I cannot say what it is that draws interest groups to parties' agendas, but observing that they are drawn at all should suffice here. Parties, that must consider politics and policy broadly from an encompassing perspective, that participate in elections and gain legitimacy from this process, and that can be held responsible and accountable for their actions by the public, seem to have something about them that structures substantial parts of interest group involvement in politics. Interest groups do not seem to command a similar power.

As I have argued above, political parties are crucial democratic organizations that come with certain flaws, which, if considered in isolation, might be seen as indicators of a crisis of democracy. How do interest groups play a role in mitigating some of these weaknesses and in averting such a crisis? I have already pointed out that groups can play a significant role for political parties by helping them retain or even improve their representation of societal interests. Particularly for government and mainstream parties, interest group involvement can thus aid in easing the tension between the demands of

responsibility and responsiveness. This inner tension of government and mainstream parties does not come in isolation, though, as it is accompanied by the emergence or growth of populist, challenger parties that emphasize their responsiveness to societal concerns at the expense of acting responsibly (Mair, 2009).

The benign effects of interest groups' relations to these members of (Europe's) bifurcated party systems are admittedly somewhat less obvious. This is due to the fact that interaction between interest groups and populist parties is generally less intense (Berkhout et al., 2021), and seems to provide fewer mutual benefits. At the same time, throughout this research, I have encountered numerous instances of cooperation between interest groups and populist parties on specific—admittedly, often non-divisive—policy issues, and only few organizations seem to actively shun populist parties at all costs. Furthermore, I expect the relations between groups and populist parties to normalize to some extent should the latter grow in size or participate in government. This suggests that interest groups could play a similar role in mitigating the inner tensions between responsibility and responsiveness for populist parties should these tensions arise.

A more important way in which interest groups could ease these tensions within party systems though, seems to be their ability to organize populist issues themselves. Being less constrained by the demands of acting responsibly, some interest groups can put all efforts into representing their members' populist demands. When these positions are expressive in nature, and viable policy solutions are hard to fathom, the interest group system could absorb some of the divisive energy that could otherwise drive party systems further apart.

Interest groups can act as alternative representative organizations not only for populist issues, though. Their function as alternative transmission belts for societal concerns becomes particularly important in relation to one of the most structural forms of bias present in party systems: the (necessary) tendency to reduce political conflict and competition to a minimal number of dimensions (see Berkhout in Lowery et al., 2015). The reduction of conflict to a few dimensions can lead to a lack of party-political representation for voters whose preferences are unaligned with these dimensions (Van Der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009). By making these voters' voices heard in the political system, despite the absence of electoral representation, interest groups can and do mitigate the consequences of this party system bias to some extent: they represent the interests of small groups of citizens who are disenfranchised, unrecognized as minorities, or politically unaccepted for various reasons and unable to find meaningful party-political representation. By bypassing electoral arenas,

interest groups offer these constituents the opportunity to be heard by government. At the same time, the most problematic aspect of the interplay between interest group and party systems relates to the points at which group and party biases do not mitigate one another in such a way, but are aligned, potentially excluding societal interests from effective political participation. It is this final question I now turn to.

“The heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent” (Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 34–35). There is no more concise and classical statement about what is arguably the greatest political flaw in the interest group system: groups representing the interest of business, institutions, and citizens with higher socioeconomic status are overrepresented and more forceful in advocating for their political demands. The poor, the less educated, and those with an interest in issues that would benefit diffuse groups within society are less well represented through the interest group system. The numerical domination of issue-level politics by business groups, which has been a central finding of this dissertation, presents another form in which (some of) the former of these interests seem to be advantaged in interest group politics.

It can be seen as a propitious feat then, that party systems are less biased and more inclusive regarding the latter types of interests. The causes of citizens who are disadvantaged in the interest group system are explicitly taken up by political parties: even among mainstream parties, there are those who portray themselves as champions of the poor, the unemployed, or the less-fortunate. In representational terms, parties thus clearly add weight to the scales on the side of the less regarded.

Unfortunately, this balancing effect does not reach the stage of substantial policy representation and is therefore not as significant as one might think. As research has revealed, policy is frequently more responsive to those with Schattschneider’s upper-class accent than to the lower and middle classes. High-income citizens are more likely to see their preferences turned into public policy in many different contexts (e.g., Gilens, 2012; Schakel, 2021; Schakel et al., 2020) and are therefore more likely to win the “policy price” (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). On the way to get there, their preferences are also better represented by political parties—even those of the left (Schakel, 2020). Moreover, policy is also more responsive to the higher educated (Schakel & Van Der Pas, 2021).

It seems then, that at this junction of interest group and party politics, the flaws of both are aligned and do not compensate for one another. The very interests that are disadvantaged in interest group politics are confronted with a similar detriment in the party system,

particularly at the stage of public-policy outcomes. If one sees equal representation and equal policy influence as a normative yardstick for democracies, as I do, then this alignment of interest group and party bias creates, if not a crisis, then a significant problem for democracy. It may foster distrust and cynicism among those doubly disadvantaged, stirring all the potential consequences thereof, and may actually harm those who need advantageous policy interventions the most (Schakel, 2020, pp. 20–21). Even though interest groups and parties compensate for each other’s weaknesses in many respects, the fact that some citizens are systematically less well represented by both raises serious concerns.

Political implications

My discussion in the previous sections suggests that, due to the interaction of interest groups and political parties, our democratic systems work better than feared in some respects but worse than expected—or as bad as supposed—in others. Both of these conclusions warrant some thoughts on their political implications, or on the question of how we could act to strengthen what works well and mitigate what is problematic. In closing this chapter, I want to offer a small number of suggestions for political action. These suggestions are necessarily broad, and it is not at all clear whether those with the power to foster political change—which certainly includes, but is not exclusive to, the protagonists of this dissertation—have an incentive to act upon such proposals. In the spirit of hope, and in following Sherlock Holmes’ advice that one should focus on means and opportunity rather than motive, I offer them nonetheless.

To begin on the bright side of life²⁸, in important ways interest groups and parties individually make important contributions to democracy and have the means to balance out some of the flaws that are associated with the other. Their joint performance in democratic politics is thus better than frequently portrayed. Raising awareness about this point is a valuable course of action to which this dissertation has contributed, but which deserves even more space in future societal debates. Emphasizing that groups and parties jointly contribute positively to democracy, despite their individual (and combined) flaws, could improve public discourse, which is often apprehensive, particularly regarding the role that interest groups play in democratic politics. Not only the public might benefit from being better informed regarding the positive role that interest groups can play, though. Interest group leaders

²⁸ Where one should always look!

themselves are another important target audience of this message. If the leaders of business and non-business groups, at the core and periphery of the interest group system, were to realize even better that they are part of a system that can act as an important corrective to certain party system developments, this could introduce a greater sense of political responsibility among them. Such a recognition could ultimately add to the forces that stabilize democratic political systems as a whole.

Where there is light, there is shadow, and in line with that there are aspects of the interplay between groups and parties that form a problem for democracy. On the one hand, these include the diagnosed business-group dominance of issue-level politics and, on the other hand, the alignment of interest group and party system bias in terms of the unequal representation of disadvantaged citizens.

While I have considered both of these aspects from different levels of abstraction, I believe that a potential course of action to confront these ailments follows along similar lines and, to a large extent, lies in the hands of political parties. This is the case because I find it difficult to fathom any realistic incentives or means on the side of interest groups—and this is particularly true of those who seem to be advantaged politically—to change their balance of power. In contrast, political parties must consider politics broadly, and at least some of them should share my principal concerns about the problems I have sketched, even if my proposed course of action could collide with some of the parties' short-term policy interests. More fundamentally, though, the reason I see political parties as the most likely candidates to induce change lies in a simple observation: the origins of bias in interest group politics are largely political (Lowery & Gray, 2016).

This suggests that political parties have the means to counteract interest group bias even more than they already do. To be clear, it seems unlikely that political parties could change the population- or guild-level balance between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups, even though patronage and the sponsoring of “new” interests has led to dramatic changes in group systems before (e.g., Berry, 1999). I am also not sure that it would be desirable if parties were to attempt this strategy. However, it seems to me that political parties have the means to counteract interest group bias at later stages of the policymaking process by taking the initiative and structuring their engagement with interest groups in a way that fosters more equal and diverse access and input. By institutionalizing and formalizing norms of equal access throughout the policymaking process—including, crucially, the agenda-setting phase—and by actively inviting disadvantaged groups to participate, parties could play a more extensive role in ensuring that interest group input is as diverse as desirable. This could not

only directly reduce the business-group dominance of issue-level politics but also diminish the risk of the unequal policy influence that might be one of its consequences. “Parties are gatekeepers to political power” (Allern & Bale, 2012, p. 8), and given that at least some of them, in some systems, have a selfish incentive and the power to at least attempt to alter the status quo, the possibility of positive change, while slight, seems real.



Supplementary material for chapter 2

This appendix presents additional information and analyses related to Chapter 2. It is structured as follows. First, additional information regarding the party programs used to measure agenda congruence (Table A2.1) is provided, and a list of example issues and coding steps and decisions is shown (Table A2.2). After that, Table A2.3 displays the correlation matrix of all variables used in the main analyses, particularly to indicate that the issue characteristics discussed are empirically related, but only weakly so. Finally, a range of robustness checks are conducted and discussed. These consist of replications of the main analyses employing alternative measures of the dependent variable (Table A2.4), alternative control variables (Table A2.5), and alternative modeling strategies (Table A2.6). While individual coefficients differ slightly between alternative models, all these tests provide robust support for the main conclusions of the original analysis.

Additional Information

Table A2.1. List of party programs used to measure the systemic party agendas

Country (Election)	Party programs (weblinks; last accessed on December 20, 2021)
Germany (September 2017)	AfD (https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/BUENDNIS_90_DIE_GRUENEN_Bundestagswahlprogramm_2017.pdf), CDU/CSU (https://www.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/170703regierungsprogramm_2017.pdf?file=1), Die Linke (https://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlprogramme_alt/bundestagswahlprogramm2017.pdf), FDP (https://www.fdp.de/content/beschluss-des-68-ord-bundesparteitages-schauen-wir-nicht-laenger-zu), SPD (https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Bundesparteitag_2017/Es_ist_Zeit_fuer_mehr_Gerechtigkeit-Unser_Regierungsprogramm.pdf).
Netherlands (March 2017)	50 Plus (https://50pluspartij.nl/images/PDFs/50PLUS_verkiezingsprogramma_2017-2021_DEFINITIEF.pdf), CDA (https://d14uo0i7wmc99w.cloudfront.net/Afdelingen/Friesland/Weststellingwer

	<p>f/documenten/CDA%20landelijk%20verkiezingsprogramma%202017-2021.pdf), CU (https://www.christenunie.nl/l/library/download/1057651), D66 (http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/10864/1/D66_vp_TK2017_def.pdf), DENK (https://www.bewegingdenk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Verkiezingsprogramma_DENK_2017-2021.pdf), FvD (https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjRIOrLlfl0AhUICuwKHYWaDXUQFnoECAUQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdnpprepo.ub.rug.nl%2F10938%2F1%2FFvD_verkprogTK2017.pdf&usq=AOvVaw1brRyaiv-K8Nt-KJ4PR_tt), GL (http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/10866/7/GroenLinks2017-2021con.pdf), PvdA (http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/10867/19/PvdA-Verkiezingsprogramma-2017.pdf), PvdD (https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/data/files/2016/12/PvdDVerkiezingsprogrammaTweedeKamerverkiezingen2017_def-0cd09fe5.pdf), PVV (https://www.pvv.nl/93-verkiezingen/9243-concept-verkiezingsprogramma-2017-2021.html), SGP (http://dnpprepo.ub.rug.nl/10869/1/Verkiezingsprogramma2017-2021SGP.pdf), SP (https://www.sp.nl/sites/default/files/pak_de_macht.pdf), VVD (https://www.vvd.nl/content/uploads/2016/11/2_vvd_verkiezingsprogramma_pages.pdf).</p>
United Kingdom (June 2017)	<p>Conservatives (https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/05/2017-conservative-manifesto-in-full/), DUP (https://www.mydup.com/images/uploads/dup-manifesto.pdf), Green Party (https://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/gp2017/greenguaranteepdf.pdf), Labour (https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf), LibDem (https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/1811/attachments/original/1515517284/2017_Manifesto.pdf?1515517284), Plaid Cymru (http://www2.partyof.wales/actionplan17), Sinn Fein (https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/2017WestminsterManifesto.pdf), SNP (https://www.snp.org/manifesto).</p>
United States (November 2016)	<p>Republicans (https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/2016-republican-party-platform), Democrats (https://democrats.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016_DNC_Platform.pdf).</p>

For each party, the official party program was downloaded from the respective party website and used for the analysis. Interviews were conducted in the following periods: US: August – September 2016; UK: October 2016 – July 2017; Germany: March – September 2017; Netherlands January 2017 – January 2018.

Table A2.2. List of example issues and coding steps

Issue as named by interview respondent (translation)	Issue to be searched for	Example party program text mentioning issue	Coding decision: issue on agenda (yes/no)?
Increase government support for bus services (UK)	Bus services	Green Party: “[...] return the railways to public ownership and re-regulate buses, <u>investing in increased bus services especially in rural and other poorly served areas.</u> ” Labour Party: “[...] we will <u>enable councils to provide first-class bus services by extending the powers to re-regulate local bus services to all areas that want them [...]</u> ”	Yes
Regulation of dog breeding and puppy trade (UK)	Dog breeding/puppy trade	-	No
Mehr bezahlbarer Wohnraum (Germany) – more affordable housing	Bezahlbarer Wohnraum	B.90/Die Grünen: “Wir wollen damit in die Entwicklung lebenswerter Quartiere, in Kindertagesstätten, Schulen, Stadtbüchereien, Jugendzentren <u>und in bezahlbare Wohnungen investieren [...]</u> “	Yes
Alterseinstufungen des Jugendschutzes (Germany) – abolish age rating for youth protection regulation	Jugendschutz und Alter	-	No
Afschaffen van de verhuurderheffing (Netherlands) – abolish a tax for certain landlords	Verhuurderheffing	Christen Unie: “We stoppen met de verhuurdersheffing, we maken harde afspraken met de woningcorporaties [...]” GoenLinks: “De verhuurdersheffing wordt omgevoerd tot een investeringsplicht voor corporaties [...]”	Yes
Voorkomen van Duitse tolheffing (Netherlands) – prevent German road charge for Dutch car drivers	Tol Duitsland	-	No
Right to work laws (US)	Right to work/compelled union membership	Democrats: “Democrats believe so-called “ <u>right to work</u> ” laws are wrong for workers [...]” Republicans: “We support the <u>right of states to enact Right-to-Work laws [...]</u> ”	No
Use of armed drones (US)	Armed drones	-	No

Table A2.3. Correlation Matrix (N=1,705)

	Shared Issue	IG Density	IG Polarization	Public Salience	Business Group	Status Quo change	#Lobbyists
IG Density	0.07**	1					
IG Polarization	0.08**	0.15***	1				
Public Salience	0.15***	0.25***	0.11***	1			
Business Group	-0.06*	0.08**	0.07**	-0.06*	1		
Status Quo change	0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.006	-0.13***	1	
#Lobbyists	0.06*	0.05*	0.07**	0.10***	0.08***	-0.009	1
Priority Issue	0.04	0.06*	0.04	0.08***	0.007	0.07**	0.03

Notes: Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Robustness checks

Alternative Dependent Variables

In this paper I have advocated an understanding of agenda congruence between interest groups and parties that centers around *any* overlap of attention: I consider interest group issues to be part of the systemic party agenda once one of the relevant national parties mentions this issue (as little as one time) in their election program as well. I advocate this understanding of agenda congruence, because, as I argue, critical changes to the politics surrounding an issue occur once the threshold of *any party attention* is crossed. One might argue that this is a quite minimalistic understanding of agenda congruence. While I maintain that my potentially minimalist understanding of agenda congruence is justified, an agnostic way of dealing with this potential criticism is to analyze if my conclusions hold when agenda congruence is operationalized in a less minimalistic fashion. Four such alternative operationalizations come to mind. Firstly, I will replicate the final model of my main analysis but predict the *share of parties in a given system mentioning an interest group issue at least once* (Model A2.1). This operationalization allows to draw conclusions regarding the question whether it makes a difference if interest group issues are attended to by just some, many, or all parties. Secondly, in model A2.2 I further refine this measure by *weighing it by*

the average seat shares held by the parties in parliament over the period of investigation. Thirdly, in more pragmatic terms the question arises whether an issue really is part of the party agenda, when it is mentioned just once – in passing so to speak – by just one party. For Model A2.3 therefore, I use my original binary measure of agenda congruence, but *recode issues that have been mentioned on the systemic party agenda once only, as not on the agenda*. Last, I predict the *level of party system attention*, rather than a binary outcome. Since inter-coder agreement about the exact counts of issue mentions in the party programs were below acceptable levels, I created an ordinal variable indicating to which quartile of the (country specific) distribution of issue mentions an issue belongs. While not as fine-grained as one would wish, this variable captures at least some of the variance of the level of attention the interest group issues in my sample receive.

Since the outcome variables of Models A2.1 and A2.2 are fractions, I estimate them as fractional response models. Model A2.3 displays a logistic regression, and Model A2.4 displays an ordered logistic regression. Random group intercepts are included for all models.

What are the results of these tests? Models A2.1 and A2.2 replicate the original final model of my analysis almost perfectly and support all drawn conclusions: the (weighted) share of parties attending to an interest group issue increases when interest group polarization and public salience rise, while the interest group density of an issue does not exert an independent and significant effect. In models A2.3 and A2.4 the effects of the group density variables become significant, while those of interest group polarization are no longer significantly different from zero. When the effects of the issue characteristics are estimated individually, however, they do differ significantly from zero and in the hypothesized direction (results not shown; available from the author). This suggests that – as also mentioned in the main analysis – it is the interrelationship between them that leads to insignificant results here. Substantially then these findings still provide support for my basic expectation that the politicization of an issue is associated with agenda congruence.

Table A2.4. Explaining Agenda Congruence: Alternative Dependent Variables

	(A2.1) Share of parties mentioning issue	(A2.2) Share of parties mentioning issue, weighted by average seat share in parliament	(A2.3) Original DV excluding single- mention issues	(A2.4) Level of party system attention
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
<i>IG Density (ref.: Density<Median)</i>				
Median Density	0.16 (0.13)	0.17 (0.13)	0.34** (0.14)	0.27** (0.12)
Density>Median	0.19 (0.14)	0.20 (0.14)	0.47*** (0.15)	0.43*** (0.13)
IG Polarization	0.31* (0.16)	0.30* (0.16)	0.20 (0.16)	0.19 (0.14)
<i>Public Salience (ref.: Public is unaware)</i>				
Somewhat aware	0.35** (0.14)	0.36** (0.14)	0.37** (0.15)	0.39*** (0.13)
Moderately aware	0.77*** (0.16)	0.76*** (0.16)	0.76*** (0.16)	0.74*** (0.14)
Highly aware	0.76*** (0.20)	0.74*** (0.20)	0.94*** (0.20)	0.83*** (0.18)
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Business Group	-0.27** (0.12)	-0.28** (0.12)	-0.33*** (0.13)	-0.20* (0.11)
#Lobbyists	0.15** (0.062)	0.14** (0.062)	0.17** (0.065)	0.13** (0.059)
SQ Change	0.019 (0.12)	0.0053 (0.12)	-0.079 (0.12)	-0.019 (0.10)
Priority Issue	0.14 (0.11)	0.14 (0.11)	0.047 (0.11)	0.13 (0.10)
<i>Country-Fixed Effects (reference: US)</i>				
UK	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.21 (0.20)	0.068 (0.21)	-0.071 (0.19)
Germany	0.19 (0.17)	0.15 (0.17)	0.44** (0.18)	0.081 (0.17)
Netherlands	0.20 (0.18)	0.17 (0.18)	0.45** (0.19)	0.12 (0.17)
Intercept	-0.55*** (0.21)	-0.50** (0.22)	-1.07*** (0.23)	/
Cut1				0.53*** (0.20)
Cut2				0.99*** (0.20)
Cut3				2.20*** (0.21)
Group intercept variance	0.25*** (0.097)	0.26*** (0.098)	0.37*** (0.11)	0.35*** (0.094)
<i>N Issues</i>	1705	1698	1705	1705
<i>N Groups</i>	327	327	327	327
<i>AIC</i>	2270.8	2261.0	2272.2	4281.0

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Alternative Control Variables

Next, I test whether my findings are robust to changes with regard to some of the control variables that were included in my original model. Firstly, as previous research has pointed out that the effects of group type on interest group strategies might be conditional on group resources (Dür & Mateo, 2013, 2016), but also since arguments made in relation to business group advantage frequently include *assumptions* about resource differentials between different group types (e.g. Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Wright, 2000), I look at the interactive effect of group type and resources (Model A2.5). The model shows that for agenda congruence there is no interactive effect of group type and resources and – more importantly – that the estimated effects of the main independent variables are stable. The same is true for Model A2.6 in which a different distinction between group types is made (contrasting non-business, business, and professional interests; see Dür & Mateo 2013; 2016).

Lastly, it might be the case that dynamics particular to the domain or policy area an issue belongs to affect both the characteristics of particular issues as well as the question whether it receives party attention or not. To ensure that these domain-level factors do not obliterate the effects of my issue-specific independent variables, in Model A2.7 I add fixed effects for the policy areas the individual issues belong to. To that end all issues have been classified according to the major code categories of the Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.net). Once more, this model supports all substantive conclusions drawn from the main analysis.

Table A2.5. Explaining Agenda Congruence: Alternative Control Variables

	(A2.5) Interaction Business Group and Resources	(A2.6) Alternative group type differences	(A2.7) Controlling for policy area
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
<i>IG Density (ref.: Density < Median)</i>			
Median Density	0.18 (0.13)	0.18 (0.13)	0.14 (0.14)
Density > Median	0.21 (0.14)	0.21 (0.14)	0.14 (0.14)
IG Polarization	0.29* (0.15)	0.29* (0.15)	0.31** (0.16)
<i>Public Salience (ref.: Public is unaware)</i>			
Somewhat aware	0.36** (0.14)	0.34** (0.14)	0.34** (0.14)
Moderately aware	0.74*** (0.16)	0.72*** (0.16)	0.71*** (0.16)
Highly aware	0.73*** (0.20)	0.71*** (0.20)	0.67*** (0.20)
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Business Group	-0.17 (0.17)		-0.35*** (0.13)
#Lobbyists	0.20** (0.089)	0.14** (0.062)	0.13** (0.062)
Business Group*#Lobbyists	-0.10 (0.11)		
Business Group (ref.: non-business)		-0.32** (0.13)	
Professional Group (ref.: non-business)		-0.38** (0.19)	
Status Quo Change	-0.0038 (0.12)	-0.0053 (0.12)	0.0018 (0.12)
Priority Issue	0.13 (0.11)	0.14 (0.11)	0.13 (0.11)
<i>Country-Fixed Effects (reference: US)</i>			
United Kingdom	-0.28 (0.20)	-0.24 (0.20)	-0.20 (0.20)
Germany	0.093 (0.17)	0.15 (0.17)	0.13 (0.18)
Netherlands	0.10 (0.18)	0.13 (0.17)	0.29 (0.18)
Intercept	-0.48** (0.22)	-0.41* (0.21)	0.17 (0.32)
Group intercept variance	0.25** (0.097)	0.25** (0.098)	0.23** (0.099)
Policy Area FE	No	No	Yes
<i>N issues</i>	1,705	1,705	1,695
<i>N Groups</i>	327	327	326
<i>AIC</i>	2272.3	2270.9	2261.1

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Alternative Modeling Strategies

Are my results driven by potentially influential observations, and are my analyses robust to different modeling choices? To provide an answer to the first of these questions, model A2.8 is a bootstrap estimation of my original model, iteratively excluding individual groups. It provides sound support for my original model as it shows that the exclusion of groups from the estimation does not meaningfully affect the estimated coefficients or levels of significance. Finally, due to the nested structure of my data and the nature of the binary dependent variable I estimated logistic regression models with random group intercepts in my main analyses. Did the choice for the logistic regression model or the inclusion of random group intercepts drive my results? Model A9 displays the results of a linear probability estimation of the main model from my analysis. Linear probability models have been suggested as viable alternatives to logistic regression models in many instances (Wooldridge, 2012). Like the other models before, this model provides support for the main conclusions of my analysis. And also the estimation of a logistic regression model with fixed group effects and clustered standard errors – as alternative to the random effects specification – leads to very similar conclusion. The only meaningful difference between this model and previous ones lies in the fact that the group density effect becomes statistically significant, while that of interest group polarization is no longer significant.

Table A2.6. Explaining Agenda Congruence: Alternative Modeling Strategies

	(A2.8)	(A2.9)	(A2.10)
	Bootstrap replications (exclusion of groups)	Linear probability model	Logit with group fixed effects and clustered se
<i>IG Density (ref.: Density < Median)</i>			
Median Density	0.18 (0.16)	0.041 (0.029)	0.22 (0.21)
Density > Median	0.21 (0.16)	0.048 (0.031)	0.49** (0.24)
IG Polarization	0.29* (0.15)	0.06* (0.04)	0.20 (0.23)
<i>Public Salience (ref.: Public is unaware)</i>			
Somewhat aware	0.36** (0.16)	0.084*** (0.032)	0.31 (0.20)
Moderately aware	0.74*** (0.18)	0.17*** (0.035)	0.70*** (0.22)
Highly aware	0.73*** (0.21)	0.16*** (0.043)	0.54** (0.27)
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Business Group	-0.28** (0.14)	-0.063** (0.027)	/
#Lobbyists	0.14** (0.060)	0.031** (0.013)	/
Status Quo Change	-0.0050 (0.13)	-0.0014 (0.026)	-0.13 (0.16)
Priority Issue	0.14 (0.13)	0.030 (0.025)	0.18 (0.15)
<i>Country-Fixed Effects (reference: US)</i>			
United Kingdom	-0.24 (0.18)	-0.052 (0.043)	/
Germany	0.12 (0.15)	0.026 (0.038)	/
Netherlands	0.13 (0.16)	0.027 (0.039)	/
Intercept	-0.44** (0.22)	0.40*** (0.048)	-0.026 (0.25)
Group intercept variance	0.25** (0.12)	0.01*** (0.004)	/
Group FE	No	No	Yes
<i>N issues</i>	1705	1705	1519
<i>N groups</i>	327	327	/
<i>AIC</i>	2271.1	2383.5	1798.1
<i>BIC</i>	2352.7	2470.6	1840.7

Notes: Model A2.8 displays bootstrapped results of model 4 from Table 2.3. Results are based on 1000 replications, iteratively excluding groups. The entries are observed coefficients and bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Supplementary material for chapter 3

In order to increase the robustness of our findings from Chapter 3, we conducted a number of additional analyses to accompany our main models. We present and discuss the following additional steps in this appendix: First, to make sure that our results are not driven by our choice to estimate multilevel logistic regression models, we present alternative multilevel OLS regression models, and models with group fixed effects for group type split samples. Second, we present models in which we investigate whether group resources might act as mediator, or moderator in the relationship between group type, party conflict, and attention, as indicated in our main text. Third, extending our original analyses, we estimate models in which we predict *decreasing* interest group issue attention rather than *increasing* attention, to see if our argument can be extended to this side of the relationship. All of these steps provide additional support for our original findings and lend credibility to our conclusions.

Alternative modeling choices

Did the choice for the logistic regression model or the inclusion of random group intercepts drive our results? Linear probability models have been suggested as viable alternatives to logistic regression models in many instances (Wooldridge, 2012). Model A3.1 and A3.2 display the results of linear probability estimations of the main models of our analysis, including random group effects. Models A3.3 and A3.4, in turn, display logistic regression models with fixed group effects, for the business- and non-business groups in our sample respectively.

As models A3.1 and A3.2 show, our findings and conclusions are virtually unchanged when we estimate linear probability models instead of logistic regression models. Very similar to model 1 of our main analysis, model A3.1 shows that there is no direct relationship between the group type indicator and changes in interest group issue attention, but that interest groups increase their attention on issues that became more conflictual among parties as compared to issues that saw no change in party conflict ($p < .05$). Once the interaction between group type and party conflict is modelled (model A3.2), we see – as in our original analysis – that it is first and foremost business groups that are reactive to increased party conflict. There are also no meaningful differences with regard to the effects of our control variables. In conclusion, our findings do not seem to be driven by our choice to model logistic regression models.

Table A3.1. Alternative modeling choices

	DV: More interest group attention			
	<i>Linear probability models with random effects:</i>		<i>Logistic regression models with group fixed effects:</i>	
	(A3.1)	(A3.2)	Non-business groups (A3.3)	Business groups (A3.4)
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Business group	.01 (.03)	-.06 (.07)		
Δ party conflict:				
Less... (ref.)				
No change...	-.03 (.04)	-.07 (.06)	-.44 (.40)	.40 (.44)
More...	.08 (.06)	-.07 (.09)	-.79 (.66)	1.95** (.65)
Business group* No change in party conflict		.07 (.08)		
Business group* More party conflict		.24* (.12)		
<i>Controls</i>				
Δ government attention:				
Less... (ref.)				
No change...	.12** (.04)	.12** (.04)	.73 (.52)	.92 (.63)
More...	.48** (.04)	.47** (.04)	2.83** (.52)	3.27** (.62)
Resources	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)		
NL (vs. GER)	-.02 (.07)	-.03 (.07)		
UK (vs. GER)	.01 (.04)	.01 (.04)		
Constant	.06 (.06)	.10 (.07)	17.49 (4,142.45)	-1.62 (1.04)
Group intercept variance	.01	.01	/	/
Group fixed effects	/	/	Yes	Yes
N _{issues}	789	789	389	400
N _{groups}	143	143	69	74
AIC	928.4	934.3	468	455.8

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parenthesis; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

In models A3.3 and A3.4 we replicate our main analysis, but rely on a group-fixed effects specification, instead of a random effects variant. Specifying these models provides a more strict test of our hypotheses, as we can exclude the possibility that our results are driven by certain groups selecting to be active on certain issues. In other words, with these “within-group” models we can compare how changes in party conflict on an issue are related to

differences in group behavior within groups. The downside of this is that we cannot estimate the effects of group-invariant factors, such as resources or the country, and that we have to split our sample by group type which reduces the number of observations. With these caveats in mind, the models provide strong support for our original findings. Whereas model A3.3 shows that there is no relationship between changes in party conflict and increased interest group attention within the non-business group sample, model A3.4 displays a significant ($p < .01$) and positive effect of issues that became more conflictual among parties for the business group sample. In other words, when looking at differences in party conflict around issues within the portfolio of individual groups, business groups get more active on issues with increased conflict, while non-business groups show no signs of reactivity to changed party conflict. This, again, provides support for our initial findings.

Testing for resources as potential mediator or moderator of the group type effect

In the main text we treated group resources as additional potential explanatory factor of increasing interest group issue attention. However, we also hinted at the possibility that it might act as a mediator, or moderator within the relationship between group type, (changes in party conflict,) and changes in issue attention. For example, it is often assumed that business groups command more material resources and that this greater affluence is the main reason why they are able to behave in ways less wealthy non-business groups are not. According to this perspective, resources might act as a mediator, rather than an additional independent factor, that stands in between group type differences, (changes in party conflict,) and changes in issue attention. If this were indeed the case, the non-significant group type effect found in our original models, would not be surprising as they include the potential mediator (resources) as well, which might absorb the group type effect. We therefore estimated models A3.5 and A3.6 in which only one of the two variables is included respectively. The findings of these two models are in line with the findings of our original analysis, however. Neither group type differences, nor group resources are significantly related to the question whether groups increase their attention to an issue or not.

Table A3.2. Disentangling group type and resource effects

	DV: More interest group attention		
	(A3.5)	(A3.6)	(A3.7)
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Business group	.02 (.19)		-.90 (.77)
Resources		.12 (.09)	.16 (.22)
Δ party conflict:			
Less... (ref.)	/	/	/
No change...	-.18 (.23)	-.21 (.24)	-.33 (.57)
More...	.49 (.34)	.42 (.34)	-.46 (1.08)
Business group* No change in party conflict			1.08 (.84)
Business group* More party conflict			1.63 (1.36)
Business group* Resources			.30 (.37)
Resources* No change in party conflict			-.06 (.25)
Resources* More party conflict			.002 (.45)
Business group* Resources* No change in party conflict			-.41 (.41)
Business group* Resources* More party conflict			-.10 (.62)
<i>Controls</i>			
Δ government attention:			
Less... (ref.)	/	/	/
No change...	1.07** (.31)	1.05** (.32)	1.02** (.32)
More...	2.74** (.31)	2.74** (.31)	2.75** (.32)
NL (vs. GER)	-.16 (.40)	-.15 (.40)	-.17 (.42)
UK (vs. GER)	.08 (.20)	.03 (.21)	.03 (.22)
Constant	-2.45** (.37)	-2.55** (.38)	-2.42** (.59)
Group intercept variance	.21	.22	.27
N_{issues}	819	789	789
N_{groups}	148	143	69
AIC	919	885	932

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parenthesis; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

In contrast to the line of reasoning advanced in the previous paragraph, Dür and Mateo (2013, 2016) have argued that group type differences and resources *jointly* affect various types of interest group behavior. Following their logic, we might expect resources to alleviate or exacerbated differential reactivity of business and non-business groups. Relatively wealthy non-business groups might not differ much in their behavior from relatively less-wealthy business groups. Differences between wealthy business groups and poor non-business groups might be particularly stark. In order to test this possibility, we

estimated an additional model (A3.7) in which we included a three-way interaction between group type, resources, and changes in party conflict. Due to the low power inherent in this model, we treat its findings with caution, but want to highlight that there indeed seems to be the possibility of an interesting interaction between group type and resources. As Figure A3.1 shows, more wealthy interest groups seem to be more responsive to changes in party conflict, than less wealthy groups, irrespective of group type (see left and middle panel). Group type differences seem to be particularly important for issues that witnessed an escalation of party conflict and for groups that are neither extremely poor nor extremely rich. Interestingly though, we do not only see a higher likelihood of increased attention on issues with more party conflict, but also on issues on which conflict got less intense. Future research should investigate the question around interactive group type and resource effects further. For now we note, that there is no reason to doubt the validity of our initial findings due to a misspecification of the relationship between group type, resources, and party conflict.

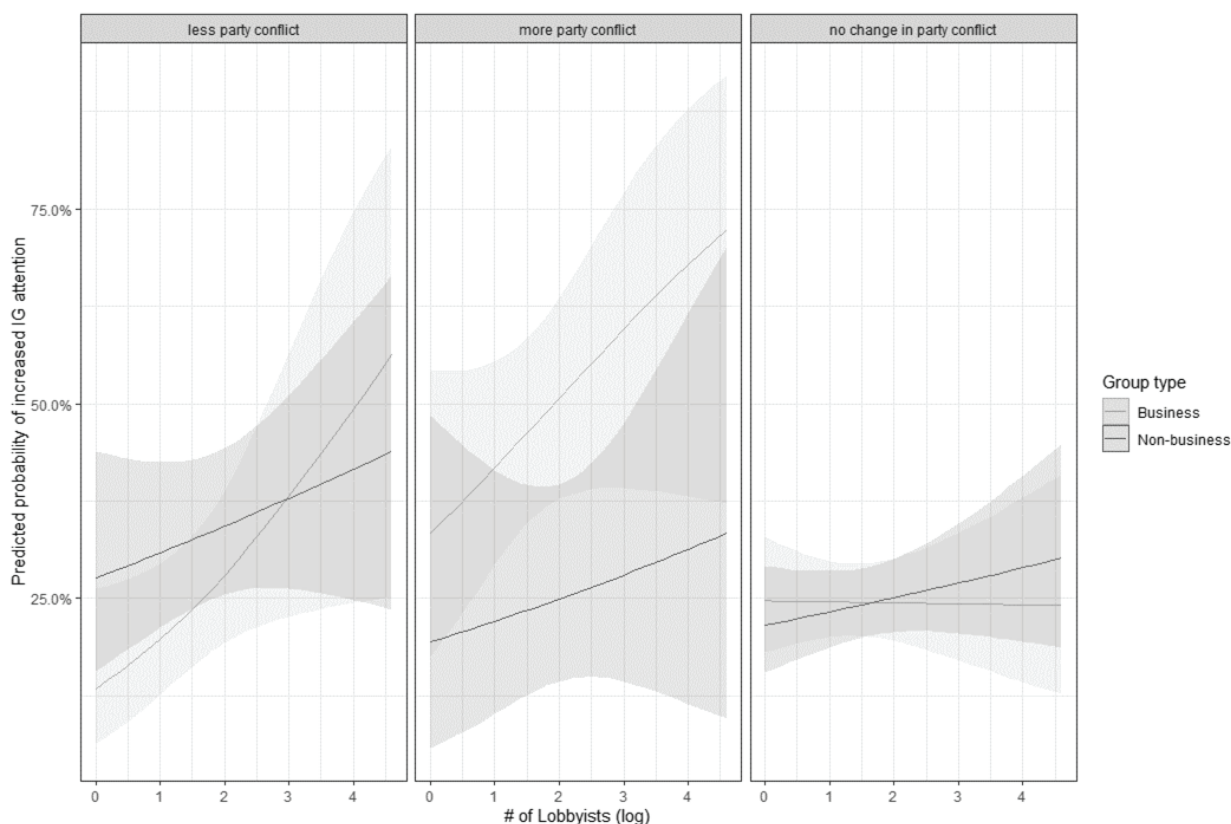


Figure A3.1. Interaction between group type, resources, and changes in party conflict. Note: The figure shows marginal predicted probabilities with 84% confidence intervals, based on Model A3.7. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Testing the relationship between conflict and decreasing attention

In our main analyses we investigated whether interest groups react to *increasing* party conflict by *heightening* the attention they devote to an issue. This is in line with the theoretical focus we have chosen. As we have seen in the descriptive part of our analysis, though, interest group reactivity does not seem to follow a linear pattern. Do groups react (differently) to decreasing party conflict?

Table A3.3. Predicting decreasing interest group attention

	DV: Less interest group attention	
	(A3.8)	(A3.9)
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Business group	-.15 (.23)	.45 (.47)
Δ party conflict:		
Less... (ref.)		
No change...	-.36 (.25)	.01 (.38)
More...	-.22 (.38)	.38 (.61)
Business group* No change in party conflict		-.71 (.53)
Business group* More party conflict		-1.05 (.79)
<i>Controls</i>		
Δ government attention:		
Less... (ref.)		
No change...	-1.72** (.23)	-1.74** (.24)
More...	-2.82** (.29)	-2.83** (.30)
Resources	-.16 (.10)	-.15 (.10)
NL (vs. GER)	.77 (.45)	.77 (.46)
UK (vs. GER)	-.01 (.25)	-.005 (.25)
Constant	.75* (.36)	.42 (.44)
Group intercept variance	.29	.35
N_{issues}	789	789
N_{groups}	143	143
AIC	719.5	721.1

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parenthesis; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Models A3.8 and A3.9 provide only very weak evidence that this is the case. While we see that changes in government attention to an issue are a strong predictor of decreasing interest group attention – similar to what we find in our main analysis with regard to increasing interest group attention – neither group type differences, nor changes in party

conflict directly relate to decreasing interest group attention. On average, interest groups do not reduce their attention to issues in reaction to decreases in party conflict. As Model A3.9 and Figure A3.2 demonstrate there is also very little reason to assume that business groups react differently than non-business groups. While the figure shows that business groups are somewhat more likely to decrease their attention to issues that got less conflictual among parties as compared to when conflict on an issue did not change ($p < .1$), differences between group types are not significant.

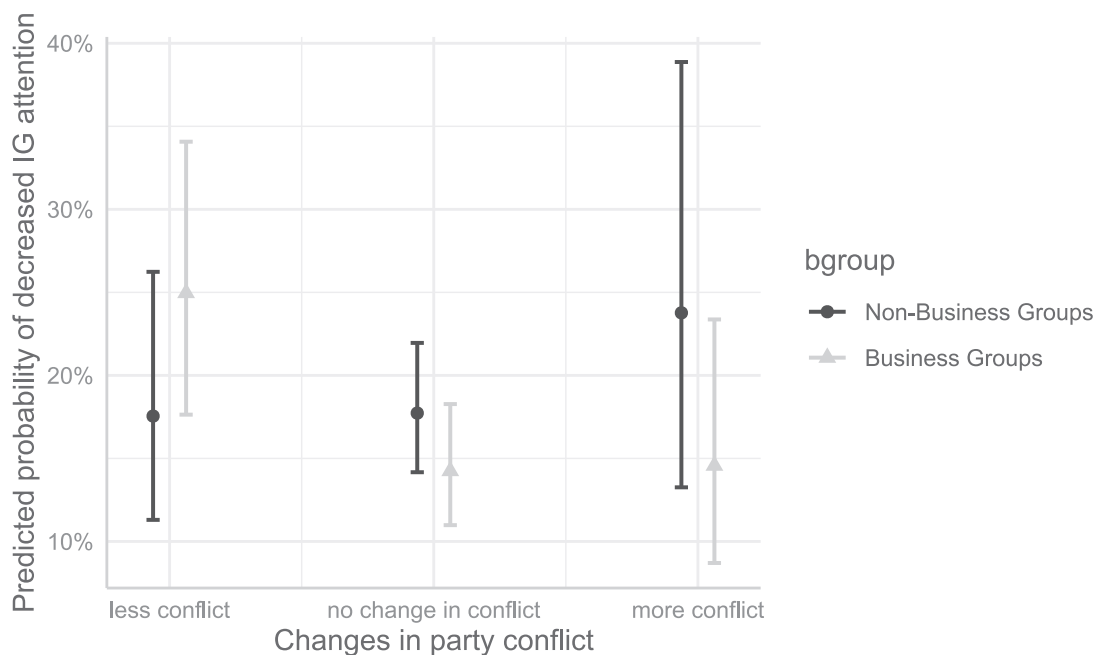


Figure A3.2. Interaction between group type and changes in party conflict. Note: The figure shows marginal predicted probabilities with 84% confidence intervals, based on Model A3.9. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Apparently, the relationship between changes in party conflict and issue attention is not a linear one. While this question was not at the center of this article, the foregoing models demonstrate that interest groups do not show any signs of reactivity to *decreasing* party conflict. This indicates that the same factors that lead interest groups to increase their attention to an issue, might not be the same that lead them to decrease their attention, or that they might do so in a mediated way. While we can imagine a couple of explanations for this null-finding, such as sunk costs, intra-organizational processes, or a larger time lag between cause and effect, future research should explicitly address this problem when specifying theoretical models. Are the factors that foster mobilization and activity the same that lead to demobilization and idleness?

Supplementary material for chapter 4

Additional information²⁹

Table A4.1. Summary statistics (N=306 issues, clustered within 80 groups)

Variable name	Variable description	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Complementary Lobbying</i>	0=IG lobbied supporters exclusively; 1=IG lobbied supporters and opponents	.60	.49	0	1
<i>Public Salience</i>	Public awareness: 0= public is at most somewhat aware; 1= public is very aware	.11	.32	0	1
<i>Interest Group Activity</i>	Other groups active: 0=five or less; 1= six or more	.67	.47	0	1
<i>Party Polarization</i>	Degree of conflict among parties: 0= Issue is not or somewhat conflictual; 1= Issue is very conflictual	.80	.40	0	1
<i>Non-business Group</i>	0=business group; 1=non-business group	.48	.50	0	1
<i>Left Friends</i>	# of left parties sharing IG's position	1.75	1.40	0	6
<i>Majority Support</i>	0=supporting parties hold no legislative majority; 1=supporting parties hold legislative majority	.39	.49	0	1
<i>Priority Issue</i>	0=the issue was not a priority for the group; 1= the issue was a priority	.64	.48	0	1
<i>Staff (log)</i>	Logged # of lobbyists working for IG	.95	.92	0	3.81
<i>Hearings (log)</i>	Logged # of parliamentary hearings IG participated in (2012-2016)	1.23	1.03	0	3.71
<i>Proportion supporters</i>	Proportion of parties sharing IG's position	.47	.20	.07	.86

Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

²⁹ The supplementary material for chapter 4 has been published as an online appendix to the article “Statsch, P. & Berkhout, J. (2020). Lobbying and policy conflict: explaining interest groups’ promiscuous relationships to political parties. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 9(1), 1-20.”

Table A4.2. Correlation Table (N=306 issues)

	Complementary Lobbying	Public Salience	IG Activity	Party Polarization	Non- business Group	Left Friends	Majority Support	Priority Issue	Staff (log)	Hearings (log)
Public Salience	0.14*	1								
IG Activity	0.19***	0.19**	1							
Party Polarization	0.17**	0.13*	0.07	1						
Non- business Group	-0.12*	0.13*	-0.15**	0.05	1					
Left Friends	-0.10	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	0.25***	1				
Majority Support	-0.10	0.03	0.09	-0.09	-0.13*	0.31***	1			
Priority Issue	0.04	0.06	0.11	-0.07	0.03	0.07	0.05	1		
Staff (log)	0.21***	0.17**	0.07	0.16**	-0.06	-0.11	-0.05	-0.04	1	
Hearings (log)	0.17**	-0.04	-0.004	0.10	0.17**	0.15**	-0.12*	-0.13*	0.27***	1
Proportion supporters	-0.01	0.05	0.07	-0.01	-0.004	0.56***	0.71***	0.06	0.01	-0.02

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Robustness checks

We conducted a number of robustness checks in order to verify that our findings are not sensitive to coding decisions and that they hold when tested slightly differently. Firstly, we re-estimated our original full model with alternative measures of the ‘interest group activity’ and ‘public salience’ variables. Remember that we recoded our original five- and four-point scales into dummy variables. Here we use the original scales instead. Model A4.1 shows that interest groups are significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to engage in complementary lobbying when between six and twenty other groups are active on their issue as compared to when they are active alone. This is in line with our expectation. The fact that no significant difference exists between issues that involve even more other groups might be due to a crowding-out mechanism whereby the attention demanded by the large number of other groups decreases the likelihood of contact with any party for any individual group. Another potential explanation lies in the possibility that interest group behavior on particularly dense issues might be determined exogenous to our model and is rather stable over time. The carrying capacity of some issue areas might be permanently exhausted or unrelated to the specific issue-factors modelled, and strong interest group bandwagons might be observable on certain issues only. This is consistent with population-ecological models. Consistent with

the results from our original model we estimate no significant effect of public salience (model A4.2).

Second, we used the predictors included in our final model to explain the frequency of contacts with parties opposing a group's position and juxtaposed this with a model explaining the amount of contact with friendly parties. If our theoretical model holds, we should see groups increasing the frequency with which they contact their foes, but not with their friends, when the conflict surrounding an issue is more intense. This is indeed what we find: while increasing interest group activity and public salience of an issue lead to more contact with opposing parties (model A4.3), these variables have no effect on the frequency of contacting supporters (model A4.4). Thirdly, due to the difficulties associated with estimating and interpreting (interaction) effects in multilevel logistic regression analyses (Ai & Norton, 2003; Berry et al., 2010) we calculate a linear probability model with random group effects (Model A4.5). Again, this model provide us with substantially the same findings as presented in our main analysis.

Table A4.3. Robustness checks

Model specification:	(A4.1) Alternative operationalization of 'IG Activity'	(A4.2) Alternative operationalization of 'Public Salience'	(A4.3) Frequency of contact with <i>opposing</i> parties	(A4.4) Frequency of contact with <i>supporting</i> parties	(A4.5) Linear probability model
<i>Explanatory variables</i>					
Public salience					
Public is very aware (vs. at most somewhat aware)	2.13* (1.27)		1.29** (0.60)	0.83 (0.55)	0.083 (0.059)
Alternative Public salience (ref. public is not aware) ... a little aware		-0.56 (0.81)			
... moderately aware		-0.82 (0.91)			
... very aware		0.83 (1.33)			
<i>Alternative Interest group activity</i>					
(ref. no other groups active)					
1-5 other groups	1.26 (1.94)				
6-20 other groups	3.72* (2.04)				
21-100 other groups	2.07 (2.08)				
>100 other groups	0.14 (1.89)				
Original Interest group activity		1.71** (0.76)	0.88* (0.46)	-0.056 (0.42)	0.083* (0.043)
Party polarization		0.68 (0.69)	0.65 (0.49)	-0.075 (0.47)	0.056 (0.046)
Issue is very conflictual among parties (vs. Issue is not or somewhat conflictual)	0.55 (0.79)				
<i>Control variables</i>					

Non-business group	-5.81**	-4.67**	-2.93***	0.55	-0.33***
	(2.35)	(2.00)	(1.05)	(0.75)	(0.11)
Left supporters	-0.051	-0.059	-0.14	-0.36	-0.0053
	(0.41)	(0.37)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.024)
Non-business group*Left supporters	1.17*	0.99*	0.52	-0.17	0.060*
	(0.65)	(0.58)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0.033)
Majority support	-1.83*	-2.10**	-0.93*	-0.023	-0.11**
	(0.98)	(0.94)	(0.56)	(0.56)	(0.055)
Priority issue	0.41	0.52	0.43	0.98**	0.031
	(0.61)	(0.56)	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.035)
Staff (log)	1.30	1.40	0.71	0.060	0.072
	(1.25)	(1.05)	(0.46)	(0.28)	(0.053)
Hearings (log)	1.38	1.27	0.76*	0.66**	0.082*
	(0.97)	(0.84)	(0.42)	(0.27)	(0.049)
Supporting parties (proportion)	0.42	1.99	0.36	-0.35	0.080
	(2.97)	(2.75)	(1.63)	(1.62)	(0.16)
Intercept	-2.04	-1.78			0.42
	(2.48)	(1.79)			(0.11)
Cut1			0.99	-5.40***	
			(1.05)	(1.13)	
Cut2			6.70***	2.82***	
			(1.21)	(0.91)	
Group intercept	31.5**	24.6**	9.18***	1.75**	0.14***
variance	(15.5)	(11.6)	(2.90)	(0.78)	(0.02)
N_{Issues}	306	306	306	306	306
N_{Groups}	80	80	80	80	80
AIC	260.5	267.5	427.2	312.4	241.8
Log likelihood	-114.2	-118.7	-199.6	-142.2	-106.9

Notes: The categories of contact for models A3 and A4 are: 'never', 'monthly or less', 'at least weekly'. The original scale included a fourth category 'daily', which was collapsed into the previous category due to being used rarely ($N=8$). Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Original interview quotes

- “Ik discrimineer niet, ik maak geen onderscheid. [...] Ja, ik doe wel veel met Partij voor de Dieren maar die hoef ik al niet meer te overtuigen. Dus mijn meeste tijd zit juist in de partijen [...] die er gewoon anders over denken” (Interview with animal rights group, March 21, 2017).
- “Bij de andere [partijen] kan je nog een gesprek aangaan en ze proberen te overtuigen. Dat proberen we wel” (Interview with consumer rights group, June 9, 2017).
- “[...] ik maak geen onderscheid tussen politieke partijen dus ik spreek ze eigenlijk allemaal. [...] of het zin heeft weet ik niet maar ik hou ze wel op de hoogte” (Interview with lobbyist from the financial sector, January 20, 2017).
- “Nee, je kunt soms aan tafel zitten met mensen...en ik kan praten wat ik wil maar het heeft geen enkele zin” (Interview with pensioners group, February 23, 2018).
- “Dus het idee: ik wil alleen met die partij praten, is heel dom. [...] En vanuit die analyse heb ik dus gezegd: Dan moet ik ook met andere partijen in contact willen komen [...] En niet vanuit een negatief idee [...] maar vanuit het idee: begrijp je wie we zijn? En begrijpen wij wat voor jullie belangrijk is? [...]Als je gehoord wil worden, moet je luisteren zegt men ook wel eens” (Interview with lobbyist from the retail sector, June 22, 2017).
- “Dus je praat ook met iedereen, [...] je moet altijd zorgen dat je met iedereen praat, maakt niet uit wie. Dus uiteindelijk moet je er gewoon voor zorgen dat je de boodschap [...] goed voor het voetlicht krijgt” (Interview with lobbyist from the cultural sector, January 10, 2018).
- “En na de verkiezingen [...] gaan we onmiddellijk een rondje maken en dan gaan we langs. Om te vertellen: wat is [naam van de organisatie] eigenlijk? En dan proberen we wel zoveel mogelijk objectieve informatie te geven. Gewoon echt omdat je weet: ze weten echt niks (Interview with lobbyist from care sector, January 31, 2018).

Supplementary material for chapter 5

Additional information on data and sample

Table A5.1. Summary statistics

	mean	sd	min	max
Proportion of issues on which group _i gained support of party _i	0.29	0.38	0	1
Business group	0.54		0	1
Party left-right position	0.52	0.24	0.13	0.95
Government party	0.3		0	1
Group resources (logged)	1.32	1.16	0	4.44
Proportion of issues on which group challenged the Status Quo	0.69	0.26	0	1
Median group population density:	2.33	0.97	0	4
Mean camp share (%)	0.67	0.2	0	1
Median public salience	1.42	0.7	0	3
Median public opposition:	0.79	0.57	0	2
Party seat change	0.45	8.28	-14.6	13.3
Issues not mentioned by party	0.29		0	1
log(party issue mentions)	1.2	1.2	0	4.26

Note: N=577; Groups=125; Parties=22; excludes listwise deletions; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Table A5.2. Comparison between first and second round samples

	1st round	2nd round
<i>Group characteristics:</i>		
Group type	Business groups =1054 (51.6%) Non-business groups =1123 (48.4%)	Business groups =496 (51.8%) Non-business groups =461 (48.2%)
Resources (logged)	min=0 max=4.44 mean=1.125 sd=1.09	min=0 max=4.44 mean=1.451 sd=1.14
<i>Issue characteristics:</i>		
Status Quo challenger	Yes=1681 (68%) No=792 (32%)	Yes=656 (73%) No=243 (27%)
Camp share (%)	min=0 max=100 mean=70.85 sd=26.01	min=0 max=100 mean=67.85 sd=26.11
Public opposition	none=875 (39%) some=861 (39%) moderate to strong=494 (22%)	none=357 (41%) some=348 (40%) moderate to strong=162 (19%)
Group population density	0-20 groups=1135 (53%) 21-100 groups=488 (23%) >100 groups=528 (24%)	0-20 groups=427 (54%) 21-100 groups=184 (23%) >100 groups=177 (22%)

Note: statistics are based on the full samples and include observations that were deleted from the analyses due to missing values on at least one of the specified variables; source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Alternative model specifications and robustness checks

In order to test the robustness of my findings I conducted a number of additional analyses to accompany the main models. These supplementary models make use of different operationalizations of the two central independent variables of this study, party ideology (Table A5.3) and interest group type (Table A5.4). Furthermore, Tables A5.5 and A5.6 add different model specifications to ensure that modeling choices did not affect the outcomes of the analyses. To that end, Table A5.5 replicates the models from the main article, but includes additional random party intercepts, and Table A5.6 displays linear probability models as alternatives to the logistic regression specification.

A dichotomous measure of party ideology

According to the ideological alignment hypothesis (H2) spelled out in the main article, interest groups are more likely to gain support by political parties they are ideologically aligned with, than by parties they are not. Based on previous literature (De Bruycker, 2016; Gava et al., 2017; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Wonka, 2017) I assume that business groups hold ideologically similar positions to right-of-center parties, whereas non-business groups are aligned with left-of-center parties. In order to test the hypothesis I operationalized party ideology as a continuous left-right scale, and use the ‘lrgen’ variable from the CHES dataset (Polk et al., 2017) to measure it (rescaled to range from 0-1). I chose this operationalization, as it accurately measures party ideology along the left-right dimension, which is a continuous phenomenon. Here I replace this continuous measure of party ideology with a binary one, distinguishing ideologically left- from right parties. Using this binary measure allows me to conduct a test of the hypothesized relationship that more accurately reflects the theoretical argument, at the cost of reducing empirically existing variation. Based on the previously used ‘lrgen’ variable, I indicate as left party all parties that score lower than .5 on the scale, whereas all other parties are considered as right.

Using this variable leads to substantially similar results and conclusions as those reported in the main analyses: model A5.1 predicts that non-business groups are less likely to gain support by right parties, as compared to left parties ($p < .05$). For business groups, in contrast, the likelihood of gaining party support remains largely the same, irrespective of the ideological leaning of the party. Differences between business and non-business groups become significant ($p < .05$) for right parties. In combination this indicates once more, that non-business groups rely on ideological alignment to gain party support, whereas business

groups do not. Results pertaining to the test of the other hypothesis are not altered in a meaningful way.

Table A5.3. Dichotomous party ideology measure

	<i>Dependent variable: Proportion of issues on which group_i gained support of party_j</i>	
	(A5.1)	(A5.2)
Business group	-.32 (.35)	-.14 (.33)
Government party	.44 (.40)	-.37 (.48)
Right party (vs. Left)	-1.16*** (.38)	-.24 (.27)
Business group* Right party	1.56*** (.46)	
Business group* Government party		1.49*** (.48)
Constant	-2.81*** (.99)	-2.80*** (1.00)
Group intercept variance	.74	.78
Observations	577	577
Log Likelihood	-185.37	-186.37
AIC	404.75	406.75

*Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses. The models include all previously used control variables, but their coefficients are not displayed because they do not differ meaningfully. Full models available from author. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).*

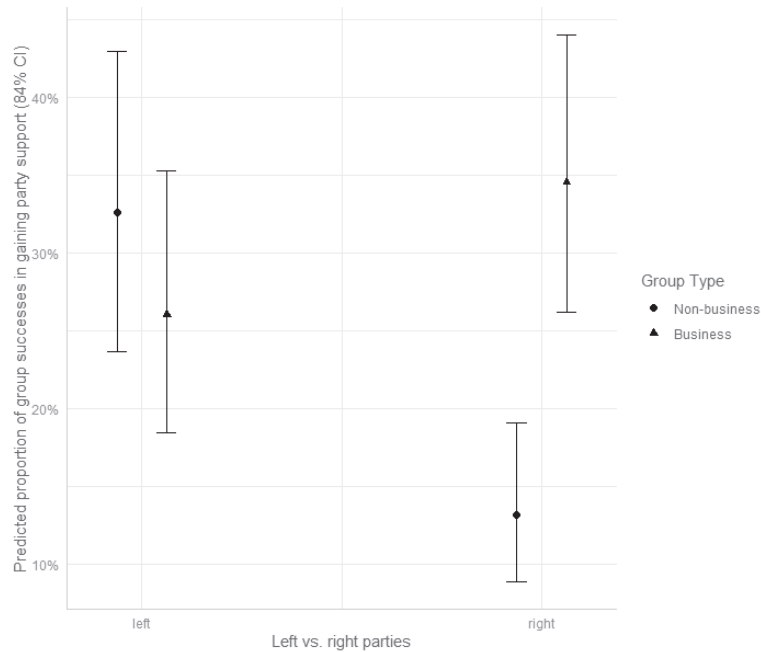


Figure A5.3. Ideological alignment and party support based on Model A5.1; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Distinguishing between business, social, and other groups

In the main analyses I am interested in the differences between business and non-business interest groups, as this is a theoretically meaningful distinction. However, one might object that distinguishing business- from non-business groups conflates a large number of different types of organizations, particularly in the non-business category. Others have therefore suggested to investigate differences between business-, social-, and other groups (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). Here I make use of this group type categorization, in order to determine the robustness of my findings to a more fine-grained group distinction. Of the non-business group category used for the main analyses, trade unions and public interest groups are considered as social groups, whereas institutional associations, identity-, hobby-, leisure- and religious groups are counted as other groups. There are no changes with regard to the business group category. Right-wing parties should be aligned with business groups, left-wing parties with social groups, and there are no expectations with regard to other groups.

The models presented in Table A5.4 show that my findings are robust to this alternative operationalization of group type differences, but that differences between business and non-business groups seem to be stronger, when *other* groups are treated as separate category. Business groups are more likely to gain party support by government parties than social groups ($p < .05$), and the finding that ideological alignment primarily matters for non-

business groups is clearly supported by the models. Furthermore, the *other* groups seem to behave very similar to non-business group, but with a generally higher level of success.

Table A5.4. Alternative group type distinction

	<i>Dependent variable: Proportion of issues on which group_i gained support of party_j</i>	
	(A5.3)	(A5.4)
Business group (vs. Social)	.24 (.38)	-.92 (.61)
Other group (vs. Social)	1.17** (.51)	.80 (.84)
Government party	.05 (.56)	.54 (.41)
Party left-right position	-.96* (.57)	-2.97*** (1.03)
Business group* Government party	1.28** (.55)	
Other group* Government party	-.63 (.77)	
Business group* Party left-right position		3.40*** (1.13)
Other group* Party left-right position		.56 (1.52)
Constant	-3.24*** (1.05)	-2.66** (1.08)
Group intercept variance	.61	.69
Observations	577	577
Log Likelihood	-182.70	-182.21
Akaike Inf. Crit.	403.39	402.42
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	486.19	485.22

*Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; standard errors in parentheses. The models include all previously used control variables, but their coefficients are not displayed because they do not differ meaningfully. Full models available from author. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).*

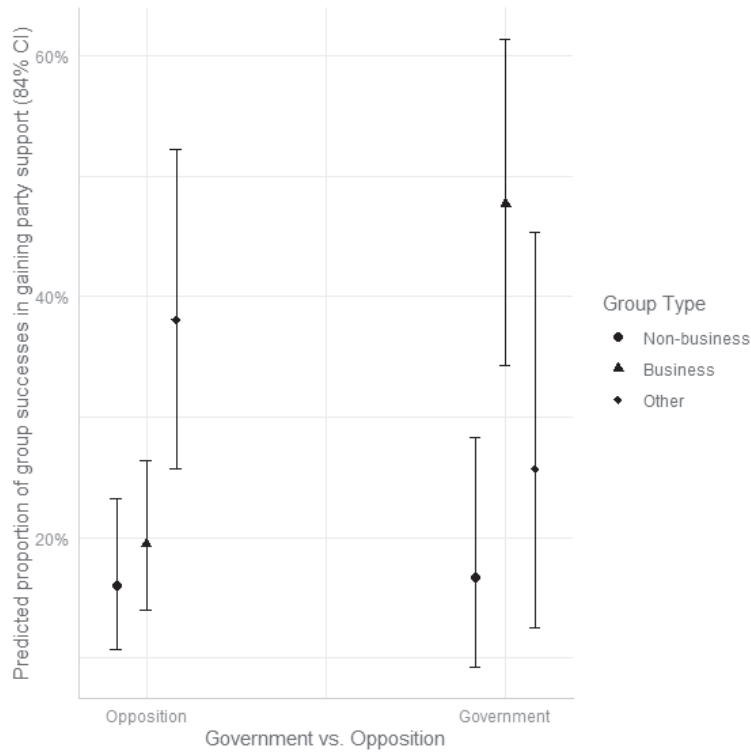


Figure A5.4. The privileged position of business and party support based on Model A5.3. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

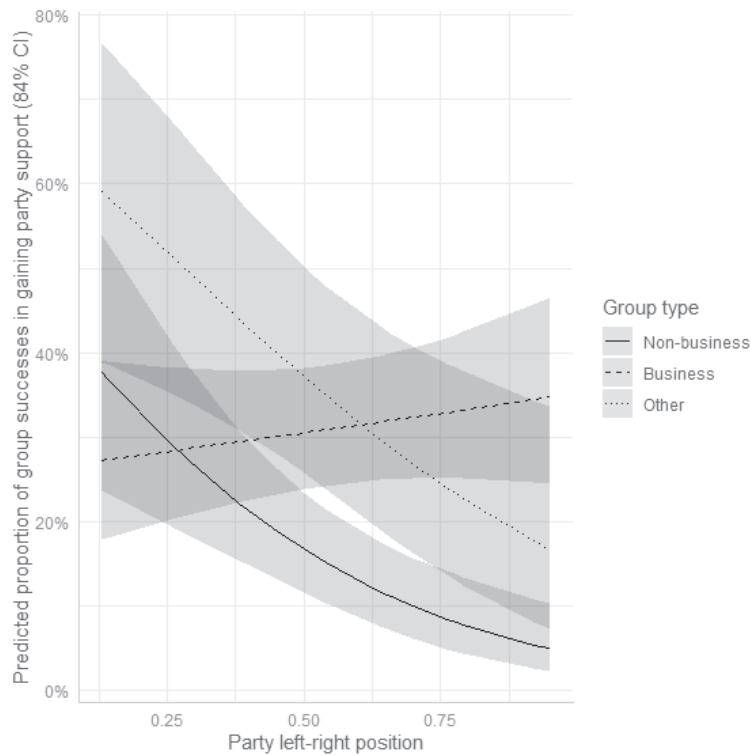


Figure A5.5. Ideological alignment and party support based on Model A5.4; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Alternative model specifications

To ensure that modeling choices did not affect the outcomes of the analyses, I replicated the models from the main article, but included additional random party intercepts (Table A5.5), and calculated linear probability models (Table A5.6) as alternatives to the logistic regression specification. Both of these alternatives provide substantially similar results to the originally computed models and thus support my findings.

Table A5.5. Additional random party intercept

	<i>Dependent variable: Proportion of issues on which group_i gained support of party_j</i>	
	(A5.5)	(A5.6)
Business group	.001 (.37)	-1.43** (.60)
Government party	-.38 (.55)	.50 (.46)
Party left-right position	-.68 (.63)	-3.35*** (.98)
Business group* Government party	1.64*** (.55)	
Business group* Party left-right position		4.30*** (1.14)
Constant	-3.54*** (1.12)	-2.86** (1.13)
Group intercept variance	.72	.66
Party intercept variance	.01	.01
Observations	577	577
Log Likelihood	-244.42	-241.33
AIC	524.84	518.66

*Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses. The models include all previously used control variables, but their coefficients are not displayed because they do not differ meaningfully. Full models available from author. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).*

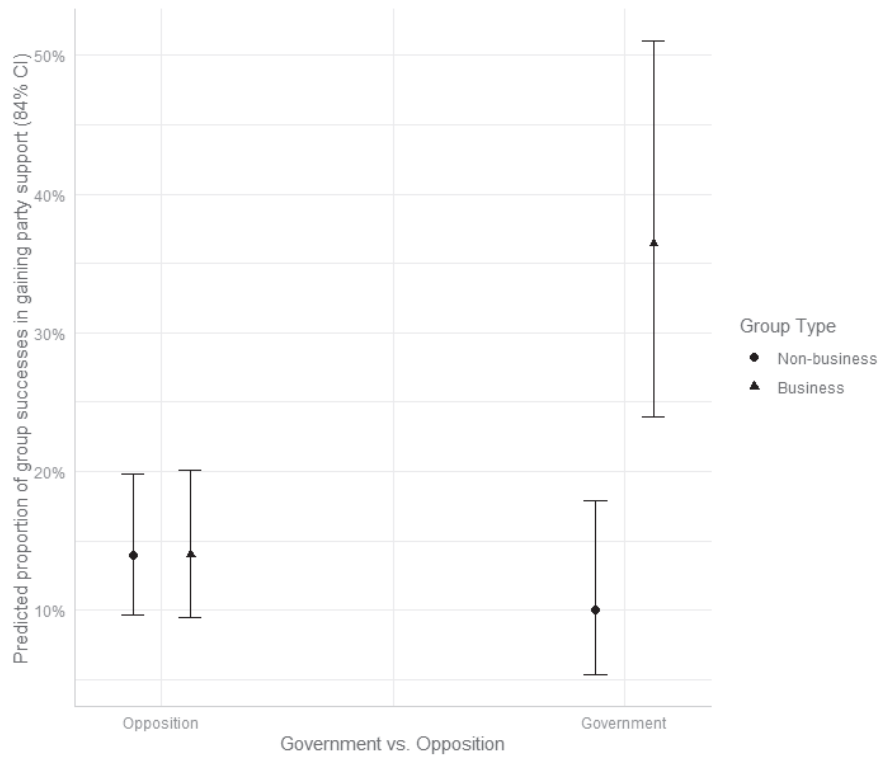


Figure A5.6. The privileged position of business and party support based on Model A5.5; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

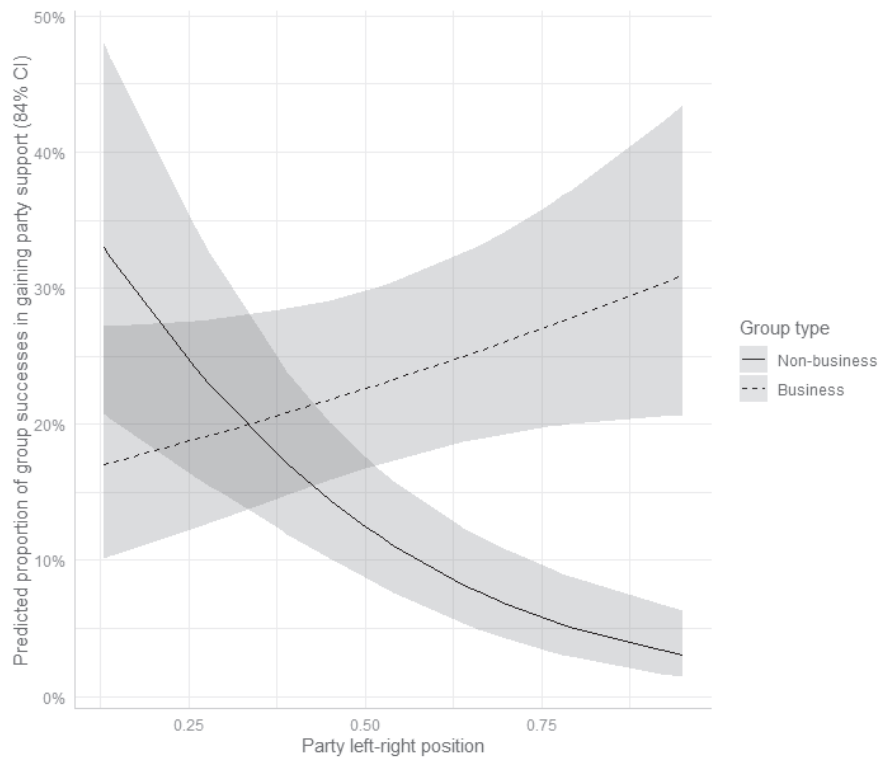


Figure A5.7. Ideological alignment and party support based on Model A5.6; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

Table A5.6. Linear probability model

	<i>Dependent variable: Proportion of issues on which group_i gained support of party_j</i>	
	(A5.7)	(A5.8)
Business group	-.02 (.05)	-.13** (.07)
Government party	-.02 (.05)	.11** (.05)
Party left-right position	-.14** (.06)	-.34*** (.08)
Business group* Government party	.27*** (.05)	
Business group* Party left-right position		.37*** (.09)
Constant	0.07 (.13)	.09 (.13)
Group intercept variance	.04	.04
Observations	577	577
REML	342.4	353.3
AIC	378.4	389.3

*Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses. The models include all previously used control variables, but their coefficients are not displayed because they do not differ meaningfully. Full models available from author. Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).*

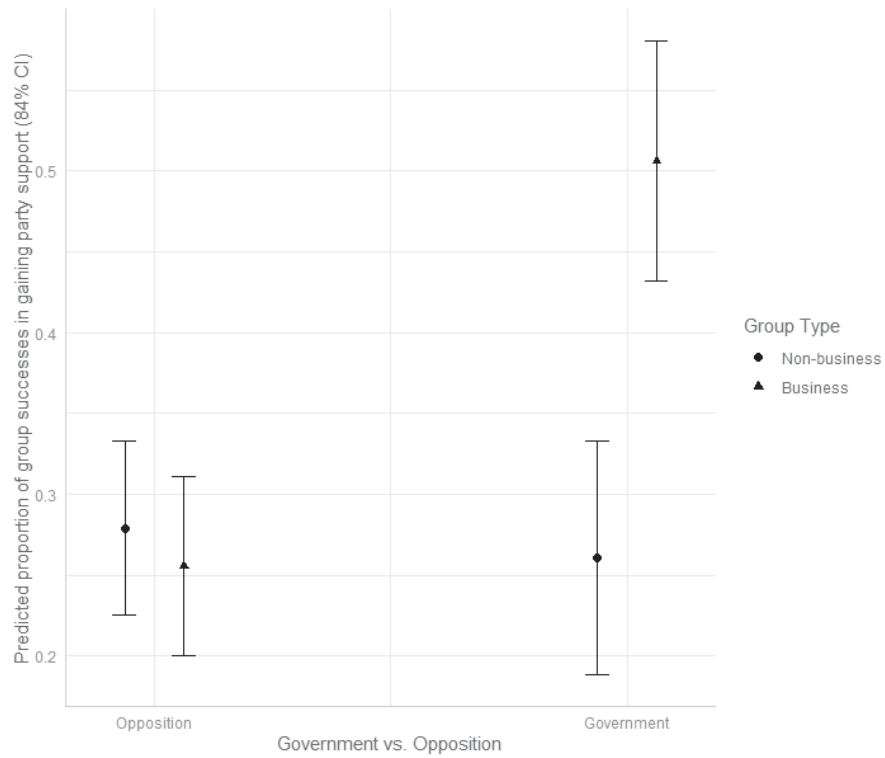


Figure A5.8. The privileged position of business and party support based on Model A5.7; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).

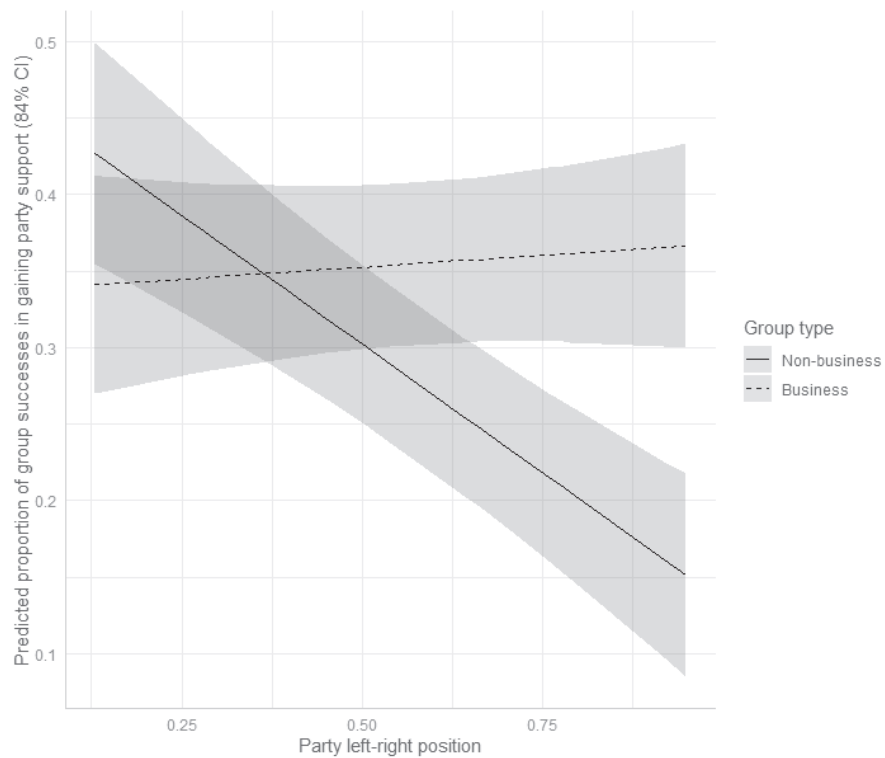


Figure A5.9. Ideological alignment and party support based on Model A5.8; Source: Own calculations based on AIG data (McKay et al. 2021).



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English summary

The activities of interest groups and political parties affect the outcomes of struggles around almost each and every political problem democratic societies may face. Together these two types of political organizations wield exceptional influence over the question which issues will receive political attention, how conflicts around these issues will evolve, and who, eventually, will secure favorable policy outcomes. In this process, interest groups and parties play distinct roles, and they play these roles sometimes better and sometimes worse. Interest groups, acting on behalf of their membership or supporters, provide necessary political and policy-related information to political decisionmakers. The great flaw of interest group politics is that some societal interests – those of businesses, institutions, and citizens with higher socioeconomic status – are much more likely to be effectively represented through the interest group system than others. Political parties in turn, being legitimized through their participation in democratic elections, control the power of government, and in this role make collectively binding decisions. They may find it increasingly difficult though to combine the responsibility that this entails with being responsive to the electorate. Given their strengths and weaknesses, the interaction of both critically shapes the democratic political process.

Despite the vital role that interest groups and political parties jointly play in democratic politics, the current literature lacks a systematic assessment of the question to what extent they balance out or aggravate each other's strengths and flaws. While a growing body of research has started to investigate their interactions at a general, organizational level, we need to better understand and explain the politics of interest groups and parties in the context of concrete policy issues. After all, these issue-level politics produce outcomes that are tangible for many of us. With this dissertation I set out to provide such an issue-level perspective on the interactions between interest groups and political parties. I seek to answer the question how and why interest groups and political parties interact in several aspects of issue-level politics and what this tells us about the way they attenuate or aggravate each other's normative strengths and flaws. To do so, I analyze various aspects of their interaction in the context of concrete policy issues in four established Western democracies. Data collected for the *Agendas and Interest Groups* project on the political activities of roughly 330 groups and political parties in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, in the context of more than 1,700 concrete policy issues form the basis for this.

As there are many potential forms of interaction between interest groups and parties one could analyze, I focus on two key aspects, or phases, of issue-level politics. On the one hand, I investigate interaction in the context of agenda-setting politics, and on the other hand, I examine the politics around issues that are already being processed in the political system. These analyses provide a number of empirical findings, all of which emphasize that conflict and cooperation between interest groups and parties on specific policy questions are ubiquitous, follow distinct issue-specific dynamics, but also show signs of a business group advantage that characterizes many other aspects of interest group politics as well.

Focusing on the agenda setting potential of interest groups, I start out by analyzing the conditions under which interest groups and parties organize the same set of issues into the political system, and which issues get organized by interest groups alone (Chapter 2). This analysis reveals that interest groups in all four countries have a considerable potential to lend a voice to societal concerns that are not represented by viable political parties: almost half of the issues they work on do not feature on the agendas of any political party represented in parliament. When it comes to explaining which kind of issues are organized into politics by both types of organizations, I find that issues that attract greater crowds of other organizations, polarize the interest group community, and are more salient to the public are more likely to be found on the agendas of both interest groups and parties. Moreover, groups representing the interests of businesses more frequently work on issues that are unique to their own agenda.

Leaving agenda-setting politics behind, I move on to study how interest groups and political parties interact in the context of issues that are already on the political agenda. To begin, I investigate how and why interest groups react to party-political dynamics around the issues they are concerned with. I analyze whether party-political conflict affects interest groups' issue attention and whether it does so differently for business and non-business groups (Chapter 3). Irrespective of country context, I find that business interest groups, but not non-business groups, increase their attention to issues on which conflict among parties intensified. Differences in the nature of the interests represented seem to be at the root of this finding.

Once interest groups are politically active on an issue and lobby political parties in order to further their interests, they need to determine their optimal lobby targeting strategy, irrespective of whether they were triggered into action by conflict among parties in the first place, or not. Thus I investigate the question under what conditions and why interest groups contact party-political supporters or opponents (Chapter 4). Focusing my analysis on Dutch

interest groups and parties, I find that interest groups' preferred strategy is to target their party-political allies, but that they contact their political opponents as well, particularly when issues are more contentious. As a plausible mechanism connecting conflict around issues to a broadly-aimed lobby targeting strategy, I identify interest groups' desire to remain recognized as prominent and consequential actors in relation to the issues they are working on, which comes under threat given higher levels of conflict.

I concluded this tour of some key aspects of the interest group and party politics surrounding concrete policy issues with an analysis of the conditions under which groups gain support for their positions by political parties (Chapter 5). I inquire which groups are more likely to gain party support for their positions on specific policy questions and why. My analyses demonstrate that business groups enjoy a slight advantage when it comes to gaining support by political parties. This advantage is due to their privileged relations with government parties, but also their ability to gain support across the ideological spectrum. Non-business groups, in contrast, are neither privileged by government nor opposition, and rely heavily on their ideological allies to gain support, and are thus less likely to gain support overall.

In short, interest groups and parties interact in various ways when they engage in politics around concrete, *ordinary* policy issues, and are part of each other's salient political environment. When interacting around concrete policy issues, the behavior of groups and parties is not guided by large-scale ideological conflict, elections, or the need to survive as organizations exclusively. Rather, in issue-level politics interest groups and parties look beyond these factors and take into account the peculiarities of the issues they are working on.

Together, all these findings have a number of important implications. The good news first: the empirical chapters of this dissertation all demonstrate that interest groups, by and large, make a positive contribution to democratic politics. They interact with a broad set of political parties and relay crucial information to policy makers and governments. They do so on issues that are already being processed in the political system, but also introduce new issues into politics that might not get represented if it were not for their action. Through this, interest groups improve political parties' ability to govern in a way that is 'efficient, effective, and responsive' (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Political parties, in turn, seem to be in a better representative state, than is often feared. This dissertation shows that even with less capabilities to aggregate and translate societal interests *from the bottom up* within their organization, contemporary political parties are in the position to be substantively representative of many of them. (Most) political parties, through their interaction with interest

groups, are very much aware of and receptive to societal concerns, and work hard to reconcile them with the demands of governing responsibly. In many aspects, interest groups and parties interact to the benefit of democracy and balance out each other's flaws in many ways.

Unfortunately, there is also some bad news: in some aspects interest groups and parties do not counteract, but reinforce each other's weaknesses and this poses a serious problem for democracy. Throughout the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I find that business interest groups dominate issue-level politics to the disadvantage of non-business groups. At the very least this implies that the process of information provision by interest groups comes with a pro-business bias that might translate into less efficient, less effective, and less responsive government than ideally hoped. Moreover, in combination with the fact that political parties and policy outcomes are frequently less responsive to the same kind of interests that are disadvantaged in the interest group system, this implies that some societal concerns are systematically less well represented by both. This alignment of interest group and party bias creates a significant problem for democracy as it threatens crucial democratic values such as equal representation and equal policy influence. To tackle this problem, political parties could institutionalize and formalize norms of equal access throughout the policy making process and actively invite disadvantaged groups to participate. In doing so, political parties could counteract the business group dominance in issue-level politics, and diminish the risk of unequal policy influence.

Nederlandse samenvatting

De activiteiten van belangengroepen en politieke partijen beïnvloeden de uitkomsten van conflicten rond bijna elk politiek probleem waarmee democratische samenlevingen te maken kunnen krijgen. Samen hebben deze twee soorten politieke organisaties een vergaande invloed op de vraag welke kwesties politieke aandacht zullen krijgen, hoe conflicten rond deze kwesties zullen ontwikkelen, en wie uiteindelijk gunstige beleidsuitkomsten zal veiligstellen. In dit proces spelen belangengroepen en partijen verschillende rollen, en zij vervullen deze rollen op sommige vlakken goed en sommige vlakken minder goed. Belangengroepen leveren namens hun leden of achterban noodzakelijke politieke en beleidsgelateerde informatie aan politieke besluitvormers. De grote tekortkoming van belangengroepenpolitiek is dat sommige maatschappelijke belangen – die van bedrijven, instituties en burgers met een hogere sociaaleconomische status – veel meer kans hebben om effectief vertegenwoordigd te worden via het belangengroepensysteem dan andere. Politieke partijen, op hun beurt gelegitimeerd door hun deelname aan democratische verkiezingen, controleren de macht van de regering en nemen in die rol collectief bindende besluiten. Zij kunnen het echter steeds moeilijker krijgen om de verantwoordelijkheid die dit met zich meebrengt, te combineren met het vertegenwoordigen van het electoraat. Doordat beide systemen sterke en zwakke punten hebben geeft juist de interactie tussen beide op kritische wijze vorm aan het democratische politieke proces.

Ondanks de vitale rol die belangengroepen en politieke partijen gezamenlijk spelen in de democratische politiek, ontbreekt het in de huidige literatuur aan een systematische beoordeling van de vraag in hoeverre zij elkaars sterke en zwakke punten compenseren dan wel versterken. Hoewel er steeds meer onderzoek wordt gedaan naar hun interacties op algemeen, organisatorisch niveau, is het van belang om de politiek van belangengroepen en partijen beter te begrijpen en verklaren in de context van concrete beleidskwesties. Deze politiek op issue-niveau produceert immers resultaten die voor velen van ons juist duidelijk voelbaar zijn. Met dit proefschrift wil ik een dergelijk perspectief bieden op de interacties tussen belangengroepen en politieke partijen. Ik probeer een antwoord te geven op de vraag hoe en waarom belangengroepen en politieke partijen met elkaar interageren in verschillende aspecten van politiek op issue-niveau, en wat dit ons vertelt over de manier waarop ze elkaars normatieve sterktes en gebreken verzachten of verergeren. Daartoe analyseer ik verschillende aspecten van hun interactie in de context van concrete beleidskwesties in vier gevestigde Westerse democratieën. Gegevens verzameld voor het *Agendas and Interest Groups* project

over de politieke activiteiten van ruwweg 330 belangengroepen en politieke partijen in Duitsland, Nederland, het Verenigd Koninkrijk en de Verenigde Staten, in de context van meer dan 1700 concrete beleidskwesties vormen hiervoor de basis.

Omdat er vele mogelijke vormen van interactie tussen belangengroepen en partijen zijn die men zou kunnen analyseren, concentreer ik me op twee belangrijke aspecten, of fasen, van politiek op issue-niveau. Enerzijds onderzoek ik de interactie in de context van agendavormende politiek, en anderzijds onderzoek ik de politiek rond issues die al in behandeling zijn in het politieke systeem. Deze analyses leveren een aantal empirische bevindingen op, die allemaal benadrukken dat conflict en samenwerking tussen belangengroepen en partijen over specifieke beleidskwesties alomtegenwoordig zijn, een aparte issue-specifieke dynamiek volgen, maar ook tekenen vertonen van een voordeel voor het bedrijfsleven dat ook veel andere aspecten van belangengroepenpolitiek kenmerkt.

Met de nadruk op het agendasettingpotentieel van belangengroepen analyseer ik allereerst de voorwaarden waaronder belangengroepen en partijen dezelfde reeks onderwerpen in het politieke systeem organiseren, en welke onderwerpen door belangengroepen alleen worden georganiseerd (hoofdstuk 2). Uit deze analyse blijkt dat belangengroepen in alle vier de landen over een aanzienlijk potentieel beschikken om een stem te geven aan maatschappelijke vraagstukken die niet door relevante politieke partijen worden vertegenwoordigd: bijna de helft van de kwesties waarmee zij zich bezighouden, komt niet voor op de agenda's van enige politieke partij die in het parlement is vertegenwoordigd. Als het gaat om de vraag welke kwesties door beide soorten organisaties in de politiek worden georganiseerd, dan blijkt dat kwesties die een grotere menigte van andere organisaties aantrekken, polariserend werken binnen de belangengroepengemeenschap en belangrijker zijn voor het publiek meer kans maken om op de agenda's van zowel belangengroepen als partijen te worden aangetroffen. Bovendien werken groepen die de belangen van bedrijven behartigen vaker aan kwesties die uniek zijn voor hun eigen agenda.

De agendavormende politiek achter me latend, ga ik verder met het bestuderen van de interactie tussen belangengroepen en politieke partijen in de context van onderwerpen die al op de politieke agenda staan. Om te beginnen onderzoek ik hoe en waarom belangengroepen reageren op de partijpolitieke dynamiek rond de onderwerpen waar zij zich mee bezighouden. Ik analyseer of partijpolitieke conflicten van invloed zijn op de mate van aandacht die belangengroepen aan hun onderwerpen besteden en of dit verschillend is voor groepen die al dan niet het bedrijfsleven vertegenwoordigen (hoofdstuk 3). Ongeacht de context van het land, vind ik dat belangengroepen uit het bedrijfsleven, in tegenstelling tot groepen die

andere belangen vertegenwoordigen, hun aandacht vergroten voor onderwerpen waarover het conflict tussen partijen intensiever is geworden. Verschillen in de aard van de vertegenwoordigde belangen lijken aan de basis te liggen van deze bevinding.

Zodra belangengroepen politiek actief zijn op een bepaald gebied en lobbyen bij politieke partijen om hun belangen te behartigen, moeten ze hun optimale lobbystrategie bepalen, ongeacht of zij al dan niet door conflicten tussen partijen tot actie worden aangezet. Daarom onderzoek ik vervolgens de vraag onder welke voorwaarden en waarom belangengroepen contact zoeken met partijpolitieke voor- of tegenstanders (hoofdstuk 4). Uit mijn analyse van Nederlandse belangengroepen en partijen blijkt dat belangengroepen zich bij voorkeur richten op hun partijpolitieke medestanders, maar dat zij ook contact opnemen met hun politieke tegenstanders, met name wanneer het om meer controversiële kwesties gaat. Als een plausibel mechanisme dat conflicten rond issues verbindt met een breed gerichte lobbystrategie, identificeer ik de wens van belangengroepen om erkend te blijven als prominente en invloedrijke actoren in relatie tot de onderwerpen waar zij zich mee bezighouden, hetgeen onder druk komt te staan bij een hoger conflictniveau omtrent een politiek vraagstuk.

Ik sluit deze rondgang langs enkele belangrijke aspecten van de belangengroep- en partijpolitiek rond concrete beleidskwesties af met een analyse van de voorwaarden waaronder groepen steun voor hun standpunten verwerven bij politieke partijen (hoofdstuk 5). Ik onderzoek welke groepen meer kans hebben om partijsteun te krijgen voor hun standpunten over specifieke beleidskwesties en waarom. Uit mijn analyses blijkt dat bedrijfsgroepen een licht voordeel hebben bij het verwerven van steun door politieke partijen. Dit voordeel is te danken aan hun bevoorrechte relaties met regeringspartijen, maar ook aan hun vermogen om steun te verwerven in het gehele ideologische spectrum. Groeperingen die niet-zakelijke belangen vertegenwoordigen daarentegen worden noch door de regering noch door de oppositie bevoorrecht en zijn voor het verwerven van steun sterk afhankelijk van hun ideologische bondgenoten, waardoor zij over het geheel genomen minder kans maken op steun.

Kortom, belangengroepen en partijen interageren op verschillende manieren wanneer zij politiek bedrijven rond concrete, gewone beleidskwesties, en maken deel uit van elkaars betekenisvolle politieke omgeving. Bij de interactie rond concrete beleidskwesties wordt het gedrag van groepen en partijen niet uitsluitend geleid door grootschalige ideologische conflicten, verkiezingen, of de noodzaak om als organisatie te overleven. Integendeel, in de

politiek op issue-niveau kijken belangengroepen en partijen verder dan deze factoren en houden zij rekening met de eigenaardigheden van de kwesties waarmee zij zich bezighouden.

Samengenomen hebben al deze bevindingen een aantal belangrijke implicaties. Eerst het goede nieuws: de empirische hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift tonen allemaal aan dat belangengroepen over het algemeen een positieve bijdrage leveren aan de democratische politiek. Ze werken samen met een breed scala aan politieke partijen en geven cruciale informatie door aan beleidsmakers en regeringen. Ze doen dat over onderwerpen die al in het politieke systeem worden verwerkt, maar brengen ook nieuwe onderwerpen in de politiek die zonder hun optreden misschien niet aan bod zouden komen. Hierdoor verbeteren belangengroepen het vermogen van politieke partijen om te regeren op een manier die 'efficient, effective en responsive' is (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Politieke partijen lijken op hun beurt in een betere representatieve staat te verkeren, dan vaak wordt gevreesd. Dit proefschrift laat zien dat zelfs met minder mogelijkheden om maatschappelijke belangen van onderop te aggregeren en te vertalen binnen hun organisatie, hedendaagse politieke partijen in de positie verkeren om inhoudelijk representatief te zijn voor veel van deze belangen. (De meeste) politieke partijen zijn zich, via hun interactie met belangengroepen, zeer bewust van en ontvankelijk voor maatschappelijke zorgen, en werken hard om deze te verenigen met de eisen van verantwoord besturen. In veel opzichten werken belangengroepen en partijen samen ten voordele van de democratie en compenseren zij elkaars tekortkomingen op vele manieren.

Helaas is er ook slecht nieuws: in sommige opzichten gaan belangengroepen en partijen elkaars zwakke punten niet tegen, maar versterken ze elkaar, en dat vormt een ernstig probleem voor de democratie. Door de empirische hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift heen, stel ik vast dat belangengroepen uit het bedrijfsleven de politiek op issue-niveau domineren ten nadele van groepen die andere belangen vertegenwoordigen. Dit impliceert op zijn minst dat het proces van informatievoorziening door belangengroepen gepaard gaat met een pro-zakelijke vooringenomenheid die zich kan vertalen in een minder efficiënte, minder effectieve en minder responsieve overheid dan idealiter gehoopt. In combinatie met het feit dat politieke partijen en beleidsresultaten vaak minder ontvankelijk zijn voor dezelfde soort belangen die in het belangengroepensysteem benadeeld worden, impliceert dit bovendien dat sommige maatschappelijke belangen systematisch minder goed door beide vertegenwoordigd worden. Deze samenloop van gebreken van belangengroepen en partijen vormt een belangrijk probleem voor de democratie, omdat het een bedreiging vormt voor cruciale democratische waarden als gelijke vertegenwoordiging en gelijke beleidsinvloed. Om dit probleem aan te

pakken zouden politieke partijen normen van gelijke toegang tot het gehele beleidsvormingsproces kunnen institutionaliseren en formaliseren en achtergestelde groepen actief kunnen uitnodigen om deel te nemen aan dit proces. Op die manier zouden politieke partijen de dominantie van het bedrijfsleven in de politiek kunnen tegengaan en het risico van ongelijke beleidsinvloed verminderen.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Aktivitäten von Interessengruppen und politischen Parteien beeinflussen den Ausgang von Konflikten um fast jedes politische Problem, mit dem demokratische Gesellschaften konfrontiert werden können. Gemeinsam üben diese beiden Typen politischer Organisationen einen außergewöhnlichen Einfluss auf die Frage aus, welche Themen politische Aufmerksamkeit erhalten, wie sich Konflikte um diese Themen entwickeln und wer letztendlich günstige politische Ergebnisse erzielen wird. In diesem Prozess spielen Interessengruppen und Parteien unterschiedliche Rollen und sie spielen diese Rollen in mancher Hinsicht besser und in anderer Hinsicht schlechter. Interessengruppen, die im Namen ihrer Mitglieder oder Unterstützer handeln, liefern politischen Entscheidungsträgern notwendige politische Informationen und sachliche Expertise. Der große Makel der Interessengruppenpolitik besteht darin, dass einige gesellschaftliche Interessen – die von Unternehmen, Institutionen und Bürgern mit höherem sozioökonomischen Status – durch das Interessengruppensystem viel wirksamer vertreten werden als andere. Politische Parteien wiederum, die durch ihre Teilnahme an demokratischen Wahlen legitimiert sind, kontrollieren die Regierungsgewalt und treffen in dieser Rolle kollektiv verbindliche Entscheidungen. Es scheint ihnen jedoch zunehmend schwerer zu fallen, die damit verbundene Verantwortlichkeit mit einer akkuraten Repräsentation der Wählerschaft zu vereinbaren. Angesichts dieser Stärken und Schwächen prägt das Zusammenspiel beider Akteure den demokratischen politischen Prozess auf entscheidenden Art und Weise.

Trotz der wichtigen Rolle, die Interessengruppen und politische Parteien gemeinsam spielen, fehlt in der aktuellen Literatur eine systematische Bewertung der Frage, inwieweit sie die Stärken und Schwächen des jeweils anderen ausgleichen oder verschärfen. Während eine wachsende Zahl von Forschern damit begonnen hat, ihre Interaktionen auf einer allgemeinen, organisatorischen Ebene zu untersuchen, müssen wir die Politik von Interessengruppen und Parteien im Kontext konkreter politischer Fragen besser verstehen und erklären. Schließlich führt Politik auf der Ebene von spezifischen Problemen zu Ergebnissen, die für viele von uns direkt greifbar sind. Mit dieser Dissertation biete ich eine solche themenbezogene Perspektive auf die Interaktionen zwischen Interessengruppen und politischen Parteien. Ich versuche eine Antwort auf die Frage zu formulieren, wie und warum Interessengruppen und politische Parteien in verschiedenen Aspekten der Politik auf Sachebene interagieren und was dies über die Art und Weise aussagt, wie sie die normativen Stärken und Schwächen des jeweils anderen abschwächen oder verschärfen. Zu diesem Zweck analysiere ich verschiedene

Aspekte ihrer Interaktion im Kontext konkreter politischer Themen in vier etablierten westlichen Demokratien. Grundlage dafür sind Daten, die im Rahmen des Projekts *Agendas and Interest Groups* über die politischen Aktivitäten von rund 330 Gruppen und Parteien in Deutschland, den Niederlanden, dem Vereinigten Königreich und den Vereinigten Staaten im Kontext von mehr als 1.700 konkreten politischen Themen erhoben wurden.

Da es viele potenzielle Formen der Interaktion zwischen Interessengruppen und Parteien gibt, die man analysieren könnte, konzentriere ich mich auf zwei Schlüsselaspekte oder Phasen der Politik auf Themenebene. Zum einen untersuche ich Interaktionen im Rahmen der Agenda-Setting-Politik und zum anderen die Politik rund um Themen, die bereits im politischen System bearbeitet werden. Diese Analysen liefern eine Reihe empirischer Befunde, die allesamt betonen, dass Konflikte und Zusammenarbeit zwischen Interessengruppen und Parteien im Kontext konkreter politischer Fragen allgegenwärtig sind, einer ausgeprägten themenspezifischen Dynamik folgen, aber auch Anzeichen eines Unternehmensvorteils aufweisen, der auch für viele andere Aspekte der Interessengruppenpolitik charakteristisch ist.

Zunächst konzentriere ich mich auf das Agenda-Setting-Potenzial von Interessengruppen und analysiere die Bedingungen, unter denen Interessengruppen und Parteien dieselben Themen ins politische System einbringen, und welche Themen ausschließlich durch Interessengruppen organisiert werden (Kapitel 2). Diese Analyse zeigt, dass Interessengruppen in allen vier Ländern ein beträchtliches Potenzial haben, gesellschaftlichen Anliegen eine Stimme zu verleihen, die nicht von etablierten politischen Parteien vertreten werden: Fast die Hälfte der Themen, an denen sie arbeiten, stehen nicht auf der Agenda einer im Parlament vertretenen politischen Partei. Wenn es darum geht zu erklären, welche Themen von beiden politischen Organisationen in die Politik eingebracht werden, stelle ich fest, dass Themen, die eine größere Anzahl von anderen Organisationen anziehen, die Interessengruppengemeinschaft polarisieren und für die Öffentlichkeit von größerer Bedeutung sind, mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit auf den Agenden beider Akteure zu finden sind. Darüber hinaus arbeiten Gruppen, die die Interessen von Unternehmen vertreten, häufiger an Themen, die nur in ihrer eigenen Agenda zu finden sind.

Nachdem ich die Agenda-Setting-Politik hinter mir gelassen habe, untersuche ich nun, wie Interessengruppen und politische Parteien bei Themen interagieren, die bereits auf der politischen Tagesordnung stehen. Zunächst analysiere ich, wie und warum Interessengruppen auf parteipolitische Dynamiken reagieren im Kontext von Themen, mit denen sie befasst sind. Ich untersuche, ob parteipolitische Konflikte die Aufmerksamkeit von

Interessengruppen für bestimmte Themen beeinflussen und ob dies für Unternehmens- und Nicht-Unternehmensgruppen unterschiedlich ist (Kapitel 3). Unabhängig vom Länderkontext stelle ich fest, dass Interessengruppen aus der Wirtschaft ihre Aufmerksamkeit für Themen erhöhen, bei denen sich der Konflikt zwischen Parteien verschärft hat. Gruppierungen, die keine Wirtschaftsinteressen vertreten, reagieren hingegen nicht auf parteipolitische Konflikte. Unterschiede in der Art der vertretenen Interessen scheinen die Ursache für dieses Ergebnis zu sein.

Sobald Interessengruppen politisch aktiv sind und Lobbyarbeit bei politischen Parteien betreiben, um ihre Interessen durchzusetzen, müssen sie ihre optimale Lobbystrategie festlegen. Dies tun sie unabhängig davon, ob parteipolitische Konflikte sie zum Handeln veranlassen haben oder nicht. Daher untersuche ich die Frage, unter welchen Bedingungen und aus welchen Gründen Interessengruppen Kontakt zu parteipolitischen Unterstützern oder Gegnern aufnehmen (Kapitel 4). Ich konzentriere mich bei dieser Analyse auf niederländische Interessengruppen und Parteien und stelle fest, dass die bevorzugte Strategie von Interessengruppen darin besteht, sich an ihre parteipolitischen Verbündeten zu wenden. Gleichzeitig nehmen sie aber auch mit ihren politischen Gegnern Kontakt auf, insbesondere, wenn es sich um strittige Themen handelt. Als plausiblen Mechanismus, der konfliktreiche Themen mit einer breit angelegten Lobbystrategie verbindet, identifiziere ich den Wunsch der Interessengruppen, als prominente und einflussreiche Akteure anerkannt zu bleiben, was bei einem höheren Konfliktniveau in Gefahr gerät.

Ich schließe diesen Rundgang entlang einiger Schlüsselaspekte der Interessengruppen- und Parteipolitik auf Sachebene mit einer Analyse der Bedingungen ab, unter denen Interessengruppen Unterstützung für ihre Positionen durch politische Parteien erhalten (Kapitel 5). Ich gehe der Frage nach, welche Gruppen mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit die Unterstützung von Parteien für ihre Positionen in bestimmten politischen Fragen erhalten und warum. Meine Analysen zeigen, dass Unternehmensgruppen einen leichten Vorteil genießen, wenn es darum geht, Unterstützung durch politische Parteien zu erhalten. Dieser Vorteil ist auf ihre privilegierten Beziehungen zu Regierungsparteien zurückzuführen, aber auch auf ihre Fähigkeit, Unterstützung aus dem gesamten ideologischen Spektrum zu erwerben. Gruppen, die nicht der Wirtschaft angehören, werden dagegen weder von der Regierung noch von der Opposition privilegiert und sind in hohem Maße auf ihre ideologischen Verbündeten angewiesen, um Unterstützung zu erhalten, so dass die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass sie Unterstützung erhalten, insgesamt geringer ist.

Kurz gesagt: Interessengruppen und Parteien interagieren auf vielerlei Art und Weise, wenn sie sich mit konkreten, alltäglichen politischen Fragen beschäftigen, und sind Teil des politisch bedeutsamen Umfelds des jeweils anderen. Im Kontext konkreter politischer Themen wird das Verhalten von Interessengruppen und Parteien nicht von großflächigen ideologischen Konflikten geleitet, von Wahlen oder der Notwendigkeit, als Organisationen zu überleben. Vielmehr blicken Interessengruppen und Parteien bei der Politik auf Themenebene über diese Faktoren hinaus und berücksichtigen die Besonderheiten der Themen, an denen sie arbeiten.

Zusammengenommen haben all diese Ergebnisse eine Reihe von wichtigen Implikationen. Die gute Nachricht zuerst: Die empirischen Kapitel dieser Dissertation zeigen, dass Interessengruppen im Großen und Ganzen einen positiven Beitrag zur demokratischen Politik leisten. Sie interagieren mit einem breiten Spektrum politischer Parteien und geben wichtige Informationen an politische Entscheidungsträger und Regierungen weiter. Sie tun dies in Bezug auf Themen, die bereits im politischen System bearbeitet werden, bringen aber auch neue Themen in die Politik ein, die ohne ihre Tätigkeit möglicherweise nicht vertreten würden. Auf diese Weise verbessern Interessengruppen die Fähigkeit der politischen Parteien, "efficient, effective, and responsive" zu regieren (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Politische Parteien wiederum scheinen repräsentativer zu sein, als oft befürchtet wird. Diese Dissertation zeigt, dass gegenwärtige politische Parteien in der Lage sind, viele gesellschaftliche Interessen substantiell zu repräsentieren, trotz ihrer geringeren Fähigkeit, diese selbstständig innerhalb ihrer Organisation im Sinne einer ‚bottom-up‘ Herangehensweise zu aggregieren und zu übersetzen. (Die meisten) politischen Parteien sind sich durch ihre Interaktion mit Interessengruppen vieler gesellschaftlicher Belange sehr wohl bewusst und empfänglich für diese und bemühen sich, sie mit den Anforderungen einer verantwortungsvollen Regierungsführung in Einklang zu bringen. In vielerlei Hinsicht wirken Interessengruppen und Parteien zum Nutzen der Demokratie zusammen und gleichen ihre gegenseitigen Schwächen in vielerlei Hinsicht aus.

Leider gibt es auch eine schlechte Nachricht: In einigen Aspekten gleichen Interessengruppen und Parteien die Schwächen des jeweils anderen nicht aus, sondern verstärken sie, was ein ernstes Problem für die Demokratie darstellt. In allen empirischen Kapiteln dieser Dissertation stelle ich fest, dass Interessengruppen aus der Wirtschaft die Politik auf Sachebene zum Nachteil von Nicht-Wirtschaftsgruppen dominieren. Dies bedeutet zumindest, dass der Prozess der Informationsbereitstellung durch Interessengruppen einer wirtschaftsfreundlichen Ausrichtung folgt, die Regierungshandlungen weniger effizient,

weniger effektiv und weniger responsiv machen könnte, als idealerweise erhofft. In Verbindung mit der Tatsache, dass die gleichen Interessen, die im Interessengruppensystem benachteiligt werden, sich auch in der Programmatik politischer Parteien und in sachpolitischen Ergebnissen seltener zurückfinden lassen, bedeutet dies, dass einige gesellschaftliche Anliegen systematisch schlechter von beiden repräsentiert werden. Dieses Parallellaufen von Problemen der Interessengruppen- und Parteipolitik stellt ein erhebliches Problem für die Demokratie dar, da es zentrale demokratische Werte wie das gleiche Recht auf politische Repräsentation und das gleiche Recht auf politischen Einfluss bedroht. Um dieses Problem anzugehen, könnten politische Parteien Normen des gleichberechtigten Zugangs im gesamten politischen Entscheidungsprozess institutionalisieren und formalisieren und benachteiligte Gruppen aktiv zur Teilnahme einladen. Auf diese Weise könnten politische Parteien der Dominanz von Wirtschaftsgruppen in der Politik auf Sachebene entgegenwirken und das Risiko eines ungleichen politischen Einflusses verringern.

