Chapter 2
The InterCov Project

To trace the influence production process of viral lobbying, we rely on data collected in two surveys we conducted in summer 2020 and summer 2021 in eight European polities: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the European Union. As will be discussed in detail in this chapter, during this period of investigation, viral politics dominated day-to-day public policymaking and interest group activities in these polities.

As the pandemic unfolded, professionals from different backgrounds probably saw and interpreted what was happening through their specific lens. So did we as scholars of interest groups and public policy and started the InterCov project (short for: Interest Representation during the Coronavirus Crisis). Although there were many developments we could not anticipate in the spring of 2020 when the pandemic violently hit Europe, we were certain that the activities of interest groups were going to play a major role in shaping how individuals, organisations and whole countries would cope with the repercussions of the virus. We, therefore, wanted to document their activities, and shed light on patterns and potential biases in interest representation during the pandemic. This is why the project unfolded along with real-world events, in a quicker manner than is typical for academic research: In April 2020, the initial project idea was developed by Wiebke Junk, and later that month our research team started to draft the first cross-national survey (team members: Ellis Aizenberg, Joost Berkhout, Michele Crepaz, Marcel Hanegraaff and Wiebke Junk). By early June, we were able to field the first wave of our cross-country survey to capture what European interest groups were going through at the time (Junk et al. 2020).

As interest group researchers, we were familiar with some of their challenges. We also had several initial ideas about patterns in lobbying after the outbreak of the pandemic, which we were interested in studying. When designing our first survey, for example, we expected business associations and firms to lobby for economic rescue packages to make up for losses in closed sectors due to the pandemic. We also imagined trade unions and associations of professionals mobilising on out-of-work benefits or issues of health and safety standards at work, or

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2 Survey-based research is a popular and wide-spread approach in interest group research (Dür and Mateo 2016; Beyers et al. 2016; Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020; Allern and Hansen 2022), and we built on these existing practices to design and field our surveys (Junk et al. 2020; Junk et al. 2021b). Our approach, however, also differs from standard approaches as it is tailored to capture the particularities of viral lobbying.
patient organisations advocating for health policy to protect vulnerable people from the spread of the virus. We could, however, not grasp yet how deeply the pandemic would affect interest group mobilisation, their organisational stability, the frequency and modes by which they communicated their concerns and interests to policymakers and the media, and, ultimately, how impactful such communication would be. One year after the first survey, we, hence, followed up with a second survey covering additional angles (Junk et al. 2021b). Its aim was also to help us understand how the role of interest groups had developed since the breakout of COVID-19.

The result of these efforts contribute significantly to the few existing cross-country projects on interest groups in Europe (see: CIG-survey (Beyers et al. 2020), GovLis (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018), INTERARENA (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020), PAIRDEM (Allern et al. 2022)). Our first survey in June 2020 was sent to 5,945 interest groups in the eight polities under study here. In June 2021, our second survey was distributed to 5,770 interest groups. A combined overall of roughly 1,500 unique interest groups completed our surveys with a response rate of 22.7 percent in 2020 and 14.3 percent in 2021 in the eight polities. Our analysis of viral lobbying relies on these responses. With this data, we complement previous efforts in lobbying research to address a key challenge in interest group scholarship, namely the availability of large-N cross-country data (Dür and Mateo 2016; Beyers et al. 2016; Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020; Allern and Hansen 2022). While our data is exceptionally well-suited to address the strategies, access and influence of interest groups during the pandemic, it can also help understand some more general patterns in lobbying (Junk et al. 2021a; Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Junk 2022).

In what follows, we first provide a brief description of the context conditions in the eight polities under investigation during the 18 months period under study here (March 2020–June 2021). We then describe how we selected the almost 6,000 organisations as potential participants in our surveys, discuss response rates and potential biases in the data collection process. Next, we describe the structure of the survey and its particularities to capture viral lobbying. The chapter then focuses on the three main explanatory variables that we focus on throughout the whole book as determinants in the influence production process: interest group type, lobbying resources and affectedness. We provide descriptive analyses of these factors and discuss these in detail. The following chapters then zoom in on different operationalisations of outcome variables: issue mobilisation (Chapter 3), strategies (Chapter 4), access (Chapter 5) and influence (Chapter 6). These are not discussed here but are explained in each individual chapter.
Background

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Eight European Polities

When the WHO declared the state of pandemic on the 11th of March 2020, COVID-19 was already widespread in Europe. Italy was the most affected of the European countries in the early weeks of the pandemic with an average of 5,200 new daily COVID-19 cases and a shocking daily average of 750 COVID-19 deaths by the end of March. Into the first weeks of April, the virus had propagated in all European countries causing what has been, later that year, called ‘the first wave’ of COVID-19.

The intensity of this wave varied by country. In Austria and Denmark, for example, infection and death rates never reached the levels found in Italy during this period (WHO 2022). Germany or Ireland, on the contrary, faced a steep rise in daily cases, hospitalisations, and COVID-19 deaths between the end of March and the first weeks of April. Apart from epidemiological reasons, the infection curve ‘flattened’ thanks to the introduction of policies which all European countries had put in place to prevent the spread of the virus. These fall in the category of viral policies, which we discussed in Chapter 1 of this book. These policies include, among other measures, school and workplace closures, cancellation of events, restrictions to movement and public gatherings, restriction to international travel, and the introduction of health and safety measures such as quarantine rules for infected people, social distancing and the use of face coverings and other sanitary equipment.

Of course, the timing of the introduction of such policies as well as their strictness has varied by country. However, scholars have observed levels of uniformity in the range of viral policies European countries have adopted during the first wave (Chari and Rozas 2021; Jahn 2022; Ritchie et al. 2020). For example, while school closures were in place only in Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal and France as of March 10th, such closures extended to almost all European countries by the 27th of the same month. The same pattern can be observed with the introduction of international travel restrictions, or with viral policies that – instead of preventing the spread of the virus – were put in place to support individuals and businesses affected by such restrictions. Income support measures for people out of work due to the pandemic, for example, fall in this category. These were absent in most European countries in mid-March but were rapidly introduced in all European countries by mid-April and remained in place for long time periods.

This first period of crisis management was followed by a relatively quiet interval, where infection rates dropped, COVID-19 hospitalisations and death rates
fell, and lockdown restrictions were to some extent eased (Jahn 2022). This situation was only temporary as in the autumn of 2020 the Alpha and Beta mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 (discovered in the UK and South Africa, respectively) started spreading globally, causing a second wave of COVID-19 in Europe. Scientists labelled these mutations as comparatively more infectious than the previous dominant strain, and this factor facilitated their propagation across the world, including Europe. Similar to what was observed during the first wave, countries across Europe responded with a combination of virus containment policies, such as lockdowns, and distributive policies to buffer their negative effects. In the seven European countries we analyse in this book (in addition to the EU level), approaches to viral policy tended to converge even more as the second wave unfolded. Figure 2.1 displays this trend plotting the COVID-19 Stringency Index, a policy index developed by Ritchie et al. (2020) to measure the strictness of COVID-19 lockdowns and other policies, over time.

As can been seen across all seven countries, an initial rise in policy responses to COVID-19 in the early stages of the pandemic was quickly followed by an easing of such policies during the summer of 2020. This easing was followed by the reintroduction of restrictions in the autumn as soon as infections became rampant again.

![Figure 2.1: Development of COVID-19 restrictions over time for seven countries under investigation. Source: Adapted from Jahn (2022).](image-url)
Taking both COVID-19 waves into account, however, one can still observe differences between countries. Italy, for example, which had the strictest lockdown in place in March, April and May of 2020, relaxed some of its regulations during the summer. It then introduced strict rules again, this time in line with approaches taken in Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland or Austria between October 2020 and January 2021, when the second wave of COVID-19 hit Europe. Sweden and Denmark took a comparatively looser approach to COVID-19 regulations with the latter scoring lower on the government response stringency index also during the second wave of the virus.

In the first time period, from March to May 2020, the closure of government buildings reduced opportunities for direct face-to-face lobbying. At the same time, the increased need to respond to major public policy decisions was demanding for the internal functioning of interest groups. At later stages, organisations continued to face these challenges but to a different degree or after effective adaptational responses. We account for the stage-wise development of the policy responses by means of the two-wave set-up of our survey (see details below).

In the background of the pandemic, the European Union (EU) played a key role in viral politics as well. Despite its relatively minor involvement in national lockdown policies, the EU has, for instance, provided a framework for the development of rescue packages. By late April 2020, EU member states had in fact already agreed to develop an EU-level recovery fund which was presented on May 27th and had the value of €750 billion. Another key policy at the EU-level concerned travel and movement restrictions. In October 2020, the Council of the EU adopted a recommendation for a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement of people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision informs the list of non-EU countries for which travel restrictions were in place, the implementation of passenger locator forms for travel and the creation of the EU Digital COVID certificate for vaccinated or recovered individuals. Finally, the EU has been a key player in vaccination policy. In the summer of 2020, the European Commission conducted talks with pharmaceutical manufacturers to secure future stocks of potential COVID-19 vaccines, which later led to the signing of four contracts with AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer BioNTech and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen), as well as the implementation of a strategy to distribute purchased vaccines across the EU in 2021.

With the role of the EU in viral politics in mind, we include the European Union in our study of viral lobbying, in addition to Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. These polities were selected foremost based on the availability of comparable lists of interest group populations (Aizenberg and Hanegraaff 2020; Crepaz 2020; Crepaz and Hanegraaff 2020; Bind-
erkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2014; Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020; Naurin and Boräng 2012; Pritoni 2019). Studying them together allows us to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of lobbying during the pandemic in Europe. More generally, this set of countries is relatively similar on a number of relevant political dimensions (e.g. they are all EU member states) which makes it possible for us to study them in a single research design. At the same time, the seven countries under investigation offer a mix of different types of welfare states, types of interest mediation and electoral systems, and different government responses to the crisis. This variation broadens the likely applicability of our findings beyond the countries studied. We argue, therefore, that the sample of polities is well suited to understand the influence production process in western democracies more broadly.

Identifying Interest Groups

We aimed at selecting comparable samples of organisations and firms in the eight polities. To do so, we drew on existing lists of active organisations, such as previous research, lobbying registers, directories of associations and lists of interest group populations. Such mixture of policy-related data sources (‘top-down’) and society-based data sources (‘bottom-up’) is recommended (Berkhout et al. 2017) for research questions that cover multiple stages of influence production. When selecting organisations from these lists, we aimed for an equal distribution of different types of interest groups within each polity. We therefore constructed a comparable ‘stratified’ sample of approximately 150 business associations, 150 profession associations, 150 unions, 150 identity or ideational groups, as well as 150 large firms sourced from lists identifying the firms with the largest revenue in a country (such as fortune 500).

We opted for stratifying the sample by organisation type in order to ensure that we included a high enough number of observations per organisation type, which is important to be able to make inferences about different group types. For this reason, we ‘oversampled’, for instance, trade unions, given the total number of unions in all countries is low, compared to NGOs or business organisations. Especially considering the potentially prominent role that trade unions and profession groups might have played in representing workers affected by the pandemic, we wanted to include a sufficient number of such organisations in our sample to ensure the statistical leverage needed for modelling group type differences. For each country, our completed stratified sample included approximately 700 interest groups. To cover the large European community of interest groups, we used a larger sample of 1,407 interest groups for the EU.
In total, we identified approximately 6,000 interest groups for which we collected the contact address of the lead political or public affairs specialist or a generalist address when the former was not available. The surveys were developed and sent to potential respondents electronically using the software package Qualtrics. The first wave of the survey was in the field from early June to mid-July 2020 and was sent to 5,945 valid addresses. As we sent out the survey, we updated our lists of organizations by replacing non-valid addresses. We ended up with 5,770 addresses for our second survey wave, which was in the field between mid-June and late July 2021. For each wave, we sent three sets of reminders, each at an interval of approximately two weeks.

The overall response rate was 22.7 percent for the first survey and 14.3 percent for the second one (based on surveys completed to the end). Although relatively low in the second wave, such levels of response rates are common in interest group research (Marchetti 2015) and are comparable to other large-N survey-based lobbying projects (Dür and Mateo 2016; Beyers et al. 2020; Binderkantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020). Importantly, and as seen in Table 2.1, response rates vary considerably between countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sent surveys</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Response Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,945</td>
<td>1,351</td>
<td>22.7</td>
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<table>
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<th>Sent surveys</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Response Rate (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>1,386</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,770</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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First of all, in Nordic countries we achieved higher response rates compared to other polities, while response rates for Italy, Austria, Germany and the EU remained comparatively low. Ireland and the Netherlands find themselves in the middle of the distribution. Such variation between countries with higher and
lower participation in surveys are common, also reported in other interest group studies (e.g. Binderkrantz and Rasmussen 2015; Dür and Mateo 2016; Junk 2019).

An additional interesting observation is the decrease in the response rates (by 8.4 percent based on all responses) when comparing the first and second survey. There are several potential explanations for this. First, this could be due to an increasing COVID-19 fatigue after more than a year of pandemic. While our first survey was timed when the pandemic was a (puzzling) new reality for organisations, by 2021 organisations were used to it, and it might have been less appealing to answer questions related to the effects of the crisis. Second, the contact lists were newly updated in 2020, and re-used in 2021. In the meanwhile, some people might have moved positions, which meant that our emails were less well-targeted, and could explain part of the drop in the response rate.

In more general terms, a major concern in survey research is non-response bias, which occurs when non-respondents from a sample differ substantially from participants in the survey. This could be introduced by, for example, under-resourced organisations that do not have time to fill out our survey, interest groups that are rarely politically active and have low interest in answering a survey about lobbying, or organisations heavily affected by the pandemic that have other priorities than supporting our research. While we cannot rule out that some organisations have decided to not participate based on these (or other) grounds, we also find much variation among survey respondents in the resources available to organisations, their level of political activity and their perceived affectedness by the pandemic. Therefore, we reason that there are no stark patterns in non-responses related to our main explanatory variables of interest (as the following sections will demonstrate). With this in mind, we believe our data is suitable to offer valuable insights into viral lobbying and the influence production process more generally. We move into the description of the survey structure and the data set next.

**Structure of the Surveys and Data**

Both our surveys consist of approximately 40 questions, which collect information about interest groups’ lobbying activities before and during the pandemic, as well as details on each organisation’s characteristics and its relationships with membership, supporters and funders. In this section, we give an overview of the questions, and present our focal explanatory variables: interest group type, lobbying resources, and affectedness by the pandemic.
Question Overview

More specifically, the focus of the first survey was on interest group activities during the first months of the pandemic (Junk et al. 2020). We collected information on:

- the intensity and form of disruption caused by the pandemic for interest groups’ political activities
- interest groups’ perceived affectedness by the pandemic
- the perceived threat to organisational stability caused by the pandemic
- the frequency of using political activities (in general and on viral policies)
- the timing of political activities (that is, week and month of activity)
- the aim of political activity when targeted at viral policies
- the frequency of exchanges between interest groups and policymakers, as well as the media
- the extent to which these exchanges were initiated by policymakers
- the perceived influence of interest groups and their levels of satisfaction with political decisions and viral policies.

In our second survey (Junk et al. 2021b), we followed up on most of these aspects and collected additional information on:

- the frequency of activities aimed at maintaining organisational stability
- the sources of income of interest groups and whether income (from each source) has increased or decreased since the start of the pandemic
- the extent to which interest groups have obtained government funds during the pandemic
- the frequency of contacts initiated by policymakers and journalists.

These foci allowed us to capture the particularities of viral lobbying and, as discussed in the following empirical chapters, items for these batteries of questions are used as outcome and explanatory variables to disentangle the influence production process. With over 50 substantive questions related to lobbying practices during the pandemic, it is impossible to cover all items in this book. Hence, we focus on selected elements to trace the influence production process (see Chapter 1). A detailed description of each of the relevant items can be found in the following chapters on issue mobilisation, lobbying strategies, access and influence. The full set of questions can be found in Junk et al. (2020, 2021b).

In addition to the questions, which we tailored to the COVID-19 circumstances, we collected information about organisational characteristics as is common in interest group research. Using these items, we describe the characteristics of respondent organisations based on the three key factors, which throughout
this book are treated as potential drivers of *viral lobbying* and explanatory factors in the influence production process.

**Interest Group Type**

First, we map respondents by interest group type. More specifically, in our survey we asked interest group representatives to identify their organisation as one of seven group types: 1) company or firm; 2) business interest association; 3) association of professionals; 4) labour union; 5) NGO or cause group; 6) citizen membership association; 7) research institute, think tank or semi-public organisation. We excluded other types of organisations in case they were registered in our data sources, most notably public agencies (e.g. municipalities lobbying nationally). We then simplified these seven categories by collapsing them into three: 1) The category of *business groups and firms* covers companies and firms, business interest associations and research institutes, think tanks or semi-public organisations active on economic issues; 2) The category of *profession groups and unions* covers associations of professionals and labour unions; 3) The category of *NGOs and citizen groups* includes NGOs, cause groups, citizen membership association and research institutes, think tanks or semi-public organisations active on social issues.

Using this categorisation of interest groups, we count 470 business groups and firms (34.9%), 448 profession groups and unions (33.2%), and 430 NGOs and citizen groups (31.9%), which have completed our first survey (2020). Among the participants of our second survey (2021), we count 271 business groups and firms (32.1%), 297 profession groups and unions (35.2%) and 277 NGOs and citizen groups (32.8%). In both surveys, this represents a fairly equal distribution whereby each interest group category accounts for approximately one third of the total responses. In Figure 2.2, we display the distribution of these three interest group types by polity, that is, by the polity (i.e. one of the seven countries, or the EU level) in which the organisations are active.

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3 The number of observations in each category were distributed as follows between these survey respondents (survey 1/survey 2, respectively): 1) Company or firm (13.6%/13.8%), 2) Business interest association: (20.3%/17.4%), 3) association of professionals (21.9%/24.4%), 4) labour unions (11.3%/10.5%), NGOs or cause groups (23.9%/24.3%), citizen membership associations (5.9%/6.0%), research institute, think tank or semi-public organisation (3.3%/3.6%).

4 If respondents chose the latter category, we additionally asked them if their organisation was mostly active on social or economic issues.
As Figure 2.2 shows, the distribution of group types is not stable across polities, which indicates that the response rates of different group types varied between countries. In Sweden, for example, the proportion of profession groups and unions exceeds that of other group types, while the opposite trend is found in the European Union. Moreover, in both surveys the count of business associations and firms exceeds that of other groups in Germany, while in Ireland NGOs and citizen groups constitute the largest proportion. Overall, distributions are relatively similar between our first and second survey. An exception is the Netherlands, where we see a drop of nearly 20 percent in the responses by business associations and firms to our second survey.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) In general, the response rate among individual firms in the Netherlands is relatively low (Aizenberg 2022). The high response rate during the first wave was therefore an unexpected (but welcome) outcome, while the response rate to the second wave was more in line with previous experiences.
Lobbying Resources

A second relevant organisational characteristic we capture is the availability of resources for lobbying. In our surveys, we ask respondents to note the number of full-time staff working in public affairs in the organisation based on five answer categories: 1) one or less (e.g. one part-time); 2) one to four; 3) five to ten; 4) eleven to fifteen; 5) more than fifteen. Once again, we collapse answers in three categories, namely, Low (less than one); Medium (between one and four); and High (five or more), with roughly equal numbers of observations in each category.

We prefer this approach to asking about an organisation’s lobbying budgets, because questions concerning (lobbying) budgets tend to discourage responses. Such questions are more sensitive and cognitively demanding compared to questions regarding staff size. We therefore opted to ask about staff size, now a common practice in (European) lobbying research (e.g. De Bruycker 2019; Flöthe 2019; Junk 2020; Mahoney 2008) and assume that lobbying staff size is a fair proxy of overall lobbying resources employed by an organisation. This allows us to compare interest groups based on their availability of lobbying resources, as summarised in Figure 2.3. More specifically, the figure shows the distribution of the organisations’ lobbying resources by polity. Comparatively, figures are quite similar for the 2020 and the 2021 survey. Overall, it can be noted that, in the majority of polities, organisations that fall in the category of low or medium resources are the norm. Exceptions are found in Austria and Germany where a comparatively higher proportion of respondents represent more resourceful interest groups.

An interesting question is whether such lobbying resources tend to be associated with specific organisational types. In Figure 2.4 we therefore show the distribution of group types for organisations with low (public affairs staff <1), medium (1–4) and high (≥5) lobbying resources for both sets of surveys.

The figure partly confirms resource asymmetries described in the literature, but suggests that these are less strong than one might expect. More specifically, in both survey waves, business associations and firms tend to exceed other group types in the category of organisations with medium and high lobbying resources. On the contrary, profession group and unions, as well as NGOs and citizen groups outnumber business groups and firms in the category of organisations with low resources. This distribution suggests that business associations and firms tend to be somewhat better-resourced compared to other interest groups. At the same time, we see a considerable share of all types of groups at the different levels of lobbying resources. We therefore reason that both factors merit separate conceptual and empirical treatment in the analytical chapters of our book.
### Figure 2.3: Distribution of lobbying resources by polity (both survey waves).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polity</th>
<th>Low resources</th>
<th>Medium resources</th>
<th>High resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>56.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Figure 2.4: Distribution of interest group types by lobbying resources (both survey waves).

- **Business groups & firms**
- **Profession groups & unions**
- **NGOs & citizen groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Low Resources</th>
<th>Medium Resources</th>
<th>High Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020 Survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Survey</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
At the same time, the distribution of observations documents that not only well-resourced business groups have taken our surveys. Quite the contrary, 33.7 percent (survey 1) and 35.6 percent (survey 2) of the respondents are representatives of organisations with low lobbying capacity. Approximately 33 percent of these are NGOs and citizen groups (survey 1: 31.4 percent, survey 2: 36.3 percent), which are generally considered the least endowed organisation type. Our data, therefore, captures variation in interest groups’ resource endowment in addition to group type, which make it suitable to explore their effects on the stages of the influence production process.

**Affectedness by the Pandemic**

Finally, because our surveys were designed to capture the disturbances caused by the COVID-19 crisis, we asked respondents to evaluate to which extent their organisation was more or less affected by the pandemic compared to other stakeholders in their country. Answer categories varied from *much less affected*, to *less affected*, *equally affected*, *more affected* and *much more affected*. We asked this question in both surveys with the aim of capturing the extent to which organisations perceived themselves as key stakeholders (relative to others) in viral politics throughout the period of investigation.

The question was phrased in *relative* terms compared to other stakeholders in the polity, because this helps us set a natural baseline for responses, which should be relatable and not too cognitively demanding. As we argued in the previous section, the intensity and timing of the pandemic varied considerably between countries, and respondents are likely to perceive their own affectedness compared to others around them. By explicitly asking respondents to compare to other groups in the country/polity, we ensured that the (presumably underlying) baseline is held constant for respondents in a given country. Our analyses then account for patterns in affectedness and the outcomes of interest within a country (with country fixed effects).

Patterns in this relative rating of affectedness show that there is variation in how affected groups perceived themselves to be, relative to others. In our first survey, we found that 24.6 percent of the respondents saw themselves as less affected than other organisations. 36.2 percent saw themselves as equally affected, while 39.2 percent declared to be more affected than other organisations. This concerns the first three months of the pandemic, during which its salience and sense of urgency was at its highest. This seems to be reflected in a large share of organisations that saw themselves as highly (more than average) affected. Despite the changed circumstances, when we fielded our second survey, a
relatively similar pattern still holds, although the share of highly affected organisations decreased. Among respondents to the second survey, 28.8 percent of organisations declared to be less affected, 38.2 percent were equally affected, and 33 percent saw themselves as more affected.

As shown in Figure 2.5, these varying levels of affectedness are also present in the individual polities. A share of between 12.5 percent (Ireland, survey 1) and 36.9 percent (the Netherlands, survey 1) of groups perceived themselves as less (or much) less affected by the pandemic than other interest groups. The share of these organisations is lowest in Ireland and Denmark for both survey waves. Most of organisations at the polity level see themselves either as equally affected or relatively more (to much more) affected than other organisations. The latter category of more affected groups is, however, comparatively larger in Ireland and Austria, where – in both surveys – more than 40 percent of the organisations declared to be at least more affected than other groups. Similar evaluations are found in Denmark in the 2020 survey and in Sweden in the 2021 survey. The opposite is found in the Netherlands, especially in the 2021 survey where only 15.5 percent of the organisations fall in the relatively more affected category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polity</th>
<th>2020 Survey</th>
<th>2021 Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>40 15.3 38.0 26.5 16.2</td>
<td>36.6 16.6 46.4 19.0 11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6.9 15.9 37.6 21.2 18.4</td>
<td>12.1 22.7 35.0 22.0 18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7.1 25.5 32.7 19.4 15.3</td>
<td>14.5 21.0 29.0 24.2 11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1.7 10.8 33.0 27.3 27.3</td>
<td>9.4 9.7 40.9 21.5 22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>10.6 18.8 43.5 17.6 9.4</td>
<td>9.9 25.0 40.4 17.3 7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>16.1 20.8 38.1 16.7 8.3</td>
<td>15.5 18.6 50.5 12.4 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>6.3 17.6 27.5 28.4 19.6</td>
<td>3.3 19.1 35.1 24.5 16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>7.1 22.2 35.8 19.8 15.1</td>
<td>11.2 24.0 32.8 21.6 10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.5:** Levels of affectedness by polity (both survey waves).

It needs to be noted, that there is a well-documented tendency to over-estimate this kind of assessments among interest representatives. For example, lobbyists
are found to often overestimate their impact on public policy (Newmark and Nownes 2017). However, considering that such tendencies are relatively consistent and that our specific measure of affectedness is expressed in relative terms to other organisations, we do not believe that – even if present – such a tendency introduces considerable biases in our analysis.

This is further supported by the fact that perceived affectedness does not vary substantially by group type (for both surveys), as Figure 2.6 reveals. In other words, there are no substantial differences in the extent to which business groups and firms perceived themselves as more affected by the pandemic compared to profession groups and unions or NGOs and citizen groups. This also indicates that the COVID-19 crisis, as described in the introduction, has been a system-wide event/shock, which has concerned the entirety of interest group systems.

Figure 2.6: Levels of affectedness by group type (both survey waves).

Still, our measure of affectedness has its limitations. As already mentioned, as a subjective and relative measure capturing perceived affectedness, it is subject to potential over- or under estimation. Moreover, some may argue that affectedness strongly varied between sectors. In any case, observations in the same sector are not independent. All organisations in the education sector, for instance, are likely to have been affected by school closures, which makes it likely for educational
groups to see themselves as more highly affected. We address this in our econometric analyses by clustering standard errors by 13 sectors in which respondent organisations are active.

In both of our surveys, we asked respondents to identify the main sector of activity of the organisation. For business groups and firms, and profession groups and unions, this was a filter question listing 18 different sectors of activity. For NGOs and citizen groups, the filter question included eleven options. To compare respondents across sectors, we collapsed these categories into 13 different sector categories. Figure 2.7 shows the distribution of respondent organisations by sector for the first survey wave. The distribution is similar for both surveys.

As Figure 2.7 summarises, the highest share of the respondents, approximately 20 percent, are representatives of interest groups active in the health and social work sector. One may think that this pattern is heavily influenced by the circumstances of the pandemic. However, as data from national lobbying registers reveal, health and social work is among the most lobbied policy areas in several European countries also in non-pandemic years. At the same time, almost ten percent of the interest representatives in our data work in the development, aid and human rights sector, arguably less affected by the pandemic in Europe relative to, for example, health and social work.

With these differences in mind, we acknowledge throughout the analyses that organisations working in specific sectors may have perceived themselves more or less affected by the pandemic. We therefore account for this by clustering standard errors by sector in our statistical analyses. As shown in our other work on lobbying in times of COVID-19, our analyses of trends in lobbying

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6 Potentially and additionally, interest groups may have evaluated their level of affectedness also relative to other organisations within the same sector of activity, rather than relative to the full population of groups.

7 Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Mining and quarrying; Manufacturing, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; Water supply; Construction; Wholesale and retail trade; Transportation and storage; Hospitality / Accommodation and food service activities; Information and communication; Financial and insurance activities; Real estate activities; Education; Human health and social work activities; Arts, entertainment and recreation; Other service activities with physical contact, e.g. hairdressers; Other service activities without physical contact, e.g. call centre agency; Other.

8 Environment and animal rights; Development and aid; Human rights; Health care; Consumers; Local development; Social work and care; Education and information; Culture, art, religion and heritage; Sport and leisure; Other.

9 See, for example, lobbying register statistics in Ireland (SPOC n.d.) and France (LHA n.d.). The recently established register in Germany (Bundestag n.d.) lists health in the top five lobbied policy issues (almost 30% of the declared lobbying activities).
also hold when further accounting for sector differences (see for example Junk et al. 2021).

**Chapter Summary**

In our view, there is no doubt that the activities of interest groups have been pivotal during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, we provided our rationale behind studying *viral lobbying* in seven European countries, namely Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, plus the European Union. As discussed throughout the chapter, the circumstances of the pandemic in these polities varied, but have also been sufficiently similar to reveal common trends in *viral lobbying*. To capture patterns in lobbying mobilisation activities, strategies, access, and influence (see chapters 3–6), we explained how we fielded cross-national large-N surveys in the summer of 2020 and 2021. We designed the surveys to capture the particularities of lobbying during the pandemic. At the same time, they build on measurements of interest group activities that are comparable to lobbying in normal circumstances. In this chapter, we also showed how we stratified samples of business associations, firms, profession associations, unions, citizen groups, NGOs and other organisations in these eight polit-
ies. In total, we reached out to almost 6,000 organisations, first in June 2020, and again in June 2021, to capture how interest group had adapted to and ‘survived’ (in organisational terms) the first wave of COVID-19.

Over two survey waves and eight polities, we collected data from almost 1,500 unique organisations. This data complements existing large-N projects on interest group activities and addresses one of the main challenges in interest group research, namely the availability of cross-country data. Moreover, our data allows comparing lobbying at two moments in time, whereas most existing projects on lobbying do not include variation over time.

In addition to presenting our survey design, this chapter has set the basis for the analyses of the factors which, throughout the book, are identified as drivers of the influence production process. We described our data by group type, lobbying resources and levels of affectedness by the pandemic. In subsequent chapters, we treat each of these factors as potential explanatory variables in our analyses of issue mobilisation, lobbying strategies, access and, ultimately, influence on public policy. In addition, the chapter provided nuances describing country-level and sectoral differences among our respondents. There is much variation in our data, which we believe allows us to explain viral lobbying throughout the stages of the influence production process.

In the subsequent chapters, we will refer back to the methodological arguments and definitions presented here. The following chapters will also introduce and describe the outcome variables of interest in our analysis. Chapter 3 deals with issue mobilisation, Chapter 4 analyses the use of lobbying strategies, while Chapter 5 and 6 deal with access and influence, respectively. For each chapter, we present the variables’ operationalisations in detail, as well as providing a descriptive discussion of their variation.

References


**Online Appendix**