Chapter 3
Issue Mobilisation

In every modern society, we find large numbers and various types of organisations; large and small commercial corporations, schools, hospitals, NGOs, voluntary associations, labour unions, cause groups, associations of professionals and so on. These organisations have relevant missions and tasks that vary in the degree to which these intersect with public policies. A major multinational airline company, for example, will have a public affairs department, but as proportion of its turnover this might still be small. A chair of a small patient association may occasionally meet hospital directors and politicians, but is likely to spend more time on organising self-help sessions. Even labour unions commonly have more staff working on legal advisory services for members than on public policy monitoring.

While these political activities may be small relative to the core tasks of these organisations, they are substantial in terms of their relevance for the policy process. This became especially apparent at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when policymakers and interest groups faced severe new policy problems. The design of respective policy interventions depended heavily on input from different social and economic interests that could help policymakers to make more informed choices regarding the complex trade-offs at stake, for example between economic and health-related risks in crisis management.

Yet, organisations vary a great deal in the extent to which they are politically active, and, over time, their political activity also follows the ebbs and flows of the saliency of the policies they are interested in. To the extent to which organisations engage in activities aimed at influencing public policies, they take the role of interest groups in the policy process (see behavioural definition noted in Chapter 1). We label the activation of the public policy function of existing organisations issue mobilisation.

The degree and nature of issue mobilisation is important, firstly, because of its empirical and normative implications for all other steps of the lobbying process – i.e. the strategies, access and influence of interest groups. Put differently, the extent to which an organisation mobilises on public policy issues in the first place affects the variety of strategies it may be able to choose from, as well as the variety of policies and policy instruments it can engage with and potentially have a say in. This mattered especially during COVID-19; organisations faced serious challenges maintaining their activities, gaining access and securing a policy voice. This is studied in full detail in the subsequent chapters. Given the step-wise nature of influence production outlined in the introduction, we, however,
first assess whether organisations dropped-out completely or were forced to seriously downscale their operations and were, therefore, not able to (effectively) advocate their interests.

Secondly, in normative terms, issue mobilisation potentially creates inequalities between interest groups in the extent to which they voice their concerns (e.g. Lowery et al. 2015). In case interests are not organisationally voiced, public policies will not be informed by plausibly relevant groups – even if access is abundant and interest group participation to policymaking is actively sought by policymakers. Importantly, if we want to assess the capacity of interest group systems to provide a somewhat unbiased voice reflecting concerns in society, we also need to know whether voices persist under more stressful circumstances.

Lastly, issue mobilisation is important in an even broader way. The degree to which organisations in society take responsibility and engage with politics can affect democratic stability, because organisational engagement can act as a counterweight to short-term populism (e.g. Truman 1959) and balance exclusively state-centred power concentrations (e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson 2020). A society without meaningfully diverse organisational political engagement, in other words, is likely to be more sensitive to political instability and concentration of power in the executive. Such society-based counterforces are also, or even especially, important in crisis situations, where other factors such as legal emergency procedures potentially contribute to instability and lack of controls on power. Regarding COVID-19, for instance, parliamentary oppositions were initially characterised by a ‘rally around the flag’ solidarity, adding positive sentiments to government initiatives, but, as time passed, showed to be adequate critics of executives (Louwerse et al. 2021). Interest groups have the potential to play a similar and complementary role.

For these reasons, we aim to assess in this chapter why some interest groups mobilise more or less intensely on policy issues than others, when an event potentially triggers their interests. We study issue mobilisation during the pandemic by looking at whether, when, and how intensely groups began to try to influence COVID-related policies. We are especially interested in differences between organisations and think that COVID-related lockdown measures created special circumstances that potentially magnified hypothesised differences between organisations. Earlier studies show several changes in the behaviour of interest groups, suggesting that the pandemic activated interest groups into action (Eady and Rasmussen 2021; Bonafont and Iborra 2021; Junk et al. 2021; Fuchs, Sack, and Spilling 2021; Fuchs and Sack 2021). Yet, these studies have not explicitly addressed issue mobilisation.
In the following, we first theoretically identify three plausible explanations for differences in issue mobilisation. The first explanations follow from theories of initial group mobilisation, and we identify why these may also be relevant in explaining issue mobilisation. Specifically, we build upon arguments about social and policy ‘disturbances’ as triggers of mobilisation (Truman 1951), leading us to hypothesise that more affected organisations by the pandemic should be more intensely politically active on COVID-19 related policies. In addition, we expand on Olson’s (1965) argument on collective action to encompass policy activity, which leads us to expect that business interests, as well as more highly resourced groups compared to others, are more likely to mobilise more intensely. As a second and alternative explanation, we consider the internal challenges that the COVID-19 crisis produced within organisations, and the extent to which these hampered policy engagement.

After formulating our hypotheses on these relationships, we present our analysis based on three different operationalisations of issue mobilisation, namely as mobilisation success, in terms of speed, and as varying in intensity. On the whole, we find that relatively heavily affected organisations, as well as groups with large numbers of public policy staff were more likely to mobilise, and did so more speedily and intensely. We also find that NGOs and citizen groups were relatively disadvantaged compared to business organisations on two of our three measures of issue mobilisation. We close with reflections on the implications of these findings.

Drivers of Issue Mobilisation in Times of Crisis

Issue mobilisation is distinct from interest, group or member mobilisation. Interest mobilisation deals with the formation of collective action organisations and the recruitment of new members or the on-going maintenance of member relations.¹ A plethora of theories and studies deal with interest mobilisation (e.g. Lowery and Brasher 2004). In fact, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) note in their extensive review of interest group research that this is the most saturated subfield, on which few, if any, empirical or theoretical innovation is needed or to be expected. While this may be somewhat of an overstatement, also given new ‘digital’ modes of mobilisation, we follow their suggestion to assume that a focus on existing, potentially politically active organisations is of greater inter-

¹ It can also include the establishment and retention of public affairs departments within (semi-public) companies or liaison offices of public agencies.
est to our understanding of interest group politics in COVID-19 times than the problem of initial group mobilisation.

Recent scholarship seems to reflect this assessment, and several studies attend to issue mobilisation (e.g. De Bruycker, Berkhout, and Hanegraaff 2019; Hanegraaff et al. 2015; Rasmussen, Carroll, and Lowery 2014), sometimes labelled, ‘second-order’ or ‘second-stage’ mobilisation or politicisation (Bolleyer 2021). This focus makes sense, as emphasised by Leech et al. (2005, 26): ‘the problems of mobilisation do not end after an organisation is formed. No organisation has unlimited resources, and no organisation wants to expend efforts on a hopeless cause.’

Rasmussen, Carroll, and Lowery (2014, 252) identify the second stage of mobilisation as ‘the decisions of individual organisations to mobilise on concrete policy issues’. De Bruycker, Berkhout, and Hanegraaff (2019) discuss the link between interest aggregation into organisations and interest articulation in the policy process and note that organisations internally have to ‘form’ an interest or a policy position in case new circumstances arise, such as in response to new legislative proposals. The relative efficiency of this ‘policy positioning’, they argue, is part of the collective action process, and may be observed in the speed with which organisations respond to new policy initiatives. Connectedly, Bolleyer (2021, 498) presents an organisational governance perspective on the relative politicisation of civil society organisations consisting of two stages: (1) a decision for or against political engagement and (2) the widening of the variety of political activities on the part of the organisation. Put differently, issue mobilisation varies dichotomously, in the sense that organisations are either politically active or not, but additionally varies in terms of intensity, which may be conceived in several ways: in terms of the variety of political tactics, their frequency of use, but also the speed of mobilisation.

We adopt such a view of issue mobilisation and explore different factors which may explain whether organisations mobilise, how much and how fast. To do so, we first draw on adaptations of regular mobilisation theories and, subsequently, include more proximate, organisational explanations.

**Explanations Based on Mobilisation Theories**

To some conceptual extent, organisations face similar challenges during their formation and when mobilising on policy issues. These challenges can be associated with the ‘optimistic’, pluralist argument by Truman (1951) and the more pessimistic arguments by Olson (1965), respectively, and they lead to two expect-
ations regarding the extent to which organisations vary in their levels of issue mobilisation.

To begin with, Truman (1951) notes that organisations will have to identify the exact collective interests that merit aggregation and articulation. In his so-called ‘pluralist’ argument, the source of collective interests lies in a change in the relationships among individuals. For instance, when medical knowledge progresses through new research or technology, the relationships among the members of a medical association may change with some doctor-members being more knowledgeable than others. This change must then be addressed to restore stability, for instance by updating the qualification standards in relevant parts of the medical profession. Sometimes the source of change lies in the mobilisation of other interests (e.g. Lowery and Brasher 2004). For instance, when a new ‘alternative’ subset of the medical profession mobilises, say those specialising in new treatment forms, established medical associations may respond by opening or closing their associations to newcomers. Given the breadth of contemporary policy processes, such changes in the relationships among individuals, labelled ‘disturbances’ by Truman, commonly have a more proximate source in changes in public policy.

Obviously, the COVID-crisis produced a lot of changes in relations among individuals, especially concerning the work they do. Some sectors, such as hotels and restaurants, completely closed for the time being; other sectors faced heavy losses, and large parts of the population could not engage in their daily pursuits. Existing organisations immediately faced new issues that merited internal formation, prioritisation and attention in the policy process.

This classic argument resonates with more recent studies of interest groups, sometimes labelled as ‘neopluralist’. For instance, Halpin, Fraussen, and Nownes (2018) (also: Fraussen, Halpin, and Nownes 2021) identify internal drivers of issue prioritisation. More specifically, the extent to which the core constituency or the group’s mission is at stake, heavily determines the priority an issue will receive from group leaders. This is especially the case when internal working routines, as addressed below, facilitate responsiveness of leaders to membership concerns.

In the context of COVID-related lockdown restrictions, leaders had to assess the extent to which the pandemic impacted the organisation and its mission. In cases where group leaders considered their organisations’ mission more directly affected by COVID-19 compared to others, it is plausible that these leaders invested more heavily in political activities than other organisations. This leads to our first hypothesis, which expects a positive link between the level of affectedness of an organisation during the COVID-19 crisis and their issue mobilisation, in terms of the likelihood to mobilise, mobilisation speed and intensity.
H1 ‘affectedness hypothesis’: the higher the level of affectedness, the more likely is i) issue mobilisation, as well as ii) timely and iii) intense issue mobilisation on Coronavirus-related policies.

Other theories of mobilisation, would, however, expect a different pattern. As famously emphasised by Olson (1965), mobilisation might be hindered because members (or potential beneficiaries) of organisations may want to avoid investing energy in the organisation, plausibly free-riding on the participatory efforts of others (also e.g. Knoke 1986; Rothenberg 1988). Given organisational leaders will need the support of members, such free-riding can have far-reaching consequences.

Among other potential implications, this dynamic is likely to play out differently between business and non-business interests (e.g. Berkhout, Hanegraaff, and Maloney 2021; Hanegraaff 2015). Business associations are more likely to draw upon a closed set and relatively small number of members, plausibly with relatively concentrated interests. This facilitates a relatively easy resolution of collective action problems, because individual benefits are more likely to outweigh the costs of contributing to the common effort. In addition, business organisations are well-placed to offer material selective incentives (e.g. critical market data) or subtle forms of forced riding (e.g. accreditation), that are less available for those mobilising other types of interests. This is consistent with Olson’s (1965, 132) ‘by-product’ argument, where some groups can overcome free-rider problems because lobbying becomes a by-product of other member benefits. Based on this reasoning, leaders of business associations should have more strategic flexibility to attend to the representation of interests in public policy, compared to other groups¹¹. Moreover, as noted by Heinz, Laumann, and Nelson (1993), public affairs departments of firms also face ‘mobilisation’ issues when justifying their political work internally in relation to other departments. While this internal justification will not always be a done deal (e.g. Hart 2004), it is plausibly easier to politically activate a well-prepared and hierarchically controlled public affairs department than to coordinate collective political action in a voluntary association.

These theoretical arguments on group type differences are likely to play out even more heavily during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, the ‘cost’ of collective action, also when conceived more broadly, is likely to have increased under COVID, especially disadvantaging those organisations who already had to invest heavily in resolving collective action problems by means of the provision of se-

¹¹ Yet, also note more nuanced findings in De Bruycker, Berkhout, and Hanegraaff (2019).
lective incentives. For instance, some of the selective material incentives provided by business interest groups, e.g. data on changes in the market, could still be relatively easily provided, whereas some of the expressive or solidary incentives offered by non-business groups, such as annual membership meetings, events or regular outings with volunteers, were impossible or heavily restricted after the outbreak of the pandemic. Our second hypothesis is, therefore formulated, as follows:

**H2 ‘group type hypothesis’:** Business organisations are more likely to i) mobilise on Coronavirus-related policies than non-business interest groups, as well as ii) to engage in timely and iii) intense issue mobilisation.

In addition, one can reason based on Olson’s argument that resources should be a key predictor of mobilisation. As Olson (1965, 132) puts it ‘lobbies are the by-products of organisations that obtain their strength and support because they perform some function in addition to lobbying’. It follows that some organisations will be ‘stronger’ than other organisations because of the ‘other function’ they perform, and therefore the scope for the employment of ‘by-products’ (lobbying) is larger. In simple terms, an organisation with a profitable members-services department will have more slack resources to invest in a large public affairs department (see also: Hanegraaff and van der Ploeg 2020), and this will ease mobilisation on issues that arise. Therefore, we expect that, independent of the type of group, the availability of (staff) resources gives organisational leaders the opportunity to mobilise politically, as our next hypothesis summarises.

**H3 ‘resource hypothesis’:** The more resources a group has, the more likely is i) issue mobilisation on Coronavirus-related policies, as well as ii) timely and iii) intense issue mobilisation.

**Alternative Explanations Based on Internal Organisational Pressures**

This application of Olson’s long-standing theories of mobilisation can, however, also be challenged. De Bruycker, Berkhout, and Hanegraaff (2019, 308) note that one ‘cannot readily conflate first-stage and second-stage collective action problems’. Similarly, Lowery (2015, 12) observes that ‘simple’ policy- or organisational implications drawn from Olson’s logic of collective action are unwarranted, and that one needs ‘a richer appreciation of the internal life of interest organisations’ in order to assess why, and on what issues, interest groups lobby.
More concretely, after the initial group formation and the resolution of collective action problems is managed sufficiently, organisational challenges shift towards the internal arrangement of the diverse tasks of the organisation. The continuation and further development of core tasks will require a lot of attention from the leaders of organisations. The engagement with public policy, as indicated above, is, or becomes, a ‘by-product’ or secondary activity of many, if not most, organisations active in politics.

Bolleyer (2021) focusses on this dynamic within civil society organisations and notes that there is a tension between attending to membership services and engaging with politics (also see: Albareda 2018; Schmitter and Streeck 1999). The membership- and policy-oriented activities operate under distinct ‘logics of exchange’ (Berkhout 2013), and may require different organisational working procedures to perform effectively. For instance, in order to service their membership, a patient organisation might want to recruit and facilitate large numbers of volunteer-run self-help meetings, while public policy engagement would require them to professionalise and move away from volunteering.

The distinct dynamics of such organisational tension may differ across associations, especially between organisations with substantial professional staff working on public policy and volunteer-based or less resourceful organisations. However, what seems to apply across all politically active groups is that organisations with problems in their primary activities will need to focus their attention on those problems and, as a consequence, scale down secondary activities, most notably their policy-oriented (lobbying) activities.

This is especially relevant when COVID-related restrictions created challenges to the primary working processes of organisations. For instance, consider two patient organisations primarily active as ‘self-help’ communities and that are similar in terms of affectedness and group type, but one of which deals with a disease that does not impact ‘digital’ engagement, whereas for the other ‘digital’ engagement is impossible. Under COVID-lockdown, the ‘primary’ task of the facilitation of communication among the patient community moved online relatively easily in the first case, but was fully discontinued in the second case. This is likely to also have reduced the possible issue mobilisation of this latter organisation, given that strategic attention plausibly fully focused on finding some alternative way to facilitate the primary tasks. This reasoning leads us to expect that internal organisational pressures, such as problems with primary membership activities, are a hindrance to mobilisation, as summarised in our final hypothesis.
An underlying assumption for all these hypotheses is that we see the spread of COVID-19 and the following lockdown restrictions as a focusing event (see Chapter 1), and expect this to have impacted organisations’ ability to mobilise politically. At the same time, we expect these effects to vary depending on the organisations’ level of affectedness, group type, resources and internal organisational problems, as stated in our hypotheses. In the next section, we test these expectations based on data from our cross-national surveys (see Chapter 2).

**Analysis: Issue Mobilisation during the Pandemic**

In line with the multifaced nature of issue mobilisation, as our dependent factor, we empirically differentiate between three dimensions of issue mobilisation: (1) whether any issue mobilisation occurs, (2) the speed of mobilisation relative to the COVID-19 triggering ‘disturbance’ and (3) the intensity of mobilisation in terms of the number of times political activities were implemented. These operationalisations are based on several survey items found in the first of our surveys (Junk et al. 2020) and will be explained further below. In what follows, we first present univariate, descriptive figures of different indicators of issue mobilisation and subsequently discuss a number of multivariate regression models to assess the explanatory power of affectedness, group type, resources, and internal organisational problems.

**Overview of Mobilisation Patterns**

We first present some descriptive statistics related to our different mobilisation measures. Our first operationalisation of issue mobilisation, mobilisation success, is based on a survey item in the first wave of our data collection effort. We asked the respondents to indicate ‘if and when [their organisation’s] political activity started to target Coronavirus-related policies’. Organisations that answered that they did not do any Coronavirus-related political work during this time period are considered not to have mobilised (0), whereas all organisations that mobilised at some point between March and the end of May 2020 are considered to have mobilised successfully (1). Around 75 percent of our respondents
who answered this question (N=1,567) conducted Coronavirus-related political work in the months following the first COVID-19 outbreak. Remember that our sample construction aims to include potentially politically active organisations. This suggests that the 25 percent of the organisations for which we do not observe any issue mobilisation are plausibly limited to do so because of the circumstances, potentially combined with the factors identified in our hypotheses (e.g. they may be unaffected by the pandemic or lack the resources to get involved).

Second, as an indicator of the pace or speediness of issue mobilisation, we took the numbers of weeks into account that it took organisations to target their political activities at Coronavirus-related policies. This measure is based on the same survey item, where respondents could enter the month and precise week between the beginning of March and the end of May 2020. To construct this variable capturing mobilisation pace, we disregard respondents who had indicated that they had not engaged politically, as we consider these as not having mobilised. Figure 3.1 shows the distribution across groups in terms of the pace of mobilisation. There is a more or less equal distribution over the five pace categories we identified. The first four categories reflect the respective four weeks in March. That is, organisations with highest pace are those that mobilised during the first week of March; high pace indicates mobilisation during the second week of March, etc. The lowest pace category refers to all organisations mobilising from early April onwards. Some organisations were clearly able to focus on the Coronavirus-policy initiatives quickly (nearly 19.4 percent of active groups doing so in the first week of March), whereas for others adaptation was slower (with 21.6 percent of active groups mobilising from early April onwards).

Furthermore, we derive the intensity of issue mobilisation by combining the length of the lobbying period with a question we asked on the frequency with which respondents aimed political activities at influencing Coronavirus related policies during the time they were active (in the weeks between March 2020 to the end of May 2020). Answer categories ranged from ‘almost daily’ to ‘only once’ after the respondent started their lobbying activities on COVID-related issues. To proxy the actual number of lobbying instances by the group, we weighted this response by the number of weeks respondents had indicated to be politically active (see Figure 3.1), which should give us a relatively precise indication of their lobbying intensity.

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12 Note that the number of observations can diverge somewhat from the numbers of fully completed surveys (see Chapter 2), given that we also use observations from surveys that were not completed to the end. In addition, missing observations exist on some variables, when respondents chose not to answer individual questions.
Figure 3.2 shows this variable, which combines speediness and frequency of mobilisation into a frequency (count) with which organisations tried to influence Coronavirus-related policies. It is calculated based on the frequency question multiplied by the number of weeks of lobbying activity. As the figure shows, we observe a cluster of organisations that mobilised intensely (50 or more times). These account for approximately twenty percent of organisations and are represented by the bars on the right-hand side of Figure 3.2. On the left-hand side of the figure, we find organisations that mobilised less intensely. This accounts for the majority of organisations.

This skewed type distribution where a minority of interest groups account for a large share of lobbying is commonly found in measures of political activity on issues (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Binderkrantz, Bonafont, and Halpin 2016; Braun et al. 2020; Hanegraaff, van der Ploeg, and Berkhout 2020). It is routinely attributed to the ‘bridge’ function particular ‘insider’ or ‘core’ organisations have within group systems (LaPira, Thomas, and Baumgartner 2014; Berkhout et al. 2017). The largest proportion of organisations has a medium or intermittent level of issue mobilisation, which is represented in the bars on the left-hand side of the Figure 3.2 (around the 10 mark on the x-axis).

In the next section, we present models to explain the variation in these measures of issue mobilisation.
Explanatory Models of Issue Mobilisation

In the following, we present the results from several regression models; each related to one of our dependent variables. In each model, we include all explanatory factors we considered in our hypotheses, as well as a number of control variables.

To test Hypothesis 1, we use a measure of affectedness, which relies on a survey item measuring the extent to which an organisation, according to its own perception, was ‘more or less affected by the Coronavirus crisis, compared to other stakeholders in [country]’. Answer categories take five values, from ‘much less affected’ (1) to ‘much more affected’ (5). For Hypotheses 2 and 3, we distinguish between business groups and firms, profession groups and unions, as well as NGOs and citizen groups, using business groups and firms as reference category. We measure resources for lobbying through an item that captures the number of staff working on public affairs in the organisations (in full time equivalents). Answers are grouped in three categories of low (<1), medium (1–4) and high (≥5). These variables are explained in more detail in Chapter 2, which also summarises their distribution.
Additionally, Hypothesis 4 provided an alternative explanation based on the internal problems faced by organisations. To capture these, we asked several questions about the implications of COVID-19 for the membership of the organisation. Respondents could indicate the extent to which members or supporters ‘cannot organise day-to-day activities’ and are ‘over-burdened’ with work. Both of these were measured on scales from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). We take these as indicators of the internal challenges the organisations faced during the pandemic: internal problems regarding activities, and internal problems regarding workload. By including these in our models, we can test whether such problems reduce the intensity of mobilisation, because they divert attention away from lobbying, as we hypothesised.

In all analyses, we control for the age of an organisation and for the extent to which an organisation is an umbrella group. We also include dummy variables for countries to explore differences between them, and cluster standard errors by sector of activity of the interest groups. The full regression output in table form can be found in the Online Appendix to the book (Table A3.1). To ease interpretation for the reader, we have chosen to only display coefficient plots of the key explanatory variables. Figure 3.3 shows such plots based on a series of regressions. Where the confidence intervals (straight lines) of the plotted coefficients (dot in the middle) do not overlap with 0 (the vertical dotted line), we can say with high certainty that there is a significant relationship between the explanatory factor and issue mobilisation.

We use different regression estimation techniques to account for the different nature and distribution of the three dependent variables. More specifically, Figure 3.3 reports estimations derived from logit regression models to explain issue mobilisation (top of the figure), ordered logit regression to explain the pace of mobilisation (middle) and negative binomial regression to explain the intensity of mobilisation (bottom).

Jointly, these models help explain why some groups mobilise more than others. As a general pattern, they suggest that especially organisations with large numbers of public policy staff and those who indicate to be highly affected by the COVID-19 crisis were more likely to engage in issue mobilisation. In all different operationalisations of issue mobilisation, we find significant and substantial effects in the direction that we theoretically expected for these factors: more affected (H1) and better-resourced organisations (H3) are more likely to mobilise, and to do so in a more timely and intense manner.
Moreover, the size of these effects is substantive. Our models predict\textsuperscript{13} that the probability that the least affected groups will mobilise successfully is 56 percent. This reaches 94 percent for most affected organisations, a substantial difference of 38 percentage points between highest and lowest levels of affectedness. More-

\textbf{Figure 3.3:} Logit regression on issue mobilisation (top chart), ordered logit regression on pace (middle chart) and negative binomial regression on the intensity of mobilisation (bottom chart). Coefficients and 95/90% confidence intervals.

\textit{Notes:} The figure is based on a series of three regressions, one for each dependent variable (success: logistic regression; pace: ordered logistic regression; intensity: negative binomial). The first includes all organisations, including those that did not mobilise (n=1018), whereas we assess the effect of pace and intensity for those that actually mobilised (n=784 and n=778, respectively). Included controls in all these models were: organisation age, the group’s potential status as an umbrella organisation, and fixed effects for the country/polity. In addition, we include the two variables capturing internal organisational problems. Moreover, we clustered standard errors by sector given that mobilisation for groups within a sector is likely to be related. For results in table form see Table A3.1 in the Online Appendix. Measures of goodness of fit (pseudo R-squared) lie at 0.19 (success), pace: 0.06 (pace), and 0.03 (intensity).

\textsuperscript{13} All predicted probabilities/values are based on the main models (see Figure 3.3) when holding all other variables at means.
over, once they mobilise, the probability that highly affected organisations will do so at the highest pace is 25 percent, while this is only 7 percent for least affected organisations. Least affected organisations are, in fact, more likely to mobilise at a slow (13 percent) or slowest pace (34 percent). Finally, our models suggest that, least affected groups are predicted to engage in approximately 11 lobbying instances during the studied period, while organisations at the highest level of affectedness are expected to do so 20 times.

Similarly, but with regards to the effect of lobbying resources, our models predict that the likelihood for better-resourced organisations to successfully mobilise is 93 percent, while this percentage drops to 66 percent for less resourceful groups. Among the organisations that have politically mobilised, the likelihood that highly resourceful groups will do so at the highest pace is 20 percent, but only 12 percent for low-resourced ones. In terms of the intensity of mobilisation, our model predicts that resourceful organisations would engage on average in 22 lobbying instances compared to only 11 for less resourceful groups.

This is consistent with earlier studies covering non-crisis time periods, but the strength of the effect suggests that the plausible implications for other parts of the influence production process are likely to be even more substantial than theoretically discussed. This general finding is also consistent with some of the journalistic accounts of lobbying under COVID. For instance, highly affected sectors with well-staffed public affairs departments, such as aviation, seem to have been more successful in voicing their concerns than less affected and less well-staffed interests, such as those of parents’ groups relying on (closed) day-cares or students’ associations in (online) academic education. In the conclusion, we highlight the, in our view ambivalent, normative implications of these findings.

In contrast to our Hypothesis 2, however, different types of groups are relatively similar in terms of their ability to conduct political activities (mobilisation success, on the top of Figure 3.3). This suggests that Olsonian collective action problems do not ‘simply’ translate into issue mobilisation challenges. Our two other models, however, do indicate relevant differences between group types: NGOs and citizen groups mobilised at a significantly slower pace and less intensively compared to business groups and firms. For example, our model suggests a significantly higher probability of NGOs and citizen groups mobilising at the slowest pace (24 percent) compared to the highest pace (10 percent). Conversely, for business groups and firms, as well as for profession groups and unions, mobilisation at highest pace is more likely (18 and 17 percent predicted probability, respectively) than the slowest pace (from 13 and 14 percent). Moreover, our model predicts that, in terms of intensity of mobilisation, NGOs and citizen groups will
engage in approximately 12 instances of lobbying, while this number is higher for business and firms (16) and profession groups and unions (19).

Concerning Hypothesis 4, Figure 3.3 only provides weak evidence for any effect of internal problems, and, where this exists, it partly runs in the opposite direction than expected. Rather than hampering lobbying, some internal problems may motivate lobbying, as seems to be the case for situations where members are overburdened with work (see models: mobilisation success and mobilisation intensity in Figure 3.3.). This finding could be explained by similar mechanisms as the effect of affectedness.\(^4\) Regarding internal problems affecting activities, however, coefficients are not consistently significantly different from zero.

Substantially, the effect of internal problems related to members’ workload on the likelihood of mobilisation success and more intense mobilisation are relatively small. This equals to a 7 percent increase in the likelihood of mobilisation success when an organisation moves from the lowest to the highest extent of internal workload challenges. In terms of intensity, our model predicts an increase of 5 lobbying instances for the same change in internal workload problems. Contrary to our expectation, this suggests that challenges to primary processes within organisations, such as pressures coming from excessive workload, can activate (instead of hinder) interest groups into lobbying. This may relate to the specific circumstances of the pandemic, during which, in many instances, internal organisational challenges overlapped with policy disturbances. For example, imagine associations of professionals drafting internal recommendations for health and safety protocols while, at the same time, lobbying for COVID-19 policy on the issue.

Overall, we found strong support for Hypothesis 1, related to the level of affectedness, and Hypotheses 3, which expects the importance of resources for issue mobilisation. We also found support for Hypothesis 2, which suggests that business groups should have an advantage in issue mobilisation: Those NGOs and citizen groups that did mobilise, mobilised less quickly and less intensely than business groups. Regarding Hypothesis 4 on internal problems affecting an organisation’s procedures, however, we found no evidence that these hinder mobilisation.

\(^4\) This is substantiated by the fact that there is a low but significantly positive correlation between the indicators of affectedness and internal dynamics, ranging from 0.19 to 0.26.
Chapter Summary

Large numbers of societal organisations have the potential to actively engage with public policy. Yet in practice, as we showed in this chapter, issue mobilisation varies substantially between organisations. We considered whether, how fast and how intensely organisations mobilised on COVID-19-related issues after the outbreak of the pandemic. Our findings show that highly affected groups by the pandemic, as well as better-resourced organisations and, to some extent, business groups mobilised significantly more than other groups.

These findings help us evaluate several normatively and theoretically relevant explanations for differences in issue mobilisation. To start, the findings clearly show that relatively heavily affected organisations are more likely to politically voice their interests and issue mobilise compared to organisations that see themselves as less affected than others. This pattern is in line with what earlier and contemporary pluralist theorists expect when they identify ‘disturbances’ as important triggers of group mobilisation (Truman 1951). Our findings confirm other recent studies (e.g. Halpin and Fraussen 2017) that suggest that disturbances not only affect membership mobilisation but also heavily impact issue mobilisation choices on the part of existing organisations. We consider this a broadly positive phenomenon. Normatively speaking, the interest group system should be biased in favour of heavily affected interests after a focussing event. This creates opportunities for citizens and other actors to meaningfully participate in politics. For policymakers, this means a broader range of voices can be included in the initiation and execution of public policy. To illustrate, it is likely that during the pandemic the interests of heavily affected health care professionals have been widely voiced. This is not only beneficial to the professionals themselves, but plausibly contributed to better-informed public policy decisions concerning the health crisis.

Second, our findings also support expectations derived from Olson’s famous Logic of Collective Action. We find relevant differences across group type, even though these only hold for the intensity and the pace of mobilisation rather than for the general mobilisation success. This finding can qualify how collective action problems translate to issue mobilisation (see also: De Bruycker, Berkhout, and Hanegraaff 2019). It is not the case that diffuse interests (represented by NGOs and citizen groups) fail to mobilise after a focussing event. Yet, they are not as fast, and act less persistently compared to business groups. This still constitutes a form of group type bias, but the picture is less bleak than the pessimistic account presented by Olson.

We also found strong empirical evidence that better staffed organisations were more likely to issue mobilise on COVID-19-related issues and did so faster...
and more intensely. Arguably, this supports the Olsonian so-called ‘by-product’ theory, whereby lobbying is a by-product of other functions organisations can fulfil for their members. Better-resourced organisations should have advantages on both accounts. At the same time, this argument is relatively unspecified regarding whether and when leaders decide to direct available resources to the political process. What we showed, however, is that available staff for public affairs strongly affects an organisation’s ability to mobilise. Resource inequalities between organisations can, therefore, introduce problematic biases early on in the influence production process, because organisations with low resources may be unable to mobilise (quickly and intensely) on new issues.

In addition, we assessed a potential alternative explanation regarding internal management challenges as important barriers for mobilisation. However, we found no support for this expectation. In fact, our findings that higher internal problems regarding the workload of members actually increase mobilisation intensity can provide further support for our hypothesis regarding affectedness as a driver of mobilisation. In the rest of the book, we focus more on this factor.

To conclude, based on our results regarding issue mobilisation on COVID-19 related issues, we are relatively ‘optimistic’ about the ability of interest group communities in the studied countries to respond to a focussing event. Around 75 percent of groups in our sample mobilised on these issues, and a core of approximately 20 percent of the mobilised groups were quick and highly active, potentially providing a bridging function for a broad range of affected groups.

In the subsequent chapters, we examine whether these patterns are also observed in the strategic choices of interest representatives (Chapter 4), and in the degree to which they gain access (Chapter 5) and potentially influence on policy outcomes during the pandemic (Chapter 6).

References


Online Appendix