Chapter 4
Strategy Selection

Once interest groups have decided to engage in political action, the question of strategy selection arises. The existing scholarly literature identifies different strategic options, from which interest groups can choose, and assesses several underlying mechanisms, which help explain variation in the chosen strategies across interest groups (Grant 1978; Walker 1991; Beyers 2004; Weiler and Brändli 2015; Dür and Mateo 2013; Junk 2016; Hall and Reynolds 2012; Hanegraaff 2015; De Bruycker 2014; De Bruycker and Beyers 2019).

Such studies largely assume a degree of ‘standard’ operating procedures in terms of the political context, agenda change, access to political institutions and organisational mobilisation. To date we know little about how disruptions affect such regular patterns of strategic choice, although disruptive focussing events (see Chapter 1) and shocks to modern political systems and their economies occur regularly (Chari and Bernhagen 2011). Under such crisis circumstances, strategic choices by interest groups may be different and, at the same time, especially consequential. In this chapter, we therefore explain potential differences among interest groups in their use of lobbying strategies during the COVID-19 crisis as an example of a system-wide focussing event.

There are only few studies which deal with the question of lobbying strategies in such crisis circumstances. Exceptions include Muraleedharan and Bryer (2020), who explore how migrant NGOs used social media platforms to mobilise public support for government intervention during the 2015 refugee crisis. Moreover, Adelino and Dinc (2014) researched firms in corporate distress who lobbied government after the financial crisis to receive stimulus funds. With a focus on financial actors, Blau, Brough, and Thomas (2013) studied banks’ political activities on bailout funds (also see: Woll 2013; Kastner 2018; Keller 2018). As a final example, the work by LaPira (2014) after 9/11 underlines the importance of studying lobbying in times of crisis. His research shows that, after the terror attack, two trends emerged in Washington’s interest group system: first, established groups realigned to the newly salient security issue; second, interest groups at the edge of the representational subsystem were replaced by new organisations, which took advantage of new opportunities to have a voice in policymaking. These are significant trends that merit further attention.

While the mentioned studies help understand lobbying in times of crises, a major shortcoming is that they focus mostly on the mobilisation of interest groups whose constituency is primarily affected and disrupted, such as financial stakeholders after the financial crisis. At the system level, studies of the impact
of such shocks on the strategic choices of all interest groups are very rare (but see: Timoneda and Vallejo Vera 2021). As a global health crisis, which affected different kinds of organisations across sectors in various ways, the COVID-19 pandemic offers the opportunity to provide a birds-eye perspective on the strategic considerations interest groups make after a disruptive focussing event.

In this chapter, we use this unique opportunity and provide two perspectives on strategy selection. First, building on the literature regarding tactics that aim to influence policy, we analyse the extent to which different types of interest groups rely on ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ lobbying strategies. Inside strategies refer to activities seeking contact with policymakers, elected officials or civil servants, whereas outside strategies refer to activities targeting the media and the public, for instance aiming to organise media campaigns or public protest (see for example: Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2005; De Bruycker and Beyers 2019; Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker 2016; Junk 2016; Kollman 1998)\(^\text{15}\).

The interest group literature identifies these two routes of ‘direct consultation’ (inside lobbying) and ‘public voice’ (outside lobbying) as theoretically distinct (Walker 1991; Maloney, Jordan, and Andrew 1994; Beyers 2004), yet potentially interrelated (Berkhout 2013), given successful outside strategies (e.g. media campaigns) can indirectly affect the inside arena (e.g. legislators). Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of variation within these routes: Media campaigns, for instance, are notably different from protests in their scope and implementation. In this chapter, we build on such theoretical distinctions to understand variation in the use of lobbying strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic and, consistent with the earlier chapter, we explore whether group type, resources, and level of affectedness explain the choice of interest groups to use inside and outside strategies to influence policymakers.

Second, we note that the COVID-19 crisis has been a major threat to the survival of interest groups. Recent literature suggests that the survival prospects of interest groups significantly impact their strategic considerations (Hanegraaff and Poletti 2019; Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen 2020). However, empirical studies substantiating such claims are still rare. Once again, the pandemic provides an opportunity to study the effect of survival fears on the strategic choices of interest groups, hereby identifying whether such considerations, indeed, drive the strategy selection of interest groups. We therefore test whether interest

\(^{15}\) Note that various channels can be used for these activities, for example email, mail, phone and text with the aim of scheduling meetings or accessing the media or formal consultation procedures (see also: Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Salgado 2021).
groups, which fear for their survival more than others (i.e. higher mortality anxiety), prioritise strategies which could alleviate this pressure.

For both analytical foci, we draw on knowledge provided by classical interest group scholarship to identify when to expect similarities and differences in the use of strategies. At the same time, we assume that lobbying strategy selection in times of crisis might deviate from what applies to other circumstances (cf. early studies of lobbying in COVID-19 times: Junk et al. 2021a; Bonafont and Iborra 2021; Eady and Rasmussen 2021; Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Junk 2022). This means that we tailor our expectations to the circumstances of the pandemic.

In a nutshell, our findings point to three main trends: First, we find that higher resources for lobbying and higher affectedness by the pandemic are consistently associated with more frequent use of both outside and inside strategies. Second, we find differences between group types: NGOs and citizen groups use social media (outside) strategies more frequently, compared to business organisations, and strategies of direct communication (inside) less frequently. Finally, while the employment of strategies of organisational stability varies by group type, we confirm that mortality anxiety is an important driver of the selection of strategies.

In the next section, we start with a broader introduction to the literature on organisational strategies, in which we make a distinction between policy-oriented strategies and survival-related strategies. Based on this discussion, we formulate hypotheses for both categories of strategic considerations. In the following section, we test our hypotheses, and we end with concluding remarks in the final section.

The ‘Logic of Influence’ and ‘Logic of Survival’ in Strategy Choice

We see the global pandemic as potentially pivotal for interest groups, both based on a ‘logic of influence’ and a ‘logic of survival’ (cf. Berkhout 2013). In the first logic, groups employ strategies to ensure that they have a say in relevant new policies, whereas, in the latter, strategies aim at securing the continued functioning and existence of an organisation. In the next sections, we explain these two logics potentially underlying strategy choice, each in turn.
Inside and Outside Strategies to Secure Policy Influence

We start with policy-oriented strategies. As argued, existing literature labels the direct route of consultation as ‘inside lobbying’ (Grant 1978; Walker 1991; Beyers 2004; Weiler and Brändli 2015; Dür and Mateo 2013; Junk 2016; Hall and Reynolds 2012; Hanegraaff 2015; De Bruycker 2014; De Bruycker and Beyers 2019). It is expected that interest groups pursuing such strategies seek to increase or maintain their prominence as part of insider circles of decision-making. Insider strategies are generally associated with the choice of an interest group to engage in ‘negotiation’ and ‘bargaining’ directly with policymakers (Beyers 2008).

The activities that aim to affect public policy via the media and by means of public protest are typically labelled as ‘outside lobbying’ (Kollman 1998; Tresch and Fischer 2015; Thrall 2006; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017). They include all forms of public political strategies whereby interest groups prioritise ‘voice’ and ‘loud politics’ over ‘quiet’ negotiation, or when used independently of inside-oriented strategies or in combination in an integrated campaign (Beyers 2004; Lipsky 1968; Keller 2018). The selection of these outside strategies follows at least two rationales. First, outside lobbying mobilises membership and public support, potentially making a political issue more salient among the public with the aim of simultaneously creating a favourable membership recruitment environment, as well as improving the political calculus on specific policy battles (De Bruycker and Beyers 2019). In media campaigns and protests, ‘communication among societal interests, policymakers and citizens becomes visible to a broader audience’, and it is among the campaigners’ objectives to attract attention of the broader public (Beyers 2004, 213).

Secondly, even when potential supporters are already exhaustively mobilised, outside lobbying sends cues and indirect messages to policymakers who – like the public – become exposed to public political communication (Maloney, Jordan, and Andrew 1994). The literature agrees that this mode of information transmission differs from what happens with inside strategies, and that public arenas, as opposed to institutional ones, are ill-suited for extensive discussion of technical information and negotiation (Beyers 2004; Junk 2016), but have the potential to increase the salience of an issue or change its framing (Junk and Rasmussen 2019). Individual interest groups, of course, rarely fully control on-going issue discussion, and, therefore, need to strategically coordinate their campaigns in order to ‘ride the wave’ of potentially favourable movements in media salience or public opinion.

While it is often assumed that interest groups choose between these strategies depending on the goals of political action, more recent literature has paid attention to the factors which constrain interest groups in strategy selection.
These constraints arise from the side of the organisation and the interest mobilised (the supply side) and from the side of policymakers and the issue at stake (the demand side).

From a supply perspective, the constraints relate to, firstly, the nature of the organisation’s membership and support and, secondly, its availability of resources to employ in lobbying (Dür and Mateo 2013; Junk 2016; Hanegraaff et al. 2015; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017). Demand side perspectives put emphasis on the nature of the issue itself (distributive or regulatory: Dür and Mateo 2013; issue with public good character and issue complexity: Junk 2016), and the institutional characteristics which determine policymakers’ willingness to engage in consultation (Beyers 2004; Victor 2007; Mahoney 2008; Weiler and Brändli 2015).

These approaches build on the implicit assumption that the choice between inside and outside lobbying is a trade-off, and that groups will choose either inside or outside strategies. Many existing studies, however, suggest that lobbying strategies should actually be considered as complementary, where a combination of both will make it more likely to impact policy (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Dür and Mateo 2016; De Bruycker and Beyers 2019; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017; Pakull, Marshall, and Bernhagen 2020). De Bruycker (2019, 3) explains that a combination of lobbying strategies can be used, as long as ‘goals, the communication channels, the message, and the target audience are all in sync’; that is, compatible. This is perhaps why research focussing on the use of outside strategies finds that lobbying the media appears to follow the same resource constraints found for inside strategies (Thrall 2006). Media lobbying and inside lobbying may, therefore, differ to a lesser extent than generally assumed (Tresch and Fischer 2015).

To this approach, recent scholarship adds social media as a (relatively) new arena for political action (Brown 2016; Van der Graaf, Otjes, and Rasmussen 2016). Chalmers and Shotton (2016) conceptualise outside lobbying on social media as part of an organisation’s broader media strategy, which helps an interest group in shaping public debate around an issue, as well as the public image of the organisation.

**The Selection of Influence Strategies during the Pandemic**

In this chapter, we take a supply-side oriented approach to the analysis of the determinants of policy-oriented strategies. This is because we keep the issue context (the COVID-19 pandemic) constant, as well as the policy context (viral policy:
lobbying on health and safety regulations, travel and movement restrictions and economic rescue packages).

Based on this context, our first basic assumption is that interest groups have engaged more frequently in outside, compared to inside strategies. This is because we expect the strain of the pandemic and the lockdown restrictions introduced by governments to have, first, made it more difficult for interest groups to reach out to policymakers (Junk et al. 2021a). Secondly, we expect that the pandemic made it more burdensome for interest groups to engage in inside strategies, which tend to be more costly (Maloney, Jordan, and Andrew 1994). Thirdly, the high media salience of pandemic politics made outside lobbying more attractive for organisations aiming to communicate policy preferences and frames in both traditional and social media (Eady and Rasmussen 2021).

In addition to the balance between inside and outside strategies, we are interested in what factors explain the use of each of these strategies. Notably, they could be explained by the same factors, which would suggest that the same organisations persist in inside and outside lobbying (cf. Beyers 2004; Klüver 2010). Or these strategies could have divergent explanations, which would indicate that different organisations use inside and outside strategies. To explain variation across organisations, we use the same indicators as employed in other chapters, namely group type, resources, and the level of affectedness. We start with group type.

The literature generally associates the use of inside strategies with business organisations and that of outside strategies with NGOs and citizen groups, as well as profession groups and unions. This is because the latter rely heavily on public means of communication to maintain, enhance and mobilise their membership and support base (Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Maloney, Jordan, and Andrew 1994; Berkhout 2010; Dür and Mateo 2013). For NGOs and citizen groups, for instance, attention-grabbing campaigns serve the triple function of satisfying the existing membership base, providing ‘free’ publicity for recruitment of members and supporters, and indirectly influencing public policy. In contrast, the closed membership structures of business associations and the material selective benefits they offer do not rely on media attention. This makes their leaders organisationally less dependent on getting the public’s attention.

This is likely to apply also in the context of COVID-19. As we already discussed, the outbreak of the pandemic and the introduction of restrictions have turned working conditions for numerous professions on their head. Certain professions were deemed as essential, for which new protocols of health and safety had to be put in place. Others were relegated to remote and distant working, more indirectly forcing substantial adaptation of working procedures. Regardless of how severely affected, we expect profession associations and unions to have
used extensive outside strategies to signal their membership that their interests were given a voice. Similarly, for some NGOs and citizen groups (such as patient groups), the pandemic has made core issues more salient. Other public groups (such as human rights cause groups), in contrast, relied on public reframing of their core policy issues in relation to COVID-policies in order to avoid being marginalised in the political debates. This could, for instance, be seen in the privacy concerns raised by human rights groups on the initiation of contact-tracing applications. All this means that both profession organisations, as well as NGOs and citizen groups had strong incentives to mobilise their supporters through outside strategies to signal political engagement.

For business organisations, on the other hand, we expect inside lobbying to have been a dominantly used strategy. Business associations have strong incentives to provide concentrated benefits to their membership (Berkhout 2010; Dür and Mateo 2013; Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker 2016). This is likely to be the case in the context of COVID-19, where business associations may have decided to use inside lobbying to influence COVID-19-related policy, such as health and safety regulations and economic rescue packages for specific sectors and member constituencies. Similarly, we argue that politically active firms engaging directly in lobbying would have had incentives to engage mainly in inside strategies, given they lack a membership they need to reach through outside lobbying\textsuperscript{16}. More generally, especially when trying to secure concrete benefits for themselves or their members, such as priority in the re-opening of sectors or larger economic help packages, we expect business organisations (including firms) to have preferred direct consultation (inside lobbying) to public discussions (outside lobbying), given such particularistic benefits might be unpopular with the public.

Based on these arguments, we do not expect that the pandemic has fundamentally overturned the way in which profession organisations and unions, NGOs and citizens groups, and business actors employ inside and outside strategies. If anything, the crisis should have emphasised the propensity of profession organisations, NGOs and citizen groups to rely on outside lobbying, while business organisations (including firms) should have (even more) reasons to rely on inside strategies. We therefore hypothesise:

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\textsuperscript{16} One can argue though, that shareholders, ownership or customers might be a media audience firms want to reach when they can foster a good reputation in the media.
Interest groups also face resource constraints in the selection of lobbying strategies. The literature associates inside lobbying with organisations that have higher resources available for public affairs (Grant 1978). Others warn against this simplistic view, since outside strategies, such as media campaigns, street protests and conferences, can be quite costly as well (Kollman 1998; Thrall 2006; Wilson 1961). It is also reasonable that interest groups, if specialised in one route of communication, are more likely to invest available resources in what they are familiar with (Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker 2016). That said, it is likely that COVID-19 has strongly affected interest groups’ ability to engage in costly outside strategies. That is, many COVID-lockdown measures have made it impossible for organisations to mobilise members through public rallies and protest activities.

Outside lobbying in COVID-19 times is, therefore, most likely oriented towards lobbying the media and social media to communicate frames, shape public debate and send cues to core and potential supporters (cf. Chalmers and Shotton 2016; Brown 2016; Thrall 2006). Lobbying the media (especially social media) is arguably less costly than seeking direct consultation with policymakers. In addition, the high public saliency of pandemic policy has transformed media and social media into more attractive venues for lobbying compared to circumstances where policy issues are less salient (cf. Junk 2016). It is therefore likely that, when faced with resource constraints during the pandemic, interest groups are more likely to use outside lobbying.

In classic works, the outside strategy is conceived of as an instrument of the ‘powerless’, weak, or challengers of government (Lipsky 1968; Schattschneider 1960). As Lasswell (1950, 235) writes, ‘an established elite is usually so well situated in control of the goods, violence, and practices of a community that a challenging elite is constrained to rely chiefly upon symbols’. Thrall (2006), however, suggests that the media venue, despite it being assumed to be a ‘weapon’ of the weak (also see: Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), attracts resourceful organisations as well, or even especially¹⁷. An increasing number of studies suggest that media strategies are common amongst well-resourced organisations and even corporations and organisations hiring specialised consultants (Aizenberg and

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¹⁷ See also the cumulative hypothesis noted in Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen (2015), and the indexing hypothesis by Bennett (1990).
Müller 2020; Huwyler 2020). Building on these findings and taking stock of the high salience of pandemic politics, we therefore formulate the following expectation:

**H2 ‘resources hypothesis’:** Better resourced organisations are more likely to engage in both inside and outside strategies during the pandemic, compared to less resourced organisations, but the difference is more pronounced for inside lobbying.

Finally, we argue that policy disturbances inform strategy selection. We have documented in the previous chapter that disturbances drive interest group issue mobilisation. Organisations that were more heavily affected by the pandemic were more likely to become politically active (controlling for other factors such as resource constrains). This echoes pluralist theory (Truman 1951) applied to issue mobilisation (Rasmussen and Gross 2015), whereby disturbances in the policy environment activate organisations whose interests are affected or under threat.

We also believe this mechanism to be tied to strategy selection. On the one hand, affected organisations can be expected to seek the most direct way to policymakers, and seek to increase their prominence within policy circles. They should, therefore, be likely to use inside strategies. Applied to the case of COVID-19, for example, affected organisations such as business actors in the airline industry, associations of teachers and health care professionals, and patient groups, had high stakes in policy and are likely to have tried to communicate this to policymakers. We expect them, therefore, to seek direct consultation with policymakers and increase their chances of affecting pandemic-policies compared to less affected groups.

On the other hand, a high degree of affectedness may also help frame the position of affected organisations as ‘popular’ among the public, increasing the strategic attractiveness of outside lobbying (Kollman 1998). In contrast, problems unrelated to the pandemic may have had less ‘news value’ (Galtung and Ruge 1965), and may, instead, have been less popular among the public, thus decreasing the strategic attractiveness of outside lobbying for less affected groups. To illustrate this better, the concerns regarding restricted opening times of supermarkets, whose profit margins increased substantially during the pandemic, are unlikely to sympathetically resonate among the public on media platforms, given the more precarious and vulnerable position of other stakeholders. We, therefore, expect less affected organisations to have taken a step back from outside communication and not to have mingled too much in public debates.
In sum, we expect that more affected groups are more likely to use both inside and outside channels more frequently during the pandemic, compared to less affected groups, as Hypothesis 3 summarises.

**H3 ‘affectedness hypothesis’: More affected organisations are more likely to engage in both inside and outside strategies during the pandemic than less affected organisations.**

**Strategies to Secure Organisational Survival**

While a focus on policy-oriented strategies is widespread in interest group research, the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis allow us to paint a broader picture of the strategies available to interest groups. The crisis has put many organisations under serious strain causing uncertainty and fears about long-term survival. In the literature, these fears are called *mortality anxiety*.

All approaches discussed so far ultimately assume that strategy selection is informed by the ‘logic of influence’, where interest groups seek to influence policies or public discussions. The additional question we ask in this chapter is whether and how the threats posed by the pandemic to organisations’ survival also affect strategic considerations. In other words, were organisations, who feared more about the continuation of their activities, more likely to select survival driven (non-policy oriented) strategies to alleviate such threats compared to organisations, that were less concerned about the sustainability of their activities?

Based on existing theories, we expect to observe variation in the degree to which organisations initiated activities to improve their long-term prospects. Organisation theory and ecological studies of interest groups remind us that interest groups are survival-seeking organisations and that policy-oriented activities are often instrumental, secondary means to the primary goal of organisational maintenance (Gray and Lowery 2000; Lowery 2007; Berkhout 2013; Berkhout et al. 2015). Only few studies of lobbying strategies point towards this nuance. Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker (2016), more specifically, observe that organisational maintenance and competition for resources between groups drives the selection of outside strategies in international contexts. Hanegraaff and Poletti (2019) confirm that survival-related calculations and mortality anxiety drive the selection of lobbying strategy also at the national level.

The study of the relationship between mortality anxiety and lobbying strategies remains, however, at its infancy. Usually, it is only included, as we have done in the previous section, as part of the theoretical considerations to identify
differences in the strategic repertoire of business and non-business interest groups, rather than explicitly measured. Further specification is needed because, first, nuances regarding the effects of specific forms of mortality anxiety (for instance related to resources, support or influence) have not been explored so far. Secondly, existing studies still conflate policy-driven and survival-driven lobbying strategies, which makes it more difficult for scholars to disentangle trends in strategy selection. Finally, in most existing studies of interest groups, mortality anxiety is only investigated as dependent variable rather than explanatory variable (Gray and Lowery 1997; Halpin and Thomas 2012).

Hanegraaff and Poletti (2019) and Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen (2020) try to provide a theoretical spine to link motivations of organisational maintenance to the selection of lobbying strategies. Like Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen (2020), we follow Stinchcombe (1965), who conceptualises three forms of mortality anxiety, related to wealth, power, and legitimacy. We see all three of these forms of anxiety as potential explanations for different survival-oriented lobbying activities, that is resource-extraction strategies (in relation to wealth), public-oriented strategies (power) and base-oriented strategies (legitimacy). In the following section, we formulate expectations about how they apply during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mortality Anxiety and Survival Strategies during the Pandemic**

The first, wealth, concerns material resources without which interest groups cannot survive. It follows that if this dimension is perceived to be under threat, for instance following a loss of income from membership contributions, public funding, sales or capital value, organisations can be expected to mobilise in a way that guarantees sources of income in the future (Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen 2020). To avoid organisational death or default, organised interests should, therefore, turn to lobbying for survival, including pressuring governments to intervene with regulatory and distributive tools, typically public funding, grants for organisational maintenance (Salgado 2014), rescue packages after economic shocks (Adelino and Dinc 2014; Keller 2018) and state aid (Chari 2015). In COVID-19 times, the vast shocks produced by the pandemic and the lockdown measures introduced by governments to tackle it, have brought many organisations’ activities to a halt, for instance challenging the turnover of firms and member contributions of associations. It follows that, facing constrains to their incomes, interest groups would mobilise politically to secure support from government.
H4 ‘wealth hypothesis’: Wealth-related mortality anxiety during the pandemic is likely to drive interest groups into survival-seeking inside lobbying in form of resource-extraction directed at the state.

The second form of mortality anxiety relates to power, understood as ‘having a political impact’ to sustain membership and supporters (Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen 2020). As Gray and Lowery (1997, 28) argue, ‘political influence and access to the policy process is one of the most vital resources for organisations to acquire as it contributes to an organisation’s identity.’ When access to insider circles is under threat, interest groups are found to displace insider lobbying efforts to outside venues with the aim of signalling to the constituency that the organisation is committed to political action and to gain legitimacy (Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker 2016; Hanegraaff and Poletti 2019; Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen 2020). Simulating the introduction of access barriers to inside lobbying during the COVID-19 pandemic, Junk, Crepaz, and Aizenberg (2022) experimentally demonstrate that interest groups turn to outside lobbying as a result. While the authors do not make a distinction between the strategy selection being policy or survival driven, we expect this behaviour to be linked to an organisation’s mortality anxiety with regards to power, as our next hypothesis formulates.

H5 ‘power hypothesis’: Power-related mortality anxiety during the pandemic is likely to drive interest groups into survival-seeking outside lobbying in form of public-oriented strategies.

The third and last form of mortality anxiety relates to legitimacy understood as the rationale and justification for the organisation’s existence. Interest groups constantly seek to justify the appropriateness of goals, objectives, and procedures through active engagement with their supporter base (Witjas, Hanegraaff, and Vermeulen 2020). Without the support of the constituency, interest groups’ legitimacy crumbles. It is therefore likely that, when an organisation’s legitimacy is under threat, organisations will seek to employ strategies which engage the constituency with the aim of attracting support. This is likely to apply to the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, where interest groups reported to have ‘lost touch’ with their membership and support base in the absence of face-to-face interactions. For example, NGOs and citizen groups could not rely on volunteers for almost two years. Membership associations (citizen, profession or business-based) had to shift internal conferences, events and annual general meetings to an online format. We therefore expect interest groups, which perceive
the loss of legitimacy as a threat to the stability of the organisation, to have engaged in other membership-oriented strategies.

**H6 ‘legitimacy hypothesis’: Legitimacy-related mortality anxiety during the pandemic is likely to drive interest groups into survival-seeking outside lobbying in form of strategies aimed at the support base.**

**Analysis: Lobbying Strategies for Policy Influence and Survival during the Pandemic**

In this section, we test the formulated hypotheses on strategy selection to assess the influence-seeking and survival-seeking mechanisms, respectively. In each case, we first present the outcome variables to measure strategy use, and then present multivariate regression models to understand the explanatory power of different factors.

**Explanatory Models of Strategies for Policy Influence**

First, we explore the use of different forms of inside and outside lobbying during the pandemic. To do so, we use data from our first survey of interest group activities after the outbreak of COVID-19 (Junk et al. 2020). We capture the use of lobbying strategies through five items, which measure the frequency of political activities targeting the media, social media, parliament, government and the bureaucracy as lobbying venues (cf. Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015). We classify ‘issuing press releases’ and ‘posting on social media about the organisation’s goals, positions or political objectives’ as outside strategies\(^\text{18}\). In contrast, seeking contact with 1) ‘politicians in government at any level’, 2) ‘members of parliament’ and 3) ‘the bureaucracy’, are grouped into inside strategies. These serve as our dependent variables. The answer categories take five

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\(^{18}\) We assume that the routine production of press releases requires substantial internal coordination and active investment in media monitoring to guarantee effective resonance. We cannot capture more ‘radical’ outside strategies, given that COVID-19 has limited the possibility of large gatherings. Our dependent variable does not capture the mode of communication (which is important, see Chalmers and Shotton 2016; Huwyler and Martin 2021). However, we assume that – given national lockdowns – most lobbying communication happened via email, text, phone or video conference.
values: ‘Never’ (1); ‘Less than once a month’ (2); ‘Once a month’ (3); ‘Once a week’ (4); ‘Almost on a daily basis’ (5).

We test our basic assumption on the stronger prominence of outside lobbying during the pandemic by taking the difference between the average frequency of the use of inside strategies and that of outside strategies and then dividing it by the sum of both. This measures the relative use of inside strategies over outside strategies and indicates which strategy interest groups favoured as net of the total volume of lobbying activity (Dür and Mateo 2013, 668).

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of frequencies (as percentages) of this measure. All frequencies to the left of the zero indicate relatively more outside compared to inside strategies. Everything to the right of the zero indicates more inside strategies relative to outside ones. In general, we observe a (somewhat) higher propensity in the use of outside strategies, but the overall distribution is quite consistent with the broader literature, which indicates that most interest groups combine the use of inside and outside strategies.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of inside strategies relative to outside strategies.

To explore the patterns in the (often simultaneous) use of both inside and outside strategies and test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, we conduct multivariate regression analyses. We employ five individual outcome variables capturing the use of 1) Media Strategies, 2) Social Media Strategies, 3) Government Strategies, 4) Parlia-
ment Strategies and 5) Bureaucracy Strategies, each corresponding to the survey item asking about the frequency of targeting these distinct arenas. This has the advantage of testing what drives the absolute use of these respective strategies, rather than the dichotomy of relative insider/outsider strategy use (see Figure 4.1), which might conceal that some – potentially powerful – organisations use both strategies very frequently (which would be located around the value of 0 in Figure 4.1).

To test for Hypothesis 1, we distinguish between business groups and firms, profession groups and unions and NGOs and citizen groups, using business groups and firms as reference category. We test Hypothesis 2 measuring resources for lobbying through an item that captures the number of staff working on public affairs in the organisations (in full time equivalents). This measure of human resources is an established proxy for resource endowment in lobbying (e.g. Mahoney 2008). Answers are grouped in three categories of low (<1), medium (1–4) and high (≥5). To test Hypothesis 3, we rely on a survey item that measures 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]’. Answers take five values, from ‘much less affected’ (1) to ‘much more affected’ (5). For more information about these variables, see Chapter 2.

Like in the previous chapter, our analyses control for the age of an organisation, which captures experience in lobbying and is likely to determine strategy selection, as well as correlating with other organisation characteristics. We also control for the extent to which an organisation is an umbrella organisation, given that these tend to operate as representation hubs in crises circumstances (Timoneda and Vallejo Vera 2021). We include fixed effects for countries and cluster standard errors by sector of activity of the interest group. The method of estimation is ordinal logistic regression for all models. The full regression output in table form can be found in the Online Appendix to the book (Table A4.1).

To ease interpretation for the reader, we have chosen to only display coefficient plots of the explanatory variables here.

Figure 4.2 plots the coefficients of our key variables on the five strategies under investigation. The left part of the graph shows results for outside strategies (media and social media), the right side shows inside strategies (government, parliament and bureaucracy). 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 factor and the frequency of use of the lobbying strategy.

Remember that, according to our first Hypothesis (H1), we expected business organisations to be more likely to select inside strategies, and profession groups and unions as well as NGOs and citizen groups to use more outside strategies. The
coefficients presented on the right-side in Figure 4.2 (inside strategies) are largely consistent with this expectation when business associations and firms and NGOs and citizen groups are compared (but, notably, not compared to profession groups and unions). Business organisations use more inside strategies (across government, parliament and bureaucracy strategy) compared to NGOs and citizen groups. Taking the bureaucracy strategy as an example (bottom-right in Figure 4.2), based on our model, the probability that business groups

Figure 4.2: Ordered logistic regression on the use of five lobbying strategies. Coefficients and 95/90% confidence intervals.

Notes: The figure is based on five ordered logistic regressions (one for each dependent variable: media strategy; social media strategy; government strategy; parliament strategy; bureaucracy strategy). Model 1 (n=1074), Model 2 (n=1073), Model 3 (n=1072), Model 4 (n=1071), Model 5 (n=1071). 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. Moreover, we clustered standard errors by sector given that strategy selection for groups within a sector is likely to be related. For results in table form see Table A4.1 in the Online Appendix. Measures of goodness of fit (pseudo R-squared) lie at 0.14 (Model 1), 0.11 (Model 2), 0.12 (Model 3), 0.10 (Model 4), 0.10 (Model 5).
and firms target this venue *almost on a daily basis* is 20 percent, while this drops to 14 percent for NGOs and citizen groups (similar effect sizes are found for other inside venues).  

On the other hand, *NGOs and citizen groups* are more active on social media compared to business organisations. According to our models, the predicted probability for the former to use this as a platform for outside lobbying *almost on a daily basis* is 38 percent and only 23 percent for the latter. Against our expectation, however, this is not the case as far as the media strategy is concerned, which business is significantly more likely to use compared to NGOs and citizen groups. This aligns with studies of lobbying in the media which show that business associations and firms shy less and less away from the media (Thrall 2006; Aizenberg and Müller 2020) than one might think. The COVID-crisis circumstances may have produced incentives for business to be active in the media across the board by ‘issuing press releases’ attempting to communicate legitimate frames around government intervention in support of the economy (cf. Keller 2018).

In our second Hypothesis (H2), we expected organisations with higher available lobbying resources to use both inside and outside strategies more frequently. Results confirm this expectation. First, higher resources are significantly and substantially associated with the use of inside strategies compared to low resources. Taking the government strategy as an example, our models predict that the probability that least resourced organisations are frequent users of this strategy between a *weekly* and an *almost daily* basis is 7 and 2 percent respectively. For well-endowed organisations, on the other hand, the predicted probability of lobbying this venue with equal frequency is 35 (*weekly*) and 15 percent (*almost on a daily basis*).

Secondly, we find that organisations with high resources for lobbying are also more likely than less resourced organisations to use outside lobbying. Looking at very frequent lobbying (*almost on a daily basis*) targeting the media, the difference between organisations with low and high resources is 25 percentage points: For less resourceful groups, the predicted probability of lobbying this venue frequently (*almost on a daily basis*) is 3 percent, whereas this increases drastically to 28 percent for better-resourced organisations. This shows that it is not the case that ‘poor’ organisations have advantages in using outside lobbying, as some theories assumed when naming them as potential ‘weapons of the weak’. This does not even hold for social media strategies, which organisations

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19 All predicted probabilities/values are based on the main models (see Figure 4.2) when holding all other variables at means.
with high and medium resources also use significantly more frequently than groups with low resources. Furthermore, the disadvantages of less resourceful organisations in outside lobbying are not less severe than for inside lobbying (see point estimates, Figure 4.2) going against what we expected in the latter part of Hypothesis 2. Instead, ‘rich’ organisations seem to be well-placed to use both inside and outside strategies more frequently, presumably as complements in their strategic toolbox (cf. De Bruycker 2019).

A test of independence in the use of outside and inside strategies further underlines this point. As Figure 4.3 shows, for highly resourced organisations (on the right of the figure), the distribution of lobbying strategy use clusters in the upper-right quadrant. This means that the combined use of frequent inside and outside strategies occurred often for organisations with high resources during the pandemic. For the category of organisations with lower resources (on the left of Figure 4.3), observations cluster on the bottom left meaning that these organisations often have low frequencies of using both inside and outside strategies.

Finally, our third Hypothesis (H3) that higher affectedness by the pandemic increases the frequency of use of all strategies is also supported by our statistical analysis. Figure 4.2 shows that more affected groups use inside and outside lobbying strategies more frequently across the board. That is, they were more active in parliament, the government, the bureaucracy, the media, and on social media. Taking all venues together, most affected organisations were on average 3.4 times more likely to use the lobbying strategies under investigation almost on a daily basis compared to least affected groups. To illustrate, while the predicted probability of least affected groups to frequently lobby parliament is 3 percent, this percentage reaches 11 percent for most affected groups. Similar differences are predicted for other venues.

This further documents a supply-side response by interest groups to the pandemic understood as a focusing event (see Chapter 1): Not only did affected groups mobilise (Chapter 3) more intensely and timely, they also used all strategies more often than less affected groups. This suggests that in times of new pressures and high uncertainty, affected organisations decide to seek contact with multiple targets to make sure their interests are considered. Moreover, it is also likely that gatekeepers were more open to engagement with more affected organisations, which we will test in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

So far, the analysis has revealed trends in the use of policy-driven lobbying strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic related to group type, resources and affectedness. The pandemic has, however, also deeply shaken the stability of the interest group system, threatening the survival of many organisations. Before
moving on to interest group access (Chapter 5), we therefore explore the extent to which strategies were driven by mortality anxiety in the next section.

**Explanatory Models of Strategies for Organisational Survival**

To explore survival strategies of interest groups, we use data from our second survey (Junk et al. 2021b) of interest group activities in COVID-19 times. We operationalise the three types of survival-driven strategies as resource-extraction strategies, public-oriented strategies and base-oriented strategies. Note that the first can be seen as a form of inside strategy, whereas the latter two are forms of outside strategies, but all three have the specific aim of securing the maintenance and survival of organisations.

These three strategies were captured by three items, which measure the frequency of political activities seeking to secure organisational maintenance. The

**Figure 4.3:** Bivariate distribution with frequency bars of the use of inside and outside strategies for interest groups with low resources (left) and high resources (right).

*Note: The bars display the frequency of a bi-variate distribution of the intensity of the use of inside and outside strategies. For example, taking the left side of the graph, the lowest frequency indicates that 55 organisations have never used inside strategies (0) and used outside strategies very rarely (0.2 on a 0–1 scale).*
first captures the frequency of activities ‘to seek public funding for organisational stability’. The second measures the frequency of activities seeking ‘public and media attention for organisational stability’, and the third ‘activities to reach out directly to members and supporters to enhance organisational stability’. Answers to these three items could take the levels ‘Never’ (1), ‘Only once a year’ (2), ‘A few times a year’ (3) and ‘Frequently’ (4).

In line with Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6, we link these survival-orientated strategies to specific dimensions of mortality anxiety related to ‘loss of income, funding and assets’, ‘loss of access to policymaking and public debate’ and ‘loss of supporters’. We capture these perceived threats to organisational stability with three survey items measuring mortality anxiety on a scale from 0 to 10.

Figure 4.4 shows variation in each form of mortality anxiety in relation to wealth, power and legitimacy (Stinchcombe 1965). All three distributions evidence a right-skewness, with 50 percent of respondents being ‘not at all’ or ‘not worried’ about organisational stability. However, 22 to 29 percent of the respondents express levels of worry higher than 5 about loss of income, access or supporters. We expect these higher levels of mortality anxiety to be associated with the use of resource-extraction, public- and base-oriented strategies.

Figure 4.4: Distribution of three faces of mortality anxiety (wealth, power and legitimacy).
We test our expectations (Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6) using ordinal logistic regression with country fixed effects and clustered standard errors by sector. Like in previous analyses, we include our main predictors (group type, resources and the level of affectedness by the crisis) and control variables. We expect that these should all influence the extent to which organisations engage in survival-driven strategies, and they plausibly relate to mortality anxiety. As an additional control, we include the percentage of an organisation’s income coming from public funding and membership fees.

As far as group type is concerned, we disaggregate business organisations into business associations and firms. Since firms do not have members, we expect them to follow different logics of survival strategy selection compared to business associations. We set NGOs and citizen groups as reference category in our analysis, since the literature associates them as more active in activities of organisational maintenance (Hanegraaff, Beyers, and De Bruycker 2016).

Results are shown in Figure 4.5 based on models with the full set of controls. The figure clearly documents that our new independent variables measuring different forms of mortality anxiety, are a systematic predictor of the frequency of engagement in survival-driven strategies.

Perceived threats from loss of resources, access and supporters are significantly associated with the more frequent use of strategies to seek organisational stability (through public funding, access to media and public debate, and direct engagement with the supporter base). Substantially, the predicted probability of making frequent use of, for example, resource-extraction survival strategies increases from 6 to 36 percent from lowest to highest levels of mortality anxiety in relation to wealth. For similar changes in mortality anxiety in relation to power and legitimacy, the likelihood of making frequent use of the associated survival strategy increases from 17 to 33 percent and from 39 to 72 percent, respectively. These are substantively large effects, showing that (inside and outside) strategy choice by interest groups was also motivated by survival fears during the pandemic in important ways.

At the same time, Figure 4.5 speaks to our main variables of interest throughout the book. Looking at differences between group types, we find that firms are less likely to engage in survival-driven strategies, compared to NGOs and citizen groups. This holds both for targeting political institutions (inside strategy for survival) and targeting the public or membership (outside strategy for survival). This highlights the differences between firms as political actors and membership or-

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20 The controls include the age of an organisation, the extent to which it is an umbrella organisation.
organisations (Baroni et al. 2014; Hart 2004). Compared to NGOs and citizen groups, however, also business associations as well as profession groups and unions are found to be less likely to engage in resource-extraction strategies.

Interestingly, higher lobbying resources are systematically associated to more frequent use of survival-driven strategies. Like in the case of policy-driven strategies, resources empower organisations in their political actions. Affected-ness, on the other hand, does not significantly impact the use of survival driven strategies. We argue, therefore that affectedness by new policy problems is theoretically distinct from mortality anxiety. While the former relates to policy dis-

**Figure 4.5:** Ordered logit regressions on the use of survival-driven strategies: resource-extraction strategies (top chart), public-oriented strategies (middle), base-oriented strategies (bottom). Coefficients and 95/90% confidence intervals.

*Notes:* The figure is based on three ordered logistic regressions (one for each dependent variable: resource-extraction strategies, public-oriented strategies, base-oriented strategies). The full models can be accessed in Table A4.2 in the Online Appendix. Model 1 (n=414), Model 2 (n=416), Model 3 (n=412). Included controls in all these models were: organisation age, the group’s potential status as an umbrella organisation, the percentage of an organisation’s income coming from public funding and membership fees, and fixed effects for the country/polity. Moreover, we clustered standard errors by sector given that strategy selection for groups within a sector is likely to be related. For results in table form see Table A4.2 in the Online Appendix. Measures of goodness of fit (pseudo R-squared) lie at 0.19 (Model 1), 0.07 (Model 2), 0.08 (Model 3).
turbances and the ‘logic of influence’, the latter represents a perceived threat to organisational maintenance and is connected to the ‘logic of survival’\textsuperscript{21}.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we analysed the strategic considerations of interest groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, we assessed the use of inside and outside strategies aimed at affecting policies, and we evaluated the explanatory power of the three main organisational characteristics considered in this book: group type, lobbying resources and affectedness by the pandemic. Our findings resonate well with the broader literature on lobbying in non-crisis circumstances, and support the hypotheses we formulated on lobbying strategies during the pandemic.

First, we show that resources are a driving force of strategy employment. We found that the use of all types of policy-oriented inside and outside strategies increases at higher levels of available lobbying resources of organisations. That is, organisations with higher staff resources used all strategic options more frequently than less resourced organisations. Moreover, we found, much in line with the literature, that lobbying resources help organisations to develop a more diverse strategic plan compared to resource-poor organisations (Pakull, Marshall, and Bernhagen 2020; De Bruycker 2019).

Second, in relation to group type, we found that business organisations were not only more actively aiming to influence inside channels, but also to target traditional media by means of press statements. Only on social media, NGOs and citizen groups were more active. While this finding is in line with earlier studies on ‘the myth of the outside strategy’ (Thrall 2006; also see: Tresch and Fischer 2015), we also think that the pandemic might play a role in explaining this result. As many businesses, much to their dismay, were closed due to the crisis, they were able to share personalised stories about the negative consequences of the pandemic (e.g. job loss). At the same time, their experiences had a large scope and affected many citizens (cf. Galtung and Ruge 1965), who, for instance, experienced closed shops, cancelled holidays etc. In contrast, the issues on

\textsuperscript{21} Also empirically, levels of correlation between our measurement of affectedness and different forms of mortality anxiety are relatively low (ranging from 0.16 to 0.27 depending on whether it is mortality anxiety in relation to wealth, power or legitimacy). This suggests that mortality anxiety does not absorb the effect of affectedness in our model. We therefore conclude that policy and other disturbances appear to explain influence-driven lobbying strategies, while mortality anxiety drives survival-driven strategies.
which many NGOs and citizen groups work, such as the environment or human rights, might have had less ‘news value’ (Galtung and Ruge 1965) during the crisis, which may have disincentivised these groups to try voice their interests through these channels.

Third, we document a strong effect of the affectedness of organisations on the use of inside and outside strategies. More affected organisations were significantly more likely to use both types of strategic options more frequently. This fits the pluralist idea that disturbances trigger political action (Truman 1951): After a focussing event, representatives of more affected societal and economic interests are incentivised to become politically active via the relevant means available. In the COVID-19 case, this holds for both inside and outside strategies. One can ask, however, whether and when other crises or focusing events give affected organisations this much media space. As Kollman (1998) implies, ‘affectedness’ may also need to be related to the public popularity of the position of a group, as this strongly affects the reputational consequences of going public.

In addition to the policy-oriented strategies of interest groups, we also analysed other strategic considerations. Considering the threat that the pandemic has posed to the survival of many organisations, we analysed whether and how levels of mortality anxiety drove the activity of interest groups. Our analysis clearly shows that such fears play a major role in strategy selection: organisations, which indicate to fear more for their survival, seek strategies – both in inside and outside venues – targeted at alleviating these pressures. Understanding these survival-orientated strategies is important because their use may partly come at the expense of policy-oriented strategic concerns. This might explain why NGOs and citizen groups use almost all types of influence-seeking strategies significantly less often than other groups: A lot of their efforts focus on survival-seeking strategies, which they are significantly more likely to use than all other group types. Overall, such trade-offs between the ‘logic of influence’ and the ‘logic of survival’ can lead to major imbalances in the system of interest representation, whereby weaker organisations become increasingly marginal in policy circles. In the next chapter, we assess the role of organisations in such ‘insider’ cycles, by looking at access to different political and media gatekeepers.

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**Online Appendix**