Chapter 6
Lobbying Influence

As the COVID-19 pandemic developed, the disproportional political influence of some interest groups at the expense of others became a rising concern, as reflected in newspaper coverage and public discussions (Guardian 2020; FT 2020). The extensive bail-out packages provided to the flag carrier airline company Air France-KLM, for example, attracted much criticism in the Netherlands (RTLnieuws 2020). In contrast, the Dutch cultural sector received little support, mostly because theatres, opera houses, music venues and exhibition areas were deemed non-essential and were, therefore, closed during the various national lockdowns. Moreover, many of the people working in this sector are self-employed and did not meet the criteria to be compensated (WorldEconomicForum 2022). This led to major outcries by workers in this sector, criticising the government for its lack of responsiveness to their demands and its too generous position towards big business (Parool 2020).

The question we pose in this chapter is whether such concerns were justified: were some interest groups’ lobbying efforts disproportionally more influential during the COVID-19 crisis compared to others? This question is inherently difficult to answer, because ‘lobbying influence’, understood as a causal effect of the activities of an organisation on policy outcomes, is extremely difficult to measure (see: Dür 2008; Bernhagen, Dür, and Marshall 2014; Klüver 2009; Lowery 2013; Leech 2010; Newmark and Nownes 2017). Like for political power in general (cf. Dahl 1957), it is extremely hard to provide empirical evidence that one actor (for instance an interest group) made another actor (for instance a legislator) do something, he or she would not otherwise have done (for instance design a rescue package).

Qualitative studies typically try to provide evidence for the causal chain leading from interest group activities to political decisions through process tracing (Dür 2008), which is a method that triangulates different data sources to provide plausible evidence for a connection (for empirical examples see: Dür and De Bièvre 2007; Phinney 2017; Rasmussen 2015). In contrast, the quantitative interest group literature typically works with selected proxies for interest group influence, which are plausible indicators for the presence of influence that do not, however, trace the causal process. One of the most frequently used proxies is perceived influence (Dür 2008), which builds on the influence perceptions of interest groups or policymakers (for empirical examples see: Binderkrantz and Rasmussen 2015; Heaney 2014; Junk 2020). Another common indicator is preference attainment (Dür 2008), which measures the extent to which policy decisions are in
line with a group’s goals (for empirical examples see: Dür, Bernhagen, and Marshall 2015; Klüver 2013; Junk 2019; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). Studies using either of these proxies build on the premise that interest group systems in which some (types of) organisations are consistently seen as more influential, or systematically see their preferences reflected in actual policies more often than others, are likely to be characterised by bias in political influence.

In this chapter, we follow this tradition and evaluate different proxies for the influence of interest groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. As in the previous chapters, we focus on group type, lobbying resources and affectedness as potential explanatory variables of lobbying influence, due to the supply and demand-side forces we described throughout the book (see Chapters 3–5). The contribution of this chapter lies in relating them to measures of political influence on COVID-19 related policies.

While most existing studies focus on only one measure of influence at a time, we here include three potential proxies for lobbying influence: 1) the self-perceived impact of interest groups on political decisions related to COVID-19, 2) preference attainment on COVID-19 related policies, and 3) policy satisfaction of interest groups with viral policies. Regarding the first indicator, we argue that influential organisations are likely to consider themselves able to impact policies by pushing policymaking into their preferred direction. The second indicator, preference attainment, refers to the proximity of policies with the policy positions held by interest groups on such issues (irrespective of whether lobbying is perceived to have caused policy to move in this preferred direction). Still, we argue that more influential organisations are more likely to see government policies closer aligned with their preferences than less influential groups do. While these two conceptions of lobbying influence are common in the interest group literature (e.g. Bernhagen, Dür, and Marshall 2014; Newmark and Nownes 2017), we add a third indicator and assess how satisfied organisations were with government policies. Our underlying assumption is that more influential organisations should arguably be more satisfied with government policies.

Although all three proxies for influence are likely to overlap in many instances (i.e. organisations see themselves as impactful, attain their preferences and are satisfied), we see them as conceptually and empirically distinct, which makes it fruitful to study them individually. Policy satisfaction and preference attainment, for instance, may diverge if organisations strategically adjust their preferences to what is feasible (achievable), not to what would make them entirely satisfied (Dür 2008). Moreover, interest groups may show awareness of the political or practical limitations of their preferred policy outcomes and could still be satisfied, even when their preferences remain unattained. It is, therefore, interesting
to analyse all three potential proxies to understand which interest groups had higher levels of political influence.

The findings in this chapter are important for several reasons. First, they matter when evaluating pandemic politics, in particular. The COVID-19 crisis has been one of the most impactful events in decades. An analysis of patterns in (perceived) political influence, preference attainment and policy satisfaction in *viral politics* helps understand which interests policymakers prioritise(d). This provides an indication of which non-state actors had the firmest grip on the political process during this crisis. Second, a more general question is to what extent lobbying influence reflects more optimistic (‘pluralist’) theories of lobbying (cf. Truman 1951), or whether a narrowly set of economic and/or well-resourced groups captures political decision-making (cf. Carpenter and Moss 2013; Dal Bó 2006; Olson 1965, 1982; Schattschneider 1960). Studying lobbying influence during the pandemic as an example of a system-wide *focussing event* helps shed light on such tendencies, as well as the resilience of (subsets of) interests group systems in a crisis situation (cf. LaPira 2014). Third, those that are interested in *measuring* political influence may find our direct comparison of three potential proxies useful.

In what follows we first juxtapose three potential indicators of lobbying influence in policymaking. We hereby set out the differences and similarities between the three proxies. In the subsequent section, we extend our argument to the COVID-19 case and develop hypotheses related to the three main group characteristics, as identified in Chapter 2: levels of affectedness, lobbying resources, and group type. In the empirical section, we test our hypotheses. Here we find quite some variation across the three proxies for influence and how they are explained by resources, group type and levels of affectedness. The results provide a nuanced view regarding the influence of interest groups during the COVID-crisis, leading to several optimistic and some pessimistic interpretations, as we discuss in the conclusion.

**Impact, Preference Attainment and Policy Satisfaction**

Why are some interest groups more successful in influencing public policy than others? Lobbying scholars have explored this question for decades, but are still short of a simple answer (cf. Lowery 2013; Leech 2010), partly because the concept is difficult to define and measure (Dür 2008; Klüver 2009; Bernhagen, Dür, and Marshall 2014). Moreover, even when one has a clear idea of what is meant by *influence* (e.g. Dür, Marshall, and Bernhagen 2019; Klüver 2013), the messy and context-dependent nature of politics complicates the account of what drives
it, because the specific situation is critical for who wins and who loses policy battles (cf. Baumgartner et al. 2009; Klüver 2011; Junk 2019). For these reasons, scholars mostly refrain from making bold statements about the general power of lobbying actors in political systems, and instead focus on specific instances where some interest groups are more impactful than others based on selected proxies for influence. In this chapter, we follow this logic by including three proxies when evaluating lobbying influence in context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our first proxy for the lobbying influence of interest groups is their perceived policy impact. We hereby link to the classic behavioural definition of influence stating that interest group influence refers to a situation where a policymaker takes a decision that, without the interaction with an interest group, would have turned out differently (cf. Dahl 1957). To derive such a causal interpretation of the effects of lobbying efforts, we rely on the perception of interest groups themselves (Dür 2008). We use the term perceived impact to refer to this behavioural and decision-making-oriented interpretation of influence, sometimes labelled ‘decision-making lobbying success’ (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2019) or ‘first face of power’ (Finger 2019; Lukes 1986). The two underlying assumptions for this proxy are that, firstly, organisations only have impact when effects result from their lobbying activities aimed at specific political decisions, and, secondly, that organisations themselves are well-equipped to evaluate these effects. Lobbying impact can, in this sense, be observed as an individual trait, i.e. an organisation is (perceived to be) impactful or not and this gives an indication of who is supposedly pulling the strings in decision-making.

Our second proxy for interest group influence is preference attainment, meaning the degree of alignment between the goals of an interest group and actual policies. This proxy helps identify which organisations have benefitted the most from particular policy programs, in our case, during the pandemic. By approximating the distance between the preferences of organisations and actual policy outcomes, it measures which interest groups see their preferred outcomes reflected in public policy. Put differently, this measure captures the extent to which outcomes in terms of government policies are in line with demands of interest groups (e.g. Bunea 2013; Bernhagen, Dür, and Marshall 2014; Klüver 2013). While this measure does not entail assumptions about the causal reasons for attaining one’s preferences, one can argue that a closer match between policies and the preferences of some interest groups compared to others suggests that political institutions have been more responsive to the needs of some organisations. Still, a key difference between preference attainment and impact is that the former does not require individual interest groups to have been politically active. Some organisations may not have lobbied (intensively) but may still see
their preferences reflected in policies because, for example, structural power is at work (Dür 2008; Culpepper 2015), or because a group has been simply ‘lucky’ (Klüver 2013), for instance, because other actors with the same preferences have made a difference (cf. Junk and Rasmussen 2019; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015). Rather than an individual achievement of specific lobbying organisations, preference attainment is, therefore, a broader characteristic of all groups sharing the same preferences.

Third, we analyse an additional potential proxy for the influence of interest groups, namely policy satisfaction. This concept is prominent in public opinion research as an indicator of the extent to which citizens are willing to accept a policy decision (Esaiasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2017). It is, however, not typically used in the interest group literature, although it might contribute fruitfully to the study of interest representation and lobbying influence. We assume that, like for citizens, it is meaningful to evaluate how satisfied interest groups are with resulting policies. While not capturing their individual impact on policies (meaning influence in a narrow, causal interpretation), satisfaction captures a broader, contextual measure of contentment with political outcomes. Satisfaction can, in this sense, be a pointer towards outcomes that do (or do not) seem fair or reasonable from the perspective of interest groups. This measure of their satisfaction with policies may, hence, consider the decision-making context and process, the positions and needs of other organisations, and other forces at play that may have impacted decision-making. Depending on such considerations, satisfaction might be high, although an organisation’s preferences might not have been attained. Especially considering the state of emergency during the pandemic, which required almost all actors to accept unpleasant outcomes and compromises, we see this measure as a useful addition to more ‘classic’ ways of approximating lobbying influence.

In the following, we theorise how interest group characteristics relate to these three potential proxies for influence after the disruption caused by external events, in our case the COVID-19 crisis. As in previous chapters, our arguments focus on the characteristics of interest groups – their level of affectedness by the pandemic, their lobbying resources, and group type differences – which we argue are important explanatory factors for their potential lobbying influence. Like in previous chapters, these factors speak to more ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ views of lobbying and political influence.
Optimistic Accounts of Affectedness as a Determinant of Influence

Our first hypothesis focuses on interest groups’ level of affectedness by the pandemic. There is not much literature to build on when seeking to explain the political influence of more affected organisations in politics. As extensively discussed in this book, disturbance theory, which, in principle, links the level of affectedness by ‘disturbances’ experienced by societal interests to the governmental process, has not seen explicit empirical assessment as far as influence is concerned. Rather, scholars working in the tradition of Truman (1951) assume that organisations which mobilise more often and quicker compared to others will eventually be more influential (Lowery and Brasher 2004; Rasmussen, Carroll, and Lowery 2014; Hanegraaff, Berkhout, and van der Ploeg 2022).

In this book, we argue – and show empirically – that this assumption holds, because affectedness is pivotal at all stages of the influence production process: First, as we argued in Chapter 3, more affected organisations have incentives to politically mobilise (more frequently and swiftly) compared to organisations which were less affected by the pandemic. Higher affectedness also drives frequent use of all types of strategies, as we elaborate on in Chapter 4. Lobbying activity (in such various ways) is likely to make an issue more visible to policymakers (see also: De Bruycker and Beyers 2019). As we show in Chapter 5, these gatekeepers do not only react to an abundant supply of lobbying by more affected groups, but also actively demand input from affected groups (cf. also: Leech et al. 2005; Broscheid and Coen 2007). Put differently, they pull affected groups into the policy process, for instance to collect information about the effects of the crisis.

We expect these push- and pull-forces involving affected groups to result in higher influence on policies after the disturbance. While access can certainly not simply be equated with influence (Dür and De Bièvre 2007), researchers tend to assume that the likelihood of influence increases with more (insider) access (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015; Danielian and Page 1994; Eising 2007). This is reasonable because policymakers should, in the first place, be more likely to ‘grant’ access to those interest groups that (in the eyes of policymakers) can actually inform policymaking (especially when policymakers themselves reach out to interest groups).

More specifically, the input of affected groups is likely to be relevant for solving the policy problems that policymakers face after a focussing event, like the COVID-19 pandemic. When policy-relevant information has been supplied by an affected group, this is arguably one of the most direct pathways to exerting a causal impact on policy, in the sense that other outcomes would have come about without the group’s input (cf. Dahl 1957).
Similarly, regarding the preferences of more affected interest groups, these should be more likely to be attained, when groups have contributed with policy relevant information based on their own affectedness by the event. This does not only hold at an individual level, but is relevant for all like-minded groups sharing the same preferences and challenges during the pandemic. In this sense, the benefits of lobbying strategies used by some actors might spill-over to other groups with similar preferences (Egerod and Junk 2022). Such like-minded groups are sometimes called lobbying ‘camps’ or ‘sides’ promoting the same position, and existing research shows that their collective efforts are highly relevant for lobbying success (Böhler, Hanegraaff, and Schulze 2022; Klüver 2013; Junk and Rasmussen 2019; Lorenz 2020; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015; Truijens and Hanegraaff 2021).

Finally, regarding the policy satisfaction of more affected groups, we expect their higher ability to voice their concerns, achieve access, and potentially enjoy impact and preference attainment to be reflected in higher levels of policy satisfaction. As we argued above, we expect policy satisfaction to be a function of the policy preferences of an organisation and the concrete policies, but weighted against an evaluation of what organisations see as reasonable or achievable in light of the broader context and other concerns. It is an interesting empirical question whether and how much this diverges from the other individual (impact) and more camp-related (preference) accounts of outcomes.

Hypothesis 1 summarises our expectations including all three proxies for influence.

\[ \text{H1 ‘affectedness hypothesis’: The more affected groups were by the pandemic, i) the more (perceived) impact they had on COVID-19 related policies, ii) the higher their level of preference attainment, and iii) the higher their policy satisfaction.} \]

‘Pessimistic’ Accounts of Resources and Group Type as Determinants of Influence

Again, we juxtapose these disturbance-driven and more optimistic accounts with ‘elitist’ expectations about resources and group type as important drivers of influence. As argued in previous chapters, Olson (1965) challenged Truman’s assumptions regarding mobilisation (see Chapter 3). As articulated in his later book, Olson (1982), however, also expected lobbying influence to be substantial and, due to unequal mobilisation, to be biased in favour of special interests. In the long-run, he expected this to be detrimental for the quality of public policy,
because the weakness of state authorities leads relatively well-staffed interest groups to be able to *de facto* control public policies in their own favour.

This argument resonates with more recent studies, as well as the concept of regulatory capture (Carpenter and Moss 2013; Dal Bó 2006), which denotes a situation where special interests (for example well-resourced industry interest) shift policy towards their own preferences and away from the public good. Based on such views, a fear would be that well-resourced organisations, as well as business groups and firms, can exert undue influence over policy outcomes.

However, existing studies have provided somewhat mixed evidence regarding whether this is the case. As far as the effect of resources is concerned, several studies, especially in the United States (US) context, follow a famous model by Grossman and Helpman (1994) and provide evidence for a relationship between money (for instance campaign contributions) and political influence (e.g. Ederington and Minier 2008; Matschke and Sherlund 2006; McKay 2018). Others have shown that lobbying expenditures systematically link to gains in tax exemption (e.g. Richter, Samphantharak, and Timmons 2009), that trade protection is granted to firms with higher assets (Egerod and Justesen 2021), or that higher available lobbying resources make an impact on decision-making more likely (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2019; Stevens and De Bruycker 2020).

While these studies confirm that financial resources are a critical factor for lobbying influence in politics, many other studies have, perhaps surprisingly, not been able to provide conclusive evidence for this relationship. For instance, in the US context, Baumgartner et al. (2009, 203) find that for ‘the most part, resources have no significant correlation with a positive policy outcome’ (also see: McKay 2012). In the EU context, Klüver (2013) similarly found no association between a groups’ individual lobbying resources and its lobbying success. These authors, however, provide evidence that *collective* resources by lobbyists on the same side of an issue (or in the same ‘lobbying camp’) are significantly related to lobbying success (also see: Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015).

Regarding potential influence advantages for business organisations, findings in the existing literature are also mixed. Several qualitative studies including different cases and policy fields suggest that business groups are more influential during legislative procedures (Rasmussen 2015; Michalowka 1998; Michalowitz 2007). In a quantitative study of Danish and British lobbyists, Binderkrantz and Pedersen (2019) find that business groups are more successful in affecting decision-making than citizen groups. In contrast, De Bruycker and Beyers (2019) studying a wide range of issues in EU legislative politics find no difference between the (perceived) influence of business associations and NGOs. Similarly, Binderkrantz and Rasmussen (2015) find that business was not considered more influential to set the agenda of the European Commission across the
United Kingdom, Denmark and the Netherlands. And, quite surprisingly, Dür, Bernhagen, and Marshall (2015) even show that business organisations are more likely to lose when it comes to EU policymaking (also see: Judge and Thomson 2019).

A potential reason for these mixed findings might be that the effect of resources and group type is strongly dependent on the specific issue or political context. In addition, these mixed findings could be related to the use of different methods to measure lobbying influence, such as through process tracing, by measuring tax benefits quantitatively, comparing organisations’ preferences and policy outcomes, or capturing their perceived influence. An advantage of our analysis is, in this regard, that we compare three different potential indicators for lobbying influence: perceived impact, preference attainment and policy satisfaction. While we a-priori expect all indicators of lobbying influence to be positively associated with better-resourced groups, as well as business associations and firms (based on elitist or ‘pessimistic’ views of lobbying), our analysis will also be able to explore whether the different measures lead to different conclusions.

Applied to ‘viral lobbying’ during the pandemic, we expect business organisations and groups with higher resources to have enjoyed significant supply side (see Chapters 3 and 4) and demand side advantages (see Chapter 5) throughout the influence production process, ultimately resulting in higher influence on COVID-19 related policies. Especially considering the pandemic’s potential to cause a deep economic recession, we reason that governments’ crisis management policies placed special focus on alleviating the pressure on economically important organisations, as well as those best able to voice their grievances thanks to higher lobbying resources (cf. Blau, Brough, and Thomas 2013, on the financial crisis). Therefore, as Hypotheses 2 and 3 summarise, we expect the levels of our three proxies for lobbying influence on viral policies to be systematically higher for groups with higher lobbying resources, as well as for business organisations.

H2 ‘resources hypothesis’: The more resources interest groups had at their disposal, i) the more (perceived) impact they had on COVID-19 related policies, ii) the higher their level of preference attainment, and iii) the higher their policy satisfaction.

H3 ‘group type hypothesis’: Business organisations had i) more (perceived) impact on COVID-19 related policies. ii) higher preference attainment, and iii) higher policy satisfaction, compared to NGOs and citizen groups.
Analysis: Lobbying Influence during the Pandemic

Before systematically testing our hypotheses, we provide a descriptive overview of our three dependent variables, which draw on both waves of our cross-country survey (Junk et al. 2020; Junk et al 2021).

Overview of Three Proxies for Interest Group Influence

To measure a group’s perceived impact on COVID-19 related policies, we use a survey question which asked respondents to ‘rate the impact of [their] organisation on political decisions related to the Coronavirus crisis’ (using a 0 – 10 scale). We asked this question in both waves of the survey (2020 and 2021). Relying on interest groups’ ratings of their (own) perceived influence is a common practice in interest group surveys (e.g. Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2019; Heaney 2014; Junk 2020). Lobbyists tend to overestimate their impact somewhat (Newmark and Nownes 2017), but this seems to be consistent across group types.

The distribution of the self-perceived impact measures (2020 and 2021) is presented in Figure 6.1 (top part of the graph). On the left side, the results of the first wave covering the period between March and June 2020 are presented, and on the right are the results for the second wave covering June 2020 to June 2021. Overall, the results show much variation across organisations and the extent to which they indicate to have impacted viral policy. Many organisations do not perceive themselves as impactful, as indicated by the higher bars at the left end of the figures. Roughly half of the respondents fall into the first four answer categories, which we label as ‘low impact’. Approximately 35 percent of organisations indicated to be medium to somewhat influential (categories 4 – 7). Below 15 percent indicated to have been highly influential during the pandemic (categories 8 – 10).

Notable is also that this pattern is relatively stable across the two waves. In wave 2, the reported impact by interest groups was somewhat lower than during the first wave, yet differences are marginal. Overall, the data is in line with other studies, which suggest that interest groups tend to fail in their lobbying efforts more often than not, and that there is variation across organisations (Lowery 2013). At the same time, we think that Figure 6.1 also reflects the relatively limited control interest groups had over executive-centred crisis management. Rather than a ‘failure’ on the part of lobbyists, one could understand this as a relative closure of government decision-making during COVID-19, also noted in COVID-related studies of parliamentary opposition (e.g. Louwerse et al. 2021; Pedersen and Borghetto 2021) and executive politics (Bolleyer and Salát 2021).
We see a somewhat different trend for our second proxy for influence: preference attainment. Figure 6.1 (bottom right) plots the answers to our question to what extent ‘COVID-related policies in [country] were aligned with [the] organisation’s goals and preferences’. Respondents could indicate this on a scale from 0–10, ranging from ‘to no extent’ to ‘the highest extent’. Note that this question was only included in the second wave of our survey and covers the period from June 2020 to June 2021. As Figure 6.1 shows, the distribution is not as right-skewed as perceived impact, and looks more similar to a normal distribution. Put differently, we see that respondents achieved higher preference attainment compared to policy impact. It is still noteworthy that very few organisations agreed to the ‘highest extent’ that all their preferences were attained. Overall, the figure illustrates that there is much variation across organisations when it comes to the attainment of policy preferences during the pandemic, with the majority seeing only some of their preferences attained.

Next, we plot policy satisfaction of interest groups with viral policies adopted by governments during the pandemic (Figure 6.1 bottom left). Respondents could indicate on a scale from 0–10 to what extent they agreed that decisions 1) on health and safety measures, and 2) on easing restrictions had sufficiently taken into account interests of organisations like [theirs] or their members. Moreover,
we asked to what extent they agreed that 3) economic rescue packages had addressed the needs of organisations like [theirs] or their members. To take all these three sets of COVID-19 related policies into account, we take the mean of the three items as our dependent variable. Note that we only asked these questions in wave 1 of the survey and cover the period from March to June 2020.

As Figure 6.1 shows, we observe quite some variation in the extent to which organisations were, in this sense, satisfied with government policies in the early phase of the pandemic. Most observations are stacked in the middle, which indicates a medium level of policy satisfaction. Only few were very dissatisfied, and only few were very satisfied, with the majority (almost 58 percent) falling in the middle categories (satisfaction $\geq 4$ and satisfaction $<8$). This is relatively similar to the measure of preference attainment: Mean values, standard deviation and skewness are comparable ($\text{policy satisfaction: mean} = 5.3$, $\text{standard deviation: 2.2}$, $\text{skewness: -0.3}$; $\text{preference attainment: mean} = 4.8$, $\text{standard deviation: 2.6}$, $\text{skewness: -0.1}$). If anything, policy satisfaction has been evaluated more positively than preference attainment.

Overall, this indicates that interest groups were moderate in their evaluation of policy (dis)satisfaction, as well as in their assessment of preference attainment regarding COVID-19 related policies (although to a slightly lesser extent)\textsuperscript{31}. In contrast, ratings of perceived impact are on average lower ($\text{mean} = 3.7$ (2020) and $\text{mean} = 3.6$ (2021) on a 0–10 scale). The patterns in Figures 6.1 tentatively indicate that there are differences between our three proxies of lobbying influence. This fits the argument we started out with. As we reasoned in the beginning, perceived impact is centred on the effects of individual lobbying efforts in a causal link evaluated by the respondent. Preference attainment, instead, can also be due chance, free-riding or structural power dynamics. Finally, policy satisfaction adds a contextual evaluation regarding the sufficient inclusiveness of the process and policy decisions. In the next section, we test our hypotheses on these three dependent variables.

**Explanatory Models of Lobbying Influence**

We now test our hypotheses by means of a series of regressions. Like in previous chapters, our independent variables are the level of affectedness, resources, and group type. Affectedness is measured through a survey item that captures the extent to which an organisation, according to its own perception, was ‘more or less

\textsuperscript{31} Note, however, that we measure this at two different points in time.
affected by the Coronavirus crisis, compared to other stakeholders in [country]?". Answers take 5 values, from 'much less affected' (1) to 'much more affected' (5). Lobbying resources are captured by a question that asks about the number of staff working on public affairs in the organisation (in full time equivalents). Answers are grouped in three categories of low (<1), medium (1–4) and high (≥5). Finally, organisations are grouped into three interest group categories: business groups and firms, profession groups and unions, as well as NGOs and citizen groups. We use business groups and firms as reference category in our analyses. For more information about these variables, see Chapter 2.

In addition, we control for the age of an organisation, which captures experience in lobbying and is likely to relate to both influence and other organisational characteristics, such as resources. We also control for whether an organisation is an umbrella organisation, given that these representation hubs might be more influential. The analyses also include fixed effects for countries/polity and clustered standard errors by sector of activity of the interest groups.

The results, based on four ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, are presented in Figure 6.2 in form of coefficient plots, whereas table-form results can be found in the Online Appendix (Table A6.1). 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 respective proxy for influence. The figure depicts the measures from 2020 on the left (perceived impact and policy satisfaction), and 2021 on the right (perceived impact and preference attainment). The first insight from the Figure 6.2 is that the evaluation of patterns in influence varies depending on which proxy is used.

Starting with perceived impact, which we measured in both 2020 and 2021, we see clear support for our ‘affectedness hypothesis’ (Hypothesis 1). More affected organisations saw themselves as more impactful compared to less affected organisations across both survey waves. To illustrate, our 2020 model predicts that the perceived impact of least affected groups on COVID-19 related policies equals 2.4 on a 0 to 10 scale. This reaches 4.8 for most affected interest groups. The size of this effect is very similar when based on our 2021 model of perceived impact.

At the same time, patterns in perceived impact support our resource and group type hypotheses (Hypotheses 2 and 3): Better resourced organisations and business organisations saw themselves as more influential, compared to re-

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32 All predicted values are based on the main models (see Figure 6.2) when holding all other variables at means.
source poor organisations, and NGOs and citizen groups, respectively. Again, the findings are consistent across both waves (left and right side of Figure 6.2). More specifically, *better-resourced organisations* see themselves almost twice as impactful compared to *less resourceful ones*. Our model for 2020 estimates the perceived impact of groups with high resources at 5.1 points on a 0 to 10 scale, while this is 2.7 for groups with low resources. Again, substantially similar effects are predicted based on the 2021 model.

Group type differences exist but are less pronounced. Our 2020 model predicts a perceived impact score for *business groups and firms* of 4, while this is 3.2 for *NGOs and citizen groups*. This difference is statistically significant. For
2021, this difference is only slightly smaller but does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

When looking at our second proxy of influence, *preference attainment* (2021), results look different compared to perceived impact in at least one important regard: *affected organisations* did not see their preferences more attained compared to organisations which were less affected by the crisis. This means that there is no support for Hypothesis 1 based on this proxy. A potential explanation for this could be that due to the collective nature of lobbying (Klüver 2013; Junk and Rasmussen 2019; Lorenz 2020; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015), whereby high lobbying involvement and (perceived) impact of the most affected organisations leads to broader benefits that also spill-over to less affected (and less individually impactful) groups. For example, the lobbying efforts of the highly affected travel and tourism industry for sizable economic rescue packages that reflect their preferences may have ‘spilled-over’ to other sectors by raising expectations for government spending and support, also in more moderately affected sectors such as retail. Put differently, the active lobbying impact of affected groups does not seem to make all affected groups significantly better off than less affected groups.

Regarding Hypotheses 2 and 3, however, the results support the previous conclusions. High resources (compared to low) and being a business organisation (compared to an NGO or citizen group) are associated with significantly higher levels of preference attainment in viral politics. Our model estimates a score of 4.3 on a 0 to 10 scale of preference attainment for *less resourceful organisations*, compared to 5.8 for *better-resourced* ones. Comparing group types, *NGO and citizen group’s* level of preference attainment is estimated at 4.4. In contrast, *business groups and firms* reach a significantly higher level of preference attainment at 5.1 on the same scale. This might suggest that resourceful organisations and business groups, indeed, lobby for more concentrated interests, as Olson (1965/1982) assumed. If the benefits of such lobbying efforts spill-over to like-minded groups (cf. Egerod and Junk 2022), then this seems to benefit the attainment of preferences for other resourceful organisations and business groups, rather than a broader set of interest groups. From a normative perspective this is worrisome, as it indicates that policy outcomes favour some organisations disproportionately, hence confirming an elitist reading of interest group politics.

The results based on the third proxy, *policy satisfaction* (2020), add to this picture. However, they show that group type differences in policy satisfaction are less pronounced than based on perceived impact and preference attainment. Moreover, we observe no significant differences in levels of policy satisfaction among groups with higher and lower levels of resources. In other words, there is no support for Hypotheses 2 (resources) and 3 (group type). This might indi-
cate that disadvantaged organisations in terms of policy impact and preference attainment (i.e. less resourceful groups and NGOs), accepted policies as sufficient or adequate, at least to the same extent of business groups and resourceful organisations. This could be related to the severity of the crisis. Arguably, the health crisis and severe risk of economic turmoil were so pressing for governments and society in general that these interest groups may have moderated their expectations and were, therefore, willing to accept compromises

³³ Anecdotal evidence supports this interpretation (see also Chapter 7). That is, some NGOs we encountered stopped their advocacy efforts, as they understood that these were not a priority given the crisis at hand.

With regards to the levels of affectedness by the pandemic, the finding based on policy satisfaction is surprising. Against our general expectation (Hypothesis 1), we see in Figure 6.1 that more affected groups were less satisfied with policies adopted by the government during the crisis (although only at a weak level of statistical significance). To illustrate, mean levels of policy satisfaction are estimated to lie at 5.5 for least affected groups and at 5.1 for most affected groups. Again, this difference is only weakly significant and relatively small in substantive terms. Nevertheless, this complements our previous findings in interesting ways. While affected groups felt more impactful on COVID-19 policy, they did not see their preferences more likely to be attained than less affected groups. This, in turn, might explain their lower level of satisfaction with policy outcomes.

This result also points to an important reservation regarding our more optimistic findings: Despite the efforts of gatekeepers to alleviate the concerns of highly affected organisations (Chapter 5), affected groups were still extremely hard-hit by the pressures and circumstances caused by the pandemic. As an example, one can imagine highly affected organisations in the education sector, such as associations of teachers and parents. Representatives of the sector may have felt impactful and may have attained some of their preferences in the passage of policies, such as on health and safety measures, financial support and priority in the re-opening of schools after lockdown periods. At the same time, they were presumably still relatively dissatisfied with government policies, given the continued presence of major challenges and grievances in the running and the implementation of school programs during the pandemic. In that sense, our analysis suggests that after a focussing event (in our case the pandemic), af-

³³ An alternative explanation could be that NGOs and citizen groups have generally lower expectations of policy impact and preference attainment, because they perceive themselves as lobbying outsiders compared to other groups (such as economic groups).
fected groups might enjoy increased attention and achieve higher lobbying impact, but still remain worse off than less affected societal groups.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we analysed the final stage of the influence production process: the influence of interest groups on policymaking. We relied on two common indicators for lobbying influence in the literature: *perceived impact* and *preference attainment*. In addition, we introduced a new potential proxy for lobbying influence in a polity, namely *policy satisfaction*. We argue that this adds relevant insights regarding the distribution of lobbying influence, because it contains a broader reflection by interest groups whereby their own preferences are weighted against the broader societal and economic context. Whenever analyses of lobbying influence are meant to speak to the broader question of biases in political decision-making, this can be an important addition. Not only is it relevant to ask which groups see themselves as influential and attain their preferences, but also whether satisfaction or grievances are distributed unequally among groups. After a focussing event like the global pandemic, it might be that more impactful groups still have relatively low policy satisfaction. At the same time, some of the factors which drive impact and preference attainment, such as group type differences, might disappear when policy satisfaction is considered. Our results speak to the case of COVID-19 and show that impact, preference attainment and policy satisfaction seem to tap into different perceptions expressed by organisations during this crisis. It is plausible this difference also holds outside of the specific crisis circumstances.

Methodologically, our results therefore highlight that these three measures potentially capture different aspects of interest group influence in the political arena. While there was certainly overlap between some findings, no pair of proxies led to the same conclusions regarding our three hypotheses on affectedness, resources and group type. This indicates that the three proxies of influence are related, but that the choice of indicator has far-reaching consequences for the results.

This means that, substantively, our findings on patterns in lobbying influence in viral politics are mixed. Regarding *perceived impact*, which we see as the best measure of *individual* and *behavioural* lobbying influence of organisations (based on their causal interpretation of their own lobbying efforts), we observed optimistic and pessimistic trends. The good news is that more affected organisations saw themselves as more influential compared to less affected groups. This is good news from a pluralist perspective, as it highlights that gov-
ernments were not only consulting relatively strong organisations, but also seem to have taken the input provided by relatively more affected organisations into account. At the same time, well-staffed interest groups, as well as business organisations were also relative winners as they had a higher perceived policy impact compared resource-poor organisations, as well as NGOs and citizen groups, respectively. Jointly, these findings fit the view of elite pluralism, as coined by Coen (1998), where the system is responsive to a broad set of actors, but still consistently favours relatively powerful groups active in the system (see also: Eising 2007).

For preference attainment, we observed similar trends only when it comes to resources and group type. That is, while better-resourced groups and business organisations experienced significantly higher levels of preference attainment, this was not the case for more affected organisations. Our reasoning for this is that the collective nature of lobbying in camps, which promote similar preferences (Klüver 2013; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015; Junk and Rasmussen 2019), means that the (individual) impact of some actors spills over to other like-minded organisations (Egerod and Junk 2022). In other words, the impact of an organisation may be more diffuse, benefitting the attainment of preferences for other (more and less) affected organisations. Who benefits, in this sense, from the lobbying efforts of others, is therefore an important question to ask when evaluating lobbying influence in a political system. We showed that the higher impact of affected groups does not systematically help all affected groups to achieve higher levels of preference attainment.

Finally, for policy satisfaction we observed both interesting variation as well as relevant null-findings. Both resources and group type did not matter for policy satisfaction. This is interesting considering the former significant findings for preference attainment and impact. This may suggest that less resourced organisations, as well as NGOs and citizen groups, who were less impactful and attained lower levels of their preferences in policy outcomes, still found government policies sufficiently balanced, perhaps because they had lower expectations of attaining their preferences and goals given the severity of the crisis.

With this diverse view of lobbying influence, we reached the end of the influence production process, covering issue mobilisation (Chapter 3), strategy selection (Chapter 4), access (Chapter 5) and, finally, influence (this Chapter). In the concluding chapter of this book, we tie the most important findings together and highlight what we have learned from studying viral lobbying. Before this, however, we first substantiate our quantitative analysis of the influence production process with qualitative nuances, derived from focus group interviews with selected interest groups. Most importantly, we assess how the conjunctures we
made in this book in relation to resources and affectedness fit in with the experiences of interest groups. This qualitative evidence also sheds more light on the mechanisms that may explain our findings. In the next chapter, we therefore let practitioners narrate and share how COVID-19 has changed lobbying for them.

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**Online Appendix**