Chapter 8
Trends and Biases in Viral Lobbying and their Implications

The spread of the Coronavirus in Europe in early 2020 set a chain of events in motion that led to a set of policies nobody could have imagined. Freedom of movement was restricted in unprecedented ways with, for example, curfews and both national and international travel restrictions. Cultural, educational and retail activities were put on hold to stop the virus from spreading. At the same time, governments made enormous economic rescue packages available to protect businesses and employees from the negative repercussions of these safety measures. In addition to national recovery packages in Europe, the EU devised its ‘largest stimulus package ever’ (Commission 2021) as a response to the pandemic: a total of 1.8 trillion Euros in the EU’s 2021–2027 long-term budget were allocated to rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe.

All these decisions had massive effects on the lives and activities of different social and economic groups. One of the key ways for such interests to express their concerns and needs during the pandemic was through political activity taking the form of viral lobbying, which we defined as all organised attempts to influence public debates or policies during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 1).

Under the extreme strain of this crisis, a myriad of interest groups competed for attention and support to represent different interests and voice the concerns of affected sections of the population. To illustrate, the organisation Eurochild, which is a network of organisations and individuals working with and for children in Europe, tried to draw attention to the fact that the ‘COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing problems of social inequality, with [...] school closures creating a wider educational divide, impacting children’s life chances, and their physical and mental health’ (Eurochild 2020). Eurochild and its members, therefore, called for ‘recovery plans that take children’s needs into account’ (ibid). At the same time, the European Tourism Sector pleaded through the European Tourism Manifesto for ‘urgent supportive measures to reduce the devastating impact of COVID-19’ (HOTREC 2020). The organisation pointed out that millions of jobs were ‘currently at stake, while many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) risk closing their business’. So, the organisation argued that ‘support for tourism must be a priority in the crisis response, recovery plans and actions of affected economies’ (ibid). These examples constitute just two of the extensive lobbying efforts interest groups advanced during the pandemic, of which many did not even make the newspapers.
In this book, we analysed quantitatively what characterised such viral lobbying efforts at different stages of the influence production process. Specifically, we looked at the mobilisation of interest groups after the outbreak of the pandemic (Chapter 3), the strategies used by groups seeking to influence and secure their survival (Chapter 4), their access to policymakers and the media (Chapter 5), and, ultimately, their influence on COVID-19-related policies (Chapter 6). Moreover, we reflected on our quantitative findings based on the diverse experiences shared with us by lobbying practitioners in three countries (Chapter 7).

Throughout the chapters, we were interested in evaluating whether there is support for what we labelled more optimistic or pessimistic accounts of lobbying in times of crisis. More pessimistic views of lobbying (Olson 1965, 1982; Schattschneider 1960) would expect systematic advantages for business groups and better-resourced organisations throughout the influence production process. In contrast, more optimistic accounts would assume that lobbying reflects the underlying changes and needs that exist at the societal level (Truman 1951). In times of COVID-19, that would have meant that groups that were highly affected by the pandemic should have been drawn into political activity, should have enjoyed the attention of subsequently better-informed gatekeepers and exerted a constructive influence on resulting policy choices.

To test these accounts, we traced the explanatory power of three main factors throughout all phases of the influence production process: resources, group type and the level of affectedness by the pandemic. In each chapter, we employed several alternative measures of the outcome variable of interest, each of which captures a different aspect of the stages of the influence production process. In this way, we captured differences in degree and type of issue mobilisation, strategies, access and influence, as well as variation over time throughout the pandemic.

Our analysis of viral lobbying in eight European polities is based on two waves of a cross-country survey (Junk et al. 2020; Junk et al. 2021b), which we conducted at different stages of the pandemic (see Chapter 2 for details) and complemented with qualitative focus group interviews (see Chapter 7). The findings of these endeavours show that the glass is both half-full and half-empty when it comes to the explanatory power and associated normative evaluation of our three factors (resources, group type and the level of affectedness), as we will summarise in the following sections.
Evidence for ‘Pessimistic’ Views of Viral Lobbying

We find strong evidence that better resourced, i.e. better staffed, groups enjoyed advantages at each step of the influence production process. They were more likely to mobilise after the outbreak of the pandemic, and they did so faster and more intensely than less resourced organisations (Chapter 3). Better-resourced organisations were able to use all types of inside and outside strategies more frequently than less resourceful groups (Chapter 4), accessed venues of decision-making and public debate more frequently and were even contacted more frequently by political gatekeepers themselves (Chapter 5). In that sense, both the supply-side of lobbying (i.e. the strategies of groups) and the demand-side (i.e. the behaviour of political decision makers) favoured better-resourced groups during the pandemic. Reaching the final stage of the influence production process, we found that better resourced groups also saw themselves as more impactful on the passage of COVID-19-related policies and attained their policy preferences to a higher degree than less resourceful organisations (Chapter 6). Tracing this mechanism in focus group interviews, we conclude that such resource advantages in the influence production process most likely relate to an interest group’s improved ability to provide useful information to gatekeepers and being recognised as insider by politicians and journalists themselves (Chapter 7).

Thus, the verdict based on our analyses at different stages of the lobbying process and different points in time (2020 and 2021) is clear: during the COVID-19 pandemic, low lobbying resources (measured as low staff capacities for policy work and public affairs) were a clear hindrance for interest representation. Against the backdrop of existing research this finding is remarkable, because, in general, the effects of resources on lobbying success have been inconclusive (see for instance: Baumgartner et al. 2009, 190–214; Mahoney 2007; Klüver 2011), or identified as being contingent on contextual factors (Dür and Mateo 2014; Stevens and De Bruycker 2020). In contrast, our findings are unambiguous: at all stages of the influence production process, organisations with higher lobbying resources enjoyed advantages. This finding arguably supports a pessimistic view of lobbying in contemporary democracies and suggest that there are ‘elitist’ tendencies in lobbying, as Olson (1965) and Schattschneider (1960) warned.

An important follow up question is how (unequally) these resources are distributed between interest groups in the European polities we studied. Our findings would be more worrying if lobbying resources were available only to organisations representing narrow interests. As shown in Chapter 2, however, the distribution of resources among organisations is fairly even (at least in our data), between the three categories, as well as across the three group types we
investigated. This is (at least) a first indication that different types of organisations are able to attract (member and government) resources, and this includes also organisations that represent broadly shared societal views (also see Chapter 7 for a discussion of the distribution of new resources during the pandemic). That said, resource advantages are still a problem in interest group communities and they do bias lobbying. Governments should therefore be aware of their potential impact on the policymaking process (Crepaz and Hanegraaff 2020; Mahoney 2008; Salgado 2014).

Our findings regarding the effects of group type also speak to the more pessimistic interpretations of viral lobbying. We find evidence for biases in favour of business organisations or other economic groups, yet these are not as consistent throughout all stages of the influence production or alternative measures of our outcome variables. There is evidence that NGOs and citizen groups were disadvantaged compared to business organisations in several instances: they mobilised at a slower pace and less intensely (Chapter 3); they used inside strategies less often (Chapter 4); compared to trade unions and profession groups, NGOs and citizen groups were also clearly contacted less often by political gatekeepers both in the early and later phases of the pandemic (Chapter 5); finally, they reached lower levels of perceived impact and preference attainment compared to business groups (Chapter 6). Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that our analyses provide a nuanced picture regarding both advantages and disadvantages for different group types. We found, for instance, that NGOs and citizens were more involved than business organisations in the use of social media strategies. This is adds to other research, which shows that different interest group types enjoy advantages in different venues of public policy (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015), while evidence for the effect of group type is mixed (e.g. Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2019; Eising 2007; Dür, Bernhagen, and Marshall 2015; Rasmussen and Carroll 2013).

Figure 8.1 summarises our findings that document biases based on resources and group type at different stages of the influence production process.

**Evidence for ‘Optimistic’ Views of Viral Lobbying**

At the same time, our analyses, also provide evidence for a more optimistic view of lobbying, a (half) full glass, so to speak: They show that lobbying at all stages of the influence process was responsive to the changes in societal interests after the outbreak of the pandemic. We see the pandemic as an example of an ‘actual’ focusing event (see Chapter 1) triggering interest groups to lobby (i.e. a supply side response) and gatekeepers to consult relevant groups (i.e. at the demand
Evidence for ‘pessimistic’ lobbying theories stressing biases in influence production

1. Issue mobilisation
   - Less resourceful organisations (and NGOs) encountered mobilisation problems

2. Strategy selection
   - Less resourceful groups (and NGOs) used all available strategies less often
   - NGOs used inside strategies less often than business organisations

3. Access to gatekeepers
   - Less resourceful groups (and NGOs) were contacted less often by political gatekeepers

4. Lobbying influence
   - Less resourceful groups (and NGOs) had lower preference attainment and perceived impact

Figure 8.1: Problems in the lobbying process: Summary of the effects of resources and group type.

Evidence for ‘Optimistic’ Views of Viral Lobbying

Besides) to inform new policies. More specifically, we found that organisations that were more affected by the pandemic were more likely to mobilise and did so at a higher pace and more intensely (Chapter 3). They also used all types of influence-seeking strategies more frequently (Chapter 4), accessed policymaking and public debate more frequently and were also contacted more frequently by policymakers themselves during the early months of the pandemic, and by both political and media gatekeepers one year into the crisis (Chapter 5). Finally, more affected organisations registered higher levels of perceived impact on COVID-19 related policies both in the first months of the pandemic and one year later (Chapter 6). As documented in our focus group interviews, such advantages have likely been associated with the affected groups’ ability to act as transmission belts between government and affected constituencies, providing an ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’ channel for the flow of information (Chapter 7). Thanks to this role, affected groups received ‘cascades of attention’, which have sometimes put them under intensive strain and workload.

Interestingly, however, more affected organisations were neither more likely to attain their policy preferences compared to less affected organisations, nor were they more satisfied with policy outcomes (Chapter 6). This might suggest that policies after a focussing event attend to affected groups to compensate for negative impacts, but do not necessarily favour affected groups in a way to fully compensate their losses, compared to the less affected actors. Moreover, the implications of viral politics may have been so broad that the benefits of policy outcomes also spilled over to less affected groups, even if these took a step
back from lobbying to leave room for stakeholders lobbying on urgent crisis-related issues (Chapter 7). At the same time, groups had the option to *reframe* their agendas in terms of COVID-19 to have a voice in policymaking (Chapter 7), which nuances our finding on affectedness. Still, our evidence throughout the chapters clearly documents, based on the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, that lobbying and gatekeeper practices help ensure the representation of affected groups after a focussing event. Figure 8.2 summarises these findings by showing how affected groups move through the influence production process and take more prominent roles than less affected organisations at each step of this process.

Evidence for ‘optimistic’ lobbying theories stressing responsiveness to the focussing event

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 8.2: Responsiveness in the lobbying process: Summary of the effects of affectedness.*

Our analyses throughout the chapters here attended to both the supply-side of lobbying (mobilisation and strategy use), and the demand-side (patterns in gatekeeper contact), as well as their combination (access and influence). Notably, our results show that the political system was more responsive to affected organisations throughout the entire influence production process; and this was a function of both supply-side and demand-side practices during the pandemic.

We see this focus on affectedness of interest groups by a focussing event as an important addition to a *normative* evaluation of the role of interest groups. As we argued throughout the book, we consider it important that interest effectively signal changes in society or plausible implications of policy initiatives to political gatekeepers, who, in turn, consult these groups to inform policy reactions. That is, responsiveness of affected parts of the group system to a focussing event, as well as policymakers’ *responsiveness* to these affected groups is impor-
tant for the groups themselves, as well as for the quality of public policy outcomes in terms of the information weighted, the likely support and effectiveness in the realisation of policy objectives (see also: Lindblom 1968).

**Implications beyond the Pandemic**

To sum up, our analyses entail both good and bad news about lobbying during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bad news first: The lack of lobbying resources was a clear hindrance for interest representation at all stages of the lobbying process. Not only did less resourced groups lobby less, but the practices of gatekeepers also disfavoured them – instead of supporting them by pulling them into the political process, which would arguably be desirable. The good news, however, is that both groups and gatekeepers managed well when it comes to ensuring that more affected interests received a voice in politics.

One can further ask: what do these patterns in ‘viral lobbying’ tell us about interest group politics in more general terms? Some may argue: ‘not a great deal’ given the pandemic was such an exceptional and unique situation. We disagree. There is evidence of a high degree of continuity with non-crisis circumstances, even though COVID-19 gave rise to unprecedented political situations. Bonafont and Iborra (2021, 21), for instance, show that the COVID-19 pandemic ‘did not alter business groups’ position in the policymaking process’ in Spain. Eady and Rasmussen (2021) suggest that the pandemic has not drastically changed biases in lobbying at the EU-level, and Junk et al. (2021a) show that access to different gatekeepers in nine European countries and at the EU-level has remained constant for approximately 60 percent of interest groups after the pandemic broke out.

To put it in the words of Fraussen et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have brought out ‘the good, bad, and the ugly’ in lobbying, in the sense that it exemplified good and bad tendencies in lobbying that also exist in non-crisis times. This is also how we interpret our findings: the patterns we documented throughout the book – advantages for better-resourced organisations, as well as a responsiveness to affected groups – are general trends in interest group politics, and what we observed here is likely to characterise other lobbying situations.
Policy Implications of our Findings

This book can inform a number of practical lessons for decision makers interested in fostering more equality in lobbying access and influence both in crisis and normal circumstances. As we document throughout Chapters 3 and 4, less resourced groups are less likely to engage in political action and use inside and outside lobbying strategies less frequently. If their voice ought to be included equally in policymaking, then demand-side forces are needed to identify them and pull them into the process (see Chapter 5). There are different ways how this can be achieved.

First, policymakers can use consultation instruments, which proactively invite interest representatives to participate in the policy process. These instruments are on the rise in European policymaking (Bunea 2013; Bunea and Thomson 2015; Binderkrantz, Blom-Hansen, and Senninger 2021; Fraussen, Albareda, and Braun 2020; Klüver 2012). However, while consultations offer an open platform of participation, their effectiveness in terms of meaningful consultation and impact remains contested (Fraussen, Albareda, and Braun 2020; Braun and Busuioc 2020).

Second, policymakers can specifically seek to pull less active and disadvantaged interest groups into the policy process. The challenge in this case is that it is difficult to identify such interest groups. Laws to improve lobbying transparency, such as lobbying registers, can help policymakers and journalists to map the interest group population, making it easier to document and correct biases in interest representation (Chari et al. 2020; Crepaz 2020; Fraussen and Braun 2018; Nästase and Muurmans 2020).

An alternative or complementary intervention targets the resource differences themselves. It is common practice that NGOs partly rely on government support to fund their activities. At the same time, research shows that better-resourced organisations and well-represented groups have better chances of obtaining grants (Crepaz and Hanegraaff 2020; Persson and Edholm 2018). Our results suggest that equitable grant allocation practices can play an important role in ensuring that groups can participate in policy processes also in crisis circumstances. Conversely, limitations to the extent to which funding can be used for advocacy and political action may undermine the ability of ‘weaker’ organised interests to mobilise and diversify the use of strategies of political action (Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz 2004; Mosley 2012; Neumayr, Schneider, and Meyer 2013; Leech 2006). With the purpose of empowering political participation, public donors could allocate some funding towards projects that aim at improving advocacy efforts and lobbying for organisations under a certain threshold of political activity.
In a long-term perspective, a combination of measures can be fruitful to level the playing field when it comes to the involvement of less resourced actors. At the same time, with such measures in place, interest group communities could find themselves better prepared when new crises hit political systems in the future. In crises circumstances, having an attentive eye on marginal and less resourced organisations is arguably especially important. When urgency drives decision-making, it is normal for policymakers to select and listen to groups that are well-adapted to give efficient and information-rich consultation input. However, such practice can bias policy outputs, especially in situations where political outsiders could also contribute with important perspectives for solving new policy problems.

By the same token, our findings imply that interest groups should strategically invest in advocacy and public affairs capacities, if they wish to have a say in policymaking. Our results show that lobbying resources correlate with issue mobilisation, a broad use of lobbying strategies, but also access and influence. This may be because lobbying becomes more professionalised when conducted by designated public affairs staff, but may also relate to the fact that higher numbers of lobbying staff help interest groups become visible and ‘get noticed’ by policymakers and journalists. When organisations receive new funding, it can therefore pay off to use parts of the newly acquired resources to empower lobbying capacity, including information gathering on new policy problems and their effects on members (see Chapter 7).

At the same time, any attempts to improve policy or lobbying practices based on our study need to take into account that all findings are contextual. An important caveat for our results is that they do not necessarily hold across all policy issues. A key finding in existing lobbying research is that the characteristics of a policy issue, such as its complexity, the level of conflict and its salience, are an important explanatory factor for lobbying patterns and success (Klüver 2011; Junk 2016; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018; Junk 2019). While our results draw a picture across policy issues related to COVID-19, nuances at the issue level should be taken into account.

### Implications of Context Conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a highly salient issue where many interest groups jumped on the ‘bandwagon’ (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Halpin 2011) and became active on COVID-19 related policies. We would argue that our findings are likely to travel to other issues that are characterised by such high salience. When a policy issue dominates media headlines, at least for a period
of time (cf. Downs’ issue attention cycles (1972)), there is a good chance that affected organisations will mobilise into the policymaking process and will be further pulled into decision-making by political gatekeepers. As we argued in Chapter 1, viral lobbying can even be interpreted to denote the situation where a highly salient issue attracts high levels of lobbying activity (i.e. ‘goes viral’), and our results are likely to be informative in such contexts.

When it comes to less salient issues, however, where only a handful of interest groups mobilise and there is little or no media attention, the rules of the lobbying game are likely to be quite different. As Schattschneider (1960, 20) put it, the ‘outcome of the political game depends on the scale on which it is played’: when salience and conflict is low, both interest groups and political gatekeepers are likely to have different incentives than on salient issues. This is likely to affect the entire influence production process, as some existing studies also document by showing that patterns in lobbying success vary on more and less salient issues (Junk 2019; Klüver 2011; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018).

How our findings travel to less salient issues is therefore an open question and should be tested in future research. Arguably, more salient issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are most likely cases for finding an impact of affectedness. That is, without the pressure of public and media attention, affected interest groups arguably have lower incentives and opportunities to mobilise intensely, given their members, stakeholders and potential influence targets are likely to pay less attention to their activities. At the same time, on issues with low salience, gatekeepers are less likely to fear being penalised in terms of decreasing public support or electoral consequences for a lack of responsiveness to affected interests. In Hacker and Pierson’s (2014) words, they may operate in the ‘electoral blindspot’ and can cater more to moneyed interests even against broader public interests, without the fear of electoral punishment. On highly salient issues, in contrast, incentives to mobilise and consult affected groups should be higher. These types of issue-specific hypotheses have increasingly been the focus of recent studies of interest group politics (e.g. Hanegraaff and Berkhout 2019; Junk 2016; Klüver 2011), but the particular interrelation between affectedness, salience, and, plausibly, group type surely merits attention in future research.

Innovations and Avenues for Future Research

We hope that our analyses are useful for future researchers and practitioners that seek to design studies to evaluate the effects of lobbying. We first reflect on the distinct ways in which we measured outcomes and subsequently identify
promising avenues for future research related to the key explanatory factors studied.

**Novel Measures of Lobbying Outcomes**

To start, throughout the chapters, we exemplify the diverse ways in which we can capture steps in the influence production process as outcome variables. Table 8.1 summarises the diverse measures we employed throughout the book for these important outcomes of interest. As the table shows, our measures include both more common operationalisations, as well as additional operationalisations that have not often been used before. We hope that our focus on pace (Chapter 3), survival-seeking strategies (Chapter 4), demand-driven access (Chapter 5), and policy satisfaction of interest groups (Chapter 6) adds new nuances to the study of interest group politics and its effects.

**Table 8.1: Overview of dependent variables to operationalise stages in the influence production process.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobilisation Strategies</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Influence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More common operationalisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue mobilisation (binary)</td>
<td>Influence-seeking inside strategies: government, parliament, bureaucracy (frequency of use)</td>
<td>Inside access: government, parliament, bureaucracy (frequency of access)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilisation intensity (count or frequency of activity)</td>
<td>Influence-seeking outside strategy: media and social media (frequency of use)</td>
<td>Outside access: media (frequency of access)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional (newer) operationalisations</td>
<td>Survival-seeking inside and outside strategies: resource-extraction, public-oriented and base-oriented strategies (frequency of use)</td>
<td>Demand-driven access: contact initiated by inside and outside gatekeepers (binary or frequency of contact)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notably, we relied exclusively on survey data in two waves of our cross-country survey to capture different facets of these important concepts (see Chapter 2). Fu-
Future research could further develop these (new) operationalisations, potentially adding other data sources, such as (automated) coding of websites or social media content, newspaper articles, consultation responses and policy documents (Aizenberg and Binderkrantz 2021; Bunea and Ibenskas 2015; Dwidar 2022; Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Klüver 2009), for instance, with a focus on timing (Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Junk 2022). Interviews with lobbyists and gatekeepers could also provide additional data needed to account for the motivations behind particular activities and the effects of the contextual factors (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Beyers et al. 2014; Leech 2002; Statsch and Berkhout 2020). In this book, we used focus group interviews (Cyr 2019), which we see as a fruitful research strategy to investigate interest group experiences and interactions (cf. Berkhout et al. 2021). In twelve online focus groups with approximately 50 participants, we were able to collect rich qualitative data on how interest representatives perceived the role of resource constrains and affectedness during the pandemic (see Chapter 7). We argue that this method, which is rarely used in political science, has high potential when participants are interest group representatives.

Substantively, there are a number of open questions connected to these newer operationalisations that we have presented in the book: How and when does mobilising early lead to first mover advantages in lobbying (see also: Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Junk 2022)? How do survival-seeking and influence-seeking strategies complement or compromise each other? To what extent are the decisions by gatekeepers to contact interest groups dependent on interpersonal relationships and/or on institutionalised party-interest group connections (see: Allem et al. 2021)? And, is it a broader trend that policy satisfaction varies so little between different types of actors as it did during the pandemic? In addition to raising these questions, our findings on the three main explanatory factors may fruitfully inform future studies.

**Future Research Directions based on our Findings**

We have several future research suggestions deriving from our findings on resources, group type and affectedness, respectively. As noted, we found staff resources to be an important explanatory factor in all stages of the influence production process. At the same time, more work is needed to assess the actual normative implications of this finding; both in terms of ‘bias’ in interest representation and the instrumental value of interest representation for public policy.

In studies of US lobbying and campaign finance, lobbying power and ‘money’ is typically assumed to be highly unequally distributed and there are
fears of ‘regulatory capture’ (Carpenter and Moss 2013; Dal Bó 2006) by moneyed interests that shift policy away from the public interest and towards special (industry) interests. When this is the case, an effect of resources on lobbying influence is a strong indicator of representational ‘bias’ in politics, and a clear substantiation of pessimistic views on interest representation. However, it remains an open question whether and when well-resourced organisations systematically lobby to counter public interests.

As Flöthe and Rasmussen (2019) show, for example, firms and business associations often lobby for positions that enjoy the support of a sizable share of the public. Similar patterns might hold for well-resourced organisations, some of which use their resources to advocate for highly popular positions. Further empirical studies are needed to assess how and when staff resources help or hinder constituent representation and congruence between public policy and citizen interests. By extension, these studies could speak to the difficult question of whether well-staffed organisations instrumentally improve the quality of the public policy outcomes (e.g. Anderson 1977; Lindblom 1968).

As regards group type, throughout the conceptual sections of the chapters, we pointed to arguments that suggest that some of the effects noted are plausibly different for business organisations compared to other interest groups. At the same time, existing studies suggest that the effect of group type on lobbying strategies and influence depends on other organisation and issue characteristics (e.g. Dür and Mateo 2013; Dür, Bernhagen, and Marshall 2015). However, we did not study such potential interactions and their implications after a focussing event. As discussed above and in Chapter 1, our focus on the COVID-19 pandemic means that we studied a set of highly salient issues after a (quite unprecedented) focussing event. More generally speaking, however, such events or crisis circumstances might affect different types of groups in distinct ways, for instance providing a platform for public advocacy for some and triggering public withdrawal for others. While each event or crisis has its unique characteristics, we see strong merit in studies comparing interest representation during a broad variety of events or crises, to uncover such potential patterns.

We know that that events trigger policy processes in unexpected ways (e.g. Birkland 1997) and that party politics is (partially) event-driven (e.g. van der Brug and Berkhout 2015), but we have limited conceptual or empirical understanding of the types of events that trigger particular interest group activities (but see: LaPira 2014). At minimum, an ‘event-measure’ could be included in issue-level research designs, such as done by Mahoney (2008), where she found meaningful differences in the likelihood of policy change following events such as the Enron scandal in 2001, the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, and the 2004 Madrid metro bombings. More elaborately, future studies could compare
interest representation following a larger number of events and unpack the political implications of distinct event-characteristics on the stages of influence production and different types of interest groups.

Finally, our analysis of the effect of affectedness could be expanded in the future. In the earlier chapters of the book, we conceptually embed affectedness as a supply-side effect arising from socio-political disturbances, whereas the later chapters emphasise the demand-side needs of policymakers in search of information to design well-targeted public policies. These conceptual arguments align with the research questions posed in the different chapters, but we do not test them as empirically distinct forms of affectedness – which they potentially are. Future studies could develop such more precise types of affectedness (see also: Junk et al. 2021a), such as ‘social affectedness’ versus ‘policy affectedness’. This could help to disentangle supply- and demand-side mechanisms further and advance our understanding of the role of affected organisations in the policy process.

We hope that our analyses of viral lobbying in this book can inform such future research. And, most importantly, we hope they have helped practitioners, students and scholars interested in this pandemic to understand the ability of interest groups to contribute to viral politics by voicing the needs and concerns of different social and economic groups.

References


References


**Online Appendix**