Live to Fight Another Day?
The Mortality Anxiety of Organized Interests: Government Patronage in Times of Austerity

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Abstract. Quite some recent research on advocacy demonstrates a link between organizational maintenance and the political activities of organized interests. This paper focuses on organizational maintenance and seeks to explain varying levels of mortality anxiety. Based on a large survey among Belgian interest groups, we show that strong government patronage in times of austerity as well as inter-organizational competition has a substantial impact on mortality anxiety. Basic organizational features – such as organizational age or membership – seem to be much less important than the resource dependencies with government agencies. Furthermore, our analysis demonstrates that neo-corporatist systems may exemplify much higher levels of competition and organizational volatility than is often assumed.
Introduction

While the activities of interest groups are often analysed through a political-strategic lens, much work has emphasized how considerations related to organizational maintenance shape the political behaviour of these organizations (Lowery 2007). For instance, the extent to which they engage in venue-shopping across multiple levels of government is, among other factors, shaped by their critical resource dependencies, more in particular their dependence on resources within the national context (Beyers and Kerremans 2007). Likewise, the balance between inside and outside strategies might be inspired by considerations about possible influence, yet also by motives related to the maintenance and survival of the organization (Dür and Mateo 2013; Hanegraaff et al. 2016). In that sense, a high public profile can ensure continued support from the constituency of the organization and its funders, which in turn benefits the further organizational maintenance of the interest group.

These examples clearly illustrate that interest group behaviour is not only driven by the need to shape public policy. It is also determined by concerns regarding organizational maintenance and continued survival. As other work has demonstrated, interest group populations are characterised by a high level of volatility, caused by the “death” of existing organizations and the emergence of new groups (for a recent overview and discussion, see Halpin and Jordan 2012; Lowery et al. 2015). In short, clarifying the potential of organizational mortality is crucial for our understanding of interest group politics. In this paper, we seek to contribute to a better understanding of these dynamics by exploring the factors that shape the mortality anxiety among interest groups in a neo-corporatist polity (Belgium) and in times of government austerity. What explains why some organizations fear for their continued existence while others do not have these existential concerns? To what extent is this determined by the overall societal environment, internal organizational aspects or a group’s relations with public authorities. We strongly focus on the latter component and more particularly government patronage. However, government patronage is a double-edged sword. Whereas government patronage might benefit the organizational development and reflects the legitimacy a group enjoys, a high dependence on government patronage may also put pressure on organizations and create high levels of insecurity among groups (especially in times of austerity). In recent years the Federal and regional governments (especially Flanders) in Belgium have strongly cut back government subsidies for civil society organizations. Government support has been diminishing for six consecutive years, while other long term subsidies are being transformed into short term project subsidies (De Standaard 2016). Yet mortality anxiety might also be shaped by other quintessential factors,
such as how organizations are managed (for instance by professional managers) or the extent
to which a group has strong and stable roots in society (for instance whether or not it has
local chapters).

In this paper, we build upon previous work on this topic, in particular the work by
Gray and Lowery on population ecology (1996), as well as previous studies on mortality
anxiety in the United States and the United Kingdom (Gray and Lowery 1997; Halpin and
Thomas 2012). Our work is also inspired by a larger literature that has put organizational
questions more central, such as research applying insights from organizational ecology (for a
recent overview, see Lowery et al. 2015), as well as work on the organizational design and
development of interest groups, social movements, third sector organizations and political
parties (Clemens 1997; Katz and Mair 1998; Halpin 2014; Minkoff 1999; Skocpol 1999;
Staggenborg 1988; Young 2010; Verschuere et al. 2013).

The contribution we make here is threefold. First, we provide the first study of mortality
anxiety in a neo-corporatist context. Sometimes it is taken for granted that interest group
competition is less pronounced in these systems compared to more pluralist ones. However,
not many scholars have assessed this assumption. A rare exception is Fisker’s work on the
population development of Danish patient groups (2013). In her study, she notes a low
proportion of organizational deaths in Denmark, which she describes to differences in how
legitimacy and group competition play out. In particular, she argues that in neo-corporatist
systems groups need to be viewed as legitimate interlocutors by state actors, and that
competition between groups therefore primarily involves acquiring a “representative
monopoly” (2013). We focus on the case of Belgium, a country that has typically been
described as “moderately neo-corporatist”; in that sense it is quite similar to countries like
Germany and Denmark (Bloodgood et al. 2013; Lijphart and Crepaz 1991; Luyten 2006;
Siaroff 1999; see also Beyers et al. 2014). Second, in explaining mortality anxiety, we
elaborate the possible impact of political-institutional factors, in particular the relations with
public authorities. Building upon recent insight from the interest group literature and
borrowing the concept of institutionalization from the party politics literature, we assess how
different aspects of organizational institutionalization relate to varying levels of mortality
anxiety. In this way, we seek to complement earlier work that has highlighted the impact of
the external environment on the maintenance and survival of organized interests, such as
population ecology (Gray and Lowery 1996, for a recent discussion see Lowery et al. 2015).
We complement this literature, which has, largely due to it strongly reliance on population
census data, less strongly focused on the way in which specific aspects of the political-
in institutional context shape the organizational maintenance of individual organized interests (Halpin and Nownes 2011; Halpin and Jordan 2009).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we relate the question of mortality anxiety to broader questions and earlier work on the maintenance and survival of interest groups. We also clarify how the concept of institutionalization can enhance our understanding of the internal design of organized interests and their relations with public authorities. Subsequently, we outline our main hypotheses for explaining mortality anxiety. Next, we clarify our research design and data, which results from a survey among national and regional interest groups in Belgium; in this section we also briefly clarify the main features of the Belgian interest group system. In the last two sections of the paper, we present the results of our preliminary analyses and discuss the main findings and implications.

**Organizational maintenance of organized interests**

Just as recent research, our project has been greatly influenced by concepts from organization theory and population ecology. In addition to this, we aim to cross-fertilize our insights with concepts developed in the literature on political parties. Although parties and interest groups fulfil different political roles (elections, lobbying), they are – organizationally speaking – similar, which makes that they face comparable organizational challenges. It is therefore not entirely surprising that authors from both fields study similar phenomenon (e.g. professionalization, individualization) and arrive at comparable insights (Burstein 1998, Katz and Mair 1995). In recent years, party scholars have paid considerable attention to the concept of institutionalization, which is generally defined as the process by which patterns of interaction between and within organizations (parties or interest groups) become more routinized, predictable and stable over time (Casal Bertoa 2012).

Party scholars have made a distinction between institutionalization at the party system level and institutionalization at the organizational level (Randall and Svåsand 2002). The main idea here is that high levels systemic institutionalization frequently go together with high levels of individual party institutionalization. Yet, this need not always be the case as, under some conditions, some institutionalized parties thrive in de-institutionalized systems (and vice-versa). With respect to interest groups a parallel distinction can be made between the institutionalization of the system of interest representation and the institutionalization of individual interest groups. For instance, systems of interest representation are frequently categorized by labelling them as (neo)-corporatist, statist or pluralist. In this paper we focus
primarily on organizational institutionalization. Parallel to the party literature, we distinguish organizational institutionalization as having an internal and external component. Internal organizational institutionalization refers to the degree of routinization of internal organizational processes. Or, to what extent relations between staff members, management and the members are characterized by predictable and stable (decision making) rules, practises or procedures (such as voting, consultation etc.). It is relevant to emphasize that institutionalization, could be, but is not necessary directly associated with organizational growth. Larger organizations need more routines and rules in order to function adequately. Nonetheless, while institutionalization is frequently associated with more “developed” organizations (groups having more resources or a larger membership), size in itself is not considered the main factor that drives organizational institutionalization. Although more resources could stimulate the process of institutionalization, also small organizations with limited resources might be pretty institutionalized if they were able to establish a routine presence, have well-established internal decision-making processes, are seen as legitimate interlocutors and are not threatened in their survival (see also Randall and Svåsand 2002).

External organizational institutionalization, the main focus of this paper, refers to how an organization is embedded within its broader environment. The external component has three aspects. It involves the extent to which an individual organization enjoys 1) stable and predictable relations with (the) government(s); 2) is connected with other intermediary organizations (such as umbrella groups, but also coalitions and platforms); and 3) whether it is considered (reified) by the ‘public’ as a legitimate representative of a certain group/constituency. In this respect, institutionalization reflects the extent to which the representation of some interests has gained a certain level of legitimacy, which, for instance, implies that some organized interests are seen as relevant interlocutors and/or are worthwhile of government support.

It is worth emphasizing that the internal and external component of institutionalization are not necessarily congruent. Some organizations are internally strongly institutionalized whilst they are (externally) not institutionalized. For instance, they are not seen as relevant or legitimate interlocutors by government agencies. When considering the Belgian system of interest representation, we could say that Belgium is typically characterized as a neo-corporatist political system (Siaroff 1999; Lijphart 2011). This implies a system of interest representation in which (mostly socio-economic) peak associations play a central role in the policymaking process. We could say that (neo)-corporatism has two crucial empirical features. First, in terms of policy formation, this system of interest representation is
characterized by an extensive and often institutionalized process of *concertation* between the government and interest organizations, in which the stakeholders try to reach some common ground (Beyers et al. 2014; Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982). Therefore, regular government access is an important factor explaining the institutionalization of organized interests. Such institutionalized arrangements include, for example, extensive consultation procedures, subsidies and in some cases even veto rights for (some) organized interests (Popelier et al. 2012). Second, this mode of policy formation is usually, but not necessarily always, associated with the mobilization of interest group communities that are to a certain degree hierarchically nested. That is, in a neo-corporatist setting, we expect to observe a relatively small, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated population headed by large peak associations.

Therefore, it is often presumed that a neo-corporatist structure generally implies a rather non-competitive and stable interest group environment. When considering the institutionalization of Belgian interest groups level, we expect a small set of policy insiders to be strongly institutionalized. Internally, the large economic peak associations and trade unions have developed stable and predictable internal decision making procedures, they embody a large array of distinct organizational entities, they frequently consult their members, and they have strong ties with their local or regional branches. They also employ a large number of staff members. Externally, there are reified in the public mind as legitimate interlocutors and enjoy a stable stream of income.

However, interest group politics in neo-corporatist countries has another side. The characterization of Belgium as a neo-corporatist country is increasingly contested. Already in 1991, Arcq and Marques-Pereira for instance argued that; ‘…it is doubtful whether the permanent conflict of interests occurring in the Belgian industrial environment are in line with the neo-corporatist frame of reference.’ In a similar vein, Vilroox and Leemput (1998) argued some years later that Belgian’s state-society relations have changed drastically since the 70’s, and as a result do no longer clearly fit with a centralized neo-corporatist framework. This leads various scholars to conclude that, due to its specific political situation, it has become more difficult to determine the place of Belgium on the neo-corporatist – pluralist continuum, although in general it still is considered “moderately corporatist” (for other countries see Christiansen 2012; Christiansen et al. 2010; Öberg et al. 2011; Traxler 2010; Woldendorp and Delsen 2008).

One of these changes in state-society relations since the 70’s is the gradual devolution of the Belgian centralized state into a decentralized federal system. Yet, in the context of
relations between the state and civil society, this feature has received less attention than neo-
corporatism. With the transfer of substantial competences to its sub-entities, the Belgian polity is now effectively split into different sub-national polities, which are characterized by their own institutional logic (see for example, De Rynck and Dezeure 2006). At this moment, it is unclear how these system level dynamics affect organizational institutionalization at the individual level. The dispersion of access points, which is typical for systems of multilevel governance, will foster interregional differences in interest group organization and a greater differentiation in the associational landscape. Furthermore, partially due to the shifting of resource dependencies of interest groups shift from the national to the regional governments as well as the emergence of various new social issues in a post-industrial society, we saw the surge of new interest groups (Keating and Wilson 2014; see also Celis et al., 2013; Fraussen and Beyers 2014). In short, neo-corporatist systems often embody more diversity and competition than is often presumed.

In the remainder of this section, we present our main expectations with respect to the origins of mortality anxiety. We primarily focus on three factors, namely characteristics of organized interests (internal institutionalization), their societal embeddedness and their relations with public authorities (external institutionalization).

When it comes to organizational maintenance, resources are a primary concern for the maintenance of any organization. This is not different for interest groups. Paying staff members, renting an office or organizing events, the operations of interest groups are very resource intensive. The availability of resources is therefore imperative for the continued existence of an interest group. Furthermore, financial security broadens the time horizon of organizations, which enables them to set aside a financial buffer in order to survive difficult periods in the future.

Yet, resources as such are a crude predictor for organizational robustness because they tell us little about how an organization invests its resources. Increasingly, interest groups are confronted with institutional, legal and political complexity. One way of coping with this is by hiring professional staff members with expertise in management, finance or law. The merits and perils of professionalization have been widely debated (Jordan and Maloney 2007; Klüver and Saurugger 2013; Warleigh 2001; Deth and Maloney 2012; McCharty and Zald 1977; Katz and Mair 1995). Hiring professionals could therefore give organizations a competitive edge. While scholars often look at the number of paid staff members, we argue that simply having staff members is a poor indicator (and furthermore strongly corresponds with organizational resources, which makes it less useful as an independent variable). We
argue, that professionalization depends on specific types of knowledge and expertise. One specific type of knowledge which might be especially relevant for interest groups is legal expertise. Such knowledge can be relevant for streamlining internal processes, but plays also a crucial role in dealing with public policymakers.

In short, we hypothesize:

**H1.** Well-resourced groups are less likely to have high levels of mortal anxiety.

**H2.** Groups who employ legal experts are less likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.

A second set of explanatory factor involves the extent to which a group has strong and stable roots in society. Instead of depending only on institutional access and government patronage (see below), groups may build stable and strong societal roots in order to reduce uncertainty and stress. One key factor here involves the membership, or the total number of members. The idea thereby is that a sizeable membership ensures a recurring and stable stream of income for an organized interests.

Another factor related to societal embeddedness is the extent to which groups have local offices or chapters. Some scholars have argued that local chapters are gradually disappearing or in disarray, while other research has contested this claim (Skocpol 1999; Walker et al. 2011). In their work on community-based organizations, Walker and McCarthy have noted how ties to regional and national community network decreases the chances of group failure (2010). Decentralized chapters ensures that an organized interest has a diversified structures, which is not only relevant in terms of resources and income (e.g. division of labour). But, more important this enables experimentation, innovation and the circulation of ideas and views that may keep the organizational leadership fit and well-informed about key developments in society. In this paper we test whether national groups that have chapters in local communities are less likely to demonstrate mortality anxiety.

The population ecology literature strongly emphasizes the level of competition between interest groups as an important explanatory factor for understanding their organizational survival (Lowery and Gray 1995). The competition usually takes place on two fronts: the competition for resources and the competition for policy influence. As regards organizational maintenance, the first is particularly relevant. Previous work has assessed the impact of interest group competition in different ways. Population ecologists usually measure this in a more indirect way by assessing the number of groups within a certain policy domain, or in other words, the interest group density. As argued by Gray and Lowery, as the number
of groups in a domain increases, a greater number of groups has to compete for the same pool of resources needed for maintenance, which increases the chances of organizational deaths and mortality anxiety (Gray and Lowery 1996: 27). Yet, despite its straightforward nature, this conceptualization has several problems. Density might be a rather crude and poor proxy for competition. High density may suggest just the opposite, namely precisely because competition is low, many groups are able to survive and flourish. Also, competition is mostly a subjective experience of stress; it is largely the perception of a competitive environment that informs group behaviour. One way to measure this is by surveying group officials and ask them directly to what extent they experience/perceive competition. The expectation is that the higher the level of perceived competition, the higher the mortality anxiety.

We have four hypothesis about the societal embeddedness and mortality anxiety:

\(H3\). Groups with wider constituencies are less likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.

\(H4\). Groups who have local offices are less likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.

\(H5\). Groups who are engaged in policy domains with a high interest group density are more likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.

\(H6\). Groups who experience higher levels of competition for members and/or financial resources are more likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.

Finally, public authorities are crucial interlocutors for organized interests, not the least because a key objective of interest groups is to influence public policy. Here, we highlight two aspects: the extent to which groups have gained institutional representation, and the extent to which they depend on government funding as a key source of income.

Most groups seek access to policymakers. While having access might be considered as an important intermediate step towards exercising policy influence, a strong institutional embeddedness might also have positive implications on the organizational development of an organized interests (Fraussen 2014). For instance, as groups become more involved in policymaking and acquire a higher status in the eyes of policymakers, this might positively affect their ability to attract members and/or additional resources. The previous argument highlights formal institutional ties between interest groups and policymakers. Yet, other work has emphasized whether and the extent to which groups depend on government funding (Walker 1983). Such dependence can be considered a “double-edged sword”. On the one hand, government patronage can enable the establishment of groups and help them to survive,
professionalize and grow. On the other hand, patronage can be a source of stress and insecurity (e.g. Mosley 2012). As many others seek to gain government subsidies, attracting resources might be a highly competitive process. And, especially in times of austerity, government funding might be ad hoc and temporary. This may push some groups to diversify their funding. We can therefore also expect certain differences between organizations who completely depend on government funding and those organizations for who government funding is merely one source of income.

In short, our hypotheses related to the relations with public authorities are:

- **H7.** Groups with high levels of institutionalized access are less likely to have high levels of mortality anxiety.
- **H8.** Groups who rely on government funding will have high levels of mortality anxiety.

**Research design**

In this section, we outline our research project, which is part of a larger research program in which we aim to conduct similar interest group surveys in various European countries.¹ The design basically involves two main steps: a) mapping the interest group population within a given population and b) implementing a survey among this population.

**Mapping the national interest group population**

Our mapping of organized interests in Belgium started from the Crossroads Bank for Enterprises (Kruispuntbank voor Ondernemingen) which is maintained by the Federal Public Service Economy, SMEs, Self-Employed and Energy (FPS Economie, Federale Overheidsdienst Economie, K.M.O., Middenstand en Energie). This database registers all legal entities that engage in some economic activity and is connected to different other databanks that are maintained by (among others) the National Bank of Belgium and the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs. It contains more than two million corporate entities and, important for our purposes, all established legal persons, non-profits (‘Vereniging Zonder Winstoogmerk or VZW’) and foundations.² The register requires organizations to indicate

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¹ Similar surveys have been conducted in the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia, and the EU-level. In the coming years a survey will be planned in Lithuania, Spain, Poland, the UK and Germany. For more information see [www.cigsurvey.eu](http://www.cigsurvey.eu).

² All European countries have a similar register and use a related classification (following NACE classification system, based on a standardization used by EUROSTAT and the OECD). NACE is the abbreviation of the French Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne. This European
which industrial or other activities they primarily engage in (multiple options can be selected). To account for the “civil society” organizations, a separate category was created known as S94, which refers to organizations that represent the interests and views of specific constituencies.³

A defining feature of the KBO is that it represents specific legal entities, which means that it does not list ‘interest groups’ as such. This is relevant because many interest groups do not consist of one legal entity, but are composed of multiple organizational entities. These so-called organizational conglomerates are typical for large, peak interest groups, such as umbrella labor unions and employer associations that have often established separate legal units for different functions.⁴ Hence, this register provides us with objective legal evidence on the organizational complexity of interest groups. One of the conceptual messages we draw from this is that we cannot always equate one ‘interest organization’ with one legal entity, as in several cases an interest organization consists of a complicated patchwork of multiple interlinked organizations. In order to identify individual organized interest (and not separate legal entities), we developed a procedure based on human and machine coding that enables us to link legal entities to led to an unbundling of legal entities into distinct organized interest.⁵ As the project primarily focuses on policy processes at the federal and regional level, we decided to restrict our population mapping to those organizations that aim to represent regional and/or national constituencies and excluded associations that are primarily focused on representation at the local level (such as provinces and cities). Combined, these steps yielded a list of 1691 regional and nation-wide (or federal) organizations, more precisely 35 percent Flemish, 23 percent Francophone and 42 percent national groups (for details see www.cigsurvey.eu).

industry classification system consists of a 4 digit code and is systematically used in most national statistical data-systems (see http://goo.gl/8NLquM).

³ The full definition of S94 reads as follows: “This division includes activities of organizations representing interests of special groups or promoting ideas to the general public. These organizations usually have a constituency of members, but their activities may involve and benefit non-members as well. The primary breakdown of this division is determined by the purpose that these organizations serve, namely interests of employers, self-employed individuals and the scientific community (group 94.1), interests of employees (group 94.2) or promotion of religious, political, cultural, educational or recreational ideas and activities (group 94.9).”

⁴ For instance, an interest group may locate its research activities in one legal entity while its services to members are managed by another legal entity. Also, some interest groups are a patchwork of federated branch organizations which each have their own legal entity. For instance, we estimate that the Belgian socialist labor union is a conglomerate of approximately 300 separate legal entities.

⁵ This procedure consisted of a combination of human coding (checking each organization) and machine coding (based on legal information we have precise evidence on how legal entities are linked). By using a series of automated filtering techniques we obtained a first potential overview of 5024 organizations. As said, such a ‘flat’ search results in a list of legal entities that are possibly part of a conglomerate. In the second step we therefore manually checked and clustered all entities. In a final step, we triangulated our sample with additional data sources.
**Surveying the national interest group population**

Having established our population dataset, we searched contact data for two (high-level) representatives of each organization (for instance: the director, chair, president or secretary-general). While we retrieved most contact details from the websites of these organizations, about ten percent of the groups were called because the website lacked sufficient information. This search yielded personal contact data for 2664 individuals (in total 4545 personal and office email addresses). Each organization was also coded in order to identify key organizational features, using a variation on the codebook applied in the INTEREURO (www.intereuro.eu) (Berkhout et al. 2015).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Overview survey sample and response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer/business associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associations of institutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associations of public authorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although much evidence on organized interests can be retrieved from public and online sources, detailed information on various aspects (such as the size and composition of the organizational budget, or lobbying strategies) are usually not publicly available. A survey is a useful tool in order to collect such information (Marchetti 2015). Our survey focuses on topics such as political strategies, organizational development and management, relations with members and stakeholders, and the challenges that interest organizations face. The web-survey was conducted over a time-span of 117 days (between January and May of 2016) and consisted of four consecutive steps, namely an invitation, an email-reminder, a telephone-reminder and one last email reminder. After these four steps, we repeated the procedure for those organizations that did not respond and for which we had a second contact person (so 4×2=8 steps in total). In total, this survey was sent high level representatives of the 1691 nation-wide and regional organized interest we identified; we

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6 For more details on the codebook, see http://www.cigsurvey.eu  
7 We only counted the organizations that filled in the survey for at least 70 percent. We received at least one answered question from 1027 organizations (so for some questions we have a 62 percent response rate).
achieved a response rate of 41% (n= 693), which is high compared to previous interest group surveys. Table 1 shows the distribution and response rate of our sample across organizational types.

The dependent variable in this paper concerns mortality anxiety, which is the subjective perception by the organizational leadership that the very existence of an organization is challenged. More precisely, we put forward the following question, replicating the question that was first applied by Gray and Lowery (1997) and also used in later studies (Halpin and Thomas 2012): “Sometimes the continued existence of an organizations is challenged, for instance by societal changes and challenges. Considering the next five years, what is your estimation of the likelihood that the continued existence of your organization will face a serious challenge.” The responses were coded on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from very unlikely to very likely. For the descriptive part of the analysis (see below) we recoded it in three categories, while in the regression analysis we estimate the probability that a respondent indicated ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’.

**Table 2. Descriptives of dependent, independent and control variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mortality anxiety</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (q08r)</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal experts (q10_06r)</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (q16f)</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r)</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of members (only ind)</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of members (only firm)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.89</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of members (only inst)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of members (only ass)</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local offices (q10_08r)</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage (patr)</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>36.14</td>
<td>37.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory bodies (q35_03)</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (q02r)</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization type (q601)</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resource endowment** was assessed based on the following question: “What was the annual operating budget of your organization in 2015 in Euros?” The answer possibilities consisted of 9 distinct categories. When recoded, we reduced the number of categories to three: first three categories as **one**, middle category as **two** and last three as **three**, and “don’t

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8 Under 10000, Between 10000 and 50000, Between 50000 and 100000, Between 100000 and 500000, Between 500000 and 1 million, Between 1 million and 5 million, Between 5 million and 10 million, Over 10 million, Don’t know.
know” was set to missing. To see whether organizations have legal experts we asked: Does your organization have legal experts? For future analyses we might develop a more sophisticated measure (for this and other variables), but for this preliminary analysis we kept it as a dichotomous variable.

The size of the organizational constituency was assessed by asking: “Listed below are different types of members. Please indicate for each type (individuals, firms, government entities and other organizations) of member how many people/organizations support your organization”. The respondent’s options ranged from none to over 1 million (8 categories). It was possible to indicate the number of members for each type of member (for instance, firms, individuals or other organizations). To account for the fact that it is difficult to compare between the amounts of different types of members a Z-score was calculated for each distinct type of member (for a similar procedure see Fraussen and Beyers 2016). Based on responses to other questions we developed a simple dichotomous measure assessing whether or not an organization has local chapters. Density was measured based on the following question: “Looking at the list below: Which areas is your organization involved in?” The answering possibilities included 22 policy domains and one ‘other’ category. For each domain we established the number of organizations active in it. Because of the skewed nature of this variable, we tested various recodes and all lead to the same results. For instance, we logarithmically transformed and we used categorizations (based on the quartiles), but this did not affect the substantive results. To measure the degree of competition we asked: “In general, how much competition from like-minded organizations does your organization experience when attracting members, donations and subsidies?” The answer possibilities ranged from “no competition” through “very strong competition” (five categories Likert-scale).

Institutionalized access was gauged as follows: “During the last 12 months, how often has your organization served on advisory commissions or boards?” The respondent could choose between the following five categories: 1=we did not do this, 2=at least once, 3=at least once every three months, 4=at least once a month, and 5=at least once a week). To measure the amount of government patronage we used the following question: “Organizations get financial support from different sources. Please indicate the percentage of your organization’s 2015 budget that came from the various sources listed below”. The percentages of funding coming from the regional governments, the national government and the European Union were combined in one index. We allowed the respondents to make an error margin between 80% and 110%. The result is a scale ranging from 0 to 100.
Finally, we add two control variables. We control for age, because one might presume that this affects questions of maintenance (recently established organizations might be a bit more vulnerable). For age, we asked: “In what year was your organization founded?” This variable was logarithmically transformed. Most interest group studies presume some difference between groups types, for instance business versus non-business. To distinguish between types of organizations we had a number of possibilities. In this paper, we use the same question as the one used for measuring the organizational constituency. Based on this question we categorized organizations with only individual members, only companies as members, only government institutions as members, associations as members and a mixed category.

Data analysis

The descriptive results of the dependent variable are presented in Figure 1. Whereas almost half of the surveyed groups considers such a challenge unlikely, 23 percentage indicated that they have considerable levels of mortality anxiety, whereas another 28 percentage of the groups took a position in the middle. The observation that one out of five groups expects serious challenges to their existence is remarkable knowing that our sample focused mostly on organization that have adopted a formal legal structure and does not include more informal groups (which are not included in the KBO). The included groups are all organizations with a legal statute and have on average have considerable financial resources. In many cases we are dealing with entities that have been in existence for quite some time.

Figure 1. Mortal Anxiety (n=861)
How does these results compare to previous studies on mortality anxiety? Previous studies on mortality anxiety have focused on systems that are traditional seen as more pluralist political systems, such as the United States (Gray and Lowery 1997) and the Scotland, UK (Halpin and Thomas 2012). Often, group competition is assumed to be pretty intense in these pluralist systems, while associational life is seen as more stable and predictable in neo-corporatist political systems (such as Belgium). Yet, if we consider the results of Halpin and Thomas’ study, we see that in the case of Scotland only 17 percent of groups considered a serious challenge to its existence (compared to 23 percent in Belgium), while 54 percent of groups perceived such a challenge not be very likely (compared to 46 percent of the Belgian groups). If we consider the results of Lowery and Gray, who assessed mortality anxiety among organised interests in the American States, we find that about respectively 14 and 17 percent considered such an existential crisis respectively “very likely” or “likely”, while 69 percent did not report any mortality anxiety. Preliminary analyses of the similar surveys conducted in Slovenia and the Netherlands shows some additional interesting variation between countries (which will be part of future analyses). In Slovenia, 35 percentage of organizations have indicated as “likely” to “very likely” they will face challenges to their existence. For the Netherlands this is considerably less, namely 17 percent.

Table 3 presents the results of a logistic regression in which we analyse the likelihood whether or not interest group leaders indicated “very likely” or “likely” in answering the survey question. Model I only consists of the control variables age and organization type, and shows that these two factors do not have a significant impact on mortal anxiety. Whether being around for a long time, or representing a specific kind of member, does not impact in any way mortal anxiety.
## Table 3. Predicting Mortality Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.11 (0.42)**</td>
<td>-1.69 (0.52)**</td>
<td>-1.69 (0.67)*</td>
<td>-2.09 (0.8)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (q02r)</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type (ind) (ref)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type (comp)</td>
<td>-0.63 (0.39)</td>
<td>-0.29 (0.53)</td>
<td>-0.52 (0.62)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type (instit)</td>
<td>-0.29 (0.45)</td>
<td>-0.90 (0.61)</td>
<td>-1.11 (0.69)</td>
<td>0.9 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type (asso)</td>
<td>-13.34 (444.36)</td>
<td>-13.59 (436.32)</td>
<td>-14.57 (715.45)</td>
<td>-14.22 (662.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type (mixed)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.24)</td>
<td>0.19 (0.35)</td>
<td>-0.37 (0.4)</td>
<td>-0.26 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (q08r) 1 (ref)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (q08r) 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.37 (0.23)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (q08r) 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.17 (0.28)</td>
<td>-0.6 (0.33)†</td>
<td>-0.72 (0.38)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal experts (q10_06r)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.68 (0.24)**</td>
<td>-0.68 (0.27)*</td>
<td>-0.63 (0.31)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number members (ind)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.25 (0.14)†</td>
<td>-0.27 (0.17)</td>
<td>-0.16 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number members (comp)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.34 (0.14)*</td>
<td>-0.45 (0.16)**</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number members (inst)</td>
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<td>-0.04 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.14)</td>
<td>-0.16 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number members (asso)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.04 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local offices (q10_08r)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.66 (0.27)*</td>
<td>-0.79 (0.31)*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (q16f) 1 (ref)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (q16f) 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.6 (0.5)</td>
<td>0.62 (0.54)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (q16f) 4</td>
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<td>-0.34 (0.28)</td>
<td>0.24 (0.32)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Density (q16f) 4</td>
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<td>-0.13 (0.3)</td>
<td>-0.21 (0.35)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r) 1 (ref)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r) 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.25 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.2 (0.41)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r) 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.82 (0.35)†</td>
<td>0.87 (0.41)*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r) 4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.67 (0.41)***</td>
<td>1.85 (0.46)***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (q07r) 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.32 (0.5)***</td>
<td>2.72 (0.59)***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory bodies (q35_03)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.04 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage (pat) 1 (ref)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage (pat) 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.45 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage (pat) 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.07 (0.32)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2LogL</td>
<td>764.39</td>
<td>667.77</td>
<td>501.27</td>
<td>397.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Index:** parameter estimates (standard errors between brackets); ***/=.<.001; **=<.01; *=<.05; †=<.1
In a next step – Model II - we added the organizational variables. Some of these variables have some impact, but most organizational features do not really predict mortal anxiety. Individual membership has some impact, but its significance is pretty low (p=.06540), while the amount of resources and the representation of institutions have no effect. The strongest impact is generated by the size of firm membership. The more companies as members, the lower the mortal anxiety. Apparently, membership type (whether or not some sorts of interests are associated) does not matter, while only the amount of firms (and not other types of members) is relevant. Also, it seems that the type of staff they hire makes a difference. Having legal experts is an important contributing factor to decreasing mortal anxiety. Model III tests for societal embeddedness. The first thing we notice is that with 5 degrees of freedom, we have a substantial improvement of the model fit (AIC Model II=693.77 > AIC Model III=543.27; Nagelkerke $R^2=0.08$ Model II> $R^2=0.20$ Model III), which suggests that these variables contribute substantially to the prediction of mortality anxiety. More generally, it shows that overall contextual embeddedness is more important than organizational level factors. Yet, not all these factors have the expected impact.

The organizational density of the area in which an organization is active, does not predict high levels of mortal anxiety. This means that the proxy for resource competition, namely density, which is often used by population ecologists, does not really impact the subjective experience of competition or mortal anxiety. Note that the correlation between the subjective perception of competition and density is, although significant, very low (r=0.16, p=<.0001). The subjective perception of competition strongly predicts anxiety, meaning that high levels or competition correspond with the fear of organizational failure. And, as expected, organizations that have local chapters, feel much more secure about the future compared to those that are not locally embedded. Although these are interesting observations, they do not really clarify the reasons why subjective competition is high (or low) for some organizations. However, the results clearly demonstrate that anxiety is not about resource endowment, organization type or membership as such, but rather about how an organization is related to its environment and how this interaction is experienced by the organizational leadership.

Model IV may shed some light at some specific aspects, more precisely the importance of government patronage and institutionalized access. Just adding these two variables has a substantial improvement of the model fit; with 3 degrees of freedom the AIC drops with 102.78 units (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.20$ Model III> $R^2=0.25$ Model IV). Most telling however, is that this huge improvement in fit is largely due to one very particular aspect,
namely a high level of government patronage. Gaining access to policy making venues or advisory boards has no impact on anxiety, but being dependent on government clearly has. However, it is not just dependence on government subsidies that matters. We distinguish three levels of dependence. For some organizations there is no dependence or the dependence counts for only less than 33 percent of the budget; this is the reference category. For this group we predict significant lower levels of anxiety, not in comparison with medium levels of dependence (between 33 and 66 percent of the budget), but especially for very high levels of dependency (more than 66 percent of the budget). Adding only this piece of information not only yields a better fit, it also makes that the effect of variables that measure the membership size (firms and individuals) lose their significance, which further corroborates our claim that organizational features (instead of contextual embeddedness) are less relevant for mortal anxiety. To put it differently, is not just government patronage that matters, but especially high levels of government patronage. Especially those who depend heavily on government subsidies feel more threatened in their survival.

**Conclusion**

This paper sought to explain why some organized interests fear for their continued existence while others do not have these existential concerns? To what extent is this determined by the overall societal environment, internal organizational aspects or the relation with public authorities.

Theoretically, we build a conceptual framework for which we borrowed extensively from the population ecology and party politics literature. Thereby we presume that institutionalization at the system level and organizational level institutionalization are inexorably linked with each other: changes in the system will lead to changes at the individual level and vice-versa. When taking the system of interest representation in Belgium as a case, we can already make some interesting statements on how these different levels (systemic and individual) interplay. For instance, the fact that our results convincingly demonstrate that changes in the institutional environment – government patronage – affects the operation of individual organized interests. The analysis has also shown that internal institutionalization is important (for instance, hiring specialized staff), but it is not the main predictor. Overall, our results demonstrate that external institutionalization (societal embeddedness, and relations with the government) is much more important. But as always, more research is needed to look at various other aspects and to discern how they interplay.
Sometimes it is somewhat implicitly presumed that interest group politics is more competitive in pluralist systems compared to neo-corporatist systems. Neo-corporatism would also entail more stable, a less dense and predictable system of interest representation. Our results do not match well with these stereotypes. Density as such is a poor predictor of mortal anxiety. Instead we observe that high levels of perceived competition correspond systematically with mortal anxiety. Moreover, we notice that, especially in times of austerity, strong ties with the government – in terms of resource dependency – actually adds considerable uncertainty and stress to the daily management of organized interests.

References


