Who Wins Media Space and Why?
Interest Groups and Legislative Lobbying in the European News Media

Iskander De Bruycker
Jan Beyers

University of Antwerp
Department of Political Science
Gebouw M (De Meerminne)
Sint-Jacobstraat 2
B-2000 Antwerp
Belgium

Paper prepared for the 7th ECPR General Conference, Science Po,

Bordeaux, 4 - 7 September 2013.

Abstract. This paper examines the coverage of legislative lobbying in European news media. The starting point thereby is that lobbying in the crowded EU-level interest community is not only a struggle for direct access to policymakers, but that in order to realize policy goals many interest groups rely on political attention generated by the media. Our main research question is how media attention is skewed towards particular interests and which factors explain these varying levels of prominence. Our empirical analysis is based on a set of 125 legislative proposals adopted by the European Commission between 2008 and 2010. For all these cases we identified 388 interest organizations that made public statements, we coded the amount of media attention for these organized interest, the type of statements they made as well as some key organizational features. While the aggregate levels of attention look pretty balanced, our evidence shows that media prominence is skewed towards particular types of interests and that the uneven distribution of media prominence is significantly explained by the type of policy position organized interests adopt.
Introduction

Being noticed by those in power is crucial for interest organizations. The news media provide a platform to draw policymakers’ attention and generate pressure on their decisions (Kollman 1998, Beyers 2004, Mahoney 2007). Moreover, through the media, interest organizations can signal their grievances towards their constituencies and increase the public scrutiny of the policymaking processes. Media coverage can thus be considered as a crucial resource for interest organizations to aspire. However, media attention is scarce and as most resources it is not equally distributed. Some interests gain more coverage than others, which might give them some competitive advantage.

Little is known about which societal interests are successful in gaining media prominence and why. The interest group literature has not paid much attention to the role of media coverage in legislative lobbying processes. Many scholars conceive the pursuit of media prominence as part of an organization’s ‘outside’ strategy, but news media coverage of legislative lobbying itself is rarely studied. The limited literature in this field explains a group’s media prominence by organizational resources (Thrall 2006), the news value of different group types (Binderkrantz 2012), issue characteristics (Danielian and Page 1994), or niche related strategies (Bernhagen and Trani 2012). In contrast with former studies that were mostly nationally focused, this paper concentrates on the European Union (EU). Research on lobbying in the EU is flourishing, yet a systematic study of interest group activity in the European news media remains absent. There is some research on how European politics is covered in the national media (for example see: De Vreese 2001, Peter and De Vreese 2004, Schuck, Xezonakis et al. 2011, Michailidou and Trenz 2013), but we are not aware of any study that looks at EU-level media and European policymaking processes. Moreover, as the EU lacks a genuine public sphere (Meyer 1999, Schlesinger 1999), a situation reinforced by its trans-national nature and its complex policymaking procedures, media coverage is often presumed to be less relevant. Nonetheless, by arguing that there is little at the EU-level that resembles domestic communicative spaces, one might neglect or underestimate how media coverage plays a role in EU legislative policymaking. Empirical studies demonstrate that, even with regard to EU policymaking, a considerable number of EU-level organized interests make use of media related strategies (Beyers 2004, Chalmers 2013). Moreover, for instance Koopmans and Erbe (2004) submit that the media are important channels in the communication process between the European institutions, organized interests and the general public. Given the crowded nature of the Brussels’ lobby circuit, gaining coverage through media appearances in EU-level media-outlets helps to attract the attention of policymakers.
and signal the salience of policy positions adopted by organized interests. This is one of the reasons why during the past twenty years various specialized media outlets emerged at the EU-level (for instance *European Voice, EurActive, EUobserver*).

Given the growing relevance of media prominence in EU lobbying processes, a closer investigation of media coverage on EU legislation is needed to understand who’s voices are heard and why. More generally, we argue that a proper understanding of an interest organization’s prominence in the news, and more particularly the potential power distribution mechanisms therein needs to incorporate evidence on an interest group’s policy position related to specific legislative issues. Although media attention might be relevant for many organized interests, only a small set of them will gain substantial prominence. Moreover, some organized interests do not seek media attention, or may even eschew it, and react only if necessary, for instance when an opponent gains substantial public attention. Our empirical goal is to assess which factors explain why some interest organizations gain more media prominence than others. Theoretically, we aim to combine extant knowledge from the interest group literature with the broader research on media and party politics.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section we conceptualize the role of media attention more closely and we try to integrate our understanding of interest groups politics with the literature on media attention and party politics. The subsequent section develops research hypotheses focusing on organizational resources, the nature of the policy positions advocated, and the type of constituency represented by an organized interest. Then, we describe the research design behind the dataset we developed for this project. The fourth section presents the results from a multivariate analyses based on evidence on the policy positions adopted by 388 organized interests regarding 125 EU pieces of legislation. In the conclusion we summarize our findings and reflect on some avenues for future research.

**What does a biased media space look like?**

The literature on media attention, organized interests and political parties makes frequent use of the concept *bias*. This section aims to integrate these different literatures and builds an overarching conceptual understanding of what a biased media space might look like. Most media studies in political science concern political parties. In this field, media prominence is traditionally conceived as a resource political parties aspire and as an important explanatory factor of campaigning success (for example see: Walgrave and De Swert 2004, Van Aelst, Maddens et al. 2008, De Bruycker and Walgrave 2013). True, the role of media and organized interests in EU legislative politics differs highly from domestic electoral
processes, but some aspects are similar. As political parties, interest groups deliberately may seek media prominence in order to give clout to their position, to seek and inform supporters and to signal their policy views to policymakers. Moreover, the expertise of interest groups can be relevant for journalists as they may supply inside information on the policy process.

However, if a particular interest is able to win more media space than its counterparts, one might speak of an unevenly distributed or biased media space. Bias can be understood in many different ways. In the interest group literature bias does not necessarily relate to media coverage. It may refer to highly different things ranging from influencing policy outcomes, becoming recognized as a representative organization or the potency to mobilize politically. Often, when interest group scholars speak about bias they refer to skewness as a characterization of how an interest community gets mobilized, not necessarily the extent to which groups were influential or to what extent interests were not able to get mobilized. A repeatedly heard conclusion is that interest representation tends to be biased towards a few selective interests and that most interest group communities are skewed, for instance towards resourceful and well-endowed constituencies (Baumgartner and Leech 2001, Lowery and Gray 2004). We have to be a bit careful with the qualification of bias as this concept, sometimes unintentionally, suggests a normative assessment in the sense that some societal interests are under- or overrepresented and that, as a result of this, policy outcomes favor one interest at the disadvantage of other interests.

One of the problems in this field is that simple counts of organized interests tell us little about the extent to which a particular interest is well - or not well - represented, especially because we lack a normative yardstick which allows us to claim beforehand how a balanced system would look like (Lowery and Gray 2004). For instance, when we observe a very small set of actors speaking on behalf of a particular interest, this small number might be pretty effective in representing its constituency. Or, one single organization may gain a large prominence because of its resources, but nevertheless this organization could aim to represent a diverse type and broad set of constituencies (Grossmann 2012).

Yet, numbers and distributions tell us something about how interest communities function. Balance and bias could be defined as a situation where two or more entities, different types of organizations or different sides of a conflict dimension, are more or less evenly covered. Biased media coverage can then be defined as a situation where two or more entities, different types of organizations or different sides of a conflict dimension, are not evenly covered. It could mean female politicians gain less media attention as their male counterparts or that government gains more coverage than opposition parties (for example
see: Van Aelst, Maddens et al. 2008, Hopmann, de Vreese et al. 2011, Van Dalen 2012, De Bruycker and Walgrave 2013). Similarly, we can qualify an instance where only proponents of upcoming legislation on GMO-technology gain attention as less balanced than a case where both opponents and proponents are gaining attention. In the remainder of this section we will distinguish two types of media bias, namely coverage bias and gate-keeping bias (D'Alessio and Allen 2000) and connect this to recent accounts in the interest group literature.

Coverage bias refers to the attention for opposing sides of a particular issue. Most studies on coverage bias concern the balance between majority and opposition parties whereby a balanced situation implies that both government and opposition gain similar amounts of attention (Stovall 1985, Sheafer and Wolfsfeld 2009, Van Dalen 2012). Media studies on interest group bias usually focus on organizational diversity and ask whether some organization types (for instance business compared to NGOs) gain more or less attention compared to other types. For example, a balanced situation implies that the distribution of interest groups in the media corresponds with the number of citizens sharing their interests (Schlozman and Tierney 1986) or that the media presence of interest groups corresponds with distributions in the overall population of organizations in an interest group system (Bernhagen and Trani 2012, Binderkrantz 2012).

One of the weaknesses of existing media studies on lobbying is that nobody has examined whether conflict occurs and, if so, whether different sides of a conflict dimension are covered equally. This limits our insight in the extent to which political conflict and the politicized nature of particular legislative cases are covered. Moreover, diversity in group type (for instance specific business organizations versus environmental interests) could be somewhat misleading as groups within the same organizational category do not necessarily adopt similar policy positions or lobby for the same cause (Smith 2000, Daviter 2007, Beyers 2008). Therefore, when analyzing coverage bias we take into account for which cause an organized interest lobbied. In this respect, Baumgartner, Berry et al. (2009) speak of ‘sides’, which they define as sets of actors who seek the same policy outcome. By focusing on the policy positions actors adopt in concrete legislative processes, we measure which positions are more inclined to gain media prominence when lobbying on EU legislative issues.

A second form of media bias, gatekeeping bias, presumes that news results from selective processes whereby reporters select items from a universe of events. Gatekeeping bias is a consequence of selection by gatekeepers who create news coverage. The selection by the gatekeepers (journalists, news agencies, editors) is driven by their preferences, their political beliefs as well as journalistic routines. Gatekeeping bias is seldom studied (D'Alessio
The main problem is that we mostly lack systematic knowledge on the universe from which the gatekeepers sample their stories, which makes that media coverage does not present us with a representative image of an underlying population of events, but rather shows us what reporters consider to be newsworthy. Nonetheless, despite the difficulty in measuring gatekeeping bias, many scholars make claims regarding this component of media bias. For example, van Dalen (2011) shows that the news value of political power biases media attention in favor of more powerful actors. Similarly, Binderkrantz (2012) argues that more traditional labor and business interests, who were conceived by journalists as ‘insiders’ to the political game, gained more coverage in the Danish radio news (see also Bernhagen and Trani 2012; Thrall 2006). However, media coverage might also be an important resource for outsiders or groups that are less capable to get their voice heard by traditional forms of inside lobbying. For instance, van Dalen (2011) points at the news value of conflict and that the drama that surrounds conflict creates a platform for less powerful actors. Danielian and Page (1994) show that this logic is applicable to interest groups in the United States where citizen action groups gained the second most coverage in TV news reports, succeeding business groups. They explain the prominent place of citizen action groups by the newsworthiness of their protest activities (Thrall 2006, Andrews and Caren 2010).

Hypotheses on who wins media space and why

These different notions of media bias provide a conceptual framework for the further development of hypotheses related to who wins media space and why. Media prominence is a matter of seeking and gaining attention, and both aspects must therefore be included in an explanatory framework. In this section we first establish hypotheses connected to the ability and motives of interest organizations to seek media attention. Then, we address factors related to the gatekeepers granting organized interests access to the news. Finally, we raise the issue-specific nature of lobbying and its relationship to coverage and gatekeeping bias in the news.

For the factors related to interest organizations themselves, both their ability and motivation to seek prominence in the news are important. Media attention is an important resource, but making the news also depends on resources. First, not all organizations are equally capable in gaining media prominence. Producing news is a labor intensive process demanding time and commitment from trained professionals. Employing spin-doctors or media experts is a luxury not all organized interests can afford. Employees of resource-scarce organizations are often obliged to combine media campaigning work with a variety of other
tasks such as raising funds, communicating to members and advocating policymakers directly. Due to an often higher workload and greater diversity of responsibilities they have less time to invest in media related strategies. Previous research on interest groups already demonstrated the relationship between organizational resources and media prominence. For instance, Thrall (2006) shows that only large and well-funded interest groups have the ability to consistently play a role in public debates. A decade earlier Danielian and Page (1994) demonstrated that business interests have the most dominant representation in the US television news, which they explained by the presumption that business groups possess more resources. Similarly we expect that resourceful organizations, especially in terms of staff members, have a higher potential to become prominent in media debates on EU legislative issues. Thus, our first hypotheses is:

\[ H1: \text{The more staff an organized interest employs, the more prominent its appearance in media debates surrounding specific legislative processes.} \]

Not only the ability, but also the motivation to produce media content explains media prominence. These motives can both be connected to resource seeking and influence seeking strategies. Regarding resource seeking activities, not all interest groups are equally dependent on public visibility. For some organizations media attention may bring additional and non-policy related benefits, such as additional resources or an expansion of the membership corpus. The reliance on media strategies strongly relates to the organizational goals. Some groups supply their specific membership with certain goods and benefits, others have idealistic goals and seek a supportive constituency from different parts of society (Dunleavy 1992). Members of the latter groups do not receive direct benefits, but these groups need to continually reinforce the loyalty of their constituency. Media strategies are an important tool for this (Walker 1991, Maloney, Jordan et al. 1994). For instance, a recent study of Binderkrantz (2005) examining the strategies of 1,722 Danish interest groups, shows that interest group that depend on a large and diffuse constituency rely more on indirect strategies, such as contacting journalists, seeking media attention or staging protest activities. Based on the fact that groups that depend on large and diffuse constituencies will seek more attention to retain and expand their membership, we expect these groups to be more prominent in the news:

\[ H2: \text{As interest organizations representing a diffuse constituency rely more on media related strategies to attract resources and communicate to members, they will enjoy a higher prominence in the news compared to specific interests.} \]
Of course organized interests do not only exist to retain and attract members; they have a political mission, they aim to shift or defend the policy status quo in the interest of their constituency. Related to this influence seeking role, media strategies can be a useful tool to bring about policy influence. Yet, one cannot simply presume that all interests are equally keen to get media prominence as gaining public visibility is not always an appropriate strategy. Many lobbying activities are visible in public sources, but much lobbying takes place behind closed doors and gets no coverage at all. Specifically for actors who support the existing policy status quo, media visibility might work counterproductive. Increased attention may lead to conflict expansion and mobilize potential opponents. Organized interests supporting entrenched powers may therefore even avoid or prevent media coverage for a given issue (Beyers 2008) and sometimes it is argued that especially the powerful avoid media coverage and act out of the spotlights (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Seeking media prominence is then rather a strategy for change seekers than for those supporting the policy status quo.

In EU policymaking the European Commission has the initiative to propose new legislation. Applying the former rationale, an actor may aim avoiding too much attention when supportive towards a proposal tabled by the Commission. However, those who seek to change the Commission’s proposal, for instance amending or blocking the EC’s legislative initiatives, might be tempted to extend the scope of conflict (Schattschneider 1960; Baumgartner and Leech 1998) and by appealing to a broader audience (among the Members of the European Parliament or national government representatives in the Council), these interests seek a strategic advantage (Kollman 1998). In order to understand media visibility of organized interest it is therefore key to consider how lobbyists position themselves vis-à-vis a particular legislative case. The premise that policy challengers are more inclined to use outside strategies and actively seek media attention may result in coverage bias, i.e. one side in a conflict enjoys more media prominence compared to other sides.

However, gaining media space is not only a matter of the abilities and motivations; it is also a matter of attracting attention from the media gatekeepers, or gatekeeping bias. Some news values and journalistic routines favor some organized interests disproportionally. To attract media attention, statements made by organized interests must exhibit some news value and fit with existing journalistic routines. One important media rule is the propensity of media to prioritize bad news. Negative events and statements are more unambiguous and contain some surprising aspects which makes them more suitable for journalists to incorporate in their
stories (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Harcup and O’neill 2001, Soroka 2006). Due to the higher value of negative news and drama, it is expected that those who openly criticize a given legislative proposal will gain more attention and prominence in news coverage. Supportive statements on how good things are less newsworthy than critical and juicy attacks on the policy initiatives taken by policymakers. It is therefore plausible that coverage will be skewed to interests challenging a Commission proposal, not only because they are more inclined to seek media attention – as outlined before – but also because they are more inclined to gain it.

**H3: As groups who oppose legislation proposed by the Commission are more inclined to seek and gain media prominence, they enjoy higher media prominence compared to groups that favor a proposed legislation.**

Another factor that might trigger higher media prominence is division of labor among organized interests. Journalists will spend most attention on policy elites they deem to be relevant. The population of EU-level interest groups consists of a diverse and interconnected patchwork of international, European, national and regional organizations. Yet, because of their role some groups are more privileged in their relationship with policymakers and might be considered as ‘insiders’ to the political game. Or, public attention does not predominantly or only go to policy outsiders who actively seek media attention. This is not because these insiders actively seek media attention, but also because journalists hunt actively for them as they possess more detailed and valuable information that is worth reporting (Ball 2004). For instance, regarding Denmark, Binderkrantz demonstrates that many of these insiders are interest organizations who occupy a more prominent position in corporatists channels of representation (2005).

Yet, the EU is more pluralist than the existing systems in most of its member-states (Crombez 2002), which means it lacks an overarching system that systematically gives particular groups more or less institutional advantages. Important in the European multi-level context is the **division of labor** among organized interests and how organizations specialize. One typical form of specialization concerns the level of governance that organizations focus on (Berkhout and Lowery 2011). In other words, while some focus on advocacy in domestic settings, others focus on the supranational or international level. An example is the **European Consumer Organization** (BEUC), which has less staff and resources than some of its members who also lobby in Brussels. Nonetheless, BEUC occupies a pretty prominent position in the Brussels lobby circuit. This division of labor among organized interests makes that BEUC will, on average, be more relevant for policymakers and journalists as BEUC,
because of its position, has a broad and general overview and possesses much inside information of what goes on in EU policymaking networks.

As Quittkat and Kotzian (2011) note, EU umbrella organizations have more access to exclusive channels of representation at the level of the European Commission (see also Pleines 2011). These venues – such as advisory committees, workshops, hearings and stakeholder meetings – are limited in numbers, the participants often go through a selection process and are recruited for specific reasons such as technical expertise or political representativeness. When regarding the news value of policy insiders, EU-level organizations thus have a strategic advantage in gaining EU-level media prominence on legislative issues compared to their international and national counterparts. Not only are these groups more inclined to gain media prominence on EU related issues, but they also to actively seek it. The raison d’être of these organizations is to advocate interests at the European level. EU-level interest organizations are predominantly focused in the monitoring of EU legislative processes, whereas domestic and international interest organizations prioritize the national and international political level. Therefore, these interests are believed to seek out media outlets correspondingly. Because EU-umbrella organizations are more inclined to seek and gain media coverage, they are expected to be more prominent in the news on EU legislation.

**H4: EU-level interest organizations are more attractive to journalists and more prominent in the news compared to their national and international counterparts.**

Summarized, the media prominence of organized interests can be explained by their capabilities and motives, or by factors peculiar to media outlets, such as news value or journalistic routines. Yet, the supply and selection of news items does not take place in a vacuum; factors related to the context of policy issues are crucial in understanding the media attention particular interests gains. For one, we know that public visibility of interest organizations varies strongly from issue to issue (Danielian and Page 1994). Also research on EU lobbying shows that lobby behavior, including the use of media strategies, depends on issue characteristics (Mahoney 2007, Klüver 2011, Beyers and Kerremans 2012). But why and how do issue characteristics matter? More than political parties, organized interests tend to concentrate their influence efforts on a few issue areas or legislative cases. Many EU legislative politics concerns particularistic issues as they affect one of just a few interests and relate to matters confined to one specific sector. While a relatively small number of cross-sector organizations are simultaneously active in multiple fields, most organized interests gravitate to a small number of issues (see also below).
However, in a small number of cases, lobbying will be highly visible, crowding takes place and various conflicting interests get mobilized (Smith 2000; Baumgartner and Leech 2001). Within these more crowded issue fields the fight for gaining policy attention and influence is highly competitive. These are the legislative cases that gain public attention, are salient, partisan and ideological (Burstein and Linton 2002). Mobilization in such cases is more than just the numbers of active lobbyists. In these cases a large diversity of actors gets involved and conflicts generally concern broader issues such as the appropriate level of regulation within a specific field or the redistributive implications involved. When studying media prominence, we must therefore keep in mind that the legislative proposals that do get covered in the news are of a very different nature than those where little or no competition exist and only a few niche players mobilize. In the remainder of this paper we test our hypotheses by using the content analysis of media coverage on 125 legislative proposals adopted by the European Commission between 2008 and 2010. Our main question thereby, is what explains the varying media coverage different organized interests are able to mobilize.

**Data and research design**

The data used in this paper are part of a larger project on EU legislative lobbying. The goal of this project is to analyze lobbying strategies and interest group influence for a stratified sample of 125 European legislative proposals (directives and regulations) that were submitted between 2008 and 2010 (Beyers, Duer et al. 2014). The sample procedure is equivalent to the procedure Thomson used in his research on legislative politics (Thomson 2011). For the sampling all Commission proposals for regulations and directives between 2008 and 2010 were mapped. Afterwards all media coverage in five media outlets (European Voice, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Agence Europe, Le Monde and Financial Times) related to these proposals was mapped with electronic keyword searchers and archived. A set of 49 directives and 41 regulations that gained media coverage in more than two media outlets were selected. In addition we included 18 proposals where the Commission organized online consultations with organized interests. By doing this we prioritized legislative proposals that were publicly debated and where interest organizations mobilized. To control for this, we also

---

1 This project is part of a larger European Collaborative Research Project, INTEREURO, carried out by research teams in nine different countries under the auspices of the European Science Foundation (2012-2014). In addition, a US-based research team at the University of Virginia is affiliated to this project through an NSF-sponsored research project. The main goal of the project is to analyse strategies, framing and influence processes for a set of 100 legislative proposals submitted by the European Commission, in effort to better understand the involvement of civil society organizations in the decision-making process of the European Union.
included 17 proposals that gained little or no media coverage and where no Commission consultation took place. Our sample of 125 proposals is thus stratified in the sense that we overweight legislative proposals that gain media attention or where public consultations were held by the Commission.

For this paper, the same 125 directives and regulations are used. Via an online search in the electronic archives of five media outlets (European Voice, EurActive, Agence Europe, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Le Monde and Financial Times) we mapped the complete media coverage related to these 125 legislative cases. Important is that only coverage that could be directly connected to the Commission proposal was kept; coverage that was only vaguely related to the subject matter of the proposal was not archived. We adopted this rather strict rule as we wanted to concentrate on coverage related to legislative issues, and not necessarily the coverage on some more general theme. Inter-coder reliability analysis for the selecting of relevant articles are well above ninety per cent overlap.

In a next step we identified all stakeholders (public and private) and stored all the statements these actors made in a separate database. These statements are quotes made by interest group officials that can be directly linked to one of the sampled proposals. We coded all these entries according to a technique that is highly similar to the political claims analysis developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999), whereby the unit of observation consists of an actor who puts forward a particular statement or claim. Varieties of this technique were also applied by Miller and Riechert (2000) and Baumgartner, de Boef et al. (2008) and are known as frame-mapping analysis. To grasp the prominence of interest organizations in the media coverage on the sampled legislative cases, our dependent variable, we look at the number of words the groups were able to devote to the issue in the news. Other possible indicators of prominence are based on the physical placement of the article in the news, but as we also consulted online news sources, this is not feasible in our study. Nonetheless, numerous former studies focused on word count as a base to measure media prominence (For example see: Hayes, Ross et al. 2007, Lee 2007, Stroud and Kenski 2007, Hartley and Coleman 2008, Cheng, Chen et al. 2011). Based on the statements we also identified the policy positions of the actors in terms of whether they aimed to block or shape most of the Commission’s legislative proposal, shape specific parts of it or support it.

In addition to the substantive coding of the statements actors made, each organized interest was coded on the basis of information available on the organizational website.² For

² For 289 interest organizations or 76 per cent of the 379 interest organizations identified in the media could identify and code the organizational website.
the purpose of this paper, organized interests were categorized into those who have a diffuse and those who have a specific constituency. The groups with a so-called diffuse constituency include: labor unions, environmental groups, groups working on humanitarian questions, and other civil society groups such as consumer and religious interests. The specific interests were categorized depending on the types of members they have: 1) businesses associations, 2) professional organizations, and 3) a category with individual firms. Next to diffuse and specific interests we also included regions and local authorities and research organizations in the analysis. Additionally, we coded based on the website of these groups the number of staff members employed. Finally, we coded the level at which these organizations were mobilized and whether they have primarily a domestic, EU-wide or international constituency. For firms and research organizations we looked at their level of activity on the international, European or domestic market. All this coding was conducted by two trained researchers and the inter-coder reliabilities are satisfying, with Krippendorff's alpha reliability coefficients of .82 and higher.3

Each entry in our dataset represents one organization making a statement on a sampled legislative proposal (n=559), implying that for each organization we assessed its position vis-à-vis the legislative proposal in question and the number of words it was able to devote to it in the news coverage. In the next section, we first explore the evidence in terms of how many groups mobilized and on how many of the sampled proposals. Afterwards we look at media balance from an aggregated perspective and compare this with some known population distributions. Finally, we carry out a regression analysis with media prominence as the dependent variable.

Results

Before testing our hypotheses, we explore the media mobilization patterns with regard to the selected legislative proposals. For the 125 legislative proposals we archived 1,298 relevant articles in which 1,239 statements were made by interest organizations. Of these statements, 281 were not directly related to the sampled legislative proposals and therefore omitted for further analysis. Other statements (62) were relevant, but made by interest organization that could not be identified due to vague or wrong descriptions in the media and therefore dropped from the dataset. Opinion pieces and interviews (n=40) were also left out for further analysis due to their different nature compared to (much shorter) media statements.

3 Krippendorff's alpha reliability coefficients calculated based on double coding of 100 media statements
The remaining 856 statements came from 379 unique interest organizations (interest groups, firms, research institutes and regional or local governments), with a mean of four interest organizations per legislative proposal ($\mu=6.4$; $s=6.15$). The mean number of statements per proposal is 5.4 ($\mu=9.7$; $s=10.7$); for 37 of the sampled proposal not any statement was made by an interest organization in the selected media outlets.\(^4\) Of the 379 identified interest organizations 81 per cent only made statements about one proposal; 16.3 per cent made statements about two to five proposals; and only 2.7 per cent made statements about more than five proposals ($M=1$; $\mu=1.47$; $s=1.45$). This suggests that most interest organizations mobilize on one case only, while a small number of actors are active across multiple cases. These results are highly in line with what we know from theories on niches and bandwagoning in lobbying processes, namely, that most groups gravitate to specific issues and aim to monopolize particular policy niches while only a few are active across multiple policy issues and fields (Gray and Lowery 1996, Baumgartner and Leech 2003).

Considering the aggregate media coverage – across all sampled proposals – the number of interest organizations making statements in the news seems quit balanced, in terms of group types making statements. In the first column of table 1 we see that societal interests, are, compared to business interests, weakly represented in the media sources we mapped. However, this does not automatically mean that these interests are disadvantaged, or that media coverage is biased towards business interest. It could be that societal interest organizations are less visible simply because the overall population has less such groups. To control for this, we compare our data with the EU interest group population as mapped by Wonka et al. (2010), which is currently one of the most comprehensive overview of the population of interest groups lobbying at the European level. Because the Wonka et al. dataset does not distinguish between NGO’s and business associations we re-codded a random sample of this dataset ($n=359$). When comparing media and population data, media attention seems to be quite balanced. The distribution of interest group types in the media and in the population is very similar. The question is, however, how unique these results are and whether the idiosyncratic nature of the EU leads to these distributions. Therefore, we compare in the next two columns compare our data with similar US-data. While also the US population has, compared to the EU, less public interests, civil society organizations are more prominently present in the media than in the population. The opposite seems to hold for business. While

\(^{4}\) In several of these 35 cases statements were made by EU institutions or other public actors. This data will be analyzed more closely in other research papers.
the US business associations are more than half of the US populations, their media visibility is less pronounced.

Table 1. Types of organized interests in the media compared to population data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>De Bruycker &amp; Beyers</th>
<th>Wonka et al.</th>
<th>Danielian &amp; Page</th>
<th>Schlozman &amp; Tierny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU media</td>
<td>EU population</td>
<td>US media</td>
<td>US population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business associations and firms</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal interests</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional and local authorities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research organizations and think thanks</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>3,132(^a)</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>5,769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. data was estimated based on combination of original data and recode of 359 organizations in the dataset

Additionally, we also explored the policy positions visible in the media coverage. Here we see that statements criticizing the sampled proposals gain more media prominence than statements supporting the Commission’s proposal. Namely, in 28 per cent of the 856 relevant statements groups aim to block or change most of the proposal, in 23 per cent groups aim to shape small parts of the proposal and in 19 per cent of the statements groups are supporting the Commission proposal. For 30 per cent of the statements the position of the group vis-à-vis the proposal was unclear or could not be coded from our sources. This distribution, however, does not tell us much about variation in terms of media prominence as the length of the statements is not taken into account. Therefore, we operationalize in the remainder media prominence with the word count of statements related to the sampled legislative proposals. The explanatory variables are the ones presented in the methods section.

We use staff as a proxy for an organization’s resources. We were only able to identify staff members for the category ‘interest group’ (civil society groups, business associations and labor unions) because the number of staff members of firms and research organizations are hardly comparable with those of interest associations. Most importantly, the number of staff
members active in advocacy in a firm or research organizations are difficult or impossible to come by via website coding. We were able to identify the staff members for 54 per cent (or 121) of the interest groups. For those where we could find staff data, the relationship between the number of employees and prominence in the news is close to zero ($r=.03$) and insignificant ($p=.61$). Similar results were obtained when taking the number of statements per proposal (and not word count) as an indicator of prominence ($r=.09; p=.17$). Based on these results we conclude that resources, measured by staff size, is unrelated to media prominence, but we remain cautious. Thinking about the poor comparability of staff data across different group types, the low success rate of website coding and its insignificant bivariate relationship with media prominence, we decided to exclude this variable in the further analysis of group prominence.

The effect of the other explanatory variables (level of mobilization, group type and position) on media prominence is tested with a negative binomial regression. As the dependent variable – number of words a group devoted to a proposal in the news – is positively skewed and is characterized by over-dispersion ($\mu=133.7; s=136.5$) we use a negative binomial regression model. The fit of the model is satisfactory (Deviance / DF = 1.1). We also considered a model with robust standard errors to adjust for heterogeneity caused by nested terms, but since this yielded similar coefficients and significant results we kept the initial model. In order to control for potential bias generated by the media outlet, we add one control variable, namely the source from which we derived the statement. Importantly, this control variable generated no significant effect, which demonstrates the robustness of our findings.

In Table 2 we present three models. Model I with all parameters, Model II excludes the position variable and Model III excludes the group type variable. First, the level of mobilization is, a categorical variable with the European level as reference category. In all models we see the same pattern, namely that, as expected, international and domestic organizations are significantly less prominent in the news compared EU level organizations. Second, the group type of an organization, or the constituency it represents, has no considerable effect on media prominence. In the theoretical section we expected that societal interests, who have a diffuse constituency, rely on media strategies to communicate to their members or to expand their membership and support, where specific or business interests do not or less so. This hypothesis finds no confirmation in our data as we observe that societal interest organizations do not have a significantly different chance of growing prominent in the
news compared to business, firms and professional associations. When comparing Model I and Model III we also see that the Log likelihood ratio test does not yield significant results, indicating that the variable ‘type of interest organization’ does not significantly contribute to the statistical significance of Model I.

Thirdly, we included the position of interest organizations vis-à-vis legislative proposals of the Commission in Model I. This position variable is a categorical variable with as a reference category ‘organizations seeks to change most or block proposal’. Each organization was attributed one position, based on the most pronounced position it voiced in its media statements.\(^5\) The analysis shows that groups who support a proposal or wish to change small parts of it are significantly less prominent compared to groups who wish ‘to block’ or ‘change most of a proposal’. For example, the expected word count for groups who support a proposal is 0.73 times the expected word count of groups who seeks to change most or block a proposal, under control of the other variables. To test whether the variable ‘position’ improves the overall explanatory power of our model, we compared the log likelihood values of Model I with Model II. We observe a significant decrease of the log likelihood value when leaving out the ‘position’ variable. Based on this we can conclude that the adopted policy position contributes significantly to the media prominence of an organized interest, while the type of constituency represented does not have a considerable effect. Interest organizations that raise negative statements – aiming to substantially shape or block a proposal – have a higher chance of growing prominent in the news media, compared to those with a more moderate, supportive or neutral stance.

Finally, we also included a variable in all models measuring whether statements were made by an individual representing the organization and was named as such. This gives an indication of the effect of personification; i.e. whether statements where individual representatives are mentioned result in higher media prominence for the interest organization. This variable proofs to be significant in all models with a high and significant estimate (0.62), indicating that, under control of the other variables, a statement was made by someone representing the organization the expected word count increases with 180 per cent.

\(^5\) In case statements were made with conflicting positions the category unclear was attributed
Table 2. Negative binomial regression: number of words devoted to proposal in the media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>MODEL I</th>
<th>MODEL II</th>
<th>MODEL III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>S.E.</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International European</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of interest organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research institute</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional or local government</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional association</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business association</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal interest organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference made to individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support the proposal</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To shape small parts of proposal</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>&lt;.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersion</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Fit</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value/DF</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>522</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>577.63</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>582.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>-3072.1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-3102.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood n</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio test</td>
<td>Chi2</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*(LL model I - LL model II)</td>
<td>60.86</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*(LL model I - LL model III)</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The starting point of this paper is that media prominence is a scare resource and we aimed to explain varying levels of interest group media prominence related to EU legislative processes. Theoretically, we submit that two dynamics are crucial in gaining media prominence: first, the ability and willingness of interest organizations to seek media attention and second, gatekeepers of media outlets paying attention to organized interests. With regard to the first we have no sufficient evidence in support of the hypothesis that organization resources, measured as staff resources, affect media prominence. Also organization type does not matter in predicting prominence. Our evidence does show that the level of mobilization is key in determining the media prominence in EU-level news sources. Likewise, this can be explained by the inclination of these groups to seek more EU-level media prominence and the proclivity of EU-level media gatekeepers to seek out these EU-level interests because these possess valuable information worth reporting.

We combined two major explanations for group prominence in the news media, namely organizational characteristics and journalistic routines. Yet, our main theoretical contribution is that media prominence of interest organizations is also considerably shaped by the policy position an interest organizations adopt in the news vis-à-vis legislative proposals. Previous research on interest groups and the media has mostly considered whether there is some bias towards particular interest group types. Considering policy positions as an explanatory factor relates to the notion of coverage bias, which concerns which side of a conflict is most prominent in the news, for example in terms of supporting or opposing a particular piece of legislation. Our evidence shows that interest organizations which adopt a negative position – aiming to change most of or block a proposal – have a higher chance to become prominent in the news compared those who voice a milder, a supportive or unclear position. This trend can be caused by these interests to seek more media attention as well as by the propensity of journalists prioritizing news generated by these interests. Interest organizations who oppose legislative proposals are more inclined to seek media prominence in order to expand the political conflict and journalists are more inclined to cover their views because of the news value of negativity and conflict.

We need to acknowledge the study reported in this paper still faces some limits. The evidence is based on content analysis only, which comes with costs. First, we only focus on interests that made it into the media. Some groups might have tried to gain some coverage, but never succeeded, and other may have eschewed media attention. We do not take regard of these interests, but explained the varying levels of prominence of groups that did make it into
the media debate. Secondly, because our findings are based on content analysis we cannot strictly distinguish between media push and pull factors in explaining varying levels of prominence. To know whether specific interests become more prominent in the news because they either seek media coverage more intensively or because journalists prioritize them, interviews with organized interests and/or journalists can be a useful complementary strategy. Regardless of these shortcomings we believe our approach entails a useful theoretical and empirical improvement in explaining interest group media prominence, namely by including the notion of coverage bias and the policy position adopted by organized interests.
Bibliography


