

**The paradox of collective action:**

**Linking interest aggregation and interest articulation in EU Legislative Lobbying**

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**Abstract:** Business interest associations presumably face fewer collective action problems than citizen interest associations. The free-rider problem is easier resolved in small groups with specific interests than for large groups representing diffuse interests. However, membership mobilization is different from policy mobilization. This implies that special interest groups may not find it easier than diffuse interest groups to respond to policy disturbances. We present and examine an important paradox: citizen groups face relatively strong challenges in mobilizing members but find it relatively easy to position themselves on policy issues whereas the reverse is true for business interest associations. We theoretically explain this paradox by (1) contrasting material and non-material selective membership benefits offered by business and citizen interest associations respectively, and (2) note that this directly affects the speed with which established associations can mobilize and position themselves on specific policies. We study this empirically based on interviews with spokespersons of interest organizations active in the European Union, and find support for our hypotheses.

## Introduction

One can hardly overstate the influence of Mancur Olson on the discipline of political science. Especially his seminal work *The Logic of Collective Action* is considered as one of the most influential books in political science and has also attracted broad interest in other academic fields, such as economics, sociology, and psychology. The theory describes the organizational obstacles that stand in between societal disturbances and political attention. The free-rider problem makes the organization of diffuse interests more difficult than that of concentrated interests (Olson 1965; Hardin 1982). This mechanism is commonly cited as one of the main causes for the overrepresentation of business interest organizations in any system of interest representation (e.g. Baumgartner and Leech, 1998; Lowery et al 2015). A subsequent assumption underlying this theory is that the relative ease of initial organization by concentrated interests produces relatively strong interest alignment among members and therefore creates the organizational capacity for relatively coherent, quick, and strategic responses to (policy) disturbances. This latter assumption is an important assumption because it means that inequalities of interest mobilization are likely to be exacerbated in the policy process.

In this paper we challenge this latter assumption. We agree with Olson's premise that concentrated interests are more easily organized than diffuse interests in society, a process we label the *membership mobilization* part of collective action. Yet, we part with the assumption that this benefit still exist once an organization is formed and becomes politically active, or as we call this process: the *policy mobilization* part of collective action. While Olson, and many others after him, saw both parts as cumulative, i.e. benefits in the first part have a positive effect on benefits in the second parts; we argue that both phases have largely opposite logics. In other words, what is beneficial in the *membership mobilization* part of collective action, most notably having an attractive package of material selective benefits for (potential) members, could restrict existing groups in their political activities. More specifically, in cases where

membership mobilization is explicitly political in nature, and membership incentives are dominantly ‘expressive’, interest group leaders are able to relatively quickly and easily form policy objectives and positions (policy mobilization). Whereas in cases where membership mobilization is construed around material selective incentives such as training programs or insurance policies, interest group leaders will not have a clear policy mandate and, when mobilizing politically, will need to coordinate policy positions with constituents more extensively. As a result, groups that face relatively few collective action problems to mobilize members and maintain themselves, are likely to face a stronger need to coordinate collective action when they engage in politics. In contrast, groups that initially face strong collective action problems, require, once members are mobilized, little internal consensus formation and can engage in political activity more swiftly.

As a case of research, we focus on interest associations active on issues on the agenda of the European Commission for two reasons. First, there is a substantial population of interest organizations and a wide variety of organizations is engaged in lobbying in Brussels (Berkhout and Lowery, 2010). The strong variation in organizational forms, for instance including sub-national government liaison offices, cause groups, business interest organizations, policy think tanks and national associations, makes sure that there is sufficient variation in the diffuse/specific nature of the interests mobilized. Second, recent studies on the EU case have found that the numerical dominance of business interest associations does not mean that business interests are more likely to successfully win policy conflicts (Dür, et al., 2015; Kluver, 2013). The tensions between the membership and policy mobilization of business interests, as further outlined below, potentially explains these counter-intuitive findings.

To put our theoretical ideas to an empirical test, we draw from 110 semi-structured expert interviews with representatives of organized interests active on a set of 66 legislative proposals submitted by the European Commission to the European Parliament between 2008

and 2010 (Beyers et al. 2014). We present several multivariate regression analyses on a dataset of 332 issue-group dyads. The results confirm the theoretical argument that diffuse citizen interests face fewer difficulties to come to a joint position on policy issues compared to business interests. Our data demonstrate that this gap dampens the more media salience policy issues enjoy. These are important findings as they indicate that the collective action problems that interest groups initially face do not necessarily, as is often argued, exacerbate in the policy process. Rather, the opposite seems true. The final section critically reflects on the broader implications of these findings and draws some suggestions for future research.

### **Theoretical puzzle**

The study of mobilization by interest groups has a long tradition. Perhaps the most influential study in this field is Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* (1965). Most researchers refer to this work to explain the dominance of business interest groups in populations of groups and the disproportional influence of these groups in the political arena (e.g. Scholzman et al 2012). Yet, the *logic* has been contested in various academic studies (see discussion in: Baumgartner and Leech, 1998 64-82) and, more empirically, in the decades following publication, many diffuse interest groups came to the fore (Berry, 1984). We concur with most of these criticisms but we do not contest the challenges identified by Olson related to the mobilization of members.

We question the consequences that Olson (1982, 41-47), in his later work ascribed to the model, i.e. that the favorable collective action context for business interests ultimately produces biased and detrimental influence of special interest groups on public policy. Olson (1982, 44-45) assumes that the policy lobby of special interest groups is commonly successful possibly at the cost of society as a whole. He (1982, 41) notes that 'small groups can usually organize with less *delay* than large groups', and, by implication, small, specific groups 'have more lobbying and cartelistic power' than large groups. Here he fundamentally expands his

original focus on mobilization into theory about policy mobilization, political influence and economic power more broadly.

A number of studies explicitly study the political implications of the logic of collective action. To start, Gray and Lowery (1996) reject Olson's idea that once established, interest groups will persist, and that one should see an indeterminate growth in the number of politically active groups. Others, such as Dür and Matteo (2013), explicitly link the magnitude of collective action problems to political strategic choice on the part of groups, with diffuse, citizen groups more likely to choose an 'outside' lobbying strategy for reasons of membership recruitment. Walker (1991) also explicitly links citizen mobilization to 'outside lobbying' and business interest associations to inside lobbying (also see: Hanegraaff et al. 2016). Last, several studies explain the inequalities in interest representation with references to the logic of collective action. Klüver (2012, 1117) links successful Europeanization of interest groups to collective action problems: "Even if cause groups [such as citizen groups] overcome the problem of collective action, they are considerably disadvantaged in comparison to sectional groups [such as business]". Baumgartner and Leech (2001, 1198) explicitly relate Olson's ideas of collective action to the agenda-setting opportunities for different groups: "[T]he sheer number of business lobbying groups [in Washington] and the level of resources they bring to bear means that businesses can afford to choose their issues, whereas consumer and ideological groups on most issues must hope that someone with cab fare is along for the ride." (see also Lohman 1998; Beyers 2002; Leech et al. 2005; Dür and Mateo 2012; Author; Oliver 1992). In short, current literature tells us that the linkage between membership mobilization and political influence is far more complex than noted by Olson. Collective action problems can be compensated through population dynamics, strategic effectivity, and the contingency of agenda-setting processes and so on.

Yet, what remains largely theoretically unspecified is the relationship between membership and policy mobilization, and the distinct ways to manage different collective action problems at these stages. In the literature mentioned it is assumed, and mostly directly retrieved from Olson's predictions, that the collective action problems that groups face when forming an organization have a *cumulative* effect on the ability to become politically active (or any of the other implications mentioned) in later stages. However, this connection is not theoretically well-developed. First, Olson (1965, 132) does not use his distinction between groups relying on negative and positive selective incentives when he notes that 'lobbies are in fact the by-products of organizations that obtain their strength and support because they perform some function in addition to lobbying for collective goods. He remains agnostic as regards the nature of 'some function' nor does he speculate about variation in the success that groups may have in the provision of various functions and their by-products. Second, as noted, we know that, especially for the mobilization of citizens, groups will strategically combine their membership recruitment with their policy campaigns. This is less likely to be the case for the mobilization of business interests. But this strategic difference does not tell us much about the organizational ease with which groups identify *which* positions they are going to voice on *which* policy issues. As a result, it is not entirely clear how the organizational maintenance strategies to successfully overcome collective action problems affect the abilities of interest groups to engage with public policy. To shed more light on this issue we first identify the multiple strategies interest groups employ to sustainably overcome collective action problems (i.e. the membership mobilization part of collective action). In the section thereafter we link these to political positioning in public policy (i.e. the policy mobilization part of collective action).

## **The membership mobilization part of collective action**

The strategies of interest organizations to generate sufficient long-term income and sustainably overcome collective action problems are commonly framed in terms of the types of selective benefits provided (material, expressive or solidary, or, negatively, coercion) to members (Olson 1965, 51; Wilson 1974, 30-55; Salisbury 1969) or type of patronage received from benefactors (private, public or corporate) (Walker, 1983). These are outlined below.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

### *Selective incentives offered to members*

Collective action problems arise when individuals benefit from the provision of a certain collective good regardless of their contribution in the provision of it (free-riding). For instance, an environmentalist need not contribute to environmental interest groups because his or her individual contribution will not matter in voicing concerns about the environment. A hotel need not be a member of the hotel association in order to benefit from minimum prizes agreed among association' members. As noted by Olson (1965, 51) 'only a separate and selective incentive will stimulate a rational individual in a latent group to act in a group-oriented way'. This incentive or benefit must be selective in the sense that non-members can be meaningfully excluded from it. They may be positive (material rewards) such as insurance schemes or negative (subtle or manifest coercion) such as exclusion from a given profession. This benefit is of a material nature. This is the 'classic' argument and a starting point for generations of students of the mobilization of interest groups and social movements (e.g. Oliver, 1992; Walker 1991; Jordan and Maloney, 1997).

An important addition to Olson's idea of selective incentives is the identification of *non-material* incentives (Wilson, 1974, 30-55; Salisbury, 1969, 15-17; Clark and Wilson, 1961). Olson (1965, 60-61) notes that, especially in small groups, individual members may receive

‘social’ benefits or be under ‘social’ pressure. He, also in later work (1982, 24), only considers it relevant for small and socially homogeneous groups. Others, and here we include ourselves, in contrast, most notably Salisbury (1969, 15-17), strongly emphasize the relevance and distinct, mutually exclusive qualities of non-material, expressive and solidary incentives.

As regards expressive benefits, individuals ‘are willing to join groups which provide mechanisms for the public expression of values’ relevant to them (Idem, 16). These mechanisms, in contemporary terms, range from demonstrating, transferring money to forwarding Twitter messages. These values need not be material, nor that the possible realization of these values must bring material benefits to the individual who seeks its expression.<sup>1</sup>

Solidary benefits ‘include such rewards as socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification, and status resulting from membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions and so on’ (Clark and Wilson, 1961, 134-35). As noted by Clark and Wilson (1961, 135), these benefits are, in contrast to the other incentives, explicitly independent of the goals of the organization because these benefits refer to the process of coming together rather than the substantive interests represented. But, these goals must ‘first and foremost be non-controversial’ (...) and ‘never relate to an “issue” (the conflict of ends)’ because organizations dominantly relying on solidary benefits ‘seek to avoid conflict with other associations as well as avoid it internally’ (Clark and Wilson, 1961, 142).

Successful group leaders will offer (potential) members or supporters an attractive mix of these incentives. Combining different types of incentives is important to maintain continuity as an organization. Salisbury (1969, 20), for instance, notes that expressive groups ‘will be easily established and as easily disappear’ and, as later noted in various studies on the

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that Salisbury (1969, 16) explicitly excludes the benefits, accrued through work satisfaction and the feeling of doing something beneficial for society, a business lobbyist for a tax cut may experience because the cut in itself is ‘material in their explicit anticipated consequences’. This is different from what Clark and Wilson (1961, also see Wilson, 1974, 34-36) identify as ‘purposive benefits’.

institutionalization of social movements (e.g. Kriesi, 1996), therefore ‘organizers may be expected to infuse other types of benefits into the group in order to give it stability’. At the same time, this is a difficult task because the management of these incentives puts different demands on the organization: for instance, adding solidary benefits (e.g. offering music at a demonstration) to expressive groups may partially be conflictual (e.g. people interested in the music at the demonstration may not be interested in the political values expressed).

### *Patronage*

Interest groups may receive routine and stable funding in the form of different forms of patronage. Walker (1983) differentiates private, corporate and public patronage. Private patronage refers to large donations by wealthy individuals separate from and in addition to normal membership contribution (Walker, 1991, 162; see discussion of this definition in: Nownes, 1995, 207-208). Such donations may be channeled via charitable foundations or trusts such as George Soros’ Open Society Foundations. Corporate patronage refers to sponsorship by companies (and other institutional funding, see Nownes (1995, 212). It also includes ‘split’ membership structures of many trade associations, in which major companies pay disproportionate large membership dues compared to smaller players in the same market (Walker, 1983, 401). Public patronage comes in the form of structural or project-related subsidies by government agencies. For instance, the subsidies by the European Commission of various civil society groups in well-documented (Sanchez-Salgado, 2015; Mahoney and Beckstrand, 2011; Greenwood, 2007). Such subsidies may be ‘indirect’ in cases where labor union or trade association membership is paid by (public) employers or where donations to officially recognized charities are tax-deductible (Walker, 1983, 400).

The former strategies deal with ways in which interest groups maintain themselves as organizations and secure organizational funds. In other words, they describe the mechanisms

that group employ in order to overcome collective problems related to the mobilization of members. What it does not tell us, however, is how this would affect political activity. In what follows we therefore sketch-out how these constituent incentives and patronage structures affect the speed with which interest organizations can become politically active, or, in other words, how different dimensions of organizational maintenance affect the policy mobilization part of collective action.

### **Hypotheses: policy mobilization part of collective action**

We conceptually connect two dimensions of organizational maintenance to the activities in the policy process: (1) the relative focus on material compared to expressive selective benefits offered to members and (2) the relative reliance on any form of patronage, here identified as all non-membership related income. We here disregard organizations with a dominant focus on solidary selective benefits or patronage that has ‘solidary’ motivations (certain private charitable foundations). For reasons noted above, we assume such organizations to fully avoid direct engagement in public policy making.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

First, a strong relative focus on expressive selective benefits is typical for the representation of interests (or causes) that are diffusely distributed over large groups of individuals. This is, to start, because of the nature of the values expressed, as these ‘are not ordinarily divisible into units of value allocated to specific persons or charged against unit costs’ (Salisbury, 1969, 16). Salisbury (1969, 16) notes “good government”, “peace” and “civil liberties” as examples. The non-divisible nature of these values commonly makes it that practically anybody potentially benefits from the realization of them but that these benefits are also diffusely spread over the population (rather than concentrated into a very specific

subgroup). Also, material benefits, such as insurance schemes, access to exclusive training programs or networking events are relatively difficult to meaningfully offer to groups who come together for a certain political cause, whereas this is relatively easy for groups who act collectively for a given joint, and relative concentrated interest. Associations of well-established (and protected) professions such as doctors, accountants or lawyers, for instance, typically offer de-facto compulsory training programs. These selective material incentives are unavailable to groups representing diffuse interests and an important explanation for the resolution of collective action problems of concentrated interests.

This has important consequences for the political engagement of groups relying on these distinct mobilization and maintenance strategies. Groups representing specific, concentrated interests managed to mobilize on the basis of material selective incentives and collective instrumental interests, without being ‘disturbed’ by government action. The commonality of the interests arises from shared economic or social interests rather than political ones. The relative ease of interest aggregation, as the membership mobilization part of collective action, does not, automatically, lead to interest similarity in response to policy initiatives. That is, because of the initial ‘non-political’ nature of the mobilization around a trade, profession, economic sector or some shared material interest, such groups will have to make a relatively substantial investment in managing the policy mobilization part of collective action when they position themselves in public policy. This requires the internal management of heterogeneity of policy interests, or necessitates avoiding certain political issues. Olson (1982, 53-58) acknowledges that specific interest groups tend to ‘make decisions more slowly than the individuals and firms of which they are comprised’. But, to repeat, he assumes that practically all interest group mobilization has a relatively narrow character and, consequently, the interests of members must be so closely aligned that, in contrast to our argument, this does not lead to meaningful variation in their policy-oriented activities (see for a similar argument on the

relationship between narrow membership mobilization and internal homogeneity: Schmitter and Streeck, 1999). Groups representing diffuse interests mobilized on the basis of expressive selective benefits offered to individuals interested in the expression noble values, will find it very easy to translate these values into explicitly political positions in concrete policy processes. Their rationale of mobilization is political to start with and, after a potentially difficult membership mobilization part of collective action, have an easy policy mobilization when acting collectively on public policy. Expressive benefits already relate to some sort of political goal, whereas material benefits are not necessarily policy related. This produces a paradox in the sense that for interest groups whose mobilization strongly depends on material selective incentives, the definition of policy goals necessitates a time-consuming process of internal consensus formation, not needed for interest organization which are already organized around values related to policy goals. This leads to the following hypothesis:

***H1:** Interest organizations whose mobilization strongly depends on material selective incentives, such as business interest organizations, find it more difficult to position themselves politically than diffuse interests organized around policy values, such as citizen groups.*

Furthermore, the relative reliance on patronage affects the ease with which organizations operate politically. This should largely work, first, as with expressive selective benefits, via the nature of the values represented. That is, we assume that governments subsidies and patronage via charitable foundations dominantly benefits groups working on ‘diffuse interests’ or values associated with indivisible goods such as ‘good government’, ‘clean environment’ and so on. This is, for instance, the practice of the European Commission (Sanchez-Salgado, 2015). Second, in addition this substantive preference for valence issues, policy makes are likely to prioritize subsidizing relatively moderate organizations relative to

more radical associations (e.g. Vermeulen, 2013). This selection bias will lead us to observe that groups with substantial proportions of non-membership income are more likely to agree with on-going or proposed policies than others, and therefore may be somewhat faster in their political response to policy initiatives. Third, it may be that government subsidization in itself has a moderating effect, in the sense that the interaction between groups and policy makers in the context of subsidies increases the procedural policy-capacities of the interest organization (in terms of the language used, the issues at stake and the organizational structure). This is similar to the more widely documented effect of cooptation. In the critical analysis of Selznick (1949, 220) such cooptive subsidies may create ‘a pattern which simply transforms an unorganized citizenry into a reliable instrument for the achievement of administrative goals, and calls it ‘democracy’. Even when we assume that Selznick overestimates the normative implications, we may still find a positive effect of public subsidization on political action. In all these cases, patronage creates an substantive alignment of goals of policy makers and of interest groups. This leads to the following hypotheses:

***H2:** Interest organizations that partially rely on non-membership income find it easier to position themselves politically than other interest organizations*

H1 and H2 deal with the relationship between membership and policy mobilization. There are several contextual factors that shape this relationship. Most notably, this is likely to be the saliency of the issue in political debate. That is, the expected difference between value-based citizen organizations and business organizations is expected to be amplified by the salience of policy issues in political debates. This works via the perceptions on the part of policy participants about the saliency and popularity of policy position in public opinion. As proposed by Kollman (1998, 155-164), groups working on ‘popular’ issues and positions respond differently to changes in saliency than groups with relatively ‘unpopular’ policy positions. That

is, when policies favorable to certain groups are not supported by a broad public and when supportive publics consider the policy important, groups will not signal their position because it ‘will take care to avoid expanding the conflict too much to spark the opposition’ (Kollman 1998, 160). This is, in Kollman’s words, ‘classical interest group politics’ and likely to be the common situation for groups representing specific interests. Interest organizations representing diffuse interests on issues that ‘hardly raise an eyebrow’ (Tarrow, 1998, 3) or are typical, broadly supported ‘valence issues’ (Stokes, 1960, 373) are likely to want to exploit the favorable public opinion by increasing the salience of the (latent) issue or, when saliency is already high, explicitly and ‘loudly’ take their ‘popular’ position. This implies that the saliency of the issue mediates the hypothesized difference between diffuse and specific interests. Namely, specific business interests get constrained by media and public pressures when issues grow salient. In that case, they need to adjust their position in such a way that it will not raise public opposition or negative sentiments among public opinion, but at the same time complies with the demands of their constituents. Value-based citizen interests are less constrained in this way because they generally adopt positions that enjoy broad support with the public and the media and are more acquainted with public lobbying activities (Hanegraaff, Beyers, & De Bruycker, 2016; Kollman, 1998). This argument results in the following hypothesis:

***H3:** Especially on salient issues interest organizations representing specific interests, such as business interest organizations, find it more difficult to position themselves politically than interest organizations representing diffuse interests, such as citizen groups*

### **Data and research design**

We rely on data about interest group behavior on concrete policy issues. Our dataset consists of issue-group dyads that has been constructed on the basis of data collected as part of a larger project on EU legislative lobbying ([www.intereuro.eu](http://www.intereuro.eu)). The INTEREURO data departs from a

stratified sample of 125 European legislative proposals (directives and regulations submitted between 2008 and 2010) (Beyers, Braun, Marshall, & De Bruycker, 2014; Beyers, Dür, Marshall, & Wonka, 2014). All Commission proposals for regulations and directives between 2008 and 2010 were mapped. Afterwards all media coverage in five media outlets<sup>2</sup> related to these proposals was mapped with electronic keyword searches and archived. A set of 48 directives and 41 regulations that gained media coverage in more than two media outlets was selected. In addition, we included 18 proposals where the Commission organized online consultations with organized interests. We also added randomly 18 proposals that gained little or no media coverage and where no Commission consultation took place. This means that sample of 125 proposals is stratified in the sense that we overweight cases that gain media attention or where public consultations were held by the Commission.

This dataset draws from 110 face-to-face interviews conducted with 89 different interest organizations active on 66 of the sampled proposals. Interviews were not conducted for all 125 sampled proposals, mostly because no lobbying activity was identified.<sup>3</sup>

We conducted face-to-face interviews with 88 different interest organizations on 237 issues and this provides us with data on 332 interest group-issue dyads. Issues are aspects of a legislative proposal on which some stakeholders disagree. In total we identified, through interviews with Commission officials, Members of the European Parliament and interest group representatives, 339 issues connected to the 125 sampled legislative proposals (Baroni, 2014; Dür, Bernhagen, & Marshall, 2015).<sup>4</sup> We could not interview interest groups for all 339 issues

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<sup>2</sup> These are: European Voice, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Agence Europe, Le Monde and Financial Times

<sup>3</sup> Forty proposals were dropped because no lobbying activity was identified in the EU-level media or in interviews carried out with the Commission. Another 8 proposals were dropped because no interest groups could be convinced for an interview or nobody within the contacted organization remembered enough about the specific proposal. For 12 other proposals we conducted telephone interviews, but no face-to-face interviews. Some groups were interviewed twice or more times if they were identified as crucial actors for several proposals. As described elsewhere (Beyers, Braun, et al., 2014), the main goal of the interview project was to interview EU-level interest organizations on each side of the issues identified for the legislative proposals.

<sup>4</sup> Within the same project also extensive interviews were carried out with 95 experts in the Commission and 29 officials in the EP.

because some issues were only relevant for the European Parliament or the European Commission.

86 percent of the 88 interviewed interest organizations are EU-level interest organizations. In cases where no EU-level organizations were active, we interviewed national or international interest organizations. For cases where more actors were active more interviews were done and for most of the cases we were able to interview groups on each side of a conflict dimension. The largest part (70 percent) of the respondents are business or professional interest associations. These are membership organizations with firms or professionals as members. These numbers correspond to the overall population of interest groups active on EU politics (Wonka, Baumgartner, Mahoney, & Berkhout, 2010).

We take the time-period that interest organizations take to position themselves on policy issues as a proxy for the policy mobilization part of collective action problems of interest groups. Interest group officials were asked how long it took to establish a position on a specific legislative proposal. The interview-question was phrased as follows:

*Given the fact that your organization might need to consult or involve its members, how long did it take to adopt your position at the point when the Commission adopted its proposal in 2008?*

Figure 1 shows the time respondents took to establish a position on a specific legislative proposal expressed in number of days. The majority of groups (57 percent) took more than one month to establish a position. The mean time it took to establish a position on an issue is sixty days. This mean is significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ) lower for diffuse interests (45 days) compared to specific interests (66 days). Figure 2 shows the descriptive values of the time it took for interest groups to establish a position for diffuse and specific interests. Also from this figure it is clear that civil society groups are in general faster in adopting a positions compared to specific business and professional interests.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The former dependent variable contains too many categories to run an ordered logit regression without violating the proportional odds assumption. Even if we collapse theoretically proximate categories, the proportional odds assumption was not met. In order not to lose the specificity of the data, we use the number of days rather than the actual answer categories. Since the data is strongly overdispersed ( $\sigma^2=4400$ ;  $\mu=60$ ) towards shorter time periods a negative binomial regression is fitted. To deal with potential dependencies due to the fact that different respondents are nested in the same issue, we estimated clustered standard errors at the level of issues within proposals (n=224 clusters).

To test the first hypothesis we estimate the effect of group type on the time interest groups took to establish a position. More specifically, for group type we distinguish between specific business groups and diffuse civil society interests. To assess our second hypothesis, we include an indicator of the relative dependence on members for financial resources. Respondents were asked during the interviews what percentage of their organizations' budget comes from membership contributions. To test our third hypothesis, we interacted group type with the media salience a legislative proposal received. Media salience was measured based on the total numbers of articles (logged) that discussed these proposals in six media outlets (Agence Europe, European Voice, Euractiv, Le Monde, The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and The Financial Times). This interaction allows us to test whether the effect of media salience is conditioned by whether a lobbyist represents a business interest or a civil society organization.

Finally, we include some control variables. First, we include a measure which determines how interest groups came at a position on a specific issue and whether members

were involved. Namely, interest groups were asked whether the position was decided by (1) the organizational leadership, (2) voting among members or (3) consensus among members. Interest groups vary in the extent to which leaders can operate autonomous from their members. Consulting members can be a resource and time intensive process and we expect that interest groups find it easier to position themselves, when organizational leaders decided on the policy issue themselves. Second, we control for staff resources (logged) because better staff means that an organization is more able to cope with the transaction costs involved in coordinating and establishing a position. Second, we take into account the position interest groups adopted in relation to the status-quo on the 237 issues studied. Lobbyists were asked whether their activities in relation to a specific issue were aimed at ‘blocking or shaping most of the proposal’, ‘shaping specific parts of the proposal, not blocking it’ or ‘supporting the commission’ (reference). Given the relatively favorable position of supporters of the status-quo (Baumgartner et al 2009), it is likely that interest groups need more time to establish a critical position vis-à-vis an issue than a supportive position. Third, we include a control for organizational salience. We asked respondents whether the lobbyists perceived the issue in question (1) ‘more important’, (2) ‘as important’, or (3) ‘less important compared to other issues she is familiar with and worked on’. When organizations deem an issue important the stakes are higher, which will likely lead to a more cumbersome and longer process of position formation. Finally we add a control for lobbying in a coalition or not. Lobbying in a coalition comes with more coordination and transaction costs (Hula, 1999) and will likely lead to an increase in the time it takes to adopt a position on a specific policy issue.

## **Results**

The regression results are presented in Table 2 (see below). As said, the dependent variable is the number of days an interest group took to establish a position on a policy proposal. Our

independent variables are group type, salience, patronage and the decision making procedure followed. We control for resources, organizational salience, position, mobilization and whether or not groups are part of a coalition. Model I shows all the main effects and Model II also includes an interaction effect between media salience and group type.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

What do the results tell us? The coefficient of the negative binomial regression analysis reported in the top rows of the table demonstrate that non-business groups are indeed significantly faster compared to business groups in establishing a position. The earlier observation in the frequency distributions reported in figure 1 that citizen groups find it easier to establish a position (H1) is confirmed while controlling for alternative factors in the regression models. This is exemplified in the predicted values portrayed in Figure 3. The predicted number of days it takes to establish a position on a legislative proposal (based on Model II) is 82 days for business groups, while only 29 days for NGOs.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Our second hypothesis about patronage finds no confirmation in the regression analysis. The relevant coefficients reported in the second row of the table are small and insignificant in both model specifications. Namely, organizations that depend largely on their members for financial resources do not face significantly more difficulties when establishing a position than groups with some level patronage income. It seems that patronage, when controlling for other factors, does not affect the ease of policy positioning. One explanation for this finding is that membership maintain relevant ways to control the political positions of interest groups, even when such groups receive subsidy for some or substantial parts of its activities.

The third hypothesis finds support in the analysis in the sense that media salience conditions the effect of group type as can be seen in the significant interaction effect reported in Model II. Generally as indicated by the significance of the group type variable, diffuse interests are faster than business groups in establishing a position, but this advantage diminishes the more media salience a legislative proposal receives. Figure 4 reports the predicted number of days it takes to establish a position for business interest groups and other groups at different levels of media salience. For instance, the figure shows that when a legislative proposal receives 30 media hits, business interest associations and other groups do not significantly differ in the time they take to adopt a position. This can be seen by the overlapping confidence intervals in Figure 4. When a legislative proposal does not receive any media attention at all, at the lower part of the x-axis, diffuse interests on average already adopt a position after 6 days (S.E.=2.81), while it takes 64 days (S.E.=20.19) for business interests. Remember that we, based on Kollman (1998), hypothesized that non-business groups would use the public support for their policy positions strategically in their policy lobby and that media attention works in their favor. This finding, in contrast, indicates that media attention seems to be in the disadvantage of diffuse interests rather than specific interests. It may be that Kollman's (1998) focus on policy mobilization makes him partly disregard the strategic considerations related membership mobilization and public salience. That is, when policy issues enjoy much media attention, diffuse constituencies grow more knowledgeable and aware of policy issues. This provides opportunities (and threats) for membership recruitment that citizen groups should carefully consider. In such instances, diffuse interest groups will want to respond to the grievances and preferences of their (potential) constituents and have to take regard of them when crafting a position; for instance by sending out opinion polls or conducting media analyses. More salient issues consequently trigger non-business groups to strategically consider mobilizing (new) members. The dual management of the membership and policy mobilization by citizen groups

gives them relatively high transaction costs on salient issues, compared to business interest associations for whom such membership consideration are not so much tied to media salience of issue. Business interest associations tend to have a clearly delineated constituency which is usually formally involved in decision making procedures about the organization's position on issues. For instance ACEA, the European Umbrella group of car manufacturers, consults all its members before taking a position on any political issue it is engaged with. This procedure is the same for salient or non-salient issues.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Several control variables yield interesting results. First, the internal decision making procedures of interest groups affects the time it takes for a position to be established. A position is more swiftly established when only the organizational leadership decides without consulting members or constituents (16 days; S.E.= 10.64). As expected, this increases to on average 289 days (S.E.=171.68) when a vote is casted among members. Second, the staff of an organization significantly impacts the difficulties groups face to adopt a position. Interestingly, groups with more staff members take longer to come at an organizational position. This is intuitive in the sense that when more people are involved in coordinating a position this also brings about more overhead and transaction costs. More organizational resources are thus no guarantee for swift position taking, on the contrary. The importance organizations attribute to a specific issue, another control variable in our analysis, is not significant. Issues that are deemed more important do not engender more difficulties in adopting a position. Finally, lobbying in a coalition nor the position of interest organizations impacts the difficulties interest groups face to form a position.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we qualified one of the central implications of the logic of collective action, namely that specific interest groups easily articulate their interests in public policy. This theory states that specific interests face fewer collective action problems compared to groups with diffuse constituents. We do not fundamentally contest the membership mobilization part of the logic of collective action, nor the empirical finding of numerical dominance of business interest associations in most contexts. However, we note that one should not conflate the ease of membership mobilization with the internal consensus creation and policy mobilization in response to policy disturbance. For existing interest groups this is a major issue: the real policy challenge for interest groups is not to form an organization, but to establish a common position that satisfies already existing members. We argue that the policy mobilization part of collective action is more problematic for specific interests compared to diffuse interests. We examined this collective action paradox for organizations active in the EU legislative process.

Our findings confirm our theoretical expectations. Citizen groups find it easier to come to a position than business groups. This allows them to become politically active in an earlier stage of the policy process. This effect is, however, mediated by the media salience of an issue. The more salient policy processes become, the longer it takes for citizen groups position themselves. Arguably, citizen groups face more constraints in balancing needs of effective policy engagement, their constituents, and the broader public, the more salient issues grow. Most notably, membership recruitment and maintenance needs to be included in the strategic considerations of citizen groups, especially on salient issues.

Our theoretical argument and empirical findings have important consequences. First, and, most importantly, the current literature on interest group formation and political activity routinely conflates the first phase of collective action with the second phase of collective action problems (e.g. Lohman 1998; Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Beyers 2002; Leech et al. 2005;

Dür and Mateo 2012; Kluver 2012; Author). For instance, many have attributed the dominance of business groups in Washington or the EU to the Olsonian collective action problems these groups face and note this dominance is likely to translate into effective political action and up-to-speed lobby interventions. In most instances the groups that become active in these polities already exist before they become politically active and we therefore need to attend to the policy mobilization of groups rather than, only, the membership mobilization. When the process of collective action is a cumulative process, as Olson argues, this would not be a problem as the membership mobilization part of the collective action problems of groups would be similar to, or even would be exacerbated, when groups engage in politics. However, we argue and show that distinct types of collective action problems underlie membership and policy mobilization and that these parts are *not* cumulative. We can therefore not readily rely on Olson's theory when dealing with the political activity of already existing interest groups. In future research, we therefore need research designs that explicitly connect the membership recruitment and maintenance activities with the policy-oriented activities of groups. Our study necessarily relied on 'group type' as a relatively crude indicator of the nature of membership mobilization (types of incentives provided) and distribution of interests mobilized (specific or diffuse). A more precise assessment of these is likely to produce better specified models on the relationship between membership and policy mobilization.

Second, our findings also bridge studies on mobilization and influence. Recent studies, surprisingly, find that business groups are not more influential in political decision-making than civil society groups. Yet, building on Olson's model of collective action, we also know that there are far more business groups able to overcome the membership mobilization part of collective action. The literature is still at odds on how to link these contradictory findings. By highlighting the opposing mechanisms between the membership and policy mobilization parts of collective action we provide a potential link between these puzzling observations. However,

more is needed. We now largely assume that certain interests, most notably of business and professionals, are more concentrated within society, compared to diffusely spread interests of citizens. However, while plausible, we did not study this connection, and future studies could more specifically look into that, and especially assess these connection at the level of policy issues rather than individual interest groups. The latter is important because the ‘an interest arises from the conjunction between some private value and (...) some proposed action by government’ (Salisbury, 1994, emphasis added 12-13), and therefore groups are likely to face distinct mobilization challenges depending on the issue, and associated interest distribution, at hand (something also noted by: Lowi, ; Wilson).

From a normative perspective our findings, yet again, provide a silver lining for those that see the EU as a business driven entity. Recent studies on interest group influence that have showed that business groups are not more successful in affecting policy outcomes compared to citizen groups (Dur, et al. 2015; author). Our study suggests that business groups are not more successful compared to citizen groups because they face substantial constraints forging internal consensus and coordinating policy positions. This may make business interest associations compared to citizen groups relatively inefficient vehicles for lobby campaigns. The numbers of lobby groups present do not tell us who is effectively pushing policy in a given direction. We therefore concur with Halpin and Jordan (2012, 245) when they note that ‘politics is not basketball and numbers are not results’.

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**Table 1. Membership mobilization part of collective action: Maintenance strategies of interest groups**

Mechanism	Attributes	Types	Interests	Policy position
Selective benefits for members	Material	Negative (coercion) and positive (benefits)	Specific, business	Slow
	Non-material	Expressive and solidary	Diffuse, citizen	Fast
Patronage	Yes	Private, public and corporate	Diffuse, citizen	Fast
	No	Indirect or absent	Specific, business	Slow

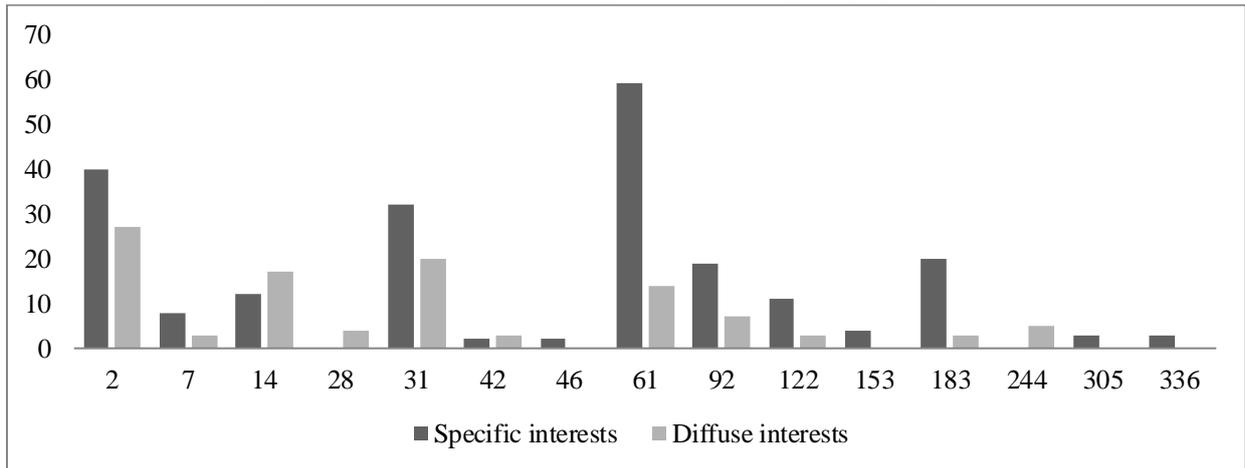
**Table 2. Negative binomial regression of the number of days it took to establish a position on a legislative proposal**

	MODEL I		MODEL II		
	Coef.	Robust Std. Err	Coef.	Robust Std. Err	
Intercept	4.90***	0.84	4.61***	0.79	
<b>Explanatory variables</b>					
- H1: Group type	Civil society groups	-1.40**	0.55	-2.40***	0.42
	Business groups (ref.)	-	-	-	-
- H3: Media salience (Ln)		0.26	0.15	0.11	0.11
- H3: Media salience * Groutype (NGO)		-	-	0.55**	0.19
- H2: Financial dependence on members (%)		-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
- Decision taken by	The organizational leadership	-1.57*	0.72	-1.35**	0.73
	Voting among the members	1.72**		1.57**	
	Consensus among members (ref.)				
<b>Control variables</b>					
- Position	Block or shape most of the proposal	0.46*	0.23	0.50**	0.18
	Shape parts of the proposal	0.50*	0.24	0.49*	0.21
	Support the proposal (ref.)	-	-	-	-
- Part of coalition	Yes	0.42	0.42	0.40	0.34
	No (ref.)			-	-
- Ln staff		-0.15*	0.08	-0.18*	0.08
- Number of interest groups that mobilized (Ln)		-0.29	0.29	-0.18	0.25
- Organizational salience	More than other issues	0.21	0.23	0.13	0.23
	Equal as other issues	-0.14	0.18	-0.23	0.19
	Less than other issues (ref.)	-	-	-	-
Alpha		1.26	0.13	1.23	0.13
Ln Alpha		0.23	0.10	0.20	0.11
		n =256 Wald chi2(13) = 64.56 Prob > chi2 = .00		n =256 Wald chi2(13) = 144.77 Prob > chi2 = .00	

Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parentheses and significance level indicated by \*

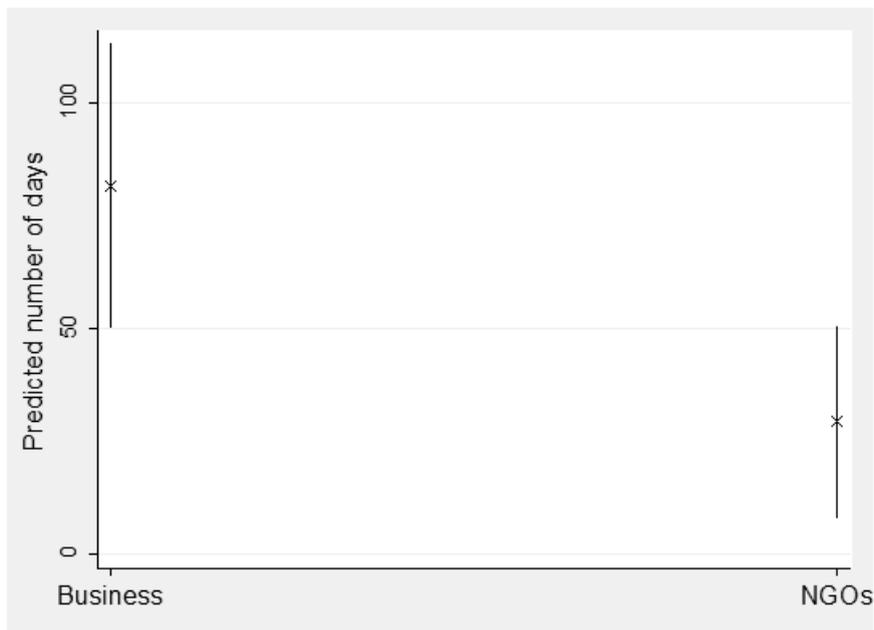
\*\*\*  $\alpha < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $\alpha < 0.01$ ; \*  $\alpha < 0.05$

**Figure 1. Frequencies (Y-axis) of the number of days (X-Axis) it took for an interest organization to establish a position on a policy proposal**



*Note: Spearman's rho = -0.21; Pr = 0.00*

**Figure 3. Predicted number of days it takes to establish a position for NGOs and business groups (with 95% Cfi's)**



**Figure 4. Predicted number of days it takes to establish a position for NGOs and business groups for different levels of media salience (with 95% Cfi's)**

