How Interest Groups Develop Their Lobbying Strategies

The Logic of Endogeneity

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Abstract. This paper argues that the literature on interest groups has neglected an important factor in explaining why interest groups use different types of lobbying tactics. The literature has emphasized motives and contextual factors in explaining why interest groups do what they do. This paper argues that the use of particular lobbying tactics can also be explained by factors endogenous to the strategy development process. Some tactics are more prone to be combined than others, because they are complementary or reinforce each other. To illustrate the endogenous nature of strategy development, I conceptualize lobbying as a communication process. I show how different tactics are related to each other and how this perspective affects our understanding of lobbying success.

Keywords: lobbying, interest groups, political strategies, political communication

Introduction: Why interest groups do what they do

Interest groups rely on a wide repertoire of tactics for influencing public policies. They may coalesce with other likeminded actors, employ inside or outside tactics, target specific institutional venues at multiple levels of government and employ different types of arguments and information. A lobbying strategy includes a pool of tactics or actions that together serve a specific political purpose (Binderkrantz, 2005, p. 176). The literature on lobbying strategies is flourishing. Yet, no overarching framework exists which connects the different tactics that have been studied (Princen, 2011, p. 928). Consequently, different tactics tend to be studied in isolation from each other (exceptions include: Caldeira, Hojnacki, & Wright, 2000; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1999).

Neglecting the relations between the different tactics within a lobbying strategy is problematic in several ways. First, incomplete or false conclusions may be drawn about why a specific set of tactics is used by a lobby group. One might, for instance, explain the use of a specific tactic by context and motives, when it actually has resulted from its strong compatibility with another tactic in the overall lobbying strategy. Second, neglecting the relations between lobbying tactics may result in a biased view on which tactics are successful in terms of influencing policy decisions. By looking at the success of one type of tactic independently from the other tactics employed, one neglects that different tactics may mutually reinforce each other and *together* influence public policy. For these reasons, it is crucial to look at the relations between different lobbying tactics, and more specifically at how the use of one tactic encourages or discourages the use of another.

In the interest group literature important theory building has been done explaining why interest groups do what they do. Broadly speaking, three different logics have been argued to drive the development of a lobbying strategy. First, interest groups have the mission to defend the political interests of their constituency as best as possible and therefore

apply certain tactics to influence public policies. They, in other words, follow *a logic of influence*, and seek to bring about policy change or maintain the status quo according the interest of their constituents (Beyers, 2008, p. 1192; Michalowitz, 2007; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, p. 19). Second, lobbying tactics are also driven by *a logic of survival* or organizational maintenance. Interest groups are organizations that need to sustain themselves. They need proper resources and staff to function as an organization. Their lobbying strategies are, thus, also tied to these maintenance-related goals and not solely determined by their political objectives (Berkhout, 2013; Binderkrantz, 2005; Lowery, 2007; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). Third, *a logic of context* may also shape interest group behavior. Contextual aspects, such as the institutional setting and the policy agenda, additionally shape the tactics interest groups deploy (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, & Kimball, 2009; Mahoney, 2007b).

In addition to the former three logics, I submit that the use of specific lobbying tactics can also be explained by factors that are endogenous to the strategy development process. More specifically, I argue that the use of a tactic can also be explained by the use of other tactics in an overall lobbying strategy. Some tactics are more prone to be combined than others, because they are complementary or reinforce each other. The use of a specific tactic may then partially emerge from an endogenous logic, where the use of one type of tactic is not only determined by factors exogenous to the development of the lobbying strategy (such as political goals, organizational needs and contextual pressures), but also by the use of other tactics. For example, interest groups are more prone to use outside lobbying tactics and political arguments when targeting parliamentarians (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2005). This implies that both the use and effect of certain lobbying tactics can better be studied by looking at combinations of tactics within an overall strategy, instead of looking at the use and

effect of one specific tactic. In this paper I defend my contentions by looking at different types of tactics and how the use of one type of tactic is tied to the use of others.

The discussion is guided by a typology of lobbying tactics that comes from viewing lobbying as a communication process in which a messenger (usually an interest group) conveys a message to a receiver (policymakers) through a channel, within a given context and with a certain effect (Austen-Smith & Wright, 1992; Lasswell, 1948; Milbrath, 1960). I assume that the tactics employed by an interest group are embedded in an overarching strategy to influence a specific policy issue. I do not claim that this overarching strategy is an elaborate and well-conceived master plan established at the start of a lobbying campaign. On the contrary, it might develop in a piecemeal manner, or to some extent, even by chance. The concept of an overarching strategy merely refers to the involvement of all components that are part of the lobbying communication process (messenger, message, target, channel and context) as well as a set of specific tactics that can be related to these components.

Conceiving of lobbying as a communication process enables one to look at it as a sequential process in which the use of different tactics is interrelated. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next few sections discuss each of the components in the communication process—messenger, message, target and channel—and some crucial lobbying tactics connected to these components (such as coalition building, targeting, and in- and outside lobbying). The main argument developed is that a lobbying strategy is not only shaped by exogenous constraints, but also results from an endogenous interaction between the different tactics which together form the overall lobbying strategy. Finally, I discuss how this affects our understanding of lobbying success and make some concluding remarks.

The messenger

As messengers of lobbying communication, interest groups can possess characteristics that may enhance or impede their chances of influencing public policy. Some of these characteristics are relatively stable or given, such as the organization's resources or the type of constituency represented, while other characteristics are more easy to adapt tactically by interest groups themselves. Crucial to influence, for instance, is whether a message is communicated by a single advocate or by an alliance of organizations. Interest groups, as messengers of lobbying communication, can give more leverage to their policy demands by establishing coalitions with other likeminded stakeholders (Hojnacki, 1997; Hula, 1999; Mahoney, 2007b; Servaes & Malikhao, 2012). A coalition consists of more than only sending the same message at the same moment to policymakers. It can, for example, include the exchange of resources and information or the coordination of advocacy efforts (see Hojnacki, 1997; Hula, 1999). Forging alliances can be a decisive lobbying strategy, one that makes the difference between failure or success (Klüver, 2011).

Importantly, the chance that interest groups coalesce is affected by whether or not some other tactics are employed, and the presence of a coalition also shapes the use of other tactics. With regard to the latter, first, being involved in a coalition may affect the content of the *messages* voiced in a lobbying campaign and groups that are part of a coalition can draw from a wider pool of information, arguments and knowledge (Hula, 1999). This can ultimately lead to more sophisticated or politically relevant lobbying messages. For example, in the political debate on the 2009–2010 Commission proposal to ban seal trade in the EU, the International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF) joined forces with the national Inuit organization of Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami). In their lobbying communication, the IFTF strongly emphasized the harm a seal ban would cause to the Inuit communities and argue that exemptions needed to be made. The focus of the IFTF on the Inuit community in their

argumentation can be related to them being in the same coalition as the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.[i] By coalescing, interest groups can draw from the same pool of arguments and information when approaching policymakers, influencing the content of their lobbying messages profoundly.

Second, being part of a coalition can also affect who will be the *target* of the lobbyist. As Marie Hojnacki (1997) points out, alliances offer a way for groups to gain access to a wider range of policymakers. By working together, interest groups can coordinate who contacts who, and are able to cover a wider array of lobbying targets. As one lobbyist stated in an interview, one typical strategy in the EU context is to bring along an expert who speaks the native language of the targeted policymakers. Speaking the same language will ease access to and communication with the policymaker. For similar reasons, EU umbrella organizations tend to delegate the lobbying of national officials to their national member organizations who can rely on existing domestic networks. By working together in a coalition one can mobilize the resources (such as information, language skills and networks) of the other coalition members. By joining forces, interest groups may also gain access to more exclusive lobbying channels and policymakers, as they are recognized as an important discussion partner due to their combined strengths and political weight. For example in the debate on the 2009 European Commission proposal to combat sexual abuse of children, a coalition of childrens' rights groups (eNACSO, MCE, NSPCC, ECPAT and *Save the Children*) joined forces and were represented at almost all official venues where the proposal was being discussed with non-state stakeholders. Arguably, the smaller organizations within this coalition would not have been represented at all these venues if it would not have been part of such a large coalition.

The message

The second component in the lobbying communication process is the lobbying *message*. A lobbying message is understood as the content organized interests communicate to policymakers. Interest organizations may tactically include or exclude specific issues, information and arguments in their messages. The content of the message interest groups convey to policymakers plays a crucial role in lobbying practices. The role and nature of the lobbying message, however, differs depending on the *interaction mode* at play. In this section I give an overview of the different interaction modes and which types of content play a role therein. In the following sections I discuss how these modes are related to the use of other types of tactics. There are three main interaction modes: *agenda-setting*, *informing* and *arguing*.

A first stream in the literature, sees lobbying as primarily based on an exchange relation between policymakers and lobbyists in which information is the main currency. Interest organizations provide information to policymakers with the aim of getting access or influence in return (Bouwen, 2004; Denzau & Munger, 1986; Greenwood, Grote, & Ronit, 1992; Klüver, 2013; Woll, 2007). Policymakers need information in order to make sound decisions and public support to legitimize their actions. When lobbying is seen as an exchange of information, the extent and quality of information in a lobbying message is crucial. The information communicated to policymakers determines the value of the supplied exchange good and the influence or access an interest organization receives in return.

A second interaction mode, *arguing*, is focused on changing the beliefs of policymakers (Beyers, 2008, p. 1198). Arguing focuses on preference transformation, on changing policymakers' minds about what they believe is right (Naurin, 2007, p. 16). In this interaction mode, interest organizations do not provide information to get a valuable asset in return, but rather they try to convince policymakers of their view or to develop a common

understanding of a policy problem. Not only the practical utility of information, but the persuasive power of an argument is key in this mode. This arguing mode is similar to what Risse (2000, pp. 8-9) describes as rhetorical action, in which actors use arguments strategically in order to justify their identities and preferences and/or shame their opponents (see also: Riker, 1990, p. 47; Schimmelfennig, 2001, p. 48). The difference between arguments and information is that arguments are primarily meant to persuade policymakers to change their mind, while information is used primarily as an exchange good or legislative subsidy (Hall & Daerdorff, 2006).

In a third interaction mode, *agenda-setting*, interest organizations communicate the salience of policy issues to policymakers and the wider public (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kollman, 1998, pp. 58-59). Lobbying is then not so much aimed at convincing or informing policymakers, but at signaling which issues are important and need to be dealt with on the policy agenda. Lobbying, in other words, is here intended to influence the selection of policy issues. To get issues on the policy agenda, actors must gain sufficient *attention* for an issue and build credibility that the issue has to be dealt with (Princen, 2011). The lobbying message plays a crucial part in this process. By highlighting specific issues above others in their lobbying message, interest groups draw the attention of policymakers to these issues. Whereas the exchange (information) and persuasion (argument) mode aim to influence *how* policies are dealt with, the agenda-setting mode more so aims at affecting *which* policy issues gain attention and become important for policymakers.

It is important to note that these interaction modes do not exist in isolation from each other. Arguing, informing and agenda-setting modes of lobbying may occur simultaneously and become, to different degrees, part of an overarching lobbying strategy. I do not claim that these modes are collectively exhaustive or mutually exclusive, only that they are theoretically

relevant for developing a framework to study lobbying strategies and more precisely the varying importance of lobbying messages.

The channel

The *channel* is understood as the medium interest groups use to convey their message to policymakers (such as press releases or direct e-mails). When developing a lobbying strategy, interest groups select which channels they will use to influence policy decisions. Different channels provide varying opportunities for organized interests to make their message heard. Some channels are more open, involving the public, while others are private, not subject to public scrutiny. In what follows, I discuss the most prominent channeling tactics described in the interest group literature—inside versus outside lobbying tactics—and how these tactics are related to other types of tactics.

A lobbying message can be conveyed directly to policymakers, through secluded channels, or publicly, by targeting the media and the broader public. Direct communicative efforts of interest organizations towards policymakers, such as via e-mail or telephone, are also known as "inside lobbying" efforts. This way of lobbying ensures a certain degree of discretion where the contact between policymakers and interest groups remains private, or "within the lobby." With outside lobbying, by contrast, interest organizations communicate their messages out in the open and involve the broader public, other stakeholders and the media in the policy debate (Kollman, 1998).

The public or private nature of a lobbying channel may affect the content of the *messages*. When a lobbying message is conveyed directly to a policymaker, through a channel that does not allow for public scrutiny, an advocacy group can give detailed and technical information that relates to the policy issue. This is different for outside lobbying efforts. When addressing policymakers and the broader public via the media, for example,

lobbying messages must draw the public's attention and concede to journalistic routines and standards for news value. This makes it difficult to make long and detailed statements on the technical requirements of policy. Public statements need to be less sophisticated, more provocative and emphasize political aspects, norms and ideals rather than technical and substantive information. Expert reports are, therefore, more easily shared via direct communication channels, not out in the open (Beyers, 2008). One animal welfare activist said in an interview, for example, that when she contacted the media she would talk about emotional and sensitive issues such as "experiments on apes." When she contacted the policymakers directly, she would communicate more about the substantive and technical aspects of the issue, such as how the new legislation would be implemented.[ii] This illustrates how the content of a message varies dependent on the channel.

The target

To influence public policies, interest groups *target* one or a multitude of institutions and/or policymakers. A target can for instance be a policy venue, such as an institution or a group in society which has the authority to make decisions concerning an issue (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010, p. 31). Individual policymakers operating within a policy venue, such as parliamentarians or government officials, are other examples of lobbying targets. Who interest groups target is affected by a number of factors. One of the most debated questions in this regard is whether interest groups lobby their allies or opponents. Some authors argue that lobbying is an exchange in which interest organizations provide information and arguments to friendly policymakers who then help them represent their cause (Bauer, de Sola Pool, & Dexter, 1972; Hall & Daerdorff, 2006). Others argue interest organization focus their efforts on "fence sitters" or legislators who are undecided (Denzau & Munger, 1986). Austen-Smith

and Wright (1992, 1994) state that interest groups focus primarily on policymakers who oppose their view in order to persuade them to vote differently.

In practice, interest groups lobby both allies and opponents (Braun, 2012; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998; Snyder, 1991). The lobbying mode and therefore also the content of lobbying *messages* is most likely to vary depending on whether allies or opponents are targeted. When targeting friendly policymakers, interest organizations are more likely to adopt an informing mode of lobbying. Interest organizations then try to maximize the informational value of their message for the policymaker. In this way, they aim to strengthen their bargaining position and increase the chances to get a favorable policy outcome in return for the information.

When contacting legislators who have a different position, interest organizations will more likely adopt a persuasive mode of lobbying. In this persuasive mode of lobbying interest organizations are likely to adjust their arguments depending on who they target specifically, taking into account factors such as political ideology or personal predispositions in order to craft arguments to which the target is likely to be receptive. The agenda-setting mode is important when contacting both allies and opponents, as their attention needs to be drawn before they can be informed or persuaded. One lobbyist from an organization advocating the interests of car owners, said in an informal conversation that she would always lobby both allies and opponents: "We more intensively exchange information with those who support our cause, but will always present our arguments to those who have a different view in an attempt to convince them otherwise."

Who interest groups target is also related to the lobbying *channel* used. Some channels are more appropriate than others to target specific venues (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1999). Elected officials are lobbied more via the news media and other public forums than non-elected civil servants. Beyers (2004), for example, found that groups who target the

European Parliament and the Council—both institutions consisting of elected officials, namely parliamentarians and domestic government ministers respectively—are more inclined to use outside strategies, whereas this was much less the case for groups that targeted non-elected officials in the European Commission. Similarly, in her study of lobbying strategies in Denmark, Binderkrantz (2005) demonstrated that media tactics were more prominently used when addressing parliamentarians than when targeting civil servants. Interest groups thus seek out different lobbying channels depending on who they target.

Finally, who interest groups target also relates to their characteristics, particularly their resource capacities. For instance, more resourceful organizations are able to contact a broader range of lobbying targets (Gais & Walker Jr, 1991; Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 782; Holyoke, 2003). As argued in the section on the messenger, interest groups try to expand the number of potential lobbying targets by coalescing with other like-minded groups (see for instance Berry & Wilcox, 1989; Hojnacki, 1997; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986). For example, in the debate on the 2008 European Commission proposal about the provision of food information to consumers, the anti-alcohol lobby was only poorly represented at the various venues. As one of their lobbyists stated, "We had insufficient resources to contact all relevant policymakers as intensely as our counterparts, the other NGOs were not keen on coalescing with us since they had their own priorities, other than alcohol labeling."

The effects

In the former sections I argued that the use of lobbying tactics is codetermined by the endogenous nature of strategy development, or, in other words, that the use of one tactic encourages or discourages the use of others. In this section I first turn to the success of lobbying given different tactical combinations. I then reflect on how accepting the endogenous nature of strategy development may contribute to the study of lobbying success.

Lobbying success is usually understood as the extent to which lobbyists influence on public policy decisions. Often, interest groups scholars measure influence or lobbying success by looking at the outcomes in particular cases of policymaking, usually by taking the legislative outcome as a reference point (Dür, 2008). This differs from the standard approach in communication research, in which the effect of communication is usually assessed at the level of the individuals who were exposed to some communication. Instead of focusing only on how lobbying affects individual policymakers or policy outcomes, I distinguish three different effects of communication based on the three interaction modes: (1) increased attention, (2) increased knowledge and (3) persuasion (see table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

First, in the agenda-setting mode interest groups try to increase the *attention* policymakers give to specific issues and mobilize them and other stakeholders to further their cause. Second, in the informing mode interest groups inform policymakers and hope to get certain policy outcomes in return. Policymakers learn or *gain knowledge* supplied by interest groups, the latter hope this translates into a desired outcome at the level of policy outcomes. The third mode, arguing, is aimed at *persuading* policy makers to generate favorable policy outcomes. All these lobbying modes can influence policy outcomes, yet the underlying mechanisms that trigger influence may differ. Hence, lobbying success is mediated through communication effects situated at the level of policymakers. These communication effects are, in other words, an important intermediate step between lobbying communication and lobbying success.

Achieving results with respect to these three intermediate steps can lead to other beneficial outcomes for a lobbyist, other than the exertion of influence on policy outcomes. An advocacy group may not succeed in influencing public policy outcomes, but may

nevertheless succeed in drawing attention to a certain issue or in informing or persuading some policymakers. Such intermediate successes are not always visible in concrete policy outcomes, but they may benefit an advocacy group in future lobbying campaigns. Many interest groups are repeat players and work with a long time horizon which implies that an intermediate success at t_1 can affect lobbying success at t_2 (Berkhout & Lowery, 2011; Lowery, 2013, p. 13). For instance, a lobbyist might have been successful in convincing certain parliamentarians on a policy issue. Even if this is not enough for gaining a majority vote on a particular proposal, these new allies could become crucial in realizing profound policy changes in future lobbying campaigns. Since such intermediate effects are an important step towards ultimately influencing policymaking, it is vital to study more closely which factors facilitate or impede success in these more immediate goals. Which issues drew policymakers' attention, through which lobbying campaigns did policymakers learn what, and who was able to persuade them? By empirically addressing these questions for particular cases of policymaking, future research may unveil the mechanisms that translate lobbying into policy influence.

Similar as with these intermediate effects, each of the discussed components of the lobbying communication process are indispensable in studying the success of lobbying. No lobbying can take place without a message, a messenger, a channel, a target or a context. To assess the effectiveness of a lobbying strategy, it is therefore important to look at the combination of tactics used with each communication component. Some combinations are more successful than others. Looking at one particular tactic type, focusing on the ultimate influence on policy outcomes and ignoring intermediate outcomes may result in a distorted and incomplete view on lobbying success. For example, some studies have depicted outside lobbying as less effective than inside lobbying (Eising, 2007; Mahoney, 2007a). Yet, the success or failure of outside lobbying could vary depending on whether this tactic is

combined with certain other tactics in the overarching strategy. When a message consists of arguments that resonate well among the public, potential allies are likely to coalesce and politicians are likely to become more sensitive to the message. The fact that the success of outside lobbying could vary depending on how it is combined with other tactics may be one explanation for the contradictory findings in studies addressing the success of outside lobbying tactics (Chalmers, 2013; Eising, 2007; Kollman, 1998; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987; Smith, 2000).

Discussion

In this paper I have constructed a framework in which lobbying is conceptualized as a communication process, and argued that the effects of lobbying on public policy outcomes can be understood by closely looking at agenda-setting effects, information effects and persuasion effects. My main argument is that the use of lobbying tactics and the incorporation of tactics in an overarching lobbying strategy is to a considerable extent an endogenous process, or, in other words, that the use of one tactic encourages or discourages the use of other tactics. Hence, tactics cannot be studied in isolation. Interest organizations make different tactical decisions that relate to each other and these may *jointly* influence policy decisions.

My discussion has some important implications for empirical research on lobbying. To explain why a specific type of tactic is used, I suggest that *other tactic types* should be considered as independent variables. For example, to explain why interest groups use outside lobbying tactics, one could include as explanatory factors the type of messages they voice, who they target and whether the groups are lobbying in a coalition or not. When explaining lobbying success, rather than studying the effects of individual tactics on lobbying success independently, I would recommend to analyze the effects of *patterns* or combinations of

lobbying tactics. For example, one might consider to what extent different combinations of coalescing, outside lobbying and political arguments resulted in lobbying success for a specific policy issue. Including tactical patterns in the study of lobbying success may provide new insights into which tactical combinations are successful and which are not.

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Table 1: Communication effects: between lobbying communication and success

Interaction mode	Communication effect	Lobbying success
Agenda-setting	Attention increase	Influence on policy outcomes
Informing	Knowledge increase	
Arguing	Persuasion	

[i] For the examples referred to in the paper I draw from evidence collected within the broader INTEREURO project. This project is carried out by research teams in nine different countries under the auspices of the European Science Foundation (2012-2014). The main goal of the project is to analyse strategies, framing and influence processes for a set of 125 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. The sampling procedure of issues is discussed in depth in a separate research paper (Beyers, Dür, Marshall, & Wonka, 2014).

[ii] The interviews referred to were conducted by the author in the context of the aforementioned INTEREURO project. The interview project is discussed in depth in a separate research paper (Beyers, Braun, Marshall, & De Bruycker, 2014).