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Perceptions of institutional complexity and lobbyists' decisions to join lobbying coalitions – evidence from the European Union context

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Abstract:	<p>We use data from in-depth interviews with business lobbyists in Brussels to investigate why they choose to join lobbying coalitions. We find that lobbyists face two competing institutional incentives. First, they are confronted with incentives to ally with other European organisations, develop multilateral policy messages, and communicate messages to the Commission and the Parliament. Simultaneously, they face inducements to join narrower coalitions, develop bilateral policy messages, and direct those messages at the Council. Lobbyists' receptivity to these incentives – and thus their choices of lobbying coalitions – differs with their age, educational background, and with the type and ownership structure of the organisations they represent. Combined, our findings contribute to the limited, mainly American literature on interest coalitions by demonstrating that lobbyists operate in complex institutional environments, and that their interpretations of and reactions to institutional complexity are shaped by individual- and organisational-level factors.</p>

Perceptions of institutional complexity and lobbyists' decisions to join lobbying coalitions – evidence from the European Union context

Abstract

We use data from in-depth interviews with business lobbyists in Brussels to investigate why they choose to join lobbying coalitions. We find that lobbyists face two competing institutional incentives. First, they are confronted with incentives to ally with other European organisations, develop multilateral policy messages, and communicate messages to the Commission and the Parliament. Simultaneously, they face inducements to join narrower coalitions, develop bilateral policy messages, and direct those messages at the Council. Lobbyists' receptivity to these incentives – and thus their choices of lobbying coalitions – differs with their age, educational background, and with the type and ownership structure of the organisations they represent. Combined, our findings contribute to the limited, mainly American literature on interest coalitions by demonstrating that lobbyists operate in complex institutional environments, and that their interpretations of and reactions to institutional complexity are shaped by individual- and organisational-level factors.

Key words: Lobbying coalitions; European Union; Institutional complexity

1. Introduction

Lobbying coalitions are sets of actors who coordinate efforts to petition policy officials and advance common advocacy agendas (eg, Baumgartner et al., 2009). They can take several forms, differing with respect to their degree of internal formalisation, the durability of relationships amongst members, and the independence that members retain within the coalition (eg, Pijnenburg, 1998). Lobbying coalitions can thus be placed on a continuum –

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2
3 ranging from informal, short-term networks that address specific policy issues, to more
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5 formal, long-term alliances that tackle a broad spectrum of questions (eg, Mahoney, 2007).
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8 Lobbying coalitions are common – even ubiquitous – in Washington D.C. politics (eg,
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10 Nelson and Webb Yackee, 2012). They have also been identified as an increasingly frequent
11
12 form of collective political action at the European Union (EU) level (eg, Greenwood and
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14 Aspinwall 1998). There has emerged in the United States a robust research tradition in
15
16 coalition formation. This primarily American literature has addressed questions related to the
17
18 behaviour of lobbyists within coalitions (eg, Hula, 1995; Hojnacki, 1998; Heaney, 2004) and
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20 the influence of coalitions over policy outcomes (eg, Nelson and Webb Yackee, 2012; Klüver,
21
22 2013). In this paper, we focus attention specifically on understanding lobbyists' decisions to
23
24 join coalitions.
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29 Prior studies highlight numerous factors that explain when and why lobbyists join
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31 coalitions. According to some scholars (eg, Berry, 1989; Hula, 1999; Baumgartner et al,
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33 2009), lobbyists ally in coalitions to obtain access to scarce skills, resources and policy-
34
35 relevant information. Others (eg, Loomis, 1986) suggest that lobbyists work in coalitions to
36
37 signal to policymakers where the lion's share of support lies for a given policy proposal.
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39 Conversely, lobbyists may avoid coalitions if they consider membership involves high
40
41 resource commitments and lost time due to coordination efforts (eg, Gray and Lowery, 1998).
42
43 Similarly, they may see no reason for joining coalitions if they perceive only weak opposition
44
45 to their interests (eg, Hojnacki, 1997; Whitford, 2003).
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49 We welcome the scholarly interest in lobbying coalitions. However, in common with
50
51 Bunea and Baumgartner (2014), we are concerned that there remains only modest interest in
52
53 EU lobbying coalitions. As per other scholars (e.g. Woll, 2006; Coen, 2007), we also wonder
54
55 whether existing studies into EU lobbying potentially take their theoretical cues too frequently
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3 from models and concepts developed primarily by North American scholars to explain
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5 interest-group politics in the North American context. Rather than seeking to apply these
6
7 existing theoretical models in a broad-brush and unquestioning manner to the EU context, we
8
9 consider it more judicious to conduct context-sensitive research with the aim of developing
10
11 theories that more explicitly reflect the specificities of the EU public policy process.
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15 In our view, institutional theory provides a useful analytical lens for conducting such
16
17 research. To date, few scholars have explicitly recognised the need to consider how
18
19 institutional structures and characteristics of political systems potentially determine whether
20
21 lobbyists band together in alliances. For example, Gray and Lowery (1998) argue that
22
23 lobbyists will be more inclined to ally in coalitions if policy issues are discussed broadly by a
24
25 large number of committees or legislators across a political system. Coen (2004) finds that the
26
27 changing institutional arrangements of the EU have over time encouraged lobbyists to join
28
29 forces and alter their policy positions to gain entrance to restricted policymaking fora. For her
30
31 part, Mahoney (2007) asserts that the democratic accountability of policy officials in a given
32
33 political system is a key consideration explaining decisions to join coalitions.
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38 Our paper builds on these emerging institutions-based accounts of coalition activity by
39
40 embracing the concept of institutional complexity. This relates to situations where
41
42 organisations and individuals in a given field are confronted with “a multiplexity of different
43
44 pressures from a plurality of institutional logics” (Greenwood et al., 2011: 357). Institutional
45
46 logics, for their part, refer to the overarching sets of principles that prescribe appropriate
47
48 behaviour (eg, Thornton, 2004). Individuals may potentially interpret the competing
49
50 institutional logics at play in complex institutional environments in different ways, depending
51
52 for example on the the structure, ownership, and governance of organisations they work for
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54 (eg, Greenwood et al, 2011), or their own previous professional or life experiences (eg,
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56 Tracey et al, 2010). Resulting variations in interpretations of institutional logics may in turn
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3 lead to heterogeneous responses in terms of strategic actions (e.g. Oliver, 1991; Pache and
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5 Santos, 2010).
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8 Inspired by this recent theorising on institutional complexity, our own research interest
9
10 lies in uncovering the different institutional logics that govern the work of lobbyists in
11
12 Brussels, analysing how lobbyists experience those logics, and ultimately understanding how
13
14 they respond strategically to institutional complexity. Our research specifically aims to
15
16 explore the extent to which lobbyists' are confronted with competing institutional incentives
17
18 within the policymaking settings in which they operate, and investigate whether those
19
20 incentives have a bearing on the types of lobbying coalitions they choose to join. We also
21
22 seek to elucidate organisational- and individual-level factors that possibly influence lobbyists'
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24 interpretations of institutional logics, and thus explain their decisions to join lobbying
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26 coalitions.
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31 Empirically, we investigate these questions through an explorative study of
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33 information-rich interviews with 26 lobbyists whose backgrounds and experiences vary in
34
35 accordance with the type of organisation they work for, the industry sector in which they
36
37 operate, their nationality, their educational profiles, their genders and their ages. Clearly, our
38
39 focus is trained explicitly on the decision-making processes of individual lobbyists. This, in
40
41 our view, is significant as the bulk of prior studies into EU lobbying tends to take individual
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43 firms (eg, Barron and Hulten, 2014), national-level business associations (eg, Wilts and
44
45 Quitkatt, 2004) and European associations (eg, Greenwood, 2002) as their primary unit of
46
47 analysis. By focusing on individual lobbyists, our research conversely seeks to unpack and
48
49 examine EU lobbying at a deeper, more complex, human level.
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54 In making these contributions, we structure our paper as follows. We begin by
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56 establishing the theoretical framework that broadly guided our research. Next, we describe the
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3 programme of empirical research underpinning our study. We then report and discuss our key
4 findings, highlighting how they provide new insights for research into lobbying coalitions in
5 general, and lobbying coalitions in the EU in particular. We round off our paper by addressing
6 the limitations of our study and indicating future avenues of enquiry.
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11 12 13 **2. Research framework**

14 15 16 *2.1 Institutions, institutional complexity and decisions to join interest coalitions*

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18 Institutions are dynamic, sense-making frameworks that guide organisational or individual
19 behaviour in a given society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). They can be formal (such
20 as government-instigated rules, regulations and laws reflecting societal choices that give
21 structure to relations amongst individuals) or informal (including norms, values, and attitudes
22 that form subjective perceptions of members of a society) (North, 1990). Institutional theory
23 posits that, in a given field, individuals are incentivised to adopt broadly accepted behaviours
24 – a process of *isomorphism* which secures access to resources and generates support from
25 critical stakeholders (eg, DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
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37 Institutional theory has a strong tradition in lobbying research. Authors (eg,
38 Blumentritt, 2003; Hillman and Hitt, 1999; Hillman and Keim, 1995) demonstrate that the
39 political behaviours of organisations are shaped by formal and informal rules imposed by the
40 national systems of governments and regulation in which they operate. For Lawton et al
41 (2013), institutional theory is useful for explaining how different political, social and
42 economic arrangements impact upon relations between lobbyists and governments, and helps
43 us understand how lobbyists adapt (or not) to evolutions in political systems. Few scholars,
44 however, have explicitly investigated whether and how institution structures encourage
45 lobbyists to join coalitions.
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Exceptions include Gray and Lowery (1998) who suggest that lobbyists are more inclined to join forces as coalitions in political systems where issues are discussed broadly across a large number of committees and by a large number of legislators across a political system. Others (eg, Bouwen, 2002; Coen, 1997; Eising, 2007; Mazey and Richardson, 2006; Woll, 2006) note the emergence in Brussels of a policymaking framework characterized by elite pluralism. Coen (1997) defines this as a system of interest representation where access is restricted to a few policy players and for whom membership is competitive and strategically advisable. Studies into elite pluralism implicitly suggest that the Commission provides lobbyists with incentives to join European federations to obtain access to EU policy forums (Broscheid and Coen, 2003; Coen, 1997; Taminiu and Wilts, 2006). For her part, Mahoney (2007) finds that Brussels-based lobbyists are less incentivised than their Washington D.C.-based counterparts to join coalitions because officials within the European Commission, as unelected policymakers, are less receptive than the more electorally accountable policymakers in the U.S. Congress or Senate to messages from coalitions about widespread public support for their policy proposals.

We welcome these emerging studies addressing institutional structures and their impact upon decisions to join lobbying coalitions. However, we nonetheless wonder whether they provide a relatively thin account of institutions and their effect on lobbyists' coalition activities. Beyond the narrow field of lobbying research, scholars increasingly embrace the concept of 'institutional complexity' (Greenwood et al, 2011: 357) and investigate how organisations and individuals face numerous pressures from a plurality of institutional logics, or overarching sets of principles that prescribe appropriate behaviour (Thornton, 2004). Notions of institutional complexity and institutional logics have long been implicit within institutional theory.

1
2
3 For example, Meyer and Rowan (1977) noted how organisations encounter
4 incompatible socio-cultural and commercial expectations in their business environments. This
5 view is shared by Scott (1991) who stated that organisations face competing institutional
6 incentives in the contexts where they operate. Elsbach and Sutton (1992) claimed that
7 organisations are confronted with conflicting expectations stemming from different
8 institutional actors who inhabit their external environments. D'Aunno et al (1991) suggested
9 that organisations have difficulties operating in fragmented institutional environments where
10 groups and organisations make incompatible demands on them. More recently, Thornton et al
11 (2012) demonstrated how different institutional logics related to markets, corporations,
12 professions, states, families, religions and communities can make competing demands on
13 organisations and individuals.
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28 In our view, institutional complexity is a highly – and increasingly – relevant
29 phenomenon for EU lobbyists. As revealed by Bunea and Baumgartner (2014) in their recent
30 review of interest-group politics in the EU, scholars focus their attention narrowly on efforts
31 undertaken to lobby the Commission. However, the EU constitutes a series of multi-level,
32 decision-taking venues (e.g. Bouwen, 2002). As explained by Nugent (2010), the Commission
33 represents but one of the three major institutions of the EU. In a process known as co-
34 decision, the European Council and the European Parliament jointly scrutinise the
35 Commission's legislative proposals, the Council through a national lens, and the Parliament
36 through an evaluation of their impact on both the Internal Market and the domestic markets of
37 the Member States.
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51 Importantly, the dynamism of the EU's institutional configurations adds to their
52 complexity. Indeed, successive treaty changes have altered the balance of power across the
53 EU institutions. For example, under the terms of the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009, the Council
54 received additional powers with respect to the setting of the strategic objectives of the EU and
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3 the handling of crises. The Treaty of Lisbon also increased the legislative power of the
4
5 European Parliament, extending its co-decision-making to almost all policy areas. Following
6
7 the Eurozone crisis, the institutional complexity of the EU intensified as the more
8
9 intergovernmental European Council achieved a more central policymaking role (e.g. Puetter,
10
11 2012). In our view, studies of EU lobbying would do well to consider more explicitly this
12
13 dynamic, changing nature of the interplay between EU institutions.
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16 17 *2.3. Variations in lobbyists' responses to institutional complexity and institutional logics*

18
19 Another concern we raise against institutions-based lobbying research relates to the idea of
20
21 agency. There is an underlying assumption, especially in the elite-pluralism tradition, that
22
23 institutional pressures stemming from the Commission will ultimately encourage lobbyists to
24
25 adopt homogeneous interest-representation practices Brussels. We wonder whether this
26
27 research places too great an emphasis on how lobbyists comply with dominant isomorphic
28
29 pressures. This focus, in our view, limits scholarly attention to how individuals respond
30
31 passively and uncritically to mimetic forces. In doing so, it overlooks the extent to which
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33 strategic decision-makers within organisations – including lobbyists – can be much more
34
35 questioning and purposeful actors who can react differently to institutional incentives.
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40 Our own concerns are shared by business and management scholars who have
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42 explicitly engaged with understanding the diverse strategies that individual managers adopt
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44 when faced with multiple institutional logics (eg, Oliver, 1991; Pache and Santos, 2010;
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46 Kraatz and Block, 2008). A common theme running through these works is that managers do
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48 not necessarily perceive and respond to institutional incentives in the same way. Instead, their
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50 perceptions of and responses to institutional pressures and incentives can be shaped by
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52 numerous factors.
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3 One such factor might be the existence of actors located beyond organisations (such as
4 professional or funding bodies). These can exert compliance pressures on managers through
5 resource-dependence relationships (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991; Pfeffer &
6 Salancik, 1978). Organisations are likely to comply with the demands of these external
7 stakeholders when they depend on them for key resources, including funds, staff, or licenses
8 to operate. Managerial perceptions of and responses to institutional complexity might also be
9 influenced by organisational attributes. For instance, Greenwood et al (2011) propose that the
10 structure, ownership, and governance of organisations frame how managers experience and
11 respond strategically to the multiplexity of different pressures exerted upon them from
12 competing institutional logics. Other scholars focus on the commitment of individuals within
13 organisations to certain institutional logics, suggesting that such commitments have an
14 important role to play in terms of influencing strategies mobilised by organisations as they
15 face institutional incentives and pressures (e.g. Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Mars & Lounsbury,
16 2009; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Tracey, Phillips & Jarvis 2010). In line with this more agency-
17 based research, managers possess filters through which institutional logics pass. The existence
18 of these filters can help explain how and why organisations might respond differently to
19 competing institutional incentives.

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 *2.4. Exploratory research framework*

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44 Inspired by research into institutional complexity, we present in Figure 1 an institutions-based
45 research framework for exploring lobbyists' decisions to join coalitions.

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50 (Insert Figure 1 here)

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53 In response to concerns that extant EU lobbying research informed by institutional
54 theory adopts a narrow view of institutional complexity, the framework proposes in line with
55 Greenwood et al (2011) that the EU policymaking system in an institutional environment,
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3 characterised by changing levels of institutional complexity. This leads to a situation whereby
4
5 EU lobbyists are potentially confronted with competing institutional logics (e.g. Thornton,
6
7 2004), each producing incentives that prescribe different types of coalition activity.
8
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10 Institutional incentives emanating from the Commission, whose purpose is to defend
11
12 and promote European interests, may encourage lobbyists to ally in broad, pan-European
13
14 coalitions that emphasise their European credentials. Inducement stemming from the
15
16 European Parliament, whose members are responsible for considering the effects of
17
18 Commission proposals on both the Single Market and national markets, possibly encourage
19
20 lobbyists to join coalitions whose compositions reflect both national and European interests.
21
22 The Council, charged with scrutinising legislation from a more national perspective, may emit
23
24 incentives encouraging lobbyists to join forces in coalitions of single-nationality actors to
25
26 appeal to their national heads of state and government.
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31 However, as per other scholars (e.g. Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Mars & Lounsbury,
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33 2009; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Tracey et al, 2010), the framework also acknowledges that
34
35 competing incentives arising from institutional complexity in Brussels do not affect all
36
37 lobbyists equally. Instead, it proposes that institutional logics are filtered by various
38
39 individual characteristics of lobbyists themselves (including, for example, their education
40
41 backgrounds) and by attributes of the organisations that they represent (such as organisational
42
43 type and ownership structure). Combined, these individual- and organisational-level attributes
44
45 determine how lobbyists make sense out of institutional complexity in Brussels and influence
46
47 their overall choices of preferred coalitions.
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51 **3. Methods**

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55 Our study was clearly informed by existing institutional theory, such that our data collection
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57 and analysis were designed to explore how lobbyists craft political-action responses to
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3 competing institutional logics. Consequently, our research adopted an abductive (e.g. Meyer
4 & Lunnay, 2012) as opposed to grounded theory (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1990) approach.
5
6 Abduction allows researchers to broaden existing knowledge as well as introduce new ideas
7 (e.g. Habermas, 1978). It provides the flexibility associated with exploratory, inductive
8
9 research by ensuring that individual's perspectives predominate and that results are grounded
10
11 in data. It has the added benefit of including theoretical frameworks within the analysis
12
13 process whilst also considering unintended observations of empirical data which can remain
14
15 opaque with a deductive approach (Meyer & Lunnay, 2012).
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20 21 *3.1.3. Selection of informants and data collection* 22

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24 We focus on lobbyists representing French and German organisations knowing that a large
25
26 number of French and German business organisations lobby the EU and its institutions (e.g.
27
28 Greenwood & Dreger, 2013). In addition, France and Germany – as members of both the
29
30 Single Market and the Eurozone – are deeply embedded in the processes of European
31
32 integration, meaning that lobbyists representing the interests of business organisations from
33
34 the two countries are likely to be interested in following political debates across all three
35
36 major institutions of the EU. We constructed our sample of informants using the European
37
38 Transparency Register (an on-line database maintained by the European Commission to
39
40 record the names and activities of lobbyists working in Brussels). In developing our sample,
41
42 we wanted to ensure diversity amongst informants in terms of the types of organisations they
43
44 represented, the industries in which they worked, and their backgrounds. Such diversity, we
45
46 hoped, would allow for the expression of a variety of perceptions regarding institutional
47
48 logics influencing lobbying in Brussels and how to respond to them.
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54 In total, we identified 114 potential interviewees and succeeded in creating a sample of
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56 26 who agreed to participate in our research. In common with previous research into EU
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2
3 lobbying (eg, Barron & Hultén, 2014), our final sample is relatively small, but consistent with
4
5 sample sizes that scholars recommend for exploratory research purposes (eg, Robson, 2011).
6
7 Table 1 reports the key characteristics of the study participants. It consists of lobbyists whose
8
9 perceptions and responses to institutional complexity in EU-level lobbying might vary in
10
11 accordance with the type of organisation they work for, the industry sector in which they
12
13 operate, their nationality, their educational backgrounds, their genders and their ages. We
14
15 considered this sample appropriate for the exploratory purposes of our research.
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19 (Insert Table 1 here)
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22 *3.1.2. Interview guide*

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25 Our interview guide consisted of three sets of broad questions. The first included general
26
27 questions enabling informants to introduce themselves, to describe the organisation they
28
29 represented, and to provide details on their career paths. These enabled us to capture
30
31 important biographical information. The second set of questions encouraged informants to
32
33 describe the different routes and venues that business organisations generally use to represent
34
35 their political interests in Brussels. Our third set of questions invited interviewees to talk
36
37 specifically about their own preferred routes and venues for interest representation, and the
38
39 reasons for those preferences. We carefully phrased our questions to ensure that informants'
40
41 testimonies were elicited in a non-directive manner, thereby encouraging informants to
42
43 answer on their own terms and in their own words. This approach reflected the qualitative
44
45 spirit of our research and the desire to avoid imposing pre-determined answers on information
46
47 that could potentially influence the way in which they responded.
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51 *3.1.3. Data analysis and interpretation*

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55 Our interviews lasted approximately an hour, and were conducted during October and
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57 November 2013 either face-to-face in Brussels or by telephone depending on interviewees'
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3 availability. We recorded and transcribed each interview. The co-authors first interrogated the
4
5 interview data to identify mentions of interviews' personal perceptions about the institutional
6
7 arrangements governing lobbying in the EU context, and second to highlight informants'
8
9 references to their strategic responses to those arrangements governing EU lobbying. We
10
11 subsequently compared our findings, resolved discrepancies, and developed from our
12
13 individual analyses a set of formally stated observations and quotes. The final steps of the
14
15 analysis included sorting the information under the themes presented in Figure 1.
16
17

18 19 **4. Results**

20 21 *4.1. Institutional complexity of EU lobbying*

22
23 Interviewees considered that, over time, lobbying in Brussels had become progressively more
24
25 complex from an institutional perspective. Some interviewees (eg Interviews 7, 15) mentioned
26
27 how complicated lobbying had become in an enlarged EU composed of 28 Member States.
28
29 Others (eg Interview 12) alluded to divisions within the EU institutions making it difficult to
30
31 skirt around growing tensions between the institutions. In the words of one lobbyist
32
33 (Interview 1), her work involved "understanding the different institutions, and recognising for
34
35 which different legal, economic and political aspects of the EU they were responsible."
36
37 Interviewees spoke about the practical challenges of this complexity. One (Interview 13)
38
39 emphasised the time needed to train staff in the ever-changing intricacies of EU
40
41 policymaking, which were increasingly difficult for both seasoned lobbyists and new hires to
42
43 understand. Others (Interviews 1, 2, 15) described how difficult it had become to select the
44
45 most appropriate route for accessing EU policymakers, highlighting the challenges associated
46
47 with judging when best to contact policy officials alone, in business associations, or through
48
49 ad hoc coalitions. As one informant (Interview 8) explained, it was difficult to work out which
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3 of the EU institutions was the most appropriate to approach on the 60 dossiers he was
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5 currently managing.
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8 *4.2. Coalition-building activity in response to competing institutional logics*

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11 Interviews suggest that this increased complexity translates into two specific institutional
12
13 logics. These, in turn, provide incentives for adopting two distinct approaches to building
14
15 lobbying coalitions in Brussels. Interviews first exposed the existence of institutional
16
17 incentives emanating from both the Commission and the Parliament. Interviewees explained
18
19 that officials working for these two institutions expected lobbyists to provide them with
20
21 technical information on how markets operate and information about the aggregated needs
22
23 and interests of particular interests in the EU internal market. In response to these
24
25 expectations, lobbyists joined large, multi-lateral coalitions of experts that addressed
26
27 relatively narrow policy issues.
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32 For example, one interviewee (Interview 2) explained that he, together with colleagues
33
34 from 12 other firms, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and foundations, had created a
35
36 pan-European alliance to provide Commission officials and MEPs with expertise to help
37
38 achieve the EU's environmental, economic and energy security goals. Another (Interview 12)
39
40 described how he joined a coalition of 188 firms, research organisations and universities
41
42 aimed at providing information on how to improve the performance and competitiveness of
43
44 the European construction industry. Another still (Interview 25) explained how he had
45
46 designed a coalition strategy, which involved allying with different partners to meet the
47
48 specific information needs of heads of unit in the Commission and the members of Parliament
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50 committees.
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55 Interviews also revealed parallel incentives emerging from the Council, which are
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57 increasingly shaping lobbyists' coalition actions in Brussels. These incentives encourage
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3 lobbyists to create narrower alliances that address broader, higher-level policy issues.
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5 Interestingly, these narrower coalitions have a distinct bi-lateral composition. Both the French
6
7 and German interviewees who admitted to creating such bilateral coalitions claimed that they
8
9 specifically choose a business organisation from the other side of the Rhine as their preferred
10
11 lobbying partner.
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15 The testimonies of two lobbyists – one French, and one German – illustrate the
16
17 emergence of such bilateral coalitions explicitly (Interviews 21 and 25). They explained that
18
19 officials in the Council and their respective Permanent Representations sought bi-lateral,
20
21 Franco-German positions in preparation for policy debates with other national leaders during
22
23 Council meetings. Thus, the two organisations were incentivised to adopt a joint
24
25 communication strategy, which involved issuing common press releases stressing the impact
26
27 of the broad, high-profile policy issues under discussion at the Council meeting (eg
28
29 employment and growth, innovation, competitiveness, the future of the Eurozone) on the
30
31 national economies of France and Germany.
32
33

34 35 36 *4.3. Variations in lobbyists' receptivity to institutional logics*

37
38 Importantly, our interviews reveal differences in lobbyists' receptivity to the two institutional
39
40 logics, and consequently variations in their choices of coalitions. All interviewees recognised
41
42 the existence of the specific institutional incentives emanating from the Commission and the
43
44 Parliament. They also admitted that – either at present or in the past – these incentives had
45
46 exerted an influence on their preferred form of lobbying coalition. By contrast, only relatively
47
48 few of our interviewees (Interviews 7, 10, 20, 21, 25 and 26) also acknowledged institutional
49
50 incentives emerging from the Council. Nonetheless, these specific interviewees admitted that
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52 Council-level incentives were increasingly shaping their coalition actions in Brussels. As
53
54 reported below, the semi-structured nature of our interviewees enabled us to identify a
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2
3 number of organisational- and individual-level factors that explain differences in lobbyists'
4
5 receptivity to the two competing institutional logics.
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8 4.2.1 Organisational-level factors influencing receptivity to institutional logics 9

10 All interviewees representing national-level, industry associations claimed to respond
11
12 principally to incentives from the Commission and the Parliament to join broad, multi-lateral
13
14 coalitions (Interviews 1, 17, 19, 22, 24). For example:
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16

17
18 “We work with all business associations representing our industry in Europe.
19
20 We certainly have no favouritism for one particular nationality or country.”
21
22

23 (Interview 1)
24
25

26 None admitted to allying in narrower coalitions in response to Council-level incentives to
27
28 conduct more bilateral lobbying actions. The *raison d'être* of national industry associations,
29
30 stressed two informants (Interviews 1 and 17), was after all to cooperate with European
31
32 associations and formulate unified, European positions expected by the Commission and the
33
34 Parliament. Lobbyists representing individual firms were, on the whole, also more receptive
35
36 to Commission- and Parliament-level incentives than to Council-level incentives. Some
37
38 lobbyists (Interviews 4, 9, 11, 12, 13) even expressed explicit concerns about being denied
39
40 access to who they considered the most influential policymakers if they formed narrow
41
42 coalitions with other firms from another, specific Member State. For example:
43
44

45
46 “It’s extremely risky, from both a commercial and a political perspective, to
47
48 have a bilateral co-operation with one company from one country only. It’s
49
50 important to ensure that the group represents various member states, bigger and
51
52 smaller companies, different industries.” (Interview 4)
53
54
55

56 As another informant explained:
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1
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3 “You’re dead if you approach the Commission and the Parliament with narrow
4
5 Member State interests” (Interview 8).
6
7

8 Ownership structures emerged as a possible reason explaining why some lobbyists
9
10 representing individual firms were sensitive to Council-level incentives and joined bilateral
11
12 coalitions. Two of our informants (Interviews 20 and 26), representing state-owned banking
13
14 organisations, suggested that their government shareholders were encouraging them to work
15
16 bilaterally to formulate and communication common positions on EU policy:
17
18

19
20 “We ally with [our German counterpart] because we are both state-owned. Our
21
22 respective national governments are interested in learning about good banking
23
24 practice in our two countries.” (Interview 20)
25
26

27
28 “Government officials in Berlin encourage me to organise bilateral workshops
29
30 specifically with [a French counterpart] to learn about the French market and
31
32 how French policymakers are addressing particular challenges. Those workshops
33
34 obviously lead to common positions.” (Interview 26)
35
36

37 Our interviews also suggest that lobbyists’ receptivity to Council-level incentives is positively
38
39 influenced by bilateral cross-shareholdings. For example, one French interviewee claimed to
40
41 communicate strictly bilateral policy positions specifically because his company had
42
43 primarily French and German shareholders:
44
45

46
47 “Our firm is basically Franco-German in ownership, so our lobbying work is
48
49 completely bilateral, aimed principally at influencing simultaneously the French
50
51 President and the German Chancellor in the Council.” (Interview 7)
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54 Another French informant (Interview 10) revealed that, although her company has been
55
56 historically reluctant to represent bilateral interests with other firms, her attitude had changed
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3 following a one-off sharing of equity capital with a German competitor. This mutual
4
5 investment, she explained, was leading to a closer political alliance, based on more frequent
6
7 dialogue, more sharing of information, and the representation of more common, bilateral
8
9 policy positions.
10

11 12 *4.2.2 Individual-level factors influencing receptivity to institutional logics*

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14
15 Our data suggest cross-national differences in lobbyists' receptivity to institutional logics.
16
17 From a purely quantitative perspective, we observe no striking variations in the extent to
18
19 which our German and French interviewees were responsive to incentives to join broad,
20
21 European coalitions and target their collective actions at the Commission and Parliament.
22
23 However, four of the six lobbyists who admitted to creating bilateral coalitions whose actions
24
25 were aimed primarily at the Council were French (Interviews 7, 10, 20 and 21). Amongst
26
27 these, we detected a common perception of strong, macro-level economic interdependence
28
29 between France and Germany. As summarised by one informant (Interview 20):
30
31

32
33
34 “France and Germany are each other’s main supplier and purchaser of imports
35
36 and exports, and amongst the main sources and destinations of each other’s
37
38 foreign direct investment. These cross-border dependency relations – based on
39
40 trade and investment – require close, bilateral lobbying of the French President
41
42 and German Chancellor in the Council.”
43
44

45
46 None of our German interviewees alluded to these close trade and investment dependencies
47
48 between Germany and France. In the words of one informant (Interview 4):
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50
51 “Maybe there were closer ties between France and Germany in the past, but it’s
52
53 certainly not the case today.”
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3 More significant than nationality in determining receptivity to institutional logics was the age
4
5 of our interviewees. Crucially, the younger lobbyists in our sample admitted to being more
6
7 sensitive to inducements to join broad, pan-European coalitions. This, explained one French
8
9 informant (Interview 2), was because they saw themselves first and foremost as Europeans
10
11 who were
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14
15 “not strongly influenced by their national cultures, but [who had] deliberately
16
17 attempted to distance themselves from the corporate and political worlds of their
18
19 home nations.”
20

21
22 This and other younger lobbyists (Interviews 4, 5, 6, 9, 11 and 18) described themselves as
23
24 working in a ‘Brussels bubble’ of policymaking. Within that bubble, claimed one interviewee
25
26 (Interview 5), younger lobbyists had decoupled themselves from political discourses in their
27
28 home countries and developed a shared European understanding of political problems and
29
30 their solutions.
31

32
33
34 We observed that informants most receptive to multilateral lobbying coalitions at the
35
36 Commission- and Parliament-level were also graduates of European Studies and European
37
38 Law degree programmes (eg, interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9). These informants admitted that their
39
40 educational backgrounds had sensitised them to Commission- and Parliament-level logics to
41
42 engage in broad, multilateral coalitions. For example:
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44

45
46 “My study year [in France] was a very *European* experience. It taught me the
47
48 value of not analysing issues from a national perspective” (Interview 1)
49

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51 “My Masters in European Law at LSE made me passionate about the European
52
53 project and the need to defend European interests” (Interview 2)
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3 “I studied in Dresden and Amsterdam, so I’ve a fair amount of European
4
5 exposure, which is important for this job. I see colleagues who have very little
6
7 European experience and tend to work along more national lines” (Interview 9)
8
9

10
11 Conversely, those lobbyists more incentivised to enter into narrower, bilateral coalitions and
12
13 target their political actions at the Council level were graduates of primarily engineering-
14
15 focused disciplines. We observed in particular that French proponents of bilateral coalitions
16
17 had attended a *grande école* – one of France’s elitist and selective higher education
18
19 establishments that exist outside the main framework of the French university system.
20
21 Commenting on our observations regarding educational backgrounds, two informants
22
23 suggested that there exists a “new school” of policymakers and lobbyists in Brussels who
24
25 have been academically and professionally trained to think and act along European as
26
27 opposed to national or bilateral lines:
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29

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31 “There’s an ‘old-school’ take on lobbying, based on wining and dining and
32
33 networking with national policymakers. My younger colleagues and I take a
34
35 much more ‘new-school’, regulatory affairs perspective. We focus specifically
36
37 on analysing content of Commission proposals, and try to identify opportunities
38
39 and threats for our firms.” (Interview 4)
40
41

42
43 “You certainly find elite-trained Brussels lobbyists who act like ‘little princes’
44
45 around national-level policymakers in the Council.” (Interview 9)
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47

48 **5. Findings and discussion**

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51 Prior research suggests that interest groups join coalitions for resource-efficiency reasons (eg,
52
53 Hula, 1999), as a result of cost-benefit analyses (eg, Hojnacki, 1997), or as part of a
54
55 bargaining process where two conflicting groups choose to work together towards a new
56
57 policy positions that satisfies them both (eg, Nelson and Webb Yackee, 2012). Distinguishing
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3 itself from this extant work, our own research highlights how lobbyists' decisions to join
4 interest group coalitions can be informed by institutional incentives. Of course, other scholars
5 have already investigated institutional factors and their effects on decisions to join coalitions
6 (eg, Gray and Lowery, 1998; Coen, 2004; Mahoney, 2007) However, our own study builds on
7 these institutionally-informed studies in two particular ways.
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14 First, it draws attention to the dynamic and complex character of institutional
15 configurations governing lobbying activities. We specifically found in the EU context that
16 lobbyists face two competing institutional logics – one logic providing incentives to join
17 forces with other European organisations, develop multilateral policy messages, and
18 communicate those messages to the Commission and the Parliament; and another, emergent
19 logic providing inducements to form narrower coalitions, develop bilateral policy messages,
20 and direct those messages at the Council. The recent emergence of incentives encouraging
21 bilateral forms of coalitions is in our view a significant finding. It adds to extant research (eg,
22 Bouwen, 2002; Eising, 2007; Mazey and Richardson, 2006; Woll, 2006) suggesting either
23 implicitly or explicitly that coalition activity in Brussels is primarily multilateral in character,
24 as lobbyists seek to acquire European credentials in broad groups and mobilize European
25 credibility to access key policymakers, especially in the Commission. It also focuses attention
26 on the Council as an increasingly important policymaking arena whilst the lion's share of EU-
27 level lobbying focuses attention on the Commission (eg, Bunea and Baumgartner, 2014).
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46 The rise of bilateral lobbying coalitions targeting the Council makes sense given
47 recent institutional changes in the EU. As argued by Puetter (2012), we are witnessing an era
48 of resurgent intergovernmentalism as the Member States increasingly take possession of pre-
49 eminent decision-making power, and the Council moves towards the centre of political
50 gravity. As Webber (1999) explains, decisions taken at the Council level commonly reflect
51 'bargains' struck between two governments who join forces bilaterally and apply pressure on
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3 other Member States to participate in integration projects they support. This changing
4
5 institutional context appears to be incentivising lobbyists to join forces bilaterally and help
6
7 their national policymakers strike bargains with representatives of other Member States.
8
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10 We acknowledge that bilateral coalitions that target the Council are – currently at least
11
12 – less common than multi-lateral coalitions targeting the Commission and the Parliament.
13
14 This finding, we suggest, could feasibly be explained by rising intergovernmentalism being a
15
16 relatively recent institutional trend in Brussels (eg, Puetter, 2012). Indeed, the lobbying
17
18 behaviours of business organisations might still be largely shaped by the more historically
19
20 entrenched, multi-level institutional configurations placing the Commission at the heart of EU
21
22 policymaking. Many of our informants might be continuing to target their lobbying activities
23
24 primarily at the Commission and Parliament because their professional experiences and
25
26 background prevent them from recognising a new institutional opportunity for lobbying.
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31 Our research also adds to institutionally-informed studies into interest coalitions by
32
33 highlighting how lobbyists' receptivity to institutional incentives – and in turn their choices of
34
35 preferred coalitions and coalition partners – vary in accordance with organisational-level and
36
37 individual-level attributes. In terms of organisational-level attributes, we found that lobbyists
38
39 representing national-level trade associations and – for the most part – individual firms were
40
41 most sensitive to incentives emanating from the Commission and the Parliament to
42
43 communicate multilateral policy messages with a large number of other European
44
45 organisations. Our finding that these broad, multi-lateral coalitions lobby policymakers on
46
47 highly specific issues is at odds with prior research (eg, Mahoney, 2007) suggesting that
48
49 organisations create broad coalitions around salient, highly mediatized issues as such types of
50
51 issues especially demand advocates to demonstrate a broad basis of support. Our interview
52
53 data suggest that trade associations and firms form coalitions in Brussels even when there is
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55 little or no widespread news coverage of a particular issue. Our finding that especially
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3 individual firms join large, multi-lateral coalitions to address relatively specific policy
4
5 questions is also significant: it contradicts existing research (eg, Gray and Lowery, 1998)
6
7 indicating that organisations are most likely to join broad coalitions if lobbying forms a key
8
9 component of their work.
10

11
12 We found examples of firms whose lobbyists were more sensitive to Council-level
13
14 incentives, and thus chose to lobby in bilateral coalitions. These lobbyists identified
15
16 ownership structures as a key reason explaining their sensitivity to these particular incentives.
17
18 This finding generally confirms prior institutions-based research suggesting that the
19
20 composition of ownership shapes the relative responsiveness to institutional logics (eg, Chung
21
22 and Luo, 2008; Miller et al, 2010; Walsh et al, 2003). We specifically found that lobbyists
23
24 representing publicly-owned firms were the most receptive to Council-level incentives to
25
26 form narrow, bilateral coalitions. This chimes with prior studies (eg, Goodrick and Salancik,
27
28 1996; Lounsbury, 2001) illustrating how differences in the public versus private ownership of
29
30 organisations influence responsiveness to institutional logics. As per these authors, the
31
32 publicly-owned organisations in our sample might implicitly yet diplomatically be aligning
33
34 their strategic responses to institutional cues to the preferences of the (national) governments
35
36 upon which they are financially dependent.
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42
43 Bilateral cross-shareholdings, we found, appear to heighten receptivity to Council-
44
45 level incentives to form bilateral coalitions. This makes sense insofar as such inter-linkages
46
47 create close, cross-country connections between organisations. These ties might feasibly make
48
49 firms more dependent on economic and political developments in two specific countries. By
50
51 extension, their lobbyists may become particularly sensitive to institutional incentives to
52
53 engage in bilateral rather than multilateral lobbying. This finding reiterates previous studies
54
55 (eg, Burris, 2005) illustrating how the ties formed through inter-firm linkages contribute more
56
57 than similarities in economic interests to patterns of political behaviour.
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3 We also found that lobbyists representing employers' associations (compared to those
4 representing firms and industry-specific business associations) were more sensitive to Council
5 incentives to join narrow, bilateral coalitions. This finding can potentially be explained by
6
7 prior research (eg, DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991) suggesting that perceptions of
8
9 and responses to institutional logics can be shaped by other actors exogenous to organisations
10
11 who exert compliance pressures on organisations and managers through resource-dependence
12
13 relationships. Crucially, employers' associations in France and Germany are 'social partner',
14
15 non-profit organisations that are partially reliant on government funding to provide services
16
17 demanded by their respective national governments, especially with respect to the
18
19 management of national social security systems . Because French and German employers'
20
21 associations are essentially organisations resembling public agencies that depend on national
22
23 governments for financial resources, it is probable that their political representatives will seek
24
25 to comply with the demands of their national government stakeholders to avoid anxieties
26
27 linked to funding uncertainty (eg, Kramer and Grossman, 1987).
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35 It is noteworthy that French lobbyists choosing to join bilateral coalitions should opt to
36
37 partner specifically with German lobbyists, and vice versa. This finding could be explained by
38
39 the pivotal role of Franco-German relationships in the process of European integration (eg,
40
41 Trouille and Uterwedde, 2013). Crucially, Krotz and Schild (2013) highlight how a special
42
43 relationship between Paris and Berlin is supported by dense networks of experts and civil
44
45 servants who facilitate frequent consultations among political leaders and promote consensus
46
47 on policy issues. Our findings tentatively suggest that this system of 'embedded bilateralism'
48
49 (ibid: 11) underpinning the Franco-German relationship may be extending beyond the purely
50
51 political arena to the broader sphere of business-interest representation. Thus, when seeking
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53 common positions on EU-level policy in the Council, French and German policymakers are
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3 potentially also increasingly supported by employers' associations and publicly-owned firms
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5 who provide bilateral information needed to craft joint Franco-German policy positions.
6
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8 Our research also exposes how the backgrounds of individual lobbyists can influence
9
10 how they are receptive and responsive to the competing institutional incentives they face in
11
12 Brussels. These findings are significant insofar as research into lobbying in general, and EU
13
14 lobbying in particular, tends to take individual firms (eg, Barron and Hulten, 2014), national-
15
16 level business associations (eg, Wilts and Quitkatt, 2004), European associations (eg,
17
18 Greenwood, 2002) as they primarily unit of analysis. By focusing on the individual lobbyist,
19
20 our own research exposes some of the deeper, more human dimensions of EU lobbying.
21
22
23

24 Essentially, we found that receptivity to Commission/Parliament-level incentives to
25
26 join broad, pan-European coalitions was strongest amongst younger lobbyists with academic
27
28 and professional qualifications in European Studies and European Law and who perceive
29
30 themselves first and foremost as European rather than French or German. This finding reflects
31
32 the spirit of emergent research exploring the role played by individual identity as a filter for
33
34 interpreting and responding to institutional cues (eg, Glynn, 2008; Meyer and Hollerer, 2010).
35
36 It is also in keeping with existing institutions-based research suggesting that individuals are
37
38 committed to certain institutional logics, and that those commitments play an important role
39
40 in terms of influencing the strategies they mobilise in the face of institutional incentives and
41
42 pressures (eg, Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Mars and Lounsbury, 2009; Reay et al., 2009;
43
44 Tracey et al., 2010). This finding especially reflects Scott's idea that individuals can be
45
46 considered in terms of carriers of institutionalised templates (Scott, 1995) into which they
47
48 have been socialised through formal education or professional experience (DiMaggio and
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50 Powell, 1983).
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3 Our finding that younger graduates of in particular European Studies and European
4 Law are more responsive to Commission-level incentives to engage in broad multi-level
5 lobbying along European lines makes sense in light of the recent efforts to create a European
6 Higher Education Area (EHEA), in which European universities are encouraged, with a view
7 to promoting staff and student mobility, to provide common study and degree programmes
8 that increasingly emphasise the broad European context whilst downplaying national interests
9 (eg, Antunes, 2006). That graduates from prestigious educational establishments are more
10 sensitive to the Council's more intergovernmental incentives appears reasonable given that
11 leading universities are commonly used by governments to mould national power elites. This
12 is especially the case in France, where the *grandes écoles* have historically imparted a strong,
13 homogenous bureaucratic training focused on the national French interest (eg, Maclean et al
14 2014).

30 6. Conclusions

31
32 Using data gathered from in-depth interviews with lobbyists representing firms, industry
33 associations and employers' associations, we investigated why business interests join
34 lobbying coalitions in Brussels. We found that, EU lobbyists' are confronted with incentives
35 to ally with other European organisations, develop multilateral policy messages, and
36 communicate those messages to the Commission and the Parliament. Simultaneously, they
37 face inducements to join narrower coalitions, develop bilateral policy messages, and direct
38 those messages at the Council. Lobbyists' receptivity to these incentives – and in turn their
39 preferred choices of lobbying coalitions – differ according to their, age, educational
40 background and the type and ownership structure of the organisations they represent.

41
42 These findings build on emerging institutions-based accounts of why lobbyists choose
43 to join coalitions. Contrary to this prior research, our own study actively engages with the
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3 concept of institutional complexity to illustrate that lobbyists face competing institutional
4 pressures and that their interpretations and reactions to those pressures are shaped by their
5 own personal biographies and the characteristics of the organisations they represent.
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10 In addition to these theoretical contributions, our research also has practical
11 implications for policymakers across the EU institutions. As mentioned above, successive
12 treaty changes – coupled with economic and financial developments in the Eurozone – have
13 altered the balance of power in Brussels, especially between the Commission and the Council
14 (eg, Puetter, 2011). As the Council has gained more decision-making powers as a result of
15 treaty changes and the crisis in the Eurozone, there has opened up another potential level of
16 lobbying activity with an additional opportunity to shape policy at a more advanced stage of
17 the policy cycle. Accordingly, if European-minded civil servants in the Commission know
18 that certain lobbyists – given their age, educational backgrounds and company affiliations –
19 could be more responsive to European concerns, they will be able to identify sympathetic
20 corporate allies upon whose specialist knowledge they depend when drafting their technical
21 proposals. The same knowledge will enable more bilaterally-orientated policymakers in the
22 Council to anticipate and respond to business opponents to their specific interests.
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40 We openly acknowledge that the qualitative, explorative focus of our study means that
41 our findings need to be handled with caution. Our research is based on 26 interviews with
42 French and German lobbyists. This reflects of course the size of two of the largest economies
43 in the EU. However, we cannot assume that our findings are generalizable to all lobbyists
44 working in Brussels, or in other institutional contexts. Our findings may also be influenced by
45 the fact that Franco-German relations represent the most prominent bilateral relationship in
46 the EU (eg, Webber, 1999). We thus advise that our key findings ultimately be considered in
47 terms of intermediate hypotheses whose broader validity requires further, rigorous empirical
48 testing. Given the growing interest in the influence of lobbying coalitions (eg, Klüver, 2013),
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3 future studies could also compare the effectiveness of broad, multilateral versus narrower,
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5 bilateral coalitions in shaping policy outcomes. In this respect, it is necessary and important to
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7 investigate whether and how officials involved in the determination of EU-level policy
8
9 ultimately respond and react to policy preferences articulated by different types of coalitions.
10

11
12 Despite these limitations and the need for further empirical work, our research
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14 nonetheless demonstrates that, as lobbyists' interpretations of institutional complexity can be
15
16 heterogeneous, so can be their strategic responses to that complexity. Thus, we hope that our
17
18 study will motivate scholars to embrace the notion that lobbyists are ultimately individuals
19
20 who draw on their personal backgrounds and experience when making sense of and
21
22 responding to the inherently complex institutional environments within which they operate.
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24

25 26 27 Appendix

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30 **Figure 1** An institutions-based framework for exploring the coalition activity of lobbyists in
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32 Brussels

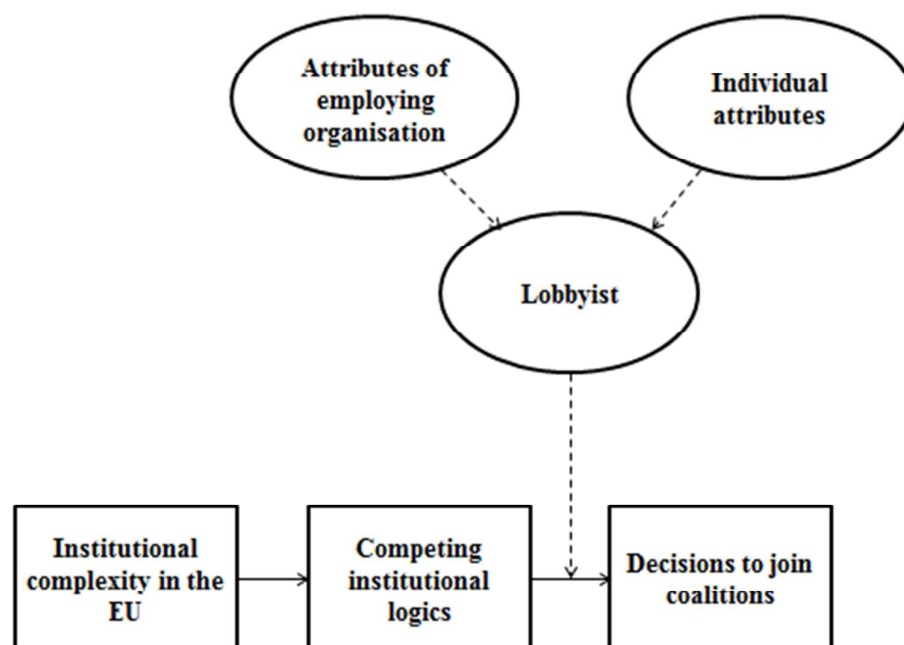


Table 1 Description of sample

Interview	Age	Education	Nationality	Organisation	Sector
1	43	European Law	German	Association	Insurance
2	38	European Law	French	Firm	Electronics
3	37	Management	German	Firm	Energy
4	39	European Studies	German	Firm	Automotive
5	34	European Studies	German	Firm	Electronics
6	44	European Studies	German	Firm	Logistics
7	47	Engineering	French	Firm	Aerospace/defence
8	51	Engineering	French	Firm	Aerospace/defence
9	31	European Studies	German	Firm	Technical inspection
10	48	European Law	French	Firm	Automotive
11	26	European Studies	French	Firm	Automotive
12	42	Bio-Science	French	Firm	Construction
13	68	Management	French	Firm	Aerospace/defence
14	37	Engineering	German	Association	Industry-spanning
15	41	European Studies	French	Firm	Energy
16	46	Management	German	Firm	Logistics
17	49	Management	French	Association	Fashion/textiles
18	45	Engineering	French	Firm	Electronics
19	58	Law	German	Association	Agriculture
20	39	Engineering	French	Firm	Banking
21	46	Law	French	Association	Industry-spanning
22	57	Economics	French	Association	Automotive
23	32	Management	French	Firm	Logistics
24	53	Economics	German	Association	Aerospace/defence
25	39	Engineering	German	Association	Industry-spanning
26	38	Economics	German	Firm	Banking

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