Interest Group Tactics and Legislative Behaviour: How the Mode of Communication Matters

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Abstract: Interest groups often seek to influence legislators and legislative behaviour. We argue that the likelihood of legislators taking interest group requests and preferences into account is shaped by how – with what tactic – they are conveyed. We expect that more direct, real-time, contact increases legislators' receptiveness to interest group demands. To test this argument, we introduce and take advantage of uniquely nuanced lobbying data that provide extensive disclosure on all 217,886 lobbying attempts targeting individual members of the Irish Parliament between 2015 and 2019, and link them to data we collected on 167,347 parliamentary questions tabled by Irish legislators. The evidence suggests that lobbying does impact legislative behaviour, particularly when communication involves higher levels of 'social presence.' Moreover, our results indicate that approximately 20% of all parliamentary questions can be attributed to lobbying.

Keywords: Interest groups; Legislative behaviour; Legislators; Lobbying tactics; Parliamentary questions; Social presence

The Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, Ireland's largest fishermen's representative body, was deeply concerned about Brexit negotiations. CEO Sean O'Donoghue was keen to express to government his industry's fears for Irish fisheries, and the future of reciprocal fishing rights for Irish and Northern Irish vessels. He contacted Pat 'the Cope' Gallagher, a member of the country's lower parliamentary chamber, the Dáil. O'Donoghue sent Gallagher an e-mail that included draft versions of parliamentary questions, and a request to table them in the Dáil. After O'Donoghue had provided additional explanations over the phone, Gallagher took action. Some days later, he tabled two parliamentary questions to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; one asking how the Minister planned to combat the problems Brexit posed for the fisheries sector, and one on the reciprocal rights.[1]

Requests to parliamentarians from interest groups are common. An analysis of Ireland's highly transparent lobbying register, upon which the abovementioned story relies, indicates that over the course of one year, the average Irish parliamentarian is confronted 458 times with interest groups' demands by means such as e-mails, phone calls, meetings, or at events organised by interest groups. And we have little reason to expect that the Irish case is exceptional: It is widely acknowledged that interest groups seek to influence public policy by lobbying legislators, with lobbyists often inundating legislators with information or requests for action (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Fisher 2015; Pedersen, Binderkrantz, and Christiansen 2014).

Such effort to lobby legislators potentially benefits or undermines the democratic process (Binderkrantz 2014). Interest group lobbying may privilege some citizens' views and preferences at the expense of others, possibly resulting in biased public policy (Dahl 1961; Lowery and Gray 2004). On the other hand, representative democracy requires that legislators understand the interests and preferences of citizens, and interest groups may provide a channel through which citizens' preferences and worries are transmitted to legislators (Flöthe 2019). The relevance of these arguments, however, ultimately depends on whether, and if so what, lobbying is effective in shaping how legislators choose to behave (see Leech 2010). In this article, we contribute to this debate by focusing on a hitherto largely understudied aspect of interest representation: the mode of communication. Our research seeks to address how and why different lobbying tactics aimed at direct interactions with legislators vary in their impact.

In political communication, modes of communication have been shown to play a defining role – face-to-face interactions more so than phone calls and written communication – in affecting citizens' political behaviour (Baek, Wojcieszak, and Delli Carpini 2012; Green, McGrath, and Aronow 2013) and attitudes (Broockman and Kalla 2016). We argue that legislators' responsiveness to lobbying is likewise influenced by how lobbyists communicate with elected officials. Specifically, we build on social presence theory (Short, Williams, and Christie 1976) to suggest that lobbying tactics with more direct, real-time, contact are more likely to influence legislators' behaviour. Face-to-face meetings between lobbyists and legislators, for example, represent a case of strong social presence, whereas use of phone calls, and even more so, e-mails, or social media are examples of weaker social presence. Lobbying tactics richer in social presence, we posit, will be more effective in eliciting responsiveness from policy-makers.

To illuminate whether communication modes shape legislative behaviour, we leverage and analyse data from the Irish Register of Lobbying. Since 2015, Irish regulation requires every lobbyist to submit a return whenever they target policy-makers, and to indicate the type and frequency of lobbying tactics they used. Previous research on lobbying efforts has relied extensively on either interviews (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; De Bruycker and Beyers 2018; Mahoney 2007), surveys (e.g., Binderkrantz 2005; Eising 2007; Nicoll Victor 2007), or both (e.g.,

Chalmers 2013; Dür and Mateo 2016; Fisher 2015), thereby building on interest groups' and policy-makers' subjective assessment of lobbying tactics. The Irish data allow us to develop a far more granular picture of how legislators are lobbied because of the country's unparalleled high-quality data on lobbying activities. We combine these nuanced data on lobbying tactics with data we collect on parliamentary questions. Parliamentary questions are ideal for exploring legislative behaviour. Not only can they serve many different purposes – agenda setting, information-gathering, holding the government accountable (Green-Pedersen 2010; Martin 2011; Raunio 1996), they are also accessible and largely uncontested tools to signal responsiveness (Rozenberg and Martin 2011).

To anticipate, the results of our multivariate analysis suggest that legislators do respond to lobbying and that communication modes matter. We find support for the theory of social presence as the mechanism behind legislators' responsiveness to interest groups. Lobbying tactics where communication is synchronous (instantaneous), and rich in non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and vocalics, are more effective in leading parliamentarians to table questions compared to tactics where interactions with parliamentarians are asynchronous, and low on non-verbal cues.

Tactics: Social Presence in Lobbying

Interest groups communicate their preferences and demands to policy-makers in a variety of manners. Do a favourable reactions from legislators to these requests depend on how they are transmitted? Earlier research has gone as far as to suggest that interest groups' tactics are more important than the type of information they convey (Chalmers 2013). Interest group scholars have predominantly classified tactics according to whom they target. Inside (or direct) lobbying aim to achieve political goals by transmitting information directly to decision-makers (De Bruycker and Beyers 2018; Weiler and Brändli 2015). In contrast, outside (or indirect) lobbying tactics are used to sway decision-makers via the public and the media (Beyers 2004; Kollman 1998).

This dichotomy of lobbying strategies has sparked much scientific interest. A sizeable portion of the debate has focused on the comparison of these two overarching strategies. Inside lobbying has been shown to be used more frequently than outside lobbying (Baumgartner et al. 2009), to provide overall better access to policy-makers (Eising 2007), and to be better suited to achieve interest groups' goals (Mahoney 2007). Yet other studies suggest that outside strategies were no less effective than inside strategies (Chalmers 2013). Rather, lobbying success has been linked to additional factors, including the public salience of issues, and the combination of inside and outside strategies (De Bruycker and Beyers 2018; Dür and Mateo 2016).

To better understand policy-makers' responsiveness to interest groups, however, it is necessary to break open the black box of strategies and to study how specific communication modes allow interest groups to engage with their targets. In the United States, personal contact with Members of Congress and their staff constitutes the most widely reported lobbying tactic (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 152). This behaviour is mirrored in other polities – Austria, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Spain, and the European Union – where direct contact with policy-makers and participation in meetings organised by political institutions are among the most, if not the most frequently used tactics (Dür and Mateo 2016, 66). For good reason, as evidence from the European Union suggests: Face-to-face meetings relate more strongly than other tactics to frequent contact with policy-makers (Chalmers 2013, 48).

This is in line with the widespread assertion among communications researchers that face-to-face interaction is the gold standard of communication (e.g., Allan and Thorns 2009,

441; Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire 1984). First conceptualised by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976), social presence refers to the extent to which individuals perceive one another to be present, i.e., 'real' and 'there' when using a specific communication tactic.

Social presence varies on two dimensions, a spatial and a temporal one (Calefato and Lanubile 2010). Key to the spatial dimension is the capacity of communication tactics to transmit non-verbal cues – kinesics (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, and posture), proxemics (e.g., physical distance), vocalics (e.g., pitch, volume, speed, and pauses), haptics (touch), and appearance (e.g., clothing and scent) – in addition to verbal content (Guerrero 2014, 54; for a review, see Gordon and Druckman 2018). These non-verbal cues are mostly transmitted intentionally and also interpreted accordingly by their receivers (Burgoon, Guerrero, and Manusov 2011). Face-to-face interaction is considered the communication mode that is the richest in cues. In comparison, video communication, even more so, audio communication, and not to mention written communication offer lower degrees of perceived social contact (for a review, see Fulk and Collins-Jarvis 2001, 629).

Such an understanding of communication tactics comes with several consequences. The fewer cues they convey, the weaker is the social presence they create, and hence the lower the salience of communication partners and interactions (Short, Williams, and Christie 1976). Tactics offering more non-verbal cues make it harder for people to ignore social pressure, which in turn facilitates consensus-building (Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire 1984). Experimental research has corroborated this, showing that communication with more cues leads to more agreement, less hostility, and stronger social orientation (for a review, see Walther and Lee 2014, 453).

In addition to the spatial dimension, social presence comes with a temporal one. Communication is either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous communications tactics such as face-to-face meetings and phone calls are immediate interactions, whereas asynchronous ones such as letters, e-mails, Tweets, or Facebook posts come with delayed or no guarantee that they have bene received. This difference affects how well tactics are suited to establish common ground (grounding) among the communicating parties. In synchronous communication, senders can easily establish whether a message was received, and if so, understood as intended (Clark and Brennan 1991). The rapid back and forth communication of synchronous tactics facilitates convergence towards a shared understanding of information, or the realisation that it cannot be achieved (Dennis, Fuller, and Valacich 2008, 580). They also support the grounding process by limiting communicating parties' opportunities to simply stop interacting.

Previous political communications research corroborates the importance of social presence in inducing action. In a meta-analysis on voter turnout, face-to-face canvassing is shown to be the most successful get-out-the-vote tactic, followed by phone calls, with leaflets and direct mail being the least impactful (Green, McGrath, and Aronow 2013). In a similar vein, face-to-face deliberation among citizens is more likely to lead to political action than internet-based discourse (Baek, Wojcieszak, and Delli Carpini 2012). At the same time, face-to-face canvassing is also effective at changing individuals' attitudes to transgender individuals, helping reduce transphobia more so than messaging via mass media (Broockman and Kalla 2016).

In the context of interest representation, the temporal dimension of social presence overlaps with the role of access in the communication process. Interest groups need to pass a threshold controlled by policy-makers to employ certain tactics (see Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers 2017). Synchronous communication, barring chance encounters, can be avoided by policy-makers. Their consent is needed for meetings, events, or phone calls to take place. Passing the access threshold is costly to interest groups – policy-makers need to be willing to

invest their own time – but not without its rewards. It has been argued that higher costs of tactics increase the 'persuasiveness, political salience, importance and even (perceived) reliability of [the transmitted] information' (Chalmers 2013, 52). Variation in synchronous tactics hence entails different types of access. In contrast, asynchronous tactics do not require access, but also lack any assurance of policy-makers' involvement. Policy-makers can opt to delegate asynchronous communication to their subordinates (e.g., have assistants reply to e-mails and letters), or to not engage at all.

To understand how interest representation can vary by communication mode, Table 1 classifies lobbying tactics on the spatial and temporal dimension of social presence. Tactics such as meetings, lobby days, events / receptions, and informal communication permit interest groups and policy-makers to interact face-to-face. They are both synchronous and richest in non-verbal cues, and hence, from our interpretation of social presence theory, the most effective in eliciting interest groups' desired reaction. Virtual meetings and phone calls, while synchronous lack certain non-verbal cues. This renders them less effective than meetings despite providing similar degrees of structuredness. The least effective are likely lobbying tactics such as e-mails, letters, submissions, Tweets, and Facebook posts. Their dearth of non-verbal cues and asynchronicity produce the lowest level of personalised interaction between lobbyists and policy-makers. Our core hypothesis then, is that the stronger the social presence transmitted by lobbying tactics, the higher is policy-makers' responsiveness. Specifically, we expect responsiveness to interest group communication to decrease in effectiveness the more dissimilar it is to face-to-face interactions.

[Table 1 about here]

Research Design

To test our hypothesis regarding the effect of social presence in lobbying tactics on policy-makers' responsiveness, we focus on Irish parliamentarians' use of parliamentary questions. Parliamentary questions are one form of legislative behaviour which permits legislators to formally request information from members of the government, including on the government's policies, actions, and plans. Tabling questions is one of the most accessible and uncontested way of demonstrating responsiveness such as to interest groups or constituents (Rozenberg and Martin 2011, 394).

Irish parliamentarians are relatively unconstrained in their ability to table parliamentary questions. No limit is placed on the number of questions which a member can ask and political parties do not exercise control over their use. In contrast to other forms of legislative behaviour that are highly influenced by party leaders (e.g., bill initiation and voting in the Irish case), questions provide a reliable perspective on the choice parliamentarians themselves make. Focusing on parliamentary questions allows us to set alternative influences on parliamentary behaviour largely aside when investigating the impact of lobbying tactics.

Moreover, parliamentary questions are highly versatile in the purposes they serve. They are used to gather information, hold the government accountable (Martin 2011; Raunio 1996), and to bring issues to the agenda (Green-Pedersen 2010). Their low-threshold availability and multi-purpose function therefore provide excellent conditions for finding a nuanced impact of different lobbying tactics. They matter to interest groups in a number of ways. Questions constitute a crucial signal to the government (including the bureaucracy) with regard to what legislators consider salient political issues. Questions, and the answers to them, also provide credible insights into both proposed government policy and legislation, and how the government and the bureaucracy is choosing to implement policy. A survey in Denmark showed

that more than half of interest groups get legislators to submit parliamentary questions on their behalf at least occasionally (Pedersen 2013, 37).

The lower house of the Irish parliament, the Dáil, represents a hard test of our theory due to the candidate-centred nature of the electoral system. Irish legislators must expend considerable effort cultivating a personal vote, including engaging in extra-legislative constituency casework – often leaving little time or appetite for (non-parochial) legislative work such as being responsive to lobbying efforts. Comparatively low limits on campaign spending also make Irish politicians less reliant on interest groups. Nonetheless, the Dáil constitutes the primary lobbying avenue for interest groups (Murphy 2014, 153). Interest groups in Ireland exhibit a particularly strong interest in questions given their prominent role in legislative business. Irish parliamentarians table more questions than their colleagues in a series of other parliaments across Europe (Rozenberg and Martin 2011, 401).

The Irish case stands out due to its unparalleled high-quality data on lobbying tactics (see Online Appendix A). The country's Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 features extensive disclosure requirements. It stipulates that individuals such as interest groups' in-house staff, contracted lobbyists, and under certain conditions even private citizens need to submit a return to the Register of Lobbying when they attempt to influence public policy, public programs, the development or zoning of land, or matters involving public funds (Online Appendix B). Returns are mandatory for all lobbying activities involving one or multiple designated public officials – ministers, ministers of state, Dáil deputies, members of the Seanad (the Irish parliament's upper chamber), Irish members of the European Parliament, members of local authorities, special advisors to government members, and public servants. Lobbyists are not only required to disclose the lobbied public officials but also the subject matter (e.g., arts funding policy) and the intended results (e.g., increased funding for the Irish Film Board).[2] Importantly for our analysis, registrants need to report the types (meetings, e-mails, phone calls etc.) and frequencies of the lobbying tactics they used.

Data and Measurement

The observation period runs from the inception of the Register of Lobbying on 1 September 2015 to 30 April 2019, thus covering both legislators of the 31st (2011-2016) and the 32nd Dáil (2016-2020).

Our novel data set draws primarily from two sources. First, we rely on the Irish Register of Lobbying. Organizations and individuals (see Online Appendix C) are required to submit returns – one for every lobbying activity – according to three annual reporting periods. The Standards in Public Office Commission processes and verifies these returns, and if necessary, requires registrants to revise them.[3]

Second, we build on publicly available data from the Irish parliament. The Houses of the Oireachtas Open Data APIs offer behavioural and biographical information on parliamentarians.[4] We used the APIs to obtain all oral and written parliamentary questions for our 44-month observation period, as well as information on party membership and ministerial positions. For biographical information, we supplemented and cross-checked our data collection efforts with other sources, including Nealon's Guide (Collins 2011; Ryan 2017), electionsireland.org, and wikipedia.org.

We rely on a triadic unit of analysis, the parliamentarian-quadrimester-policy area. Information on the 201 parliamentarians in our data are collected on a four-month basis, thus giving us observations for 11 quadrimesters during our observation period. These four-month episodes correspond to the reporting periods used by the Register of Lobbying. On the level of these parliamentarian-quadrimesters, we study legislative behaviour in 16 separate policy

areas (see Online Appendix D). Variables on lobbying tactics (independent variables), some of parliamentarians' characteristics (control variables) and parliamentary questions (dependent variable) are coded according to policy area. This allows us to link the impact of lobbying tactics in a certain policy area (e.g., health) to parliamentarians' use of parliamentary questions in said policy area. In total, our data set comprises 22,848 observations.

The count of tabled questions serves as the dependent variable. Between September 2015 and April 2019, parliamentarians tabled 167,347 questions. During the same time, 217,886 lobbying tactics were used to target individual parliamentarians. For the key independent variables, we use this information to calculate frequency measures[5] for nine distinct lobbying tactics (for details, see Online Appendix E).[6]

Beyond these variables of key interest, we include a series of other factors that may also influence parliamentarians' behaviour. Most importantly, we control for parliamentarians' expertise and interest in specific policy areas by relating their policy area-specific use of questions to their professional background and party spokesperson roles. Our models also control for party leadership positions, membership in a governing party, and the salience of a policy area (for the rationale to include these controls, see Online Appendix F). Online Appendix G provides a descriptive overview of the dependent, key independent, and control variables.

Analytical Strategy

We employ a two-step approach to understand parliamentarians' responsiveness to interest groups' lobbying tactics. In the first step, we explore the prominence of different tactics for lobbying parliamentarians. We assess their role by both scrutinizing how parliamentarians are targeted, and what differences emerge in tactic use between interest group types.

In the second step, we focus on the capacity of different modes of communication to affect parliamentarians' tabling of questions. We link the total frequencies of distinct lobbying tactics used on a single parliamentarian in a particular policy area to the number of questions that parliamentarian submitted in the respective policy area. Relying on frequency measures comes with the previously corroborated idea that more frequent use of tactics increases the chances of success (Chalmers 2013). This means that we expect lobbying tactics to be cumulative in their effect, notwithstanding that tactics richer in social presence will be more effective.

We use fixed effects negative binomial regression to investigate the impact of lobbying tactics on tabling parliamentary questions. Negative binomial models serve to account for the overdispersion present in our dependent variable i.e., the count of tabled questions in a certain policy area. Our approach incorporates multiple sets of fixed effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity. We rely on parliamentarian-fixed effects to control for stable characteristics of parliamentarians such as their personal interests and areas of expertise. Quadrimester-fixed effects eliminate time-variant confounders that vary across all parliamentarians such as political conditions and defining events during the four-month periods. Furthermore, we include policy area-fixed effects to control for variation between policy areas such as their salience to legislators, voters, parties, and interest groups collectively.

Ideally, we would connect tactics to tabled questions on the level of parliamentarian-interest group dyads. However, the available data do not allow us to systematically detect whether a specific tactic or combination of tactics as used by a particular interest group is the direct cause of a question. We do, however, account for the causal connection that may be presumed among different communication tactics. We remove e-mails, letters, and phone calls that were likely used to convey invitations and coordinate parliamentarians' participation in meetings, events/receptions, or lobby days to ensure that tactics served to convey preferences

and policy-related requests. An overview of how interest groups combine lobbying tactics is presented in Online Appendix H.

To provide further corroboration of our results, we conduct a series of additional tests reported in Online Appendix I to M. They indicate that the reported findings are not driven by multicollinearity. Most importantly, though, we show that differences in the effect of tactics are not driven by pre-existing access of interest groups to specific parliamentarians. To that end, we estimate our models counting only lobbying tactics of interest groups that had already previously enjoyed access to specific legislators i.e., face-to-face interaction (meetings, events / receptions, or lobby days) with the respective parliamentarian had to occur in a prior quadrimester.[7]

We also address the possibility of reverse causality. While it seems unlikely that tabling more relevant parliamentary questions should push parliamentarians to immediately become more frequent lobbying targets, we nonetheless address this issue. Following the approach of Leszczensky and Wolbring (2019), we estimate cross-lagged fixed effects negative binomial models, which allow us to obtain unbiased estimates even when reverse causality occurs. Moreover, we re-estimate our models without removing tactics that were likely used to schedule face-to-face interactions. Lastly, we focus on the concern that simple tactics (e.g., e-mails) might become more effective over time as interest groups and parliamentarians deepen their relationships. Our investigation into this claim does not produce any substantiating evidence. In sum, all of the additional tests support our key findings.

How and By Whom Are Parliamentarians Lobbied?

On average, parliamentarians are lobbied 38 times per month (see Online Appendix N). Written forms of direct communication with policy-makers constitute the most frequently used lobbying tactics. E-mails alone account for 76.1% of all observed lobbying communications, with letters accounting for 7.1% of communications. The prominent role of written correspondence likely rests on multiple reasons. Both e-mails and letters are asynchronous tactics that do not require any guarantee of involvement by the parliamentarian. Compared to other tactics, interest groups only incur minimal to moderate expenditure for preparing and executing the relevant communication (Fisher 2015, 91-2). If necessary, the same message can easily be sent to a large group of parliamentarians. In contrast, submissions – well-researched and costed documents – require far more extensive preparation. They account for only 2.6% of all tactics.

The exception to the cost argument is lobbying via social media. While sending a Tweet or posting on Facebook is cheap and would allow for many parliamentarians being targeted simultaneously, only 1.6% of all lobbying tactics involve social media. A possible explanation for this might lie in Ireland's system of regulated and institutionalised interest representation. Previous research has related interest groups' reluctance to use public lobbying strategies to the country's corporatist system (Dür and Mateo 2016, 76).

Overall, synchronous modes of communication are much rarer than asynchronous ones. The percentages are much lower indiscriminate of whether spoken communication takes place face-to-face or in a mediated fashion. Meetings account for 5.5% of all tactics, phone calls 2.5%, informal communication 1.8%, events/receptions 1.7%, and lobby days 0.9%.

During our observation period of 44 months, 998 interest groups executed 217,886 individual tactics on parliamentarians (Figure 1). Patterns of tactics do not differ widely by interest group type. Written communication dominates interest groups' tactical repertoire. Regardless of their type, all interest groups communicate most frequently by e-mail with parliamentarians. The second most frequently used tactic is letters for all interest group types

with the exception of occupational associations and firms for which it is meetings. Even cheap synchronous communication such as phone calls is not a very prominent lobbying tool. With the exception of private firms that list phone calls their third most frequently used tactic, all other interest group types only rely on them as their fifth, sixth, or seventh option.

[Figure 1 about here]

Multivariate Results

Our ultimate aim is to understand whether legislators are responsive to lobbying, and if this depends on the chosen tactics. Table 2 reports the results of fixed effects negative binomial regression models. Model 1 includes the different lobbying tactics; Model 2 also incorporates a series of key control variables.

The results offer strong support for the hypothesised social presence mechanism. Tactics where parliamentarians engage with interest group representatives or members face-to-face are overall the most effective ones. The strongest impact is found for meetings. For every additional meeting in which parliamentarians participate, they increase their rate of tabled questions in the respective interest group's policy area by a factor 1.061, all else equal (Model 2). Other synchronous tactics – lobby days, events / receptions, informal communication, and phone calls – increase parliamentarians' rate of tabling relevant questions by a factor between 1.037 and 1.046. This suggests that interactions with legislators are the most impactful when lobbyists pre-book their discussions, define the topic and agenda beforehand, and communicate with visual cues (i.e., not phone calls) and in an environment with few diversions (i.e., not at an event / reception or a lobby day).

Asynchronous lobbying tactics and those most lacking in non-verbal cues are, as hypothesised, the least effective. Letters (factor 1.026), submissions (factor 1.022), and social media (factor 1.020) exert a weaker effect on the number of tabled questions than synchronous ones. This reinforces the hierarchy of lobbying tactics where those offering synchronous communication and more non-verbal cues are more effective. Notably, these differences are more pronounced in Model 1 than Model 2. Comparing the two models shows that introducing controls for prior profession and spokesperson roles particularly decreases the magnitude of synchronous tactics. This suggests that the effect of synchronous tactics in Model 1 primarily masks the effect of parliamentarians' personal expertise and influence on their activities in a given policy area.

[Table 2 about here]

The results in Table 2 also reveal that all but one out of the nine lobbying tactics have a consistently significant effect across models. Despite being the dominant mode of communication, sending e-mails is the only tactic that fails to affect parliamentary behaviour. A possible explanation lies in the common scattergun approach to e-mail campaigns where many or even all parliamentarians are contacted. Assuming that only few, if any of them will take action upon such untargeted communication, mass e-mails will hence mask the effect of the more narrowly targeted ones.

To illustrate the substantive effect of lobbying tactics, Figure 2 shows the predicted average change in the number of tabled questions for one-unit increases of each tactic while holding all other variables at their observed levels. It exemplifies the large differences in tactics' impact, which range from 0.03 additional parliamentary questions for an e-mail to 0.57 questions for a meeting. The figure also again emphasises the tendency of synchronous tactics being more impactful than asynchronous ones. This is notwithstanding the relatively large confidence intervals of some synchronous tactics, which indicate a large variation in how these

tactics are executed and how legislators are involved (e.g., as participants or speakers at events).

[Figure 2 about here]

Since tactics are aggregated over parliamentarians, the results express the overall collective impact of lobbying tactics on parliamentarians' behaviour. Model 2 predicts that each quadrimester, parliamentarians table on average 9.68 questions in every policy area. In the absence of any lobbying, the predicted mean question count would be 7.64. This suggests that about two questions per parliamentarian, or 21% of all parliamentary questions are the result of lobbying. This corroborates earlier evidence from the Netherlands where interest groups in 2009 were the source of 17% of parliamentarians' oral questions (Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2014).

Despite the important role of different tactics, it is crucial to consider their impact relative to other factors. Meetings are the most influential lobbying tactic. The absence of this tactic alone would reduce the predicted mean question count from 9.69 to 8.66. However, even their impact is dwarfed by the role of parliamentarians' own interests and expertise. The effect of parliamentarians' prior profession is 4.1 times larger than that of an additional meeting, that of a party spokesperson role even 57.7 times larger – and parliamentarians attend on average only 0.62 interest group meetings per policy area and reporting period. Moreover, for every additional 1,000 questions tabled in a policy area by the Dáil collectively, an individual parliamentarian will increase their question count by a factor 1.484. This is the equivalent to 6.6 meetings. Lobbying hence affects parliamentarians' behaviour, but does not define it.

Conclusion

In a representative democracy, legislatures and the legislators who sit in them play a key role in determining 'who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell 1936). Little wonder then that interest groups attempt to influence fundamental political decisions by lobbying legislators. A normative and empirical debate continues in the academic literature as to whether such lobbying of elected officials is compatible with democratic principles, undermines democracy, or, because lobbying may not 'work', has little bearing on democratic governance.

The goal of this article was to suggest that legislators' responsiveness to interest groups depends on the nature of the lobbying tactics. We posited that the extent of social presence in lobbying tactics affects the degree to which legislators respond to interest groups. To test our argument, we combined unique data on lobbying tactics from the Irish case with parliamentary question data. Our results showed that lobbying tactics that are synchronous and richer in non-verbal cues are more effective than asynchronous ones, and those devoid of cues.

The role of social presence has important bearings for understanding the workings of lobbying tactics. It offers an additional perspective on previous research that emphasises lobbyists' high demand for direct contact to policy-makers (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009, 152; Dür and Mateo 2016, 66). The inside lobbying perspective has linked those results to access; a concept understood as being dichotomous. Policy-makers either grant it – or not (Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers 2017). Social presence, in contrast, provides the tools to evaluate lobbying tactics on a continuous scale. It allows us to explain why, for example, not all communication modes with some form of access as a prerequisite are equally effective e.g., why a meeting is more impactful than a phone call. At the same time, the concepts of access and social presence overlap as to the differences between tactics they seek to explain. Incorporating both concepts in future research should hence prove a fruitful avenue.

Although our research design did not permit us to take into account which information was transmitted by which interest group to the different legislators, our findings have nonetheless implications on the type of information that proves to be particularly effective. Synchronous interactions generally convey information that requires a reduced cognitive effort from senders and receivers. Smaller amounts, and less complex information can be processed more easily, and help develop a shared understanding faster (Dennis, Fuller, and Valacich 2008). Given that we find higher responsiveness for synchronous tactics, this suggests that legislators are more sympathetic to interest groups' concerns when both actors can develop and adjust a shared understanding, in contrast to interest groups simply supplying complex information.

This article has provided a first step into research on social presence and lobbying. It will be useful to study under what specific conditions – what issues, transmitted information, interest group characteristics, combination of tactics, and institutional environments – social presence makes a difference. Ideally, a dyadic perspective on policy-maker-interest group relationships will be employed to shed further light on the micro-level dynamics surrounding lobbying tactics. This will pave the way for a clearer understanding of how synchronicity and the wealth of non-verbal cues of communication tactics allow interest groups to achieve greater responsiveness from policy-makers.

Moreover, future research should also explore the 'follow-on' effects, if any, of questioning on the production and implementation of public policy. Specifically, case study or quantitative research could investigate whether questions motivated by lobbying lead to further government action: either via new legislation or changes to how existing legislation is implemented via executive actions. But with regard to legislative behaviour the findings from this study are clear: For better or worse, lobbying impacts what legislators do, and different communication tactics can be more or less effective.

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Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at [link to source – publisher will add doi at proof]

Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at [link to source – publisher will add doi at proof]

Replication materials

Supporting data and materials for this article can be accessed on the Taylor & Francis website, doi: [publisher to add the doi at proof].

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

[1] The respective lobbying record and the parliamentary questions are available online:
- Standards in Public Office Commission, Lobbying Return 24037, URL: https://www.lobbying.ie/return/24037/killybegs-fishermens-organisation-ltd (last accessed 17 June 2020)
- Houses of the Oireachtas, Written Question 41517/17, URL: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2017-10-03/57/#pq_57 (last accessed 17 June 2020)
- Houses of the Oireachtas, Oral Question 41518/17, URL: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2017-10-03/39/#pq_39 (last accessed 17 June 2020)

[2] The returns provide a reliable measure of interest group activities as the sector is actively policed by a Standards in Public Office Commission. Failing to register, to make timely returns, or providing misleading, incomplete, or inaccurate information can result in legal action and monetary fines and imprisonment for up to two years. The Commission also informed the authors at their request that it is not aware of any systematic reporting biases.

[3] Standards in Public Office Commission (2019), Second Legislative Review of the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015: Submission by the Standards in Public Office Commission. URL: https://www.lobbying.ie/media/6224/sipo-submission-10-may-2019-1.pdf (last accessed 8 April 2020)

[4] Houses of the Oireachtas Open Data APIs, URL: https://api.oireachtas.ie (last accessed 8 April 2020)

[5] Counting tactics per legislator across interest groups also entails the decision to not study interest groups as networks. This minimises the issue of autocorrelation that may otherwise arise when using legislator-interest group dyads as the unit of analysis (i.e., the risk of non-independent data where legislators are connected to one another via interest groups).

[6] Virtual meetings and conference calls had to be excluded from our analysis because they were never or only 9 times used respectively.

[7] For instance, meetings organised by interest groups with prior access are still far more effective than e-mails from interest groups with prior access.

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Tables

Table 1 Classification of lobbying tactics in a time/space matrix

Temporal dimension	Different space	Same space
Synchronous	Virtual meetings Phone calls Conference calls	Meetings Lobby days Events/receptions Informal communication
Asynchronous	Letters E-mails Submissions Social media	Billboards*

Spatial dimension

Notes: Table from Calefato and Lanubile (2010, 286) adapted to lobbying tactics listed by the Irish Register of Lobbying. * Billboards are not a category of the Irish Register of Lobbying, but have been retained from the original table to give examples for every quadrant.

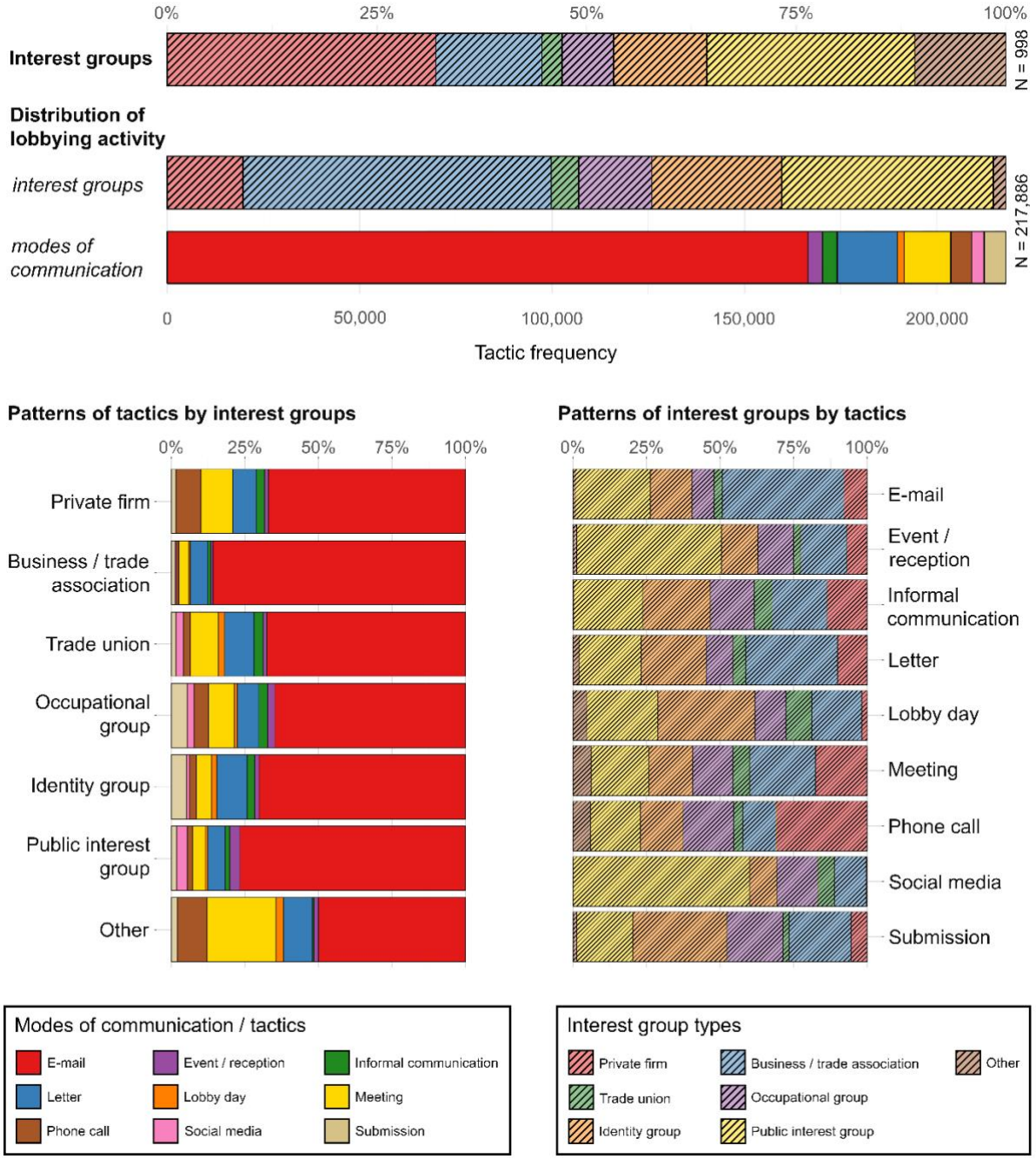
Table 2 The effect of lobbying tactics on the number of questions a parliamentarian tables in a certain policy area

		Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Tactics				
Synchronous	Same space	Meetings	1.168*** (0.014)	1.061*** (0.009)
		Lobby days	1.128*** (0.029)	1.044* (0.021)
		Events / receptions	1.096*** (0.020)	1.037* (0.017)
		Informal communication	1.056*** (0.014)	1.037*** (0.010)
Asynchronous	Different space	Phone calls	1.075*** (0.020)	1.046** (0.017)
		Letters	1.050*** (0.006)	1.026*** (0.005)
		Social media	1.033*** (0.006)	1.020** (0.007)
		Submissions	1.025*** (0.007)	1.022*** (0.006)
		E-mails	1.003 (0.003)	1.003 (0.002)
Controls				
		Profession		1.248** (0.102)
		Party spokesperson		4.506*** (0.508)
		Party leadership		0.981 (0.062)
		Total questions		1.005*** (0.001)
		Government party		0.883 (0.355)
		Policy area salience		1.484*** (0.084)
Fixed Effects				
		Parliamentarian	Yes	Yes
		Quadrimester	Yes	Yes
		Policy area	Yes	Yes
Diagnostics				
		Pseudo R^2	0.56	0.63
		BIC	113,226.20	109,617.36

Notes: Negative binomial regression models. Table reports incidence rate ratios. Standard errors are clustered by parliamentarians. Pseudo R^2 refers to the adjusted Kullback-Leibler divergence-based R^2. N = 22,848. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

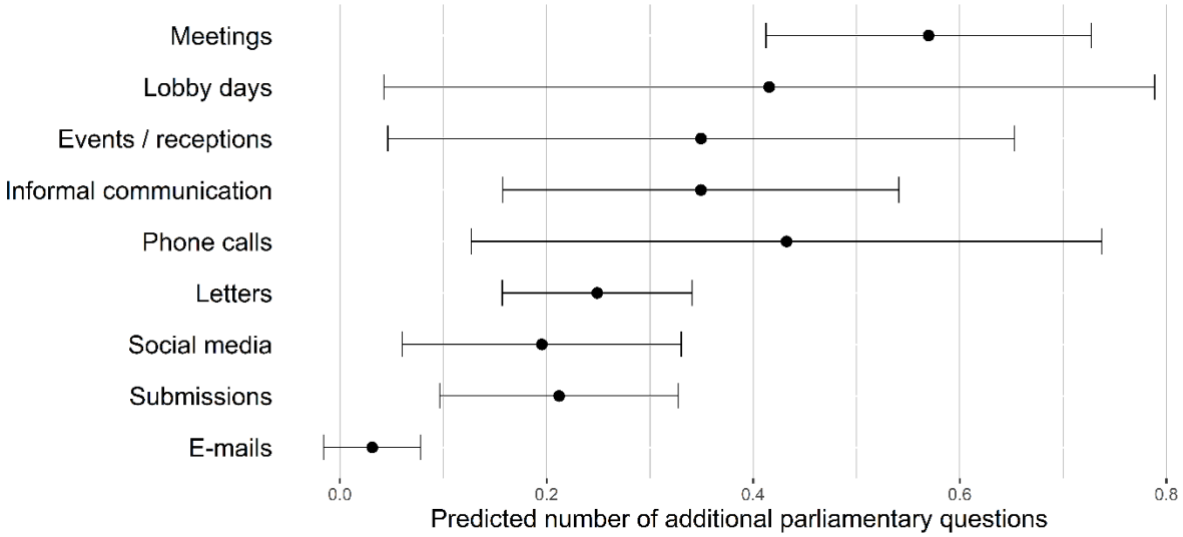
Figures

Figure 1 Patterns of lobbying tactics and interest groups



Notes: The Other category comprises hobby/leisure groups, state-affiliated organisations, and individuals. The definitions of the remaining interest group types are provided in Online Appendix O, the underlying data are reported in Online Appendix P.

Figure 2 Average marginal effects



Notes: Estimations are based on results from Model 2. 95% confidence intervals.