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# Interest Group Access to the Bureaucracy, Parliament and the Media

## Abstract

A key issue for interest groups and policy makers is the ways through which organized interests voice their interests and influence public policy. This article combines two perspectives on interest group representation to explain patterns of interest group access to different political arenas. From a resource exchange perspective it argues that access to different political arenas is discrete as it is determined by the match between the supply and demands of interest groups and gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters. From a partly competing perspective, it is argued that access is cumulative and converges around wealthy and professionalized groups. Based on a large-scale investigation of group presence in Danish political arenas, the analyses show a pattern of *privileged pluralism*. This describes a system where multiple political arenas provide opportunities for multiple interests, but where unequally distributed resources produce cumulative effects, i.e. the same groups have high levels of arena access.

Interest groups are central to political representation and thus to the public policy agenda and public policy output. Groups voice their concerns in the media, lobby politicians and seek access to bureaucrats. Although complicated to ascertain group influence, it is indisputable that many interest groups have decisive political influence (Baumgartner et al. 2011; Dür 2007). For decades, scholars have debated the extent to which interest group systems provide different societal groups with equal opportunities for representation (Dahl 1961; Olson 1971; Schattschneider 1975). The underlying premise is that diversity in group representation is a democratic good – but many studies have found significant bias in the group system, with overrepresentation of privileged groups such as business interests (Danielian and Page 1995; Schattschneider 1975: 34-35; Schlozman 1984; Schlozman et al. 2012; Walker 1991: 3).

Evidence suggests that group representation varies across political arenas (Bouwen 2004; Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984: 74-75). This issue is crucial because interest groups striving to affect public policy seek access to different arenas (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2005; Kriesi et al. 2007). Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 35) argue that it is democratically less important whether a particular venue confers advantages to specific groups than whether multiple venues exist in a political system. Different political arenas provide opportunities for different groups to voice their concerns. If, on the other hand, the same types of groups dominate all political arenas, losers in one arena have nowhere to turn.

We define a political arena as a political institution of importance for political decisions and/or the political agenda of a society.<sup>1</sup> We focus on interest group access in the bureaucracy, parliament and the media in order to address the extent to which different arenas permit different

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1. Political arena is a broader concept than policy venue (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). A policy venue is a group or institution in society that has authority to make decisions concerning an issue. Decision-making capacity is not a defining characteristic of a political arena and arenas also include institutions important to the political agenda such as the media.

groups and types of interests to be politically represented. Existing studies of group access across political arenas are mainly descriptive (Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984). We go beyond description by conducting a systematic test of the importance of group type and resources in explaining access to the bureaucracy, parliament and the media.

The article juxtaposes two perspectives on arena access: one emphasizing diversity in arena access and one arguing that access can be expected to be cumulative across arenas. The expectation about diversity is based on a theoretical argument focusing on resource exchange between interest groups and gate-keepers in political arenas. In contrast to previous studies (Beyers and Kerremanns 2007; Bouwen 2004; Hansen 1991) we incorporate not only the resources that groups may supply to bureaucrats, politicians and reporters, but also the different priorities groups may ascribe to different goods to be won in different arenas. Interest groups are seen as rational actors screening political arenas for the best prospects for success (Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012; see however Pralle 2003). Group access is a result of an exchange with gatekeepers in different arenas (Bouwen 2004; Braun 2012: 7; Öberg et al. 2011). Crucially, the goals and assets of interest groups vary. For example, groups interested in affecting the political agenda will direct much attention to the media, while groups seeking influence on preparation and implementation of policies are more likely to approach bureaucrats (Gais and Walker 1991). The value of different assets also varies across arenas (Bouwen 2004). A group may provide detailed technical information valuable to a bureaucrat preparing a policy decision, but not very attractive for a journalist selling newspapers. Consequently we expect patterns of group representation to differ across arenas. From a partly competing perspective, we stress that group access to different arenas may be cumulative. Here, spillover effects and the relevance of general resources are central. Some group resources such as finances and staff are relevant for access across all political arenas. Further, access to one arena may positively affect access to other arenas – for example the news media are more likely to report on actors with insider positions in the political system (Bennett 1990).

The empirical analysis of these different perspectives on arena access draws on a study of Danish interest groups. Denmark has traditionally been one of the world's more corporatist countries, but in recent decades corporatism has been in decline (Öberg et al. 2011). At the same time, parliament has gained in relevance as target of interest groups, and the media has become an increasingly important political arena (Binderkrantz 2005; Rommetvedt et al. 2013). Our analysis draws on a unique dataset combining measures of group access across three arenas with information from a survey of all national interest groups. This allows us to trace each individual group as it appears in the media, in the bureaucracy, and in parliament – and to link this with survey data on group resources.

After discussing the conceptualization of group diversity, the article proceeds to a discussion of the resource exchange model of group access and the competing model of cumulative access. Subsequently, research design and data are presented followed by the empirical analysis.

### **Bias and diversity in arena access**

The issue of diversity versus bias in interest group systems is classic. Ever since Schattschneider (1960/1975) questioned the pluralist assumption of a relatively well-balanced group system, scholars have investigated different groups' success in mobilization and political influence (Baumgartner and Leech 1998: 100-19; Jordan et al. 2012; Lowery and Gray 2004; Schlozman et al. 2012; Walker 1991; Wonka et al. 2010). One challenge is that there is no way to know what unbiased group presence would look like. Some groups may be compared to relevant societal groups (see Schlozman 1984), but often it is not feasible to establish how their "natural" presence in the group system might look (Baumgartner and Leech 1998: 93). It is, however, possible to compare the share of different types of groups in politically mobilized interest group populations to the level of political access obtained (Danielian and Page 2006) and to establish the relative success of groups across different political venues (Halpin et al. 2012).

In addressing diversity in political voice it is essential to capture the nature of the interests being represented in political arenas (Schlozman 2012: 30). Because our main purpose is to explain and understand the representation of citizens through the channel of interest groups, we define interest groups as membership organizations working to obtain political influence. Group members may be individuals, firms, governmental institutions or other interest groups (Jordan et al. 2004: 200). Within the set of groups delimited by this definition we find groups representing very different types of members or causes – some organize well-defined sectional groups, for example related to the labor market, whereas others work for broader causes like animal protection or human rights. A division into the following group categories speaks to the main themes of the literature: 1) business groups, 2) trade unions, 3) institutional groups, 4) identity groups, 5) public interest groups, 6) professional groups and 7) leisure groups.

A recurrent theme in the interest group literature is the overrepresentation of business interests. From Schattschneider's (1975: 34-35) ascertainment that the "heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" to more recent accounts, a main concern has been to determine the relative (over-)weight of business interests in the pressure group system (Danielian and Page 1994; Schlozman et al. 2012). In many respects, trade unions constitute the immediate counterpart to business, and in corporatist settings these group types are traditionally the quintessential participants (Molina and Rhodes 2002; Schmitter 1974). Institutional providers of public or semi-public services – that is, associations of local authorities, schools, museums and other types of institutions – have also played a prominent role in corporatist arrangements. Another crucial concern is the political representation of groups and causes not related to the market and/or vocations, professions or institutions. Berry (1999) argues that such citizen groups in US politics has been on the rise, while others are more skeptical about the role played by representatives of public interests and disadvantaged constituencies (Schlozman 2012: 34). The broad class of citizen groups, however, masks the important distinction between organizations that seek public goods and those seeking benefits for limited constituencies such as patients or

minority groups (Dunleavy 1991; Schlozman 2012: 31). Consequently, our category of “identity groups” covers sectional groups, e.g. for patients, minorities, the elderly, students and other non-labor market groups. “Public interest groups,” meanwhile – consistent with Berry’s definition in his early work (1977: 7) – encompasses groups seeking collective goods, the achievement of which would not selectively or materially benefit their members or activists. These latter groups have been argued to face particularly harsh obstacles in organizing for political influence, and in effect to be underrepresented in political arenas (Olson 1971; Schlozman et al. 2012: 277).

We also include a category of “professional groups,” representing, e.g. specific societies of doctors, and one of “leisure groups,” including groups organized in relation to interests such as sports or religious and spiritual interests. These groups are numerous, but their political participation is often rather peripheral because their main purposes are non-political (Jordan et al. 2004).

### ***Political arenas: bureaucracy, parliament and media***

Interest groups participate in various stages of political processes, from formation of the political agenda to the eventual implementation of policies (Bernhagen and Trani 2012: 50). Throughout these processes, they seek access to administrative and parliamentary decision makers and reporters (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Beyers 2004; Eising 2007a). While Congress has been at the center of much US research, European scholars have traditionally been preoccupied with group interaction with bureaucrats (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Rhodes and Marsh 1992). In reaction to the increasing political importance of the media, this arena has attracted increased attention (Bernhagen and Trani 2012; Binderkrantz 2012; Danielian and Page 1994; Kepplinger 2002; Kollman 1998).

Ultimately interest groups are relevant insofar as they channel interests into political influence. A crucial step in gaining influence is accessing political arenas. Access signifies political importance and eventually a higher likelihood of political influence (Eising 2007b:

387). As argued by Hansen, “the policy views of advocates with access receive consistent, serious consideration” (1991: 11). Groups that do not take part in the policy process are less likely to successfully defend their interests, as acutely captured in the Washington adage, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” (Schlozman et al. 2012: 309). Access does not necessarily imply influence, but it constitutes a necessary step towards influencing the political agenda or decisions (Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007b). Contacts with members of parliament, access to relevant bureaucrats and presence in the media are relevant measures of interest group positions in these arenas – although other mechanisms may exist to counteract the influence of organized interests (Denzau and Munger 1986).

While this study is the first to systematically compare group access across arenas , there is some evidence that different arenas provide different types of groups with political opportunities. First, several studies have analyzed the strategies employed by interest groups and demonstrated variation in the extent to which different types of groups target political arenas (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2005; Kriesi et al. 2007). Second, a few studies have found different patterns of representation in different arenas (Halpin et al. 2012: 133; Salisbury 1984: 74-75). A common theme is that publicly visible arenas are more attractive to groups pursuing broad political goals, whereas business interests are more likely found in less visible arenas. In the next section we link this to an exchange model of arena access.

### *An exchange model of arena access*

Exchange theory constitutes a classic perspective within the interest group field and has been particularly prominent in accounts of group formation (Salisbury 1969). Group access to political arenas is seen as the result of an exchange of resources between interest groups and arena gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters. Resource dependencies matter because neither state institutions nor interest groups can autonomously pursue their political goals. The interaction of groups and gatekeepers can be seen as a series of interorganizational exchanges

based on interdependent relationships (Beyers and Kerremans 2007; Bouwen 2004: 339; Braun 2012; Pfeffer and Salancik 1987). Groups supply decision makers with relevant resources, and gain access and eventually political influence in return (Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007b; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hansen 1991; Woll 2007; Öberg et al. 2011).

Similarly, the media literature has described the relationship between reporters and their sources as an exchange of resources in which newsworthiness is continuously negotiated (Cook 2005).

These studies focus on the external constraints to arena access. However, there is another – often neglected – side to the exchange. Groups may have different preferences when seeking access (Pralle 2003: 240). To some groups, it is very important to “go public” in order to appeal to (potential) members. Other groups may prefer to work behind closed doors in order to strike deals on policy concessions. Following this reasoning, our argument has two elements: first, different types of groups possess resources of different composition. Some groups control *insider resources*, particularly relevant for inclusion in decision-making processes, while other groups score higher on *outsider resources*, which matter more in public arenas. Second, interest groups pursue diverse political goals, which affect the priority given to different arenas. Groups emphasizing *agenda setting* are more attracted to the media arena, while groups interested in affecting *policy decisions* are more likely to approach bureaucrats. In effect, group representation is expected to vary across political arenas.

In explaining group access to decision makers, many different resources have been cited as important. An influential strand of US scholarship emphasizes financial resources (Austen-Smith and Wright 1996; Hall and Wayman 1990). Other contributions have addressed intangible resources, such as the provision of expertise, political intelligence and propaganda (Hansen 1991: 3-5; Hall and Deardorff 2006: 72-74). Similarly, European contributions have pointed to the dependence of government institutions on groups for information, consent and active cooperation (Eising 2007b: 385). Corporatist and network scholars have described group access as an effect of groups’ ability to control their membership and contribute to the policy process by

moderating public opinion (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Rokkan 1966; Öberg et al. 2011: 367-8). In sum, *interest groups may possess insider resources consisting of information and expertise of relevance to the policy process on the one hand, and external control – e.g. of members – of relevance to the political fate of policies on the other. These resources are likely to affect the relative access of groups to decision makers.*

Insider resources can be contrasted to *outsider resources*, which are of particular relevance for group access to public arenas. Kollman (1998) emphasized the ability of groups to mobilize citizens in collective action efforts. Groups also differ in the extent to which their causes have broad public appeal. Groups pursuing issues of relevance only to narrow societal sectors have fewer outsider resources – in the form of the ability to make claims of broad appeal – than groups focusing on issues of broad societal relevance (Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012). Groups also differ in the extent to which their causes correspond with news values. Wolfsfeld (2011: 72) argues that the media are, above all, dedicated to telling good stories, implying for example that stories involving drama and conflict are more likely to appear in the news. News value theory also emphasizes personalization as a factor affecting the likelihood that stories are reported by the media (Galtung and Ruge 1973). Groups able to provide reporters with personalized stories therefore have a competitive advantage. Accordingly, *interest groups may possess outsider resources due to their representation of causes with broad public appeal or their ability to provide reporters with stories of news value. These resources are likely to affect the relative access of groups to public arenas.*

The second element in our argument is the political goals of groups. Previous accounts of resource exchange assume that interest groups interact with decision makers in order to gain influence (Bouwen 2002; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hansen 1991; Öberg et al. 2011). A more nuanced view of group goals includes attempts at agenda setting alongside influence on policy decisions (Bernhagen and Trani 2012: 50). Interest groups are expected to include different political goals in their portfolios, but the balance between goals is likely to vary. *Groups*

*focusing relatively more on agenda setting are therefore expected to seek access to public arenas to a higher degree than groups focusing relatively more on affecting decision making. These latter groups are more likely to seek access to decision-making processes.*

In relating these speculations to group types, we expect sectional groups – for example, trade unions, business groups and institutional groups – to be relatively more concerned with affecting policy decisions of interest to their membership. Public interest groups are likely to give higher priority to agenda setting. These groups generally work for broad causes and are interested in communicating to rather diffuse sets of members and potential members. Here, the crucial goal of group maintenance therefore affects the political work of groups (Berkhout 2013; Gais and Walker 1991: 105; Dunleavy 1991; Lowery 2007).

Public interest groups are expected to be well-equipped with outsider resources, because they work for broad causes and may raise issues with public appeal. Many identity groups also possess outsider resources due to their representation of groups such as the elderly or patients, which enables them to make use of personalized angles. Insider resources, meanwhile, are predominantly found among groups representing interests related to the private or public sector – that is, business groups, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups. They possess important information and expertise and represent constituencies that are important to societal production (Rokkan 1966).

Likelihood of arena access increases when the goals and resources of a group fit the needs of the relevant arena. Bureaucracy constitutes the predominant insider arena, where political decisions are prepared and implemented and important information is exchanged. To prepare technically implementable and politically feasible decisions, bureaucrats need technical information and information about the political support of core actors. This makes for a match between bureaucracy and business groups, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups. These groups possess relevant resources and pursue goals related to specific decisions, which draws them towards bureaucrats.

A similar match is found for public interest groups and the media. The media is the most public arena and – reporters – are interested in news stories with broad appeal and/or a personalized angle. Public interest groups are, on balance, expected to be more focused on agenda setting, and their causes have broad appeal. Many identity groups also possess resources – in terms of delivering personalized stories – that are relevant for public arenas. While identity groups are expected to be more interested in affecting decisions of relevance for their membership than in public agendas, drawing them towards decision-making arenas, their lack of insider resources may imply them to be better represented in the media than in the bureaucracy.

Parliament is a more ambiguous arena, as it plays an important role in decision making and as a more open forum for agenda setting (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995). Legislators may value both insider and outsider resources. MPs actively involved in devising policy proposals (Eising 2007b: 385) may value the expertise of insider groups, while colleagues who seek to draw public attention to themselves and their political goals may be more interested in giving access to groups with outsider resources. Moreover, the role of parliament varies between presidential and parliamentary systems and within both systems. The Danish parliament is involved in agenda setting and specific decision making, but compared to other parliaments, it is relatively powerful in agenda control and less so in drafting legislation (Binderkrantz 2003; Mattson and Strøm 1995: 298-300). We therefore expect public interest groups and identity groups to be relatively well-represented in parliament, while groups with insider resources are likely to prioritize contact to bureaucrats.

In sum, we argue that the access of interest groups is a product of the match between the preferences and resources of groups, and the demand for resources on the part of the gatekeepers in different political arenas. Therefore we expect unions, business groups, institutional groups and professional groups to be best represented in the administrative arena, while identity groups and public interest groups are more likely to be found in the media and parliament. Leisure

groups have neither insider nor outsider resources. Their political involvement is typically rather sporadic, and we expect them to be relatively poorly represented across all arenas.

*A competing perspective: Cumulative arena access in arena access*

The exchange model posits that the resource exchange between groups and gatekeepers varies across arenas. A competing theoretical perspective emphasizes factors that lead to cumulativeness in group access across media, parliament and the bureaucracy.

Importantly, resource differentials may matter for access to all arenas. We know from previous research that group resources such as finances and staff dedicated to monitoring and lobbying affect the political role of interest groups (Binderkrantz 2005; Eising 2007b). These resources may be relevant across arenas, as they affect the ability of groups to engage professionally with gatekeepers. All gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters – are busy people dealing with crowded and volatile political agendas. They are likely to prefer clear and constructive communication that suits the political reality of the moment. Group finances and staff resources serve as a proxy for this professionalization. Lobbying efficiency is likely to be the product of a group's financial resources – and especially the amount of money invested in a professional secretariat. Therefore, in contrast to the exchange perspective it is expected that group finances and staff will increase group access across all political arenas.

Access to one arena may also spill over to other arenas, leading to cumulative access.

Bennett (1990) argues that reporters “index” the range of voices and viewpoints in the news according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate. Cook (1998) discusses how public officials are seen as more reliable sources than other actors. The effect is a systematic bias in actor appearance favoring public officials (Bennett 1990: 106; Thrall 2006: 408). By the same reasoning, interest groups with privileged access to decision-makers possess inherent news value because of their access to public decision-making. The groups that dominate the inside game of politics will, according to this reasoning, also be predominant in the media

arena (Thrall 2006: 408). Similar spillover effects may be present, from media to parliament, where media attention may be instrumental in attracting the attention of politicians (Berkhout 2013: 228), and from parliament to the bureaucracy, where bureaucrats may anticipate the reactions of legislators and provide access to groups that enjoy legislative attention.

The empirical analysis juxtaposes these two theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, we expect different patterns of group access in different arenas. Business groups, trade unions, professional groups and institutional groups are expected to be *relatively* well-represented in the administrative arena, and public interest groups and identity groups to fare *relatively* better in the media and parliament. At the same time, general financial and personnel resources are relevant in all arenas, and spillover effects may lead to convergence in arena access.

## **Research design**

The concept of access implies that groups have successfully entered the relevant political arena and gained the attention of bureaucrats, politicians or the media. Previous studies of access have utilized a wide range of methods, such as surveys to groups, interviews with decision-makers and appearances in the media or on public boards (Bouwen 2004; Braun 2012; Christiansen et al. 2010; Danielian and Page 1994). Reflecting our interest in general conclusions about the involvement of groups in different arenas, we prioritize measures allowing for large-scale analysis of access. We use measures of: 1) group representation in public committees, 2) group meetings with parliamentarians/parliamentary committees and corresponding parliamentary responses and 3) group appearances in newspapers.

In the administration, group representation on public committees constitutes a primary mechanism of incorporating interest groups in decision making (Christiansen et al. 2010). We have established a database of all committees active on December 31, 2010. All committee members have been registered and the unit of analysis is number of group appearances in public committees. 1,898 administrative appearances by groups were registered.

For parliament, a main data source in previous studies has been letters sent to parliamentary committees (Binderkrantz 2003). This measure is not suitable here because it does not indicate the passing of a threshold of access. Instead we rely on parliamentary responses to interest group approaches as indicator of group access. We have recorded all letters sent to parliamentary standing committees and traced whether they led to: 1) a committee question to the minister, 2) a question in the general session of parliament, and/or 3) an interrogation of the minister. Further, we have registered every meeting (deputation) that groups have with parliamentary committees, and have used data from the calendars of a selection of members of parliament.<sup>2</sup> These measures were combined in a database with a total of 931 parliamentary appearances for the parliamentary year 2009/10.

Media access is operationalized as appearance in a news story. Two large national newspapers with opposite political leanings were selected for analysis (*Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*). The papers' first sections and business sections were searched for articles with interest group appearance. Front pages were registered for a full year (from July 1 2009 to June 30 2010), and the remaining pages were recorded for half a year. We omitted negative appearances as they cannot meaningfully be seen as constituting group access to the media arena. We registered a total of 3,673 media appearances.

Another crucial step in evaluating arena access is establishing a list of the Danish interest group population. We constructed a population list relying on an existing list of previously identified groups (see Christiansen 2012). The list was updated through internet-based searches

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<sup>2</sup> We contacted 44 individual MPs and four party secretaries, meaning that we contacted 87 of the 179 MPs in the Danish parliament either directly or via their parties. Two parties did not want to participate. In total we obtained access to the calendars of 33 MPs. Data are not perfectly representative; however, when we conducted the multivariate analyses excluding these observations we arrived at similar results.

of group names, identifying name changes, mergers and abolishment of groups. All groups identified in either of the indicators of access to political arenas as well as groups found in online group directories have been added to the list. The final list included 2,541 groups.

To obtain information about group resources, a survey was administered to the group population. 1,645 groups – corresponding to 65 percent – responded to the survey, and 1,109 of these that reported to be politically active are used as the reference population of interest groups. Measures of group resources include annual group income and number of employees working with politics (contacts to bureaucrats, politicians or reporters as well as conducting analyses and political process monitoring). To obtain linearity the measures were logarithmically transformed and recoded to range from 0 to 1. The full questionnaire as well as the frequency distributions of group answers may be found at <http://interarena.dk/>.

For each group we combine information obtained from the survey with access data for the three arenas. For each arena, groups are given an appearance score, which reports how many times the group appeared. The maximum number of appearances was 1260 for the administrative arena, 22 for the parliamentary arena and 254 for the media arena. Finally, all groups were coded into different group categories. This categorization was performed by the authors, with a reliability test of 100 groups resulting in a Cohen's Kappa of 0.906.

### **Interest group representation across arenas: bias or diversity?**

The combination of data on group appearances across three arenas allows us to investigate differences and similarities in group access. Do we find different groups represented in the media, parliament and the bureaucracy, or do we find similar patterns of representation between the arenas? Table 1 presents an overview of the 852 unique interest groups identified in at least one arena and their appearances in the bureaucracy, parliament and the media.

**Table 1 here**

Most groups are found in one arena only. In fact, 64 percent have been identified in only one of the three arenas, and all arenas have a rather high number of uniquely active groups. On the other hand, a significant number of groups – 15 percent – occur in all three arenas, while the remaining groups appear in any combination of two arenas. These patterns correspond to previous findings of relatively little overlap between interest groups identified in different data sources (Berkhout and Lowery 2008; Halpin et al. 2012).

An important part of the picture, however, is shown in figure 1. While groups occurring in all arenas only constitute 15 percent of all groups gaining access, they account for remarkable 67 percent of all appearances. In contrast groups only appearing in one arena constitute 65 percent of the actors gaining access but only account for 16 percent of all appearances. This indicates strong bias in political attention and mirrors previous studies of media access also finding attention to be unequally distributed across groups (Andrews and Caren 2010; Danielian and Page 1994: 1067-1068). While there is generally little overlap in group presence across arenas, the pattern is different for the most dominant groups. Five groups – The Danish Consumers Council, The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, The United Federation of Danish Workers, The Confederation of Danish Industry, and The Danish Chamber of Commerce – are among the ten most dominant in all three arenas. Alongside the many groups accessing only one arena, we thus find an elite corps of groups with high access across the board. This is our first indication that factors driving towards cumulative access on the one hand and arena-specific dynamics on the other combine to account for group access to different arenas.

### **Figure 1**

Table 2 displays the distribution of group types. For each arena, the first column shows the distribution of unique interest groups, while the second column reports the distribution of all appearances in the arena. As a standard of comparison, the table includes the distribution of the population of politically active interest groups as identified in the group survey.

**Table 2 here**

The pattern of group access in different arenas reveals a number of points. First, the contrast between business representation in bureaucracy and the two other arenas is marked. Those who view business groups as particularly dominant political players will find overwhelming support in the patterns of access in the bureaucracy. In fact, 41 percent of all seats on public boards and committees are occupied by business representatives. In the media and parliament, the share of business groups is closer to (or even a little lower than) their share in the general group population, but regardless of indicator, they are the best-represented type of group.

Trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups were also assumed to be well-equipped for interacting with bureaucrats. Here, evidence is mixed. Unions constitute a larger share of the groups winning access to the bureaucracy than their share of the general population. However, their representation is broadly similar across arenas: the performance of unions at the administrative arena does not seem to be any better than in other arenas. Institutional groups display almost the same pattern, though it should be noted that their high share of total access is mainly driven by two large groups representing local and regional authorities: Local Government Denmark and Danish Regions. Professional groups, meanwhile, are underrepresented in the bureaucracy compared to their share of the general population. This may be a result of these groups being less politically active. Nevertheless, professional groups are better represented in the bureaucracy than in the other political arenas. This supports the expectation that the goals and resources of professional groups fit the preferences of bureaucrats better than the preferences of politicians and journalists.

A notable contrast to business groups is found among identity groups and public interest groups, which were expected to align more closely with the logic of the public and agenda-oriented arenas. Corresponding to this line of reasoning, neither group type has much success with accessing administration forums. Identity groups constitute 14 percent of the group population, but occupy only 4 percent of public committee seats. . Public interest groups fare better, but their administrative representation is still far below their share of the population.

In parliament and the media, the representation of identity and public interest groups is a bit larger than their population shares, and especially in parliament these groups account for a high share of total appearances. For identity groups this could be a result of their ambition to affect decisions relevant to their membership combined with their lack of resources attractive to the bureaucracy. However, in contrast to the expectations of the exchange perspective the total media access of identity and public interest groups is actually smaller than their population share. The diversity among public interest and identity groups appearing in the media is high and they account for a relatively large share of all groups mentioned, but the media attention that these groups are able to attract does not equal the share they constitute in the population of organizations. This means that there is less attention per group for these group types which may relate to their general financial and staff resource, which we turn to below.

Finally, as expected, leisure groups are not very present in either arena. With a share of 12.7 percent in the group population, their levels of 3.0, 4.5 and 2.4 percent respectively of arena appearances are not impressive. As acknowledged many of these groups – e.g. sports associations – do not primarily pursue political goals (Jordan et al. 2004).

Generally, we find diverging patterns of access in different arenas. This corroborates the conclusion of Halpin and colleagues (2012: 133) that the lens through which one chooses to view group mobilization is crucial for what is found. Particularly, the administrative arena is relatively dominated by business groups, while the other arenas exhibit a much higher share of identity group and public interest group activity. It is interesting that the patterns differ according to whether we look at mere presence – appearing at least once in an arena – or level of access. This corresponds with previous findings that a few dominant groups are able to attract much attention, with many other groups appearing infrequently (Danielian and Page 1994: 1067-1068).

### ***Group types or group resources? Explaining arena access***

In this section we contrast the two competing perspectives on arena access. Table 3 presents the result of multivariate analyses of arena access, including dummy variables for group type and resource variables measuring income and number of political employees. Due to the nature of our dependent variables – discrete counts of access – we estimate count models. Because data are characterized by overdispersion, the negative binomial regression model is the most appropriate choice (Long and Freese 2006: 372).<sup>3</sup>

**Table 3 here**

When we compare business groups with other groups with insider resources – that is, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups – their patterns of arena access are in all instances not significantly different.<sup>4</sup>

The representation of identity groups and public interest groups is clearly different from that of business groups. The results support the expectation that identity groups and public interest groups are more present in open, public arenas than in closed administrative circles of

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3. Since we compare the population of groups with groups accessing specific arenas in one year there are many zeros in the data. Consequently, we have tested the appropriateness of our model against a zero-inflated negative binomial regression. The Vuong test indicates that a zero-inflated model would provide a better fit, while plotting the predicted counts against the observed counts indicates that the negative binomial model provides the best fit. Since our theoretical expectations do not indicate some groups always to obtain zero access to political arenas, negative binomial regressions are reported in the analyses (Long and Freese 2006: 405-414).

<sup>4</sup> We use business groups as reference category to be able to show differences between business and other types of interest groups in the model. We have run the analyses using the least political active groups – leisure groups – as reference category. Business groups are significantly different from this group type across all arenas, but the coefficient is almost twice as large in the administration compared to the two other arenas.

decision making. If we compare identity groups and public interest groups to business groups, their levels of administrative access are 42 percent and 47 percent lower, respectively. In contrast, their levels of access to the media and parliament are between 64 and 236 percent higher than that of business groups. Interpreting these differences, it is important to remember that we compare groups *controlled* for the impact of staff and finances, hence the findings do not contrast the pattern shown in table 2; business groups do gain quite substantial access to parliament and media as well. The analysis also affirms low levels of access for leisure groups. .

The role of finances and staff is rather constant across different arenas. The number of political employees positively affects access to all arenas. High income also leads to more access to the bureaucracy and the media, while it does not significantly affect levels of access in parliament – or perhaps more correctly, it does so only through the effect of income on the number of political employees.<sup>5</sup> The amount of change related to these general resources is rather large, with changes in access between 108 and 162 percent as a group's value on political employees changes one standard deviation.

The effect of finances and staff supports the argument that the same factors are important for accessing different arenas. A more direct test is whether access to one arena spills over to other arenas. As argued above, a core argument in the media literature is the overrepresentation of actors and views from official decision-making circles (Bennett 1990; Cook 1998). Similarly, it may be speculated that officials pay attention to media appearances by groups and are more likely to give access to groups regularly appearing in the media. We consequently face a problem of endogeneity in testing the presence of spillover effects. Rather than including access to other arenas in the multivariate models, we have tested the partial correlations between the measures of arena access, controlling for the other independent variables included in the models above. All measures of access turn out to be significantly and positively correlated (at the 0.001 level). Even

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<sup>5</sup> Pearson correlation between the transformed variables for group income and number of political employees is 0.573 and significant at the 0.001 level.

when we control for resources and group type, access to one arena affects access to the others. The highest correlation is found between levels of access to the bureaucracy and to the media, which indicate that the media tends to give more attention to insider actors. Still the opposite effect could also be present: bureaucrats incorporating actors with high media presence in decision-making processes.

In relation to our two theoretical perspectives, there is ample evidence to support the logic of cumulative access. Access to one arena is correlated to accessing others, and resources such as professional secretariats are important determinants of access across all three arenas. We also find clear support for the alternative view – that different logics of resource exchange are present in different arenas, leading to different patterns of group access. Groups with insider resources are overrepresented in the bureaucracy, at the expense of identity and public interest groups. However, these groups are more likely to find their way into the political process through parliament and the media.

## **Conclusion**

Interest groups are active in multiple venues. While previous research (Bouwen 2004; Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984: 74-75) has found evidence of diverging patterns of access to different arenas, this article has provided the first systematic test of the relative importance of group type and resources in explaining access to the bureaucracy, parliament and the media. The answer is mixed as to whether these venues provide different groups with opportunities to be heard or, serve as multiple arenas for the same groups. On the one hand, many groups are present in one arena only. The existence of multiple arenas thus provides more groups with the opportunity to appear in a politically relevant context. On the other hand, a relatively small number of groups get the lion's share of access across all arenas, and money and professional staff make groups more successful in gaining access across arenas.

The bureaucracy is home to a particularly high number of business groups with 41 percent of all seats on public boards and committees in Denmark occupied by business representatives. The media and parliament provide better approximations of the diversity within the interest group population allowing the appearance of broad public interests and non-vocational constituents. The composition of the subpopulation of groups appearing in the media is closest to the pattern in the overall population of groups, whereas the composition of total access is most representative in parliament. The multivariate analyses lend further support to the divergent patterns of group access in different arenas, and thus to the idea that different resource exchange logics lie behind the involvement of groups in different arenas. At the same time, general resources such as money and staff are important across all arenas, indicating a logic of cumulative access alongside the logic of exchange.

To what extent can we expect the pattern of arena access found here to be repeated in other contexts? The content of the resource exchange in different arenas is likely to depend on the balance between arenas in a specific political system and on their institutional organization. For example, parliaments with more say in decision making are likely to attract more groups with insider resources. The Danish corporatist heritage may increase the overlap between the administrative and the media arena. While the specifics may differ, we expect the general theory of arena-specific resource exchanges to be generalizable beyond the Danish context. The conclusion that more diversity is present in the composition of group appearances than in the composition of all attention given to groups is also likely to be mirrored in other systems (Danielian and Page 1994: 1067-1068). Nevertheless, country-comparative studies would be instrumental in further mapping the factors affecting access to political arenas.

The provision of access to different group types on different political arenas can be seen as a pluralist trait. As Dahl (1961) argued, different resources are politically relevant and many groups have a chance to affect politics. Losers in one arena may find another in which to express their views. However, including more arenas does not bring us to pluralist utopia. Resources

matter for accessing all arenas, and an elite corps of groups has a particularly privileged position across political arenas. The best description of the system of group representation may thus be *privileged pluralism*. Different arenas offer options for different groups to access politics, but when it comes to the major players cumulative effects are evident, i.e. the same groups dominate across all arenas (see also Eising 2007b). Resources are paramount. Resources are found not only among the major business groups and unions, but also among institutional groups and public interest groups, of which a few large groups are allowed to speak on behalf of the general public interest.

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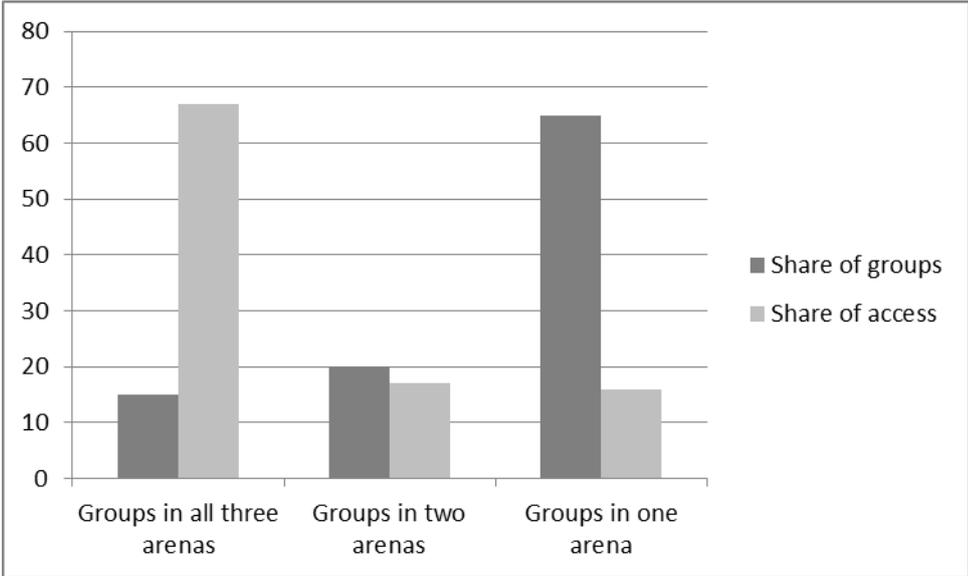
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**Table 1: Overlap in arena access, numbers and column percentages**

	Unique groups	
Arena	Numbers	Percentages
Only in the media	220	26
Only in parliament	150	18
Only in the bureaucracy	180	21
In media and parliament	65	8
In media and bureaucracy	65	8
In parliament and bureaucracy	40	5
In all arenas	132	15
All groups	852	100

**Figure 1: Interest group dominance. Share of groups and appearance, percent**



**Table 2: Patterns of arena access: unique groups and access, column percentages**

	Survey population	Administrative arena		Parliamentary arena		Media arena	
		Unique groups	Total access	Unique groups	Total access	Unique groups	Total access
Business groups	25.3	39.1	40.9	20.4	26.3	27.2	31.4
Trade unions	14.2	22.5	25.2	22.2	23.7	17.2	29.8
Institutional groups	6.3	7.4	13.7	7.8	7.1	5.8	12.0
Professional groups	11.5	7.4	4.2	4.7	2.1	7.9	1.6
Identity groups	14.4	9.1	4.3	18.6	18.4	15.8	9.1
Public interest groups	15.6	7.7	8.6	19.4	17.8	18.5	13.7
Leisure groups	12.7	6.7	3.0	7.0	4.5	7.7	2.4
N	1,109	417	1,964	387	931	482	3,673

**Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression with group access as dependent variables**

		Administrative arena		Parliamentary arena		Media arena	
		Coefficients (standard errors)	% change	Coefficients (standard errors)	% change	Coefficients (standard errors)	% change
Group type	Business groups	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
	Trade unions	-0.286 (0.208)	-24.8	0.293 (0.199)	34.1	0.392 (0.216)	47.9
	Institutional groups	-0.3654 (0.286)	-30.6	0.413 (0.264)	51.1	0.239 (0.301)	27.0
	Professional groups	0.485 (0.271)	62.5	-0.444 (0.361)	-35.9	-0.035 (0.303)	-3.5
	Identity groups	-0.539* (0.241)	-41.7	1.212*** (0.199)	235.9	0.603** (0.219)	82.8
	Leisure groups	-0.778*** (0.265)	-54.1	-0.465 (0.278)	-37.2	-0.948** (0.287)	-61.2
	Public interest groups	-0.625** (0.229)	-46.5	0.584** (0.198)	79.3	0.497* (0.227)	64.4
Resources	Political employees	5.439*** (0.534)	132.2	4.737*** (0.452)	108.3	6.231*** (0.582)	162.5
	Group income	4.564*** (0.890)	106.4	1.061 (0.592)	18.4	2.986*** (0.582)	60.6
	Constant	-4.363*** (0.591)		-2.543*** (0.396)		-3.253*** (0.404)	
	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.179		0.134		0.148	
	N	1,025		1,025		1,025	

Note: Levels of significance: \* = 0.05, \*\* = 0.01, \*\*\* = 0.001. The columns “% change” report the change in expected counts for a one-unit change in all dummies for group type and the change in expected count for one standard deviation change in the staff and income holding all other variables constant.