

Lobbying access during the Covid-19 pandemic

An analysis of communication frequency between interest organisations and political gatekeepers in Denmark and Sweden

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Abstract

This chapter assesses how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the communication frequency between interest organisations and political gatekeepers in the media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy in Denmark and Sweden. Based on cross-national survey data, it analyses how lobbying access to these important arenas of policy debate has changed after the outbreak of Covid-19. While there is only minor variation between the political arenas and countries, three clear findings stand out: 1) access to policy debates remained relatively stable: for over 60 per cent of organisations, lobbying access did not change in the first months of the pandemic; 2) access after the outbreak of the pandemic is strongly related to pre-pandemic access, meaning it favours previous insiders; and 3) access still changed for a considerable share of organisations. Especially organisations that considered themselves more heavily affected by the crisis enjoyed more lobbying access during the pandemic than less-affected organisations.

Keywords: lobbying access, interest groups, pandemic politics, political advocacy, political voice

Introduction

Both in normal circumstances and in times of crisis, a considerable share of public and political communication is organised collectively by different types of interest organisations. Whether it is the Danish sector organisation HORESTA communicating on behalf of the hotel, restaurant, and tourism sector, or the Swedish nongovernmental organisation (NGO) Astma och Allergiförbundet, promoting the interests of people with airway diseases and allergies, organisations that advocate or lobby for different economic, social, or environmental interests play a key role in public and political communication.

The global Covid-19 pandemic is no exception, and it might have even increased the importance of interest organisations. In the face of massive uncertainties and an urgent need for information provision – both from public authorities to various social and economic groups, and from different stakeholders to political decision-makers – interest organisations had the potential to act as important “transmission belts” (Junk, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2014) in information exchange. They can, for instance, communicate the needs and concerns of particularly vulnerable groups – for example, restaurant owners, the elderly, or citizens with preexisting health conditions – to decision-makers. At the same time, interest organisations can help ensure that new, relevant policy information, for instance, on economic compensation, health and safety measures, or vaccines, reaches members of these groups.

On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic has put both decision-makers and interest organisations under extreme pressure: The outbreak of the virus, and policy responses to limit it from spreading, put many actors in a literal state of emergency. This might also have brought out “the ugly” sides of lobbying (Fraussen et al., 2020a–c), such as a (more) biased pattern of communication with, and access to, gatekeepers. It is conceivable, for instance, that more resourceful groups were able to continue communicating with political gatekeepers, or that political access was mainly granted to previous “insiders” that already enjoyed frequent interaction with political decision-makers before the pandemic. It is an important empirical question, how these potential roles of interest organisations have played out in Nordic countries.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate patterns of lobbying access in Denmark and Sweden both before and shortly after the outbreak of Covid-19. Three research questions are addressed:

- RQ1. To what extent did lobbying access to key arenas of public policy change after the outbreak of Covid-19?
- RQ2. Did previous “insiders” enjoy significantly more access during the Covid-19 crisis than other organisations?
- RQ3. Was more frequent access granted to organisations that were most affected by the Covid-19 crisis?

Notably, access is here defined as a situation where an interest organisation “has entered a political arena [...] passing a threshold controlled by relevant gatekeepers” (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017: 307). Specifically, in this chapter, I investigate access to the media, government, parliament, and the bureaucracy as important arenas of political debate. Put differently, access entails that an interest organisation interacts directly with political gatekeepers in these arenas, for instance, by contributing to a news story or meeting with a parliamentarian or member of government.

The focus on interest organisations here includes diverse types of organisations that become active in public policy and political debates. The literature on lobbying often works with a behavioural definition of interest organisations as organised non-state actors, which try to influence policy discussions (see Baroni et al., 2014; Junk, 2019; Klüver, 2013). The interest organisations studied here include business associations, trade unions, professional groups, and NGOs. Moreover, individual firms are included, since it is increasingly acknowledged that they engage in corporate lobbying themselves (Aizenberg & Hanegraaf, 2020a), rather than only using (sectoral) umbrella organisations, such as HORESTA, to get a voice in the political debate and decision-making.

The next sections explain the chapter’s focus on access across four arenas of political communication, as well as two strands of expectations about how access to these arenas might have been affected by the outbreak of the pandemic. My argument builds on already published work that explores changes in access patterns since the outbreak of Covid-19 in nine European countries and at the EU level (Junk et al., 2022). In this chapter, I add to this aggregate analysis by presenting patterns in Denmark and Sweden individually. First, I provide an overview of the quantitative survey data from Denmark and Sweden that is used throughout the chapter to shed light on access patterns during the pandemic. After initial descriptive findings, I present the results of multivariate analyses to gauge the drivers of access patterns during the pandemic. Finally, I conclude the chapter by summing up that lobbying access in Denmark and Sweden after the outbreak of Covid-19 has been characterised both by continuity – that is, a tendency to provide access to previous insiders – as well as change, in the form of an adaptation of access patterns to include the most affected organisations in policy debates.

Access to four arenas

Studying patterns in lobbying access is important from a communication perspective. As Milbrath (1960: 35) wrote, lobbying can essentially be seen as “a communication process” between groups and legislators. The more recent political science literature acknowledges this and typically theorises the interactions between interest organisations and political gatekeepers as information

exchanges (Binderkrantz, 2020; De Bruycker, 2016; Flöthe, 2019; Klüver, 2012), including the (strategic) framing of positions (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008; De Bruycker, 2017; Junk & Rasmussen, 2019).

While an investigation of the specific frames – or the facts, arguments, and power (Milbrath, 1960) – in communication relationships is highly fruitful (see, e.g., Binderkrantz, 2020; Daviter, 2007; Ihlen et al., 2018; Junk & Rasmussen, 2019; McEntire et al., 2015), this chapter's focus lies on a necessary condition that comes before this: the *opportunity* to communicate with different decision-makers – that is, political access – after the outbreak of Covid-19.

Not least during a pandemic, the opportunity to share new information and suggest frames of different policy options can be pivotal. Decisions about vaccine plans, including the order and prioritisation of different groups in the population, for example, are likely to be affected by the types of interest groups that have the opportunity to provide information and affect the framing that dominates political debates.

Importantly, such debates and exchanges with lobbyists take place in multiple arenas at the same time. The literature on interest organisations and their lobbying practices typically distinguishes between inside and outside lobbying (e.g., Dür & Mateo, 2016; Hanegraaff et al., 2016; Junk, 2016; Kollman, 1998; Weiler & Brändli, 2015). Inside lobbying entails targeting – and perhaps reaching and influencing – policy-makers in various political institutions (see, e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Bouwen, 2004; Chalmers, 2013; De Bruycker, 2016; Dür et al., 2015; Klüver, 2011; Nelson & Yackee, 2012). Outside lobbying, on the other hand, is aimed at trying to impact media debates or public opinion, and thereby potentially (also) affecting policy-makers more indirectly (see Aizenberg & Müller, 2021; Beyers & De Bruycker, 2013; Binderkrantz, 2012; Binderkrantz et al., 2016; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Junk & Rasmussen, 2019; Thrall, 2006).

When evaluating the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic with a focus on opportunities for communication between interest organisations and political gatekeepers, both inside and outside forms of lobbying access are important. The appearances of interest organisations in the media and their interactions with journalists (i.e., important gatekeepers in the outside arena) might, for instance, have been affected in different ways than lobbying interactions with parliamentarians, cabinet members, or bureaucrats (i.e., gatekeepers in inside arenas). Moreover, there might be differences in how the pandemic has affected consultation practices and information exchange in these *different* inside arenas, for instance, because of temporary suspensions of parliamentary work, or a centralisation of power in the hands of central governments. For these reasons, this chapter distinguishes between four arenas of lobbying access: media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Junk et al., 2022). In the next section, I revisit the chapter's research questions and

introduce expectations about how the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected access to these arenas.

Access after the outbreak of Covid-19: Research questions and two strands of expectations

Firstly, it is an important empirical question to ask what political access looked like after the outbreak of Covid-19 across these arenas and compared with pre-pandemic access (see RQ1). Given that the spread of Covid-19 exerted a massive, system-wide shock (Sabatier, 1998) which affected the information needs of policy-makers as well as the interests of social and economic groups, it is probable that patterns in lobbying access granted by gatekeepers to active interest organisations were affected by the pandemic. This is why the analysis first looks at whether and how much access to the four arenas of public policy changed after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Secondly, in addition to the descriptive expectation of *some* form of pandemic-driven change in access patterns, it is vital to assess potential drivers of access after the outbreak of the pandemic (see RQ2 & RQ3).

Existing theories of interest organisations offer quite contrasting accounts of the levels of bias in interest group systems, and might, therefore, lead to different expectations when it comes to how these systems react to an external shock (Sabatier, 1998) such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Broadly speaking, one can contrast a more pessimistic view with a more optimistic one of how lobbying access can be expected to be distributed after the outbreak of the pandemic.

From a pessimistic or cautionary perspective on lobbying (Olson, 1965; Schattschneider, 1960), we might expect that access after the outbreak of the pandemic is likely to have been biased, and to have prioritised and potentially further empowered “the usual suspects”. These usual suspects could here be interest organisations that already enjoyed high levels of access before the crisis, that is, previous insiders in all arenas. Reasons for this expectation can be structural inequalities (Schattschneider, 1960) and collective action problems (Olson, 1965), but also practical limitations. Especially in times of crisis, it might be difficult for political gatekeepers to adjust their patterns of consultation and interaction to include new voices: Even though the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in immense new policy problems, interacting with those actors that gatekeepers already know and trust might be a convenient fall-back option, and can ensure that effective consultation practices do not come to a halt. Put differently, this perspective would expect only limited changes in access after the external shock and would mainly predict that it further empowered organisations with previous ties to gatekeepers. Furthermore, an important factor in such a view on empowering the usual suspects can be resources, that is, capacities on the supply side of lobbying: Some organisations are better equipped to

lobby effectively, for instance, due to higher staff capacities (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Mahoney, 2008). These resources should help them to respond more swiftly and effectively to the sudden external shock that the spread of Covid-19 exerted on political systems.

In contrast, a more optimistic take on interest group access after the outbreak of the pandemic would expect a higher level of responsiveness to the changes in policy problems and the underlying social and economic interests that were affected by the pandemic. Such a perspective goes hand-in-hand with pluralist theories of interest organisations (e.g., Truman, 1951), which expect that societal interests that are threatened or “disturbed” will organise and find a voice in the political process. Normatively, we can argue that it is desirable that the new social, economic, and political problems during the Covid-19 pandemic have led to a change in access patterns that prioritised giving voice to those organisations that represent more highly affected interests. Moreover, one can argue from the perspective of information exchange through lobbying that new information needs of gatekeepers during a crisis are arguably best met by organisations that are affected by it (Junk et al., 2022).

In the next section, I present the data used to address the chapter’s research questions, including testing these different expectations in Denmark and Sweden. While these two countries vary in their policy responses after the outbreak of the pandemic, no a priori expectations are formulated about whether or how access patterns vary *between* these countries. Instead, the data on the two cases are presented exploratively to assess potential similarities or differences between these two Nordic countries. Similarly, no explicit expectations are formulated regarding access to the different arenas (media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy), but in the empirical section, I carefully trace whether and how access patterns vary between them.

Data collection: Online surveys of interest organisations in Denmark and Sweden

The data for this chapter was collected as part of the international InterCov project (Interest Representation during the Coronavirus Crisis), which conducted its first wave of a cross-country survey of interest organisations in June–July 2020 to assess how the outbreak of Covid-19 had impacted lobbying practices in the first months of the pandemic. The survey was conducted in ten polities. In each of these, the survey was sent to stratified samples of the active interest group population to include approximately 150 organisations each in the following categories: 1) business organisations, 2) NGOs (i.e., public and ideational organisations), 3) professional organisations, 4) trade unions (limited by the number of existing unions in each country), as well as 5) large individual firms. To compile lists of the active interest group population, we relied on lobbying

registers as well as existing efforts by lobbying scholars (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020b; Crepaz & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz et al., 2020; Naurin & Boräng, 2012; Pritoni, 2019) (for more information about the sampling and data collection, see Junk et al., 2022).

In this chapter, comparative results from the Danish and Swedish survey are presented. In addition, a series of focus group interviews were conducted in Denmark in early 2021, which also serve as background information for this chapter.

Response rates to the online survey in Denmark and Sweden lie at approximately 42 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, which is high compared with the other countries and the typical response rates in surveys of interest organisations (Marchetti, 2015). In total, 529 organisations (304 in Denmark and 225 in Sweden) completed the survey to the end (for a discussion of non-response bias, refer to Junk et al., 2022).

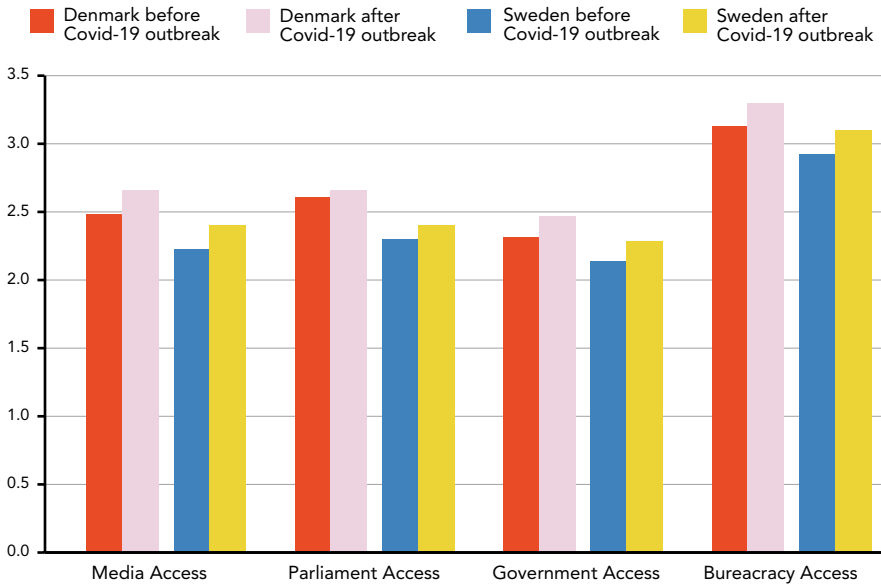
The main focus in this chapter lies on items in this survey that measured 1) the frequency of access to the four political arenas *after* the outbreak of the pandemic (March–June 2020), against the baseline of 2) the frequency of access *before* the outbreak of the pandemic. More specifically, the survey asked respondents to rate, on a five-point scale from “never” (1) to “almost on a daily basis” (5), how frequently their organisation had access to 1) media platforms, such as television, newspapers, and radio; 2) elected government officials at any level of government; 3) members of parliament; and 4) civil servants of government departments and agencies. This question was asked concerning the time before the Covid-19 pandemic and for the time during the pandemic (i.e., since March 2020) separately. These questions allow for comparing access before and after the outbreak of the pandemic, as well as assessing the effect of pre-crisis access (i.e., the effect of being a previous insider) (for the codebook including relevant questions, refer to Junk et al., 2020).

The next section provides descriptive evidence regarding these changes in access, before testing the expectations in multivariate regressions.

Descriptive findings: Stability and change in lobbying access

Figure 9.1 gives an initial overview of the mean rating of access in all four arenas in both Denmark and Sweden. A first (but too hasty) conclusion based on the comparison of means could be that access to the key arenas of political debate has changed little. In Denmark, for instance, the mean level of access to the media has changed from 2.5 (pre-pandemic) to 2.6 (post-outbreak) on a 1–5 scale. This corresponds to having access to the media between “Less than once a month (2)” and “Once a month (3)” for the average respondent – both before and after the outbreak of the pandemic. Variation between arenas and countries is small.

Figure 9.1 Access before and after Covid-19 outbreak, by arena (mean rating of access frequency)



Comments: Figure 9.1 shows respondents' mean ratings of access in each arena in Denmark ($n \geq 329$) and Sweden ($n \geq 247$) before and after the outbreak of Covid-19 in Europe. Note that all analyses take all responses into account, including cases in which the survey was not completed to the end.

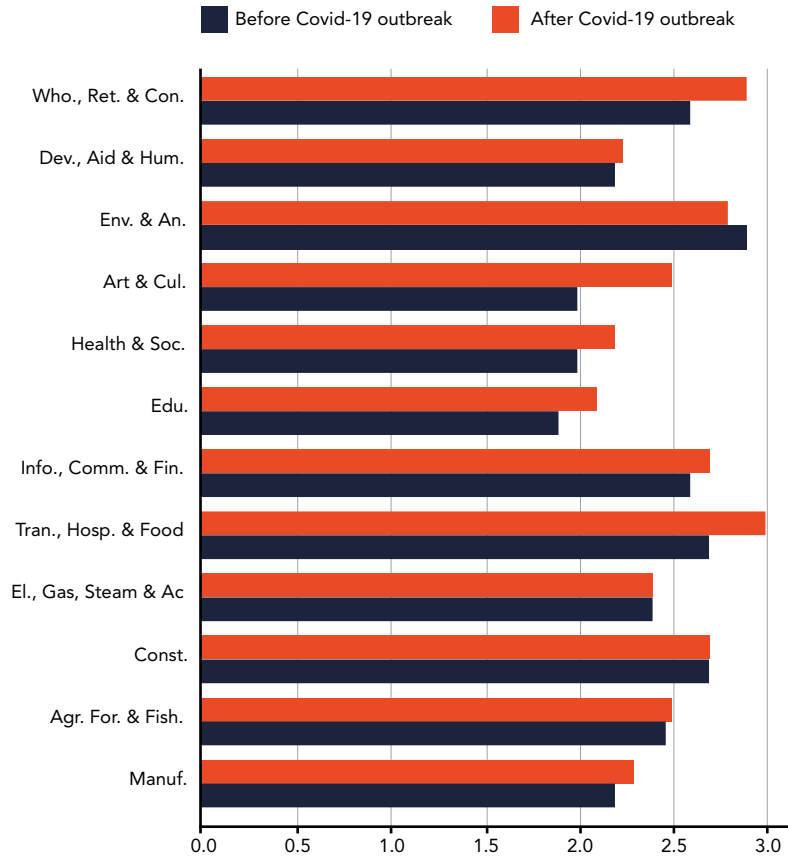
Source: Based on Junk et al., 2020

Still, it would be too hasty to conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic hardly affected lobbying access, because this only holds an average. What Figure 9.1 illustrates is that total access to the political arenas does not seem to have changed much. However, there is an important – and unanswered – question based on Figure 9.1: (How) has the *distribution* of lobbying access changed?

A first perspective on this can be to ask about distributive effects across sectors. Figure 9.2 gives a descriptive idea of variation between mean government access – before and after the outbreak of Covid-19 – in twelve broad sectors. These were categorised based on respondents' answers about which (economic or social) sector was the most relevant to their work. Figure 9.2 provides some nuance to the picture in Figure 9.1: While the average rating of government access in some sectors, such as “transportation and storage, hospitality, accommodation, and food service activities” increased more, it stayed relatively level or seems to have decreased slightly in others (such as “environment and animal rights”). Note, however, that this comparison must be taken cautiously, given that the number of observations varies greatly between sectors (between 8 and 115). Only few of the differences in mean post-outbreak access between sectors

are statistically significant. This holds, for instance, for the higher mean in post-outbreak access in the “transportation and storage, hospitality, accommodation, and food service activities” sector, compared with “agriculture, forestry, and fishing”, or “human health and social work activities”.

Figure 9.2 *Government access before and after Covid-19 outbreak, by sector (mean rating of access frequency)*



Comments: Figure 9.2 shows respondents’ mean ratings of government access in different sectors in Denmark and Sweden (pooled sample; *n* = 427) before and after the outbreak of Covid-19. Read sector abbreviations as follows: Agr. For. & Fish. = agriculture, forestry, and fishing; Manuf. = manufacturing; El., Gas, Steam & Ac. = electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, water, and mining; Const. = construction; Tran., Hosp. & Food = transportation and storage, hospitality, accommodation, and food service activities; Info., Comm. & Fin. = information and communication, financial and insurance activities, and real estate activities; Edu. = education; Health & Soc. = human health and social work activities; Art & Cul. = arts, entertainment, culture, sport, and leisure; Env. & An. = environment and animal rights; Dev., Aid & Hum. = development, aid, and human rights; Who., Ret. & Con. = wholesale, retail, trade, and consumers.

Source: Based on Junk et al., 2020

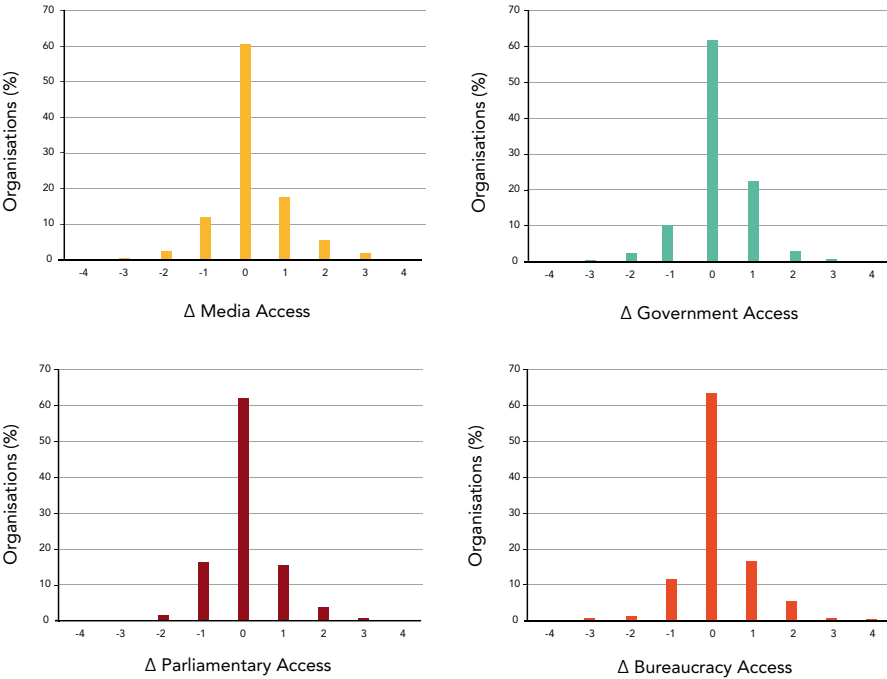
Tentatively, these patterns suggest that organisations in some sectors have been better than others at securing governmental access early in the pandemic. At the same time, the categorisation into sectors is relatively broad. Another valuable, and more comparable, level of analysis is that of individual interest organisations. The two data points on access (before and after the outbreak of Covid-19) allow the assessment of whether access has increased or decreased after the outbreak of Covid-19 for each organisation that has taken the survey. To do so, a measure of the change in access (Δ) is created per respondent per arena (media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy) by taking the difference between the frequency of access before the crisis and the frequency of access during the crisis for the particular respondent and arena. These variables take positive values if access has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic relative to the access before the crisis, and negative values in the opposite scenario. A value of zero indicates no change in access before and after the crisis. Figures 9.3 and 9.4 show the distribution of this organisation-level measure of the change in access in both Denmark (see Figure 9.3) and Sweden (see Figure 9.4).

Several important conclusions follow from these figures. First, there is a stable core of access in both countries: Approximately 60–65 per cent of the organisations in both countries and all four arenas have enjoyed the same level of access in the first months after the outbreak of the pandemic as they did before the crisis ($\Delta = 0$). This attests to the ability of gatekeepers and interest organisations to continue interacting and exchanging information, despite the extremely difficult conditions. Some might argue that this could be an effect of strong corporatist traditions in Sweden and Denmark (Jahn, 2016) that institutionalise and lock-in patterns of interaction between interest organisations and political gatekeepers. Notably, however, the InterCov project also analysed changes in access patterns in eight other polities including Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, and found similar patterns in changes in access, including a stable core of organisations for which access remained unchanged (Junk et al., 2022).

A second important insight from Figures 9.3 and 9.4 is that a considerable share of organisations has increased their access ($\Delta > 0$). The share of organisations to which this applies varies somewhat between arenas but amounts to approximately 20–25 per cent of surveyed organisations that increased their access after the outbreak of Covid-19. Third, the flipside of this pattern is that another set of organisations has decreased ($\Delta < 0$) their access relative to the time before the pandemic. This applies to approximately 13–18 per cent of surveyed organisations. These patterns show that the pandemic has created both access “winners” and “losers”, that is, there are distributional consequences when it comes to who has more voice in political debates. Fourth, we see some variation between the arenas: While there is a higher share of access “winners” in the media, government, and bureaucracy arenas (in both Denmark and Sweden),

there is a higher share of organisations that had decreased access to the parliamentary arena. This might indicate that, especially in the first months of the pandemic, parliaments lost importance from a lobbying perspective, whereas the information industry (media), the executive (government), and the administration (bureaucracy) increased their interactions with interest organisations.

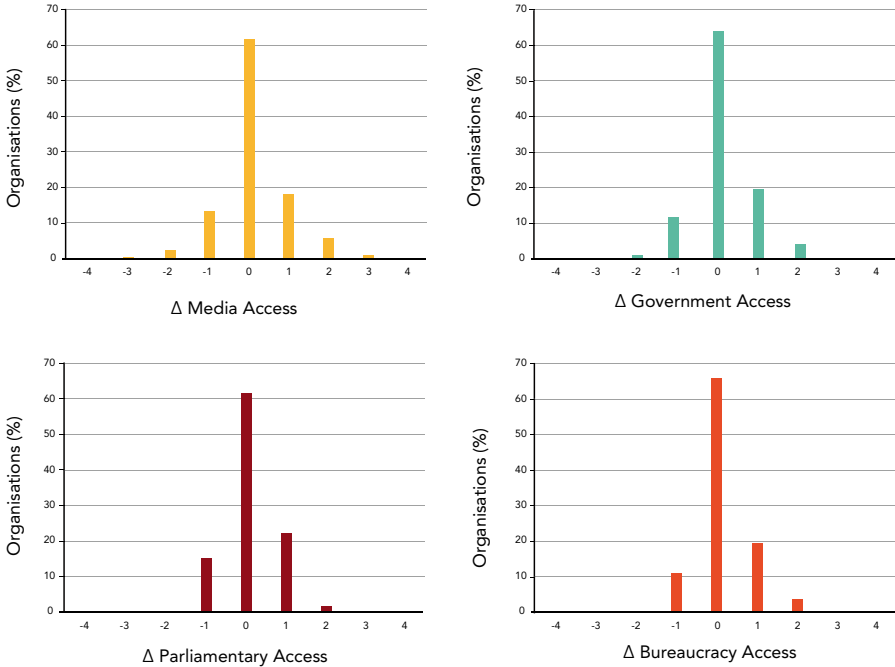
Figure 9.3 *Share of Danish organisations that experienced changes in access (per cent)*



Comments: Figure 9.3 shows the share of respondent organisations that experienced changes in access across four arenas in Denmark ($n \geq 328$).

Source: Based on Junk et al., 2020

Figure 9.4 Share of Swedish organisations that experienced changes in access (per cent)



Comments: Figure 9.4 shows the share of respondent organisations that experienced changes in access across four arenas in Sweden ($n \geq 246$).

Source: Based on Junk et al., 2020

Based on these descriptive findings, it is important to ask the following questions: What drives these changes in access? Are the usual suspects (previous insiders and more resourceful organisations) the ones who enjoyed higher access after the outbreak of the pandemic (RQ2)? Or did access during the pandemic prioritise more highly affected and vulnerable groups (RQ3)? The next section presents the results of multivariate regressions to address these questions.

Analysis: Drivers of access after the outbreak of Covid-19

To test the extent to which there is support for different expectations about lobbying access after the outbreak of Covid-19, Table 9.1 presents the results of multivariate ordinal regressions. The dependent variable is the respondent's rating of the frequency of access to the respective arena after the outbreak of the pandemic. As independent variables, the models include 1) the pre-pandemic level of access to the specific arena, 2) the level of staff resources of the organi-

sation, and 3) the rating of the organisation's level of affectedness by the crisis. The level of pre-pandemic access here taps into the effect of being a previous insider. It also means that the analysis effectively teases out drivers of changes in access after the outbreak of the pandemic, given it controls for pre-pandemic access. Staff resources allow addressing the more pessimistic expectation with a focus on whether resources drive increases and decreases in access during the Covid-19 crisis. To operationalise these resources, respondents were asked to place their organisation in one of five categories, based on how many full-time staff members "focus on political work, such as advocacy or public relations". For the analysis, answers are grouped into three categories: low (< 1), medium (1–4) and high (≥ 5) lobbying staff resources. To assess evidence for the second expectation regarding the organisation's level of affectedness, we use data from a survey question that asked respondents to rate the extent to which their interests were "more or less affected by the Coronavirus crisis, compared to other stakeholders in [country]". This was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (much less affected) to 5 (much more affected).

In addition, the models in Table 9.1 control for the organisation type in three categories: 1) business organisations, including business associations and firms; 2) profession groups, including professional associations and labour unions; and 3) NGOs, including public interest groups, cause-centred groups, and citizen associations. As another relevant control, the models include the organisation's age in three intervals (< 21 years; 21–50 years; > 50 years), as this might affect existing relationships with gatekeepers, as well as other variables, such as resources. Finally, the models include clustered standard errors by sector.

Table 9.1 runs models in the Danish and Swedish samples separately, one for each lobbying arena, respectively. This allows for teasing out potential differences between both the countries and arenas.

The results displayed in Table 9.1 provide support for both the optimistic and more cautionary accounts of lobbying access during the Covid-19 pandemic. We see clearly across all four arenas and both countries that pre-pandemic access is a strong predictor of post-outbreak access ($p < 0.001$). This, on its own, does not necessarily have to be bad news, however. It can also indicate that there was a level of stability in the interaction of gatekeepers with interest organisations. Very interesting is to see what other factors explain post-outbreak access, when controlling for previous access.

Table 9.1 *The frequency of access after the outbreak of Covid-19*

		Media		Government		Parliament		Bureaucracy	
		(1) DK	(2) SE	(3) DK	(4) SE	(5) DK	(6) SE	(7) DK	(8) SE
Pre-pandemic access (arena-specific)		2.03*** (0.21)	1.96*** (0.21)	2.37*** (0.33)	2.90*** (0.39)	2.29*** (0.27)	3.03*** (0.27)	2.43*** (0.27)	2.43*** (0.27)
Staff resources (baseline: low)	<i>medium</i>	0.75*** (0.18)	0.43* (0.18)	0.94*** (0.26)	0.29 (0.37)	1.10*** (0.32)	0.26 (0.50)	0.31 (0.21)	0.40 (0.25)
	<i>high</i>	0.71** (0.27)	1.66*** (0.39)	1.36*** (0.28)	0.32 (0.56)	0.82* (0.38)	0.40 (0.74)	0.24 (0.41)	0.14 (0.47)
Affectedness by the crisis		0.87*** (0.15)	0.65*** (0.11)	0.75*** (0.12)	0.55*** (0.14)	0.80*** (0.12)	0.53** (0.20)	0.71*** (0.13)	0.37** (0.12)
Type of organisation (baseline: NGOs)	<i>business & firms</i>	0.15 (0.19)	-0.33 (0.53)	0.22 (0.28)	0.23 (0.53)	0.44 (0.29)	0.63 (0.46)	0.75* (0.34)	-0.38 (0.38)
	<i>profession & labour</i>	0.09 (0.23)	-0.24 (0.45)	0.44 (0.38)	0.50 (0.35)	0.17 (0.35)	1.28*** (0.33)	0.61*** (0.18)	0.34 (0.28)
Age of organisation (baseline < 21 years)	<i>21–50 years</i>	0.27 (0.45)	-0.34 (0.63)	0.16 (0.33)	0.15 (0.34)	-0.32 (0.42)	0.56 (0.43)	-0.13 (0.39)	0.65* (0.31)
	<i>>50 years</i>	0.18 (0.23)	0.24 (0.28)	0.35 (0.22)	0.10 (0.28)	0.44 (0.37)	0.18 (0.37)	0.53* (0.27)	0.55+ (0.29)
Number of organisations		290	208	289	207	289	206	290	208

Comments: Table 9.1 shows a series of ordered logistic regressions. The respective dependent variable is the frequency of access – 1 (never) to 5 (almost on a daily basis) – to one of the four political arenas: media (models 1 & 2), government (models 3 & 4), parliament (models 5 & 6), and bureaucracy (models 7 & 8) in Denmark (DK; models 1, 3, 5, 7) and Sweden (SE; models 2, 4, 6, 8). All models include clustered standard errors for sector. Reporting on cuts omitted to limit table length. *N* is reduced somewhat due to missing values (skipped questions).

* $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Based on Junk et al., 2020

Firstly, when it comes to media access in Denmark and Sweden, as well as government and parliamentary access in Denmark, we see that organisations with medium or high staff resources enjoyed more access after the outbreak of Covid-19 ($p < 0.05$). This advantage for more resourceful organisations, however, cannot be traced when it comes to access to the Swedish government, parliament, and bureaucracy. Still, these (partial) access advantages for more resourceful organisations are potentially worrying. If access to political debates during a crisis is strongly affected by staff capacities, this can introduce biases at the expense of smaller, less resourceful organisations, for instance, those mainly relying on volunteers. As an illustrative example, in interviews conducted with Danish interest organisations in the human health and social

work sector, several of them named concerns about the effects of Covid-19 on volunteers in the organisation. Inequalities in the size and type of staff capacity of interest organisations – and their effects on access and political voice – are an important factor to keep in mind, perhaps especially in crisis situations, where the failure to consult some groups due to limited staff capacities can have far-reaching consequences.

Judging from both the anecdotal evidence in the interviews and the results in Table 9.1, however, there is also reason for optimism. Many of the health-focused groups I interviewed experienced high levels of access to the media, government ministers, and health authorities due to a high interest in their input on Covid-19–related questions. In this way, these organisations were able to voice the concerns of their members, who were typically highly affected by the pandemic, for instance, as patients with different types of preexisting illnesses. Their anecdotes fit well with the next finding seen in Table 9.1: Higher affectedness by the crisis is a strong predictor of access during the pandemic. This holds in all four arenas and both in Denmark and Sweden ($p < 0.01$). This attests to the ability of interest organisations and gatekeepers to adjust their interactions based on the new policy problems and information needs during the pandemic. Rather than only giving access to previous insiders and resourceful organisations, all arenas increased access to highly affected organisations.

Moving on to the controls, there is limited evidence that – all else equal and controlling for access patterns before the pandemic – economic organisations enjoyed higher access during the pandemic than NGOs. Only when it comes to access to the Swedish parliament and the Danish bureaucracy do we see a significant access advantage for profession and labour organisations ($p < 0.001$). Businesses and firms only enjoyed significantly higher access than NGOs to the Danish bureaucracy ($p < 0.05$). In this sense, the pandemic seems to have only mildly increased potential business biases in access, compared with pre-pandemic access. Regarding organisation age, it seems there are hardly any advantages for older organisations, except when it comes to access to the Swedish bureaucracy ($p < 0.1$).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have assessed communication during the Covid-19 pandemic based on the frequency of interactions between interest organisations and political gatekeepers in the media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy. My empirical material relied on a large survey of over 500 interest organisations in Sweden and Denmark and allowed comparing patterns of lobbying access before and after the pandemic's outbreak. This material – complemented by qualitative interviews – was used to address three research questions on the

extent to which access to key arenas of public policy changed after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as on potential drivers of those changes.

The results of descriptive and multivariate analyses clearly attest to both continuity and change in access patterns to public and political debates during the crisis. On the one hand, access to important arenas of public policy has remained unchanged for over 60 per cent of surveyed organisations, indicating that Danish and Swedish interest group systems demonstrated a high level of stability. Put differently, previous insiders were more likely to enjoy higher levels of access in the first months after the outbreak of the pandemic.

On the other hand, we see that, when holding pre-pandemic access constant, there is strong evidence that a higher level of affectedness by the crisis had a significant positive effect on the frequency of access to all lobbying arenas (media, government, parliament, and bureaucracy) in both Denmark and Sweden. In this sense, lobbying access in these two Nordic countries under study can be seen as an instance of exchanges between interest organisations and different political gatekeepers that are *adaptive* to the changed circumstances during the crisis.

Other than this, there is some evidence that organisations with higher staff resources increased their access during the pandemic. This holds for media, government, and parliament access in Denmark, and for media access in Sweden. There is limited evidence that some types of organisations enjoyed higher access increases than others. Both Danish labour and professional organisations, as well as business organisations and firms, for instance, enjoyed higher access to the Danish bureaucracy after the outbreak of Covid-19, compared with NGOs, when controlling for pre-pandemic access. This indicates that the crisis has partly increased inequalities in access between different group types against the baseline of pre-pandemic access. This conclusion is in line with other analyses of changes in lobbying access during the Covid-19 pandemic, including to the European Commission, where a business dominance in Covid-19-focused meetings has been attested, although the differences between group types are not stark (Rasmussen, 2020).

The quantitative analyses presented in this chapter are insightful to gauge potential biases in consultation practices and the opportunities for organisations to voice the interests of (more or less affected) members for stakeholders in Scandinavian countries. At the same time, however, there are several aspects of crisis access and communication they overlook. Importantly, the frequency of access says little about the *content* of information exchanges. It might have been one thing to secure access to Covid-19-related policy discussions, while, according to the qualitative interviews I conducted in Denmark, it has been difficult to place (or keep) non-Covid-19-related issues on the agenda of political gatekeepers. Moreover, the data presented here focused only on the first months of the pandemic (March–June 2020), that is, the short-term effects of this massive crisis on lobbying access. Future research could assess whether the access

advantages for more affected organisations continued throughout the pandemic, or whether different types of actors enjoyed access advantages during different phases of the crisis (see Crepaz et al., 2022a: Chapter 5). Finally, access does not necessarily entail influence. In the future, it is important to evaluate which groups were most successful in attaining their policy preferences (see Crepaz et al., 2022a: Chapter 6), negotiating favourable health and safety measures for their sectors, or securing larger economic rescue packages (see also Crepaz et al., 2022). Both groups' opportunities to communicate (political access) and the content of communication (e.g., arguments and frames) are likely to be pivotal for understanding such influence.

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