

Book Review: Lobbying in the European Union: Interest Groups, Lobbying Coalitions, and Policy Change

by Blog Admin

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*Why can some interest groups influence policy-making while others cannot? Even though this question is central to the study of politics, we know little about the factors explaining interest group influence. This book aims to shed light on the impact of interest groups on European policy-making, with author **Heike Klüver** developing a comprehensive theoretical model for understanding lobbying success. Reviewed by **Benedetta Voltolini**.*

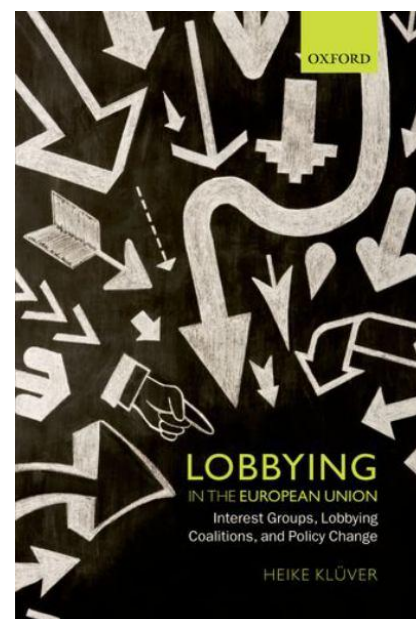


Lobbying in the European Union: Interest Groups, Lobbying Coalitions, and Policy Change. Heike Klüver. Oxford University Press. February 2013.

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Questions about the power of interest groups in shaping policy outcomes are key also at the European Union (EU) level, especially following recent lobbying scandals. For example, the Transparency Register, established in 2011, represents a policy measure aimed at ensuring more transparency in the policy-making process. Interest group influence on policy outcomes has also been a key topic in academic debates for a number of years. Questions concerning whether interest groups influence policy-making and prevent issues from being placed on the political agenda, or whether policy outcomes are biased in favour of concentrated interests, are important issues of debate in the academic community.

[Heike Klüver](#)'s book offers an important contribution to these academic debates by investigating interest group influence in the European Union, shedding light on European Union policy-making and the democratic legitimacy of its policies. By focusing on 56 policy issues and over 2,500 interest groups, Klüver aims to identify the key determinants of lobbying success with a view to explaining why some actors win while others do not manage to successfully influence EU institutions. This book nicely complements the current political debate on lobbying with a thorough analysis of the phenomenon from an academic point of view. It also represents a crucial contribution to the literature on interest groups, as it directly engages with the core question on the influence of interest groups in the policy-making process, which surprisingly remains relatively uncharted territory.



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Klüver adopts the exchange model – widely used in the literature on interest groups – to conceptualise lobbying: EU institutions need certain ‘goods’ to fulfill their institutional tasks; interest groups provide these goods and demand access to policy-making in exchange. In the book, these goods are information, citizen support, and economic power. To the standard exchange relationship, however, Klüver adds a new element in her theoretical model. In her view, lobbying needs to be conceived of as a collective process involving a plurality of interest groups, so that what matters is the aggregated amount of goods provided by the lobbying coalitions, not the individual contribution of single actors. Therefore, the key unit of analysis becomes the ‘lobbying coalition’, defined as the sum of interest groups that share the same political goal, without the need to be formally linked or to coordinate lobbying actions. This implies that interest groups belonging to the same lobbying coalition are aligned on the same side of the political space on a given issue. Interest group influence is thus determined by the aggregated amount of information, citizen support and economic power that each lobbying coalition provides.

Despite the centrality of the topic for research on interest groups and public policy, the issue of influence has often been neglected in the literature due to methodological obstacles. Klüver faces this challenge by adopting an innovative methodological approach. The author combines the preference attainment approach – which consists of measuring the distance between a policy outcomes and the policy preferences of interest groups – with recently developed quantitative text analysis techniques. By drawing upon the European Commission’s online consultations with stakeholders, Klüver compares the initial legislative position proposed by the Commission, the final output, and the positions expressed by interest groups. Content analysis of policy documents and interest group submissions to the online consultations are analysed by employing the text analysis software *Wordfish*, which estimates positions on the basis of the relative frequencies of single words. Through content analysis Klüver therefore defines which groups have been able to exert influence and shift policy outcomes closer to their preferences. Klüver then tests her theoretical model through multilevel modelling, which allows her to examine the effect of the three determinants; namely, information supply, citizen support, and economic power.

This book is therefore an invaluable work in theoretical, methodological, and empirical terms. Despite its crucial contribution, Klüver’s book has some limitations. First of all, the analysis relies on online consultations and the use of the initial policy proposal to measure influence. This tool, as well as the initial document, are not available in all cases or in other contexts (see also [Lowery 2013](#)). Related to this point, Klüver focuses her analysis on the interest groups that took part in online consultations, assuming that the majority of actors lobbying the European Union are covered, given that this is the easiest form of access. However, it is not possible to exclude that some interest groups do not rely on this mechanism at all and lobby the European Union by using other forms of access that are not captured in this analysis. Thus, her research design has undoubtedly clear advantages in terms of reliability and the possibility of using a large-N sample, but the black-boxing of the process hides those actors who do not fit into the model as well as the actual mechanisms that made the determinants of the model matter in practice. I also wonder to what extent citizen support and economic power are different from information supply. In other words, policy-relevant information can be also defined in terms of public support and/or the preferences of economic powerful actors, and not just as expertise or technical information, as Klüver’s analysis seems to implicitly assume. The three aspects could be conceived as information, whereby the difference is the content of the information provided or, even better, the frame used to convey a certain message.

Nevertheless, the book remains an important step in developing large-N studies on lobbying in the EU and offers an innovative methodological approach that paves the way for further research in this field. Scholars and students interested in interest groups and EU policy-making will necessarily have to engage with Klüver’s work, as it provides a different approach to the measurement of influence and one of the few large-N studies on interest groups in the EU.

Benedetta Voltolini is a Ph.D candidate at the LSE. She was a Visiting Fellow at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) between September and December 2011 and a Visiting Ph.D student at the Freie Universität Berlin in May-June 2012. Her research interests include lobbying and advocacy in EU foreign policy, EU policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and EU democracy promotion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. [Read more reviews by Benedetta.](#)