

The Unequal Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Political Interest Representation

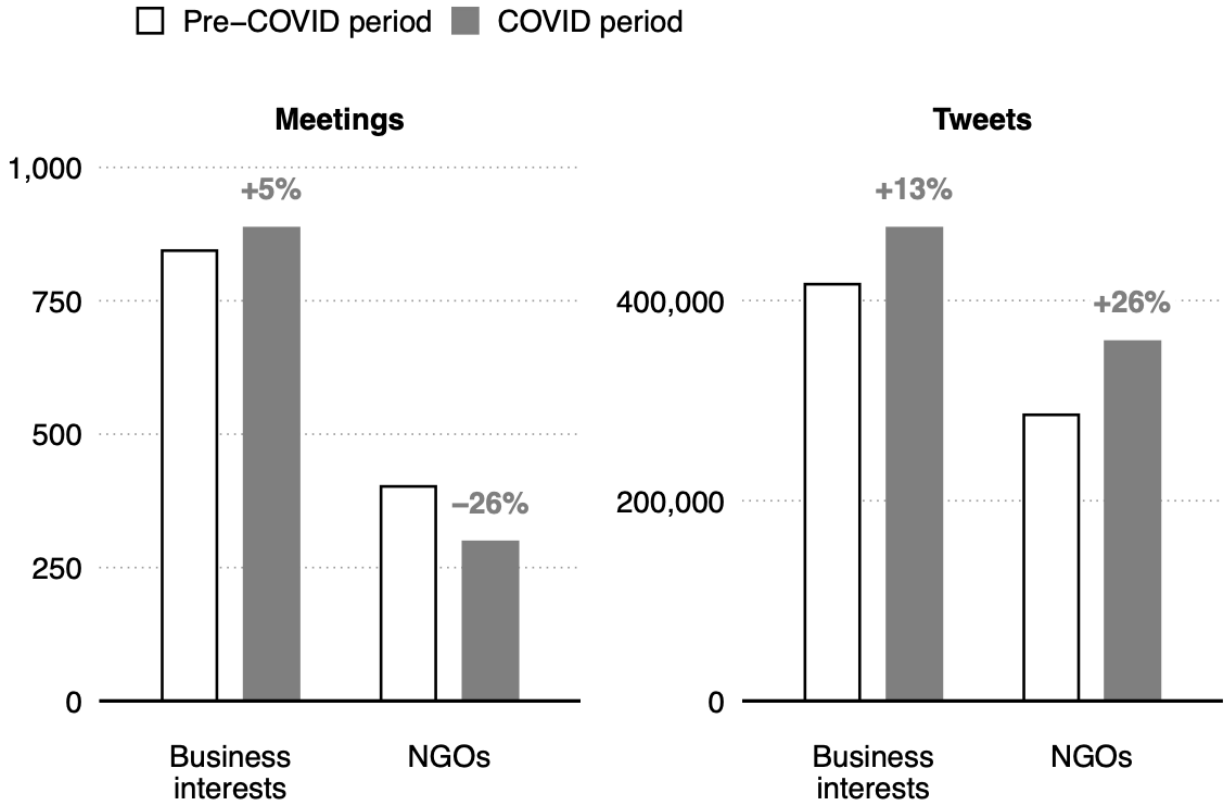
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We document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on inequality in political access to the European Commission among interest groups. Since the pandemic began, substantial lobbying attention in the US was directed toward the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act; in Europe, toward the €750 billion EU Recovery Plan for Europe. Lobbying during the pandemic is widely criticized for lacking transparency and reinforcing inequalities and biases in interest representation. However, we have lacked systematic evidence about whether the pandemic has indeed exacerbated existing pro-business biases in interest representation.

Our headline empirical finding (from a difference-in-difference analysis) is that large businesses more successfully capitalized on the pandemic in terms of political access than did smaller businesses and NGOs.

Our analyses document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on differences between NGOs and business interests in (1) political access to the European Commission, and (2) public communications. We use panel data that catalogue the population of meetings with the European Commission and the social media (Twitter) activity of 11,967 interest groups from 116 countries included in the European Union Transparency Register. We examine both whether differences in political access and social media activity between business interests and NGOs persist or change during the COVID-19 crisis.

We demonstrate that business interests successfully capitalized on the crisis in insider arenas, while NGOs increased prominence on social media (see Figure). We use textual information about the content of each meeting and social media post to provide corroborating evidence that the driver of these results is consistent with the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we show that differences in access to policy-makers and social media activity between business interests and NGOs are not simply due to differences in the economic resources available to each interest group.



Our findings speak broadly to concerns that the pandemic has created inequalities in political representation, as often shown anecdotally in Europe, the US, and internationally. We would provide the public and policy-makers with systematic evidence who the European Commission has provided access to during Covid-19.

There are a number major news story tie-ins, for example those that look at the tech sector using the pandemic as an opportunity to gain access to EU policy-makers [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/14/technology/big-tech-lobbying-europe.html>]; or pressures on business groups to find new avenues for lobbying access [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/covid-dented-lobbying-by-business-groups-ravaged-by-pandemic/2021/01/25/78de2d56-5ee3-11eb-a177-7765f29a9524_story.html]

The full paper can be found here:

[https://gregoryeady.com/Papers/The Unequal Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic.pdf](https://gregoryeady.com/Papers/The_Unequal_Effect_of_the_COVID-19_Pandemic.pdf)

Our backgrounds:

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