P115 / Business, Power, and Policy-making

Topic : Interest Groups/Lobbying

Chair : Alexander Katsaitis (Stockholm University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Large corporations are important participants in public policymaking, contributing expertise, investment, data and implementation resources. Their involvement can help governments address complex problems, but it can also privilege particular interests, narrow policy alternatives and redistribute costs and benefits unequally. These tensions are especially visible in climate adaptation, environmental protection, digital regulation and policies affecting civil and minority rights. Understanding corporate involvement therefore requires attention to how public problems are defined, policy instruments selected and policies implemented, alongside the accountability of these processes.

Research on lobbying examines how information, resources and institutional access shape business–government relations (Coen, Katsaitis and Vannoni, 2021). Political economy identifies structural and institutional forms of business power, including dependencies created when firms provide essential public functions (Busemeyer and Thelen, 2020). Research on policy capacity highlights the analytical, operational and political capabilities required to pursue public objectives (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015). Building on these contributions, the panel addresses how corporate involvement at different stages of policymaking translates into specific policy choices and outcomes, and how those choices subsequently reinforce or constrain corporate power.

The panel asks: how, and under what conditions, do large corporations shape policy agendas, policy design and implementation, and with what consequences for policy effectiveness, distributional equity and democratic accountability? It focuses on large companies, multinational enterprises, digital platforms and their representative organisations, examining national, EU and multilateral policymaking.

Four hypotheses provide starting points for discussion. First, greater governmental dependence on corporate investment or infrastructure increases the likelihood that policy agendas and instrument choices accommodate corporate preferences, even without active lobbying. Second, corporate expertise is more likely to improve policy design and implementation where public authorities retain sufficient analytical capacity to assess private information independently. Third, delegating policy delivery to corporations generates feedback that strengthens incumbent providers and increases the costs of policy redesign, particularly where public authorities lack alternative providers. Fourth, corporate resource advantages translate less readily into favourable policy outcomes where labour, civil society and affected communities have effective access and opportunities to challenge corporate claims.

The panel will examine how lobbying regulation, conflict-of-interest rules, oversight and participatory procedures mediate these relationships. It also invites analysis of how foreign corporate actors, intermediaries and digital influence campaigns affect policy debates and decisions. Distinguishing legitimate participation from corruption and improper interference is essential. Gender-sensitive and intersectional analysis will help identify whose interests enter policy agendas and how policy consequences vary by gender, age and other intersecting inequalities.

Its scientific contribution is to connect research on corporate power with policy processes, implementation and feedback, explaining variation across sectors and institutional settings and identifying arrangements that support effective, equitable and accountable public policy.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Call for Papers

How do large corporations shape public policy, and under what conditions does their involvement improve policy performance or privilege particular interests? This panel invites papers examining corporate influence across agenda setting, policy formulation, instrument selection, implementation and evaluation. We focus on large companies, multinational enterprises, digital platforms and business associations, including their relationships with public authorities, labour organisations, civil society and affected communities.

We welcome contributions addressing corporate lobbying, political financing, revolving doors, public–private partnerships, private standard setting and the delegation of public functions. Papers may investigate how

firms influence problem definitions, the evidence used in policy debates, regulatory choices and enforcement, or the allocation of policy costs and benefits. Contributions on foreign corporate actors, lobbying intermediaries, political advertising and disinformation are also encouraged where they establish a clear connection to public policymaking.

A particular interest is how policy institutions condition corporate influence. Relevant questions include whether administrative expertise reduces dependence on private information; how consultation and deliberative procedures affect representation; and whether transparency, oversight and conflict-of-interest rules change corporate behaviour or policy outcomes. Papers may also examine policy feedback, including how existing instruments and implementation arrangements strengthen or constrain subsequent corporate power.

We welcome theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions from public policy, political science, public administration and related disciplines. Comparative research and carefully developed single-case studies are equally welcome, using qualitative, quantitative, experimental or mixed methods. Cases may concern national, EU or multilateral policymaking, including climate, environmental, digital and social policy.

Contributions should consider whose interests are represented and whose rights, resources or opportunities are affected, incorporating gender-sensitive and intersectional perspectives where relevant. Proposals should clearly identify their research question, theoretical argument, methods and evidence, and explain their contribution to understanding corporate involvement in public policy. Papers may test, refine or challenge the panel’s hypotheses or develop complementary explanations.