P212 / Corporate influence and policy obstruction: strategies, discourse and power

Topic : Interest Groups/Lobbying

Chair : Kathrin Lauber (University of Edinburgh)

Second Chair : Dieter Plehwe (Berlin Social Science Center)

Third Chair : Guus Dix (University of Twente)

Fourth Chair : Linda Knoester (Solid Sustainability Research)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Corporate influence is a long-standing concern in the study of health, climate, and environmental policy, but scholarship remains fragmented across sub-fields. Researchers have examined the policy influence of industries such as tobacco, ultra-processed food, fossil fuels, plastics, and agriculture, mobilising related and overlapping concepts including corporate political activity, commercial determinants of health, and climate obstruction (e.g., Maani, Petticrew & Galea, 2023; Roberts et al., 2025). Drawing, to various degrees, on scholarship in political science, sociology, and policy studies in addition to specialised (sub)disciplines - for example, building on theories of power - they have documented shared practices and mechanisms ranging from traditional lobbying to indirect efforts to shape science and its use in policy, harness co- and self-regulation to prevent binding rules, and shape policy discourses (Kinol et al., 2025; Legg et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2021). Alongside corporate agency, an emergent strand of scholarship has also begun to examine how institutional context and the design of decision-making processes – such as consultation mechanisms and requirements for cost-benefit analysis – shape access and influence (e.g., Lauber & Brooks, 2022).

There is, however, little comparative analysis, and key sectors such as agriculture, which matter greatly for health, climate and biodiversity, remain under-researched from this perspective. Moreover, we still have limited knowledge about (transnational) counterstrategies and regulatory approaches to counter corporate influence and safeguard the integrity of policymaking processes, such as conflict-of-interest and lobbying transparency rules, and more equitable governance of participation and access. Much of the scholarship is still focused on national settings, although scholars recognise the importance of understanding the less visible exercise of corporate power in international and supranational arenas.

In this panel, we focus on common concerns across the empirical sectors: the role of corporate practices and discourses in policy delay, dilution, and reversal. The panel calls for a broader conversation on corporate influence in climate, health, and environmental policy, inviting scholars working in these fields to exchange substantive and theoretical insights. It does so by addressing the following question: How do corporate actors shape policymaking across health, climate and environmental domains?

References

Kinol, A., Si, Y., Kinol, J., & Stephens, J. C. (2025). Networks of climate obstruction: Discourses of denial and delay in US fossil energy, plastic, and agrichemical industries. PLOS Climate, 4(1), e0000370.
Lauber, K., & Brooks, E. (2023). Why meta-regulation matters for public health: the case of the EU better regulation agenda. Globalization and Health, 19(1), 70.
Legg, T., Hatchard, J., & Gilmore, A. B. (2021). The science for profit model—how and why corporations influence science and the use of science in policy and practice. PLOS One, 16(6), e0253272.
Maani, N., Petticrew, M., & Galea, S. (2023). The commercial determinants of health. OUP.
Reed, G., Hendlin, Y., et al. (2021). The disinformation playbook: how industry manipulates the science-policy process—and how to restore scientific integrity. Journal of Public Health Policy, 42(4), 622.
Roberts, T. J., Milani, C. R., Jacquet, J., & Downie, C. (2025). Climate obstruction: A global assessment. OUP.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel aims to foster a broader conversation on corporate influence in climate, health, and environmental policy, inviting scholars working in these fields to exchange substantive and theoretical

insights. in doing so, it aims to contribute to breaking down the disciplinary and sectoral silos in which this work is often conducted. We invite both theoretical and empirical contributions on corporate policy influence across health, climate, and environmental domains (defined here in broad terms, including, for example, supply chain regulation).

Contributions are encouraged to explore one or more of the following topics: the role of institutional context in shaping corporate strategies and their outcomes; transnational political strategies and opposition mobility (Plehwe, Moreno & Neujeffski, 2025; Lauber et al., 2026); and efforts to counter, prevent, or weaken corporate policy obstruction. The latter may encompass, for instance, examinations of measures such as conflict-of-interest policies or lobbying regulation, provided discussion of their implications for corporate influence is included.

We will prioritise submissions which:
(1) Focus on international contexts and institutions, including UN agencies and agreement-making processes (e.g., the World Health Organization, UNFCCC, or UN plastics treaty negotiations) and the European Union.
(2) Address under-researched sectors, such as animal agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and mining.
(3) Take comparative or cross-sectoral approaches.

Papers may draw on any theoretical or conceptual perspective, including corporate political activity, interest group and lobbying studies, regulatory capture, policy design, institutionalism, and critical policy studies; they may also take any methodological approach, including case studies, comparative designs, network analysis, document and discourse analysis, and quantitative work. We specifically encourage interdisciplinary contributions.

References

Lauber, K., Barry, R., van den Akker, A., & Collin, J. (2026). Problematizing ultra-processing: opposition strategy mobility and an emergent challenge to food systems governance. Critical Policy Studies, 20(3), 418–433.

Plehwe, D., Moreno, J. A., & Neujeffski, M. (2025). Challenging energy transition and green jobs: climate policy obstruction across borders. Critical Policy Studies, 19(4), 614–636.