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From Consultation to Referendum: A Policy-Level Approach to Media Visibility of Interest Groups in Switzerland

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A Policy-Level Approach to Media Visibility of Interest Groups in Switzerland

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To my father, Daniel.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how interest groups gain media access in Switzerland during two distinct phases of the policymaking process: the administrative consultation phase and the direct democratic referendum phase. Using a policy issue–centred approach, it examines when and how group visibility changes across institutional venues, policy issues, and varying levels of salience. The analysis builds on an original dataset covering 1,505 interest groups involved in 40 national laws between 2011 and 2024, tracking their appearances in six national newspapers using Swissdox.ch.

Descriptive statistics and multilevel regression models reveal that media access is highly unequal. A small set of powerful peak organisations—mainly business associations—receive the bulk of coverage in both phases. Although referenda increase overall media activity, this expansion primarily benefits actors that were already prominent during the consultation phase. Citizen groups gain proportionally more visibility but remain underrepresented. The results challenge the notion that the media arena broadens access during the contested referendum phase. Instead, media visibility remains structurally concentrated, consistently favouring well-resourced and institutionally embedded groups across both venues.

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Introduction

Switzerland is often described as a model democracy, where political power ultimately lies with the people. The Swiss voter is souverän—the ultimate authority—not just symbolically, but through institutional mechanisms that enable direct participation in policymaking (Sciarini, 2023). Citizens can propose new laws through popular initiatives or overturn parliamentary legislation via referenda (Eichenberger, 2020; Sager et al., 2022). Less well known, but equally central, is the consultation procedure, which allows individuals and organisations to comment on draft laws before they reach parliament (Bieri, 2020; Christe et al., 2016). Few countries offer such a wide range of formal avenues for co-determination. These channels also create structured opportunities for organised interests to influence policy, either behind closed doors or in the public arena (Gava et al., 2017; Mach & Eichenberger, 2023).

Nevertheless, formal access to Swiss democracy does not ensure that all actors hold equal influence (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014). Among the most visible and contested participants in policymaking are lobby groups, often referred to as interest groups in the literature (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013). These actors do not run in elections but represent the goals of their members, who may be individuals or corporate entities such as associations and enterprises

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(Mach & Eichenberger, 2023). Their aims range from promoting business interests or labour rights to advocating for minority interests (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, et al., 2020). Organisationally, interest groups differ widely: some operate as large, professional umbrella organisations, while others focus on narrow causes with limited resources (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Crepaz et al., 2022; Varone & Eichenberger, 2021).

To gain influence in policymaking, interest groups apply both insider and outsider strategies (Beyers, 2004). They may approach the administration during the drafting of new legislation or provide technical input to parliamentary debates—practices referred to as inside lobbying (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Berkhout, 2013; Weiler & Brändli, 2015). Alternatively, they can engage the broader public by running media campaigns or organising demonstrations, commonly known as outside lobbying (De Bruycker, 2019; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Kriesi et al., 2007). These strategic options are closely tied to the institutional venues available at different stages of the policy process (Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2018). Yet these channels are not equally accessible: groups with more resources and established networks tend to have greater impact, while smaller organisations often face barriers in both institutional and public arenas (Hanegraaff et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2023).

In contrast, the media is often considered an accessible arena for public influence. Unlike institutional lobbying channels such as the administration or parliament, which require insider status, the media is seen as a more open and pluralistic space (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). It offers a platform where actors compete for attention and attempt to shape public debate. According to this view, groups without access to formal policymaking venues can bypass institutional barriers by going public (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz et al., 2015). Less well-established interest groups are therefore thought to mobilise through media campaigns to influence policy outcomes. Yet this claim raises an important question: what happens when even business groups are forced to compete in the public arena? In the context of direct democracy, all groups, regardless

of lobbying preference, face increased pressure to engage the media to shape public opinion (Eichenberger, 2020). This thesis asks whether group type continues to shape media access when public communication becomes necessary for all.

However, access to the media is unequal and tends to favour already powerful actors (Thrall, 2006). Recent research challenges the idea that all interest groups can compete on equal footing in the public arena (Stevens, 2025). While media platforms are formally open, visibility in practice often depends on resources. Organisations with established networks, professional communication teams, and the capacity to produce newsworthy content are more likely to appear in coverage (Berkhout, 2013; De Bruycker, 2019). As a result, political headlines and public discourse tend to be dominated by economically strong actors, particularly business groups, while smaller or less organised groups remain largely invisible (Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020; Stevens, 2025; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

This thesis contributes to a growing body of research that questions whether the media pluralises political debate (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Berkhout, 2013; Binderkrantz et al., 2023). While some studies suggest that disadvantaged groups gain visibility through media channels (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Christiansen et al., 2017), findings remain inconsistent. These contradictions often result from methodological limitations. First, many analyses rely on highly aggregated data and overlook the specific context in which interest groups appear in the media (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014). Visibility may reflect public engagement, but it may also stem from non-political mentions such as cultural events or organisational milestones (Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020). Second, much of the literature isolates either insider or outsider lobbying strategies and focuses on a single point in the policymaking process (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014). This fragmented perspective makes it difficult to assess how the same actors adapt their strategies when the access rules shifts—from expert-driven consultation procedures to high-salience referendum campaigns (Eichenberger, 2020; Weiler & Brändli, 2015).

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Building on the work of Jourdain et al. (2017) and Varone et al. (2018), this thesis argues for a more integrated approach. It examines multiple stages of policymaking and considers both institutional and media-based forms of lobbying within a single design. To address these gaps, the study poses the following research question:

> **Research Question:** *Does group type remain a strong predictor of media visibility when all interest groups face equal strategic incentives to go public during referendum campaigns?*

This thesis develops an issue-centred, multi-venue approach to explain variation in media visibility across policymaking phases. It assumes that visibility is shaped not only by group type but also by the specific issue at stake and the institutional context in which it arises (Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020; Christiansen et al., 2017). Switzerland offers a strong case for this type of analysis. It combines an insider-dominated consultation process with a direct democratic referendum, two distinct settings for interest group mobilisation (Eichenberger, 2020; Varone et al., 2018, 2020). The same policy issue may pass through both phases, allowing for direct comparison of media visibility across venues.

The analytical framework builds on three strands of interest group literature: group strategies and access (e.g., Dür & Mateo, 2013; Hanegraaff et al., 2016), institutional context (e.g., Culpepper, 2011; Mach & Eichenberger, 2023), and media arena(e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2015; De Bruycker, 2019). The media is conceptualised as a distinct advocacy arena during the referendum phase and not just for agenda setting. Access is not guaranteed, and coverage tends to reflect and reinforce broader power structures (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020). Visibility in this space is not determined by activity alone but results from the interaction of resources, strategies, issue salience, and institutional opportunity.

Empirically, the thesis draws on an original dataset covering 40 federal legislative processes in Switzerland between 2011 and 2024 (Bundeskanzlei, 2024a, 2024b; Fedlex, 2024). For each law, all 1,505 interest groups that submitted at least one

statement during the consultation phase were identified. Their presence was then tracked in six national newspapers during both the consultation and referendum phases, using Swissdox (Swissdox, 2024). This design allows for a systematic comparison of group visibility across phases and issues. The analysis focuses on variation between group types, particularly business groups and citizen groups, while also disaggregating results at the issue level. Both descriptive statistics and multilevel regression models are used to analyse how media access differs by actor type and policy context.

The findings confirm already existing results that media access is highly unequal (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014). A small number of dominant interest groups, primarily large business associations, receive disproportionate attention across both the consultation and referendum phases. While the overall volume of media coverage increases during referenda, this higher salience does not translate into more pluralistic visibility. Instead, the referendum phase amplifies the visibility of already prominent actors. Business groups significantly increase their media presence during referenda, supporting the expectation that they adapt to the changing strategic incentives of public campaigns. However, this strategic adaptation does not give business groups a relative advantage: citizen groups receive a similarly strong increase in media visibility and even slightly improve their relative position—although the difference is not statistically significant.

In summary, this thesis contributes to the literature on interest group influence across policymaking venues (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020; Christiansen et al., 2017) by means of a comparative research design tracing interest group visibility across institutional phases for specific policy issues. It offers an empirical test of the pluralisation thesis by comparing media access in the consultation and referendum phases within the same national context. The findings show that group type alone does not explain visibility outcomes. The specific issues and the institutional setting are equally important in shaping how and when interest groups appear in the media.

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The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on lobbying strategies, institutional context, issue salience, and media framing , and outlines the theoretical framework of issue- and phase-centred media access. Chapter 3 presents the quantitative research design, including case selection, coding procedures, and modelling strategy, based on a dataset constructed for this study. Chapter 4 contains the empirical analysis, starting with descriptive results and followed by multilevel regression models that compare group visibility across phases and policy types. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the main findings, their implications for interest representation in Switzerland, and directions for future research. The structure enables a systematic comparison of how interest group visibility shifts across policymaking venues within the same institutional and specific issue context.

2

Theory and Hypotheses

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2.1   An Issue- and Venue-Centered Approach

2.1.1   Unequal Visibility Across Interest Groups

Unequal political influence remains a central concern in interest group research. Since Schattenschneider's (1960) seminal critique, scholars have argued that policy-making is often dominated by a small elite of well-resourced lobbying organisations (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Bieri, 2018; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Christe et al., 2016; Giger & Klüver, 2016). His observation that *"the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent"* still shapes contemporary debates (Schattschneider, 1960). While democratic systems formally promise openness, influence in practice remains concentrated among actors with economic and organisational advantages (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007).

At first glance, the media appears to offer a more inclusive arena for interest group engagement than traditional policymaking venues. Unlike parliamentary or administrative lobbying, media visibility is often more accessible to citizen groups such as environmental organisations and NGOs (Dür & Mateo, 2013; Kriesi et al., 2007). These actors rely on public campaigns, emotional narratives, and strategic framing to attract attention (Hanegraaff et al., 2016). Such methods align with journalistic preferences for conflict, drama, and human-interest stories (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Willems, 2024). In Denmark, for example, Binderkrantz et al. (2015) finds that public interest and identity groups together received more media coverage than business actors. These findings have supported what is often referred to as the pluralisation thesis (Olson, 1971)—the notion that the media can counterbalance insider biases by amplifying the voices of less powerful actors (Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

However, this optimistic view has been challenged by empirical studies. Thrall's (2006) analysis of 244 U.S. interest groups finds that media coverage is dominated by the largest and best-resourced organisations, reflecting the dominance of insider lobbying channels. Aizenberg & Hanegraaff (2020) reports similar patterns in the UK and the Netherlands, where business actors consistently dominate media

debate. These findings suggest that media visibility tends to reproduce existing power asymmetries rather than counteract them.

At the same time, visibility does not automatically translate into policy influence. While citizen groups are often present in public debate—typically through non-political content or agenda-setting—they frequently struggle to convert this exposure into concrete policy outcomes (Berkhout, 2013; De Bruycker, 2019; Varone et al., 2020). This gap reflects the strategic logic of lobbying, as agenda-setting does not imply influence. Business groups, in turn, tend to avoid public attention and focus on low-salience, technical arenas, where decisions are shaped more by expertise and insider access than public opinion (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Culpepper, 2011; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Citizen groups, by contrast, often resort to public campaigning because they are excluded from these institutional channels (Dür & Mateo, 2013; Hanegraaff et al., 2016).

These strategic differences raise a broader theoretical question: Do business groups avoid the media arena because they benefit from privileged access to policy-making institutions? And if the media promises pluralistic engagement, why does it often reflect the power asymmetries found in insider politics? Understanding this requires more than classifying actors as insiders or outsiders, or explaining media access by group type alone (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Willems, 2024). This thesis argues that patterns of media access depend on how specific resources—such as expertise, staff size, or newsworthy content—align with the demands of a given venue. Little attention has been paid to how the strategic incentive to appear in a venue shifts throughout the policymaking process. Visibility is shaped not only by group characteristics, but also by the issue at stake, the policy phase, and the institutional setting in which the debate unfolds.

2.1.2 Switzerland as a Strategic Case for Visibility Analysis

Switzerland's institutional design enables a structured, within-case comparison to examine how interest groups adapt their strategies across policymaking phases. The formal consultation procedure and the facultative referendum represent two

distinct venues: one expert-driven and low in salience, the other public-facing and highly visible (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Mach & Eichenberger, 2023). These phases differ not only in terms of access, but also in the logic of participation—administrative negotiation versus public contestation (Weiler & Brändli, 2015). This two-phase setting allows the same actors to be observed under changing institutional conditions, without the background variation introduced by cross-country comparisons (Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2018; Weiler et al., 2019).

In addition, the referendum mechanism introduces a predictable rise in salience by shifting authority from institutional actors to the electorate (Weiler & Brändli, 2015). This shift alters the incentives for advocacy, particularly in relation to media strategy (Culpepper, 2011; Kriesi et al., 2007). During the referendum campaign, the media becomes a de facto arena of policymaking, as the Swiss voting population decides the outcome of the vote (Eichenberger, 2020). Visibility becomes a strategic priority for all groups—not only for those excluded from formal policymaking channels (Mach & Eichenberger, 2023).

This chapter develops an issue- and venue-centred framework that goes beyond group type as the primary explanation for media visibility. It argues that the consultation and referendum phases create distinct opportunity structures that shape how and when groups engage the media (Varone et al., 2018). While earlier research often assumes stable lobbying strategies over time (Berkhout, 2013; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Hanegraaff et al., 2016), this framework highlights how institutional venue and rising issue salience interact to generate phase-specific differences between consultation and referendum.

Second, media access is conceptualised not simply as a general tool for outsider groups, but as a selective and competitive arena shaped by the policy debate at hand (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Stevens, 2025). Under high salience, coverage tends to concentrate on resource-rich actors, particularly business groups (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020). These dynamics challenge the pluralisation thesis, which suggests that media access can offset institutional inequalities (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Thrall, 2006; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

Third, the framework builds on Berkhout's (2013) model of influence, support, and reputation, but places greater emphasis on strategic adaptation rather than organisational maintenance. Visibility is not a fixed trait of group identity; it is shaped by how policy issues interact with institutional context and public attention (Christe et al., 2016; Culpepper, 2011). These assumptions guide the methodological design and inform the empirical analysis presented in the following chapters.

2.2 Interest Group Strategy and Media Access

2.2.1 Types of Interest Groups and Their Resource Profiles

Interest groups are non-electoral political actors that represent the interests of their members, who may be private individuals or organised entities such as associations, trade unions, or businesses (Dür & Mateo, 2013; Sciarini, 2023). These groups advocate on a wide range of issues, including environmental protection, labour rights, and healthcare reform. While their visibility, lobbying strategies, and levels of professionalisation vary considerably, they share a core role: translating societal demands and economic interests into political claims within the policymaking process (Mach & Eichenberger, 2023; Sager et al., 2022). To analyse these actors systematically, the literature classifies them according to institutional status, membership base, or functional role.

A central distinction in the literature on interest groups separates sectional groups from cause groups, based on the nature of the interests they represent (Giger & Klüver, 2016; Weiler & Brändli, 2015). Sectional groups pursue material, constituency-based interests. Business associations, often labelled as business groups, represent employers and defend economic interests across sectors (Dür & Mateo, 2013). Trade unions promote the rights of workers and often participate in formal negotiations with policymakers (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). Professional associations regulate access to specific occupations and organise members around common standards of training and practice (Varone & Eichenberger, 2021).

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Cause groups, by contrast, pursue broader, often non-material goals that promote the common good (Giger & Klüver, 2016). Public interest groups, for example, are open to general membership and advocate for collective concerns such as environmental protection or democratic rights (Dür & Mateo, 2013). Identity-based organisations represent specific social constituencies—such as women, youth, or consumers—and mobilise around defined societal claims (Varone & Eichenberger, 2021). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are often included in this category when they promote humanitarian or social justice aims (Crepaz et al., 2022). However, some scholars distinguish NGOs from the broader group of citizen actors, emphasising their more institutionalised structures and service-oriented roles (Buffardi et al., 2015; Hanegraaff et al., 2016).

However, classification practices vary, and the literature reveals notable inconsistencies. Trade unions, for example, are sometimes grouped with citizen actors due to their mobilisation capacity and alignment with collective causes (Häusermann et al., 2004). In other typologies, they appear alongside business associations as institutional insiders—particularly in neo-corporatist contexts where both enjoy privileged access to policymaking arenas (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Christiansen et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2020). This variation underscores the need for a transparent and well-justified typology that aligns with the theoretical framework and research design. In this thesis, the chosen classification supports systematic comparison across policy venues and group types.

This thesis adopts a streamlined but analytically grounded classification based on the INTERARENA typology, which originally identifies eight interest group categories (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, et al., 2020). Following the adaptation by (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020) to the Swiss context, four of these categories are merged into a broader "citizen group" type. This adjustment preserves cross-national comparability while reflecting institutional conditions in Switzerland, where formal restrictions on citizen groups are relatively weak (Christiansen et al., 2017). In practice, identity-based, religious, leisure, and public interest organisations all

operate under similar legal and procedural conditions and face comparable opportunities for access. The resulting framework distinguishes five overarching group types while still covering all eight categories from the original INTERARENA model.

- **Trade unions (1)** represent labour interests and fulfil hybrid roles that combine mobilisation with formal participation in policymaking.
  Examples: Swiss Trade Union Confederation (SGB); Travail.Suisse.
- **Business associations (2)** include trade and employer federations that defend sectoral economic interests.
  Examples: economiesuisse; Swiss Trade Association (SGV); Swiss Farmers' Union (SBV).
- **Institutional actors (3)** refer to cantonal governments or legally mandated stakeholders involved in formal policymaking.
  Example: Swiss Conference of Cantonal Governments (KdK).
- **Occupational groups (4)** comprise professional chambers and sector-specific organisations that represent the interests of professions and regulate education and standards.
  Examples: Swiss Medical Association (FMH); Swiss Lawyers Association (SAV).
- **Citizen groups** consist of four subtypes in the framework used in this thesis:
  - **Identity groups (5)** represent specific demographic constituencies, such as the elderly or people with disabilities.
    Examples: Pro Infirmis; Pro Senectute.
  - **Leisure groups (6)** are organised around recreational, cultural, or sports activities.
    Examples: Swiss Alpine Club (SAC); Swiss Scout Movement (PBS).
  - **Religious groups (7)** represent organised faith communities.
    Examples: Swiss Bishops' Conference (SBK); Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG).

– **Public interest groups (8)** advocate for causes that benefit society at large, such as environmental protection or humanitarian goals.
Examples: World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); Amnesty International; Caritas Switzerland.

This classification accounts for both institutional access and the strategic orientation of interest groups. The first four types, business associations, trade unions, occupational groups, and institutional actors, are generally well embedded in Swiss policymaking and benefit from established administrative access (Mach & Eichenberger, 2023; Sciarini, 2023). Citizen groups, by contrast, are less institutionally integrated and rely more heavily on public communication, campaigning, and outsider strategies (Hanegraaff et al., 2016; Jourdain et al., 2017). Aggregating identity-based, leisure, religious, and public interest organisations into a single citizen group category improves analytical clarity by reducing the risk of misclassifying actors with overlapping goals or constituencies.

2.2.2 From Insider Access to Public Advocacy

Interest groups pursue influence through a range of strategies, shaped by their group type, available resources, and the broader political environment. A common distinction in the literature separates insider from outsider approaches (Beyers, 2004). Insider strategies involve direct engagement with policymakers—such as participating in consultation procedures, contributing to expert groups and parliamentary commissions, or building long-term relationships with elected officials (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Christiansen et al., 2017; Sciarini, 2023). Outsider strategies, by contrast, focus on indirect influence through supporter mobilisation, media campaigns, or public pressure outside formal institutional channels (De Bruycker, 2019; Hanegraaff et al., 2016).

In neo-corporatist systems such as Switzerland, insider approaches have traditionally been dominant (Mach et al., 2020; Sciarini, 2023). Business associations, occupational groups, trade unions, and other institutional actors occupy formal

roles in the policymaking process and tend to favour discreet, expertise-driven influence (Mach & Eichenberger, 2023; Weiler et al., 2019). These strategies depend on legal and technical knowledge, access to administrative channels, and staff who can provide timely and detailed input. While institutional embeddedness contributes to continuity and trust, it can also reduce flexibility when issues become politicised or move into more visible public arenas (Häusermann et al., 2004).

Outsider strategies are often associated with citizen groups, such as NGOs, identity-based organisations, or public interest actors, which typically have limited access to formal policymaking venues (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Hanegraaff et al., 2016). These groups rely on legitimacy, public mobilisation, and strategic framing to exert influence outside institutional channels. Common methods include petitions, public demonstrations, and media campaigns (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). Outsider lobbying also requires distinct capacities, such as effective communication, coalition-building, and the ability to align advocacy with prevailing public values. Such strategies should not be seen only as fallback options for weaker actors (Wagner et al., 2023). Many organisations use them deliberately—for identity-building, member mobilisation, or to shape public agendas and influence policymaking indirectly (Berkhout, 2013; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

However, many interest groups combine different strategic approaches. A growing body of research shows that hybrid strategies are common (Dür & Mateo, 2013; e.g., Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2018). For example, a trade union may contribute to a consultation while also organising street protests. Similarly, a business association may engage in direct contact with policymakers and at the same time issue press releases to shape public debate. The choice of strategy often depends on the stage of the policy process, the institutional venue where the issue is addressed (Buffardi et al., 2015; Weiler & Brändli, 2015), and the content and type of the policy itself (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Consultations tend to favour insider tactics based on expertise and established relationships. In contrast, public-facing phases—such as parliamentary controversies, electoral debates, or especially

direct democratic votes—encourage outsider approaches focused on visibility and agenda-setting.

The choice of strategy is also shaped by the policy domain. In technical areas such as health or taxation, insider channels are more common, as these fields prioritise expert knowledge and attract limited public attention (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Willems, 2024). In contrast, policy areas linked to identity, values, or ethics—such as environmental protection, education, or migration—are more likely to trigger outsider mobilisation (Dür & Mateo, 2013; Sciarini, 2023). Additionally, not all organisations have the same level of strategic flexibility. Larger, more professionalised groups often have the capacity to operate across multiple venues and adjust their tactics (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Hanegraaff et al., 2016; Varone et al., 2020). Smaller organisations, by contrast, tend to rely on familiar methods and may lack the resources to diversify their approach. Taken together, advocacy strategies are shaped not only by group type, but also by organisational capacity, policy domain, and institutional context.

2.2.3 Beyond Group Type: Strategic Flexibility and Inequality

The traditional distinction between insider and outsider strategies has long provided a useful framework for studying interest group behaviour (Beyers, 2004). It highlights how some groups have direct access to policymakers, while others must rely on public campaigning to make their voices heard. However, as shown in the previous section, this dichotomy does not fully capture how interest groups operate in practice. Instead, groups can and do combine different approaches at different times and under varying circumstances (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Kriesi et al., 2007). Strategic behaviour is dynamic and evolves in response to institutional phases of policymaking and the policy domain and level of public attention.

One limitation of the insider–outsider model is its tendency to treat strategies as mutually exclusive. In practice, many groups adopt hybrid or sequential

approaches—relying on insider channels when available and turning to public arenas when needed (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Wagner et al., 2023). Jourdain et al. (2017) shows that even resource-rich organisations often combine venues over time, contributing expert input during consultations while preparing public campaigns in parallel. In Switzerland, where the policy process is procedurally segmented, interest groups frequently adapt their tactics as issues move from closed administrative phases to open and contested arenas such as referenda.

The concept of venue shopping refers to the strategic selection or combination of institutional arenas to advance policy goals (Buffardi et al., 2015; Varone et al., 2018). In Switzerland, the potential for venue shopping is particularly pronounced. Draft legislation typically moves through public consultations, administrative revision, parliamentary debate and approval (Weiler et al., 2019), and, if contested, a referendum (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020). Interest groups are not confined to a single channel of influence; they may adopt different strategies at different stages of the process (Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2023). For example, a group that fails to influence a bill during the consultation phase may later shift to public mobilisation or media advocacy once the issue gains political salience, in a renewed effort to shape the same policy.

While venue shopping offers strategic flexibility, it also introduces new forms of inequality. Not all groups are equally equipped to navigate multiple arenas or achieve cumulative access (Weiler et al., 2019). The ability to engage in multi-venue lobbying depends on organisational resources, institutional knowledge, and staff capacity (Varone et al., 2020). As Binderkrantz et al. (2015) and Jourdain et al. (2017) show, only a small number of highly professionalised organisations dominate across consultation, parliamentary, and media arenas. These groups—typically business associations or large umbrella organisations—coordinate their efforts across venues and adjust rapidly to changing political conditions. In contrast, smaller or less resourced organisations often intervene only once and in a single arena, which limits their visibility and influence.

Moreover, strategic flexibility depends not only on organisational resources but also on the structure of political opportunity. In low-salience policy areas, insider access tends to be more effective (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). In contrast, high-salience phases—such as referenda—make public visibility more important. Weiler & Brändli (2015) shows that citizen groups lacking formal influence often rely on public mobilisation when institutional dynamics shift. Business groups, too, adjust their strategies when insider tactics become less effective. In such cases, they may turn to media advocacy or reframe their campaigns (Culpepper, 2011; Mach & Eichenberger, 2023; Willems, 2024). The changing relevance of each arena over time creates what Jourdain et al. (2017) terms "venue sequencing": the process by which interest groups adapt their strategies as issues move through different phases of policymaking.

While group type and the insider–outsider model remain analytically useful, they overlook how interest group visibility shifts across the institutional sequence of policymaking (Weiler & Brändli, 2015), and how it is shaped by issue context and organisational networks (Wagner et al., 2023). This thesis proposes a comparative framework to examine how organisations adjust their strategies between the consultation phase, public referendum campaigns, and media debates. By focusing on these distinct venues and their varying access conditions, the analysis goes beyond static classifications and single-venue approaches (e.g. Baumgartner & Leech, 2001). It aims to capture how institutional context and issue characteristics jointly shape the incentives for interest groups to seek visibility.

2.3 How Institutions Shape Strategy Choice

2.3.1 The Consultation Phase: Expert Input, Limited Visibility

The consultation procedure (*Vernehmlassung*) is an early stage of Swiss policymaking. As a formalised pre-parliamentary phase, it allows stakeholders—such as cantonal authorities, interest groups, and other organised actors—to comment

on draft legislation before it reaches the Federal Assembly (Mach & Eichenberger, 2023; Sager et al., 2022). The procedure reflects Switzerland's neo-corporatist tradition, which institutionalises the involvement of organised interests in policymaking. Business and professional associations, in particular, are expected to provide expertise, implementation knowledge, and political legitimacy. The consultation phase serves to improve legal quality and support early consensus-building (Bieri, 2020).

While consultation procedures have become more inclusive over time, participation remains formally open but substantively selective. Until the 1970s, consultations were not publicly announced and were limited to a small set of actors (Bieri, 2020). The federal administration controlled access, deciding which stakeholders were invited and how their input was handled. Reforms in the 1970s and the adoption of the 2005 Consultation Law formally extended participation rights. Today, any organisation or individual may submit statements on policy drafts (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020). In practice, however, participation still reflects asymmetries in access and capacity.

Empirical studies show that access and influence in the consultation phase are closely linked to organisational capacity. Business associations and professional organisations are more likely to submit responses and better equipped to provide detailed, technically substantiated input—contributions that tend to carry greater weight in legislative drafting (Christe et al., 2016; Sager et al., 2022). Although all actors may formally participate, well-resourced groups are more likely to influence outcomes, as administrations often prioritise sophisticated submissions (Bieri, 2020). Citizen groups and smaller NGOs, by contrast, often lack the legal and administrative expertise required to meet these expectations (Christiansen et al., 2017).

Recent procedural reforms have further reinforced asymmetries in access and influence during the consultation phase. Since 2016, oral hearings and conferences have been eliminated, and all feedback must now be submitted in written form (Christe et al., 2016). This change institutionalises a system that favours actors

with the capacity to produce formal and legally precise documents. Compared to delivering an oral statement, submitting a written contribution represents a significantly higher organisational threshold. At the same time, the federal administration retains broad discretion over how inputs are evaluated, summarised, and integrated into legislative drafts (Bieri, 2020). As a result, formal inclusion does not necessarily imply substantive influence, as the administration ultimately decides how consultation feedback is weighted and whether it affects the final policy.

The consultation phase in Switzerland illustrates what Culpepper (2011) describes as "quiet politics": a low-salience, expert-driven form of policymaking that takes place largely outside the public eye. In this setting, access depends not on public mobilisation or media visibility, but on recognised expertise and longstanding institutional ties. These conditions reinforce the strategic advantage of well-organised, professionalised actors—particularly from the business sector— who benefit from early and direct access to the legislative process. Within the framework of this thesis, the consultation phase represents one of two core venues of interest group participation. It stands in contrast to the referendum phase, which involves greater public visibility and political contestation.

2.3.2 The Referendum Phase: When Public Advocacy Becomes Necessary

Switzerland's system of direct democracy provides interest groups with institutionalised tools to shape legislation beyond parliamentary decision-making. Two mechanisms are particularly relevant: the popular initiative, which requires 100,000 signatures to propose a constitutional amendment, and the facultative referendum, which enables 50,000 citizens—or eight cantons—to call a national vote on recently adopted laws within 100 days (Sciarini, 2023). These instruments shift decision-making from elite negotiation to public contestation and open additional channels for interest group engagement in the policy process (Eichenberger, 2020; Sager et al., 2022; Sciarini, 2023).

2. Theory and Hypotheses

The facultative referendum, the second institutional venue examined in this thesis, provides a last opportunity for contestation in the policymaking process (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Sager et al., 2022). It enables actors to challenge legislative outcomes after parliamentary approval and functions as a veto point within the political system. This mechanism is particularly attractive to groups with an interest in preserving the status quo. Business associations, for example, have often used referenda to oppose regulatory changes (Varone et al., 2020). Between 1990 and 2009, they initiated approximately a quarter of all facultative referenda, frequently campaigning in defence of existing legal and economic arrangements (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020).

In contrast, popular initiatives are more frequently used by citizen groups, NGOs, and social movements, typically to place new issues on the political agenda (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Sciarini, 2023). These actors employ initiatives not only to promote legal change but also to express political positions and increase public pressure on policymakers. While popular initiatives are more difficult to pass, they offer a means of public agenda-setting that complements other forms of advocacy. The popular initiative is not examined in this thesis, as it introduces new policy proposals, whereas the facultative referendum is used to contest laws that have already been adopted.

Direct democratic instruments change the conditions of political access. In the context of referenda, interest groups must address not only policymakers but also a broad electorate that serves as the final decision-maker (Eichenberger, 2020). This shift requires different organisational capacities, including the ability to mobilise supporters, handle media outreach, and coordinate large-scale campaigns (Varone et al., 2020). Although referenda open opportunities for a broader range of actors to influence policy outcomes, they also raise the resource threshold for participation—making it more difficult for less well-funded groups to compete effectively.

The institutional design of referenda ensures a publicly visible decision point. Unlike other forms of political debate, where outsider lobbying exerts influence indirectly, referenda establish a direct link between public campaigning and policy

outcomes (Sciarini, 2023). This makes referenda a distinct venue in the Swiss political system—not just informal means of exerting pressure, but formalised tools that allow citizens and organised interests to contest legislation through a public vote. For well-organised interest groups, this creates strong incentives for strategic preparation. On one level, actors may try to avoid a referendum through pre-legislative negotiation. On another, they may treat the referendum as a secondary venue, launching public campaigns after unsuccessful insider lobbying to shape opinion at the ballot box.

In summary, the referendum phase introduces a formal element of popular decision-making into the legislative process and offers interest groups an institutionalised channel for public engagement. In this thesis, the facultative referendum is analysed as the second policy phase, following the consultation process. Together, these two venues provide the basis for comparing how interest group activity varies across institutional settings.

2.4 The Media as a Political Arena

Interest groups often extend their lobbying efforts into the media, which operates according to a different logic than institutional venues. Media visibility depends less on formal access or technical expertise and more on news values such as conflict, personalisation, and emotional resonance (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Willems, 2024). Strategic success in this arena requires outsider resources such as communicative skill and framing capacity, rather than institutional status. These differences are important for understanding how interest groups shape public discourse and influence decision-making during referenda.

The media is not merely a channel for communication but a strategic arena in which interest groups compete for visibility and agenda-setting influence. While formally open, it is governed by selective filters shaped by journalistic routines. Journalists—not policymakers—decide which voices are included in coverage, drawing on editorial judgement, audience expectations, and commercial considerations

(Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017). Visibility is therefore co-produced: interest groups offer narratives, but it is ultimately journalists who determine whether—and in what form—these messages reach the public (Binderkrantz et al., 2023).

Unlike institutional venues, where insider status or formal mandates determine access, the media rewards other capacities. Strategic success depends on aligning messages with journalistic expectations—such as clarity, drama, and timing—within the constraints of a fast-paced news cycle. As Berkhout (2013) notes, media advocacy functions as a form of reputation exchange: interest groups provide content that fits editorial demands and, in return, gain symbolic recognition and public visibility.

Media visibility functions as a political resource for interest groups. Its agenda-setting power and public presence shape perceptions of legitimacy and relevance, which can enhance a group's position in other venues. In Switzerland, where direct democracy elevates public opinion in policymaking, the media additionally serves as a key channel of direct influence on the electorate. Securing coverage during a referendum campaign enables groups to frame policy debates and mobilise support before decisions are made at the ballot box.

2.4.1 Structural Bias in the Media Arena

Although the media arena is formally accessible to all actors, empirical research shows that media visibility is unequally distributed. A small number of well-resourced interest groups dominate coverage, while most remain marginal or invisible (Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023). This distribution reflects broader inequalities found in administrative policymaking venues and challenges the notion that the media offers a pluralistic platform where all voices are equally represented (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Thrall, 2006).

Visibility tends to concentrate among large, professionalised organisations with established reputations and communication infrastructure. In Denmark, Binderkrantz & Christiansen (2014) found that just 25 groups accounted for half of all interest group media appearances. Similar findings from the United States show that

coverage is disproportionately allocated to business associations, major advocacy groups, and organisations capable of regularly producing journalist-friendly content (Thrall, 2006). These actors benefit from cumulative visibility advantages: past media appearances increase their likelihood of being selected again. In addition, prior access to administrative or parliamentary venues can further raise the chances of media inclusion (Wagner et al., 2023).

This structural bias is particularly pronounced in favour of business interests and private sector actors. Aizenberg & Hanegraaff (2020) show that firms and business associations consistently receive the most media attention across decades of coverage in both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Their findings challenge the view that citizen groups have become increasingly visible in the media, a claim often associated with the pluralisation argument of the media (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). The observed rise in NGO visibility, they argue, partly reflects the fact that earlier studies often left out firms and corporations from the population of interest groups (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020).

Organisational capacity remains a key driver of media visibility, as in other advocacy venues. Larger groups are more likely to employ dedicated communication staff, invest in media training, and maintain long-term relationships with journalists. Vesa & Binderkrantz (2023) show that business groups consistently outperform citizen groups in media presence, even across different political systems. This suggests that structural inequalities in media access are not solely a byproduct of corporatist systems, but reflect broader differences in resources and professionalisation among interest groups.

The way news is selected and produced further reinforces this asymmetry. Journalists work under pressure to deliver content that is timely, credible, and focused on conflict. Groups that can quickly provide polished material, such as ready-made statements, clear figures, and visual elements, are more likely to be featured. In contrast, smaller organisations often lack the capacity to respond quickly or to frame their messages in ways that match journalistic expectations (Grömping, 2019). While there are exceptions, such as professionalised advocacy groups with

strong media skills, these are rare and usually active in narrow fields where their expertise is widely recognised.

Oppositional or controversial positions can temporarily benefit outsider groups, particularly in high-conflict contexts (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). However, such gains are often short-lived and do not offset the underlying structural bias. Moreover, even when citizen groups receive media attention, they tend to be underrepresented in high-prestige outlets or framed in less authoritative terms than business actors (Thrall, 2006). Visibility alone does not imply equality of voice or influence, especially in the context of specific policy debates and efforts to shape policy outcomes.

Media visibility is filtered through structural and organisational hierarchies, leading to a skewed distribution that favours resource-rich and professionalised actors. These asymmetries help explain why a small number of groups consistently dominate media coverage, often regardless of issue or phase. In this context, visibility is not a neutral by-product but a competitive and constrained resource, shaped by pre-existing inequalities in capacity, access, and credibility. The following section examines how interest groups respond to these conditions by adapting their framing, timing, and communication strategies.

2.4.2   Reputation, Framing, and Strategic Adaptation

Given the structural barriers outlined above, interest groups cannot rely on organisational capacity alone to secure media attention. They must also adapt strategically, tailoring their communication to journalistic expectations and audience preferences. Visibility depends not only on access but also on how messages are framed, who delivers them, and how well they align with broader public narratives.

Strategic framing is one of the most important tools in gaining media attention. Interest groups increase their chances of coverage when they present issues in ways that align with dominant news values—such as conflict, urgency, or broad societal relevance. De Bruycker (2019) finds that public-interest framing, which appeals to voters, families, or consumers rather than organisational goals, improves the

likelihood of favourable coverage. This approach is particularly important for citizen groups and NGOs that lack institutional authority or financial resources, as it enables them to gain symbolic legitimacy by aligning with democratic norms and collective concerns. In Switzerland, for example, citizen groups campaigning for lower rents often frame their demands as benefiting the broad majority of the population, tapping into concerns that affect many tenants.

However, the success of framing strategies is conditional. Not all appeals resonate equally, and the same message may yield different outcomes depending on the political context, timing, and perceived credibility of the messenger (Burstein, 1991). Business groups, for example, may struggle to justify self-interested claims under conditions of high public scrutiny (Willems, 2024). To avoid backlash, they often reframe economic interests in terms of employment, innovation, or stability—frequently invoking the middle class or small and medium-sized enterprises to build broader appeal. Still, the media remains a less favourable arena for business actors, who tend to perform better in the quieter, less contested settings of insider lobbying (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Culpepper, 2011; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007).

The consequences of media visibility are context-dependent. While coverage can strengthen an organisation's capacity to influence public debate, it also carries reputational risks. Groups that fail to control the framing of their message may be portrayed as extreme, unreliable, or self-serving. Thrall (2006) cautions that visibility—particularly under hostile or overly simplified coverage—can harm a group's standing rather than improve it. This trade-off is especially pronounced in high-salience moments, when journalistic scrutiny increases and the risk of misrepresentation grows (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017).

Beyond shaping public opinion, media visibility plays a central role in reputation management. As Berkhout (2013) argues, interest groups operate across multiple arenas at once: they influence policy, maintain supporter relations, and demonstrate legitimacy in public. Media engagement contributes to all three. For many organisations, particularly NGOs and advocacy networks, visibility is not only a tool for shaping policy outcomes, but also a way to demonstrate relevance

to members, donors, and external audiences. Crepaz et al. (2022) show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, even well-established groups increased their media presence not to influence policy directly, but to maintain their public profile and remain visible to supporters.

This logic of reputation also influences how interest groups engage with the media. Binderkrantz & Christiansen (2014) find that citizen groups are often more active than business actors in initiating contact with journalists, issuing press releases, and offering interviews. However, as shown earlier, effort alone does not ensure visibility. Strategic communication must be supported by professional skill, clarity, and timeliness. Smaller groups can occasionally outperform larger ones, particularly when they develop media literacy, craft strong narratives, and rely on recognisable spokespersons (Grömping, 2019).

Media lobbying is not simply an extension of insider strategy, nor its opposite; it requires a distinct repertoire of communication and resources (Wagner et al., 2023). Interest groups must weigh the potential benefits of visibility against the risks of reputational harm and narrative loss. In contexts such as Switzerland, where public campaigning becomes essential during referenda, the ability to frame messages effectively and demonstrate credibility in the media becomes a strategic necessity.

2.5 Hypotheses: Visibility Across Venues and Policy Issues

This section concludes the theory chapter by formulating three hypotheses based on the issue- and venue-centred framework developed above. Each hypothesis addresses a potential factor influencing how interest groups appear in the media.

1. **Strategic Incentives:** Interest groups adjust their strategies across institutional phases in response to changing opportunity structures.
2. **Persistent Concentration:** Media access remains concentrated among a small number of dominant groups, reflecting existing advantages across venues.

3. **Increased Mobilisation:** The high-salient referendum phase triggers broader engagement by interest groups due to the higher public visibility of political issues.

Switzerland provides a suitable context for testing these expectations. The policy process moves from a consultation phase—where expert input is prioritised and public attention is limited—to a referendum phase, where voter mobilisation and media communication play a more central role (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2018). This institutional shift allows for a comparative analysis of how interest groups respond to varying access conditions and media logics.

The first hypothesis examines whether business groups gain more media visibility than citizen groups during referenda, as insider strategies become less effective and public communication more relevant. The second asks whether structural patterns of concentrated media visibility persist across both phases. The third considers whether higher salience in the referendum phase facilitates broader access to the media, potentially lowering barriers for less dominant actors.

2.5.1 H1: Strategic Adaptation of Business Groups

As discussed above, in low-salience venues such as the consultation phase, business groups benefit from structural advantages. Their strategies prioritise insider influence, drawing on technical expertise, early access to policymakers, and procedural legitimacy to shape outcomes with limited public scrutiny (Culpepper, 2011). In this setting, media visibility is not a strategic objective and may even be avoided, as it can increase exposure to criticism or politicisation (Baumgartner et al., 2009).

When a referendum is launched, the institutional conditions for advocacy change. Decision-making shifts from administrative negotiation to public contestation, and influence depends on reaching the broader electorate (Sciarini, 2023). The referendum phase requires all actors to engage more openly, regardless of their typical

strategic preferences. Business groups that generally operate through closed channels are also expected to take public positions in order to remain effective.

Among the three hypotheses, H1 captures the core expectation of this thesis. It focuses on how dominant groups adapt their media strategies when institutional settings become more visible and contested.

> **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** *Business groups specifically increase their media visibility during referendum phases compared to citizen groups, as the direct-democratic decision-making context reduces the effectiveness of insider lobbying and compels them to engage publicly.*

This hypothesis does not assume that business groups generally favour public communication, nor that visibility reflects resource advantages alone. Instead, it expects a relative increase in their media presence compared to citizen groups, driven by the strategic need to adapt when policymaking moves into the public domain.

2.5.2 H2: Structural Concentration of Media Visibility

Even as the policy process shifts toward more public-facing engagement during referenda, structural inequalities in media access are expected to persist. As discussed in Section 2.4, media visibility is shaped not only by active outreach, but also by accumulated advantages such as professional infrastructure, media training, established relationships with journalists, and reputational standing (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Thrall, 2006). These resources enable a small number of well-connected organisations, especially business groups and umbrella associations, to maintain consistent media access across institutional settings.

During referendum campaigns, the overall level of media visibility may increase. However, the distribution of access remains uneven. Journalists, working under time constraints and professional norms, often rely on familiar actors they consider credible. As a result, the groups that are frequently covered during the consultation phase tend to remain the most visible during the referendum phase.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Media visibility within specific policy contexts remains concentrated among a small set of interest groups, with the same actors dominating coverage across both consultation and referendum phases.*

H2 thus expects continuity in the distribution of media coverage across phases. The shift toward a more public venue does not substantially alter which groups receive attention.

2.5.3 H3: Generalised Mobilisation under High Salience

The referendum phase in Swiss policymaking is characterised by higher issue salience and a shift toward public contestation. In this phase, reaching the voting population requires public communication, making media visibility a necessary strategy, even for groups that typically rely on insider access (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020). Because referenda are institutionalised and predictable, interest groups have both the time and incentive to prepare their media strategies in advance. As a result, increased media effort and mobilisation are expected.

High salience also increases media demand for diverse perspectives (Culpepper, 2011). Journalists are more likely to include a broader range of voices when covering contested issues, which can create entry points for groups with limited media experience or unpopular positions (Willems, 2024). This broader visibility is shaped both by group mobilisation and by the logic of editorial selection under high-salience conditions.

The third hypothesis does not assume equal access to media coverage. As suggested by H2, organisational resources and editorial preferences continue to shape which actors receive attention. However, the referendum phase is expected to generate broader attempts to gain visibility and result in more frequent media appearances across a wider range of interest groups.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *There is an overall increase in media visibility for all interest group types during the high-salience referendum phase compared to the consultation phase.*

This hypothesis focuses on systemic mobilisation rather than equal outcomes. It expects an increase in both (1) the total number of distinct groups appearing in the media and (2) the overall volume of media coverage. It reflects how the institutional design of referenda can broaden participation when more is at stake, even if media visibility remains uneven.

3

Methodology

Contents

This thesis examines how interest groups gain access to the media arena across two phases of the policymaking process in Switzerland's direct democratic system. It starts from the assumption that business groups typically rely on insider access to the administrative venue and therefore have limited incentives to engage in media advocacy during the consultation phase. While formally open, the consultation phase primarily targets expert input and administrative feedback. In contrast, the referendum phase shifts decision-making to the public, requiring interest groups to

communicate their positions more openly. Media strategies become essential, as the final outcome is determined by the voting population.

This thesis investigates whether business groups, which are assumed to avoid media exposure during the consultation phase, become significantly more active in the media during referendum campaigns. The expectation is that they adjust their strategy in response to the institutional setting, becoming more visible when public persuasion is required. At the same time, the study offers a descriptive challenge to the pluralisation hypothesis proposed by (Binderkrantz et al., 2015), which suggests that media attention reflects the overall composition of the interest group population. According to this view, the media acts as a more pluralistic arena than institutional venues. The analysis provides evidence to the contrary, showing that media appearances are neither equally nor proportionally distributed across group types.

To investigate these questions, the study relies on an original dataset constructed specifically for this purpose. It includes 1,505 unique interest groups that formally participated in at least one consultation related to the 40 selected policy issues. These issues were chosen because they underwent both a consultation phase and a facultative referendum between 2011 and 2024. The unit of analysis is the mobilisation of an interest group on a specific policy issue, resulting in 2,898 group–issue dyads. These dyads constitute the Level 1 observations in a cross-classified structure: each mobilisation is linked to both an interest group (Level 2a) and a policy issue (Level 2b), reflecting that many groups engage with multiple issues, and each issue involves multiple groups. The dependent variable is media appearance, defined as whether and how often a group was mentioned in six major Swiss newspapers. A multilevel regression model was used to account for the cross-classified nature of the data, as described later in the chapter.

The dataset captures mentions during both the consultation and referendum phases. All media appearances were manually coded, and the dataset was structured in Excel before being imported into R for statistical analysis. All data processing, statistical analysis, and figure/table generation were performed in R

(version 4.4.2) using an R Markdown template based on Lyngs' (2019) *Oxford-down*. The full dataset—`2025.05.19_ig_visibility_data`—and all R scripts are publicly archived on the University of Geneva's Yareta platform: `https://doi.org/10.26037/yareta:2dwkqima4rdo3f62qtswbfnjlm`.

The empirical analysis is guided by three hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework. Hypothesis 1 (H1) tests whether business groups increase their media visibility more than citizen groups during the referendum phase, when public communication becomes strategically necessary. Hypothesis 2 (H2) examines whether media access remains concentrated among a small number of dominant actors across both phases. Hypothesis 3 (H3) assesses whether overall media visibility increases in the high-salience context of referendum campaigns. The statistical models presented in the following sections are designed to test these expectations while accounting for the cross-classified structure of the data.

The remainder of this chapter introduces the variables, explains the case and group selection procedures, and documents the data collection process. As the dataset is entirely original and manually compiled, the structure of the methodology follows the chronological steps of the research process.

3.1   Case Selection and Time Frame

The selection of political issues is based on the aim to compare interest group media visibility across two policymaking phases: the consultation phase and the referendum campaign phase. To ensure consistency, only issues that underwent both a formal pre-parliamentary consultation—inviting stakeholder input on draft legislation—and a facultative referendum, triggered by 50,000 valid signatures, were included.

The dataset covers the full population of applicable cases between 2011 and 2024, based on the official list of referenda provided by the Swiss Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzlei, 2024a, 2024b). Although the observation window begins in 2011, no referendum from that year met the inclusion criteria. The first qualifying

case with both a consultation and a referendum occurred in 2012. The initial list included 43 facultative referenda within the defined period. Three cases were excluded based on two criteria:

- **Overlap between consultation and campaign phases**, which made phase separation impossible (e.g. the Social Security Law (ATSG) of 2019, where a new consultation coincided with the referendum campaign on an earlier revision).

- **Missing consultation process**, such as for the Free Trade Agreement between Switzerland and Indonesia in 2021.

After applying these criteria, the final dataset consists of 40 political issues that underwent both a consultation phase and a facultative referendum. This full-population approach strengthens the internal validity of the study, as no issue selection bias was introduced. It also ensures that each case includes both an institutional and a public-facing phase, allowing for consistent comparison of interest group media visibility across venues.

In each case, I verified the existence of a formal consultation process by consulting Fedlex, where I retrieved the consultation reports (*Berichte über das Vernehmlassungsverfahren*) (Fedlex, 2024). These reports list the organisations that submitted official statements, allowing me to identify the population of interest groups involved. The documents were typically available in German, French, and Italian.

3.2 Identifying Interest Groups

The main independent variable in this study is interest group type, used to analyse media visibility across categories of actors. Group type is measured at the interest group level (Level 2a) and linked to the group–issue dyads that form the Level 1 observations. The dataset includes 1,505 unique interest groups that formally participated in at least one of the 40 consultation procedures.

Private individuals, cantonal governments, municipal authorities, and private companies were excluded from the dataset. These actors are either not representative of organised interest groups or fall outside the scope of this study, which focuses on collective interest representation. Cantonal and municipal authorities often participate in consultations, but their interests are also represented through umbrella organisations such as the Conference of Cantonal Governments. These are included under the category of institutional actors. Private companies were also excluded. Although they could be considered business actors, they lack the institutionalised form of associations. Many are members of one or several associations, which makes it difficult to distinguish between individual and collective representation. Their exclusion improves the clarity and consistency of the group-level coding.

3.2.1   Creating the Group–Issue Dataset

To identify the population of interest groups, I manually reviewed each of the 40 consultation reports (*Vernehmlassungsberichte*) published by the Swiss federal administration (Fedlex, 2024). These reports list all actors that submitted a statement in response to a proposed law. I extracted the names of all participating organisations and compiled a master list of unique interest groups. This was done manually, report by report, using the original German and French versions.

In many cases, the same organisation appeared under different names, spellings, or abbreviations. Naming conventions varied depending on how different individuals within the administration wrote the reports. For example, the Fédération suisse des patients and the Schweizerische Patientenorganisation were merged into a single entry. I also standardised abbreviations and translated group names into a consistent naming scheme to ensure accurate tracking across documents written in both French and German.

The final dataset includes all interest groups that participated in at least one consultation. Many groups appeared across multiple policy issues. Each of the 1,505 groups was linked to relevant issues in a structured Excel database, using a drop-down menu referencing the master list. As a result, the dataset contains

2,898 unique group–issue combinations. These dyads form the basis for analysing media visibility across institutional phases.

3.2.2 Group Type Classification

Interest groups were classified into broader categories using the INTERARENA typology developed by Binderkrantz, Christiansen, et al. (2020). This framework defines eight group types, which I used as a starting point. The full typology was preserved in the raw dataset. However, for the regression analysis, I collapsed four conceptually overlapping categories—identity groups, leisure groups, religious groups, and public interest groups—into a single category labelled "citizen groups." This step was implemented in R at the modelling stage and follows a similar approach proposed by Eichenberger & Varone (2020). It reduced classification errors and improved interpretability in the analysis.

The final typology used in the statistical models includes five group types. These five categories are used consistently throughout the regression models presented below:

- **Business associations** (e.g. economiesuisse, SAV)
- **Trade unions** (e.g. SGB, Travail.Suisse)
- **Institutional actors** (e.g. Conference of Cantonal Governments – KdK)
- **Occupational/professional groups** (e.g. Swiss Medical Association – FMH)
- **Citizen groups** (e.g. WWF, Pro Senectute, Swiss Bishops' Conference)

The primary source for classifying group types was Lobbywatch.ch, a Swiss non-profit platform that documents interest group affiliations of parliamentarians (Lobbywatch, 2024). It provided detailed organisational descriptions and policy fields, allowing me to assign group types with greater confidence. For groups not listed on Lobbywatch, I consulted official websites, statutes, and public records to determine their main purpose and structure.

Some organisations had been dissolved, renamed, or merged. In these cases, I cross-checked multiple sources and assigned group type based on the last known

activity or successor organisation. Once classified, each group was linked to its category and associated policy issues in the Excel dataset. Many groups appeared in more than one consultation and are therefore represented in multiple rows. Group types were later recoded in R during the model-building process.

3.3 Measuring Media Visibility

The dependent variable in this study is media access, measured as the number of times an interest group is mentioned in news coverage related to a specific policy issue. Following Binderkrantz et al. (2015), media visibility is treated as a proxy for access to the public sphere. Mentions are recorded separately for the consultation and referendum phases. The unit of observation is the group–issue–phase combination, which forms the basis of the statistical analysis.

3.3.1 Selection of Media Sources

To ensure broad linguistic and political coverage, six major Swiss newspapers were selected—three from the German-speaking region and three from the French-speaking region:

- **German-language:** Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages-Anzeiger, St. Galler Tagblatt
- **French-language:** Le Temps, Tribune de Genève, 24 heures

These outlets were chosen to reflect a balance of editorial positions and media ownership structures (e.g. NZZ vs. Tamedia), as well as broad political relevance. All six newspapers are fully accessible via the Swissdox media archive, which was used for identifying media appearances. Although interest group names were also coded in Italian during the early stages of data collection, no Italian-language newspapers could be included in the analysis due to their unavailability in the database.

3.3.2   Media Search Strategy

Media appearances were identified using the Swissdox archive, which includes approximately 24 million articles from Swiss print and online sources (Swissdox, 2024). For each of the 40 political issues, I constructed a tailored keyword string that combined legal or thematic terms with the names, abbreviations, and common variants of all participating interest groups—up to 250 per issue. Strings were created in both French and German, enabling systematic article retrieval across all six selected newspapers.

To support consistency and efficiency, keyword strings were semi-automatically generated using ChatGPT. The tool helped combine policy-specific terms with name variants, but it did not replace conceptual judgment. All strings were manually reviewed and refined to ensure relevance and coverage accuracy.

To capture indirect or ambiguous references, I also included general expressions in both languages. These helped identify articles where group names were not mentioned explicitly. For example, terms such as *Verband*, *Gewerkschaft*, or *Geschäftsführer* in German, and *association*, *syndicat*, or *porte-parole* in French, were added to the search queries.

3.3.3   Coding Media Mentions

Media appearances were coded separately for each policy phase. For the consultation phase, I used the official consultation window as defined in the administrative documents. For the referendum phase, I applied a 90-day window preceding the vote, corresponding to the core campaign period. The voting day itself was excluded, as coverage typically shifts from advocacy to reporting outcomes.

Each article was reviewed manually. An interest group could appear only once per article, regardless of how many times it was mentioned within it. However, it could appear multiple times on the same day if it was mentioned in different articles, either within the same newspaper or across newspapers. For example,

if a group was mentioned in a front-page report and again in an editorial, both instances were counted separately.

In total, over 8,000 articles were reviewed. I used Swissdox's keyword highlighting function to support the screening process. Before conducting each search, I identified the list of interest groups that had submitted a consultation statement on the given policy issue. Highlighted keywords—both specific group names and general terms such as *Verband*, *Gewerkschaft*, *association*, or *porte-parole*—helped me scan articles more efficiently. When a general term appeared, I assessed from the context whether it referred to one of the pre-identified groups for that issue.

To improve comparability across language regions, cantonal-level mentions were recoded to their corresponding national umbrella organisation. For instance, cantonal branches of the farmers' association were coded under the Swiss Farmers' Association. This standardisation was applied manually during data entry.

The final count of media appearances is recorded at the group–issue–phase level and serves as the dependent variable in the multilevel regression models presented later in the chapter.

3.4   Policy Type as Control Variable

This thesis primarily examines variation in interest group media visibility across institutional phases and group types. To account for variation linked to the content of policy debates, issue type is included as a control variable in the regression models.

Previous research shows that policy content shapes both political conflict and media attention (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007). Redistributive issues, such as tax reform or welfare policy, often provoke value-driven debates and broad mobilisation, which increases the likelihood of media coverage (Kriesi et al., 2007; Lowi, 1972). Regulatory policies create clear material consequences: some actors benefit from new rules, while others face additional costs or constraints. These opposing interests make the conflict more visible and incentivise both insider lobbying and public communication. In contrast, distributive or technical issues usually remain within

administrative venues and receive little media attention (Burstein, 1991; Dür &
De Bièvre, 2007; Dür & Mateo, 2013).

The 40 policy issues included in this study were classified into one of four
standard categories, based on Lowi's typology:

- **Distributive policies:** targeted benefits to specific groups (e.g., subsidies)
- **Regulatory policies:** imposed rules or standards (e.g., environmental regulations)
- **Redistributive policies:** reallocation of resources between groups (e.g., welfare reforms)
- **Constituent policies:** structural changes to government institutions (e.g., constitutional amendments)

Controlling for issue type allows the models to account for differences in public
visibility, the number and type of competing actors, and the likelihood of media
coverage. By adjusting for these differences, the models more accurately isolate
the effects of institutional venue and group type on media visibility.

3.5 Modeling Approach

To analyse differences in media visibility across interest group types and policy
phases, the study applies three multilevel negative binomial regression models. The
outcome variable is the number of media appearances per group–issue dyad. These
counts are highly skewed, with many zeros and some extreme values. A Poisson
model was not appropriate, as it assumes equal mean and variance. The negative
binomial model addresses overdispersion by including a dispersion parameter. All
models were estimated using the `glmmTMB` package in R.

Each group–issue dyad appears once per phase, resulting in two observations
per dyad: one for the consultation phase (`media_cons`) and one for the referendum
phase (`media_dd`). This yields a total of 5,796 observations (2 * 2,898), which
form the basis of the analysis.

3. Methodology

Both `media_cons` and `media_dd` are non-negative count variables. In both cases, the variance exceeds the mean, confirming overdispersion. A negative binomial model is therefore applied. The general specification is:

$$y_{ij} \sim \text{NegBin}(\mu_{ij}, \theta), \quad \log(\mu_{ij}) = \eta_{ij}$$

- y_{ij} is the observed number of media mentions for group i on issue j
- μ_{ij} is the expected number of mentions
- θ is the dispersion parameter, estimated by maximum likelihood

The dataset has a cross-classified structure:

- **Level 1:** Mobilisation (group–issue dyads)
- **Level 2a:** Interest groups
- **Level 2b:** Policy issues

Interest groups often engage with several issues, and each issue typically involves multiple groups. This structure supports the use of multilevel models with crossed random intercepts. The linear predictor is:

$$\eta_{ij} = \beta_0 + X_{ij}\beta + u_j^{\text{issue}} + v_i^{\text{group}}$$

- $X_{ij}\beta$ includes fixed effects for group type, issue type (based on Lowi's typology), and policy phase
- $u_j^{\text{issue}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\text{issue}}^2)$ is the random intercept for issue
- $v_i^{\text{group}} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\text{group}}^2)$ is the random intercept for interest group

Zero-inflated models were considered, given the high number of zero values. However, they were not applied. All groups had a theoretical possibility of media presence, suggesting that zero counts reflect low activity or salience rather than structural exclusion. In addition, random intercepts for groups and issues account for much of the baseline heterogeneity. Model diagnostics confirmed overdispersion but did not indicate a need for zero-inflation.

Robust standard errors were used to compute confidence intervals. Marginal effects were estimated with the `ggeffects` package and visualised using `ggplot2`.

3.5.1   Phase-Specific Models

The first two models are estimated separately for each policy phase: one for the consultation phase and one for the referendum phase. This allows for a direct comparison of group visibility across institutional contexts, with the model structure held constant. The dataset is split by phase, and each model includes a phase-specific dependent variable.

$$\log(\mu_{ij}^{\text{phase}}) = \beta_0 + \text{type3}_i + \text{lowi}_j + u_j + v_i$$

- μ_{ij}^{phase}: expected number of media mentions for group i on issue j in a given phase
- type3_i: fixed effect for group type (e.g. business, citizen, union)
- lowi_j: fixed effect for policy type, based on Lowi's classification
- u_j: random intercept for policy issue
- v_i: random intercept for interest group

This modelling strategy enables a direct test of Hypothesis 1: whether business groups are more visible than citizen groups, particularly during the referendum phase. Estimating the phases separately also allows for the comparison of baseline visibility across venues while controlling for policy type.

3.5.2   Interaction Model: Phase x Group

The third model combines both policy phases in a single analysis to assess whether group types respond differently to changes in institutional context. In contrast to the previous models, which were estimated separately by phase, this specification uses a long-format dataset where each group–issue dyad appears once per phase.

In this model, phase is included as an explanatory variable. The key element is an interaction term between group type and phase, which captures whether the effect of group type on media visibility varies across venues.

$$\log(\mu_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \text{type3}_i + \text{phase}_j + (\text{type3}_i \times \text{phase}_j) + \text{lowi}_j + u_j + v_i$$

- μ_{ij}: expected number of media mentions for group i on issue j
- phase_j: fixed effect for policy phase, coded as a binary variable (0 = consultation, 1 = referendum)
- $(\text{type3}_i \times \text{phase}_j)$: interaction between group type and policy phase
- All other terms are defined as in the previous model specification.

This model allows for a joint test of all three hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 (strategic adaptation) is assessed through the interaction term, which indicates whether business groups gain more media visibility than citizen groups when policymaking shifts to the public arena. Hypothesis 2 (structural concentration) is examined by evaluating the variance of the group-level intercept. Hypothesis 3 (general mobilisation) is tested via the main effect of the phase variable, which reflects whether overall visibility increases during referendum campaigns.

3.5.3   Issue-Level Model

The final model focuses on the two group types most central to the analysis: business groups and citizen groups. For each of the 40 policy issues, media appearances are aggregated separately by group type and policy phase. This yields 160 observations (2 group types * 2 phases * 40 issues), each capturing the total visibility of a group type in a given phase for a specific issue.

The model follows the same structure as before but simplifies the actor dimension by using group-type aggregates instead of individual organisations.

$$\log(\mu_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \text{group}_i + \text{phase}_j + (\text{group}_i \times \text{phase}_j) + \text{lowi}_j + u_j$$

- group_i: fixed effect for group type (business or citizen)
- $\text{group}_i \times \text{phase}_j$: interaction term testing whether the change in media visibility across phases differs between group types
- All other terms are defined as in the previous models. The issue-level random intercept (u_j) accounts for variation in baseline salience across the 40 policy issues.

This model offers an issue-level test of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3. H1 is examined through the interaction term, which indicates whether business groups gain more visibility than citizen groups during referendum campaigns. H3 is assessed through the main effect of the referendum phase, which reflects whether both group types become more visible under public-facing conditions. Aggregating mentions at the group-type level allows the model to capture broader mobilisation patterns while reducing within-group variation.

4

Analysis and Results

Contents

This chapter presents how different types of interest groups gain media access during two distinct policy phases in Switzerland. The consultation phase is an insider-oriented venue where interest groups submit feedback on draft legislation (Bieri, 2020). As discussed in the theory chapter, business groups hold an advantage in this administrative setting due to their technical expertise and institutional ties (Christe et al., 2016; Christiansen et al., 2017). The referendum phase, by

contrast, shifts decision-making into the public sphere. Once a policy is contested by referendum, interest groups must campaign publicly (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Sciarini, 2023). The media then becomes the central arena for advocacy. Although citizen groups are typically associated with public campaigning (Beyers, 2004), the referendum phase is expected to prompt increased media mobilisation by business groups (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020).

The main hypothesis (H1) tests whether the institutional shift between phases alters the media strategies of business groups. If business associations are compelled to engage the public during referenda, we should observe a marked increase in their media presence. Citizen groups, by contrast, already rely on outsider strategies and are more accustomed to media advocacy (Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020; Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017). H1 therefore expects business groups to increase their media visibility more than citizen groups during the referendum phase, thereby narrowing the visibility gap. This provides a direct test of whether strategic incentives, not group type alone, structure access to the media arena.

Two additional hypotheses guide the broader analysis. Hypothesis 2 (H2) tests whether media visibility remains concentrated among a small elite of powerful groups, even as the policy process shifts into the public domain. Hypothesis 3 (H3) expects an overall increase in visibility across all group types during referenda, reflecting the high salience and broader mobilisation these campaigns generate. Both hypotheses concern the distribution and evolution of media access across phases and are tested alongside the main hypothesis.

This chapter proceeds in four steps. First, it presents descriptive statistics on the distribution of media visibility across phases. Second, it compares group-level access using both absolute numbers and percentages. Third, it applies two multilevel regression models to test whether group type and policy phase predict media visibility, including an interaction model and controls for issue type. Finally, it estimates a disaggregated issue-level model to examine how the visibility of business and citizen groups varies across specific policy issues.

4.1 Overview of Media Visibility in Swiss Policymaking

This section begins by mapping the distribution of media access across the 1,505 interest groups involved in the 40 selected policy issues. The descriptive overview speaks directly to Hypothesis 2, which expects visibility to remain concentrated among a small elite, and Hypothesis 3, which anticipates a general increase in media activity during the high-salience referendum phase. By analysing total media mentions, concentration levels, and inequality indicators such as Gini coefficients, the section examines whether referenda broaden access—or merely amplify already prominent actors.

4.1.1 Most Groups Remain Silent in the Media

The analysis begins by establishing the baseline distribution of media visibility across both policy phases. It examines the total number of media mentions received by all interest groups that participated at least once in a consultation by submitting a statement on one of the 40 policy drafts. Table 4.1 summarises the data for the 1,505 unique interest groups included in the dataset. These figures offer an initial sense of how limited and unequal media access is across the policymaking process. A strongly skewed distribution would lend support to Hypothesis 2, which expects visibility to concentrate among a small set of dominant actors. Conversely, a marked increase in overall activity during referenda would support Hypothesis 3, which anticipates broader mobilisation under conditions of public contestation.

Most interest groups receive little to no media attention. During the consultation phase, the average number of mentions is just 0.50, rising to 2.34 in the referendum phase. In both cases, the median remains zero—meaning that over half of all groups are not mentioned at all. This underscores the exclusivity of media access, even when issues are put to a popular vote. The sharp increase in total mentions, from 745 to 3,517, offers initial support for Hypothesis 3.

4. Analysis and Results

Table 4.1: Media Mentions: Summary Statistics by Phase

Metric	Consultation Phase	Referendum Phase
Total Observations	1505.00	1505.00
Mean Mentions	0.50	2.34
Median Mentions	0.00	0.00
Standard Deviation	3.83	16.14
Maximum Mentions	99.00	402.00
Total Mentions (Sum)	745.00	3517.00
Total Mentions (%)	17.48	82.52
Number of Groups with 0 Mentions	1363.00	1258.00
Percentage of Groups with 0 Mentions	90.56	83.59

Media attention remains highly concentrated, despite rising totals. The skew in coverage becomes even more apparent when looking at the spread of the data. The standard deviation increases from 3.83 in the consultation phase to 16.14 in the referendum phase—both well above the corresponding means. This confirms a right-skewed distribution: most groups receive little or no attention, while a few dominate the coverage. One single group accounts for 99 of 745 mentions during consultations; in the referendum phase, the top actor appears 402 times—more than 11% of all mentions. As noted earlier, the share of interest groups with zero media presence remains extremely high: over 90% during consultation and still above 83% during referenda. These findings show that although overall visibility increases, media access continues to be highly concentrated.

Concentration is measured using Gini coefficients and Lorenz curves. To assess inequality more systematically, we calculate Gini coefficients for both phases—separately for each of the five interest group types and for all groups combined. These coefficients are paired with Lorenz curves, which visualise the cumulative distribution of media mentions. A Gini coefficient of 0 indicates perfect equality, while a value of 1 reflects complete concentration in a single actor. The further the Lorenz curve bends away from the 45° equality line, the more unequal the distribution.

Media visibility is highly concentrated across all group types. The Gini coefficient for the full set of 1,505 interest groups is 0.95, indicating near-total con-

4. Analysis and Results
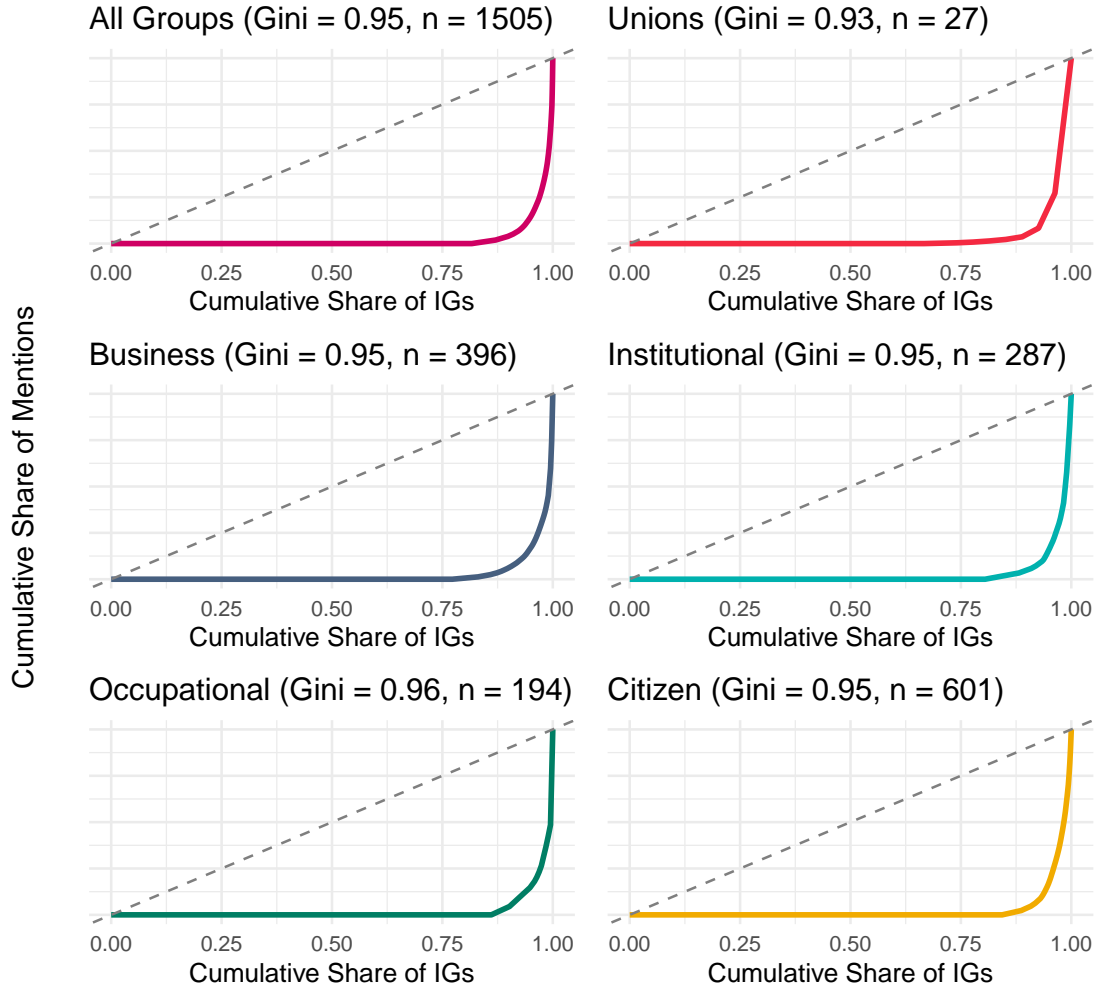
Figure 4.1: Lorenz curves: concentration of media mentions among interest groups

centration. Lorenz curves in Figure 4.1 confirm this distribution: all follow a flat trajectory before rising steeply at the top end. This means that most groups receive no media attention, while a small elite dominate coverage. The same structure appears across all five group types. Despite wide differences in group size, from 27 trade unions to over 600 citizen groups, each category reports a Gini coefficient above 0.93. In every case, more than 90% of groups account for only a small share of total mentions. This confirms that media visibility is highly skewed within each group type, regardless of category size.

These findings offer strong support for Hypothesis 2 and initial confirmation of Hypothesis 3. The data show that media access in Swiss policymaking is concen-

trated in the hands of a small number of actors, and that this concentration persists across both institutional phases. Although the distribution of visibility remains highly unequal, total media coverage increases substantially during referenda. The following section explores whether this inequality holds when media access is broken down into different levels of visibility.

4.1.2 Tiered Patterns of Media Presence

This section introduces six visibility tiers to show how media access is distributed across the two policymaking phases, whether it remains concentrated or becomes more widely shared. While the summary statistics and Lorenz curves reveal strong inequalities, they do not indicate how access varies across levels of prominence. The tiered categorisation addresses this gap by sorting all 1,505 interest groups into categories based on how often they were mentioned in each phase. This approach provides a more fine-grained view of Hypothesis 2, which expects visibility to remain concentrated, and Hypothesis 3, which anticipates broader mobilisation during referenda. The categories are defined as follows:

- 0 mentions (no coverage)
- 1–5 mentions (very limited visibility)
- 6–10 mentions (limited visibility)
- 11–20 mentions (moderate visibility)
- 21–50 mentions (broad visibility)
- 51+ mentions (very high visibility)

Table 4.2 presents the number and percentage of interest groups in each category for both the consultation and referendum phases. The same distribution is visualised in Figure 4.2.

The results show that most interest groups remain entirely absent from the media. During the consultation phase, 90.56% of all groups (1,363 out of 1,505) received no mentions. In the referendum phase, this figure declines slightly to

Table 4.2: Distribution of Mentions Across Visibility Tiers

Media Mentions	Consultation Phase		Referendum Phase	
	Con: Unique Groups	Con: Share %	DD: Unique Groups	DD: Share %
51+ Mentions	3	0.20	15	1.00
21-50 Mentions	3	0.20	24	1.59
11-20 Mentions	4	0.27	29	1.93
6-10 Mentions	21	1.40	28	1.86
1-5 Mentions	111	7.38	151	10.03
0 Mentions	1363	90.56	1258	83.59
Total	1505	100.00	1505	100.00

83.59% (1,258 groups), indicating a modest expansion in participation. This limited shift lends some support to Hypothesis 3, as more groups gain at least one mention. However, with only 16.41% of groups appearing at all, media access remains highly exclusive.

Among the groups that do appear, most receive only minimal coverage. During the consultation phase, 111 organisations (7.38%) are mentioned 1–5 times; in the referendum phase, this number rises to 151 (10.03%). At the upper end, only three groups (0.20%) exceed 50 mentions during the consultation phase, increasing to 17 groups (1.13%) during referenda. Across both phases, just 27 groups are mentioned more than 20 times—fewer than 2% of all interest groups. This confirms that sustained media visibility remains confined to a narrow elite.

Even when combining all groups with more than ten mentions—that is, the moderate to dominant tiers—only 78 interest groups surpass this threshold, representing just 5.18% of the total. This confirms that increased media activity during referenda primarily benefits a narrow elite of highly visible actors. Figure 4.2 shows that most groups remain absent or marginal, while a small set, mainly peak associations and well-resourced organisations, command the majority of attention. These findings strengthen the case for Hypothesis 2 and lend some support to Hypothesis 3. While direct democracy increases the total volume of coverage, it does not equalise media access. The next subsection examines which actors dominate this expanded visibility space.
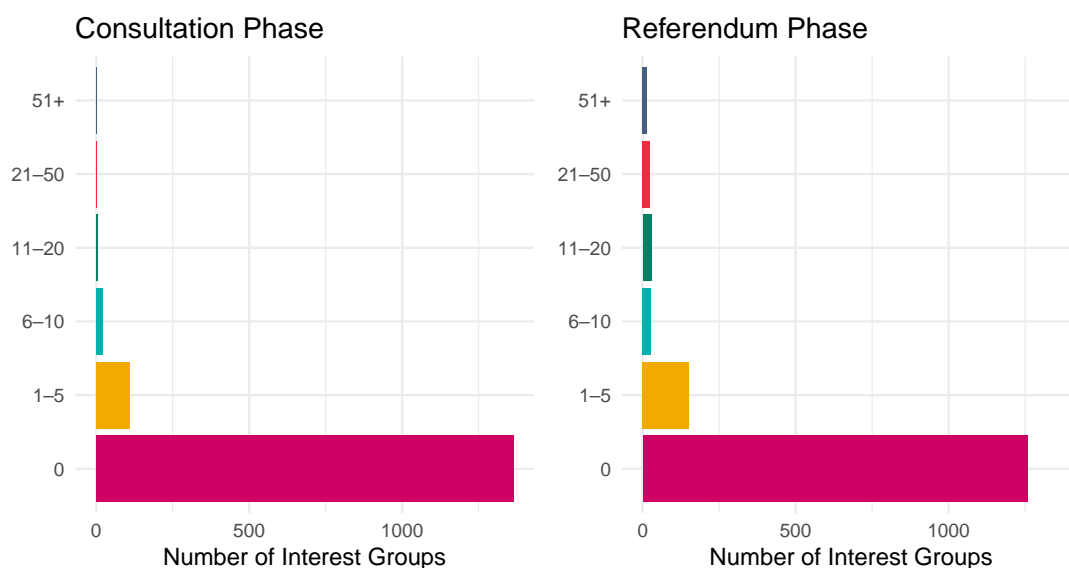
Figure 4.2: Distribution of media mentions across phases

4.1.3   A Minority That Dominates: Top-Tier Actors

This subsection identifies the most visible interest groups and examines whether media access is dominated by a small elite. It builds directly on the previous analysis by focusing on the top tier of actors to assess the degree of visibility concentration across both policymaking phases.

Table 4.3 lists the 20 most frequently mentioned interest groups across the 40 policy issues. These organisations form the top tier of media visibility in Swiss politics. Despite accounting for just over 1% of the total population, they generate 57.88% of all media appearances. The top five alone are responsible for more than 30% of mentions. This extreme concentration reinforces earlier findings and provides strong descriptive support for Hypothesis 2, which expects media access to remain dominated by a small number of highly visible actors.

The most prominent group, the Swiss Trade Association (SGV), appears in nearly 11% of all articles, more than ten times the average. It is followed by the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB) and economiesuisse, the national business federation. Together, these three organisations generate over a quarter of

all mentions, confirming that public discourse revolves around a small number of peak business associations across both phases.

While business groups dominate the ranking, eight of the top 20 belong to this category, other actor types are also represented. Trade unions, citizen groups, institutional actors (e.g. cantonal associations or courts), and professional associations appear in the list but with markedly lower visibility. Table 4.4 breaks down the top actors by group type, showing the five most visible organisations in each category. This allows for a more precise comparison of whether visibility is broadly distributed within group types or similarly concentrated at the top.

Table 4.3: Top 20 Most Visible Interest Groups

Interest Group Name	Group Type	Total Mentions	Share (%)
SGV (Swiss Trade Association)	Business	464	10.89
SGB (Trade Unions Federation)	Unions	359	8.42
economiesuisse (Swiss Business Federation)	Business	270	6.34
SBV (Swiss Farmers Association)	Business	135	3.17
SAV (Swiss Employers Association)	Business	132	3.10
WWF Switzerland	Citizen	113	2.65
SRG SSR (Public Broadcaster)	Institutional	110	2.58
Travail.Suisse	Unions	93	2.18
FMH (Swiss Medical Association)	Occupational	91	2.14
TCS (Touring Club Switzerland)	Citizen	89	2.09
FDK (Cantonal Finance Conference)	Institutional	85	1.99
Federal Administrative Court (BVGer)	Institutional	82	1.92
Pro Natura	Citizen	69	1.62
Centre Patronal	Business	60	1.41
VCS (Transport Club)	Citizen	60	1.41
HEV (Homeowners' Association)	Business	56	1.31
SGV (Municipalities Association)	Institutional	56	1.31
SSV (Swiss Cities Association)	Institutional	52	1.22
GastroSuisse	Business	47	1.10
Alliance F (Women's Organisations)	Citizen	44	1.03

The five most-mentioned business groups alone account for 43.54% of all media appearances, with SGV and economiesuisse together responsible for over 30%. Among trade unions, SGB secures nearly 15% of mentions, while the remaining four union actors contribute just 5.2% combined. Visibility is similarly concentrated among institutional and occupational groups, where one or two organisations dominate coverage. In the citizen group category, WWF Switzerland and TCS are

the only actors exceeding 3.5%, while Alliance F receives just 1.8%. These figures confirm that media access is not only unequal between group types but also highly concentrated within each category, reinforcing Hypothesis 2.

Table 4.4: Leading Media Actors Within Group Types

Group Type	Interest Group Name	Total Mentions	Share of Total (%)
Business			
Business	SGV (Swiss Trade Association)	464	19.04
Business	economiesuisse (Swiss Business Federation)	270	11.08
Business	SBV (Swiss Farmers Association)	135	5.54
Business	SAV (Swiss Employers Association)	132	5.42
Business	Centre Patronal	60	2.46
Unions			
Unions	SGB (Trade Unions Federation)	359	14.73
Unions	Travail.Suisse	93	3.82
Unions	UNiA (Trade Union)	23	0.94
Unions	Syna (Trade Union)	7	0.29
Unions	VPOD (Public Service Union)	4	0.16
Institutional			
Institutional	SRG SSR (Public Broadcaster)	110	4.51
Institutional	FDK (Cantonal Finance Conference)	85	3.49
Institutional	Federal Administrative Court (BVGer)	82	3.36
Institutional	SGV (Municipalities Association)	56	2.30
Institutional	SSV (Swiss Cities Association)	52	2.13
Occupational			
Occupational	FMH (Swiss Medical Association)	91	3.73
Occupational	SIA (Engineers & Architects)	11	0.45
Occupational	VSAO (Junior Doctors Association)	10	0.41
Occupational	SBK (Nurses Association)	9	0.37
Occupational	SOG (Swiss Officers Association)	9	0.37
Citizen			
Citizen	WWF Switzerland	113	4.64
Citizen	TCS (Touring Club Switzerland)	89	3.65
Citizen	Pro Natura	69	2.83
Citizen	VCS (Transport Club)	60	2.46
Citizen	Alliance F (Women's Organisations)	44	1.81

These findings also offer preliminary insights into Hypothesis 1. Several of the most visible business associations—SGV, economiesuisse, SBV, and SAV— are known for their insider access and central roles during the consultation phase. Their continued media prominence across both phases indicates that these groups do not avoid public engagement. Rather, they combine insider lobbying with strategic media use when required by the institutional context of direct democracy. This suggests, at the descriptive level, that business groups adapt their strategies to changing venues. A more systematic test of this hypothesis follows in the

regression sections.

4.2 Comparing Group Types in the Media Arena

After demonstrating that media access is highly concentrated across the interest group population, the next section examines how visibility varies by group type. The analysis focuses on five categories: business associations, citizen groups, trade unions, institutional actors, and occupational organisations. It builds on the approach of Binderkrantz et al. (2015), who suggest that the distribution of unique media appearances can reflect the structure of the interest group landscape. If visibility aligns with population shares, this may indicate a pluralising media effect. Using issue-level data, we compare the media presence of each group type to its population share across both policy phases.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, it visualises media access within each group type. Second, it compares how many organisations receive coverage, and how often, across the two policymaking phases. Third, it evaluates whether each group type's media presence is proportional to its population share.

4.2.1 Concentration Within Categories

This subsection examines whether media visibility is unequally distributed not only between but also within group types. It contributes to testing Hypothesis 2, which expects that a small number of dominant actors receive disproportionate attention, even when groups are disaggregated by category.

Figure 4.3 presents violin plots showing the distribution of media mentions for the five main group types: business associations, citizen groups, trade unions, institutional actors, and occupational organisations. In each category, the distribution is strongly right-skewed. The x-axis is log-transformed to account for the strong right-skew of the data. In each category, the median number of mentions
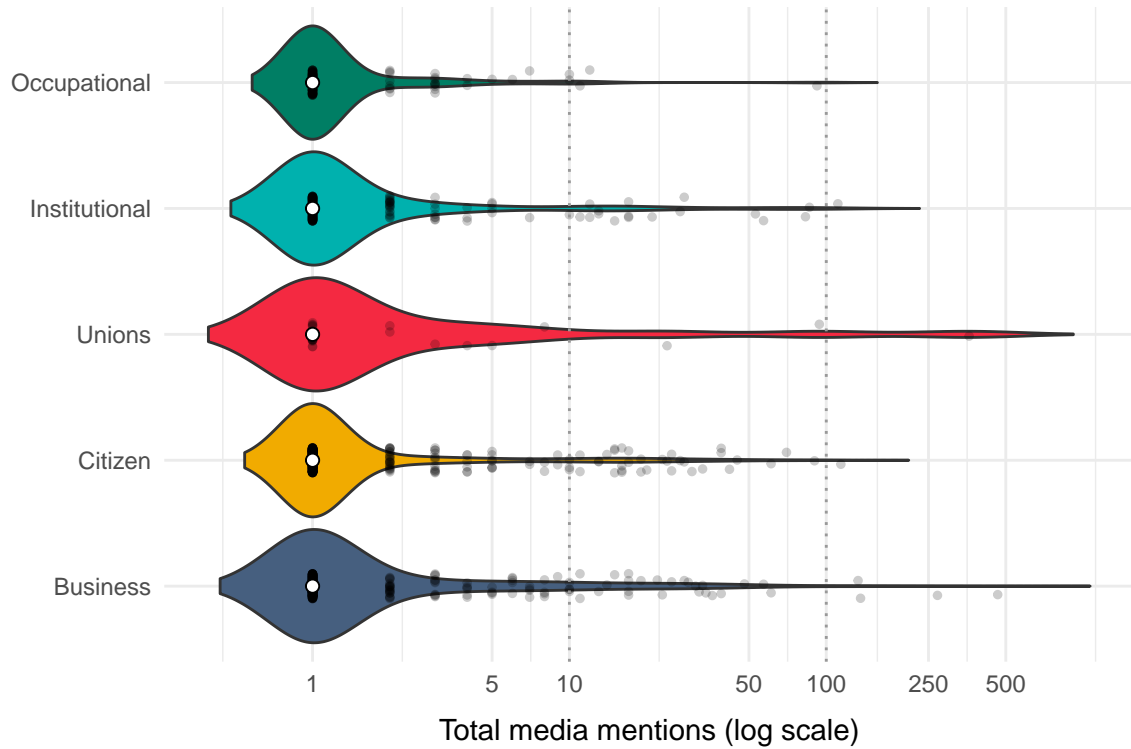
Figure 4.3: Distribution of media visibility within group types, including zeros

is zero, meaning that more than half of the organisations receive no media attention at all. Most actors cluster at the lower end, while a small minority gain substantial visibility.

Business groups show the widest variation in media visibility, with several groups reaching exceptionally high levels of exposure. A similar concentration is visible among citizen groups and trade unions, where actors like WWF Switzerland and SGB also attract high numbers of mentions. This indicates that internal inequality in media access is not confined to resource-rich or insider groups, but extends to categories often associated with grassroots mobilisation.

These findings further strengthen the case for Hypothesis 2. Media access is not only unequal between group types, but also stratified within them. Rather than broadening representation, the media arena reproduces hierarchical visibility structures similar to those observed in other policymaking phases.

4.2.2 Media Mentions by Type and Phase

Building on the previous violin plot, this section examines how media access varies across group types by comparing the number of organisations covered and their total media mentions. Table 4.5 and the two-by-two bar plot in Figure 4.4 present these results separately for the consultation and referendum phases. This comparison directly informs the testing of the thesis' three hypotheses: whether business groups increase their media activity when public campaigning becomes necessary (H1), whether access remains concentrated among a small set of actors (H2), and whether the referendum phase leads to an overall rise in visibility (H3).

Table 4.5: Group-Level Media Presence Absolute Counts

Group Type	Number of IGs	Consultation Phase		Direct Democratic Phase	
		Unique	Total	Unique	Total
Business	396	52	333	80	1493
Unions	27	5	122	8	371
Institutional	287	29	109	48	545
Occupational	194	8	18	25	159
Citizen	601	48	163	86	949
Total	1505	142	745	247	3517

Business associations are the most visible group type in both phases. During the consultation phase, 52 of 396 business groups received coverage, accounting for 333 media mentions. In the referendum phase, their visibility increases markedly, with 80 groups appearing in the media and a total of 1,493 mentions. Citizen groups form the largest category (601), but receive less attention overall. During consultations, 48 citizen groups are mentioned (163 mentions), rising to 86 groups and 949 mentions during the referendum. Although citizen group access expands during the public campaign phase, it remains well below the level of business groups, both in terms of reach and frequency.

Institutional actors and trade unions occupy a middle position. Institutional visibility rises from 29 to 48 unique groups and from 109 to 545 mentions. Trade

Figure 4.4: Media presence by group type and policy phase

union presence increases from 5 to 12 groups and from 122 to 371 mentions. Occupational organisations remain the most marginal: only 8 of 194 groups appear during the consultation phase (18 mentions), rising to 25 groups and 159 mentions during the referendum. Although all group types become more active, the overall visibility order remains stable: business groups receive the most coverage, followed by citizen groups, institutional actors, trade unions, and finally occupational organisations.

In relation to Hypothesis 1, the central hypothesis of this thesis, these findings offer a nuanced perspective. Business groups are already highly visible during the consultation phase, challenging the assumption that they avoid public arenas when insider access is available. Still, the referendum phase triggers a marked expansion: business groups not only retain their dominant position but increase their total mentions by more than 1,100. Although citizen groups surpass business

groups in the number of unique organisations covered during the referendum (86 vs. 80), their overall media presence remains considerably lower. This development supports H1 at the descriptive level: when insider venues lose relevance, business groups do not retreat—they mobilise.

Hypothesis 2 is further supported by the consistently low share of groups that receive any media attention. Section 4.1 showed that visibility is highly concentrated across the full population. This group-level breakdown reveals that the same applies within each category. Only about 20% of business associations and 14% of citizen groups are ever mentioned in either phase. These numbers confirm that the media arena privileges a narrow set of actors, regardless of group type, and that structural exclusivity persists across the board.

Hypothesis 3 also receives support. All major group types see an increase in both the number of organisations covered and the total number of mentions from consultation to referendum. Citizen groups, for instance, rise from 163 to 949 total mentions, and occupational organisations also expand their media presence. These shifts confirm that the referendum phase broadens media visibility in absolute terms. However, the increase does not disrupt the underlying hierarchy between group types: business associations remain the most visible throughout.

4.2.3 Comparing Media Coverage to Population Share

Binderkrantz et al. (2015) argue that the media may fulfil a pluralising function when group appearances correspond to population shares. To apply this reasoning to the Swiss case, we compare each group type's share of the overall interest group population with its share of media access, measured as both the percentage of unique groups mentioned and total media mentions in each phase. Table 4.6 and Figure 4.5 present the results. This proportional perspective offers an alternative lens for assessing Hypothesis 1 by shifting the focus from absolute numbers to relative representation.

Business groups are consistently overrepresented. Although they make up only 26.3% of the interest group population, they account for 36.6% of unique mentions

and 44.7% of total mentions during the consultation phase. This imbalance persists during referenda, where their share of unique and total mentions rises to 32.4% and 42.5%, respectively—still well above their population share. Citizen groups, in contrast, remain underrepresented. They constitute 39.9% of the population but receive only 33.8% of unique and 21.9% of total mentions during consultations. While their presence increases during referenda to 34.8% and 27.0%, the gap remains wide, and parity is not reached.

Table 4.6: Group-Level Media Presence Relative Shares

Group Type	% of IGs	Consultation Phase		Direct Democratic Phase	
		% Unique	% Total	% Unique	% Total
Business	26.31	36.62	44.70	32.39	42.45
Unions	1.79	3.52	16.38	3.24	10.55
Institutional	19.07	20.42	14.63	19.43	15.50
Occupational	12.89	5.63	2.42	10.12	4.52
Citizen	39.93	33.80	21.88	34.82	26.98
Total	1505.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

The remaining group types continue to play a marginal role. Institutional actors represent 19.1% of the population and achieve near-proportional visibility in terms of unique mentions, but fall short in total coverage (14.6% and 15.5%). Occupational groups are clearly underrepresented: they make up 12.9% of all organisations but receive only 5.6% of unique mentions during consultation and 10.1% during referenda. Their total media presence remains negligible. Trade unions form a notable exception. Although they constitute just 1.8% of the population, they account for 10.6% of total mentions during the referendum phase. This imbalance, however, is largely attributable to the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB), which dominates coverage within its category.

These results complicate the interpretation of Hypothesis 1. Business group visibility increases in absolute terms during referenda, but their relative share of media access declines: unique mentions drop from 36.6% to 32.4%, and total mentions from 44.7% to 42.5%. Their activity grows, yet they do not expand their
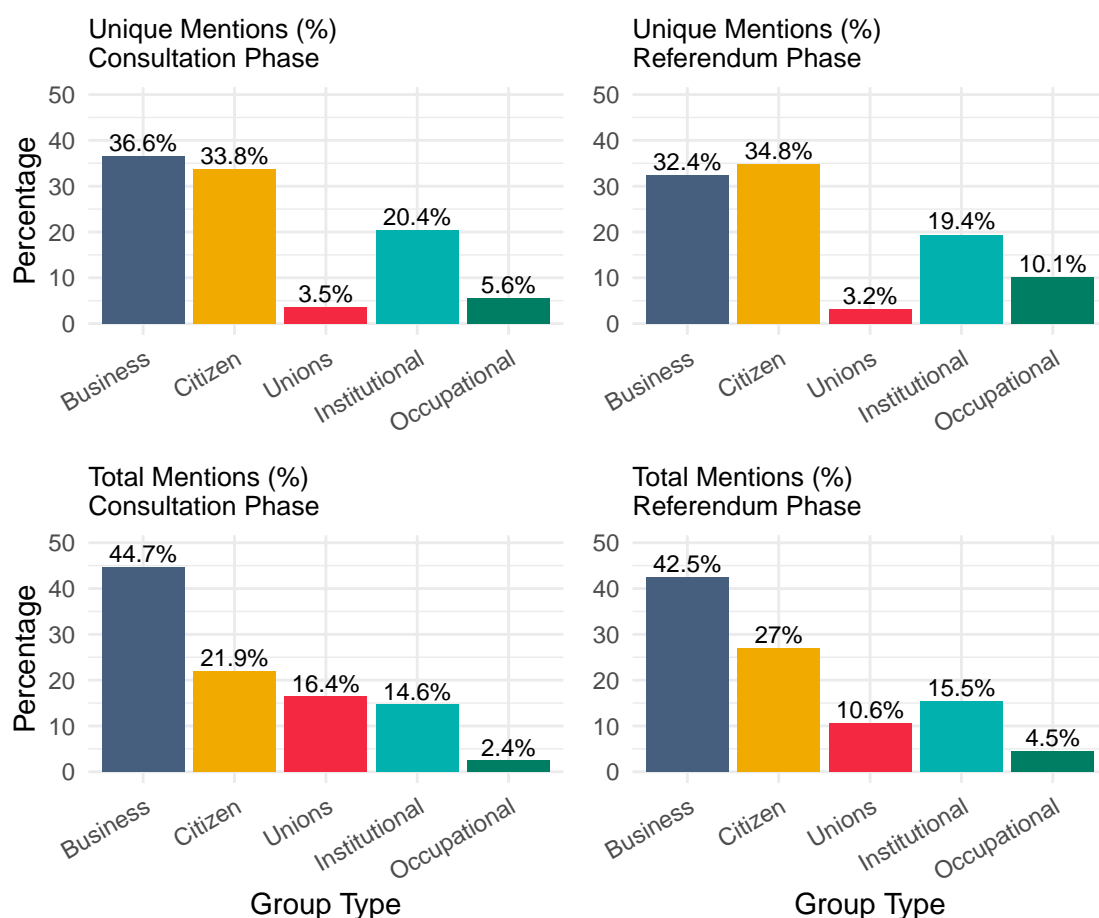
Figure 4.5: Media share relative to population size by group type

proportional dominance. Citizen groups, by contrast, gain modest ground—rising from 33.8% to 34.8% in unique mentions and from 21.9% to 27.0% in total mentions. From a proportionality perspective, the anticipated convergence between group types does not materialise. This challenges a key assumption of Hypothesis 1: that business groups adjust their media strategy in a way that narrows the visibility gap.

Even when evaluated against the pluralising expectation of Binderkrantz et al. (2015), that media visibility should reflect population shares, the findings do not support this claim. Business groups remain substantially overrepresented across both phases. In the referendum phase, where all groups face similar incentives for public mobilisation, business actors still exceed their population share by six percentage points in unique appearances and over sixteen in total mentions. The overall picture remains one of persistent media dominance by business groups and,

to a lesser extent, peak-level trade unions. While Hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed on proportional grounds, the results reaffirm that the media arena remains far from evenly representative.

4.3 Explaining Visibility with Regression Models

Moving beyond descriptive comparisons, this section presents results from three multilevel negative binomial regression models that predict media visibility based on group type and policy phase.

4.3.1 Separate Models for Consultation and Referendum

The first set of regression models tests whether media visibility varies systematically by group type and policy phase. They directly evaluate Hypothesis 1, which expects business groups to increase their media presence during referenda, and Hypothesis 3, which anticipates a general rise in visibility under high-salience conditions. In addition, the models offer indirect insight into Hypothesis 2, which concerns structural concentration among a small number of dominant actors.

The analysis relies on two multilevel negative binomial models fitted to the full population of 1,505 interest groups across 40 policy issues. All groups are included, whether they appeared in the media or not, enabling a comparison between visibility and exclusion. This makes it possible to assess broader inequalities in access. Both models include random intercepts for `issue_id` and `group_id` to account for unobserved heterogeneity across policy debates and organisations. The dependent variable is the number of media mentions per group–issue dyad. The baseline category is a business group involved in a redistributive policy debate. Full model results are presented in Table 4.7.

The clearest result is the sharp decline in the intercept between phases. During the consultation phase, the intercept is –2.19 ($p < 0.01$), corresponding to 0.11 predicted mentions for the baseline group. In the referendum phase, it falls to –6.20 ($p < 0.01$), equating to just 0.002 mentions. This decline reflects a substantial

	Consultation Phase	Direct Democratic Phase
Intercept (Business x Redistributive)	−2.186***	−6.202***
	(0.534)	(0.505)
Unions	0.772	0.711
	(0.738)	(1.127)
Institutional Groups	−0.095	0.305
	(0.356)	(0.480)
Occupational Groups	−1.772***	−0.375
	(0.490)	(0.581)
Citizen Groups	−0.184	−0.057
	(0.301)	(0.402)
Constituent Policy	−0.798	−1.014*
	(1.268)	(0.607)
Distributive Policy	−0.398	−0.790**
	(0.761)	(0.383)
Regulatory Policy	−0.767	−0.469*
	(0.552)	(0.275)
AIC	2318.278	5348.433
Log Likelihood	−1148.139	−2663.217
Num. obs.	2898	2898
Num. groups: issue_id	40	40
Num. groups: ig_id	1505	1505
Var: issue_id (Intercept)	1.343	0.253
Var: ig_id (Intercept)	1.572	37.405

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Table 4.7: Predictors of Media Mentions by Phase

drop in average predicted visibility, even though overall media activity increases. The explanation lies in the model structure: unlike the descriptive statistics, which consider only observed mentions, the regression includes the full population, including the 87% of groups that receive no coverage. The lower intercept signals growing inequality, with a small number of actors attracting most attention while the majority remain excluded. This interpretation is confirmed by the rise in the group-level variance component from 1.57 to 37.40. In short, referenda raise the stakes—but only a few groups benefit.

When it comes to group type, few statistically significant differences emerge. In the consultation phase, only occupational groups receive significantly fewer

Consultation phase

Predicted media mentions with 95% CI

Referendum phase

Predicted media mentions with 95% CI
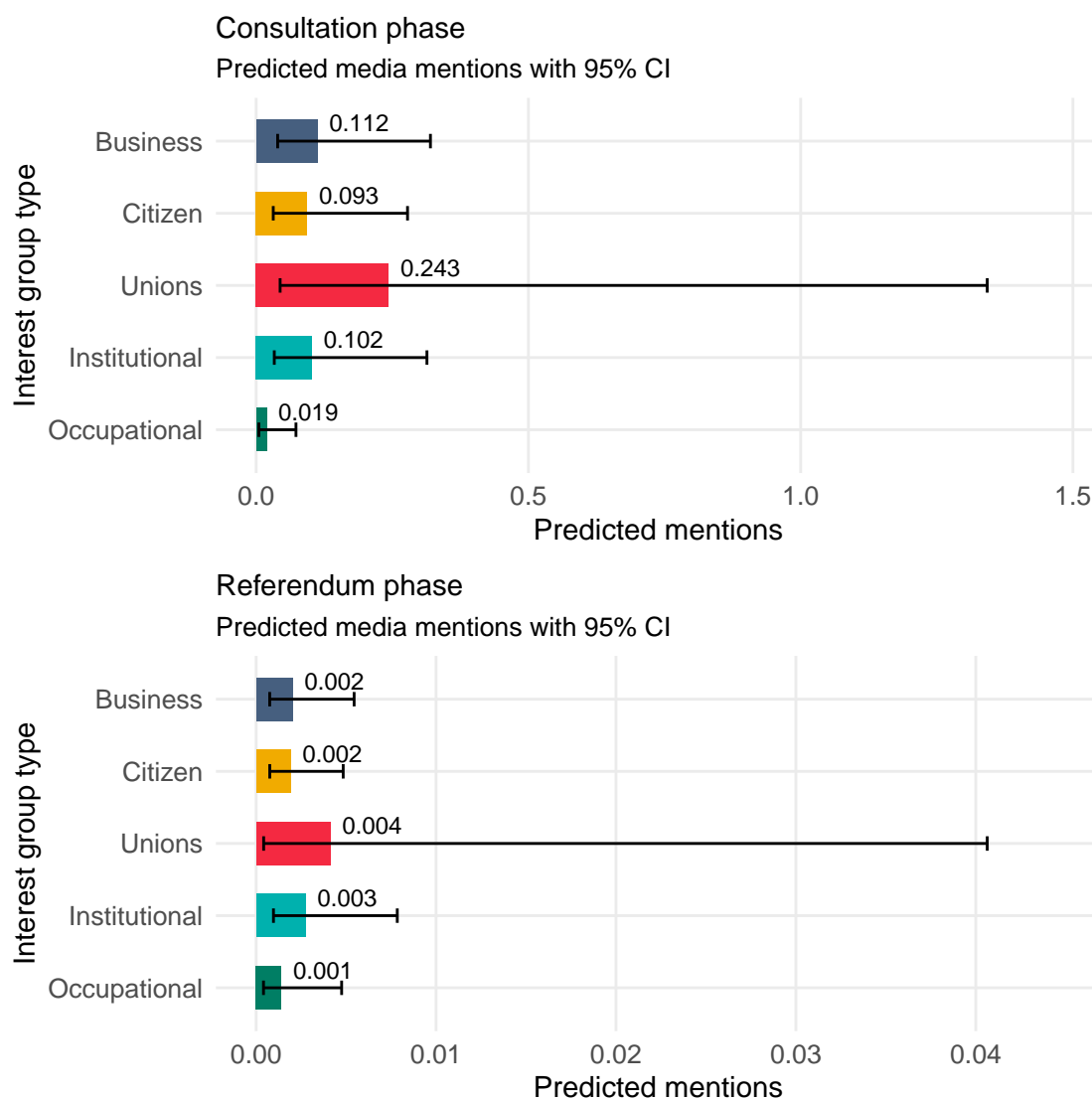
Figure 4.6: Modelled visibility by group type and phase

mentions than business groups (b = −1.77, p < 0.01). In the referendum phase, no group type differs significantly from the business baseline. Notably, citizen groups, typically linked to outsider strategies and bottom-up mobilisation, do not enjoy a significant visibility advantage in either phase. These results suggest that, once issue context and overall media dynamics are accounted for, visibility gaps between group types are limited.

Returning to Hypothesis 1, the regression results in Table 4.7 challenge the assumption that business groups become broadly more visible during referenda.

While a few high-capacity business actors dominate coverage, predicted mentions for the average business group decline from consultation to referendum. This suggests that public campaigning does not activate the business sector as a whole, but instead reinforces the visibility of a select elite. Media engagement under referendum conditions appears highly selective, even within dominant categories.

The model supports both secondary hypotheses. Although the descriptive statistics confirmed an overall increase in media mentions during referenda (H3), the regression predicts lower average visibility once the full group population is taken into account. This suggests that the rise in media activity is not broadly distributed but instead concentrated among a small number of highly visible actors (H2). As shown in Figure 4.6, most groups remain marginal or absent, while a narrow subset receives intensified attention. Taken together, the baseline models indicate that referenda amplify existing visibility hierarchies—offering strong support for Hypotheses 2 and 3.

4.3.2 Do Group Types React Differently to Referenda?

To test whether group types respond differently to the shift from consultation to referendum, a multilevel negative binomial regression model is estimated with an interaction term between group type and phase. This model enables a formal test of Hypothesis 1, whether business groups increase their media visibility more than citizen groups during referenda, and provides additional insight into Hypothesis 2 by capturing residual inequalities in access. It also refines the assessment of Hypothesis 3, which expects overall visibility to rise during the high-salience referendum phase, without assuming that this increase is evenly distributed across group types. The model includes random intercepts for both `group_id` and `issue_id` and controls for policy type. The baseline category is a business group commenting on a redistributive policy issue during the consultation phase. Table 4.8 reports the results.

The main effect for the referendum phase is strongly positive (b = 1.85, p < 0.01), indicating a substantial increase in media mentions when the policymaking context shifts to the public arena. For business groups, this corresponds to a six-fold

	Interaction Model
Intercept (Business x Redist. x Consult.)	−8.00***
	(0.54)
Unions	0.70
	(1.23)
Institutional Groups	0.33
	(0.53)
Occupational Groups	−1.10
	(0.74)
Citizen Groups	−0.19
	(0.46)
Referendum Phase	1.85***
	(0.16)
Constituent Policy	−1.26**
	(0.60)
Distributive Policy	−0.97**
	(0.40)
Regulatory Policy	−0.85***
	(0.28)
Unions x Referendum	−0.23
	(0.38)
Institutional x Referendum	0.11
	(0.29)
Occupational x Referendum	0.70
	(0.51)
Citizen x Referendum	0.06
	(0.26)
AIC	7385.48
Log Likelihood	−3676.74
Num. obs.	5796
Num. groups: issue_id	40
Num. groups: ig_id	1505
Var: issue_id (Intercept)	0.34
Var: ig_id (Intercept)	39.14

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Table 4.8: Interaction Effects Between Group Type and Phase
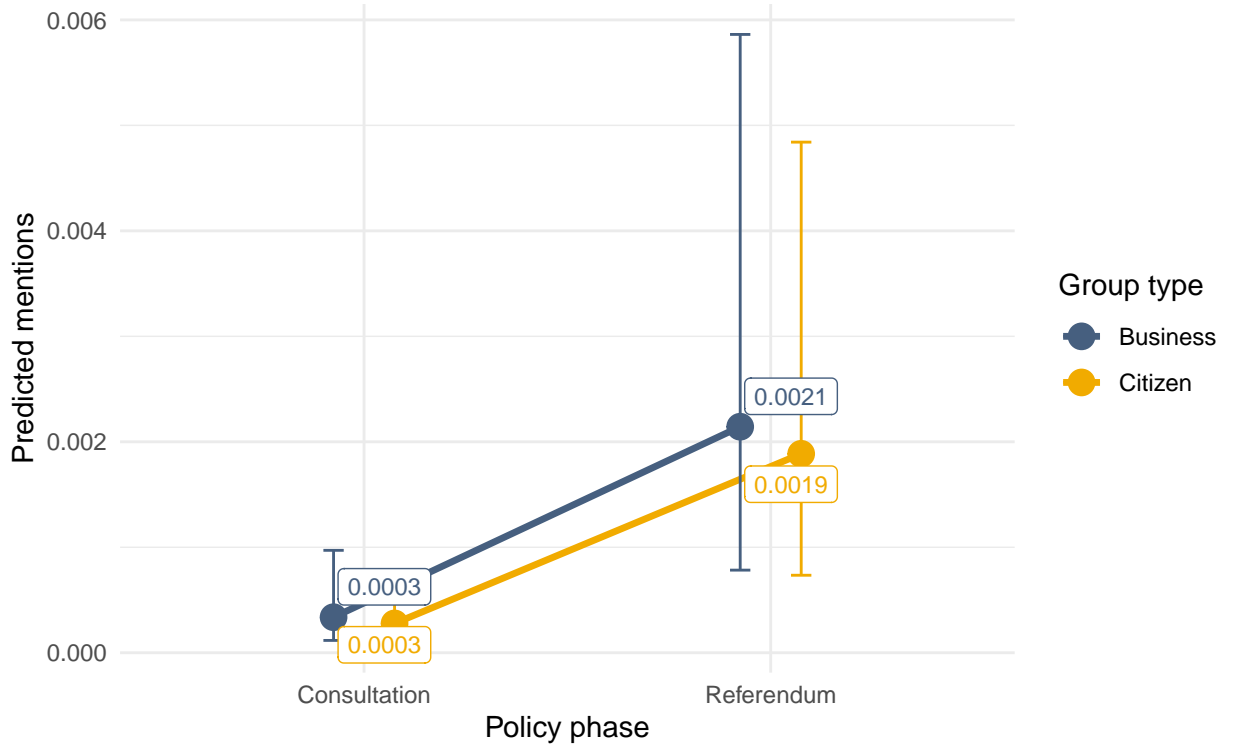
4. Analysis and Results

Figure 4.7: Interaction effect: group-specific media responses to phase shift

rise in predicted visibility compared to the consultation phase. At the same time, the model intercept (b = –8.00, p < 0.01) shows that average predicted mentions remain close to zero under low-salience conditions. The interaction terms are not statistically significant, meaning that no group type experiences a systematically different change in visibility across phases. The coefficient for citizen groups is positive but negligible (b = 0.06, n.s.); unions (b = –0.23), institutional actors (b = 0.11), and occupational groups (b = 0.70) also show no significant differences. These results suggest that referenda increase media visibility in broadly similar ways across group types, without favouring any specific category.

Policy issue type also shapes media visibility. Compared to redistributive issues (the baseline), visibility is significantly lower for constituent (b = –1.26, p < 0.05), distributive (b = –0.97, p < 0.05), and regulatory policy areas (b = –0.85, p < 0.01). This confirms that redistributive conflicts attract more attention, likely due to their political salience and divisiveness. Although not statistically significant,

occupational groups also receive fewer mentions overall (b = –1.10), suggesting a potential visibility disadvantage for this category.

At first glance, the results provide strong support for Hypothesis 1. The sharp increase in media mentions for business groups confirms that they become more active under referendum conditions. However, the absence of significant interaction effects suggests that other group types do not differ meaningfully in their response. This challenges the central assumption of H1: that business groups mobilise more than others when the policymaking venue shifts to the public.

Hypothesis 3 receives clear support. The strongly positive main effect for the referendum phase indicates that overall media visibility increases when decision-making moves into the public arena. However, this increase is not broadly shared. As in the baseline models, a small number of actors benefit disproportionately, while most remain marginal. This selective intensification also lends support to Hypothesis 2. The group-level variance ($\sigma^2 = 39.14$) remains substantial, suggesting that access to the media arena continues to be unequally distributed. Even after accounting for group type, phase, and issue context, much of the variation is explained by unobserved organisational characteristics, likely linked to differences in capacity, reputation, or strategic resources.

4.4   Media Access Disaggregated by Policy Issue

This final section concludes the analysis by examining how media visibility varies across the 40 individual policy issues. A key advantage of the dataset is that all media appearances are nested within specific policy debates, allowing for disaggregation by issue. This structure enables a direct comparison of media presence between group types within the same policy context. As the thesis focuses on the strategic adaptation of business groups in comparisson to citizen groups, the analysis is limited to these two categories.

The section begins with a dot plot showing the number of media appearances for citizen and business groups across both phases. It then presents a table, similar to

that in Section 4.2, that compares each group type's media share with its population share, this time disaggregated by issue. Finally, a regression model predicts media appearances by group type and phase, aggregated at the issue level (160 observations). The dot plot and table offer a descriptive check of Hypothesis 1, while the regression provides a structured test of whether business groups increase their visibility during referenda compared to citizen groups. Although concentration (H2) cannot be assessed here, the issue-level analysis adds evidence for Hypothesis 3 by examining whether referenda trigger broader mobilisation across both types.

4.4.1 Who Gains Visibility on Which Issues?

Figure 4.8 presents two dot plots that explore how media visibility is distributed between business and citizen groups across all 40 policy issues. While the plots do not allow for formal hypothesis testing, they offer a useful entry point into the issue-level variation that remains concealed in aggregate models. Each dot represents a single issue, with business group mentions plotted on the y-axis and citizen group mentions on the x-axis. The diagonal line indicates parity between the two types: points above reflect business dominance; those below indicate citizen group dominance. Colours reflect policy domains using Lowi's (1972) typology, providing an initial sense of whether mobilisation varies by issue type.

During the consultation phase, most issues cluster in the lower-left quadrant, indicating limited media attention overall. Four redistributive issues stand out with clear business group dominance, while citizen groups are nearly absent. This is notable, as business actors are typically assumed to avoid public exposure at this early stage. Yet when comparing only business and citizen groups, it is business groups that appear more active—contrary to initial expectations.

In the referendum phase, the distribution becomes more dispersed, with many issues shifting toward higher values on both axes. This points to a general rise in media coverage and broader mobilisation. Citizen groups gain visibility across a wider set of issues, including two distributive and several regulatory debates where they appear in over 50, and at times more than 75 articles. Still, business
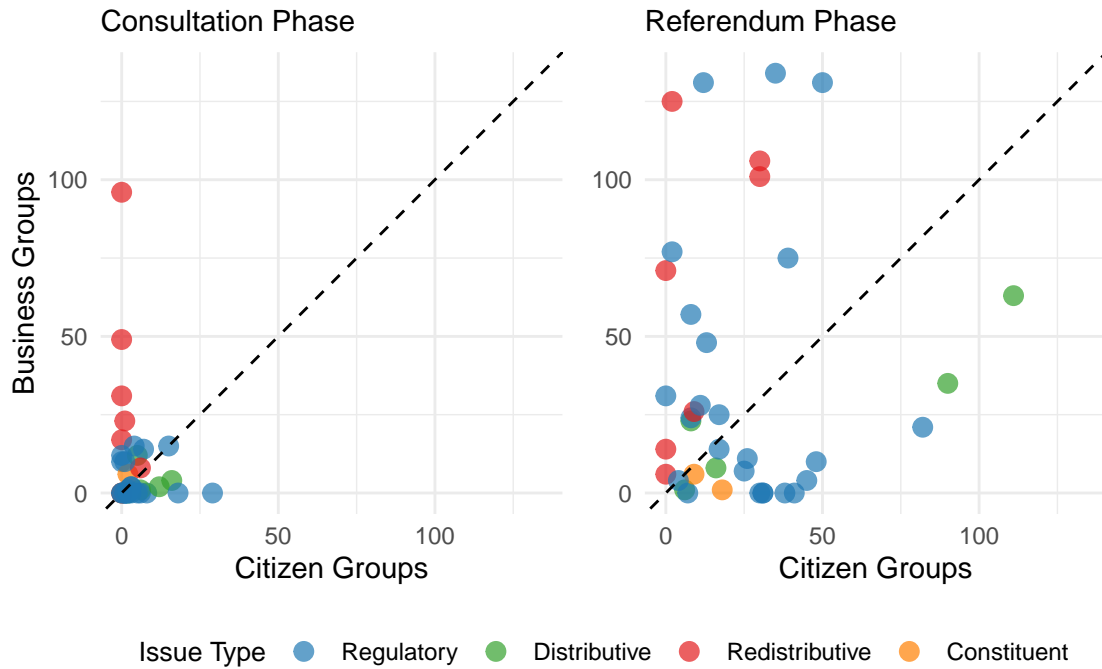
Figure 4.8: Citizen and business group visibility across policy issues

groups dominate in most cases. They are especially prominent in four redistributive campaigns and more than seven regulatory debates, surpassing 100 mentions in seven issues.

The scatterplots suggest that referenda are associated with increased media visibility for both group types. They also indicate that business groups dominate a larger number of issue debates and often do so more visibly than citizen groups. Finally, the marked differences across issues show that aggregate comparisons conceal important variation—supporting the case for disaggregated, issue-level analysis.

4.4.2 When Do Business or Citizen Groups Dominate?

To better understand how media access varies across specific policy issues, Table B.2 in the second appendix presents the media shares of business and citizen groups across all 40 cases. It also shows how these shares compare to each group type's population proportion, 26.3% for business groups and 39.9% for citizen groups. This allows for a descriptive comparison between media presence and group

prevalence, similar to the approach used in Section 4.2. While the table focuses only on business and citizen groups, the media shares are calculated relative to all five group types. A value of 100% for one group indicates that no other types appeared in the media for that issue.

Business groups dominate media coverage, particularly during the consultation phase. In 10 out of 40 issues, they account for over 50% of all mentions—making them clearly overrepresented relative to their population share. Their visibility remains high in the referendum phase, especially in key economic and taxation debates. These include regulatory or redistributive reforms such as the Withholding Tax Reform (81.48%, n = 44), the AHV Reform 2020 (56.99%, n = 106), and the STAF proposal (62.83%, n = 71). Their strong presence in these cases likely reflects institutional access, economic expertise, and the capacity to engage early in technically complex debates.

In the referendum phase, citizen groups gain visibility in issues related to ethics, equality, and minority rights. They dominate media coverage in the Marriage for All initiative (95.35%, n = 41), the Transplantation Law (65.52%, n = 38), and the Anti-Discrimination Penal Code (93.94%, n = 31). In these cases, their share of coverage far exceeds their population share of 39.9%. However, citizen groups remain underrepresented in most debates, particularly in complex economic issues and throughout the consultation phase.

Environmental policy debates stand out as a domain where both business and citizen groups gain visibility. These issues are often highly salient and contested, with business groups warning of economic costs and environmental organisations calling for stronger regulation. In the Climate Law debate, business groups accounted for 75% of mentions (n = 48), while citizen groups made up 20.3% (n = 13). A similar pattern appears in the Gotthard Tunnel renovation, where citizen groups received 33.51% of mentions (n = 63) and business groups 59.04% (n = 111). These cases illustrate that certain issues attract high and relatively balanced media attention across both group types. To illustrate this more concretely, the CO_2 Law is presented in the case study on the next page (Swissdox, 2024; UVEK, 2024).

4. Analysis and Results

Case Study: The 2021 Referendum on the Revised CO_2 Act

On 13 June 2021, the Swiss electorate narrowly rejected the revised CO_2 Act, with 51.6% voting against and 48.4% in favour. The result came as a surprise to many observers, as pre-referendum polls had indicated a narrow majority in support. The law, already passed by Parliament, sought to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 in line with the Paris Agreement. It included higher taxes on fossil fuels, levies on airline tickets, and subsidies for climate-friendly technologies. The campaign was highly contested and received prominent media coverage. In the dataset, business groups accounted for 74.9% of mentions ($n = 134$), while citizen groups made up 19.6% ($n = 35$).

The Yes campaign was backed by an unusually broad alliance, including the Federal Council, all major parties except the Swiss Peoples Party (SVP), scientific institutions such as PSI (2) and Empa (1), and environmental organisations like WWF (8 mentions). Business groups, however, were not unified: economiesuisse (25), the Swiss Farmers Association (11), and Swissmem (7) supported the reform, while others remained silent or opposed it. Despite this broad coalition, the Yes side struggled to communicate the laws benefits in a way that resonated with the wider public. The campaign was frequently criticised for its technical tone and lack of emotional appeal.

By contrast, the No campaign successfully framed the law as economically harmfulplacing a burden on small businesses, rural areas, and working-class households. It portrayed the reform as elitist and out of touch. This narrative was led by the SVP and reinforced by industry associations in sectors directly affected by the proposed regulations. Key actors included auto-schweiz (14 mentions), the Homeowners Association HEV (15), the Petroleum Association EV (12), and Swissoil (6).

This referendum illustrates how issue type influences both mobilisation and media visibility. It also shows that group type does not fully predict alignment: business actors were divided, and framing successnot media volumeproved decisive. Although the Yes side recorded more total mentions in the dataset (Yes: 126; No: 82), the No campaign shaped public perception more effectively. The result revealed a clear urbanrural divide, with rural areas rejecting the law more strongly.

Overall, the disaggregated table shows that referenda increase media visibility for both business and citizen groups, lending support to Hypothesis 3. However, this expansion varies substantially by issue. Hypothesis 1 therefore receives only partial support: while business groups remain highly visible, their dominance is not consistent across all domains. They lead in economic and taxation debates and during the consultation phase, whereas citizen groups are more prominent in

symbolic and ethical issues. Environmental debates, by contrast, feature strong mobilisation from both sides.

4.4.3 Regression at the Issue Level

The final regression model draws on the nested structure of the dataset to examine whether differences in media appearances persist across individual policy issues. Instead of analysing each interest group separately, the data are aggregated by group type (business vs. citizen), policy phase (consultation vs. referendum), and the 40 issues, yielding 160 observations (2 group types * 2 phases * 40 issues). For each issue, the model compares how many media mentions business and citizen groups received in each phase.

This setup enables a test of whether business groups increase their visibility during referenda (H1) and whether referenda generally lead to higher media visibility for both group types (H3). The number of media mentions is predicted using a multilevel negative binomial regression model, with group type, policy phase, issue type, and their interaction as predictors. The results are shown in Table 4.10. By disaggregating the data to the level of individual policy debates, the model sharpens the earlier findings and addresses the blind spot of issue-level variation. However, because the data are aggregated by group type, the model cannot capture within-group concentration and thus does not test Hypothesis 2.

The intercept (2.17, p < 0.01) reflects the expected log count of media mentions for a business group commenting on a redistributive issue during the consultation phase, equivalent to approximately 8.76 mentions. The coefficient for the referendum phase is strongly positive and statistically significant (+1.66, p < 0.01), indicating that business groups receive considerably more media coverage when decision-making moves to the public arena. This supports Hypothesis 1: business actors appear to "go public" when insider access loses relevance and public persuasion becomes strategically necessary. The increase corresponds to an estimated fivefold rise in media mentions (exp(1.66) 5.26).

	Issue-Level Model
Intercept (Business x Redist. x Consult.)	2.17***
	(0.35)
Citizen Groups	−0.47
	(0.39)
Referendum Phase	1.66***
	(0.35)
Constituent Policy	−0.43
	(0.37)
Distributive Policy	−0.09
	(0.51)
Regulatory Policy	−1.37**
	(0.70)
Citizen x Referendum	0.16
	(0.48)
AIC	1124.00
Log Likelihood	−553.00
Num. obs.	160
Num. groups: issue_id	40
Var: issue_id (Intercept)	0.14

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table 4.9: Issue-Level Regression Group Type and Policy Domain

The interaction effect for citizen groups in the referendum phase is slightly positive but not statistically significant (+0.16). This suggests that citizen groups do not gain substantially more or less visibility than business groups during the referendum phase. While the effect is not conclusive, it indicates that the visibility gap between the two types does not narrow—and may even widen slightly—offering only limited support for Hypothesis 1. In addition, citizen groups display a negative but non-significant main effect (–0.47), pointing to somewhat lower media visibility than business groups during the consultation phase. Figure 4.9 shows the predicted media mentions across phases.

Policy issue type also shapes media visibility. Constituent issues receive significantly less coverage than redistributive ones (–1.37, $p < 0.05$), supporting the view that technical and economically consequential topics attract more sustained media attention. Regulatory and distributive issues also show negative coefficients, but
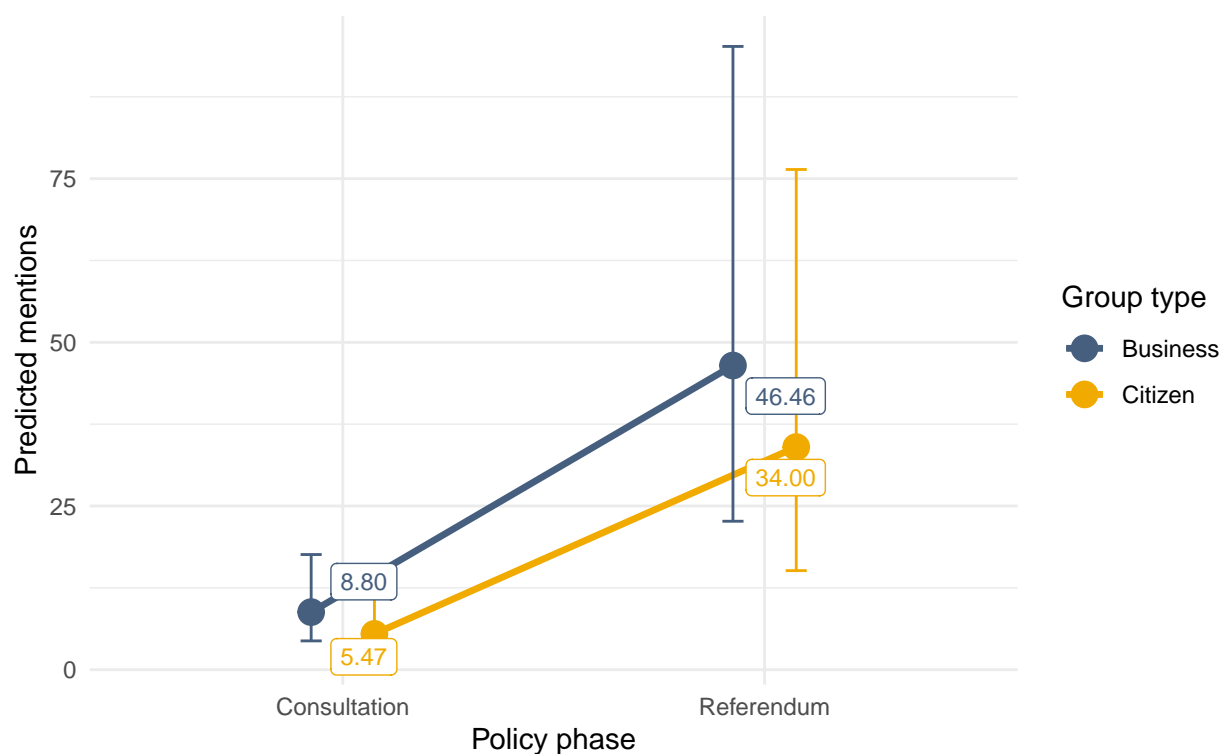
Figure 4.9: Predicted media visibility across issues and group types

these differences are not statistically significant. The random intercept variance for issue ID is low (0.14), suggesting that group type, policy phase, and issue characteristics explain most of the variation in media mentions across the 40 cases.

Taken together, these results offer partial support for Hypothesis 3. The referendum phase is clearly linked to higher predicted media visibility for both group types, confirming that referenda constitute a more contested and salient arena where public engagement becomes more strategic. Support for Hypothesis 1, however, remains limited. Business groups receive more media attention during referenda, but there is little evidence that their advantage increases relative to citizen groups. The small and non-significant interaction effect provides no robust confirmation of H1.

5

Discussion and Conclusion

Contents

5.1 Revisiting the Main Findings

This thesis set out to examine the factors shaping interest group media visibility in Switzerland, focusing on two distinct phases of the policymaking process: the administrative consultation phase and the facultative referendum phase. It challenged the common assumption that the media arena primarily benefits outsider groups and broadens interest representation. Rather, it asked whether business and citizen groups gain access on equal terms, even when public campaigning becomes necessary. The quasi-experimental setting of Swiss referenda, where all actors face similar strategic pressures—offered a unique opportunity to test this.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis contributes to the study of interest group politics by showing how institutional context shapes media visibility. Drawing on a novel dataset of 1,505 organisations across 40 policy issues, the thesis demonstrates that business groups remain dominant even in high-salience settings. While media activity increases during referenda, coverage remains highly concentrated. Public decision-making, in this context, does not level the playing field but instead reinforces existing advantages, as peak groups mobilise more forcefully when more is at stake.

5.1.1 Strategic Mobilisation or Business Dominance? (H1)

Hypothesis 1 predicted that business groups would significantly increase their media visibility during the referendum phase, particularly in comparison to citizen groups. This expectation rested on the idea that public campaigning reduces the effectiveness of insider strategies, pushing business actors to engage more visibly in the media arena (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Sciarini, 2023).

The empirical results do not provide a clear answer—neither in the descriptive data nor in the regression models. Business groups did increase their media presence substantially during the referendum phase, rising from 333 to 1,493 mentions. However, this expansion did not narrow the visibility gap between business and citizen groups. While business actors remained the most prominent type overall, their share of total coverage declined slightly, from 44.7% in the consultation phase to 42.5% in the referendum phase. This suggests that although business groups mobilised more intensively and continued to dominate the media arena, their relative advantage eroded marginally as citizen groups gained ground. Based on the descriptive results, Hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed.

The regression analysis confirms this overall pattern. Business groups became more visible during the referendum phase, but the increase was not significantly different than that of other group types. Citizen groups also gained ground, and the predicted media mentions for business actors declined slightly in relative terms. This is partly explained by the growing internal concentration within the business group category: a small number of peak organisations—such as SGV and

economiesuisse—accounted for the majority of coverage, while most others remained absent. The findings suggest an intensification of media visibility among a narrow elite rather than a broader mobilisation across the business sector.

The interaction effects in the regression model show that citizen groups, despite their lower baseline visibility, also gained ground during the referendum phase. However, this increase was not statistically significant in comparison to business groups. This suggests that the referendum phase encouraged higher visibility across all group types, but did not fundamentally alter the existing hierarchy in media access. The expected shift—where business groups would close the gap or surpass citizen groups in relative terms—does not emerge from the regression results. Hypothesis 1 is therefore not supported by the regression analysis.

These findings suggest that group type alone does not fully account for media access when strategic incentives are high. While the referendum phase encourages broader public engagement, it does not structurally pluralise media visibility. Instead, it leads to a general increase in coverage volume—a trend well-documented in the literature as a result of heightened salience (De Bruycker, 2019; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Willems, 2024). The institutional shift toward a public decision-making venue acts as a trigger, but the effects are uneven. Business groups remained particularly active in economic and taxation debates, while societal and ethical issues drew greater attention to citizen organisations. Only a few contested environmental issues attracted sustained media visibility from both group types.

5.1.2   Media Access Remains Unequal (H2)

Hypothesis 2 assumed that media visibility would remain concentrated among a small elite of top-tier interest groups across both policymaking phases, regardless of institutional change. This expectation builds on the argument that media access is often dominated by a limited number of well-resourced organisations—those with substantial budgets, expert staff, or strong outsider appeal. Such concentration challenges the idea of media pluralism and suggests that visibility is

not equally available to all actors (Binderkrantz et al., 2023; Thrall, 2006; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

The empirical findings offer strong support for Hypothesis 2. Descriptive statistics show a marked concentration of media visibility among a small number of dominant actors. During the consultation phase, over 90% of interest groups received no media mentions. Even in the more open referendum phase, more than 83% of groups remained absent from coverage. The 20 most visible organisations accounted for nearly 58% of all mentions, with just five groups—mainly large business associations such as SGV and economiesuisse—responsible for over 30%. These results indicate that, despite the increased public mobilisation during referenda, media access remains concentrated in the hands of a few powerful actors. This finding echoes previous research highlighting the structural inequality of media visibility (e.g. Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014).

The regression analysis further supports this conclusion. The models reveal a substantial increase in the variance of media visibility between phases. The group-level random intercept variance rises from 1.57 during the consultation phase to 37.40 in the referendum phase. This suggests that although more groups appeared in the media, the additional coverage was not evenly distributed but disproportionately concentrated among a small subset of powerful actors. Even when the institutional context encourages public engagement, media access remains highly unequal. Taken together, the descriptive and regression results provide strong confirmation for Hypothesis 2, showing that media appearances are concentrated across policy phases, consistent with earlier findings in the literature (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023).

5.1.3 Increased Visibility Without Pluralism? (H3)

Hypothesis 3 expected that media visibility would increase for all interest groups during the referendum phase, reflecting the higher salience and broader public engagement that characterise these campaigns. The underlying assumption is that referenda, by moving decision-making into the public arena, generate greater media

interest and compel interest groups to become more publicly active (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2020).

The descriptive results offer cautious support for Hypothesis 3. Overall media activity rises sharply between phases, with total mentions increasing from 745 during the consultation phase to 3,517 in the referendum phase. The average number of mentions per group also grows from 0.50 to 2.34. Although the proportion of groups receiving at least one mention remains low, it increases from 9.4% to 16.4%. The visibility tables further show that all group types experience an increase in both the number of unique organisations covered and the total number of mentions. These developments indicate that the referendum phase generates broader media engagement, lending support to H3.

The regression results provide a more differentiated view. Predicted media visibility increases significantly during referenda, confirming that the shift to a public venue is associated with greater overall coverage. However, this rise is not evenly distributed. While total mentions increase, the predicted mentions for the average group decline. This points to a growing concentration of media attention, as the additional coverage is largely absorbed by a small number of already prominent actors. The increase in variance confirms that media visibility becomes more unequal, reinforcing rather than reducing existing hierarchies.

The interaction model supports this conclusion. The rise in media mentions during referenda applies across all group types, with no significant interaction effects between group type and phase. This suggests that referenda benefit different types of actors to a similar extent. These findings confirm Hypothesis 3: referenda lead to an overall increase in media visibility. However, the gains remain unequally distributed, underlining persistent disparities in access.

5.2 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This thesis contributes to the literature on interest group politics, media access, and pluralism by challenging the pluralisation thesis (Lowery et al., 2015). According to this view, the media amplifies marginalised voices and serves as an equalising force in democratic policymaking. While the referendum phase does increase overall media visibility, coverage remains concentrated among a small number of well-established, resourceful actors—particularly business groups (see also Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020). These findings call into question the assumption that public engagement or rising salience necessarily leads to broader media representation (Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2023; Willems, 2024), a core expectation of pluralist democratic theory.

One of the more notable findings is that business groups already dominate media visibility during the early, low-salience consultation phase. This challenges the common assumption that insider phases benefit government-aligned actors, while citizen groups compensate by turning to public arenas (e.g. Beyers, 2004; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Hanegraaff et al., 2016). Instead, business dominance emerges from the outset and remains largely stable across both phases. This helps explain why Hypothesis 1—expecting a relative increase in business group visibility during referenda—is not confirmed. When visibility is already highly concentrated before salience peaks, it is less surprising that citizen groups gain a slightly larger share during the public campaign phase.

This points to a gap in the existing literature that this thesis directly addresses. Influential studies such as Binderkrantz et al. (2015) argue that citizen groups attract media attention due to their exclusion from insider processes, but they do not examine how media access varies across different policymaking phases. Much of the existing research draws on aggregate media data or focuses on long-term agenda-setting rather than phase-specific political activity (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Christiansen et al., 2017). By contrast, this thesis

5. Discussion and Conclusion

investigates strategic media advocacy in the context of concrete legislative decision-making. This phase-specific perspective reveals how structural inequalities shape public communication not just at the level of issue promotion, but during active political negotiations.

Two methodological innovations form the basis for these findings. First, the thesis draws on media data linked to 40 concrete policy proposals. This disaggregated design makes it possible to trace media engagement patterns by issue and phase. It captures strategic interventions rather than general visibility by focusing only on media appearances directly tied to the policy debate (as in Binderkrantz et al., 2023; Willems, 2024). Business groups are especially active in economic legislation, while citizen groups gain visibility in societal conflicts—particularly when salience is high. This issue-level perspective avoids the distortion of aggregate measures and shows how visibility functions as a tactical resource in policymaking.

Second, the thesis adopts a multi-venue framework that compares the same policy issues across the consultation and referendum phases. This design makes it possible to observe how interest groups adjust their strategies in response to shifting institutional settings (Buffardi et al., 2015; Jourdain et al., 2017; Varone et al., 2018). In contrast to single-venue or survey-based approaches, this framework captures whether groups respond to exclusion in one phase by re-engaging in another. It also shows that access to the media—and influence over public discourse—is shaped by the institutional rules and constraints specific to each phase.

Together, these theoretical and methodological contributions offer a more grounded perspective on media access in democratic systems. The results suggest that visibility is not inherently pluralising but shaped by institutional structures, organisational capacity, and strategic adaptation to different policy issues and venues. These findings raise broader normative questions about media access, democratic participation, and the role of interest groups in shaping public discourse.

5.3   Implications for Democratic Representation

At the core of democratic interest group theory lies the principle that all organised interests should have a fair opportunity to participate in public debate (Beyers, 2004; Lowery et al., 2015). This expectation is particularly relevant in the context of direct democracy, where decisions are made through popular vote. Media access plays a central role in this process: it is through the media that interest groups communicate their positions, contribute to public narratives, and engage with the electorate. Ideally, such access should reflect the diversity of societal interests, ensuring that a range of voices can inform and influence democratic deliberation.

The findings of this thesis challenge the assumption that referenda and public campaigning naturally broaden interest representation. Media visibility remains highly concentrated across both policymaking phases, with a small set of peak organisations—primarily business associations—dominating coverage. Citizen groups, though formally included in the policy process, appear marginal in the media arena when public attention peaks. While business groups lose some relative share and citizen groups make modest gains, these shifts are limited. In absolute terms, business actors continue to account for more than 42% of all media appearances during referendum campaigns. These findings call into question the pluralist claim that the media serves as an open and inclusive platform for all organised interests (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Thrall, 2006; Willems, 2024).

This persistent inequality in media access raises concerns for the legitimacy of Swiss direct democracy. Referenda are widely regarded as instruments of popular empowerment (Eichenberger & Varone, 2020; Sciarini, 2023). Yet if public debates are disproportionately shaped by a narrow set of resource-rich actors, the principle of equal participation becomes difficult to uphold (Lowery et al., 2015). Voting rights alone do not ensure democratic fairness if access to the public sphere is structurally skewed. When media visibility is unequally distributed, the informational conditions under which citizens form political opinions are distorted—posing challenges to transparency, deliberative quality, and democratic inclusion.

In the end, despite the normative concerns about media visibility and democratic representation, it remains uncertain whether all interest groups participating in consultations actually seek media attention. It is often taken for granted that every group aims to appear in the media. Yet the extent of their substantive policy interest, or the quality of their consultation statements, is largely unknown and difficult to evaluate. This leads to the limitations of this thesis, which future research could address.

5.4 Limitations and Avenues for Further Study

The first and most important limitation of this thesis concerns the lack of data on organisational resources. Variables such as annual budget or staff size were not included in the models. As a result, the regression estimates may be biased, since previous research has shown that such resources are strong predictors of both media visibility and political influence (Binderkrantz, Halpin, et al., 2020; Grömping, 2019; e.g. Varone et al., 2020). Due to time constraints and the single-author nature of this Master's thesis, it was not feasible to collect resource data for all 1,505 interest groups. Future research should integrate such data to assess how financial and operational capacity shapes media access, and whether smaller, less-resourced groups can gain visibility when controlling for these factors.

Secondly, this thesis focused on the consultation and referendum phases but excluded the parliamentary phase in between. During this stage, final drafts from the consultation process are debated and approved by the legislature (Mach et al., 2020; Sager et al., 2022). Interest groups may target members of parliament, especially if they failed to reach their goals during the consultation phase (Jourdain et al., 2017). Including this phase in future research would allow for a more complete understanding of multi-venue lobbying (Varone et al., 2020) and would help identify which groups maintain visibility across all phases, and which are only active in selected venues.

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Thirdly, the dataset does not identify which interest groups initiated the referendum or led the campaign on either side, nor does it indicate whether a group supported the winning or losing position. Leading organisations often receive more media attention due to their involvement in signature collection, public events, and media appearances. The relevance of this information became clear only after data collection had concluded. Future studies should include these dimensions to better assess the relationship between campaign leadership and media visibility.

Fourth, while this thesis focused on business associations, it did not include their individual member firms, many of which may engage in lobbying independently. Some corporations submitted consultation statements but were not tracked in the Swissdox dataset and were thus excluded from the analysis. This is particularly relevant in light of findings from other countries. In the Netherlands, for instance, Aizenberg & Hanegraaff (2020) shows that firms are gaining visibility at the expense of their associations. As corporatist structures evolve, individual companies may increasingly bypass umbrella organisations and engage directly with the media. Whether a similar trend is occurring in Switzerland warrants further investigation.

Fifth, the dataset was collected and coded manually by a single researcher. Although care was taken to ensure consistency, no inter-coder reliability check was performed. Classifying group type can be challenging, especially in cases where the distinction between business associations and occupational organisations is unclear. Moreover, media appearances were identified using keyword searches, which—despite iterative testing—may not have captured all relevant articles, particularly in the French-language press. The manual nature of the process also introduced potential fatigue effects, as reviewing thousands of articles inevitably leads to diminished concentration. Given that the entire coding process was conducted alone, this represents a notable source of possible human error.

Despite these limitations, the thesis offers a clear contribution: it demonstrates that media access in Swiss policymaking remains highly unequal. While referenda increase the total number of group appearances, they do not disrupt the existing hierarchy. On the contrary, already dominant peak organisations gain further

visibility. This challenges the assumption that public campaigning leads to broader representation. What this study contributes is a new way of analysing media access: by comparing phases and disaggregating by issue, it reveals how advocacy strategies shift with institutional context. Future research would benefit from adopting this multi-venue, issue-centred approach to better understand the dynamics of media influence—and why some groups remain largely invisible.

Appendices

A

Codebook and Variable Definitions

This dataset `2025.05.19_ig_visibility_data` was created by Rafael Huber for the purposes of a Master's thesis at the University of Geneva. It is a complete record of 2,898 interest group–policy issue observations in Switzerland (2011–2024), combining consultation participation and mediamention counts across six national newspapers. Data collection and coding took place between August and December 2024. The dataset was last verified on 19 May 2025.

Unit of analysis:

Each row in the dataset represents one *interest group–issue dyad* (N = 2,898). That is, each observation corresponds to one interest group commenting on, or appearing in the media in relation to, one of 40 national policy issues that underwent both a consultation and a referendum phase between 2012 and 2024.

All variables are complete; there are no missing values. Media mentions are coded as 0 where a group was not mentioned in a given phase or outlet. All count variables are zero-inflated, with a majority of interest groups receiving no mentions and a few dominant actors accounting for most coverage. Dates are formatted as `dd.mm.yyyy`.

Variable count:

2 identification variables (`ig_id`, `issue_id`)

2 group-level variables (`ig`, `type`)

6 issue-level variables (`issue`, `vote_date`, `lowi_type`, `lowi_id`, `com_type`, `com_id`)

14 media visibility variables

A.1   Identification Variables

`ig_id`

Type: Integer

Description: Unique identifier assigned to each interest group. The IDs serve only for internal tracking and have no substantive meaning.

Source: Assigned manually.

`issue_id`

Type: Integer

Description: Numeric identifier for each of the 40 selected policy issues.

Source: Created manually by the author for this project.

A.2   Group Variables

`ig`

Type: Character string

Description: Full name of the interest group, including official abbreviations and translations in German, French, and, where applicable, Italian.

Source: Extracted from official consultation reports; missing language variants or abbreviations completed using group websites.

Example: SGB / Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund / USS / Union syndicale suisse / Unione sindacale svizzera

A. Codebook and Variable Definitions

type

Type: Categorical (integer-coded factor)

Description: Group classification based on the INTERARENA typology (Binderkrantz et al., 2020). Categories were not modified. Coding was conducted by a single coder.

Values:

1 = Trade union

2 = Business group

3 = Institutional association

4 = Occupational association

5 = Identity group

6 = Leisure group

7 = Religious group

8 = Public interest group

A.3   Issue Variables

issue

Type: Character string

Description: Simplified label for each policy issue, created by the author based on official Fedlex titles.

Example: Covid-19 Law, Pension Reform AHV 21

vote_date

Type: Date

Format: dd.mm.yyyy

Description: Date of the facultative referendum on the respective policy issue.

Source: Swiss Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzlei)

A. Codebook and Variable Definitions

`lowi_type`

Type: Categorical (string)

Description: Policy type according to Lowi's (1964) typology. Coded based on the policy objective as described in Fedlex law texts and official explanatory reports.

Source: Assigned manually by the author.

Values: Distributive, Regulatory, Redistributive, Constituent

`lowi_id`

Type: Integer

Description: Numeric identifier for each Lowi category.

Values:

1 = Distributive

2 = Regulatory

3 = Redistributive

4 = Constituent

`com_type`

Type: Categorical (string)

Description: Provisional classification of each policy issue by policy domain.

Source: Manually assigned by the author; not based on official parliamentary committee records.

Note: Not used in the final analysis, but included for transparency.

Example: Legal Affairs, Social Security and Healthcare, Foreign Policy

`com_id`

Type: Integer

Description: Numeric code for each `com_type`.

Note: Not based on official parliamentary commission identifiers.

Values:

1 = Legal Affairs

2 = Security Policy

3 = State Policy

4 = Economy and Taxes

5 = Social Security and Healthcare

6 = Science, Education and Culture

7 = Transport and Telecommunications

8 = Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy

9 = Foreign Policy

A.4 Media Visibility Variables

All variables below are non-negative integer counts indicating the number of times an interest group was mentioned in Swiss newspapers during either the consultation or referendum phase. Mentions were retrieved using Swissdox.ch and filtered for political relevance. Zero indicates no mention. Variable names follow the pattern: `[newspaper]_[phase]`, where `phase` is either `cons` (consultation) or `dd` (referendum).

A.4.1 Aggregate Media Mentions

media_cons

Type: Integer

Description: Total number of mentions across all six newspapers during the consultation phase.

Range: 0–34

media_dd

Type: Integer

Description: Total number of mentions across all six newspapers during the referendum phase.

Range: 0–87

Note: Both distributions are strongly right-skewed.

A.4.2 Newspaper-Specific Mentions – Consultation Phase

nzz_cons

Description: Mentions in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* during the consultation phase.

sgtb_cons

Description: Mentions in *St. Galler Tagblatt* during the consultation phase.

tagi_cons

Description: Mentions in *Tages-Anzeiger* during the consultation phase.

tribune_cons

Description: Mentions in *Tribune de Genève* during the consultation phase.

temps_cons

Description: Mentions in *Le Temps* during the consultation phase.

24h_cons

Description: Mentions in *24 heures* during the consultation phase.

A.4.3 Newspaper-Specific Mentions – Referendum Phase

nzz_dd

Description: Mentions in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* during the referendum phase.

sgtb_dd

Description: Mentions in *St. Galler Tagblatt* during the referendum phase.

tagi_dd

Description: Mentions in *Tages-Anzeiger* during the referendum phase.

tribune_dd

Description: Mentions in *Tribune de Genève* during the referendum phase.

A. Codebook and Variable Definitions

`temps_dd`

Description: Mentions in *Le Temps* during the referendum phase.

`24h_dd`

Description: Mentions in *24 heures* during the referendum phase.

B
Transparency, Tools, and Supplementary Tables

B.1 Data Availability and Replication Archive

All data, code, and documentation used in this thesis are openly accessible and archived on the University of Geneva's Yareta platform. The dataset includes:

- The full list of interest group–issue dyads (N = 2,898)
- Variables used in the analysis, including media counts and group classifications
- A codebook with definitions, sources, and coding structure
- R scripts for data cleaning, analysis, and visualisation
- Output tables and figures reproduced in the thesis

The complete archive is available at: https://doi.org/10.26037/yareta: 2dwkqima4rdo3f62qtswbfnjlm

This repository supports full transparency and replicability of the empirical results presented in the thesis. All data were collected and processed by the author between August and December 2024. The archive was last updated on 19 May 2025.

B.2 R Markdown and LaTeX Framework

This thesis was written using an R Markdown template originally developed by Ulrik Lyngs (2019) for the University of Oxford. The template is based on the bookdown package by Yihui Xie and builds on earlier work by Chester Ismay (*thesisdown*) and the OxThesis LaTeX class.

The workflow integrates R code and Markdown to support full reproducibility and automate the generation of figures, tables, and cross-references. All formatting and output are handled through this open-source environment.

Further documentation is available at: https://ulyngs.github.io/phd-thesis/

B.3 Use of AI Tools in Thesis Development

Throughout the development of this thesis, the author made constructive use of AI-assisted tools—particularly OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4)—to support the analytical and editorial process. AI was used as a complementary instrument in the following ways:

- To generate and refine keyword search strings for media data collection via Swissdox
- To debug R-related issues and improve the formatting of tables and plots
- To assist with LaTeX and R Markdown code, particularly in solving formatting and compilation errors
- To provide feedback on clarity, structure, and expression in specific sections
- To outline paragraphs or sections based on the author's conceptual ideas
- To polish language, reduce redundancy, and correct grammatical inconsistencies
- To suggest more accessible or precise formulations when appropriate

All core research decisions, including the theoretical framework, data analysis, interpretation of results, and overall argumentation, were independently developed

by the author. AI tools were used solely to support technical implementation and language refinement across multiple rounds of editing.

B.4   Supplementary Tables

Table B.1: Overview of Selected Issues and Referenda

ID	Issue	Referendum Date	Lowi ID	Lowi Type	Comm. ID	Commission Type
1	Pension Reform (BVG-Reform)	2024-09-22	3	Redistributive	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
2	Secure Electricity Supply (Sichere Stromversorgung)	2024-06-09	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
3	Climate Law (Klimagesetz)	2023-06-18	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
4	Withholding Tax Reform (Verrechnungssteuer)	2022-09-25	3	Redistributive	4	Economy and taxes
5	Pension Reform AHV 21 (AHV 21)	2022-09-25	3	Redistributive	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
6	European Border and Coast Guard (Europäische Grenzwache)	2022-05-15	4	Constituent	9	Foreign Policy
7	Film Law (Filmgesetz)	2022-05-15	1	Distributive	6	Science, Education and Culture
8	Transplantation Law (Transplantationsgesetz)	2022-05-15	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
9	Media Package (Medienpaket)	2022-02-13	1	Distributive	6	Science, Education and Culture
10	Stamp Duty Reform (Stempelabgaben)	2022-02-13	3	Redistributive	4	Economy and taxes
11	Amendment to the Covid-19 Law (2nd Revision) (Änderung des Covid-19-Gesetzes - 2. Revision)	2021-11-28	2	Regulatory	3	State Policy
12	Marriage for All (Ehe für alle)	2021-09-26	2	Regulatory	3	State Policy
13	Covid-19 Law (Covid-19-Gesetz)	2021-06-13	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
14	CO Law (CO-Gesetz)	2021-06-13	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
15	Anti-Terrorism Law (Terrorismusbekämpfung)	2021-06-13	2	Regulatory	2	Security Policy
16	E-ID Law (E-ID-Gesetz)	2021-06-13	4	Constituent	3	State Policy
17	Fighter Jet Procurement (Kampfflugzeuge)	2020-09-27	1	Distributive	2	Security Policy
18	Paternity Leave Law (Vaterschaftsurlaub)	2020-09-27	3	Redistributive	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare

Table B.1: Overview of Selected Issues and Referenda *(continued)*

ID	Issue	Referendum Date	Lowi ID	Lowi Type	Comm. ID	Commission Type
19	Hunting Law (Jagdgesetz)	2020-09-27	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
20	Tax Deductions for Children (Kinderabzüge)	2020-09-27	3	Redistributive	1	Legal Affairs
21	Anti-Discrimination Penal Code (Diskriminierungs-Strafnorm)	2020-02-09	2	Regulatory	1	Legal Affairs
22	STAF Proposal (STAF-Vorlage) (Federal Act on Tax Reform and AHV Financing)	2019-05-19	3	Redistributive	4	Economy and taxes
23	Gambling Law (Geldspielgesetz)	2018-06-10	2	Regulatory	4	Economy and taxes
24	AHV Reform 2020 (AHV Reform 2020)	2017-09-24	3	Redistributive	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
25	Energy Strategy 2050 (Energiestrategie 2050)	2017-05-21	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
26	Corporate Tax Reform Act III (Unternehmenssteuer-reformgesetz III)	2017-02-12	3	Redistributive	4	Economy and taxes
27	Intelligence Service Act (Nachrichtendienstgesetz)	2016-09-25	2	Regulatory	9	Foreign Policy
28	Asylum Law (Asylgesetz)	2016-06-05	2	Regulatory	9	Foreign Policy
29	Reproductive Medicine Act (Fortpflanzungsgesetz)	2016-06-05	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
30	Renovation of the Gotthard Road Tunnel (Sanierung Gotthard-Strassentunnel)	2016-02-28	1	Distributive	7	Transport and Telecommunications
31	Partial Revision of the Radio and Television Act (Teilrevision Radio und Fernsehen)	2015-06-14	2	Regulatory	6	Science, Education and Culture
32	National Road Toll Act (Nationalstrassenabgabegesetz)	2013-11-24	1	Distributive	7	Transport and Telecommunications
33	Labor Law (Arbeitsgesetz)	2013-09-22	2	Regulatory	4	Economy and taxes
34	Epidemics Act (Epidemiegesetz)	2013-09-22	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
35	Asylum Law (1st Consultation) (Asylgesetz 1. Vernehmlassung)	2013-06-09	2	Regulatory	9	Foreign Policy
36	Asylum Law (2nd Consultation) (Asylgesetz 2. Vernehmlassung)	2013-06-09	2	Regulatory	9	Foreign Policy
37	Spatial Planning Act (Raumplanungsgesetz)	2013-03-03	2	Regulatory	8	Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
38	Animal Epidemics Act (Tierseuchengesetz)	2012-11-25	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare
39	Managed Care Law (Managed Care)	2012-06-17	2	Regulatory	5	Social Securiry and Healthcare

Table B.1: Overview of Selected Issues and Referenda *(continued)*

ID	Issue	Referendum Date	Lowi ID	Lowi Type	Comm. ID	Commission Type
40	Federal Act on Fixed Book Prices (Bundesgesetz über die Buchpreisbindung)	2012-03-11	2	Regulatory	6	Science, Education and Culture

Table B.2: Coverage Shares Compared to Group Population (By Issue)

ID	Issue	Group Population Share		Consultation Phase		Direct Democratic Phase	
		BG Pop. Share (%)	CG Pop. Share (%)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)
1	Pension Reform (BVG-Reform)	26.31	39.93	66.21% (96)	0% (0)	50% (101)	14.85% (30)
2	Secure Electricity Supply (Sichere Stromversorgung)	26.31	39.93	83.33% (10)	0% (0)	19.27% (21)	75.23% (82)
3	Climate Law (Klimagesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (1)	75% (48)	20.31% (13)
4	Withholding Tax Reform (Verrechnungssteuer)	26.31	39.93	100% (3)	0% (0)	81.48% (44)	0% (0)
5	Pension Reform AHV 21 (AHV 21)	26.31	39.93	41.46% (17)	0% (0)	24.56% (14)	0% (0)
6	European Border and Coast Guard (Europäische Grenzwache)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	0% (0)	4.17% (1)	75% (18)
7	Film Law (Filmgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (2)	9.09% (1)	54.55% (6)
8	Transplantation Law (Transplantationsgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	47.06% (8)	0% (0)	65.52% (38)
9	Media Package (Medienpaket)	26.31	39.93	41.38% (12)	17.24% (5)	30.26% (23)	10.53% (8)
10	Stamp Duty Reform (Stempelabgaben)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	0% (0)	63.27% (31)	0% (0)
11	Amendment to the Covid-19 Law (2nd Revision) (Änderung des Covid-19-Gesetzes - 2. Revision)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	33.33% (1)	64.86% (24)	21.62% (8)
12	Marriage for All (Ehe für alle)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (29)	0% (0)	95.35% (41)
13	Covid-19 Law (Covid-19-Gesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	33.33% (1)	83.78% (31)	0% (0)
14	CO Law (CO-Gesetz)	26.31	39.93	60.87% (14)	30.43% (7)	74.86% (134)	19.55% (35)
15	Anti-Terrorism Law (Terrorismusbekämpfung)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (1)	0% (0)	30.43% (7)
16	E-ID Law (E-ID-Gesetz)	26.31	39.93	75% (6)	25% (2)	26.09% (6)	39.13% (9)
17	Fighter Jet Procurement (Kampfflugzeuge)	26.31	39.93	7.69% (1)	46.15% (6)	29.63% (8)	59.26% (16)
18	Paternity Leave Law (Vaterschaftsurlaub)	26.31	39.93	36.36% (8)	27.27% (6)	50% (26)	17.31% (9)
19	Hunting Law (Jagdgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (2)	15.87% (10)	76.19% (48)

Table B.2: Coverage Shares Compared to Group Population (By Issue) *(continued)*

ID	Issue	BG Pop. Share (%)	CG Pop. Share (%)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)
20	Tax Deductions for Children (Kinderabzüge)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (6)	0% (0)
21	Anti-Discrimination Penal Code (Diskriminierungs-Strafnorm)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	93.94% (31)
22	STAF Proposal (STAF-Vorlage) (Federal Act on Tax Reform and AHV Financing)	26.31	39.93	71.88% (23)	3.12% (1)	62.83% (71)	0% (0)
23	Gambling Law (Geldspielgesetz)	26.31	39.93	60% (12)	0% (0)	77% (77)	2% (2)
24	AHV Reform 2020 (AHV Reform 2020)	26.31	39.93	67.39% (31)	0% (0)	56.99% (106)	16.13% (30)
25	Energy Strategy 2050 (Energiestrategie 2050)	26.31	39.93	33.33% (1)	66.67% (2)	55.56% (75)	28.89% (39)
26	Corporate Tax Reform Act III (Unternehmenssteuerreformgesetz III)	26.31	39.93	55.68% (49)	0% (0)	49.21% (125)	0.79% (2)
27	Intelligence Service Act (Nachrichtendienstgesetz)	26.31	39.93	12.5% (2)	18.75% (3)	13.58% (11)	32.1% (26)
28	Asylum Law (Asylgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	85.71% (6)	0% (0)	40.79% (31)
29	Reproductive Medicine Act (Fortpflanzungsgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	25% (3)	11.48% (7)	40.98% (25)
30	Renovation of the Gotthard Road Tunnel (Sanierung Gotthard-Strassentunnel)	26.31	39.93	12.5% (2)	75% (12)	33.51% (63)	59.04% (111)
31	Partial Revision of the Radio and Television Act (Teilrevision Radio und Fernsehen)	26.31	39.93	62.5% (15)	16.67% (4)	56.47% (131)	5.17% (12)
32	National Road Toll Act (Nationalstrassenabgabegesetz)	26.31	39.93	19.05% (4)	76.19% (16)	24.82% (35)	63.83% (90)
33	Labor Law (Arbeitsgesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	20% (1)	20.9% (14)	25.37% (17)
34	Epidemics Act (Epidemiegesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	0% (0)	12.9% (4)	12.9% (4)
35	Asylum Law (1st Consultation) (Asylgesetz 1. Vernehmlassung)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	64.29% (18)	4.94% (4)	55.56% (45)

Table B.2: Coverage Shares Compared to Group Population (By Issue) *(continued)*

ID	Issue	BG Pop. Share (%)	CG Pop. Share (%)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)	BG (%) (N)	CG (%) (N)
36	Asylum Law (2nd Consultation) (Asylgesetz 2. Vernehmlassung)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	62.5% (5)	0% (0)	51.72% (30)
37	Spatial Planning Act (Raumplanungsgesetz)	26.31	39.93	44.12% (15)	44.12% (15)	56.71% (131)	21.65% (50)
38	Animal Epidemics Act (Tierseuchengesetz)	26.31	39.93	0% (0)	100% (2)	65.12% (28)	25.58% (11)
39	Managed Care Law (Managed Care)	26.31	39.93	45.45% (10)	4.55% (1)	37.01% (57)	5.19% (8)
40	Federal Act on Fixed Book Prices (Bundesgesetz über die Buchpreisbindung)	26.31	39.93	28.57% (2)	42.86% (3)	43.1% (25)	29.31% (17)

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