

2012 survey of Dutch Interests Groups:

Data Overview and Results

Introduction

In all democratic societies a wide range of interest groups seek political influence. The project INTERARENA (Interest Groups across Political Arenas) analyzes interest group influence towards the bureaucracy, parliament and the media. Among other things the project seeks to establish which groups are successful in attracting the attention and work of the media, bureaucrats and politicians.

The project was initiated by the Department of Political Science of Aarhus University in Denmark. It is carried out in a four-year period from January 1st 2011 to December 31th 2014 with research conducted in the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands besides Denmark. The project has received a Sapere Aude grant from the Danish Council for Independent Research.

In the end of 2012 a survey was conducted among Dutch interest groups under the supervision of Dr. Anne Rasmussen, Leiden University. This document provides a summary of some of the first results of the research in the Netherlands. For more information, please see <http://interarena.dk/Default.asp?l=eng>

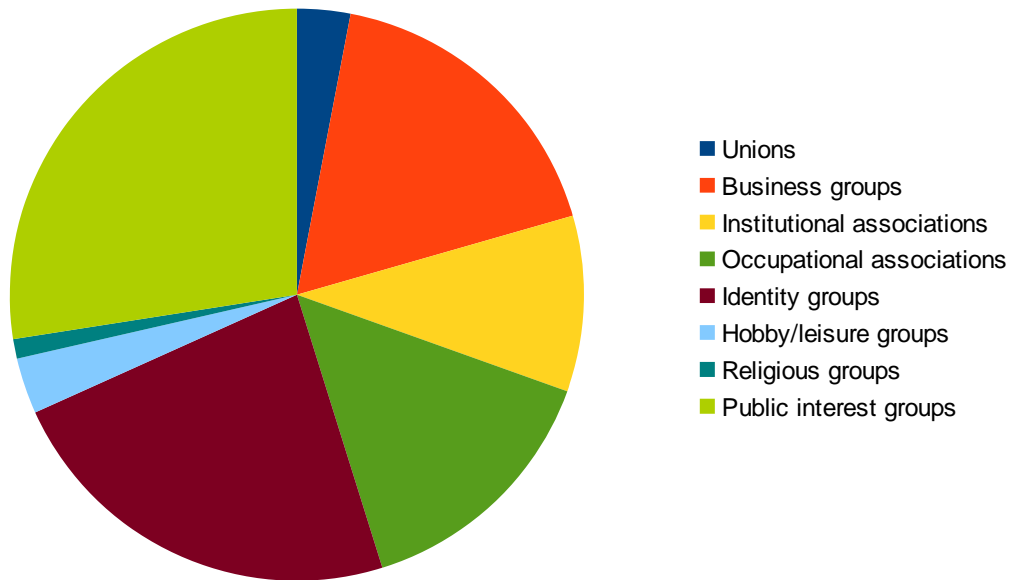
Summary of interest groups

The first step in the investigation was to determine the population of interest groups for our survey. To do so all official contacts of the Dutch House of Representatives with external organizations and persons in 2011 were examined. This information was available through the agendas and inventories of letters received by the committees of the Dutch House of Representatives. We also included actors who contributed to online consultations by ministries in the period from 2008 to 2011. These consultations concern three types of legislation: formal laws, *algemene maatregelen van bestuur* (AmvB or “orders in council”) and ministerial regulations.

In total 12,931 different actors had contact with the House of Representatives and/or the administration in this period. Almost half of the contacts were made by individuals and a quarter came from interest groups. In total, there were 1,286 national interest groups. Because it was not possible to

find contact data for 87 interest groups, a survey was sent to 1,199 groups. After e-mail and telephone reminders 639 answered surveys were received. This corresponds to a response rate of 53%. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the interest groups between eight main categories.

Figure 1: Distribution of interest groups across categories



Of the organizations who answered the survey, public interest groups made up the largest category with 174 organizations. Identity groups and business groups come in second and third with respectively 146 and 111 organizations. Table 1 adds more detail by including detailed information about the number of interest groups in different subcategories. It shows that when it comes to specific subcategories, sector-wide business groups make up the largest subcategory with 92 organizations. Environment and animal welfare groups are the second largest subcategory with a number of 71, while patient groups take the third place with 60 organizations. The remaining groups are spread relatively evenly over the other subcategories.

Table 1: Division of surveyed interest groups in subcategories

Type of interest group	Number	Percent
Unions		
- Blue-collar union	5	0.8
- Other unions	14	2.2
Business groups		
- Peak-level business groups	3	0.5
- Sector-wide business groups	92	14.5
- Breed associations	5	0.8
- Technical associations	7	1.1
- Other business groups	4	0.6
Institutional associations		
- Associations of local authorities	8	1.3
- Associations of other public institutions	24	3.8
- Associations of managers of public institutions	7	1.1
- Other institutional associations	24	3.8
Occupational associations		
- Doctors' associations	16	2.5
- Associations of other medical professions	18	2.8
- Teacher's associations	7	1.1
- Other occupational associations	52	8.2
Identity groups		
- Patients	60	9.5
- Elderly	8	1.3
- Students	11	1.7
- Friendship groups	2	0.3
- Racial or ethnic	12	1.9
- Other identity groups	40	6.3
- Women	10	1.6
- Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Transsexual	3	0.5
Hobby/leisure groups		
- Sport	8	1.3
- Other hobby/leisure	12	1.9
Religious groups		
- Associated with the protestant church	1	0.2
- Other religious groups	5	0.8
- Roman-Catholic groups	1	0.2
Public interest groups		
- Environment and animal welfare	71	11.2
- Humanitarian – international	27	4.3
- Humanitarian – national	16	2.5
- Consumer group	13	2.1
- Other public interest group	29	4.6
- Government reform	2	0.3
- Civil liberties	13	2.1
- Citizen empowerment	3	0.5
Category code missing (anonymous organizations)	3	
Total	636	100

The political influence of interest groups

An important reason for researching interest groups is the potential influence they exert. Influence can be defined in many different ways. The survey asked the organizations to which extent they think it is important to influence certain activities. The results are displayed in table 2.

Table 2: Appraisal of importance of influence in per cent

	Very important	Important	A little	Not at all
Public opinion	36.5	44.6	16.7	2.2
The media agenda	15.4	48.3	29.9	6.4
The political agenda	52.0	36.4	9.5	2.1
Legislation or parliamentary decisions	57.9	28.8	10.7	2.6
Administrative orders or circulars	20.2	37.8	33.3	8.7
Decisions by the public administration	30.9	41.1	21.9	6.1

Between 624 and 630 interest groups answered each individual question. Influencing legislation or parliamentary decisions is considered most important. Public opinion follows at some distance, whereas fewer respondents found it “very important” to influence the media agenda. The survey also asked how interest groups estimated their actual influence on certain events. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Estimated influence on events in per cent

	Very often	Fairly often	Occasionally	Never
Changes in public opinion	5.5	17.9	56.1	20.5
The media have taken up an issue	12.6	33.1	46.5	7.8
Other organizations have taken up an issue	9.2	33.3	48.8	8.8
Public servants have taken up an issue	13.7	33.8	38.5	13.9
EU institutions have taken up an issue	2.3	10.3	33.1	54.3
Politicians and political parties have taken up an issue	9.9	27.0	48.0	15.0
The government has launched proposals in Parliament	3.7	14.8	47.1	34.4
Other parties have launched proposals in Parliament	3.4	14.2	47.5	34.9
A legislative proposal was changed during the ministry reading	8.4	17.9	40.9	32.8
A legislative proposal was changed during the parliamentary reading	4.8	14.6	40.9	39.7
Interpellation debates tabled in Parliament or questions to the minister	4.6	16.3	37.6	41.5
Changes in orders or circulars	3.5	11.7	34.2	50.7
Changes to decisions in the public administration	3.3	10.6	43.7	42.4

Between 519 and 526 interest groups answered each individual question. Interest groups report that they influence the agendas of the media, public servants and political parties. On the other hand, their influence on the agendas of EU-organizations is very limited. It is also clear that it is not fre-

quently the case that groups obtain actual changes in internal directives of the public service and ministerial decisions.

Figure 2: Interest groups answering that the media “very” or “fairly often” took up an issue, percentage share per category

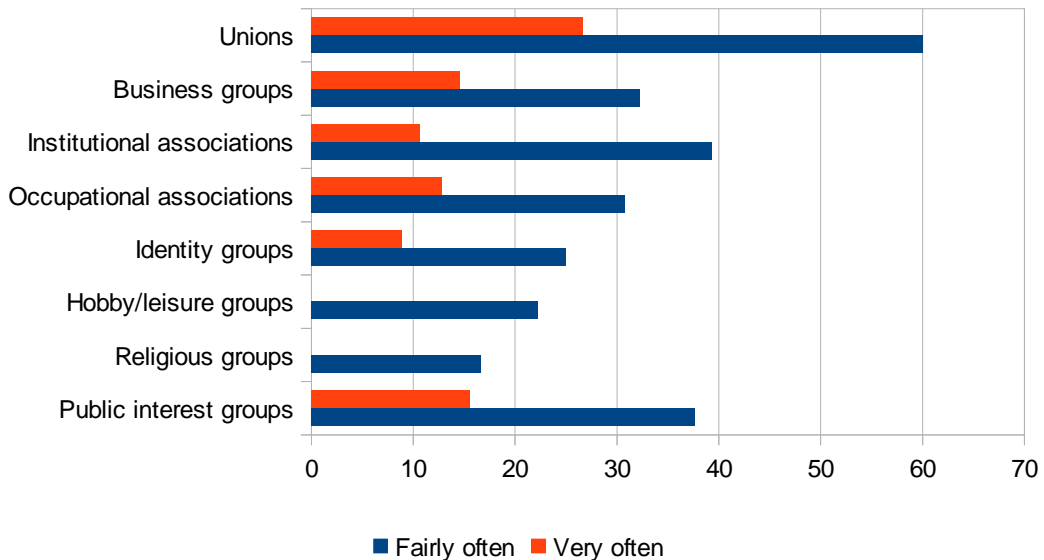
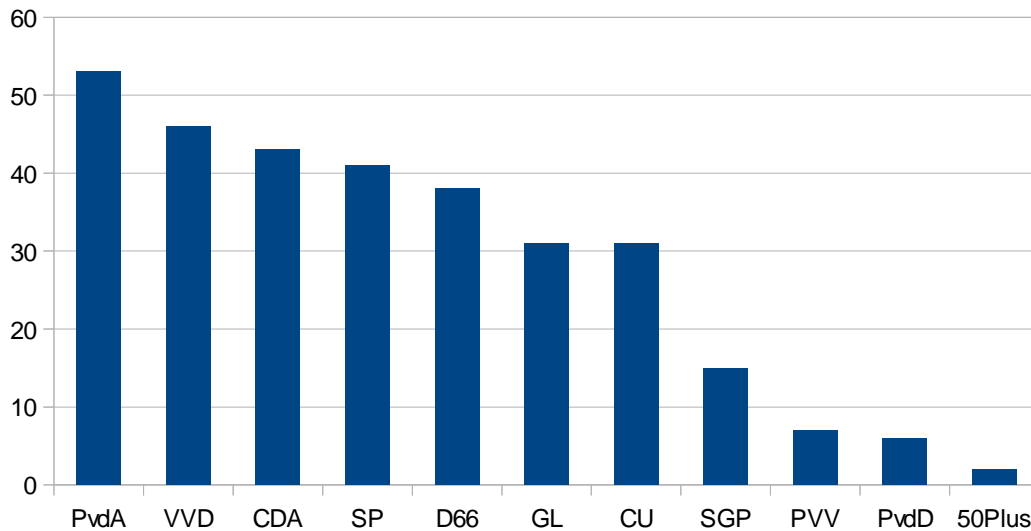


Figure 2 shows the self-reported influence of interest groups on the media agenda across group types. Even if the interest group literature argues that business groups are likely to be particularly influential, it is interesting that business groups are not the most successful when it comes to placing issues on the media agenda, at least not according to their own perception. Instead, we see that a greater share of unions perceive themselves as being influential than any other group type. At the other end of the spectrum, we find hobby and leisure groups together with religious groups, which do not perceive themselves as being very successful in influencing the media agenda.

Finally, figure 3 shows with which political parties interest groups cooperate most intensively. The Labour Party (PvdA) is favorite with 53 interest groups cooperating with this party. The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democrats (CDA) follow with respectively 46 and 43 interest groups. 50Plus scores lowest with two interest groups.

Figure 3: Number of interest groups cooperating intensively with political parties.



These figures show that interest groups do not necessarily cooperate with the largest political parties. The Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) is a good example of this: In the period examined, it possessed 24 seats but merely seven interest groups reported that they cooperated intensively with this party. A much higher number of interest groups cooperated with parties which possessed significantly fewer seats such as GreenLeft (GL), the ChristianUnion (CU) and the Reformed Party (SGP). A possible pattern may be that if political parties cater to a more limited electorate or perform single-issue politics, they cooperate less intensively with interest groups. This certainly applies to the Party for Animals (PvdD) and 50Plus, which are a party for animal rights and a party for the elderly respectively.

Conclusion

These preliminary findings of the 2012 survey of Dutch interest groups provide some interesting insights into their operation. We hope these preliminary descriptive statistics give a useful first impression of the results of the survey. We are very grateful to the interest groups who responded to the survey and satisfied with our high response rate of 53%. There is no doubt that the gathered data gives us a fertile basis to expand our scientific knowledge on the workings of interest groups in the Netherlands and elsewhere.