Can money buy access? Political finance contributions and the impact on interest group access to legislative committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

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Abstract

Western governments continue to be marred with campaign contribution scandals and accusations of permitting wealthy donors' undue political influence. Yet, current literature on political finance has not found consistent or conclusive evidence to suggest political finance donors receive advantages in the public policy process. However, existing studies have focused heavily on the later stages of the policy process and often use the United States as a sole case study. This thesis addresses key gaps in the literature by asking whether political finance donations can impact interest group access to legislative committees in four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Existing theories on financial dependence and corporate lobbying advantage were used to create new frameworks to examine their impact on interest group access to legislative committees. By examining the impact of political finance at the consultation stage of the policy process, it focuses on an understudied but crucial point of access characterised by low public visibility but a high potential for policy influence. The thesis finds evidence to suggest contributions could give interest groups better access to legislative committees but only in certain countries. Associations between political finance contributions and privileged access were strongest in Australia, which has a lax approach to political finance regulation. Moreover, it also finds evidence of corporate dominance and an overall lack of witness diversity in committee hearings. The findings helped broaden our understanding of political finance and elite influence within the agenda-setting and consultation process.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1 Can money buy access to committees?

Introduction

Former US Governor and presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee poetically once said, 'Washington is like a strip club, you've got people tossing dollars and people doing the dance'. The belief that financial contributions can gain political advantages is supported by recent real-world scandals within modern western democracies. In 2021 alone, the UK Conservative government was accused of exchanging political appointments for cash, using political donations to fund private home refurbishments, and granting lucrative government contracts to corporate donors during the COVID-19 pandemic (Forrest 2021; Merrick 2021; Thévoz 2021). These events continue to fuel serious questions about how contributions can shape political decision-making within democratic nations. Understanding these issues is fundamental, considering that even the appearance of corruption is likely to erode the public's confidence in their governments and the fairness of the democratic process. In fact, polling in the United States shows the public holds strong opinions that money matters in politics and supports stronger campaign finance laws to limit affluent influence (Gallup 2019; New York Times 2015).

Established intergovernmental organisations also share concerns that political contributions could provide the wealthy with undue political influence. For example, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe recognise that political contributions could be potentially harmful to core democratic principles and have produced detailed guidelines on the ideal campaign finance practices countries should follow (OCSE 2015). Moreover, scholars have also long been concerned that wealthy individuals and organisations could use political contributions to achieve unequal political influence. Consequently, extensive research has been conducted on the impact that contributions could have on legislative behaviour during the policy process (Canes-Wrone and Gibson 2019; Flavin 2014; Powell 2013; Witko 2011).

However, existing research has failed to find clear and consistent evidence of political finance influence within the policy process. Numerous studies find little to no evidence of political finance influence (Bronars and Lott 1997; Fleisher 1993;

Gordon et al. 2007; Wawro 2001). Significantly, however, most of the existing literature on this topic has explored political finance influence at the policy legitimation stage where policy receives its final ratification in the legislature (Stratmann 2017). This imbalance in coverage exists despite strong theoretical reasoning presented in this thesis to suggest earlier stages of the policy process, such as the agenda-setting and consultation stage, could be more susceptible to political finance influence.

The legislative committee process primarily operates within the agenda-setting and consultation stage, where policy options are formulated and initially discussed. This thesis argues there are two primary reasons why this stage could be targeted by interest groups seeking to influence through financial contributions. Firstly, this policy stage is significantly less scrutinised by the eyes of the media and public (Cotton 2012). Typically, attention is greatest at the final ratification stages before a bill becomes law. Consequently, politicians and interest groups might feel more emboldened to engage in *quid pro quo* exchanges early on. Furthermore, legislative committees play a core role in the agenda-setting process whereby policies are endorsed but also removed from further consideration. This presents interest groups with a unique lobbying opportunity to stop a policy from developing before it has a chance to gather further momentum (Grenzke 2019).

However, only a handful of studies have attempted to study the link between contributions on access at this stage. Empirical studies that have explored political finance influence at this policy stage have investigated contribution patterns to committee members to better understand the motivations of donors (Esterling 2007; Powell and Grimmer 2016). Their findings have revealed that donations are often targeted at powerful committee members providing further credence to the idea that committees could be key financial lobbying targets. However, existing research has yet to explicitly examine the links between political finance contributions and interest group access to legislative committees.

This thesis fills this gap by asking: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees? In answering this research question, this thesis provides a unique examination of political finance

influence within a severely under-researched area of the policy process and it provides a much-needed comparative analysis of countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. This thesis asks a new question that focuses on the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process. Specifically, it investigates whether political finance contributions can impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committee proceedings. Legislative committees frequently allow interest groups and individuals to give their opinion on a particular policy problem. Interest groups can typically participate in committees via written and oral formats. These two formats involve distinctly different levels of access. Written participation requires open access, meaning any interest group or individual can participate using this format. However, oral participation requires invited access, meaning interest groups or individuals must be invited by the committee to participate using this format. Oral participation requires legislators to grant a particular group privileged access. This thesis will examine whether political finance contributions could increase an interest group's likelihood of achieving invited access to legislative committees.

To answer the research question, this study collected data on interest groups that have provided evidence to legislative committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK between 2005 and 2010. As most studies have almost exclusively researched the United States, this thesis fills another critical empirical gap by conducting a comparative study on non-US countries. The collected data distinguished whether an interest group had participated through an oral or written format to measure access. To understand variance across different policy areas, the committee inquiries chosen for analysis related to eight policy topics: oil mining and natural resources, climate change, health insurance and drug pricing, alcohol and tobacco regulation, banking regulation, corporate tax, social housing, and child welfare. This thesis presents two novel datasets that allow a comprehensive analysis of interest group access to committees and the political finance activity of groups engaged in the committee process.

This thesis found evidence to suggest that political finance contributions could increase the likelihood that an interest group receives priority access. However, these findings were limited to specific country and policy contexts. Thus, Australia with

the weakest political finance regulation showed the strongest association between political finance contributions and privileged access to committees. Moreover, contributions were found to matter more in committees that discuss issues of high importance to corporate groups, such as macro-economic or environmental and energy issues. Interestingly, corporate groups have greater access advantages than non-corporate groups across all countries, which supports evidence from previous studies on committee access (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012).

This chapter introduces the thesis. The next section will outline the importance of understanding political finance contributions' impact on interest group access to committees. The following section will present the theoretical framework, which will explain the specific questions the thesis addresses and the supporting theoretical underpinnings. It will also detail the scope of the research and its possible limitations. The next section will summarise the existing literature on the topic and explain how this thesis will present three clear contributions to knowledge. The following section will provide an overview of the research design. The final section will outline the thesis chapter structure.

1.1 Why research the impact of political finance contributions on interest group access to committees?

This thesis asks whether political finance contributions could impact groups' access to legislative committees in representative democracies. But why is it important to uncover how political finance contributions could change legislative behaviour in this way? At its core, this thesis addresses a fundamental principle of representative democracy: political equality. Political equality denotes that all citizens should have equal opportunities to influence the political landscape. In representative democracies, free and fair elections are typically used to secure political equality through universal suffrage. However, ensuring political equality in a representative democracy is not as simple as enforcing the 'one person, one vote' rule.

Political influence can be exerted in many forms other than voting. For instance, citizens and organisations can influence politics through grassroots mobilisation, media campaigns, and protests (Zittel 2006). Another form of influence is lobbying

and informational exchange with legislators during the formal consultation process. This type of influence involves direct contact with policymakers. Existing research has found that direct strategies, such as informational exchange, are a more effective lobbying tool than indirect strategies, such as protests (Rietig 2011; Sühlsen and Hisschemöller 2014). Considering the effectiveness of direct lobbying strategies, we need to understand whether there is equal opportunity for actors to engage in this process. But beyond recognising if inequality exists, scholars must also seek to understand why unequal participation occurs. This thesis addresses these aims directly by analysing the composition of witnesses invited to testify at committee hearings. Specifically, this thesis investigates whether witness diversity can be impacted by a participant's political finance contribution activity. In other words, if an interest group or individual contributes to a political party, are they more likely to gain access to committees? The answer can alter our understanding of political equality in modern representative democracies. If political finance contributions help groups obtain better access to the policy process, wealthy groups naturally have a greater opportunity to capitalise on this lobbying strategy. If political power is linked to economic stature, serious questions are raised about the extent to which political equality exists in our democracies.

But why research the impact of political finance contributions specifically? Scholars have argued that political finance contributions can improve a group's chances of effectively lobbying policymakers (Gordon 2005; Hickmott 2003). This means affluent groups and individuals have a greater likelihood of influencing policy in their favour resulting in representational inequality. Representational inequality occurs when political representatives consistently push for policies in the interests of specific demographics (Gilens 2009). Typically, scholars assess representational inequality through the lens of economic inequality by investigating policy responsiveness to different socio-economic groups (Gilens et al. 2011). Several of these studies have found that policymakers are often more responsive to the policy wishes of the affluent than the poor (Bartels 2008; Erikson 2015; Gilens 2012). Notably, the same studies have recognised that campaign contributions could give the affluent political advantages. It is suggested that wealthy donors with the means to contribute large sums to campaigns could use this munificence as an effective strategy to obtain attention from policymakers (Erikson 2015), which might

consequently result in policy decisions that better reflect the wishes of the affluent. Yet despite scholars recognising the potential importance of political finance contributions, these studies did not explicitly analyse these effects. Therefore, this thesis will address whether contributing groups are given access advantages to policymakers through legislative committees. While this thesis will not comment specifically on policy outcomes, investigating access advantages in response to political donations remains fruitful in understanding representational inequality.

Why is it important to understand the effects of political finance contributions within the context of legislative committees? Policy consultations through committee inquiries are a fundamental part of the policy process and are a crucial deliberative sphere in many countries (Longley and Davidson 2007). Although the power of legislative committees may differ depending on the political system, they often have a key role in setting policy agendas, approving policy solutions, and scrutinising government decision-making (Gaines et al. 2019; Strøm 1998).

The core functions of committees are evidence-gathering and consultation. In considering policy problems and solutions, committees consult key stakeholders and citizens. Committee inquiries represent one of the only avenues for individuals and interest groups to participate in the policy process formally. As such, it gives these actors a unique chance to influence the opinions of key legislators. Engaging in direct informational exchange with legislative committees is a recognised effective lobbying strategy, especially among corporate groups (Aplin and Hegarty 1980). However, as committees only grant privileged access to a certain number of groups, all groups do not have equal opportunities to engage in effective informational exchange. The inequality in interest group access matters because the information gathered in consultation sessions helps committees develop reports and submit policy recommendations. Existing empirical evidence suggests committee inquiries can help shape government agendas and guide policy direction (Hindmoor et al. 2009; Monk 2012). Therefore, understanding why certain interest groups gain privileged access to consultation proceedings could have larger implications to our understanding of the policy process.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Legislative committees are a vital part of the policy deliberation process. They provide a rare chance for interest groups and citizens to directly engage in the policy process. A key function of committees is to gather evidence from external groups and present policy recommendations in committee reports. This means groups and individuals participating in the committee process could have crucial influence over policy agendas. But importantly, not all participants receive the same level of access to committees. According to most committee procedures, anyone can participate in committee inquiries through a written submission, but only invited groups can participate in oral hearings. The type of access interest groups receive could impact their level of influence over a committee (Halpin et al. 2012; Thompson 2014). Giving oral evidence at a committee hearing ensures an interest group engages directly with committee members. Empirical evidence has shown that face-to-face communication with policymakers is a particularly effective lobbying strategy (Huwyler and Martin 2021; Nownes and DeAlejandro 2009). Moreover, by explicitly granting certain groups privileged access to testify orally, committees also assign legitimacy to these groups and imply these groups can contribute valuable information to the deliberations.

This thesis does not investigate policy influence outcomes relating to different types of committee access. However, as political equality is a core principle of representative democracies, it is important to investigate why some groups may receive exclusive opportunities to participate in the policy process. Several scholars have previously investigated committee witness diversity to examine whether specific demographics receive priority access to committees (Berry and Kippin 2014; Bochel and Berthier 2021; Bruckner et al. 2020; Holli 2012). These studies that examined committee witness diversity across different gender and ethnic groups have found that committee witnesses are more likely to be male and white. Some studies have also examined witness diversity according to specific group types and found that witnesses are often composed of the same few groups (Pedersen et al. 2015). However, scholars focusing on committee participation have yet to ask whether political finance contributions could impact interest group access. Moreover, scholars focusing on the effect of political finance contribution on legislative behaviour have also neglected this area of investigation. This thesis fills this gap by

investigating whether political finance contributions could impact an interest group receiving invited access to legislative committees.

While committee inquiries are expected to obtain the opinions of key stakeholders when deliberating issues, committee witnesses should still be diverse and represent a plethora of views within the community. However, this thesis argues that certain interest groups can receive unequal access to legislative committees due to two core factors. The first factor is political finance contributions. This thesis will argue interest groups that contribute to political parties will be more likely to achieve invited access than non-contributing groups. The second factor relates to specific interest group factors, namely interest group's type and motivations. This thesis will argue that corporate or economically motivated groups are more likely to achieve invited access to committees than non-corporate or issue motivated groups. These arguments draw on different strands of literature and have different theoretical underpinnings.

For this reason, two levels have been delineated to distinguish between the factors: the political finance level and the interest group level. These levels have different research questions and hypotheses. The political finance level features hypotheses that use political finance factors to explain committee access outcomes. In contrast, the interest group level uses interest group factors to explain committee access outcomes. The following sections provide a brief overview of the theoretical underpinnings of each level and state the associated hypotheses.

1.2.1 Political finance level: Understanding the impact of political finance on interest group access to legislative committees

Why could political finance contributions impact whether an interest group receives invited access to legislative committees? This thesis argues that political parties and contributing interest groups are engaged in a mutually dependent relationship that results in certain *quid pro quo* exchanges. The incentives for engaging in such an exchange can be explained by dependence theory. Dependence theory argues that political parties and policymakers often rely on substantial amount of private money to sustain a successful election campaign (Jorgenson 2013). Conversely, private groups and individuals rely on political parties and policymakers to push their policy

interests forward through legislation. This mutual reliance can create a dependent relationship between policymakers and donors, potentially encouraging *quid pro quo* exchanges.

Existing research has produced evidence to support the theoretical assumption that a dependent relationship exists. Studies have shown that money matters to electoral success across various countries (Avis et al. 2017; Kenig and Atmor 2019; Schuster 2020). This suggests that political actors rely on fundraising to bolster their election chances. Additional funding is also required between election campaigns to fund general party activities. Furthermore, evidence shows that interest groups specifically target donations towards influential policymakers. This is important as it helps to dispel the notion that contributions are made for purely ideological reasons. Existing research on contribution patterns has found that interest groups are more likely to financially support committee members than non-committee members (Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016). This suggests that interest groups seek to influence committee proceedings through donations to powerful committee members. Support would not fluctuate depending on a legislator's committee status if donations were solely given to show ideological support. A logical explanation for changing contribution patterns is that interest groups are investment-motivated. In other words, groups use contributions specifically to influence the committee process. Importantly, this research also highlights committees as a particular target for contributing groups. This warrants further investigation into whether political finance influence exists in the committee process. This thesis provides a theoretical contribution by conceptualising political finance influence within the agenda-setting and consultation policy process, whereby political finance contributions are used to leverage privileged access to committees.

However, this thesis recognises that dependent relationships are not guaranteed. Various factors could impact the strength of financial dependency. It is argued that the strength of the dependent relationship can be significantly affected by political finance regulation. Governments can implement regulations to restrict political finance in various ways. Regulation can be used to apply contribution and spending limits, restrict third-party spending or compel political parties to disclose their donations regularly. Regulations can also introduce or expand upon public funding.

Many of these regulations can impact the extent to which political parties are reliant upon private sources to sustain their election campaigns. If regulations limit or even ban private donations or campaign spending is capped, political parties are under less pressure to fundraise and persuade private groups to support them financially. This can also result in greater electoral competitiveness by reducing incumbent advantages (Eom and Gross 2006). Moreover, a generous public finance system can also ensure that political parties have the necessary funds to run a campaign without turning to private donors (Francia and Herrnson 2003; Marziani et al. 2011).

As such, it can be argued that a dependent relationship between policymakers and donors is likely to be weaker in countries with generous public financing and contribution and spending limits. A weaker dependent relationship means policymakers would be less likely to engage in *quid pro quo* exchanges, such as granting contributing interest groups privileged access to committee proceedings. For this reason, a comparative analysis was conducted to compare countries with different approaches to political finance regulation.

This thesis constructed and tested the following hypotheses to explore the arguments presented at the political finance level.

> H1: Interest groups that contribute to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees.

> H2: Interest groups that contribute to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees in countries with lower levels of political finance regulatory stringency.

1.2.2 Interest group level: Understanding the impact of interest group factors on interest group access to legislative committees
Aside from solely addressing the impact of political finance on committee witness diversity, this thesis also explores the broader impact of interest group factors on the level of access groups receive to legislative committees. In doing so, this thesis can add to the growing literature on interest group lobbying and elitism in public policy. Elitist public policy theories have long argued that certain groups achieve

disproportionate influence over the policy process (Schattschneider 1960; Wright Mills 1956). Elitist influence can be particularly prominent at the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process where committee inquiries occur. Agenda-setting theories, such as the Punctuated Equilibrium Model (PEM), argue that elitist groups are crucial actors in the agenda-setting process (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The agenda-setting process allows elite groups to exert multiple forms of political power, whereby these groups help maintain policy stability by advocating for status quo policies while alternative policy solutions are removed from consideration (Lukes 2005).

But what factors make an interest group elite? Wealth creates a significant divide between groups that can cause large deviations in policy interests (John 1998). Existing research has shown that certain interest groups have disproportionate lobbying resources and overall wealth (Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson 2015; de Figueiredo and de Figueiredo Jr 2010). These factors can alter an interest group's political influence at the agenda-setting and consultation stage. For instance, greater organisational resources have been associated with greater access to US legislative committees (Leyden 1995). Moreover, scholars have regularly identified corporate groups as having special access advantages to the policy process (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012). Corporate groups arguably have unique features that help them to accumulate political power. These groups have significant economic importance in a capitalist society that also relies upon them to provide vital public services (Lindblom 1977; Garsten and Sörbom 2017). Corporations can use this position to their political advantage. As governments rely on corporations for economic stability, these groups are likely to receive priority access to policy discussions (Miller and Mooney 2010). Consequently, corporations can develop close relationships with policymakers, which continues the cycle of unequal influence over time (McCambridge et al. 2013). For this reason, this thesis will focus on interest groups with different organisational structures (E.g., business, trade association, non-profit, research institute). This definition of interest groups permits an investigation into the different access advantages granted to corporate and non-corporate groups.

Therefore, to explore the arguments presented at the interest group level, this thesis addresses the following research question:

> H3: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to achieve invited access to legislative committees than non-corporate and issue-motivated groups.

> H4: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to be granted invited access to legislative committees in policy areas with high corporate issue salience.

> H5: Corporate and economically motivated interest groups are more likely to contribute to political parties.

1.3 Thesis contribution

Existing research has examined political finance and influence through various lenses and has found that campaign finance contributions can impact legislator behaviour in multifaceted ways (Hawkins et al. 2012; Flavin 2014; Monardi and Glantz 1998; Witko 2011). But despite the logical assumptions from citizens and experts that money can influence politics and some empirical evidence to support these claims, scholars have been unable to achieve a clear consensus on the consequences of political finance contributions and political finance regulatory structures on the policy process. Scholars have yet to find concrete evidence to show that contributions can increase interest group influence over legislative behaviour. Several studies have found no link between contributions and political influence (Bronars and Lott 1997; Wawro 2001), while other studies have found weak correlations at best (Fleisher 1993; Fouirnaies and Fowler 2021; Gordon 2005). In fact, a systematic review of political finance literature found that over 75% of the empirical studies produce weak or contradictory results (Ansolabehere et al. 2003).

But importantly, the majority of campaign finance literature focuses on the policy legitimation stage of the policy process in US contexts. The policy legitimation stage occurs when a policy is fully developed and goes through the final ratification

process. Examining this phase has several merits for scholars. Firstly, the policy legitimation stage represents a key final political decision-making process before a bill becomes law. Secondly, there are clear methodological advantages gained from assessing final votes or policy outcomes to measure the policy preferences of politicians. However, focusing on this stage alone cannot give a complete picture of interest group influence through campaign finance. Moreover, the literature is also heavily saturated with US case studies. Literature on non-US cases is limited, and comparative studies are even rarer.

Therefore, this thesis addresses three critical gaps in the political finance literature to provide three core contributions. Each contribution will be discussed in this section. The first contribution is the examination of financial contribution influence in the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process. The second contribution is a comparative analysis of non-US countries to help understand how a country's approach to political finance regulation could weaken or strengthen political finance influence. The third contribution is an empirical contribution made by developing two unique datasets. These datasets provide a comprehensive assessment of interest group participation in legislative committees and accompanying data on political finance activity.

1.3.1 Contribution (1) Examining the agenda-setting and consultation process.
The most heavily researched stage of the policy process, the policy legitimation stage, is also the most visible one. Politicians' final votes and the ultimate legislative outcomes often receive more public attention and scrutiny than in earlier stages of the policymaking process. By contrast, the consultation and agenda-setting phase of the policy process is much less publicly scrutinised. Moreover, this phase is crucial and sets the course of policy direction, with legislators choosing which policy options are worthy of legislative attention and omitting policy options from consideration. Legislative committee inquiries are a fundamental tool in this process, as they are used to gather evidence and information from a variety of stakeholders on a particular policy problem to produce policy recommendations. This thesis will outline two reasons why this stage of the policy process may be more susceptible to political finance influence than the policy legitimation stage. Firstly, the lack of public and media scrutiny allows politicians to participate in *quid pro quo* exchanges

with less risk of appearing corrupt, whereas exchanging donations for vote changes at the policy legitimation stage requires much higher stakes for the actors involved. Secondly, this stage allows interest groups to exert influence to stop policy against their interest before it gains public attention and momentum in the legislative process. The ability to exercise influence at this stage can be instrumental in maintaining status quo policy options that typically favour elite groups (Baumgartner and Jones 1993).

Despite the logical reasoning for analysing the effects of political finance through the agenda-setting and consultation stage, few empirical studies have attempted to assess political finance influence in this context. However, the few studies that have tackled this topic have garnered noteworthy results that further justify focusing on the agenda-setting and consultation stage where public scrutiny is low. For example, Chin et al.'s (2003) study on US Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions and the subsequent effects on congressional access found PAC influence is greater on issues with low public visibility. Studies have also found evidence to suggest that interest groups seeking to obtain influence through contributions tend to target the agenda-setting and consultation process specifically (Hojnacki and Kimball 2001; Powell and Grimmer 2016). These studies have found that interest groups are more likely to give money to politicians on committees than non-committee members, suggesting the power that these politicians wield over committee proceedings is important to contributing interest groups.

However, while these studies have provided substantial contributions to the political finance literature, they are limited in scope. None of the studies directly assesses whether political finance contributions result in increased access for groups wishing to influence the agenda-setting process. As such, the hypotheses presented in Chapter 3 examine new associations between political finance and interest group access that have not been investigated in the current literature. Thus, presenting several conceptual contributions. Moreover, the studies cited only analyse the United States. While the issue of political finance is undoubtedly a pressing topic in the United States and worthy of exploration, other countries with differing approaches to political finance regulation also need scholarly attention. This narrow focus across the campaign finance literature brings us to the next key contribution.

1.3.2 Contribution (2) Comparative analysis beyond the US.

This thesis presents a comparative analysis of the impact of political finance contributions on interest groups access to committees within four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. These case studies allow the thesis to depart from past political finance literature that is heavily centred on the United States. Many of the key theoretical works and empirical studies cited in this thesis focus on the US. Political finance has long been a controversial topic in the United States, but it has become even more intense since the Supreme Court decision on the *Citizen United Vs. Federal Election Commission* (2010) case. The ruling effectively gave corporations the ability to spend unlimited amounts during political campaigns

Moreover, the US case provides a unique opportunity for comparative research as the US states have vastly different approaches to political finance regarding state elections. Comparing US states presents a more manageable task in controlling other possible influential variables than comparing countries. US states have relatively similar economic status, socio-economic composition, and political culture. The same comparative standard is harder to achieve when analysing different countries. However, comparing US states does not provide an entirely satisfactory enquiry into the effects of different political finance systems. While the US state policy would attract lobbyists seeking influence, big donors are more likely to spend most of their financial resources on national elections. Therefore, national regulatory approaches also deserve comparative exploration.

A much smaller pool of literature has explored other countries beyond the United States and has even sought to compare the regulatory approaches of different countries. Norris and Abel Van Es (2016) and Alexander (1994) provide some pertinent comparative literature examples. The authors give a historical, descriptive account of the political finance approaches and reforms within various liberal democracies. Norris and Abel van Es (2016) also present an index for examining a country's political finance regulation based on the level of stringency. However, the literature lacks a longitudinal comparative analysis of different political finance approaches and their effects on political outcomes. While providing an in-depth assessment of the historical events leading up to significant political finance reforms

can help decipher why reforms are enacted, they do not provide the necessary comparative analysis to test the effects of political finance on the political sphere. As such, the current literature scope remains in the early stages of producing supported conclusions about which regulatory approaches should be preferred (Hummel et al. 2021)

This thesis will address this gap by examining the association between political finance contributions and interest group access to committees across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. To provide this comparison, this thesis studies national committees in four different countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected due to the similarities regarding economic stature, high standards and legislative committee evidence-giving procedures and the differences in regulating political finance (see section 4.1).

1.3.3 Contribution (3) Empirical contribution through novel datasets.

This thesis presents the first empirical analysis of the associations between contributions and interest group access to legislative committees. To provide this unique empirical analysis, two original datasets were created. The first dataset recorded all instances of interest group participation across a sample of committee inquiries across the four countries under investigation. Importantly, this dataset included a variable to distinguish between two different forms of committee participation that represented two different access levels. Oral participation represented invited, or privileged access, and written participation represented open or non-privileged access. The second dataset recorded each participating interest group's political finance activity.

Several prominent comparative datasets, such as the Comparative Agendas Project (2021), have examined the agenda-setting and consultation process. However, these projects focus on the policy areas being discussed rather than interest group participation, meaning they do not assess committee participation or committee witness diversity. Some individual studies have compiled data on interest group participation in legislative committees in countries such as Scotland and Germany (Halpin et al. 2012; Pedersen et al. 2015). These studies also use oral and written

participatory formats to distinguish between different levels of access, but they have a distinctly different focus to the one presented in this thesis. These studies examine witness diversity to assess gender inequality or interest group type and do not examine political finance activity. This thesis offers the first comparative dataset on interest group access to legislative committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. It also presents the first dataset that merges data on the political finance activity of committee participants.

1.4 Research design

1.4.1 Methodology

The research design was carefully constructed to answer the question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK? The primary purpose of the research design was to identify interest groups and individuals that have participated in committee inquiries, recognise whether this participation was through an open-access or closed-access format, and collect data on committee participants' political finance activity. Other key explanatory variables that could affect access also needed to be identified, including interest group, political, and institutional factors.

This thesis adopted a quantitative approach to allow for a broader assessment of patterns across several countries. This was important because the existing literature on political finance currently lacks longitudinal cross-country comparisons. As this thesis presents the first comparative study into the association between contributions and committee access, adopting a broader approach was a crucial first step in identifying noteworthy trends. Conducting quantitative research across different countries increases the generalisability of the findings and helps guide the direction of future research. While the benefits of triangulation in improving causal inferences were recognised, a mixed-methods approach was deemed inappropriate due to the pitfalls of using traditional qualitative methods in political finance research. If interviews, focus groups, or surveys were conducted, there would be strong concerns over the truthfulness of participant answers. A quantitative approach was adopted to eliminate this problem using existing secondary data on committee access and political finance activity.

To answer the research question, two medium-N datasets were created (see Chapter 5). The purpose of the first dataset was to collect data on all committee participants across a sample of committee inquiries. This was done by assessing committee documents, including written submissions, committee hearing transcripts, and committee reports. The purpose of the second dataset was to collect data on the political finance activity of the committee participants identified in the first dataset.

The data was collected using content analysis techniques. Content analysis techniques allow researchers to code qualitative sources into a set of quantifiable variables. Constructing quantitative variables from an analysis of committee documents meant the data on interest group access could be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. A coding framework was developed to assign a numerical value to a corresponding variable category to conduct the content analysis. The coding framework was then applied to qualitative sources using two coding methods: manual and automated. Manual coding uses the traditional content analysis method whereby the researcher codes documents by hand. Automated coding uses computer-assisted coding. Each method has individual benefits and pitfalls, explored further in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, an important benefit of automated analysis is minimising research bias and error. As such, this thesis utilised automated coding wherever possible.

Manual coding was required to create the first dataset on interest group access to committees. This was because committee documents from different countries could not be easily standardised into a computer-readable format. While manual coding was used in this case, steps were taken to ensure the coding was accurately applied. To certify the replicability of the coding framework and the reliability of the manual coding, stringent intercoder reliability checks were conducted. A second researcher coded a sample of the committee documents. The resulting data were compared to the original data using statistical methods. This confirmed a high level of agreement between the coders and demonstrated high measurement reliability.

Automated coding was used to gather data on the political finance activity of interest groups that participated in committee inquiries. A bespoke program was developed to complete this task. The program was created using Python programming language.

The program used a keyword search function to search for participating interest groups in secondary datasets containing official political finance donation datasets. It analysed the results of this keyword search and assigned numerical codes for several political finance activity indicators. The indicators recorded whether an interest group had donated to a political party. Additional information on their political finance activity was also recorded, including the donation recipient, the date of the donation, and the donation amount. The program inputted this data into a second dataset.

After the coding process was completed, the first dataset on interest group access to committees and the second dataset on political finance activity were merged. This merged dataset was analysed using statistical modelling. Chapter 6 displays the results of the statistical analysis.

1.4.2 Sources

This thesis used a variety of secondary documents to collect data on committee witnesses and participants and their related political finance activity. The documents were obtained from official sources to maximise data reliability in most cases. These sources included official government websites or independent electoral oversight bodies. Overall, 5543 committee documents from 217 committee inquiries were analysed to construct the first dataset on interest group access to committees. This resulted in 9164 observations of interest group participation in committees. Existing donation data from independent electoral bodies or research organisations were used to obtain data on participating groups' political finance activity. A secondary dataset was created from these existing datasets that collated individual contribution data from all interest groups and individuals found to have participated in the committee inquiries. The secondary dataset contained 17,247 observations of individual contribution data for committee participants.

1.4.3 Time frame

This thesis focuses on a recent 15-year period to provide a contemporary assessment of parliamentary committees. Data were collected on committee inquiries that occurred between 2005-2020. During this time, the importance of money in politics continued to grow (Rockey and Zakir 2021). Moreover, many countries have only

begun to regulate donation disclosure in recent decades. For instance, the UK introduced formal annual donation disclosure laws in 2000 and created an independent electoral oversight body. This means comprehensive data on donations from the UK is only available from 2001 onwards. By focusing the research on the period between 2005 and 2020, it was possible to ensure the necessary data were available to adequately assess the political finance activity of interest groups participating in committee inquiries during this period. Moreover, it also allowed an assessment of interest group access to committees across different political environments and events.

1.4.4 Case selection overview

Chapter 4 details the process of selecting the country case studies and the policy areas used to choose the sample of committee inquiries used in the analysis. The country selection process aimed to select countries that have political finance regulations of differing strengths. This thesis examined the variance across countries with different regulatory approaches because regulations can alter how political parties depend on private donors. For instance, it is argued that political parties become less reliant upon private donors in countries with generous public financing systems, restrictions on private contributions, and spending limits. Therefore, the country selection process was designed to achieve variance regarding political finance regulatory stringency. The policy area selection aimed to guide the selection of committee inquiries for analysis and to ensure committees. Moreover, it was also important to select policy areas with differing importance to corporate groups. This thesis predicts that corporate groups receive unique access advantages in the policy process corporate advantages. As such, it was also expected that these advantages would be most prominent in committee inquiries on issues of high importance to corporate groups. Therefore, the chosen policy areas needed to represent juxtaposing corporate issue salience.

1.4.5 Country selection

The following four countries were chosen for analysis: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. Countries were selected based on Mill's Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) (Mill 1874). MSSD provides a framework for selecting countries for comparative analysis. The framework is designed to select countries with similar

features, but that differ in terms of the explanatory variable. This allows comparative researchers to control for factors that may influence the dependent variable to empirically assess the independent variable of theoretical interest (Anckar 2006). As discussed in section 1.2.1, a key research aim was to compare the associations between contributions and interest group access to committees in countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. Therefore, the country selection process was designed to obtain four countries with different approaches to political finance regulation but with key similarities regarding their political system, economic stature, and democratic standards. To ensure countries had similar political systems, only countries representing the Westminster model were chosen. Moreover, only countries that were OECD members and representative democracies were selected so countries had similarly high economic status and democratic expectations. This base comparability criterion meant countries could be controlled for these key similarities. A further selection method was also required to ensure the chosen countries displayed acceptable variance regarding their political finance regulatory approach.

Countries will typically have some form of regulation on contributions limits, spending limits, public financing, third party regulation, and donation disclosure. However, comparative research on political finance regulation has found that countries have vastly different regulatory approaches (Norris and Abel Van Es 2016). Regulatory approaches can be distinguished based on their level of stringency (Global Integrity 2005; Witko 2005). Countries have highly stringent regulations if the state intervenes to ensure donation disclosures are transparent and limits contributions from private sources and political party spending. Countries with highly stringent regulations will also provide generous public financing options for political parties. In contrast, countries with low regulatory stringency do not place restrictions on contribution or spending limits nor offer significant public financing support to political parties.

To identify countries with different levels of regulatory stringency, a political finance stringency index was developed to categorise a country's laws regarding public finance, spending limits, contribution limits, and third-party regulation. A numerical coding framework was developed to score countries on their levels of regulatory

stringency within the four categories. Information on political finance laws was sourced from IDEA's political finance database (2021). This information was used in conjunction with the political finance stringency coding framework to assign each country a numerical score. Countries were selected that displayed varying scores across the stringency spectrum. High scores represented strong regulations, and low scores represented lax regulations.

1.4.6 Policy area selection

The policy areas were selected based on corporate issue salience. Four policy areas with juxtaposing importance to corporate groups were selected: environment and energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare. An existing large-N dataset, the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset (CCLD) was used to rank issues based on corporate issue salience (Bernhagen 2019). An analysis of the CCLD found macro-economic, and environment and energy policies were highly important to corporate groups, whereas health and social welfare policies were of low importance to corporate groups. After establishing the policy areas, eight sub-topics relating to the four policy areas were also chosen to ensure a comprehensive analysis of all relevant committee inquiries could be conducted within the time and resource constraints of the thesis. The environment and energy topics were oil mining and climate change. The macro-economic topics were banking regulation and corporate tax. The health topics were pharmaceutical pricing and tobacco and alcohol regulation. Finally, the social welfare topics were social housing and child welfare.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters that are divided into three parts. The first part includes two theoretical chapters (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). The second part contains four empirical chapters (Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Chapter 7). The third part consists of the concluding chapter (Chapter 8).

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature on three key areas: political finance, elite influence in public policy, and witness diversity in legislative committees. Through discussing the past theoretical and empirical literature on political finance, this thesis will explore the dependent relationship between donors and political parties, and the empirical

evidence showing contributions can affect legislative behaviour. This chapter will also use existing literature to justify researching the link between contributions and legislative behaviour within the agenda-setting and consultation process. Moreover, an examination of elitist public policy theory will help explain how wealthy interest groups could receive advantages over the policy process, particularly in the early stages. This chapter also explores theories on corporate power to understand the unique advantages of corporate groups in affecting the policy process. Finally, this chapter also unpacks literature on committee witness selection and clearly defines interest group access. This chapter provides an assessment of possible factors that could impact the diversity of committee witness selection. Understanding these explanatory factors was fundamental in the construction of the research design.

The third chapter expands upon the theory explored in chapter two to develop several hypotheses based on a clear theoretical framework. This chapter outlines two groups of explanatory factors that will be used to predict interest group access to legislative committees. The first group is political finance, which includes factors such as political finance contributions and political finance regulatory stringency. Here, this chapter expands upon dependence theory discussed in Chapter 2 and presents a mechanism to explain why contributions would incentivise political parties to grant privileged access to interest groups. It also presents evidence that interest groups regularly target donations towards committee members and rely on political parties to enforce their political interests. Furthermore, this chapter also argues that a country's political finance regulation can impact the strength of this dependent relationship. Stricter contribution and spending limits, in addition to a generous public finance system, are argued to reduce the need for political parties to rely on private donations. The second group of explanatory factors relates to interest groups, including interest group type and motivations. This chapter draws upon elitist public policy theory and theories of corporate power to argue that corporate and economically motivated groups have unique advantages that grant them higher stature in policy consultations. As a result, these groups are expected to be granted disproportionate privileged access to the legislative committee process. Consequently, this thesis also predicts that corporate access advantages will be stronger in committee inquiries that focus on issues important to corporate groups.

The fourth chapter presents the first empirical step in answering the research question by selecting the countries and policy areas to analyse empirically. Ultimately, four countries were selected - Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK – along with four policy areas - environmental and energy, macro-economic, health, and social welfare policy. The systematic selection method used to choose these countries and policy areas was implemented to ensure the research sample adequately tested the hypotheses established in Chapter 3. The hypotheses required an assessment of countries that displayed different approaches to political finance regulation. They also required an assessment of committee inquiries deliberating policy issues with varying importance to corporate groups. The fourth chapter detailed the systematic process to select the country cases and committee inquiry topics for analysis. A numerical index was constructed to score countries on the stringency of their political finance regulation to select the countries. Additional criteria were also established to ensure the selection controlled for other key factors and assessed the suitability of the data in each country. Policy areas were selected using the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset (Bernhagen 2019). This dataset was used to identify policy areas with juxtaposing levels of corporate issue salience.

The fifth chapter details the methodological framework used to explore the research question and test the hypotheses established in Chapter 3. To answer the research question, two original datasets were constructed. The first dataset compiled data on interest group access to legislative committees across the four selected countries. The second dataset compiled data on the political finance activity of interest groups that participated in the committee process. This chapter justifies using a solely quantitative approach and content analysis techniques to code qualitative sources. This chapter also includes a detailed account of the data collection process. This chapter also details the steps used to ensure high data reliability and validity standards and recognises the data limitations that were faced.

The sixth and seventh chapters present the results of the data analysis conducted on the two datasets. Each hypothesis was tested in turn, and the chapter was structured accordingly. The data was primarily analysed using logistic regression modelling. Chapter 6 presents the findings relating to the political finance level. Chapter 7

presents the findings relating to the interest group level. Both chapters detail several vital discoveries. Firstly, the data analysis provided evidence to support several hypotheses. This included hypotheses that predicted political finance contributions would increase the likelihood interest groups engaged in invited access formats. Secondly, it was found that interest groups that donate to political parties are more likely to be granted privileged access to committees than interest groups that do not donate. But significantly, the strength of these associations changed depending on the country being examined. The evidence suggested that political finance influence can differ depending on the level of political finance regulatory stringency adopted in a country. For instance, a strong statistically significant association between contributions and invited access to committees was found in Australia, which has a lax approach to political finance regulation. However, no association was found in Ireland, with strong regulations and a more generous public financing system. Thirdly, the data analysis also found that corporate and economically motivated groups received more privileged access to committees across all countries. Chapter 6 discusses the findings, which supports claims that political finance influence could be stronger earlier in the policy process. Chapter 7 discusses the more general implications regarding the findings on limited witness diversity in legislative committees.

The eighth chapter provides a thesis summary and concluding thoughts. The chapter concludes by discussing the main findings, research limitations and future avenues for research.

Chapter 2 Literature review: Exploring existing literature on political finance, elitism in public policy, and committee witness diversity

Introduction

This chapter will explore existing literature relevant to the research puzzle outlined in Chapter 1. The general topic of political finance and elite influence in policy spheres has been widely explored from a theoretical perspective and through empirical assessments. This thesis provides an original contribution to the literature by conducting the first comparative assessment of political finance and interest group access to legislative committees. Very few comparative analyses have been conducted examining the impact of contributions on legislative behaviour despite the apparent merits of this approach. Country approaches to political finance regulations can differ vastly, even among western liberal democracies. Gaining an increased understanding of how different political finance regulatory structures could impact the policy process can, in turn, help to decipher the best overall approach. This thesis also adds to the scant literature on the influence of political finance contributions on the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process.

While this thesis explores important unearthed territory, the theoretical framework and research design are informed by existing theory and empirical works. This chapter will unpack the relevant literature on political finance, elite influence, and interest group access to legislative committees. Firstly, this chapter will dissect current literature relating to political finance. This section explores current standards set for political finance stringency and existing comparative studies on different political finance regulatory approaches. Here, it is explained how current literature on political finance regulation has generally agreed that greater regulatory stringency is preferable to avoid the dominance of elite groups in the political sphere. However, current comparative work has fallen short in adequately empirically testing these assumptions.

This section will also outline the different types of political finance contributions and theories relating to the motivations of political donors. This thesis will focus

exclusively on direct contributions from donors to political actors in order to ensure that the most consistent data was collected across comparative cases. However, this section will address the importance of indirect contributions and the past difficulties in empirically measuring this type of donation. Furthermore, the reasons why organisations and individuals donate will also be explored. Here, it will be argued that donors are primarily motivated to contribute to political campaigns to show ideological support or as an investment. This thesis focuses on the latter motivation, whereby donors see their contribution as an investment intended to reap political rewards in the future.

In addition to exploring theories on donor motivations, this chapter will also unpack existing theories on the dependent relationships between political donors and political actors. It is argued that political donors and political actors engage in a mutually beneficial relationship. But significantly, the level of dependence in this relationship can be exacerbated by specific electoral systems and political finance regulation. Therefore, unpacking this theory is crucial to understanding how the political finance approaches in different countries could influence how impactful contributions are in legislative environments.

Furthermore, this section will also unearth the numerous empirical studies investigating the impact of political contributions on legislative behaviour. As mentioned previously, comparative studies on this topic are scarce. Single case studies, almost exclusively examining the United States, currently dominate the literature on this topic. Nevertheless, these studies provide an essential insight into the impact contributions can have on policy outcomes. By examining this literature, two noteworthy observations can be made. Firstly, the current literature is heavily focused on the legitimation phase of the policy process, e.g., final legislative votes and budgetary decisions. Secondly, there is a notable lack of consensus among scholars as to the importance of political finance as a determinant of legislative behaviour. Considering these observations, the lack of consistency among the empirical literature highlights the need to examine a different stage of the policy process, which may present stronger associations between contributions and legislative behaviour.

Therefore, the following section examines existing theoretical and empirical evidence to justify a greater focus on the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process, as this stage of the political process could be particularly susceptible to political finance lobbying strategies. Using existing observations from scholars on the US policy process, it is argued that the agenda-setting and consultation phase provides a better environment for politicians to accept donations in exchange for political favours due to the lessened public and media scrutiny at this stage.

After unpacking the literature relating to political finance, the second part of this chapter will discuss existing public policy theories examining elite influence. This section draws upon these theories to explain why wealthy groups often receive unique advantages in the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process. It is argued that powerful groups use the agenda-setting and consultation process to maintain status-quo policy options and stunt alternative policy options that do not serve their best interests. Furthermore, this section will explore the existing empirical literature on interest group lobbying advantages across different policy contexts. Current empirical literature strongly suggests corporate groups receive notable advantaged access to the policy process than other interest group types and these trends are most acute within policy areas of highest interest to corporations.

The final section will examine literature specifically on access to the consultation phase. This section will present a clear definition of access, which distinguishes between open and closed access. This distinction represents the different levels of political gatekeeping required for each access type. It provides an understanding of the levels of access available in most current legislative committee proceedings. Moreover, this section will explore existing literature on witness selection and informational exchange in legislative settings. The literature identifies several explanations for why witness diversity in committee proceedings could be limited, including procedural limitations, issue conflict, institutional and ideological factors. These factors were important to consider when constructing the research design. This section ends by exploring existing empirical evidence on interest group access to committees, which finds corporate groups often achieve privileged access compared to other groups. Furthermore, it has been found that corporate groups specifically

target donations efforts towards existing committee members, highlighting the importance of examining how contributions could impact access outcomes at the committee stage.

2.1 Political finance literature

The breadth of political finance literature has expanded rapidly through the 21st century, with literature attempting to understand political finance through various lenses. For instance, one can find extensive literature on how political finance can impact different facets of political decision-making or the composition of legislatures, whether specific political finance approaches can reduce elite influence, and under what conditions are political finance reforms enacted, among many other topics. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, much of the existing literature is focused on the US case, and only a handful of comparative studies have been conducted over recent years. It is worth noting that much of the literature cited is US-based. Nevertheless, the scope of literature explored for this thesis can provide a helpful overview of the theoretical and empirical findings regarding political finance and the potential impact on the policy process, which can help predict certain outcomes and establish expectations going forward. For instance, dependence theory helps explain why interest groups that donate to political actors may be more likely to receive privileged access to legislative committees.

Additionally, this section will outline the several pitfalls and gaps within the current literature that this thesis will address. For instance, the lack of comparative studies into political finance as a potential determinant of legislative behaviour. Moreover, existing single-case studies addressing these associations focus almost exclusively on the legitimation stage of the policy process. This leaves a significant gap in the literature that examines earlier stages, such as the agenda-setting and consultation stage, which could be more susceptible to political finance influence due to a lack of public scrutiny compared to later stages.

2.1.1 Comparative political finance standards

This thesis will present a comparative study of four different countries, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK, each widely perceived to operate with high standards of democratic integrity. Scholars of democracy do differ in their emphasis

on certain democratic principles. But in the age of liberal democracy, the principles of equal political representation, civil rights, free and fair elections are almost universally regarded as essential to democracy (Beetham, 1994). International bodies have recognised political finance as potentially harmful to these core democratic principles. For example, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has produced detailed guidelines on ideal campaign finance practices to aid official election observers in their investigations of European elections (OSCE, 2015). The guidelines specifically highlight political finance regulations, or lack thereof, which could impact the key democratic standard of free and fair elections (OSCE, 2015). These concerns from international bodies are not without empirical support. Scholars have found that the ability to pour unlimited amounts of money into political campaigns could produce unfair advantages in elections, potentially alienating lower socio-economic candidates from running for office and consequently producing a less economically diverse legislature (Ferguson et al. 2019; Gerber 1998; Kilborn, 2018). Obtaining unfair electoral advantages through political finance activity threatens representational equality and free and fair elections. However, political finance practices can also affect other core standards of democracy.

This thesis will focus specifically on political finance and interest group access to the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process, whereby the democratic principles most at stake are equal opportunities for political participation and unequal representation. The OSCE and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) political finance guidelines focus on reducing bribery and corruption and highlight the potential for unregulated or lax political finance laws to pollute the political process in favour of the affluent (OSCE, 2015; IFES 2013). But despite these recommendations, countries have continued to adopt vastly different approaches to political finance with varying levels of stringency.

Throughout recent history, several countries have undertaken significant reforms to their political finance systems. The motivations behind these reforms have often been to reduce corruption and elite influence, with some reforms being a direct result of bribery scandals. For instance, in 1994, Japan introduced a set of campaign finance reforms that introduced harsher spending limits and improved donor transparency to

reduce corruption after a series of bribery scandals (Norris and Abel Van Es 2016). Furthermore, the growing expectations for countries to reform their campaign finance practices to align with corruption minimising guidelines has led to significant legislative changes in many countries throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Although notably, there is little consensus on the correct campaign finance formula needed to produce the best outcomes for democratic integrity. Many countries have chosen to adopt different reforms in response to similar issues.

But this does allow a prime opportunity to explore the effectiveness of these reforms through a comparative lens. Existing comparative studies on party finance tend to examine the factors that trigger regulation changes in different countries (Clift and Fisher 2004; Norris and Abel Van Es 2016). For instance, a recent prominent work by Norris and Abel Van Es (2016) used a variety of country case studies to highlight the historical transformation of political finance reform and ask how political finance has become essential to the functioning of parties and elections. However, both the qualitative historical analysis and the quantitative analysis in this book do not fully discuss the impacts of these reforms, especially on policy outcomes. Although the authors argue that 'unregulated abuses' of political finance can cause several problems, including allowing 'the wealthy to dominate the policy agenda, and marginalise the voices of the poor' (Norris and Abel Van Es 2016, 258).

The authors successfully used a comparative approach to create a quantifiable index to measure the level of interventionism by governments, which consequently measures a form of stringency. The authors suggest that countries with higher levels of state interventionism provide a better safeguard to the harmful effects of political finance influence than more lax approaches; however, the exact ideal regulatory conditions are not explored. But other studies have also shown that scholars can convincingly categorise existing political finance regulations based on various classifications. For example, Kulesza et al. (2016) have also categorised US state political finance regulations based on levels of stringency. Levels of political finance stringency relate to the laws regulating spending and contribution limits, disclosure, and public financing. The authors argue their approach provides clear index statements that can be easily replicated and allow a composite score to be calculated based on the three main approaches to campaign finance, which were also used in

Norris' research: spending and contribution limits, disclosure, and public financing (Kulesza et al. 2016, 2). However, the authors recognise that their results indicate a disconnect between public financing regulations, as defined in the statutes, and the actual enforcement action.

Other indexes have attempted to account for these differences between de jure and de facto regulation. For example, Global Integrity (2005) conducted a prominent and extensive study designed to categorise countries based on their political finance regulations in theory and practice. Classifications were based on expert assessments using a comprehensive series of index questions relating to the three regulatory categories relating to spending and contribution limits, contribution disclosure, and public financing. This allowed experts to qualitatively calculate the de jure and de facto scores separately (Global Integrity 2005). But ultimately, stringency of regulatory laws remains the most used measurement variable. As such, this thesis will also establish an index to categorise various counties' political finance structures based on levels of stringency.

2.1.2 Political finance contributions

Political finance contributions are monetary funds given directly or indirectly to political actors, such as parties or individual candidates. Most campaign finance regulations address direct contributions, while third-party contributions, such as political advertising paid for and created by third-party groups, face notably fewer legal limitations. Direct contributions from individuals or groups are often recorded, and political actors are frequently required to submit financial reports that include all donations. This has allowed for a comprehensive catalogue of direct contribution data that is publicly accessible in most countries, especially western democracies. However, while scholars can gather comparatively accurate data on direct contributions, considering third-party contributions presents a significant data gap. Existing comparative research has found that in 54 countries, 'third-party actors…are subject to little, if any, oversight of their electoral activities', which has meant third-party contributions can be hard to trace (Global Integrity, 2005, 12). Dimmery and Patterson's (2016) study into so-called 'dark money' highlighted the vast amount of politically charged financial transactions that occur unregulated and undocumented, citing a sizable amount of undisclosed political expenditure (around $309 million per

election cycle) in the US. Other studies have found that these illegal contributions can impact electoral outcomes and hence are worthy of exploration (Kera and Hysa 2020). However, the lack of existing datasets presents a significant challenge in collecting accurate data on dark money donations, making it incredibly difficult for scholars to measure the true scale of the finances filtered through political spheres of various countries. Due to these methodological difficulties, this thesis will focus exclusively on direct contributions, although any subsequent results and discussion will consequently be a conservative reflection on the impact of political finance on interest group access to legislative committees.

Even in the case of direct contributions, countries have relatively lax laws on the type of groups that can contribute to political actors and often allow corporations, trade unions, charities, and other interest groups to contribute to campaigns, albeit with some contribution limits. However, in allowing a multitude of interest groups and individuals to contribute, inequality between interest groups could surface, with wealthier individuals and groups being able to contribute more to political parties and candidates than their poorer counterparts. Therefore, countries with more lenient contribution regulations permit interest groups and individuals to contribute varying amounts, which can cause significant disproportionality in the donor types and donation amounts. For example, the United States has relatively strict contribution restrictions on paper; however, a legislative loophole allows unlimited donations through third-party actors. This has resulted in significant contribution inequalities whereby only the top 0.47% of the US population gave over 71% of the total donations in the 2018 election cycle (Centre for Responsive Politics 2019).

This disparity is particularly concerning if the motivation to donate is to influence the policy process through increased access to politicians, instead of simply expressing political support for a party or candidate. Scholars have noted various reasons why an individual or group would donate money to political actors, but these can be divided into two overarching categories: ideological and investment (Fink 2017; Barber 2016). Ideologically-motivated donations can be defined as donations given to express support for a political candidate or party's ideological stance or potentially as an expression of disapproval of an opposing candidate or party's ideological stance (Barber 2016). An investment-motivated donation can be defined

as donations given with the intent to receive something tangible in return (Fink 2017). In other words, donations are given by those seeking a return on their financial investment, most likely by gaining special access to politicians or encouraging a politician to support a policy in their interests.

Existing empirical research has found that donations can reap rewards for certain donors, bolstering claims that some donations are made for investment purposes. These findings are significant as investment motivated donations are closely linked with dependence theory and our understanding of why politicians would be willing to give priority access to significant donors. Previous studies have found corporate stakeholders are much more likely to be investment-motivated than ideologically motivated, while individuals are often ideologically motivated (Fink 2017; Gordon et al. 2007; McMenamin 2008). Moreover, a study by Stratmann and Verret (2015) on the link between corporate shareholder wealth and political finance activity demonstrates the returns corporations can receive by investing through political contributions. Researchers found that 'corporate political activity enhances shareholder wealth' and these privileged are exacerbated by US political finance laws that allow corporations to engage in unlimited political spending (Stratmann and Verret 2015, 545). As corporations have received political privileges from donations, it is unsurprising that these groups would continue to use political finance activity to maintain these advantages.

2.1.3 Dependence theory

After establishing that donors can be motivated by short-term investment goals, it is crucial to understand why politicians would be susceptible to engage in behaviour that enables these investments to be rewarded, even if it potentially goes against constituents' interests. Dependence theory can explain political finance behaviour from the perspective of donors and recipients, which can alter depending on the political finance regulations and practices in operation. Dependence theory describes how the relationship between policymakers and wealthy stakeholders can manifest and how political finance can exacerbate unequal treatment of political participants (Jorgenson 2013). The phrase 'dependence theory' has been used for various theories seeking to explain vastly different political phenomena, with the primary use of the phrase used to explain the relationship between developed and developing countries.

However, in this case, the term dependence theory will describe the relationship between political parties, politicians, or those seeking political office, and political finance donors and the political behaviours that manifest from this relationship. Notably, it describes how electoral institutions and procedures exacerbate the level of dependence political actors have on financial assistance.

Dependence theory can be defined as the cycle of reliance between politicians and wealthy interest groups, whereby the politicians rely on the political finance contributions from elite interest groups to get re-elected (Jorgenson 2013). Other proponents of dependence theory have examined the behaviours of political actors within these dependent relationships (Lessig 2011). In his examination, Lessig moved away from typical citizen perceptions of corruption, whereby the actors involved are viewed as inherently self-interested and consciously selling out at the expense of the disadvantaged. Instead, he argues that politicians are not themselves corrupt. Instead, politicians that engage in political actions devoid of democratic integrity are a symptom of the system itself (Lessig 2011). The system, in this case, is the process of running a modern election campaign, whereby politicians who must engage in the realities of this costly process become reliant on actors that can help their campaign. The astronomical costs of US elections, and perhaps more importantly, the average cost of conducting a winning campaign, continue to rise with each election cycle. Clearly, under the current financial realities of elections, parties must have significant financial backing to conduct a widespread and successful campaign.

Moreover, as seen in the UK, often candidates must also contribute their own money and time to run for office. This could naturally deter candidates from low socio-economic backgrounds from entering political elections. A cross-national comparative study found that a much higher proportion of politicians are from a high socio-economic background, even though voters do not display a specific preference for this type of candidate (Carnes and Lupu 2016). A lack of socioeconomic diversity within legislatures could have a detrimental impact on representation, as it risks politicians being blind to the needs of poorer citizens while seeing the need to protect those more affluent people within their social circles. A study on campaign finance and policy access argued it is the 'social relationships between contributors and

lawmakers' that is the key to understanding affluent influence, whereby campaign finance can be a means of buying friendships with politicians that can have a lasting impact on policy over time, as politicians seek to advance the interests of those within their close confines (Peoples 2013, 900). Understanding the implications of electoral fund-raising pressures on legislative behaviour, specifically in granting access to legislative committees, is at the heart of this research project and has driven the decision to examine these relationships through a comparative lens, whereby these pressures may be felt differently depending on the political context.

Dependence theory provides a clear explanation of the cycle of reliance between politicians and wealthy actors because of electoral systems that require candidates to raise large amounts of money. Under these assumptions, specific approaches to electoral and political finance regulation could minimise or exacerbate the effects described by dependence theory. Advocates of public financing of electoral campaigns argue that an extensive public financing system can dramatically reduce the need for candidates to appeal to affluent donors, leaving more time to focus on what matters: ordinary citizens (Gerken and Tausanovitch 2014; Marziani et al. 2011). This notion is supported by a recent large-N comparative research that found increased subsidies are associated with a reduction in corruption (Hummel et al. 2021). Moreover, enforcing limits on contributions could also reduce the level of reliance and even out the interest group playing field. In his assessment of campaign finance in the US, Gierzynski (2000) expresses stark criticism of the current attitudes towards political financing as simply a form of speech protected under civil liberties. Instead, he argues that unlimited contribution limits can provide interest groups with the means to buy a more prominent and louder voice in public issues than other interest groups, essentially decimating the pluralist ideal (Gierzynski 2000). The potential differences political finance regulatory approaches can make to the relationship between politicians and interest groups highlights the need for a comparative study to examine the effects of these differences empirically.

2.1.4 Political finance and impact on legislative behaviour

The previous two sections have outlined various theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence to suggest unlimited political finance contributions and spending could create a system whereby politicians are susceptible to the policy wishes of

donors and wealthier interest groups have an unequal advantage. This section will examine existing empirical literature on the relationships between donors and political actors that assess whether political finance impacts legislative behaviour. While there is a notable lack of research on the influence campaign contributions have on political behaviour within the agenda-setting and consultation stage, numerous existing studies have explored outcomes within the latter stages of the policy process. These studies typically examine legislative behaviour relating to government contracting, roll call votes and budgetary decisions (Flavin 2014; Powell 2013; Witko 2011). These studies have found that campaign finance can have an impact on legislative behaviour. For instance, one study found that US states' with more stringent campaign finance regulations have larger social welfare budgets compared to states with lax regulations (Flavin 2014, 78).

Other evidence demonstrates that contributions could also impact policy outcomes. For example, Monardi and Glantz (1998) presented research on the role of corporate tobacco industries on legislative policy in various US states. They found a statistically significant correlation between campaign contributions and whether individual legislators became more sympathetic to the tobacco industry. Other studies have had similar results; in a rare non-US study, Hawkins et al. (2012) provide evidence to show the alcohol industry is a key political actor in policy areas relating to alcohol, which has likely stunted meaningful reforms in the United Kingdom. These studies importantly demonstrate how wealthy corporations can directly influence policy using campaign contributions and indicate similar trends could be identified when examining decisions on granting access to legislative committees.

Yet, as explored in Chapter 1, scholars have been unable to achieve a clear consensus on the consequences of certain political finance structures on democratic integrity and political processes, particularly as they relate to unequal power, influence, and advantage. Not all scholars agree that political finance can change elite influence on the policy process or even its existence. Several studies have found no link (Bronars and Lott 1997; Wawro 2001), while other studies have found weak correlations at best (Fleisher 1993; Gordon et al. 2007). A systematic review of political finance literature found that over 75% of the empirical studies produce weak or contradictory

results (Ansolabehere et al. 2003). For example, Bronars and Lott's (1997) research assessed the potential links between campaign contributions and legislative voting patterns but found no evidence of a relationship between campaign contributions and legislative voting behaviour. They found a 'generally weak and statistically insignificant relationship for retiring politicians between their change in donations and their voting behaviour'; however, some level political finance influence was observed regarding foreign policy (Bronars and Lott 1997, 332). Regardless, the researchers argue that any relationship is due to the common ideological goals between donors and the representatives they choose to fund. This highlights a fundamental problem in isolating the effects of political contributions, as they are often intertwined with existing ideology. For this reason, party ideology will be an essential control factor when examining the relationship between contributions and committee access. It is expected that donors would contribute to political campaigns they feel are already best in line with their interests, giving them the greatest chance of policy success.

However, even in accepting this principle, it does not mean that contributions do not guide the scope of policy options considered by politicians or mitigate the scale access advantages granted to wealthy donors. Nevertheless, the existing studies on political finance impact on legislative behaviour currently present a contradictory picture. The common thread between these studies is the overwhelming focus on the latter stages of the policy process, notably voting behaviour and policy outcomes. But there are reasons to suggest that the less publicly scrutinised areas of the policy process, namely the agenda-setting and consultation phase, could be more susceptible to this type of influence. The following section will outline the need to explore political finance in new contexts and examine the small pool of studies relating specifically to the policy consultation stage.

2.1.5 Political finance, access, and the consultation stage
The previous section demonstrated that past investigations on political finance influence on legislative behaviour have primarily focused on the latter stages of the policy process. The policy process typically features the following stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, legitimation, and implementation (Cairney 2016). Existing literature on political finance has almost exclusively examined the

legitimation stage. This approach undoubtedly has merit, as it is reasonable to assume interest groups lobbying efforts are concentrated on legislative votes and budgetary decisions, which are guaranteed to impact policy implementation. But consequently, these stages often garner significant public and media attention. The increased scrutiny seen in the latter stages of the policy process could limit the influence of donors, as politicians may reject calls from donors to shift policy position at the final stages to avoid accusations of engaging in a quid pro quo (Cotton 2012). Past empirical findings support the assumption that the influence of political contributions has limitations in liberal democracies, considering politicians seek to avoid perceptions of corruption. For instance, a meta-analysis of existing literature on campaign finance and policy influence found explicit quid pro quo exchanges are rare, and campaign contributions had less impact on high visibility bills than low visibility bills (Peoples 2013). Moreover, a study into the effect of campaign contributions on legislative votes in the United States House of Representatives found representatives were more likely to vote in business donor interest on bills that support the business but not those that directly assign funds to businesses, such as government expenditure bills (Fellowes and Wolf 2004).

Following this theoretical assumption, the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process creates an opportunity for donors and politicians to operate in a lower-stakes environment, whereby less public and media scrutiny reduces the risk of being caught engaging in dubious practices. From the perception of interest groups, these phases remain crucial and set the course of policy direction, with legislators choosing which policy options are worthy of consideration and omitting policy options from consideration. Hacker and Pierson (2010) convincingly presented similar theoretical assumptions in their paper on the perpetuating economic inequality observed in the United States, whereby they highlighted the importance of non-decision making early in the policy process as fundamental to fostering policy stagnation.

Agenda-setting allows interest groups to push forward their policy agenda and stop policy in its tracks if it opposes their positions, potentially without public awareness. Legislative committee inquiries are a fundamental tool in this process, gathering evidence and information from various stakeholders on a particular policy problem

to produce policy recommendations. Therefore, it is expected that interest groups that donate to politicians with the intent to influence policy are more likely to seek access to politicians at the consultation phase rather than seek to influence final votes, where they may be less likely to have success. Existing studies have shown that committee members are more likely to receive contributions than non-committee members; however, most data are limited to the US contexts (Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016). By assessing the campaign contribution patterns of interest groups to serving and exiled committee members, this type of research can provide compelling accounts of motivations of interest groups who financially contribute to campaigns and provide a greater understanding of the avenues of influence interest groups use to gain advantages in the policy process. For instance, Powell and Grimmer (2016) tracked donation patterns to politicians when they were in powerful committee positions and after they were exiled from the committee. The researchers found that interest groups motivated by achieving short-term legislative influence would drop their funding for exiled members, concentrating donations on serving committee members. However, interest groups motivated by influencing elections would continue to support politicians even after serving on committees (Powell and Grimmer 2016). This suggests interest groups targeting committee members are likely looking to gain influence over committee proceedings specifically.

To obtain access to politicians within committee hearings, interest groups must demonstrate their relevance to the topic and ability to engage in informational exchange. In the ever-expanding sphere of interest groups, standing above the crowd is difficult. A plethora of interest groups could have helpful information for policymakers, but only a select few would be chosen to give evidence at a legislative committee hearing. Therefore, instead of engaging in direct quid pro quos where money is exchanged for votes, interest groups use contributions to raise their profile and credibility in the eyes of policymakers (Lohmann 1995).

Limited studies have explicitly examined the link between contributions and access, but existing research has supported assumptions outlined in dependence theory that donors use contributions to obtain priority access to politicians. For example, an experimental study tested legislators' responses to emails requesting a meeting to

discuss policy (Kalla and Broockman 2015). A proportion of the emails explicitly stated the sender was a financial donor, while other emails did not. Staggeringly, the researchers found that legislators were four times more responsive to donor requests for a meeting than non-donor requests. Furthermore, Langbein's (1986) study on interest group meetings with members of the House of Representatives found a correlation between political finance donations and the length of meetings, whereby higher donors received more time with Congressmembers. It is important to note that these studies examined informal meetings, which are not bound by the same transparency disclosures of formal committee hearings. While studies have often found contributions can increase interest group access advantages in committee contexts, this has been found to play a limited role compared to organisational power (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hojnacki and Kimball 2001). For this reason, this thesis will examine the organisational structures of committee evidence-givers and political contribution patterns to broaden the investigation into elite influence.

2.2 Elite advantages within the agenda-setting and consultation process

To add to the existing political finance literature by focusing on a notably understudied area of the policy process, the agenda-setting and the consultation phase, it is fundamental to understand the theoretical frameworks that explain the public policy process. The public policy process is highly complex, and many variables could impact how this process manifests in different contexts. For example, various types of institutions, actors, procedures, political cultures, and real-world circumstances can impact the policy process and represent an infinitely broad number of contributing factors. This section will explore some noteworthy theories that have attempted to organise and prioritise these variables into workable frameworks. This section will focus on the agenda-setting theories within this strand of literature and theories that focus on the role of interest groups within agenda-setting.

The first section defines the concept of an agenda and explores how different scholars view the policy prioritisation process. This section argues that agenda-setting is particularly important to the overall policy process for two reasons. Firstly, the agenda-setting process allows actors to push policies forward that serves their interests. Secondly, it also allows these actors to suppress or stall policy alternatives

from being further considered. Therefore, interest groups with wealth and resource advantages can better wield both forms of political power.

The second section delves further into the multifaceted world of agenda-setting theories, citing several key public policy theories, such as institutionalism (Linder and Peters 1990), the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon 2014), and the Punctuated Equilibrium Model (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). This section explores the importance of interest groups during the policy process to understand the role of elites and the unequal influence wealthy groups can receive. Once establishing the theoretical support for unequal influence in the policy process, with wealthy elite groups procuring the most political power, this section will delve further into key theories on political power. Pluralism, neopluralism, and elitism can provide useful theoretical frameworks to understand the importance of interest groups in directing the public policy process and how political power is dispersed among these groups.

The final section delves into the corporate power literature, which has already been identified as a group most likely to use political finance as a means of investment. This section argues that corporations hold unique advantages not held by other interest groups due to their economic importance and ability to maintain close networks with politicians. Corporate power literature will help further hypothesise the role corporations can have on the policy process using lobbying techniques, such as political finance.

2.2.1 Defining agendas

Agendas are often simply defined as a list of matters to be discussed; however, an agenda has a slightly more complex definition in a political context. Most public policy scholars highlight the necessity of political agendas to prioritise the unending number of societal issues requiring government attention. For example, Cobb and Elder define an agenda as 'a general set of political controversies that will be viewed as falling within the range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity' (Cobb and Elder 1971, 905). Practically, governments cannot address all conceivable policy problems at one time, meaning legislators must carefully select the problems and solutions for consideration. Scholars generally agree that political agendas relate

to the prioritisation of policy issues and solutions, but disagreements arise between scholars in how this prioritisation occurs in agenda-setting.

While most scholars emphasise prioritisation as an act of decision-making, others have noted the equal importance of non-decision making in establishing political agendas and exercising political power. Bachrach and Baratz (1963) further defend the importance of non-decision-making to political agendas but argue this type of power is different from the subconscious 'negative decision-making', whereby an individual or group simply decides not to act on an issue. Instead, powerful groups used manipulation tactics to convince political actors only to consider status quo options and disregard alternative issues entirely from the sphere of debate (Bachrach and Baratz 1963, 641). The prioritisation of issues is an essential component of governance and is a vital role of legislative committees tasked with investigating policy problems, which can help push certain policy solutions into the political sphere. Other core theoretical works on power, such as Lukes' (2005), describe different dimensions of power, including the manipulation of interests and the power of non-decision making. Lukes argues that his third dimension of power best describes the realities of power and influence, whereby political agendas are shaped through decisions and non-decision making, and dominant actors can influence the perceived interests of subordinates (Lukes 2005). By manipulating the interests of various subordinate political actors, including citizens, powerful groups can control the political agenda and subsequently exclude policy issues and options from consideration in the act of non-decision making. The following section will explore the factors involved in establishing agendas, focusing on the role of interest groups in this process.

2.2.2 Agenda-setting theory and interest group advantages

Agendas are a crucial element of the policy process that denotes the prioritization of issues and solutions. But who sets the agenda? Public policy scholars differ significantly in their categorisation of key players in the agenda-setting process. Public policy theories have focused heavily on the role of institutions in shaping the agenda-setting process. Public policy scholars Linders and Peters (1990) argued that institutions rather than individual actors are the most important factor in explaining the agenda-setting and policy formulation process. They believe that institutions are

essential in creating certain mechanisms that dictate the type of policy information stakeholders and experts filter to policy decision-makers (Linders and Peters 1990). All institutions must have a system for prioritising and categorising policy information; otherwise, policymakers would be inundated with information, making it difficult to decipher the highest quality sources with the most relevant information. Institutions also play a fundamental role in maintaining the status quo or providing flexibility in the policy process for alternative ideas.

Significantly, political systems can vary widely regarding institutional procedures which guide the decision-making process. Therefore, this thesis will analyse the institutional factors in each of the four chosen countries and explore the key differences that could impact committee witness selection procedures and policy information exchange. Comparative empirical evidence has shown that different institutional systems can change the ability of interest groups to engage in the policy process. A study into agenda-setting in the EU found that key institutional differences in the EU structure compared to national governments had a notable impact on the agenda-setting process (Peters 1993). For instance, the EU institutional structure is more fragmented than typical national political systems, allowing interest groups with many more avenues for influence. Institutions and the associated procedures and political cultures are fundamental factors in explaining the agenda-setting and consultation process.

But while institutions are important in the agenda-setting process, evolving public policy theories have increasingly recognised the impact of actors, notably elite actors on shaping the policy process. As John notes, the 'self-interest of actors can lead to a bypass of institutional structures', especially when these actors wield significant political, economic, and societal power (John 1998, 49). Certain interest groups can be classed as elites if they exhibit an increased societal and financial privileged compared to other interest groups. Elitist scholars, such as Schattschneider, emphasise the undeniable wealth and resource inequality among interest groups in US politics (Schattschneider 1960). Studies show this inequality manifests in various forms, such as wealth and spending capabilities, size, and access to media coverage (Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson 2015; Binderkrantz et al. 2017).

These inequalities have long been recognised within socio-economic approaches to public policy, which seek to trace the source of inequality to the overarching capitalist economic systems. Inspired by the works of Karl Marx, these theories stress that 'policy processes, far from being a rational weighing-up of alternatives, is driven by powerful socio-economic forces that set the agenda and structure decision-makers choices' (cited in John 1998, 92). Powerful socio-economic forces manifest in the clear divide between economic interests and citizens' interests. In modern democracies, various organisations and groups that wish to influence the political process represent these juxtaposing interests. For example, for-profit groups are primarily concerned with maintaining or advancing their economic interests within the capitalist system, and therefore, actively advocate for public policy that will achieve this aim and suppress policy that will threaten their position (John 1998).

Considering the consequences of capitalist societies, elitist scholars such as Schattschneider have developed agenda-setting theories that recognise the importance of interest groups in fulfilling the core democratic value of participation but argue that the natural inequality between interest groups seen in modern capitalist societies has a significant impact on policy agendas and public opinion (Schattschneider 1960). These elitist theories of agenda-setting have been further inspected in single case studies. For instance, Hacker and Pierson's assessment of the current United States policy process reflects the socio-economic school of thinking and argues that the policy process has exacerbated wealth inequality in the US (Hacker and Pierson 2001, 152). The authors cite organised interests as the primary drivers of the US policy process, particularly the policy agenda, which has consequently led to a policy that has favoured elite capitalist interests. They argue that 'pro-business parties', such as the Republican Party, monopolised electoral finance and elite organised interests, which led the Democratic Party to soften many of their policies to reflect business interests (Hacker and Pierson 2001). This type of behaviour is in line with Schattschneider's (1960) theory of the mobilisation of bias, which underscores how elite actors can manipulate the agenda-setting process by curbing policy alternatives that would go against their interests from consideration.

Other popular public policy theories, such as the punctuated equilibrium model (PEM) and the multiple streams framework (MSF), also recognise the importance of

political actors, especially elites, in structuring policy agendas (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 2014). Although they define and categorise the role of elites slightly differently, both theories describe elite actors as fundamental in maintaining the status quo in the policy process. For instance, the MSF describes actors with strong policy preferences and lobbying intentions as 'policy entrepreneurs' who are fundamental in manipulating agendas to favour their interests. While this definition of policy entrepreneurs does not necessarily relate to elites, the framework argues that the success of policy entrepreneurs is greatly heightened by direct access to policymakers, which could be dictated by the amount of time and resources a policy entrepreneur has at their disposal (Kingdon 2014).

Furthermore, Baumgartner and Jones' PEM includes a similar concept, which they dub 'policy monopolies', to explain the ability to shape policy issues in a particular light. The concept of policy monopolies does not exclusively refer to elite groups but does refer to a system of policy stability reliant on the direct lobbying of elite groups with clear access to policymakers. In other words, these periods of stability are created when powerful interest groups hijack the policy agenda to maintain a strict status quo and work to remove unappealing policy options off the table. These theoretical claims have been supported by empirical evidence, which corroborates the effect of policy monopolies on agendas with empirical evidence on the United States (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The study found that US budget agendas heavily involved typical policy monopolies resulted in minimal budget changes, whereas issues that garnered significant public attention saw much larger changes (cited in Weiber 2017, 70).

Alongside these public policy theories, a further exploration of political power theory is required to build a further understanding of the role of actors in the agenda-setting process. Pluralism is a fundamental normative theory on interest group politics and political power. Classical pluralist frameworks state that political power should be dispersed across multiple diverse groups and that competing interests can fight for influence over policy decision-making (Held 2006). Classical pluralism correctly identifies the importance of groups in politics. In a representative democratic model, singular citizens can rarely, if ever, present their interests effectively unless they form a collective. Subsequently, modern democratic polities undoubtedly consist of

many groups that seek to propel their interests into the political sphere. As a result, they require groups to engage in a constant bargaining process to influence policy (Dahl 1973). But while some early pluralist thinkers see the give-and-take of this bargaining process as creating an equal dispersal of power across different interest bases, neopluralists recognise that political, economic, and social inequalities can impact political power (Lindblom 1977).

Consequently, this unequal power distribution can manifest in unequal representation in the policy process. Several prominent studies have convincingly shown that representational inequality exists in the policy process, particularly among socio-economic divides (Bartels 2008; Erikson 2015; Gilens 2012). Gilens' assessment of the US case found the policy preferences of the affluent were consistently prioritised within numerous policy areas, stating 'the social welfare domain is the only policy domain examined in which the divergence of preferences across income groups does not lead to a substantial decline in the responsiveness to the preferences of less-well-off Americans' (Gilens 2012, 121).

Scholars have put forward multiple theories to explain observed instances of inequality, which so often favour economically affluent citizens over poorer citizens. Other theories have highlighted several factors including, the diminished levels of political participation among low socio-economic groups, the backgrounds and experiences of legislators, and the lack of clear preferences among low socio-economic groups (Erikson 2015; Carnes 2012; Butler 2014; Campbell 2010). However, these scholars have not given adequate attention to political finance as an exacerbating this inequality. Although, most recognise political finance as a likely contributing factor. For example, Erikson notes that inequality within interest representation could 'stem from special attention to the views of wealthy campaign contributors, but also the fact that politicians often are, or aspire to be, members of the economic elite themselves' but he declines to delve deeper than a baseline observation (Erikson 2015, 17). However, a study by Witko provided evidence that political finance structures can change the level of mobilization of elite actors, such as corporations, to give them more control of the political process (Witko 2017). These studies highlight the importance of affluence and wealth in garnering undue influence over the policy process; however, it is important to note that corporations

may hold distinctive political advantages due to their economic importance. In examining committee access privileges across different interest group types, this thesis will partly test existing theories on corporate power, which will be observed further in the next section.

2.2.3 Corporate power

Previous sections have argued that elites wield disproportionate political power and use this power to have greater influence over the policy process than the ordinary masses. However, "elites" is a broad term and can encompass many organisations and individuals. Moreover, the term "interest group" can also describe a variety of organisations, including businesses, trade associations, non-profit groups, professional associations, governmental organisations, and trade unions. Considering the range of group types, one must identify which groups are likely to have the most significant financial advantage and potentially wield more political power using political finance tactics. Existing literature has identified corporations as a group with specific political influence advantages in a world where economic strength dominates (Garsten and Sörbom 2017). This section explores the critical components of corporate power theory to understand why particular interest groups hold unique advantages, including priority access to policy discussions.

This thesis argues that corporate groups use their economic significance to wield greater political power than other interest groups and be more frequently consulted to engage in policy discussions. Furthermore, this contact with politicians can encourage corporate groups and politicians to maintain close relationships, which continues the cycle of privileged access. Corporations can also further strengthen their power in these relationships by supporting politicians through campaign donations or engaging in revolving door practices.

Corporate power can be categorised in two ways: instrumental power or structural power (Fairfield 2010). To accumulate instrumental power, corporations will forge relationships with policymakers. A qualitative study on the alcohol industry's corporate strategies to influence relevant health policy found that forging relationships with policymakers was the primary method for influencing the agenda-setting process (McCambridge et al. 2013). One avenue for interest groups to gain

the attention of politicians and build relationships is to donate a notable amount to their campaigns. Fairfield (2015) argues that campaign donations can help solidify relationships based on shared ideological goals, which helps to explain why corporations are more likely to donate to right-wing parties and candidates. These relationships can be exacerbated when politicians and corporate elites often come from similar social-economic backgrounds and operate within the same networking circles (Butler 2014). This can create a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" attitude among these wealthy insiders. Another study conducted by Holden and Lee (2009) also found that campaign finance is an effective method for corporations to gain instrumental power. Their research found tobacco companies lobbying and campaign donation spending effects were significant between 1997 and 2007 and were crucial in allowing these corporations to wield instrumental power or agency power to influence health policy.

But corporations can also utilise another form of power, structural power, which follows similar theoretical thinking to the dependence theory discussed earlier in this section. Structural power occurs when governments become dependent on the financial success of corporations, as under current economic structures, corporate success is fully intertwined with the success of the economy (Lindblom 1977). This gives corporations an edge over other groups, such as non-profit organisations, which are not seen to have nearly as much effect on economic growth and sustainability. Structural power is also particularly effective when governments rely on corporations to deliver public services (Miller and Mooney 2010). Most modern democracies provide private enterprises with governmental contracts in some form and create a cycle of reliance on for-profit companies that will likely prioritise extending profit margins than delivering the best possible public service. Studies have also found that certain policy areas create a more volatile divide between corporate interests and the public good. As already highlighted, there is evidence to suggest corporations can stilt health policy from addressing key public health problems, or at the very least, policy can be significantly diluted (Hastings 2012).

Another policy area that demonstrates this divide is environmental and energy policy, where despite the dire need to address the growing climate crisis, corporations who are Earth's biggest polluters continue to have significant influence

over policy direction. There is vast literature on the role of oil/energy corporations in opposing action on climate change and sowing environmental scepticism within the political discourse (Jacques et al. 2008). For instance, a study into corporate influence of US environmental policy found 'corporations mobilize politically to advance their economic agendas and weaken environmental policy', often by finding common goals that also align with governmental interests, such as the wish to reduce reliance on foreign energy sources (Prechel 2012, 357). The study also found that once corporations succeeded in influencing environmental policy, this would become the status quo position and create a precedent to stifle future policy alternatives. This finding supports Baumgartner and Jones' PEM model describing long periods of status quo stability favouring elite groups. Importantly, the studies on corporate power demonstrate the likelihood different policy areas have varying susceptibility to elite and corporate influence, which could translate into different levels of access granted to corporate groups over non-corporate groups. This creates further demand for a comparative study, whereby the impact of political finance on the consultation process can be analysed within different policy contexts.

2.3 Access to legislative committees

The previous section examined the various public policy and corporate power theories that can help explain elite influence over the agenda-setting and consultation process. This section will provide a narrower focus of the literature that specifically relates to interest group access to legislative committees. Exploring this literature was crucial in achieving a clear definition of access, understanding the factors that could alter access to committees in parliamentary democracies and witness diversity.

2.3.1 Defining access

Each strand of interest group lobbying literature has a different definition of access that affects its operationalisation. Some scholars define access as obtaining direct contact with political actors to exchange information (Beyers and Braun 2014; Dür and Mateo 2013). This simplistic definition is useful for scholars wishing to distinguish between direct and indirect forms of lobbying. Direct lobbying relates to direct contact with politicians. This could be in formal settings, such as testifying at legislative committees, or more informal settings, such as private meetings with politicians. Whereas indirect lobbying use tactics to obtain political attention without

communicating with political actors directly. For example, recent environmental movements, such as Extinction Rebellion, use protests and disruptive action to gain political attention. Other groups may use online petition campaigns to lobby MPs indirectly. Recent empirical works on interest group access have focused on different group strategies to influence agendas (Binderkrantz 2005; Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2019; Christiansen et al. 2017). These studies examine so-called "insider groups" who often use direct access strategies to obtain influence, such as directly contacting and consulting with legislators and bureaucrats, and "outsider groups" who do not use these traditional routes of informational exchange and instead use indirect strategies to mobilise citizens and appeal to the media.

This thesis only focuses on interest groups engaging in direct strategies, either through submitting written evidence to a committee or participating in direct informational exchange through committee hearings. Therefore, rather than using a standard definition of access that encompasses general contact or information exchange, it is more appropriate to use a definition that allows for a distinction to be made between different levels of access. Binderkrantz et al. (2017, 306) provide this function by defining access as 'instances where a group has entered a political arena (parliament, administration, or media) passing a threshold controlled by relevant gatekeepers (politicians, civil servants, or journalists)'. Committee proceedings typically allow interest groups and individuals to participate in inquiries through oral and written evidence-giving. However, these two types of evidence-giving require significantly different levels of gatekeeping for a group or individual to participate in the consultation process. The oral evidence-giving format, sometimes referred to as "invited access", requires political actors to select particular interest groups or individuals to testify directly before the committee and gives those actors direct face-to-face access to legislators. In contrast, the written evidence-giving format, referred to as "open access," is accessible to all groups that wish to engage and requires no selection process. While procedural nuances may change from one country's legislative system to the next, the countries selected for this thesis will have similar committee procedures that provide oral and written opportunities.

2.3.2 Interest group access to parliamentary committees

This study examines interest group access to parliamentary committees. Parliamentary committees have many legislative duties but are primarily tasked with deliberating specific bills put forward to parliament and conducting inquiries on any topic that falls within a committee's specific remit. Tasked with deliberating pressing policy problems, committees are responsible for informational acquisition and producing reports detailing the committee's findings and recommendations (Strøm 1998). To obtain advice on a particular topic, a committee will often put an open request to the public to submit a written brief, and specific organisations and individuals will be selected to provide testimony at committee hearings.

The public descriptions of a parliamentary committee's witness selection procedure are typically vague. Several of the countries analysed in this thesis do not explicitly state the power structure of committees nor identify the actors responsible for selecting witnesses. For instance, UK select committee members choose witnesses, whereas party whips typically select witnesses for bill committees, but neither has a straightforward procedure for selection (Pedersen et al. 2015). This can make it challenging to establish the role and power of the committee chairs in selecting witnesses. Existing comparative research of parliamentary systems has found that the powers of committee chairs can vary dramatically, but notably, British and Irish committee chairs hold the highest powers compared to 15 other Western European democracies (Sieberer and Höhmann 2017). Although it is essential to note that the power of committee chairs can include multiple responsibilities beyond witness selection, including the ability to schedule and cancel meetings, liaise directly with ministers, and even set the policy agenda (Krauss et al. 2020). In Ireland and Canada, committee witness selection duties are not exclusive to the committee chair. Instead, the responsibility lies with all committee members. Committee research staff can suggest witnesses for selection; however, the final decision remains with the committee (Schofield and Fershau 2007). By contrast, some countries do not grant the role of witness selection to the committee. In Australia, government ministers select witnesses for the respective committee, giving governments distinctive powers over the committee process.

But what compels a committee chair, member, or government minister to select a particular interest group to testify? Ideally, witnesses are selected based on their level of expertise, and relevance to the topic should represent a plethora of interests and opinions. However, official explanations of witness selection criteria are often notably vague. For instance, Canada's House of Commons official website states, 'committees select witnesses based largely on the type of study and the amount of time available', which does not provide any information on the criteria for witness selection or procedural efforts to diversify the witness pool (House of Commons Canada 2021). Legislative committees are deliberative spaces that can directly connect representatives and citizens, serving a crucial democratic purpose. Standards of deliberative democracy, a strand of democratic theory continually emerging in public policy literature, consider inclusive and rational deliberation essential for effective policy decision-making (Cohen 2009; Fishkin 2011; Habermas 2004).

In representative democracies, citizens and interest groups are expected to continually impact policy direction beyond the ballot box, and committees can provide an opportunity for this type of legislative participation. However, existing studies have observed a lack of gender and ethnic diversity among legislative committee witnesses in various country contexts. (Bochel and Berthier 2019; Bruckner et al. 2020; Holli 2012). Moreover, rather than being spheres for deliberation with high citizen and public accessibility, committees are elite spheres where the same interest groups circulate. The usual suspects framework can be used to describe the consistent reoccurring presence of particular interest groups or interest group types in decision-making settings. A wealth of empirical evidence has supported the usual suspect theory. For instance, research into European Parliament committees found private interest groups consistently dominate committee hearings discussing economic issues; however, the opposite was observed when analysing committee topics of high potential for societal impact (Coen and Katsaitis 2018). But research on European Parliamentary lobbying, British coalition government consultations, and US congressional lobbying have found evidence to suggest business and corporate groups get disproportionally high access to political officials during the policy process compared to other groups, such as non-profit organisations or research groups (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012). For example, Baumgartner and Leech's large quantitative study of American

lobbyist groups and their diversity of policy interests found businesses make up 41% of direct lobbyists and 44% of clients for other firms compared to 14% and 7% respectively for non-profits and citizen groups (Baumgartner and Leech 2001, 1195). These studies demonstrate clear evidence that levels of accessibility can differ depending on the interest group type.

What could cause a lack of diversity in committee witness selection? Of course, this thesis explores whether political finance contributions from interest groups could impact these decisions, but previous literature has explored other possible factors. Issues surrounding witness diversity could be due to unconscious bias, or political actors may make conscious decisions on witness selection to benefit their political goals. It has been suggested that committee members are less driven by the need to select the most knowledgeable and valuable evidence-givers and instead carefully select groups to best align with their ideological issue agendas to bolster perceptions of support around a particular policy (Vera 2021). For political actors, providing a platform for a greater number of interest groups can effectively push a particular issue into the public spotlight. Existing research has shown policy-specific factors, such as the level of conflict on a given issue, can impact the diversification of parliamentary committees (Chaqués-Bonafont and Marquez 2016). For highly controversial issues, committees may be keener to represent diverse interests to avoid accusations of bias.

Furthermore, institutional factors can also impact witness selection. For instance, political systems, such as the Westminster model, often have a government-led selection of committee members and agenda, meaning committee independence is limited (Schofield and Fershau 2007). Other studies have found that the type of government, either a majority or minority government, can be reflected in the ideological composition and strength of committees, which has been found to impact witness selection (Eising and Spohr 2016). Moreover, a study into Spanish parliamentary committee witness selection found interest group granted access committee could depend on key institutional factors such as government type and committee structures and political context factors, which can impact agenda-capacity (Chaqués-Bonafont and Marquez 2016). Large crises and significant events often shift the focus of a government's agenda and capacity to focus on other issues, which

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could limit the scope of evidence-givers selected to testify. But some selection decisions could also be due to practical factors that occur because of standard administrative constraints. For instance, interviews with committee chairs in the UK revealed that routine inquiry time restrictions could encourage committees to select the same interest groups for different inquiries, as the committee knows these groups will be receptive and willing to contribute at short notice (Beswick and Elstub 2019).

Interestingly, research on regulatory agencies, as opposed to legislative committees, has found that interest group diversity increases in closed access settings when these institutions need to maximise the legitimacy attached to any decision-making (Arras and Beyers 2020). Researchers found businesses typically dominate EU regulatory agencies closed access hearings but that non-profit and trade union groups are also 'surprisingly well represented' in these sessions (Arras and Beyers 2020, 850). However, unlike agencies that are expected to act in an entirely bipartisan and independent manner, legislative committees are certainly not held to the same standard of independence, despite expectations for committees to consider a wide range of opinions. Therefore, in addition to controlling for certain institutional factors relating to governments and committees, it is also important to control for ideology factors, which could influence levels of bias in the witness selection procedure.

While considering evidence of other potential factors that could impact access, ultimately, this thesis seeks to understand the role political finance contributions can play in altering levels of interest group access to legislative committees. As discussed previously in this chapter, existing research has focused on the patterns of contributions given to committee members compared to non-committee members to assess interest group intent to influence committees (Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016). While limited studies have explicitly examined the role of contributions in impacting interest group access, the importance of financial power has been highlighted in previous research. For example, a study into the impact of interest group resources on committee access in the US found that groups with greater organisational resources are more likely to be included in the committee process (Leyden 1995). Moreover, evidence from Germany found that business policy preferences expressed in committee hearings are more frequently adopted into

the legislative agenda due to the reliance on businesses to implement policy changes in many cases (Eising and Spohr 2016). This idea of dependence encompasses the core theoretical underpinnings utilised in this thesis to explain why political finance contributions could create a dependent relationship between contributing interest groups and legislators, resulting in different evidence givers being granted unequal levels of access to legislative committees.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive examination of the literature relating to the three core components of the research puzzle: political finance, elite advantages in the policy process, and interest group access to legislative committees. An exploration of the political finance literature revealed the lack of concrete evidence that political finance contributions can influence the policy process and exposed the limited scope of the current literature, which has neglected national comparisons and primarily focused on the United States and the latter stages of the policy process. This section highlighted a clear gap in the literature and provided theoretical and empirical evidence to support this thesis' assumptions that earlier stages of the policy process are likely to be more susceptible to political finance influence.

To build upon this theory, this chapter also explored several theoretical frameworks previously developed to understand the role of interest groups in the agenda-setting and consultation phases of the policy process. Elite public policy theories explain how the early stages of the policy process provide unique benefits to interest groups seeking to influence policy, as these under-scrutinised stages allow groups to influence policy before it gets off the ground, providing the ability to propel policy but also to stop policy momentum in its tracks. Elite groups with wealth and dependence advantages, for instance, wealthy businesses that are relied upon to provide key services, can consequently be granted privileged access to policymakers. These groups often push for policy that maintains a pro-business status quo approach. Empirical studies have provided empirical evidence for this phenomenon and have shown that interest groups can differ in their levels of access to and subsequent influence over the agenda-setting process (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Prechel 2012).

As legislative committees are tasked with a key function of informational acquisition, these institutions become key ports of policy influence at this crucial stage. The final section on interest group access literature highlighted the complexities involved in the committee witness selection process. The literature highlighted the importance of understanding key variables that could impact witness selection procedure, such as institutional, ideological, and policy factors. Identifying the key factors was crucial in the development of the research design and in unpacking the data analysis results. But while this thesis will consider these factors where appropriate, it will not examine all these factors in-depth. Instead, the thesis aims to examine the witness selection procedure through an entirely new lens that directly examines the correlations between political finance contribution and interest group access.

A comprehensive exploration of the current literature has uncovered key contexts and approaches that have yet to be examined. This thesis will address this core gap by examining the role of contributions on access to legislative committees within a range of policy contexts through a comparative study of non-US countries. In doing so, this research will test theoretical assumptions of elite advantage and political finance dependence. It will help identify whether the earlier stages of the policy process and particular countries deserve further in-depth exploration of the links between political contributions and interest group advantages.

Chapter 3 Predicting interest group access to committees: Theoretical framework

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the existing relevant literature used to underpin the main research question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees? This was achieved by exploring the existing literature on political finance, elite advantages in the policy process, and interest group access to legislative committees. From the literature, several key themes emerged that have informed the direction of the research presented in this thesis.

Firstly, existing literature on the impact of political finance on legislative behaviour has focused too heavily on the policy legitimation stage of the policy process instead of the agenda-setting and consultation stage. Secondly, a country's approach to political finance regulation can alter whether political actors feel pressured to raise funds from private sources. As such, the ability of interest groups to use political finance to influence policy could be limited in countries with strict political finance laws and generous public financing. Thirdly, elite groups can dominate the policy process, especially when they have unequal resources and opportunities. Fourthly, corporations have unique advantages within the political sphere due to the importance of these groups on economic stability and public service delivery.

These themes have been used to develop a set of hypotheses that are grounded in theory. Developing testable hypotheses helps direct the methodological process to ensure the research aims can be met effectively. Primarily, the research aims are to understand the role campaign finance activity, and a country's political finance regulatory approach, has on levels of access to legislative committees. The research also aims to further understand the impact of interest group factors, such as interest group type and their motivations, on levels of access to committees. As such, this thesis presents a notable contribution to the political finance field but also provides further knowledge on interest group participation in different country and policy contexts.

For clarity, the hypotheses will be separated into two levels: the political finance level and the interest group level. In this chapter, these levels will be discussed successively. The political finance level details the theoretical assumptions and derived hypotheses that predict interest group access outcomes based on political finance factors. Here, it will be argued that legislative committees conducted within the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process are particularly susceptible to campaign finance influence for several reasons. These reasons include the lack of public scrutiny compared to the policy legitimation stage and the opportunity for interest groups to remove policy options off the agenda in addition to pushing for policy options to be considered (Cotton 2012; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Peoples 2013). As a result, it is expected that interest groups that contribute to political parties are more likely to receive privileged access to legislative committee inquiries.

An additional hypothesis predicts the strength of this association depending on the country context. The association between contributions and access is expected to be strongest in countries with lax political finance regulation compared to countries with a robust regulatory approach. This is because lax regulation puts more pressure on political parties to seek private donations and sometimes does not provide the necessary public funding support to counteract this pressure (Gerken and Tausanovitch 2014; Gierzynski 2000; Marziani et al. 2011). When parties feel this pressure to seek out donations to support their electoral hopes, they can become more responsive to a donor's requests to obtain privileged access to policy discussion (Jorgenson 2013; Lessig 2011).

The interest group level will predict access outcomes based on interest group factors. Specifically, this section will argue that interest group types that likely have greater financial and resource advantages, such as corporate and profit-motivated groups, would be granted more privileged access to committees. This is because, in addition to their financial and resource advantages, these groups are seen as particularly important to the policy process. These groups are essential in maintaining a strong economy and providing essential services for the public (Garsten and Sörbom 2017; Miller and Mooney 2010). Moreover, as corporate groups are predicted to receive special access advantages in committee inquiries, it is also expected that this trend

will be most acute within committee inquiries that deal with issues most important to these groups.

The interest group level will present an additional hypothesis that predicts patterns in interest group contribution activity depending on a groups' type and motivation. Groups driven by profit motives have been found to contribute to political efforts more frequently than non-profit groups (Adams and Hardwick 2002). Moreover, surface examinations of donor activity from existing political finance databases in the UK show that corporate groups compose a large percentage of the total donations given to political parties, particularly the Conservative party (Electoral Commission 2021; Fisher 2020). Therefore, it is expected corporate and economically motivated groups participating in legislative committees are more likely to contribute to political parties.

This chapter proceeds as follows: Firstly, this chapter will define three core concepts relevant to the research puzzle: access to committees, political finance contributions, and interest groups. It is necessary first to establish clear definitions for concepts so they can be observed and measured empirically. It is crucial to provide the required context for each hypothesis and ensure it can be effectively tested. Once these definitions have been established, this chapter will outline the main hypotheses, divided into the political finance and interest group levels. The political finance level discusses the hypotheses relating to campaign finance activity and regulatory stringency. In contrast, the interest group level discusses the hypotheses relating to the impact of interest group type and motivations on interest group access to legislative committees and campaign finance activity.

3.1 Definition of core concepts

The primary research question features three concepts that require clear definitions to create suitable testable hypotheses. The concepts are political finance contributions, access, and interest groups. These concepts do not have one clear definition and can be interpreted and categorised differently. For this reason, this section will discuss each concept successively to establish a clear definition and categorisation.

The definition of political finance contributions often incorporates all forms of political giving, which can be donated from multiple sources. Donations to political actors can include gifts, such as free or discounted office spaces or other services or third-party advertising. However, the typical form of contribution, and the type measured in this case, is a direct monetary contribution from an organisation or individual to a political party.

The decision to analyse direct contributions was taken because most official political finance laws focus on regulating direct monetary contributions instead of third-party contributions. A study of political finance laws from 54 countries found that 89% had little to no formal regulation of third-party contributions (Global Integrity 2005). Instead, countries focus most of their formal regulation on direct contributions. As this thesis presents a comparative analysis of different countries, including assessing a country's political finance regulatory approaches, focusing on the most heavily regulated type of contribution was deemed appropriate. Moreover, the lack of regulatory focus on indirect contributions has also affected standards of disclosure and monitoring. Few countries require political actors and third parties to routinely disclose indirect contributions, which presents a significant data gap when analysing these contributions. Although these unchecked donations are noteworthy and demand closer empirical examination, it was deemed most effective to analyse direct contributions, as comprehensive and accurate records from official sources can be easily obtained. However, it is essential to note that this approach presents a conservative picture of the total political contributions in circulation.

Access is defined as 'instances where a group has entered a political arena (parliament, administration, or media) passing a threshold controlled by relevant gatekeepers (politicians, civil servants, or journalists)' (Binderkrantz et al. 2017, 306). This definition of access allows the fundamental distinction between two key access points featured in legislative committee inquiries, i.e. written and oral evidence-giving. This thesis analyses legislative committee inquiries that permit interest groups and individuals to engage in oral and written evidence-giving. Significantly, these two access points have different gatekeeping implications. Written evidence-giving is a participatory format open to all willing participants, whereas groups wishing to engage in an oral evidence-giving format must receive a

formal invitation from the committee. Access, the primary dependent variable used in the study, is measured through a categorical variable distinguishing between these two types of access. Several hypotheses for this study predict the impact of interest group contributions and interest group factors on groups achieving oral or invited access to committees.

Both group or individual committee participants will be referred to as "interest groups" or "evidence givers". It is important to unpack the term "interest groups" as the classification of these groups can differ significantly depending on the study. The definition of an interest group can be broadly defined as 'an association of individuals or organisations or a public or private institution that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favour' (Thomas 2004, 4). However, some scholars have expanded this broad definition to produce a more specific classification of interest groups. For example, Beyers et al. (2008) developed three characteristics for defining interest groups: organisational structure, political interest, and informality. Organisational structure refers to different stakeholder types that are often mutually exclusive, such as businesses, non-profits, or governmental groups. Political interest characteristic describes groups wishing to influence politics in some form. For example, groups may wish to change the political agenda, stop legislation from passing, or help a preferred candidate win an election. By engaging in committee inquiries, interest groups typically display a political interest even if they are primarily motivated by information exchange. The third characteristic, informality, is used to describe groups that do not actively seek political office; instead, they are focused on lobbying existing political actors. Most interest groups participating in committees will meet all three of these criteria. Outlier groups include politicians that participate in committee inquiries who naturally do not meet the third criteria.

In addition to defining interest groups, it was important to develop a precise classification to distinguish between groups. So, after identifying committee inquiry evidence-givers, these interest groups were categorised by organisational structure. This categorisation is beneficial as it is commonly used in existing lobbying studies (Ban and You 2019; Garlick 2021; Hunter et al 1991). Without a standard categorisation method, scholars have recognised the difficulty in comparing

empirical results and accumulating knowledge on interest group activity (Baroni et al. 2014). Therefore, interest groups have been categorised based on organisational structure. However, a separate categorisation was developed to analyse diversity among evidence-givers further and identify an interest group's core motivation.

An interest group motivation includes a broad assessment of the fundamental aims of the organisation, primarily focusing on whether the group is driven by economic or self-interests or if the group is predominately issue focused. This categorisation is a commonly used distinction between groups with sectional interests and those with cause interests (Hopkins et al. 2018; Murphy 2010; Stewart 1958). Groups with economic or sectional interests are concerned with issues that directly affect members or elites; therefore, they mainly focus on self-interest causes. Whereas issue-focused groups are concerned with specific causes, such as environmental or humanitarian issues. But while this distinction has been used and justified in past interest group research, it is worth noting that these categorisations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Sectional or economic interests may also be drive groups that are focused on a particular issue. For example, the TUC is a traditional sectional interest group and primarily fights for members rights. However, the trade union has launched lobbying campaigns to support environmental justice causes (Hampton 2018). Therefore, it is important to clarify that interest groups that could be placed in either category will be considered to have economic/sectional motivation.

Creating interest group categorisations that distinguish between interest group type and motivations allows an assessment of the different levels of access granted to corporate and economically motivated groups compared to non-corporate and issue motivated groups. Importantly, existing literature has observed that these groups routinely have different lobbying capabilities and levels of success within various policy spheres, including achieving access to policymakers (Boehmke et al 2013; Chand 2017; Dommett et al. 2017; Yackee and Yackee 2006).

3.2 Predicting access to legislative committees
The previous section defined three critical concepts needed to develop and test the research question and subsequent hypotheses. It also described the specific

classifications that will be used to categorise interest groups and levels of access. It is important to remember that two types of access formats have been established to distinguish between different levels of access. These formats are 'written/open' access and 'oral/invited' access, whereby the latter format requires political actors to engage in direct decision-making and authorisation to select participants. The access and interest group categorisations were used to develop the five hypotheses that establish several predictors of interest group access to legislative committees. The predictors relate to political finance and interest group factors. To clearly distinguish between political finance and interest group factors, the hypotheses have been split into two different levels: the political finance level and the interest group level. These levels draw theory from different literature strands and focus on different explanatory factors to predict access to committees.

The political finance level establishes two hypotheses that explore explanatory factors of interest group access to committees relating to political finance. The first hypothesis predicts levels of access depending on an interest groups' political finance activity. Interest groups that contribute to political parties are expected to engage in invited access formats more often than non-contributing groups. The second hypothesis predicts the variance in the trends described in H1 across different countries depending on its political finance regulatory approach. Countries have applied vastly different levels of stringency to their political finance laws relating to the regulation of contributions, spending, third-party donations, and public financing. It is expected that countries with more stringent political finance laws will show stronger associations between interest group contributions and invited access to legislative committees.

Both hypotheses are grounded by the theory established in previous literature that explains the link between political contributions and legislative behaviour. Specifically, dependence theory explains how political finance can make legislators and donors reliant on each other for different resources (Jorgenson 2013). Legislators become reliant on donors to financially support their political campaigns, while donors rely on legislators to support their policy interests. Hence, allowing political finance donations from private sources can result in contributions being exchanged for political favours, including privileged access to legislative committees. Other

theories relating to the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process explain why these exchanges are more likely to occur in policy areas that are less heavily scrutinised and allow for early intervention to both pushes forward and stop policy development. Dependence theory also helps explain how political finance regulation can impact the dependency in a legislator/donor relationship. Regulation that reduces pressure on politicians to seek out private donations to fund campaigns can weaken an interest groups' ability to use contributions as leverage for political favours.

The interest group level establishes three hypotheses that use interest group factors to explain committee access outcomes and political finance activity. The interest group factors include organisational structure and motivations. An interest group's organisational structure describes the type of interest group, such as a business, non-profit, or trade association. An interest group's motivation describes their primary interests and distinguishes whether a group is economic or cause motivated. Three hypotheses have been created using these interest group factors and elitist public policy and corporate power theories. It is important to note that, unlike the political finance level, the interest group level features two hypotheses that use access as the dependent variable and one hypothesis that uses contributions as the dependent variable. The latter hypothesis allows an additional assessment of political finance activity across different interest group types. This hypothesis is placed under the interest group level because the explanatory factors relate to the characteristics of interest groups.

The first interest group level hypothesis predicts levels of access to legislative committees depending on the interest groups' organisational structure and motivation. Precisely, it is predicted that corporations and economically motivated groups are expected to engage in invited access formats more than other group types. The second hypothesis predicts variance in the trends described in H3 across policy areas with high and low corporate issue salience. Corporate issue salience describes the importance of a particular policy area to corporate interests. The final and third hypothesis uses contributions as the dependent variable and predicts that contribution activity is greater among corporate and economically motivated groups.

The interest group level hypotheses are grounded in public policy theory relating to elitism and corporate power. Elitist theories recognise interest groups do not have the same access to resources, which can impact lobbying outcomes (Schattschneider 1960). Lobbying resource inequality can cause some privileged groups, typically corporations, to dominate the policy sphere (Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012). Consequently, these groups having more significant influence over the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Moreover, groups with greater financial resources are also more likely to engage in lobbying strategies, such as donating to political campaigns (Adams and Hardwick 2002). The literature on corporate power has identified corporations as having unique characteristics beyond resource advantages that enable them to be favoured in policy discussions (Fairfield 2010). These characteristics include corporations' notable importance to the economy and the delivery of public services (McCambridge et al. 2013). These unique characteristics could mean corporate approval of policy options are considered paramount during legislative consultations.

The following sections will discuss the two levels successively and will ground each hypothesis with the relevant theory.

3.2.1 Political finance level

This thesis investigates direct campaign contributions as the primary explanatory variable for committee access at the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process. Legislative committees are used for agenda-setting by discussing possible solutions to pressing policy problems and consultation on existing policy ideas. Scholars investigating the impact of political finance contributions on legislative behaviour have yet to focus on this area of the policy process, likely due to the ease of measuring voting outcomes and the difficulty in assessing legislative committee processes (Grenzke 1990). This thesis fills this gap by directly examining this understudied area by testing predictions that contributions could impact levels of committee access granted to interest groups.

Why would contribution influence be strongest at the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process as opposed to the policy legitimation process? Scholars have argued that interest groups are more likely to seek influence over the agenda-

setting and consultation stages of the policy process, as these areas are less publicly scrutinised than the policy legitimation process, and hence, provide better cover for subtle quid pro quo exchanges (Cotton 2012; Peoples 2013). The policy legitimation process involves ratifying already developed policy through final legislative deliberations and roll-call votes. The media typically pays significantly more attention to this stage, meaning the public is more aware of the decision-making of parties and individual legislators. However, the media and the public large ignore the decisions made during committees, especially witness selection decisions. Providing access privileges to interest groups at this earlier policy stage requires less commitment from politicians than directly changing their policy stance on final legislative votes. Therefore, political actors are likely to see granting access to contributing groups as a less questionable exchange, making them more inclined to engage in this type of behaviour. But while this stage of the policy process may create a suitable environment for quid pro quo exchanges, it is important to address why interest groups and policymakers would engage in this exchange.

So why are interest groups incentivised to seek privileged access to the agenda-setting and consultation stage through contributions? Theories of political power highlight the importance of the agenda-setting stage in allowing two critical forms of influence: interest groups can exert power to push specific policies and omit policy from consideration (Bachrach and Baratz 1963; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Lukes 2005). This unique opportunity to control policy direction is likely to attract increased lobbying efforts. Current literature on campaign contributions and legislative committees have shown that contributing interest groups often prioritise donations to serving committee members (Berry and Fowler 2018; Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Hojnacki and Kimball 2001; Powell and Grimmer 2016). The evidence suggests interest groups are aware of the power of committees in the policy agenda process and actively seek to influence this stage through contributions. For interest groups to target committee members specifically, it can be assumed that interest groups expect a return on investment, such as receiving access to policymakers.

But why would policymakers be willing to grant contributing interest groups special privileges? Political parties and politicians are often reliant upon donations to run successful campaigns in ever-increasingly expensive elections. Previous research

investigating developed democratic countries has shown that electoral candidate spending is influential in winning races, especially for challengers wishing to overcome incumbent advantages (Benoit and Marsh 2008; Fisher et al. 2014; Shin et al 2005). Fundraising from small donors, typically sourced from middle-class citizens, can be time-consuming and challenging (Gais 1998; Graf et al. 2006). Instead, raising large sums from wealthy donors and interest groups could prove an easier task. Although as previously discussed, these groups typically see contributions as investments and may expect returns through political favours. As a result, policymakers facing pressure to raise money for elections and general expenses between election campaigns would be more willing to grant these favours to contributing groups.

The importance of money in elections can mean political parties and politicians can become dependent on contributing groups to sustain their campaign efforts continually. However, as previously mentioned, interest groups are also dependent on political parties to support their policy interests. Scholars have identified this mutual dependency and theorised the potential consequences of such relationships (Jorgensen 2013; Lessig 2011). The consequences can include contributing groups receiving special advantages in different areas of the policy process, including securing government contracts, changing legislative votes, and influencing budgetary decisions. This thesis focuses on the exchanges that result in contributing groups receiving privileged access to legislative committees. As this thesis views privileged access as those that engage in invited access formats as opposed to open access formats and considering the outlined arguments and evidence, the following is hypothesised:

H1: Interest groups that contribute to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees.

But it is important to note, the observed trends relating to H1 are likely to vary significantly across different country contexts depending on the stringency of a country's political finance regulations. As with any type of electoral regulation within nation-states, the government decides the rules, typically regulated by an independent oversight body. For instance, political finance law in the UK has been

set through legislation such as the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000)* (PPERA), which has implemented regulations on campaign spending limits, introduced regulation on third-party spending, and improved disclosure requirements for larger donations. The Electoral Commission, an independent oversight body, was also established in the PPERA and has since been tasked with investigating possible violations of the political finance laws, among other electoral-related duties.

While most modern democracies have some level of regulation on political finance and have an appointed body to oversee that political parties and candidates play by the rules, the exact rules can differ significantly depending on the country. For instance, Sweden has no regulations whatsoever on political giving and even permits donations from foreign interest groups or individuals abroad (IDEA 2021a). Whereas in France, corporations, trade unions and other organisations are banned from donating to political parties or candidates (IDEA 2021b). Donations from French nationals are also restricted, meaning parties are mainly funded through party memberships than direct donations. These examples demonstrate the distinctly different approaches countries can take in regulating political finance, with some displaying much higher levels of stringency than others.

Within the topic of political finance, a large proportion of the comparative literature focuses on categorising and assessing levels of regulatory stringency and discussing campaign finance reform across different countries and jurisdictions. In their prominent book on campaign finance regulation, Norris and Abel Van Es (2016) categorised countries based on the degree of stringency of their political finance laws in public financing, donation disclosure, and contribution and spending limits. These categories were chosen as they represent the most frequently regulated areas, which explains why other studies have also used these topics in examining stringency (Global Integrity 2005; Witko 2005). Typically, these indexes will examine the level of state interventionism displayed by each country relating to four regulatory categories. The resulting indexes in past comparative assessments of stringency have confirmed that the strength of political finance regulation varies significantly across countries (Global Integrity 2005; Norris and Abel Van Es 2016).

But while countries have been shown to regulate political finance differently, how could political finance regulatory stringency impact political behaviour and outcomes? The limited comparative studies on campaign finance regulation assume more stringent regulations help prevent representational inequality (Global Integrity 2005; Kulesza et al. 2016; Norris and Abel Van Es 2016). It is theorized that lax political finance regulation permits unregulated donations and spending allows the affluent to obtain undue influence over the political process (Pevnick 2016). Hence, campaign finance reform that implements stricter regulations can help mitigate political inequality. However, it is important to note that an adequate assessment of the impact of political finance regulation on legislative behaviour and policy outcomes is missing from the literature. This thesis presents a significant contribution by conducting a comparative assessment of countries with different regulatory approaches and analysing its effect on legislative behaviour. But some studies have sought to examine the effect of campaign finance regulation on political decision-making (Flavin 2014; Gilens et al. 2021). For example, Flavin (2014) found that US states with stricter regulations are more likely to give higher budgets for social welfare programs. The results indicated that political finance laws could bolster or hinder the representation of lower socio-economic interests and suggested states with lax laws are less responsive to poorer groups.

This thesis also expects political finance regulatory stringency to impact political behaviours. But instead of assessing policy and budgetary outcomes, this thesis will examine legislative decision-making to grant privileged access to interest groups during legislative committees. Specifically, the thesis expects to find a stronger association between interest group contributions and invited access in countries with weaker regulatory stringency than in countries with tougher regulatory stringency.

But why could lax political finance laws result in greater committee access for contributing interest groups? The theory provided to support H1 argued that policymakers are incentivised to give political favours to contributors due to the pressures and expense of running a modern election campaign. Interest groups and other donors can capitalise on this pressure and use donations to negotiate political favours. But importantly, the dependent relationship between legislators and donors can be altered by external factors, most notably by campaign finance rules. The

strength of dependence is reduced when political parties are under less pressure to raise money from private sources, such as interest groups. Fundamentally, political finance regulations directly affect this pressure. For instance, where countries have generous public finance and limitations on private donations, there is less pressure on political parties to spend significant energy and time collecting private donations. Political parties would not rely as heavily on private donations to provide an instrumental boost to a party's election chances and to fund other party activities and expenses between election times (Gerken and Tausanovitch 2014; Marziani et al. 2011). Moreover, similar consequences could also occur depending on the contribution and spending limits implemented in a specific country (Gierzynski 2000). Permitting unlimited contributions and spending places unending pressure on political actors to continually raise money and moves the goalposts of the amount of money required to win national elections.

So why could a change in the dependent relationship between legislators and contributing groups affect interest group access to committees? Existing research has shown that interest groups directly target influential committee members with financial contributions (Berry and Fowler 2018; Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Hojnacki and Kimball 2001; Powell and Grimmer 2016). This suggests that groups are mainly concerned with influencing the committee process. The most important way for interest groups to participate in the committee process is to either submit a written statement to the committee or by testifying at a committee hearing. The former process is open to all, and there are no guarantees the statement will be read or considered by committees, while the latter process allows direct communication with the committee but requires a formal invitation. A dependent relationship exists when committee members rely upon contributing interest groups to support their electoral chances, and interest groups use contributions to target the committee process. This dependent relationship could result in contributing groups being given more opportunities to participate in oral hearings. Therefore, unequal interest group access to committee hearings due to contributions is likely to occur more frequently as the dependency strengthens due to a country's political finance regulations.

Based on the outlined assumptions regarding campaign finance regulation and access, the following is expected:

H2: Interest groups that donate to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees in countries with lower levels of political finance regulatory stringency.

3.2.2 Interest group level

Aside from political campaign contributions, this paper will also assess other explanatory variables to explain interest group access to committees previously highlighted in the existing literature. One of these variables is interest group organisational structure. By assessing access to legislative committees, this thesis analyses interest groups engaging in a direct form of political participation rather than groups engaging in indirect lobbying tactics. Direct forms of political participation include actions that directly include those in political power, such as participating in meetings with legislators and committee hearings. In comparison, indirect forms include actions that seek to enact political change from outside the political sphere, such as protests and petitions. Focusing on direct forms of participation will inform the hypotheses relating to access depending on interest group type, which will predict corporate groups will be more likely to achieve access to committee inquiries than non-corporate groups.

It has been well-recorded that privileged and affluent groups are more likely to engage in direct lobbying activities. For instance, Binderkrantz (2005) found that privileged groups are no less likely to engage in indirect activity than disadvantaged groups, but results did show that privileged groups are significantly more likely to engage in direct activities. Strong evidence suggests that engaging in direct lobbying tactics garners successful results for privileged groups in achieving greater access to policymakers even across different legislative contexts. Various studies examining a multitude of legislative environments have observed elite groups, such as businesses, enjoy greater access to politicians, obtaining a greater chance to influence policy direction than non-corporate groups (Klüver 2012; Dommett et al. 2017; Baumgartner and Leech 2001). Previous studies have also indicated a similar disparity among interest group types when assessing two different evidence-giving

formats. For instance, a study on evidence-giving in Scottish parliamentary committee hearings and another comparative study including the United Kingdom found invited access is concentrated among a select cluster of interest groups (Halpin et al. 2012; Pedersen et al. 2015). However, the latter comparative study investigated stakeholder access to legislative committees in the UK, Denmark, and the Netherlands by distinguishing between oral and written evidence-giving formats but did not precisely categorise interest group types (Pedersen et al. 2015). Consequently, clear empirical associations between interest group type and committee access could not be ascertained; however, the study found oral evidence-giving featured a higher concentration of stakeholder types such as private organisations, while the opposite occurred in written evidence-giving.

Corporate power theories can help explain these instances of unequal access advantage, which are caused by political reliance on these groups to provide economic stability and key services for society (Fairfield 2010). This unique position helps these groups to exert "instrumental power", whereby personal relationships are forged between politicians and corporate groups required to work closely and often belong to similar social circles (McCambridge et al. 2013). Therefore, it would be unsurprising if corporate groups receive certain access advantages to legislative committees and retain these privileges over time by continually maintaining close relationships with political actors.

Interest groups will be distinguished based on the two factors outlined at the beginning of the chapter. These are organisational structure (i.e. business, non-profit, trade association) and their core motivations (economically or issue motivated). Based on theories of corporate power and existing empirical works on interest group access outlined previously, the following is expected:

H3: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to achieve invited access to legislative committees than non-corporate and issue-motivated groups.

This thesis will also examine the variance across policy contexts using interest group level variables. Like the expectations outlined at the political finance level, determinations regarding policy variance will be predicted based on corporate issue

salience. Corporate issue salience describes policy issues most important to corporate groups. While H3 predicts corporate groups will overall be more likely to achieve invited access in committee inquiries, the strength of this association should be more significant when examining committee inquiries discussing issues with high corporate salience.

Why would corporate groups achieve greater access to committee inquiries discussing policy areas of the highest importance to them? One apparent reason is that corporations are more likely to actively engage in committee participation in areas of high interest. But this alone does not explain why political actors would give unequal privileged access to these groups. However, the structural power of corporations provides a clear explanation as to why these groups hold an important role in the policy process (Fairfield 2010). The structural power of corporations relates to the need to rely on these groups to provide economic stability and success. Consequently, business groups will be given a seat at the table in many policy discussions.

As businesses are typically specialists in niche areas, these groups can also provide invaluable policy information to political actors and bolster the validity of subsequent decisions. Existing theories denote corporations use 'information subsidies' to push their agenda onto media and public platforms (Berger 2001). The media can rely heavily on corporate groups to provide crucial information, and without needing to research issues themselves, journalists can save precious time and resources. But the same logic also applies to political actors through policy-making venues, such as legislative committees. Evidence from the UK shows committees will often use the same well-resourced interest groups to avoid spending significant time researching possible witnesses (Beswick and Elstub 2019). But while corporations hold clear advantages that could grant them unique access to legislators, evidence has shown corporations can have varying success in utilising information subsidies in legislative spheres depending on whether the issue at hand is private or public (Berger 2001). In other words, corporations are likely to achieve greater access to political actors on issues important to corporations but less so compared to the public and media.

So how do corporations, or any interest group, decide which issues should be prioritised? Halpin et al. (2017) developed a framework to understand the core factors involved in interest group issue prioritisation. Scholars have also explored external factors to explain interest group agendas, such as public issue salience and a government's sympathy towards issues (Fraussen et al. 2020). Ultimately, interest group agenda-setting is thought to involve a complex trade-off of factors. One factor, internal responsiveness, can be crucial in setting corporate agendas. Internal responsiveness relates to the issues of greatest interest to the members of a group (Halpin et al .2017). Group leaders will respond to members' wishes and prioritise these issues on the interest group's agenda. Internal responsiveness is particularly common in membership-driven and issue-based groups, such as trade unions or non-profits. However, in cases where groups do not have regular and accessible procedures to allow members to express their views, the opinions of the group leaders will be spotlighted. This is an important distinction when understanding corporate issue salience, as it is not the workers of corporations that set the group's agenda. Instead, it is the corporate leaders and shareholders. Corporate leaders will prioritise issues in the best interest of the corporation as an entity, which at times could be in direct conflict with the interests of the workers. Corporations may be motivated to participate in lobbying practices to protect shareholder interests and profit margins. Studies have shown that businesses can increase shareholder wealth when strong political connections exist, whereas the opposite occurs in situations where corporations lose these connections (Faccio 2006; Faccio and Parsley 2009).

Therefore, issues important to shareholders and other corporate elites are expected to drive the corporate issue agenda. This categorisation of corporate issue salience will help predict committee access outcomes. Hence, the following is expected:

H4: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to be granted invited access to legislative committees in policy areas with high corporate issue salience.

Interest groups also vary in terms of their contribution patterns. It is expected that committee evidence-givers identified as corporate and economically motivated groups will be more likely to have contributed to political parties than non-corporate

and issues-based groups. This prediction is based on elitist public policy theories that highlight the overarching financial advantages businesses enjoy compared to non-profit organisations. These financial advantages naturally give corporations increased lobbying resources, including the increased ability to donate to political campaigns (Schattschneider 1960). These assumptions have been demonstrated in the existing empirical literature. For example, one study of the UK has shown that groups with higher profitability are more likely to donate to political causes (Adams and Hardwick 2002). Moreover, an overview of the Electoral Commission's UK donations data shows businesses donated approximately £220 million to political parties between 2001-2021, whereas unincorporated associations only donated £48,689,438.50 over the same period (Electoral Commission 2021). It is expected similar trends would be observed among committee evidence-givers across country contexts, therefore, the following is predicted:

H5: Corporate and economically motivated interest groups are more likely to contribute to political parties.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the hypotheses and accompanying theoretical assumptions that will be empirically tested in later chapters of the thesis. These hypotheses were split into two levels, the political finance and interest group level, which featured different factors to explain variation in interest group access to legislative committees. The political finance level explored how interest group contributions could impact the privileged access interest groups receive to committees. It also explored how the strength of the association between contributions and interest group access could vary depending on the country context. Specifically, depending on whether a country has a strict or lax approach to campaign finance regulation. This chapter outlined the main theoretical arguments to support these assumptions and centred around dependence theory. Dependence theory was used to explain why policymakers would be more likely to grant privileged access to committees to interest groups that contribute to political campaigns than non-contributing groups. It was also shown how a country's approach to political finance regulation could alter the strength of this dependent relationship. It was argued that countries with stricter

regulations could weaken a policymaker's dependence on interest groups and could deter them from exchanging contributions for political favours.

The interest group level explored how interest group factors, such as the type of interest group and their motivations, could also impact the level of access these groups received to committees. Here it was predicted that corporate groups and economically motivated groups would achieve more privileged access to committees. Elite public policy theory and theories on corporate power were used to support the hypothesis. Notably, it was argued that corporations have specific features, such as economic importance and the ability to provide public services, which means these groups have unique leverage in policy discussions. An additional hypothesis was outlined to predict how the association between interest group factors and access could change depending on the policy area being discussed by a committee. As corporations are expected to achieve more privileged access to politicians, it was also predicted that corporate access advantages would be most prominent in committee discussing issues of high importance to corporate groups. Finally, it was also predicted that corporate groups would also be more likely to donate to political parties, as profit-motivated and wealthier organisations have been previously shown to engage more in political-giving than other groups (Adams and Hardwick 2002; Electoral Commission 2021).

These hypotheses were used to shape the research design discussed in Chapters 5. Significantly, these hypotheses predict trends based on variance across country and policy contexts. To test these hypotheses, countries with different approaches to campaign finance regulation needed to be selected. Moreover, policy areas with different levels of corporate issue salience were also required. The next chapter details the process of selecting appropriate country cases and policy areas for analysis.

Chapter 4 Investigating the links between political finance contributions and interest group access to legislative committees: Case selection

Introduction

The previous two chapters outlined the theoretical underpinnings to help answer the primary research question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees? In doing so, several hypotheses have been constructed to predict privileged access outcomes to committees using campaign contribution patterns and interest group factors. These hypotheses also predict that the strength of these associations is dependent on the country and policy context. Firstly, it is predicted that the link between contributions and interest group access to committees will be stronger in countries with lax political finance regulations. This is because countries with softer political finance regulations can increase political parties' dependence on private sources to fund campaigns. Secondly, corporate access advantages are expected to be greater in committee inquiries that consider issues of high importance to corporate groups.

To test these trends outlined in the hypotheses, the countries and policy areas selected for examination had to provide acceptable variance in political finance regulatory stringency and corporate issue salience, respectively. This chapter explains the process implemented to select the country and policy contexts required to provide this necessary variance while controlling for other potential contributing factors. The chapter first details the process of selecting the four country case studies. Only four countries were chosen to ensure a deep breadth of data could be analysed from each country within the time constraints. A set of criteria was established to ensure a level of similarity across factors that could impact interest group access to committees. The base comparability criteria included three conditions for each country to ensure similarity in terms of their democratic standards, economic status, and political system.

This chapter then details the process of establishing variance between countries in terms of political finance regulatory stringency. This was done using an original index derived in part from an existing index created by Witko (2005) to examine

regulatory approaches across different US states. The index assigned an overall numerical score to a country to determine the strength of the regulatory approach. Countries were also given separate scores to individually assess the strength of their approach within four specific areas: public financing, corporate contribution limits, spending limits, and third-party regulation.

The third and final criterion for the country case selection was implemented to ensure the necessary data relating to committee inquiries and contribution activity were easily accessible. This meant confirming that data from at least 15-years were publicly accessible and available in an English language format. Data needed to be available in English as a significant part of the data collection process included manual coding techniques. The three criteria ensure that the selected countries met the theoretical and practical standards necessary to produce robust empirical research.

This chapter will explain the process of using the outlined criterion to select the following four country case studies: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected for several reasons. Firstly, assessing non-US countries provides an essential contribution to current political finance literature that is heavily focused on the US. Secondly, these countries have similar broad characteristics as wealthy nations with internationally recognised high democratic standards and parliamentary systems (IDEA 2021). This element meant several contributing factors that could impact interest group access and contribution activity could be controlled. Thirdly, the countries have similar committee procedures that allow for gate-kept oral evidence-giving and open-access written evidence testimony. Finally, these countries provide adequate variance regarding their political finance regulatory approaches. Each country has adopted different approaches to political finance regulation, including offering different types of public financing and adopting varying contributions and spending limits.

In addition to selecting the country cases, it was necessary to also select policy areas that provide juxtaposing areas of low and high corporate issue salience to test the established hypotheses. Therefore, the policy area and topic selection were based on existing theoretical and empirical evidence of issue salience among corporate groups.

The Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset (CCLD), an existing large-N dataset of corporate lobbying activity, was primarily used to measure corporate issue salience and subsequently select policy areas and sub-topics (Bernhagen 2019). Two policy areas and four relating sub-topics of high corporate issue salience were selected. These areas were environmental and macro-economic policy. The sub-topics were oil mining, climate change, banking regulation, and corporate tax. In addition, two policy areas and four relating subtopics of low corporate issue salience were selected. These areas were health and social welfare. The sub-topics were pharmaceutical pricing, tobacco/alcohol regulation, social housing, and child welfare.

This chapter is structured as follows: The first section details the case study selection process, composed of three core criteria relating to base comparability, political finance stringency, and data suitability. This section uses these criteria to justify selecting Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. The second section of this chapter will provide an overview of each selected country's committee procedures and political finance regulations. A brief overview of the country's political system and the agenda-setting and committee procedures will be discussed. Also, the current political finance laws and any recent noteworthy reforms will be reviewed. This section provides the necessary context to each case that will inform the data analysis and discussion later in the thesis. The third section will outline the process of selecting the policy areas and topics for analysis.

4.1 Case study selection process

To select the country case studies, three criteria were implemented. The purpose of these criteria was to shortlist countries that have varied political finance approaches and share similar institutional characteristics while providing the necessary data to satisfy practical concerns. Establishing a set of similar institutional characteristics was essential to be able to isolate the effects of political finance regulatory approaches on interest group access to committees. Scholars have noted that one core objective of case study selection is to obtain a 'useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest' (Seawright and Gerring 2008). As this thesis partly examines the role political finance regulations may play in exacerbating or diminishing elite access to committees, providing a comparison of different regulatory approaches was

crucial. However, conducting an effective comparative analysis also requires selected countries to bear similarities in other key factors that could impact the tested variables.

Therefore, the first criterion, the base comparablish criteria, was adopted to establish similarities across several key areas: democratic standards, economic status, and political system. It was essential to maintain consistency across cases in these areas, potentially impacting interest group access and contribution activity. Poor democratic standards and low economic status have been recognised as possible determinants of corrupt practices in politics (Kolstad and Wiig 2016; Ades and Di Tella 1999). Moreover, political systems can greatly impact legislative committees' procedural and practical functions, including witness selection. Controlling for these factors can discount them when examining the observed associations between contribution and interest group access to committees.

After establishing the control factors, another criterion was needed to ensure the selected countries differed in the core area of interest. Therefore, the second criteria, political finance regulatory stringency, was adopted to establish the necessary variance in the political finance approach to test the established hypotheses. Countries can differ significantly in terms of their approach to political finance regulation. While some countries will have strict restrictions on contributions and spending practices, others will allow unlimited amounts of private money to be donated. Moreover, countries also adopt different approaches to public financing of campaigns. Certain countries, such as Norway, offer generous public financing schemes, meaning political parties do not gather many funds from private sources. Whereas others, such as the US, provide little to no funding for federal campaigns. This thesis argues that softer political finance regulation and poor public financing can intensify dependent relationships between political parties and contributing interest groups. This dependency can foster behaviour among political actors that provides contributing groups with advantages in the policy process, such as increased access during the agenda-setting and consultation phase.

The two criteria outlined provided the necessary comparability across the case studies to satisfy the theoretical standards needed to conduct a compelling

comparative study. However, there were also critical practical concerns to consider. To successfully implement the research design outlined in Chapter 5, data on committee witnesses and contribution activity must be publicly available and readable. Therefore, it was also essential to include additional criteria to assess the data suitability of each country. This section details each criterion in-depth and justifies selecting the following four case studies: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.

4.1.1 Base comparability criteria

The base comparability criteria established the need to compare countries with broadly similar characteristics in economic status and democratic standards. A lack of homogeneity can cause various problems in evaluating causality between independent and dependent variables in comparative studies. As a result, scholars have long used systematic methods of comparative case selection, with the most prominent being the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) (Faure 1994). Applying the MSSD in its purest form to this study is impractical, as a limited number of suitable countries have strict similarities across key explanatory factors aside from the political finance regulatory approach. However, the base comparability criterion was established to ensure the selected countries share similarities in three core areas: democratic standards, economic status, and political systems. These three broad country characteristics were chosen as they could affect interest group access to legislative committees or impact the level of campaign finance influence for the following reasons.

Firstly, countries without high democratic standards, specifically countries without representative democracies and free elections, would not be expected to feature the same level of diversity among committee witnesses as countries that strive to make their legislatures representative. Countries dedicated to upholding core values of democratic representation would have a greater incentive to ensure committee inquiries include a diverse range of voices in their proceeding and ensure these values are upheld in the policy process. Furthermore, political bribery and general corruptive practices are more likely to be seen in countries with low democratic standards (Kolstad and Wiig 2016). Among countries with high democratic standards, it is expected that instances of explicit bribery are rare due to the strict

laws and regulations commonly implemented to restrict this activity. As this study examines legal financial transactions, minimising the potential to encounter the consequences of illegal practices is desirable.

Secondly, an additional criterion was chosen to ensure countries have a similarly high economic status for the same reasons relating to levels of corruption. As this comparative study examines whether legal financial contributions can result in specific political advantages, it is important to control for country-specific factors that have been found to exacerbate the level of political corruption. Existing studies have found that countries with high levels of economic development have featured lower levels of corruption (Jong-Sung and Khagram 2005; Treisman 2000). Specifically, the presence of a free-trade system has been identified as a factor in reducing instances of corruption (Ades and Di Tella 1999). As this study examines legalised methods of providing financial assistance to politicians and not explicit corruption, only countries with high economic status have been chosen.

Thirdly, different political systems alter the role of government in the legislature and subsequent legislative committees. Two overarching types of political systems are parliamentary and presidential systems. These systems are characterised by the relationship between the legislative and executive. Presidential systems have an executive which functions separately from the legislature and is not dependent on the political support of the legislature to retain power. In contrast, parliamentary systems have an entwined executive and legislature, whereby the executive derives its power from its support in the legislature. As a result, parliamentary systems typically feature executive-led governance. This is significant as the executive-led nature of parliamentary systems could alter the levels of representation observed in the legislature compared to presidential systems. As the executive is derived from the majority support in the legislature, parliamentary systems pave the way for single-party dominance. This can reduce cooperation between parties within the policy process, including agenda-setting (Bräuninger and Debus 2009). Whereas presidential systems can often result in an executive and legislature that different parties control. This situation requires significantly more bipartisanship to pass legislation. These core differences mean this thesis must only compare one of these systems.

Parliamentary systems provide an interesting case study considering the close connection between the executive and legislative agenda. Moreover, examining parliamentary systems allows for an assessment of systems with strong one-party executives. Scholars have argued that political systems with dominant cabinets can result in less independent committees (Schofield and Fershau 2007). Maintaining similarities among the case studies regarding committee independence is fundamental as this directly impacts witness selection procedures. Committees with less independence could be more likely to select witnesses approved by the governing party. This study will specifically examine the links between contributions to governing parties and interest group access to committees. As a result, it would be prudent to examine countries with dominant cabinets, such as those recognised as Westminster systems.

There are other factors that may affect the influence of donations on politics. For instance, some studies have found greater campaign spending may affect electoral outcomes differently depending on the electoral system (Johnson 2012). However, electoral systems were not deemed to be a necessary factor to control in the case study selection as this thesis does not examine electoral outcomes or related activity.

The base comparability criteria were implemented in the country case selection to ensure the country's selector bore similar characteristics in these areas. These factors can then be controlled while accounting for differences in political finance stringency. This means the impact of political finance stringency can be better tested and identified.

Considering this, the chosen countries were required to satisfy the following conditions:

- Representative democracies with free and open elections.
  By measuring levels of access granted to different interest groups, this study addresses key democratic principles of participation and representation. To suitably compare different countries, these countries must share similar democratic expectations. For instance, it would not be helpful to compare a

nation such as the UK with Somalia, as the countries do not have the same established democratic institutions. Therefore, expectations of democratic integrity cannot be consistent across country cases. Countries with low democratic standards could be more likely to foster corruptive practices, including bribery. Furthermore, countries that do not commit to upholding values of fair representation may not have the incentives to ensure adequate diversity among committee witnesses. Instead, high standards of participation and representativeness in the political sphere can only be realistically expected from a representative democratic government beholden to citizens through free and fair elections. Therefore, any country selected must adhere to this core criterion.

- An OECD member and high GDP

This criterion addresses the need to select countries with similar economic stature, which is a determinant of political corruption (Treisman 2000). Membership of the OECD requires countries to have a democratic system of government and a free-market economy (OECD 2021). Therefore, selecting OECD countries ensures a level of similarity in democratic expectations and economic structure. Furthermore, selecting countries with high GDP ensures the countries have similar economic status.

- Westminster systems of government

Liberal democracies have adopted various political systems that dictate the institutions and functionality of government. As previously discussed in this chapter, most political systems can be broadly categorised into parliamentary or presidential systems. Selecting countries with parliamentary systems of government was necessary as the strength of the executive and the close connection between the executive and the legislature can impact how committees' function. Parliamentary systems often produce strong ties between the executive and legislative agendas. As a result, parliamentary committees typically have close links with their ministerial department counterparts and subsequently develop similar policy agendas. This means the policy options sanctioned in committees are more likely to be carried through the policy process. Consequently, this may encourage interest groups to target their influence on parliamentary committees.

However, not all parliamentary systems are created equal. Parliamentary systems can include several different characteristics that drastically alter the role of government and parties in the policy process. Parliamentary democracies can typically be separated between two models of democracy, composed of different institutional characteristics: the Westminster model and the consensus model of democracy (Lijphart 1999). Both models have many associated characteristics that describe the composition of the executive and legislature, the role of parties, the type of constitution, and the role of the judiciary and interest groups in politics. Westminster models typically feature the strong one-party executive and cabinets that have been established as important to the inner workings of committees. Whereas in consensus democracies, power is typically shared between broad party coalitions.

For this reason, this thesis will examine countries with parliamentary democracies that feature characteristics of the Westminster system. Scholars have long disagreed on the key distinguishing principles of the Westminster model (Bulmer 2020). The complicated and contested definition of Westminster systems has caused some scholars to condemn its use in comparative research (Russel and Serban 2020). These scholars believe countries historically labelled as Westminster systems do not share enough similar characteristics to warrant comparison. It is true that very few parliamentary democracies have identical features, which limits perfect comparisons. However, the Westminster model remains useful in comparative research, as countries can still share central attributes (Rhodes et al. 2021). For instance, several countries have one-party cabinets and strong executive authority (Lijphart 1999). These characteristics of the Westminster model can potentially impact the variables being tested in this thesis, specifically interest group access to committee and interest group contribution activity.

As Lijphart (1999) showed in his comparative assessment of 36 modern democracies, countries mostly fall somewhere on a spectrum between majoritarian and consensus democracies. This study seeks to examine the countries that fall broadly within the Westminster, or majoritarian, model of

democracy. Therefore, countries selected for analysis will have been determined to be within the majoritarian dimension of Lijphart's two-dimensional conceptual map of democracies instead of the consensus dimension.

4.1.2 Political finance stringency criteria

Countries have a variety of approaches to political finance regulation, but all regulations typically fall within four core categories: public financing, contribution limits, spending and third-party regulation, and disclosure requirements (Norris and Abel Van Es 2016). This thesis argues that the likelihood contributing interest groups receive privileged access to committees is dependent on the stringency of political finance regulation of a country. In other words, it is expected that stronger associations between the independent variable (contributions) and the dependent variable (access) will occur in countries with lax regulatory stringency compared to those countries with stricter regulations. To test this impact of regulatory stringency, there needs to be adequate variation in regulatory stringency among the selected countries. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the selected countries must vary in the areas required for theoretical testing but are controlled for other key factors (Seawright and Gerring 2008). The base comparability criteria were designed to control for important contributing factors and select countries with similar features. In contrast, the political finance stringency criteria were designed to select countries with suitable variation in their political finance regulatory approaches.

This thesis will use an original political finance stringency index (PFSI) to score a country on the level of stringency of its political finance laws. It is important to note, other scholars and organisations have created their own categorisations for political finance stringency. The most notable indexes include those created by Norris and Abel van Es (2016), Global Integrity (2005), and Witko (2005). But these existing categorisations were deemed unsuitable to use in this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, the Norris and Abel van Es (2016) index only included a select number of countries, as the categorisations relied on several existing databases with various data limitations. Using this index would limit the scope of countries for selection. Secondly, the Global Integrity (2005) index was deemed too complex to implement realistically. The index features over 50 questions that require individual assessment by an expert of each respective country and would require peer-review. Thirdly,

while the Witko (2005) index was more appropriately sized, it was initially designed to examine state-level regulations. Therefore, the index created for this thesis used many of the same categorisations from Witko's index but added alterations to reflect national regulation better.

This thesis will use a political finance stringency index (PFSI) to score a country on the level of stringency of its political finance laws. The PFSI uses a similar categorisation strategy as an index created by US scholar Christopher Witko (2005). However, it also includes additional categories to incorporate public finance and third-party regulatory approaches better and maximise the suitability of the index to compare national cases. Witko's (2005) index was designed to examine the political finance stringency of different US state laws and only provides a dichotomous categorisation of public financing laws, which does not allow for a more nuanced assessment of the public financing opportunities available for political parties. This PFSI used in this study will include additional categories to assess public financing laws.

The PFSI used in this thesis featured the following four core categories to assess political finance regulatory stringency: public financing, corporate contributions, spending limits, and third-party regulation. The selected categories have been chosen due to the likelihood that these regulations would exacerbate the principles of dependence theory, which stipulates that politicians reliant on private sources for electoral purposes would be more likely to grant favours to such sources to maintain the mutually beneficial relationship (Jorgenson 2013). Public financing, corporate contributions, spending limits, and third-party regulation could alter a political actor's dependence on wealthy private sources for vital financial support. While disclosure requirements have been used in similar existing indexes, this category was omitted as most countries with high democratic standards feature similar strict disclosure requirements (IDEA 2021; Witko 2005).

Each of the four core categories of regulatory stringency was assigned mutually exclusive sub-categories used to denote the level of regulatory stringency. Each sub-category was then assigned a numerical value. Sub-categories representing the most stringent political finance laws were given the lowest values. Countries can be scored

between 0-6. A score of 0 would represent the country with the most stringent regulation, whereas a score of 6 represents the laxest regulations. The sub-categories and their explanations are displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Political Finance Stringency Index (PFSI) categories and values.

Public financing (PF)		Value
PF for both general and campaign	The state provides political finance assistance for both general and campaign uses	3
PF for campaigns only	The state provides political finance assistance for campaign use only. Financial assistance for general use (outside campaigns) is not provided.	2
PF for general use only	The state provides political finance assistance for general use i.e., for purposes outside of campaigning. Financial assistance for campaigning is not provided.	1
No PF	The state does not provide political finance assistance	0
Corporate contributions		
Allowed	Corporate contributions are permitted in the country	0
Banned	Corporate contributions are banned in the country	1
Unlimited spending		
Yes	Parties are allowed to spend unlimited amounts	0
No	Parties have spending limits	1
Third party regulation		
Yes	Country has some form of third- party political finance regulation	1
No	Country has no third-party political finance regulation	0

Data on political finance laws were collected from the IDEA Political Finance Database (IDEA 2021). The IDEA Political Finance Database provides written information on the regulations of every country. Using this information, countries were given a score using the assigned numerical values shown in Table 4.1. This

meant countries could be given a score for each category, and an overall score could be calculated by summing the values.

4.1.3 Data suitability criteria

In addition to establishing criteria that address political finance, economic status, and democracy types, practical criteria must be implemented to ensure the research design can be suitably applied. This means the necessary data needs to be publicly accessible or reasonably obtainable. Therefore, the data suitability of 36 OECD countries was assessed against the following practical criteria:

- Must hold regular committees, both administrative and parliamentary, across a wide range of policy areas.
- Transcript records of administrative and parliamentary committee hearings and consultation documents are publicly accessible.
- Political finance data on contributors and contribution amounts from 2005-2020 are publicly available.
- Data does not require translation.

An assessment of the data suitability of OECD countries highlighted a lack of publicly available committee transcripts (see Appendix I). It is rare for official parliamentary archives to have complete transcripts of committee meetings or details of consultation documents submitted by organisations and individuals. It is also important to note that much of the shortlisted country data are not available in English, requiring an extensive translation process. This process would have exceeded the research time and resources available. As a result, it was more practical to conduct an in-depth study of Anglo-Saxon countries, especially as these countries have complete data and meet the selection standards previously established.

4.1.4 Final country selection: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.

As discussed, the case study selection process began with examining OECD countries to obtain a broad overview of the data limitations (see Appendix I). This process examined whether a country had publicly accessible committee transcripts and submissions and political finance data. This exercise highlighted four countries with suitable data availability and satisfied the other core base comparability criteria: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

After identifying countries that satisfied the base comparability and data suitability criteria, it was imperative to establish whether the countries also displayed appropriate variance in campaign finance regulations to give an adequate comparative measure. The PFSI coding framework was applied to the shortlisted countries (see Appendix I). The results of the PSFI evaluation found an adequate level of variance in regulatory approaches (Table 4.2 and 4.3). The PSFI scores show that Canada and Ireland have the highest level of political finance stringency overall. However, it is important to note that Canada and Ireland's regulatory approaches still have significant differences depending on the regulatory category. For instance, Ireland provides significantly more public financing assistance than Canada. Australia has the laxest regulatory approach, while the United Kingdom displays a more middle-ground approach.

Table 4.2 Political finance regulations in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and UK.

Country	Public finance	Corporate contributions	Unlimited spending	Third party regulation
Australia	Campaign only	Allowed	Yes	No
Canada	Campaign only	Banned	No	Yes
Ireland	Both	Allowed	No	Yes
United Kingdom	General only	Allowed	No	Yes

Table 4.3 Political finance stringency index scores.

	PFSI Score**	Public financing score	Contribution score	Spending and third -party score
Australia	2	2	0	0
Canada	5	2	1	2
Ireland	5	3	0	2
United Kingdom	3	1	0	2

*Maximum PFSI score = 6

4.2 Case study background

4.2.1 Australia

Australia has a federal parliamentary system and six states that operate somewhat independently from the federal government. Australia's federal government has broad jurisdiction over several policy areas including, macro-economic policies, national health services, and foreign affairs. However, states still hold considerable control over public services, such as the police, education, hospital management, and welfare services, meaning both governmental entities must collaborate on policy-making that overlaps the set responsibilities.

Political parties are responsible for setting the overarching policy agendas, and like the other selected countries, parties often express their initial agendas through party manifestos during election times. However, the Parliament of Australia notes that the agenda-setting roles are no longer solely held by internal party members. Instead, outsider interest groups have garnered a much larger role in recent times (Parliament of Australia 2020).

Civil services officers within the Australian Public Service (APS) typically formulate specific policies. These officers consider key policy problems and create possible policy solutions, authorised by government ministers (Matheson 2000). Therefore, by the time the formulated policy reaches the legislative process, it is already a formed policy option. However, at this stage of the policy process, the option still goes through other formal consultation processes where possible amendments are discussed. Interest groups and other stakeholders can participate in these policy discussions through various advisory committees. Each governmental department has numerous advisory committees that focus on specific policy areas. For example, the Department of Health is advised by the following committees: The Advisory Committee on Medicines, the Advisory Committee on Medicine Scheduling, and the Advisory Committee on Vaccines.

The policy formulation and consultation process continue within the formal legislative setting in the Australian parliament. The Australian parliament has two chambers, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Both chambers have separate legislative committees, but joint committees feature members from both

houses. Legislative committees can serve different purposes. For instance, some committees are dedicated to departmental scrutiny while others focus on monitoring conflict of interest. However, this study will focus on legislative committees that discuss policy topics and existing legislation. Legislative committee members are selected at the beginning of each new parliament and follow a specific formula, which gives the governing party most of the committee members. However, the opposition party, minority parties, and independent legislators are also granted membership.

Like all the countries selected for analysis, Australian legislative committees allow any organisation or individual to submit a statement to any committee, and these statements are made publicly available. However, unlike other country case studies, the selection of oral witnesses in Australia is not the responsibility of each committee. Instead, ministers of the corresponding department or an appointed department secretary are responsible for choosing witnesses. However, there are no official criteria for witness selection.

Australia has different political finance regulations for federal elections and state elections. States are allowed to create their political finance laws for state elections. As a result, several states have chosen to implement significantly stricter regulations than those at the national level. Federal regulations do not limit political party and candidate spending nor set contribution limits for certain actors. Moreover, public financing is granted for campaigns only. Public financing is given to candidates and parties that receive 4% of the formal first preference vote and is allocated based on the votes received. The number of votes won by a political party or candidate is multiplied by the election funding rate to calculate how much should be allocated. Australia has recently undertaken several reforms to the political finance regulation legislation. For instance, in 2018, the Australian Parliament banned foreign political donations of more than $1000. The reforms also took steps to better identify significant third-party political spenders by changing their reporting regulations. Public financing was also expanded, giving all political parties and candidates an automatic sum of $10,000 if they receive at least 4% of the vote. Despite these reforms, Australia has the lax regulatory approach of our chosen countries. Unlimited spending is permitted, and there are no limits on corporate contributions.

4.2.2 Canada

Canada is a constitutional monarchy with a political system closely aligned with the UK. Canada has a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature and elects legislators through a single-member plurality electoral system. However, unlike the UK, where parliament has complete sovereignty over the passing of legislation, Canada's ten provinces and three territories retain partial authority over certain legislative decision-making. For instance, provinces have jurisdiction over taxation, social programs, education, natural resource management, and hospitals, among other powers. However importantly, federal legislation always supersedes provincial legislation when the laws conflict (Forsey 2005).

Canada's national policy agendas can come from a variety of sources. Some policies are developed by recommending an oversight body or think tank or because of strong public demand. But policy formulation mostly comes from party manifestos or interest group recommendations given to legislative committees. Both Canadian national legislative chambers, the House of Commons and the Senate have a multitude of parliamentary committees. At the beginning of each parliamentary session, committee members are chosen to ensure a fair representation of the legislature's composition. As part of the committee proceedings, interest groups are invited to testify as witnesses in committee hearings. Each committee is collectively responsible for selecting witnesses to testify before the committee, but formal procedures do not provide clear criteria for witness selection. However, the official House of Commons Canada website provides a vague justification for selection by stating that 'committees select witnesses based largely on the type of study and the amount of time available' (House of Commons Canada 2021). However, any individual or organisation is permitted to submit a written briefing to a committee.

A committee will hold hearings and create reports that will typically feature a policy recommendation, all publicly available to view. After this stage, there is sometimes a second opportunity for interest groups and the public to participate in the policy formulation through various public discussions. These public discussions are sometimes held through the government initiative 'Consulting with Canadians', which allows citizens to submit their input on a given policy problem or government

proposal for consideration. While the individual submissions are not available to the public, the consultation session ends with an overview report summarising the responses. After this, the policy recommendation will be drawn up as an official legislative paper, and the formal parliamentary process will begin. During this stage, politicians will seek further advice from interest groups to inform them on the merit of the policy as a whole and to direct possible amendments.

Canada has perhaps the strictest political finance regulation of the countries selected, whereby regulations have been largely unchanged since 2000. Significant limits are also placed on those who can contribute. Corporations, trade unions, foreign interests have been banned from donating to federal parties or candidates since Canada Election Act 2000. Although, it must be noted that this does not stop these organisations from donating to the regional counterparts of the main federal parties, nor does it ban individuals with strong affiliations to these organisations from donating to federal parties. However, individuals are also limited in the amount they can donate. Currently, any Canadian citizen can only donate up to CAD 1500 a year. Parties are also only allowed to spend a certain amount depending on the number of candidates running per election. Strict regulations on contribution limits and spending accompany a relatively generous public financing system. Parties that receive 2% of the overall vote, or at least 5% in their district, are eligible for a 50% reimbursement of all campaign expenses.

4.2.3 Ireland

Ireland's parliamentary political system features a central parliament called the House of Oireachtas, separated into two chambers: the Seanad Éireann (Senate) and Dáil Éirean (House of Representatives). In Ireland's parliamentary republic, policy formulation can often stem from government civil servants, who rely heavily on thinktanks and other organisations to provide essential advice, which is then slowly filtered up to government ministers who ultimately authorise and set the agenda. Unlike most other countries selected, Ireland must also consider EU requirements and existing policy when setting an agenda. EU requirements can considerably limit the scope of policy options, although this happens in some policy domains more than others. For example, the EU can heavily influence environmental policy, while Ireland largely still has sovereignty over social welfare policy. Policies are initially

formulated in a green paper, involving several potential policy options for a given problem. The main consultation stage occurs during the green paper discussion. During this stage, departmental committees will request advice from a variety of stakeholders. However, it must be noted that not all policy options will go through the green paper stage. Once a policy is clearly outlined, a white paper is published, which is then considered by parliament, during which the consultation stage continues through parliamentary committees, as in other countries.

The House of Oireachtas selects certain legislators to serve on a committee relating to a particular policy topic. Committee members are chosen based on the composition of the legislature using the D'Hondt system. Ireland has a proportional electoral system that results in coalition governments, and therefore committee chairs may not always be from the governing party. Committees will either be tasked with examining a particular government department and their proposed legislation or will be tasked with examining a particular subject that requires attention. Committees are typically set with each new parliament, therefore the name and focus on the committee can change often. However, the committee will typically fall under two categories: joint committees that include representatives from both chambers and select committees that include representatives from a single chamber. During their inquiries, committees will consider both oral and written testimonies from stakeholders. Any organisation or individual is permitted to submit a written statement for consideration; however, oral testimonies require an invitation from the committee. The committee itself has sole power in deciding who to invite to testify at committee hearings. Little official information is provided on the method used to choose witnesses or the criteria for selection.

Ireland's political finance regulation has been static since the Electoral Act 1997. As a result of this act, Ireland has perhaps the most generous public financing system of the countries selected, resulting in a large percentage of total party income originating from public sources rather than private. Funding is provided to parties and candidates both for their election campaigns and for general use. To qualify for public financing, parties must be officially registered and have won at least 2% of the first preference vote at the previous general election. There is also a further condition to encourage parties to be more gender-inclusive, as parties will receive half the state

funding if they fail to reach legislative quotas for the number of women in parliament. The amount allocated is proportional to the number of votes received by a party, which can benefit incumbents. Further public financing assistance is given to parties to help fund general party activities, party research, and to encourage women and young people into politics. But despite a generous public financing system, contribution and spending limits are lax. Parties are free to spend unlimited amounts on election campaigns, and only organisations that receive state resources are banned from contributing to political parties. However, there is a 2500 EUR limit on the total amount an individual or organisation can contribute annually.

4.2.4 United Kingdom

The UK parliament is separated into two chambers, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Legislative powers are not split equally between the chambers, but both have significant roles in the consultation process. Both chambers have numerous committees dedicated to investigating public policy issues brought to their attention. The executive, specifically cabinet ministers, will often set the agendas with the help of junior ministers and civil servants with their respective departments. However, the agenda-setting abilities of ministers depend on various factors, including the flexibility in powers granted by the Prime Minister of the time and the proactive nature of the ministers themselves. Think tanks also play a significant role in policy formation and agenda-setting in the UK and will often liaise with departments during the policy formulation process. There are many think tanks dedicated solely to developing policy ideas to key societal problems, such as Policy Studies Institute, Centre for Policy Studies, and National Institute of Economic and Social Research. Ministers will also meet with other stakeholders, including various interest groups, that lobby for certain policies. The discussions during these stages are private and finding records of policy discussions during the agenda-setting phase is uncommon.

Formal public discussion of policy between different stakeholders primarily occurs during House of Commons Select Committee meetings. Select Committees gather stakeholder evidence, debate the proposed policy, and develop reports with their recommendations, including amendment suggestions. The selection of committee chairs and committee members is designed to reflect the party composition of the

current parliament. Most select committee inquiries will consult with stakeholders. Any stakeholder can send a written submission to a select committee, and all written submissions are publicly accessible. Select committee members are responsible for selecting stakeholders to testify orally to the committee. But, like the other country case studies, there are no clear criteria for selection.

Although the House of Lords has limited legislative powers, the chamber still holds significant committee and consultation hearings, which can have a substantial impact on the amendments that get suggested and often eventually accepted into the bill. The House of Lords will also extensively debate any proposed bill with weaker party alignment than seen in the opposite chamber, granting a less partisan-focused discussion (Russell and Sciara 2007). However, most of the consultation process takes place in the House of Commons select committees, which are tasked with gathering stakeholder evidence, debating the proposed policy, and ultimately developing a report with their recommendations, including amendment suggestions. Additional consultation sessions have occurred when legislation has proved particularly unpopular with the public, such as in the case of the Health and Social Care Act 2010. Once the consultation process is concluded, the legislative chambers will continue to debate and amend the policy until its eventual rejection or implementation.

The United Kingdom's public financing system is relatively weak and comes with several provisions. A grant of £2 million a year is distributed to the main political parties for general purposes, but parties will receive a proportion of the grant depending on the number of MPs and the number of votes received at the previous election. Half of the public funds are distributed equally between eligible parties, while the other half is allocated according to each party's proportion of MPs and votes. Furthermore, parties must apply for the grant, clearly stating the ways the funds will be used. Therefore, there is no public financing assistance available for the specific use of campaigning. However, the state provides other subsidies in the form of free political broadcasting for the main parties. Moreover, opposition parties receive additional funds called 'short money', which comes in the form of an annual payment.

There are no restrictions on the types of organisations that can donate aside from foreign interests. But there are strict spending limits for parties that are only permitted to spend a certain amount (£30,000) per constituency contested.

4.2.5 Case selection comparability

The primary purpose of the case selection processes outlined in this chapter was to establish a set of countries with similar key institutional characteristics but differed in terms of political finance regulatory stringency. These key characteristics included democratic standards, economic status, and political system. All four countries were similar across these areas. This similarity ensures these factors are controlled when examining the variance across country cases regarding its political finance regulatory stringency. Therefore importantly, each country was also found to have key differences in their political finance regulatory approach. These similarities and differences are represented in Table 4.4.

This table also includes several other factors relating to committee features that are important to understand each country's committee witness selection process. These features include the procedure to select committee members, the witness selection authority, whether there is a clear criterion for witness selection, and whether the committees allow oral and written submissions from outside witnesses. An analysis of the four countries regarding these committee features demonstrates several similarities. For instance, all the countries allow oral and written evidence. This was important considering these two evidence-giving formats provide the key measure of access used in this thesis. Moreover, none of the countries had a straightforward procedure for selecting witnesses. However, they differ in terms of their committee member selection procedures and witness selection authority. For instance, in Canada, Ireland, and the UK, committee members have the power to select witnesses. However, in Australia, typically government ministers of the corresponding department oversee this task. The implications of these differences will be further unpacked in the discussion of the study results in Chapters 6 and 7.

Table 4.4 Case selection comparability.

	Australia	Canada	Ireland	United Kingdom
Democratic standards				
Representative democracy with free and fair elections	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic status				
OECD country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political system				
Parliamentary or presidential	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Parliamentary**(Semi-presidential)	Parliamentary
Westminster system	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Committee features				
Committee members selection procedure	Majority given to ruling party	Proportional to legislature	Proportional to legislature	Proportional to legislature
Witness selection authority	Government ministers	Committee members	Committee members	Committee members
Clear criteria for witness selection	No	No	No	No
Committees allow oral testimonies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Committees allow written testimonies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political finance features				
Public financing for campaigns	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Unlimited spending	Yes	No	Yes	No
Corporate donations allowed	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Third party regulation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

4.3 Policy area selection

In addition to selecting countries, this thesis also needed to select policy areas for analysis. As the list of possible committee inquiries for a given country was too large to realistically include them all in the study, a select number of policy areas and sub-topics were chosen. Four policy areas and eight sub-topics were deemed sufficient to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis while making the research process manageable. These topics dictated which committee inquiries were chosen for empirical analysis. Narrowing the policy contexts ensured the data collected were a complete account of all committee inquiries related to a specific policy topic. This section discusses the process of shortlisting policy areas and topics.

To select the four policy areas, an assessment of corporate issue salience was conducted. Corporate issue salience examines the level of importance attributed to different topics within corporate spheres. An assessment of the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset identified macro-economic, energy and environmental, health, and social welfare policy areas as providing a broad spectrum of corporate issue salience (Bernhagen 2019). Specific sub-topics were then selected based on corporate issue salience and other necessary practical criteria. To improve comparability, only sub-topics with universal importance were chosen regardless of the country case and with no links to specific socio-political events.

4.3.1 Policy areas

Policy areas and topics were selected based on the level of issue salience to corporate groups. In political literature, issue salience is typically used to describe issues considered the most important to the public (Dennison 2019). This thesis has outlined two hypotheses that predicted trends across policy contexts based on corporate issue salience instead of public issue salience. Corporate issue salience was considered an important factor in understanding the relationship between campaign finance and committee access. This is because corporations are considered to have unique privileges that allow them greater leverage in the dependent relationship between interest groups and political actors. These privileges typically include greater wealth, and subsequently greater lobbying resources, the ability to provide specialist expertise and essential services, and the ability to use their heightened respectability to provide legitimacy to government decisions. Due to the vital role

corporations play in understanding elite advantages in the policy process, it is helpful to analyse a range of policy contexts of varying interest to corporate groups. Therefore, this thesis focused on issue salience from a corporate perspective and selected four broad policy areas that present different levels of issue salience among corporate groups. Two policy areas shown to be of high importance and two policy areas shown to be of minimal importance to corporate groups were selected to provide a useful comparative measure.

Data from the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset (CCLD) was used to select four policy areas based on corporate issue salience (Bernhagen 2019). The CCLD is a large-N comparative dataset of corporate social responsibility activities from 2043 corporations across 43 countries, including the four selected for this thesis. The study sought to assess a corporation's involvement in political affairs and decipher the motivations for engaging in lobbying activity. Part of the study was dedicated to identifying issues important to corporate groups. Researchers used corporate documentation and participant interviews to create a series of dichotomous variables relating to 36 issues. The variables measured whether a company had previously professed an interest in each issue and were coded 'yes' or 'no'. Using the CCLD dataset, descriptive statistical analysis on the 36 variables was conducted to obtain a hierarchy of issues spanning from the most salient to the least salient. Fig. 4.1 displays the results from 75 corporations.

The data shows sharp disparities in the attention corporate groups pay to different issues. Economic and environmental issues were observed to be highly salient to corporate groups. Over half of corporations professed an interest in economic and environmental affairs, including taxation and energy issues. The data also suggests corporate groups are significantly less concerned with public health, domestic social issues, and foreign policy. For instance, only 29.3% of corporations professed an interest in public health. Furthermore, while domestic social issues were not ranked as one clear category in the CCLD data, key issues under this policy umbrella were not considered important to corporate agendas. For example, over 94% of corporate groups did not register an interest in youth affairs, and only 28% professed an interest in home affairs in general. Foreign policy was also shown to have low issue salience among corporate groups but was deemed inappropriate for policy selection.

As this is a comparative study of four countries, foreign policy issues are less likely to be universal across different cases and involve a diverse network of interest groups than domestic issues. Considering this constraint and the results of the CCLD data, the four policy areas selected for analysis were: environmental, macro-economic, health, and social welfare. Environmental and marco-economic policy was chosen as an example of high salience, while health and social welfare policy were chosen as an example of low salience.

Fig. 4.1 Issues important to corporate participants (CCLD).
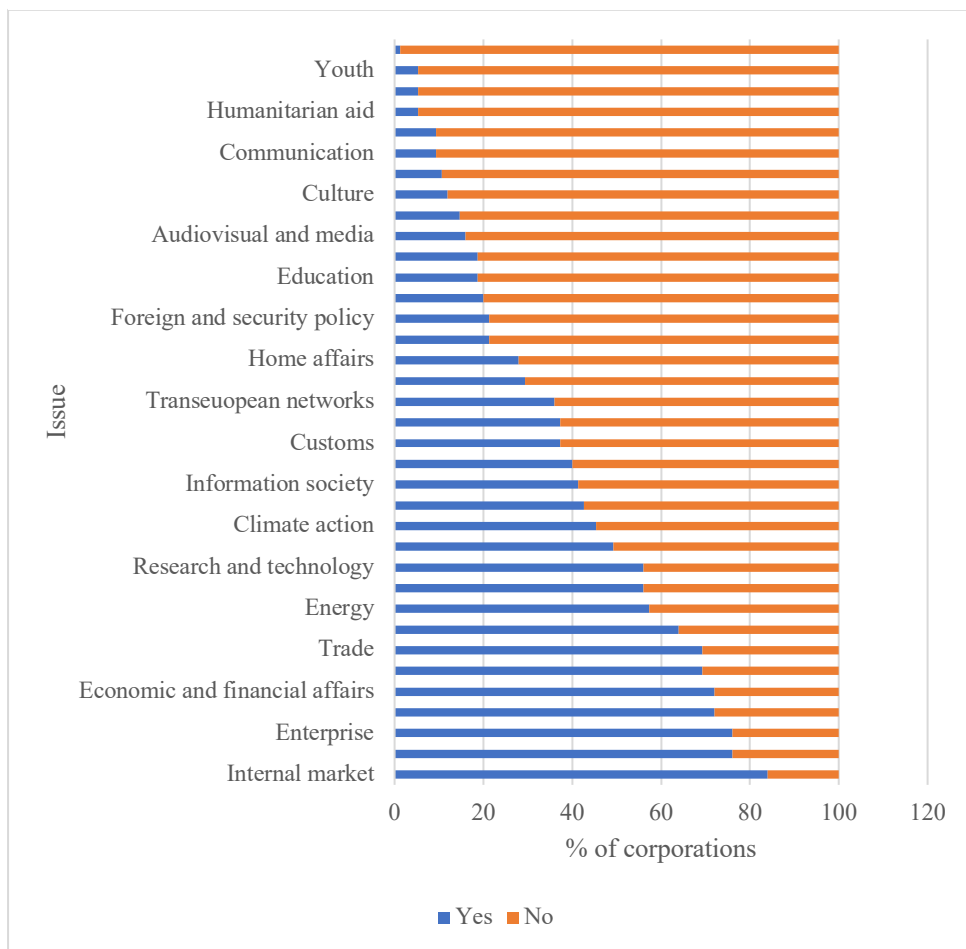
4.3.2 Policy topics

Once the four policy areas were established, eight sub-topics were also selected. These sub-topics were essential in selecting the committee inquiries for analysis. The decision to choose eight policy topics was driven by the desire to obtain a comprehensive dataset that featured an exhaustive list of inquiries relating to a specific topic. As a result, two sub-topics for each policy area were chosen. The

CCLD data assisted in choosing specific policy topics. For instance, researchers examined corporate interest in the youth, taxation, and climate action. For this reason, child welfare, corporate tax, and climate change were established as three suitable policy topics. The remaining policy topics were selected based on the following criteria:

1. It is an active issue in all the selected countries
2. It is likely to involve a diverse range of stakeholders
3. It has been an ongoing issue for over 15 years.

Considering these established criteria, the following eight policy topics were selected: oil mining, climate change, pharmaceutical pricing, alcohol/tobacco regulation, banking regulation, corporate tax, social housing, and child welfare.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the first empirical step needed to conduct a comparative analysis to answer the research question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access stakeholders receive to legislative committees? Country cases were selected with similar key institutional characteristics while displaying variance in their political finance regulatory approaches. The criteria allow the subsequent empirical analysis to effectively compare each country and assess whether regulatory stringency can impact the strength of the associations between contributions and interest group access to committees. Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK provided the essential qualities to effectively compare while meeting all the data suitability requirements.

Furthermore, specific policy areas and topics needed to be chosen to narrow the scope of the study and allow a comprehensive assessment of committee inquiries within a particular topic. But more importantly, these policies needed to present juxtaposing areas of corporate issue salience. After analysing an existing large-N dataset of corporate behaviour, environmental and macro-economic policy was determined to be of high corporate issue salience, whereas health and social welfare were determined to be of low corporate issue salience. Hence, proving the necessary contrast required to test its effects on interest group access to committees. Eight

policy sub-topics were derived from these policy areas. The chosen policy topics were used to select the committee inquiries used in the main empirical analysis.

Once the country and policy topics were finalised, the second part of the empirical process could be implemented. The next chapter explores the methodology used to create an original dataset to test the established hypotheses.

Chapter 5 Investigating the links between political finance contributions and interest group access to legislative committees: Data and methodology

Introduction

This study has been designed to answer the following research question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive in legislative committees? This thesis seeks to examine possible associations between political finance campaign contributions and levels of interest group access to legislative committees across different countries with varying approaches to political finance regulation. The study examines committee inquiries between 2005-2020 in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK to capture different political contexts and policy environments. This is the first comparative study to examine these trends at the agenda-setting and consultation stage. As the current understanding of whether contributions can impact legislative decision-making at this stage is extremely limited, this study conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis to identify trends of political finance influence during the committee witness selection process. By conducting a comparative analysis of four countries and different policy contexts, this study also examines in which contexts elite influence is more likely to occur.

This chapter explains the methodological approach in chronological order. The first section outlines the research design and approach. This section justifies using a quantitative design to identify broad and noteworthy trends across country cases. The second section provides an overview of the datasets constructed for this thesis. The lack of existing data warranted the construction of new and innovative datasets on interest group access and political finance activity. This section outlines the data collection process used to compile two datasets. The first dataset collected data on interest group access to committees, while the second dataset collected data on the political finance activity of identified committee witnesses. The third section justifies the decision to use content analysis to code qualitative documents numerically. This section also unpacks the merits of using manual and automated coding techniques. The fourth section outlines the data collection process in-depth. This section explains the collection of sources, the coding process for each dataset, and merging the two datasets. The fifth section details the operationalisation of each variable in the

dataset. The sixth section outlines the steps taken to ensure maximum data reliability, primarily using inter-coder reliability checks. The seventh section discusses possible data limitations incurred due to the research design. This section focuses on the methodological limitations instead of conceptual limitations, which will be discussed later in the thesis. The final section concludes.

5.1 Research design and approach

This section provides an assessment of the research design and approach used in this thesis. The empirical strategy required careful planning to ensure the approach would best answer the research questions and test the outlined hypotheses. Ultimately, the decision was made to employ a strictly quantitative approach due to the merits of said approach and the notable pitfalls accompanying qualitative strategies in this case.

This thesis relies on a quantitative design to examine the links between political finance contributions and interest group access to legislative committees. There were several reasons why a quantitative approach was deemed the most appropriate method to investigate these trends.

Firstly, the lack of conclusive evidence already observed in the existing literature warranted a broader quantitative approach. As discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, current studies often cannot find conclusive evidence linking political finance contributions and legislative behaviour (Ansolabehere et al. 2003). When examining these links in a new country and policy contexts, it was first essential to identify broader trends to find where the hypotheses can be confidently rejected. This approach helps narrow areas of interest and focus the direction of future research.

Secondly, as quantitative analysis allows this broader examination of patterns, this approach tends to increase the generalisability of its findings. Assessing generalisability is important in understanding how political finance could impact interest group access across different contexts, instead of under specific policy and time contexts. Using a quantitative method, which is time and resource-efficient, has allowed an analysis of a large and comprehensive sample of committee evidence-

givers representing different country, time, and policy contexts. A large sample of committee evidence-givers across different environments ensures a diverse representation of subjects, which is crucial to increasing research generalisability.

But why use a solely quantitative approach? Conducting interviews with committee members and interest group leaders would have been the most appropriate qualitative method to investigate links between contributions and committee access. However, while a triangulation approach typically helps improve causality in social science studies, investigating political finance contributions presents a unique challenge in conducting qualitative research. Firstly, the standard difficulty in recruiting elite participants is exacerbated when examining potential corrupt behaviour. Committee members are unlikely to participate in a study that questions their integrity and behaviour while in positions of power. Even if a study were able to gather enough willing participants, the reliability of participants' responses may be in doubt as participants would be discussing topics that could have negative implications for them despite assurances of anonymity. A quantitative approach avoids these limitations and provides a more objective perspective. Therefore, a quantitative dataset was created to examine associations between the dependent and independent variables using statistical methods. Nevertheless, future research may wish to build upon this study using qualitative research methods. For instance, interviews with former committee members and clerks could be helpful in building further knowledge on the selection process and factors that impact witness selection.

5.2 A new and innovative dataset on interest group access to legislative committees and political finance activity

While there are existing comparative datasets on the agenda-setting and consultation process, notably the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) and the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP), these studies do not record the necessary data required for this project (John et al. 2013; Volkens et al. 2020). The CMP records the policy issues political parties place on the agenda through party manifestos, and the CAP investigates policy-making trends across different deliberative spheres, including legislative committees. However, these studies do not examine committee evidence-giving. Studies that have recorded committee evidence-givers did not feature all the selected countries or include a measurement of political finance activity (Halpin et

al. 2012; Pedersen et al. 2015). Due to a lack of existing data, original datasets were created to record each instance of evidence-giving from a sample of committee inquiries and the political finance activity of participating interest groups. During the data collection process, two datasets were created. Each dataset was created using open-access secondary sources. The first dataset included variables relating to interest group access to legislative committees. These data were primarily collected from committee documents, including committee hearing transcripts, submission documents, and committee reports. The second dataset included variables relating to the political finance activity of committee evidence-givers. Data for the second dataset were collected using existing datasets from the electoral oversight bodies of each country. After the data collection was complete, the datasets were merged to create the primary dataset.

For the first dataset on interest group access, sources were primarily collected from government websites from the four countries chosen using the selected criteria detailed in Chapter 4. The countries were Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. To gather the correct committee inquiry documents, an assessment was conducted on all legislative committee inquiries operating within the four countries between 2005-2020. A period of 15 years allows an examination of committee inquiries across various policy and legislative environments, including times with different governing parties. The initial assessment of committee inquiries over this time identified inquiries that fell under the eight policy topics selected for analysis. The environment and energy topics were oil mining and climate change. The health topics were pharmaceutical pricing and alcohol and tobacco regulation. The macro-economic topics were banking regulation and corporate tax. The social welfare topics were social housing and child welfare. A complete list of the selected inquiries can be found in Appendix IX.

Once the inquiry documents were collected, content analysis was used to code the sources and develop quantifiable variables. Oral and written submission committee documents were coded manually to identify participating interest groups. Each observation in the dataset represented one instance of evidence-giving from an individual. Information on interest groups, such as their organisational structure and motivations, was ascertained through the testimonies themselves or a review of an

interest group's website. A brief search of an interest group's website would often reveal key distinguishing facts about the organisation, such as whether the group was operating as a non-profit or for-profit. Committee inquiry documents were used to collect other data, such as the committee structure and whether the inquiry was bill-related or a general inquiry. Other manually collected data included information surrounding the political context at the time of an inquiry to provide critical control variables, i.e., the government type, the majority party, and the ideology of the majority party. Party ideology codes were primarily taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). Additional codes were generated for parties not included in the CMP (Volkens et al. 2020). After the manual coding process was finalised, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted on a sub-section to ensure a high degree of data reliability (see section 5.6).

For the second dataset on political finance activity, sources were collected from each country's independent electoral oversight body, or in the case of Canada, a dataset compiled by National Post researchers (Australian Electoral Commission 2021; Electoral Commission 2021; National Post 2021; Standards in Public Office Commission 2021). All available contribution data since records began were included. Australian contribution data spanned from 1998-2018. Canadian contribution data spanned from 1993-2018. Ireland contribution data spanned from 2000-2019. United Kingdom contribution data spanned from 2001-2019.

Once the interest group access data were collected, data on the interest groups' campaign finance activity were collected using a bespoke text-matching program developed using Python. Automated data collection was used in this instance to eliminate the potential for human error and to search through large datasets quickly. The Python program used a function called fuzzy matching, a text-matching function that allows for approximate searches. The program searched each interest group name listed in the primary dataset in the relevant country's political finance dataset and returned data on that interest groups' finance activity.

Data on interest group finance activity were linked with the original dataset on access, which used each instance of interest group evidence-giving as the unit of analysis. Overall, the final merged dataset included 9164 observations from 217

committee inquiries. A total of 5543 documents, including committee hearing transcripts and written submissions, were analysed.

To ensure the dataset had a high degree of data reliability, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted on a sub-section of the data. These reliability tests ensured that the manual coding used in this study was both accurate and replicable. However, while significant measures were implemented to ensure the study was robust, some limitations remained. While the decision to use automated coding had significant benefits, the program could not achieve complete keyword match accuracy in every instance. However, steps were taken to ensure errors in the keyword matching process would result in a conservative picture of political finance activity, instead of inputting incorrect contributions into the dataset.

5.3 Content analysis overview

Content analysis was used to construct both datasets used in this study. Content analysis is a research method often utilised in communication research to examine the written and spoken word systematically. Content analysis can be 'used to assign numerical values to categories of content based on valid measurement rules' (Riffe et al. 2019, 20). This study uses content analysis techniques to examine relevant committee inquiry documentation. A coding framework was applied to the documents to create numerical categories that can later be quantitatively analysed. This meant statistical methods could be used to make inferences from the data, which was required to answer the research question and meet the empirical aims adequately.

Content analysis brings several other methodological benefits. Content analysis requires a clear systematic data collection procedure, which maximises replicability and ensures consistent data collection (Bryman 2016). This feature is critical in comparative analysis. Furthermore, a quantitative application of content analysis can also ensure an objectively complete overview of the data. A clear coding framework should remove any researcher subjectivity and bias when coding. Moreover, intercoder reliability checks further bolster data accuracy. These checks are standard practice in content analysis research. Intercoder reliability checks typically involve having two or more researchers code a sample of the data, and the results are

compared to examine the level of agreement between the two coders. A high level of agreement is expected in content analysis to ensure the coding framework can be easily replicated. Constructing a clear coding framework means other researchers can also replicate the study design easily in alternative contexts to create a rich wealth of knowledge in the future. However, quantitative content analysis can be criticised for lacking the necessary methods to account for complexity in exchange for achieving objective interpretations of content (Drisko and Maschi 2015). However, these limitations largely do not apply to this study, as most measurements require simplistic mutually exclusive categories.

This project has utilised both manual and automated content analysis methods. Manual content analysis was used to code the data on interest groups access (dataset 1). In contrast, automated content analysis was used to code the data on political finance activity (dataset 2). Traditional manual methods, whereby the researcher codes documents without computer assistance, were used to collect all measurements except those relating to political finance data. There were several reasons why the evidence-giving data were manually coded. Firstly, the different committee documentation formats across different country cases limited the ability to create a standardised format that could be easily readable through automated means. Secondly, to identify evidence-givers, an automated program without a standardised format would require a keyword search procedure that features a catalogue of all potential evidence-givers. This type of catalogue could not be acquired for practical reasons, so manual coding methods were used instead. Intercoder reliability checks were implemented to limit researcher bias and ensure consistent application of the coding framework (see section 5.6).

However, while manual coding was unavoidable in this case, automated coding was used where possible. Automated coding can benefit the coding process in several ways, including improving the efficiency, accuracy, and reliability of the data collection process (McGetrick et al. 2016). For these reasons, automated coding is often seen as the superior content analysis method (Evans et al. 2007). Therefore, automated coding was used to collect political finance data, as the same practical constraints observed with the evidence-giving data did not apply here. But while automated methods continue to evolve and be more widely applied in social science

research, this method still carries notable limitations. Some researchers believe its ability to limit research bias and improve efficiency and objectivity is overstated. Therefore, it is important not to assume automated methods ensure flawless data collection (Graff and Vossen 2013). However, automated methods are still considered the preferred content analysis method, especially when working with large data samples, such as the one used in this project. The secondary political finance data included millions of individual donation observations, which could have been difficult to navigate using manual methods only.

5.4 Step-by-step data collection process

5.4.1 Dataset 1: Interest group access

Sources

The primary sources used to collect data on interest group access were committee documentation featuring committee hearings and written submission participants. These documents typically were committee hearing transcripts, individual written submissions, or committee reports. Committee documents were gathered from official parliamentary websites or website archives. Once the policy topic selection process was completed, all the committee inquiries between 2005-2020 in each country were examined. Inquiries relating to one of the selected policy topics were added to the inquiries list (Appendix IX). Once all the inquiries were examined, and a final inquiries list was complete, the documentation detailing interest group evidence-giving was downloaded and saved onto a Google Drive.

Each document that provided evidence-giving information, either a committee hearing transcript or individual written submission, was given an individual file name. The file name was formatted accordingly to provide essential information and straightforward identification (Fig. 5.1).

Fig. 5.1 Document file labelling example.

AI_1_3_2013_1

| Country: A = Australia; C = Canada; I = Ireland; UK = United Kingdom | Subject type: I = Inquiry; No letter = Bill-related | Policy topic: 1 = Oil mining 2 = Climate change 3 = Drug prices 4 = Alcohol/tobacco 5 = Banking 6 = Corporate tax 7 = Social housing 8 = Child welfare | Evidence type: 2 = Oral evidence 3 = Written evidence | Date inquiry finished | Document list number |
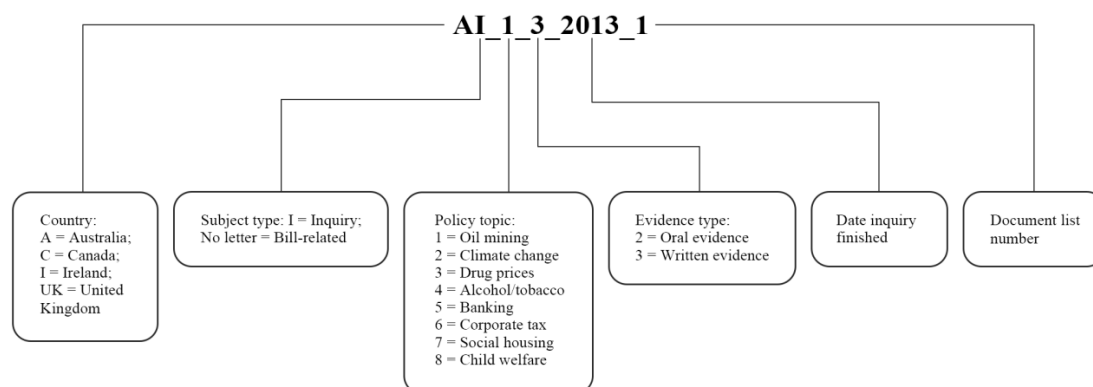
Coding

Once all the committee inquiries had been screened for relevance to the policy topics and each evidence-giving document had been labelled for coding, each document was then manually coded according to an established coding framework. The coding framework was developed to create categorical dependent, independent, and control variables (Appendix II). Interest group-specific data and contextual data on the committees and governance were all collected manually. The coding framework in Appendix II outlines which specific variables were collected qualitatively through committee documents and web searches.

In conducting this qualitative process, each committee document was reviewed individually to extract information on committee participants. Each instance of interest group evidence-giving constituted a separate observation in the dataset. A dichotomous variable was used to record the type of evidence-giving, which represented the primary dependent variable of access. Written evidence-givers were coded 0, and oral evidence-givers were coded 1 to distinguish between the two key levels of access. For each observation, the full name of the interest group participating in the evidence-giving was recorded. The individual's name was only recorded when an evidence-giver represented their views and not on behalf of any affiliation. Names were recorded to avoid certain prefixes and suffixes. This aided the automated coding process that used a text-matching function to search interest groups and individual names in the political finance database. Recording interest

groups in this manner ensured a high level of standardisation. Political finance databases were also screened to remove the same prefixes and suffixes using a find and replace function. These omitted words are listed in Table 5.1.

Once the participating evidence-givers were identified, many additional variables were coded relating to each instance of evidence-giving. The coding framework was used to code each instance of evidence-giving manually (Appendix II). Essential information on the interest group, namely the group's organisational structure and its motivations, were either ascertained from the committee document itself or a web search of the group. If an individual participated as a citizen, motivations were marked as unknown. Contextual data surrounding the committee or governing party were ascertained from committee documents or parliamentary websites.

Once the manual coding was completed, the primary dataset included 9164 instances of evidence-giving. This dataset now included all interest groups and individuals who participated in committee proceedings on the six chosen policy topics.

Table 5.1 Words omitted from interest group names.

General	Mr; Mrs; Ms; Miss; Ltd; Ltd.; Limited; Pty; Inc.; Inc Sir; Lord; &(and); LLP; Assoc, Ass'N Assn. (Association)
Ireland	TD; MEP; Senator
UK	MP; MEP

5.4.2 Dataset 2: Political finance activity

Sources

After the first dataset was completed, data for the second dataset relating to political finance activity needed to be collected. This study sought to find the political finance contribution history for all interest groups participating in the selected inquiries. To find this information, existing datasets on direct political finance contributions were analysed. Each country has an extensive and transparent method of reporting and recording political finance donations. All available direct campaign finance data for each country were collated from reputable sources, either from the country's

electoral institution or in Canada's case, from a research institute (Australian Electoral Commission; Electoral Commission 2021; National Post 2021; Standards in Public Office Commission 2021). The National Post's published dataset was used to source Canadian political finance data instead of Elections Canada, as the dataset provided fully integrated data in an easy-to-read format. All the datasets used each individual contribution as the unit of analysis.

Once the secondary datasets were identified, these data were transferred to four Microsoft Excel files. The files were separated according to country. To save file space, only the necessary data required for the study were transferred. This data included information on the donor's name, the recipient of the donation, the amount of the donation, and the year the donation was given. Each dataset was formatted identically with the same four variables: donor's name (PF_donor), donation date (PF_date), donor recipient (PF_prty), and donation amount (PF_amt). Once the data were inputted into the excel files, donor names were standardised in the same format used in the previous manual data collection process (see Table 5.1).

Coding

Once all the manual coding of the interest group data was completed, the campaign finance variables were coded using a bespoke program constructed using python coding language (see Appendix VIII). The program was designed to search the political finance datasets for all the manually coded interest groups and return data on each group's political finance activity. Table 5.2 lists the specific data on political finance activity collected.

A program was constructed using PyCharm, an integrated development environment that uses Python programming language. The program used an approximate string-matching technique called a fuzzy search, which allows a program to search the text for a particular string that may not be an exact match. Using an approximate string-matching technique was fundamental for this project, as manually inputted interest groups and large datasets gathered from secondary sources likely include many spelling errors and inconsistencies. Using an exact string match would eliminate many relevant matches and would result in inaccurate data. However, using fuzzy

search techniques allows the programmer to account for possible inconsistencies in a string by setting a specific confidence ratio between 0-100, with 100 representing an exact match. Selecting the correct confidence ratio was essential to ensure high data quality. If a confidence ratio was set too high, relevant matches could be omitted. Whereas a confidence ratio set too low would result in irrelevant matches.

Table 5.2 Political finance variables collected through automated methods.

Variable	Variable information	Code
Cont_pr	Variable records whether an interest group contributed to a political party or candidate prior to their committee participation	0 = No contribution 1 = Contribution made prior to participation
Cont_aftr	Variable records whether an interest group contributed to a political party or candidate after their committee participation	0 = No contribution 1 = Contribution made after participation
Amt_pr	Variable records the total amount an interest group contributed to a political party or candidate prior to their committee participation	Numerical
Amt_aftr	Variable records the total amount an interest group contributed to a political party or candidate after their committee participation	Numerical

To select the correct confidence ratio for each country, a series of tests were conducted. A random sample of ten interest group names was selected for confidence ratio tests from the manual data set. At the start, the confidence ratio for each country was set at 75%. Each interest group was inputted into the program, and the number of correct matches, incorrect matches, and missed matches was recorded. A manual search for the interest group name was then conducted, and the correct number of matches was recorded. Following an analysis of the data, the confidence ratio was

amended (+-5%) as required. The test was then repeated until each interest group search a high level of correct matches (>90%).

Confidence ratio differences were dependant on various factors, such as the number of individuals in the dataset, how accurate the data were initially recorded, and the total number of donations. Therefore, it was necessary to assess each country's confidence ratios individually and to have different confidence ratios depending on whether the search term is an organisation or an individual. Once a confidence ratio was set, another sample of interest groups was tested to ensure the set confidence ratios returned accurate results. Due to the standardisation process used earlier in the data collection process, a high confidence ratio of 90 was sufficient in most cases (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Fuzzy search confidence ratios.

Country	Confidence ratio (Organisations)	Confidence ratio (Individuals)
Australia	95	90
Canada	90	90
Ireland	90	90
United Kingdom	90	90

Once the confidence ratios were set, the program was created to search each interest group name in the relevant country political finance dataset and return data on the four critical political finance variables (Table 5.2). The four output variables were appended to the evidence-giving dataset to create a merged dataset. This merged dataset included all the interest group evidence-giving data and information on each group's political finance activity.

In addition to generating political finance variables for the main dataset, a secondary dataset was created that collected individual contribution data for all interest groups found to have contributed to a political party. In this dataset, the unit of analysis was each contribution. This secondary dataset allowed the researcher to calculate the total amount contributed by evidence-givers, identify the exact recipients of each

donation, and assess whether donations were given to a party within government at the time of the donation (see Appendix III for complete variable list). Obtaining this additional information was crucial to understanding the motivations of interest groups when donating to political parties. This was achieved in two ways.

Firstly, by recording complete data on donation recipients, this study can assess whether interest groups will typically donate to one specific political party or multiple parties that fall on different sides of the ideological spectrum. One primary justification for allowing unlimited contributions to political parties is the implication that interest groups are simply using their free speech to voice a preference for a particular ideology or candidate (*Citizens United vs FEC* 2010). If this assumption is valid, one would expect interest groups to consistently donate to one political party that is most aligned with their political preferences. For example, business groups would likely only donate to pro-business, often right-leaning parties. However, if these groups donate to numerous political parties with different ideological preferences, the justification that these contribution decisions are purely ideological is weakened significantly.

Secondly, creating a variable to assess whether the donation recipient was in political power when the donation was made allowed an additional assessment of motivation. Again, following arguments that contributions are a means of free speech of political preferences, one would not expect contribution patterns to differ depending on whether the political party was currently in political power or not (*Citizens United vs FEC* 2010). Primarily donating to political parties in power, even if these parties are different ideologically, suggests donors are motivated to affect those in power. These additional indicators of motivation are not conclusive, and any analysis of these data must be discussed tentatively. However, these are essential indicators considering the extreme difficulty in obtaining data on contribution motivations using quantitative research methods. But while this study was unable to directly ascertain motivations for donations or motivations for granting different levels of access to certain groups, this study attempts to gain some insights into this political phenomenon through carefully designed quantitative research.

5.4.3 Final merged dataset

Once the interest group data were combined with the data on political finance activity, a final merged dataset was created to include all the variables listed in Appendix II. This dataset was then ready to test the outlined hypotheses using statistical methods, as seen in Chapter 6 and 7. The final dataset included 9164 observations of evidence-giving across the four countries.

A secondary dataset featuring data on individual contributions from participating interest groups was also kept for further analysis. This political finance dataset was not used to test core hypotheses but to provide further contextual information about participating interest groups' political finance activity. The political finance dataset included 17,247 contributions from interest groups participating in committee inquiries across the four countries.

5.5 Variable operationalisation

Key concepts needed to be translated into quantitative measures to meet the empirical aims and answer the proposed research questions. The process of operationalising variables required clear definitions for each concept. Chapter 3 detailed the key definitions used in the study for the following concepts: access, interest group, political finance contributions. Operational definitions are needed to empirical testing the following hypotheses that were outlined in Chapter 3:

H1: Interest groups that contribute to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees.

H2: Interest groups that donate to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees in countries with lower levels of political finance regulatory stringency.

H3: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to achieve invited access to legislative committees than non-corporate and issue-motivated groups.

H4: Corporate and economically motivated groups are more likely to be granted invited access to legislative committees in policy areas with high corporate issue salience.

H5: Corporate and economically motivated interest groups are more likely to contribute to political parties.

This section will outline all the variables measured in this study and will specifically explain and justify the decisions to include specific categories to maximise the validity of measurement where possible. All the variable names and descriptions are listed in the coding framework in Appendix II. Appendix II has a colour-coded key, which details the data source used to code each variable.

5.5.1 Dependent variable: Access

The dependent variable measures levels of access to legislative committee inquiries. It is a dichotomous variable with the following two categories: 1) written evidence-giving; 2) oral evidence giving. In the dataset, this variable was named *Ev_type* (Appendix II). Instances of evidence-giving were coded 0 if it was written submission and 1 if it was an oral testimony. Written evidence-giving is an open-access format, whereby any individual or organisation that wishes to comment on the committee inquiry can do so through a written submission. In contrast, oral evidence-giving is a closed access format whereby individuals or organisations must be specifically selected to participate in oral hearings. All the countries selected for analysis allow for each format in their respective legislative committee proceedings. For each instance of evidence-giving, the type of evidence-giving was recorded to distinguish between these two levels of access. Measuring the concept of access to distinguish between open and invited access formats was essential to capture the definition of access used in this study, which understands access through an actor's ability to pass political gate-keeping procedures successfully.

5.5.2 Independent variables: Political finance level

1) Contribution status before participation

2) Contribution status after participation

Two categorical variables were constructed to measure whether an evidence-giver had donated to a political party before or after their committee inquiry participation. These variables were named *Cont_pr* and *Cont_aft* (Appendix II). Distinguishing between these variables was essential to bolster any associations regarding the impact of contributions on access, as the independent variable must predate the outcome if a relationship exists. Both variables were dichotomous. Therefore, evidence-givers could only be categorised as 'yes' or 'no' as to whether the evidence-giver had contributed before/after their participation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, contributions were only logged if they were direct contributions to a political party meaning third-party contributions were not recorded. This decision was made to ensure maximum consistency in the data collection procedure for each country, as some countries did not have reliable or complete third-party contribution data. These variables were used to test H1, H2, and H5 that require data on interest group political finance activity.

3) Contributions to the governing party

To further examine the links between contributions and level of access, an additional contribution categorical variable was recorded to whether an evidence giver had ever donated directly to the party governing at the time of their participation. This variable was named *Cont_prty* (Appendix II). The governing party is likely to have the most influence over committee proceedings and witness selection. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between general contributions to any party and those that donated specifically to the governing party to bolster any association between the primary independent and dependent variables. This variable had three categories: yes, no, and not applicable. Evidence-givers were marked in the 'not applicable' category if they had never donated to a political party. This variable was used to test H1, H2, and H5 that require data on interest group political finance activity.

5.5.3 Independent variables: Interest group level

1) Interest group name

The name of the evidence-giver, either an interest group or individual, was recorded in full using a standardised formatting procedure (Table 5.1). In the dataset, this string variable was recorded as *IG_Name.* This variable was not used for statistical analyses but was crucial to the automated data collection process. Using a standard format for entering evidence-giver names was essential for implementing an efficient keyword search program.

2) Interest group organisation structure type

Interest groups have been defined as 'an association of individuals or organisations or a public or private institution that, based on one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favour' (Thomas 2004, 4). But within the broad umbrella of interest groups are distinct classifications based on a group's organisational structure. It is common in research to categorise interest group types using these organisational structures, and this study will also use this classification method. The classification accounts for different types of associations but also distinguishes between individual evidence-givers. One does not need to be affiliated with a specific organisation to participate in committee inquiries, through open or closed access. The measurement of interest group type identifies individuals and distinguishes between regular citizens and experts. This is a fundamental distinction, as an important factor in witness selection is expected to be expertise to ensure optimal information exchange between witnesses and committee members. Therefore, the variable measuring interest group organisation structure includes the following categories: business, governmental, non-profit, trade association, expert, citizen, professional association, trade union, research institute/university. This categorical variable will also account for anonymous written submissions and organisations that do not fit into the established categories. This variable is named *IG_type* in the dataset, and the codes for each of the organisational types can be found in Appendix A. This variable was used to test H3, H4, and H5 requiring data on the type of organisational structure.

3) Interest group motivation

While this study does not record the policy preferences of evidence-givers, a broad understanding of a group's intentions was obtained by measuring an interest group's overarching motivations. This variable was primarily used to differentiate between economically motivated and issue motivated groups. While this variable cannot provide information relating to the financial resources of a given evidence-giver, it does provide an important means of identifying groups that are more likely to participate in committee inquiries to bolster their self-interest. Therefore, this categorical variable will classify evidence-givers using the following motivations: economic/self-interested, issue, governmental, and unknown. This variable was named *IG_mov.* Evidence-givers were categorised as having an economic or self-interest motivation if the group was a for-profit organisation, represented a for-profit industry, or represented employee groups. Evidence-givers were categorised as having an issue-based motivation if the group advocated for a specific cause or external group of people or was an independent researcher or research organisation. Governmental groups received a separate classification, and an additional category was provided for evidence-givers where a clear broad motivation was not ascertainable. While the motivations of most of the organisations were easily identified, certain evidence-giver motivations could not be confidently established, especially in the case of regular citizens. This variable was used to test H3, H4, and H5 that require data on interest group motivations.

5.5.4 Context variables

1) Country

This thesis examines committee proceedings in the following four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. This variable is named *Cntry_code,* and the codes for each country are listed in Appendix II. Distinguishing between these countries allows one to assess different determinants of access within each country. The outlined hypotheses expect significantly different levels of association between evidence-givers' campaign contribution status and levels depending on the country due to the country's approach to campaign finance regulation. Therefore, each instance of evidence-giving will have a corresponding code to represent the country where the committee proceeding took place. This is important as one organisation could have provided evidence to committee

proceedings in multiple countries. This variable was used to test H2 that sought to examine variance across country cases.

2) Policy area

3) Policy topic

In addition to examining the association between the dependent and independent through a comparative lens based on the country, this thesis will also examine variation across different policy contexts. Policy area and policy topics codes were listed under the variable names *Pol_area* and *Pol_topic,* respectively. To compare across different policy contexts, four broad policy areas (environment and energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare) and six specific policy topics (oil mining, climate change, pharmaceutical pricing, alcohol and tobacco regulation, banking regulation, corporate tax, social housing, and child welfare) were chosen for analysis. The corresponding codes for each area and topic are listed in Appendix II. All committee inquiries relating to the six policy topics conducted between 2005-2020 that included witness evidence-giving were selected for analysis. For each instance of evidence-giving, the policy area and policy topic of the corresponding committee inquiry was recorded. These variables were used to test H4 that sought to examine variance across policy areas with different levels of corporate issue salience.

4) Date

The date of each instance of evidence giving was recorded under the variable name *Date.* This variable was crucial in conducting the automated coding process and collecting the necessary political finance data.

5.5.5 Control variables

1) Government type

This study will measure the government type at the time of the committee proceeding to control for a key institutional factor. In the dataset, this variable was named *Gov_type.* Existing literature has argued that the government type impacts the witness selection frequencies in parliamentary committees, whereby majority governments may be more confident to organise committee hearings with witnesses for controversial bills (Chaqués-Bonafont and Márquez 2016). The government types

have been categorised as single-party majorities, single-party minorities, and multi-party coalition governments.

2) Governing majority party

3) Governing majority ideology

The party of the governing majority and the ideology of this party was recorded to control for different party types. These variables were named *Gov_maj* and *Gov_ideo,* respectively. This is an important control variable, as the governing party's ideology could impact the type of interest groups typically chosen in the witness selection process. For instance, pro-business conservative parties could be expected to select more business and trade association groups as oral witnesses than left-leaning groups. Therefore, this study categorised the party and ideology of the governing party using a legislative codes list listed in Appendix D. The party and ideology codes were generated with the help of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens 2020). The CMP has established codes to represent different ideologies (e.g., green, far left, centre, right, far-right) and has assigned these codes to most of the major political parties. As seen in the legislative codes list, these codes were used to assign each party an ideology code (Appendix IV). If the government type was a coalition government, the party with the largest majority in the legislature was recorded.

4) Committee type

Committee type is a dichotomous variable that measures whether a committee inquiry is a single-chamber or joint chamber session. The variable is named *Cmmt_type.* While the impact of this variable on witness selection is unclear in the current literature, an existing study observed that joint chamber sessions often have a greater diversity of witnesses (Berry and Kippin 2014).

5) Subject type

Subject type is a dichotomous variable that measures whether an instance of evidence-giver is from a bill-related inquiry or a more general inquiry. The variable is named *Sub_type.* Legislative committees will conduct inquiries to examine prospective legislation, but inquiries can also be a procedure for examining a policy problem that does not yet have a clear solution on a piece of legislation attached to it.

Previous studies on interest group access have distinguished between bill-related inquiries and general inquiries to examine whether the distribution of group types differs depending on the subject type (Halpin et al. 2012). This study will control for subject type as a possible influencing factor, as bill-related inquiries could be more likely to attract elite groups due to the higher possibility for real policy impact depending on the outcome of the committee inquiry.

<u>5.6 Data reliability</u>

To validate the reliability of the coding framework and integrity of the manually collected data, a second coder blind-coded a subsection of the total dataset. In content analysis, conducting adequate inter-coder reliability checks is essential to ensure the data collected are an accurate measurement of each variable, which gives further validity to the overall data analysis. A high level of agreement between the primary and secondary coder indicates that the coding frameworks can be easily interpreted, and that minimal individual researcher bias has affected the coding process.

It is important to note that every content analysis study will approach these checks differently depending on the resource, time, and data constraints. For instance, in particular studies, it would be appropriate to use three or more coders on different data sections to handle large-N data. This study dealt with a manageable data size but was limited by resources and time constraints, which meant it was appropriate to employ a second researcher to re-code a sample of the overall dataset. The inter-coder reliability process implemented in this study rigorously followed accepted procedures regarding coder training, coding samples, and measurement agreement outlined in the social science method literature (Krippendorff 2009; Lombard et al. 2002; McHugh 2012).

5.6.1 Coding sample

Standard inter-coder reliability procedures dictate that at least 10% of the overall dataset should be selected for the coding sample (Lombard et al. 2002). As the overall data set has 9164 observations, at least 886 observations needed to be selected. To ensure at least 886 observations and a suitable representation of each

country and policy area were sampled, two committee inquiries for each policy area in each country were randomly selected using a computer generator (Appendix VI). Consequently, 32 inquiries were selected that included 968 observations (~10% of the overall data), which provided a sufficient sample for inter-coder analysis.

5.6.2 Coder recruitment and training

The replicability of the coding framework is fundamental in ensuring multiple researchers can collect data accurately. While a layperson should technically be able to interpret the coding framework, an experienced researcher was chosen due to the individual's familiarity with the research process, which saved significant time on general training. Once the second coder was recruited, they were given a clear coding instruction sheet that included comprehensive information of the document types to be coded, how to interpret document file names, each variable and the relevant assigned codes, instructions on how to code ambiguous cases, and examples to visually demonstrate the process (Appendix VII).

The primary and secondary coders had several meetings before the reliability coding process to ensure the second coder understood the procedures thoroughly. As this was a blind coding process, the second coder did not have access to the main dataset. The documents to be coded were placed on a secure Google Shared Drive and in relevant folders for easy and safe access. An Excel spreadsheet was created for the second coder to input the data. The data collection took five days, after which an initial meeting was conducted to discuss any difficulties. The second coder was unsure how to code a small number of interest groups, which she categorised as 'other'. This problem was resolved between the two coders, and definitive codes were chosen and updated.

5.6.3 Analysis method

After the second coder completed the data collection process, the primary and secondary coder data were formatted and inputted into statistical software. Each variable pair was then analysed to determine the levels of agreement using Cohen's *kappa* statistical method. Cohen's *kappa (k)*, created by statistician John Cohen, is a popular method for calculating measurement agreement between two coders. The

method is applied to two variables, one variable is collected by the primary coder and the other is collected by the secondary coder. The output will be a value between -1 to +1, whereby 1 represents a complete agreement between both coders (McHugh, 2012).

The equation for k is as follows (Watson and Petrie 2010):

$$K = \frac{po - pc}{1 - pc}$$

Whereby *po* is the observed agreement and *pc is the chance agreement*. The standard interpretation of k results is displayed in Table 5.4 (Watson and Petrie 2010).

Table 5.4 Cohen's *Kappa* level of agreement standards.

Level of agreement	
Poor agreement	$k < 0.00$
Slight agreement	$0.00 \leq k \leq 0.20$
Fair agreement	$0.21 \leq k \leq 0.40$
Moderate agreement	$0.41 \leq k \leq 0.60$
Substantial agreement	$0.61 \leq k \leq 0.80$
Almost perfect agreement	$k > 0.80$

A coefficient of 0.80 or more is often acceptable in most social science studies (Lombard et al. 2002). This measurement of inter-coder reliability was deemed suitable, as it continues to be a well-used technique in the field and is appropriate to use in a study with only two coders. This method was applied to one variable pair in turn, whereby each pair contains the data coded by the primary and secondary coder. Each variable pair was tested individually to allow for separate measurements of agreement. This was important as certain variables were much more likely to encounter discrepancies than others. For example, the country code variable was objective and unlikely to feature discrepancies aside from human error, whereby the interest group type and interest group motivation variables were more subjective and

more likely to feature actual discrepancies. However, all the variables had a low likelihood for significant inconsistencies.

5.6.4 Measurement of agreement results

The measurement of agreement results indicates high levels of agreement across all variables. With certain variables (country code and evidence type) achieving perfect agreement. As expected, the interest group-specific variables did garner a lower, albeit still almost perfect, level of agreement (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Measurement of agreement results.

Variable	Cohen's *Kappa*
Country code	1.000**
Policy area	0.961**
Policy topic	0.824**
Subject type	0.977**
Committee type	0.912**
Evidence type	1.000**
Interest group type	0.850**
Interest group motivation	0.856**
** $p < 0.0005$	

Based on the *k* results achieved for each variable, one can have a high level of confidence in the reliability of the data and replicability of the coding framework for future research projects.

5.7 Data limitations

This project faced certain data limitations that were important to consider when conducting the data analysis and subsequent interpretations of the data. Firstly, the data-matching process may have yielded inaccurate results due to the size and lack of uniformity in the secondary political finance datasets. Although the standardisation process and thorough confidence ratio testing ensured highly reliable results, complete accuracy could not be guaranteed. For instance, Canada's political finance reporting database was particularly inconsistent in reporting donor names and contained over 3.5 million individual donations. However, the strategies implemented in this process were designed to maximise reliability by implementing

high confidence ratios, ensuring that it would be more likely that relevant data would have been omitted from the final dataset rather than there be irrelevant data included unintentionally. In other words, the final data would be a more conservative representation of the raw political finance data rather than an exaggeration of the political finance landscape.

Secondly, the decision to report interest group organisation names rather than the individual employees or founders of the organisation that participated in the committee process may have omitted relevant political finance contributions submitted by individuals on behalf of an organisation. However, the reporting approach was deemed necessary as this thesis is focused primarily on interest groups, and it would be impossible to determine whether an individual's donation was genuinely motivated by their affiliated organisation's interests. Nevertheless, this provides another reason why the data collected are likely to underestimate the potential importance of campaign finance contributions.

Thirdly, this thesis uses a binary measure to distinguish between contributing evidence-givers and non-contributing evidence-givers. This was done to ensure there was consistency across country cases, as donation patterns and sizes may differ depending on the country. For example, what counts as a "large donation" is subjective and may be different in Australia than in Ireland. But it is important to note that by using a binary measure of donating, this study accounts for all donors regardless of the amount an individual donor has donated. As such, the data analysis cannot comment on the impact of donation size on access outcomes.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodological process used to collect the data needed to answer the primary research question: Can political finance contributions impact the level of access interest groups receive in legislative committees? Due to a lack of existing data, two original datasets were constructed to collect the necessary data on committee witnesses and the political finance activity of these witnesses. The first dataset was constructed using manual content analysis techniques to code data on committee witnesses. The second dataset was constructed using automated content

analysis techniques to code each witness' political finance activity. Both datasets were merged to create one primary dataset suitable for statistical analysis.

Using content analysis to construct the datasets allowed the development of quantifiable codes that could be statistically analysed. The decision to use a solely quantitative approach to answering the primary research question was due to several factors, including the need to undertake a broad assessment of the potential association between political finance activity and committee access due to the lack of existing data and knowledge. To identify any notable cases, it was deemed best to conduct a broad but comprehensive quantitative assessment of committee witnesses and their political finance activity across different country and policy contexts. This approach also presented an opportunity to produce more generalisable results.

This chapter outlined the variable operationalisation that was created to ensure all key concepts were measured effectively. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that the data collected have undergone robust checks to ensure high levels of data reliability. The accuracy of the manual coding was verified using inter-coder reliability checks. These checks also confirmed that the coding framework could be easily replicated in future research. The automated coding process was also shown to have been designed to maximise data reliability using data standardisation methods and fuzzy text-matching functions. These carefully designed processes provide high confidence in the validity and accuracy of the datasets.

The next chapter details the results of the statistical analyses conducted on the two original datasets. The chapter reiterates the empirical aims of the thesis and examines each of the outlined hypotheses to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role contributions and interest group factors have on committee access across different country and policy contexts.

Chapter 6 Understanding the impact of contributions on levels of access to legislative committees: Data analysis and discussion

Introduction

Chapter 5 outlined the methodological processes used to collect the necessary data on interest group evidence-giving in legislative committees and the political finance activity of participating groups. It detailed the data collection process used to create two separate datasets. The first dataset on interest group access recorded data on all interest group evidence-giving across the selected committee inquiries. The second dataset recorded data on all individual donations made by interest groups that participated in the committees. These datasets were merged to create an overarching dataset that could be used to test several hypotheses. Chapter 3 outlined various hypotheses that will be tested. These hypotheses were split between the political finance and interest group levels. The political finance level hypotheses used political finance factors to predict interest group access outcomes across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation.

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis relating to the political finance level hypotheses. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyse the associations between political finance contributions and levels of interest group access. Several logistic regression models were constructed to assess these associations across different country-specific data. Overall, the findings indicate a link between political finance contributions and privileged access to legislative committees. However, the strength of these findings varied significantly depending on the country case. For instance, no link was found across the Ireland data. But notably, Ireland has some of the most robust political finance regulations of the selected countries. In comparison, Australian data presented the strongest link between contributions and access. As such, this trend followed the hypothesis that interest groups that donate to political parties are more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees in countries with lower levels of political finance regulatory stringency.

This chapter also provides an analysis of the contribution patterns of participating interest groups. Additional information on the activities of contributing interest groups was recorded, including whether a contribution was given to the governing party. Additional information was collected to ascertain whether the contributions from interest groups are likely to be investment motivated or ideologically motivated. This information helps provide a better understanding of the dependence relationship mechanism discussed in Chapter 3. If a dependent relationship exists between parties and donors whereby contributions are exchanged for political favours, donations would be motivated by investment purposes rather than purely ideological. As such, one would expect contributing interest groups to give to parties in political power regardless of their ideological leanings. The results suggest that contributions from corporate groups are likely to have been given for investment purposes rather than to express an ideological preference.

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings. Most prominently, the findings support the existence of a dependent relationship between donors and politicians within the committee stage. This justifies a greater focus on the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process when examining political finance influence. Moreover, the mixed results observed across countries with different levels of regulatory stringency validate the need for more comparative research into political finance influence.

This chapter is structured into five sections. The first section provides an overview of the data using descriptive analysis statistics. These statistics provide crucial context surrounding the distribution of the data collected and help identify possible trends and associations requiring further exploration. The second section presents the results of the descriptive statistics created to explore the political finance activity of committee participants. The third section presents the results of the regression analysis. This section displays the regression models used to test the two hypotheses related to the political finance level. The fourth section includes a discussion of the findings and how they align with our existing knowledge of political finance influence and the final section concludes.

6.1 Data overview

This section provides an overview of the data collected on interest group evidence-giving to legislative committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. A series of descriptive statistical tests were conducted to indicate the evidence-giving patterns in each country. These tests showed that evidence-giving patterns could differ depending on the country or the policy area discussed during an inquiry.

A total of 9163 observations of evidence-giving were recorded across the four countries. For each country case, data were collected on all committee inquiries relating to six policy topics. As such, the dataset presents an extensive account of the available committee data for each country on the chosen topics. The composition of the total observations per country case is as follows: Australia (41.8%), Canada (20.9%), Ireland (8.3%), and the UK (29.0%) (Table 6.1). The difference in observation rates between each country was not due to a significant difference in the number of inquiries assessed. Instead, it was due to the number of stakeholders typically consulted during committee inquiries (Table 6.1). For instance, a large proportion of the evidence-giving observations were from Australian inquiries, whereas Ireland had comparatively very few evidence-giving observations. Data on the type of evidence-giving format show Australia had a much higher percentage of open-access observations than Ireland (Fig. 6.4). This suggests Australian committees draw significantly more engagement from outside groups.

Table 6.1 Total inquiries and evidence-giving observations per country.

	Inquiries	Evidence-giving observations
Australia	46 (21.2%)	3829 (41.8%)
Canada	57 (26.3%)	1916 (20.9%)
Ireland	54 (24.9%)	758 (8.3%)
UK	60 (27.6%)	2660 (29.0%)
	217 (100.0%)	**9163 (100.0%)**

This study examined inquiries relating to six specific policy topics under four broad policy areas: environment and energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare. The results show varying levels of interest group engagement across different policy areas depending on the country. Across all countries and among the four policy areas

environment and energy inquiries garnered the highest number of evidence-giving observations but were closely followed by social welfare inquiries (Fig. 6.1). Similarly, among the six policy topics, climate change and child welfare inquiries had the highest rates of evidence-giving, while pharmaceutical pricing and corporate tax inquiries had the lowest rates of evidence-giving (Fig. 6.2).

The frequency of evidence-giving within each policy area and topic differed depending on the country context despite each country holding a similar number of inquiries overall (Table 6.1). While Australian instances of evidence-giving were distributed evenly across each policy area, Canada had notably higher instances of evidence-giving within environment and energy committee inquiries. In comparison, Ireland and the UK had the highest evidence-giving within social welfare inquiries (Fig. 6.3).

Fig. 6.1 Evidence-giving observations across committee inquiries discussing environment/energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare issues.
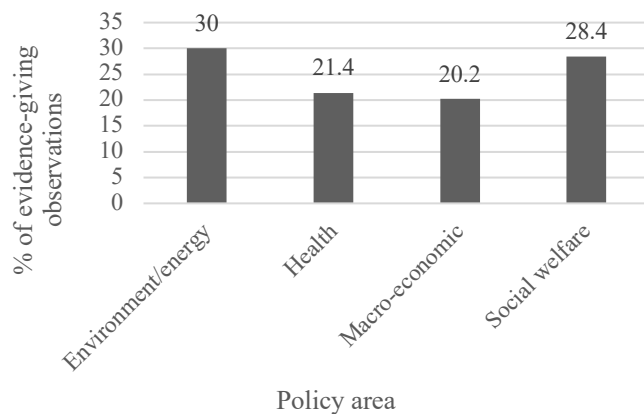
The primary dependent variable in this study was access. Access was measured by distinguishing between open access/written evidence-giving and closed access/oral evidence-giving. Interest groups must be selected explicitly by legislators to participate in oral evidence-giving. In contrast, any interest group that wishes to engage in the committee process can do so through a written submission. Therefore, recognising the format of the evidence-giving establishes a distinction between privileged and non-privileged access.

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Fig. 6.2 Evidence-giving observations across committee inquiries discussing oil mining, climate change, pharmaceutical pricing, alcohol/tobacco regulation, banking regulation, corporate tax, social housing, and child welfare.
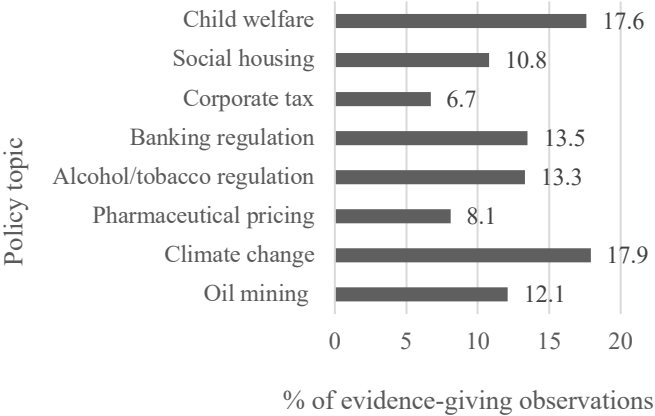
Fig. 6.3 Evidence-giving observations across committee inquiries discussing environment/energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare issues within Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.
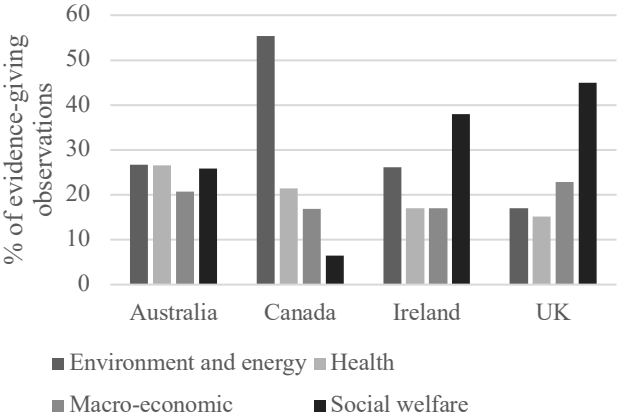
Among the 9163 observations of evidence-giving, there were a similar number of written and oral evidence-giving observations. However, the frequency of written and oral submissions differed depending on the policy area. For instance, environment and energy inquiries featured the highest rate of oral evidence-giving (37.9%), while health policy featured the lowest rate of oral-evidence giving (18.0%) (Table 6.2). This is somewhat surprising, considering health policymaking would likely require significant input from experts and is a highly salient issue among the

public (YouGov 2021). Social welfare inquiries featured the highest rate of written evidence-giving (33.8%), and macro-economic inquiries featured the lowest rate of written evidence-giving (17.7%) (Table 6.2). The frequency of open and closed access observations also differed depending on the country context, which indicates that some countries had more exclusive closed-access spaces than others. For instance, in the case of Canada and Ireland, most observations were oral evidence-giving, whereas the opposite was seen in Australia and the UK (Fig. 6.4).

Table 6.2 Written and oral evidence-giving across committee inquiries discussing environment/energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare issues.

	Written evidence-giving observations (%)	Oral evidence-giving observations (%)
Environment/energy	23.0	37.9
Health	24.5	18.0
Macro-economic	17.7	21.9
Social welfare	33.8	22.2
	100.0	**100.0**

Fig. 6.4 Evidence-giving observations across Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.
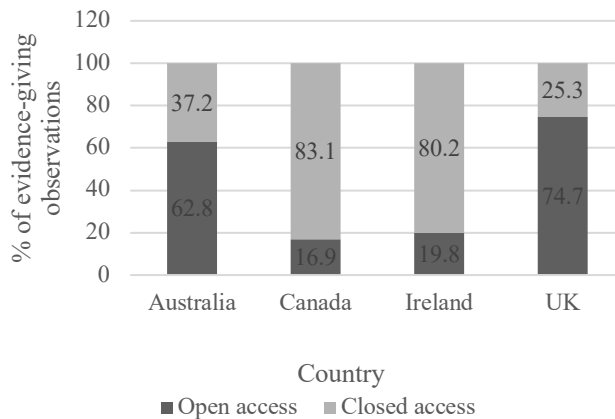
6.2 Contribution patterns

This thesis explored the political finance activity of interest groups that participated in committee inquiries across Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. This section provides a descriptive overview of the contribution patterns identified in the data. The analysis shows that most interest groups that participate in legislative committees do not contribute to political parties. However, among those interest

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groups that do contribute, there is evidence to support the assumption that contributions are given with the hope of securing political favours.

The results show that most donors are corporate groups who gave their donations before participating in the committee process. Importantly, it was found that a high proportion of corporate donations were given to the governing party regardless of their ideological position. In contrast, the opposite trend was observed among issue-based groups. This suggests economically motivated groups often target their donations to those in political power, potentially to expand their political influence. The idea that most donations are likely to be investment-motivated is noteworthy considering committees discussing environmental issues, precisely climate change policy, were more likely to receive evidence from interest groups that have contributed to a political party. The results suggest that environmental committees could be primarily targeted by profit-motivated groups seeking to obtain influence through financial means.

This section provides an assessment of the political finance activity of committee participants using data from the merged dataset. It also analyses individual donation data from committee participants using the secondary political finance dataset on individual contribution activity.

6.2.1 Political finance activity of committee participants

Data were collected to identify whether an interest group that had participated in committee inquiries had ever donated to a political party. Overall, this study found that the total number of contributing interest groups was relatively small. Only 12.5% of observations showed a corresponding contribution, while 87.5% did not. However, the data show that the number of contributing interest groups varied significantly depending on the country. For example, Australian and Canadian data constituted over 80% of the total contribution observations (Table 6.3). This indicates that political finance contributions are not critical in the witness selection process, particularly in Ireland and the UK. However, this does not mean that contributions cannot provide some level of advantage.

Table 6.3 Interest group contributions to political parties in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.

	Did not contribute to political parties (%)	Contributed to political parties (%)
Australia	40.8	48.4
Canada	17.8	41.9
Ireland	9.2	2.1
UK	32.1	7.6
	100.0	**100.0**

To understand political finance influence, it was essential to establish the timeframe for donations, as only contributions given before an interest group participated in a legislative committee can be associated with access advantages. The results showed that many contributions came before an interest group participated in a committee inquiry. Data showed that among contributing groups, the majority (64.5%) had given to a political party before they participated in a committee inquiry. Only 7.6% of interest groups had contributed after their participation, but 27.9% had contributed both before and after their participation in the committee (Fig. 6.5).

In addition to analysing more general contribution patterns, this study also assessed whether the recipient of these donations was governing at the time of the participation. This is important in supporting possible associations between political contributions and access to legislative committees. Results among contributing groups showed that the majority (73.3%) had donated to the governing party at the time of their participation (Fig. 6.6). This is noteworthy as groups looking to secure political advantages would be more likely to target those in political power. As such, these results suggest that participating interest groups are motivated to donate for investment purposes rather than for purely ideological reasons.

Fig. 6.5 Donation timeframes for interest groups that contributed to political parties.
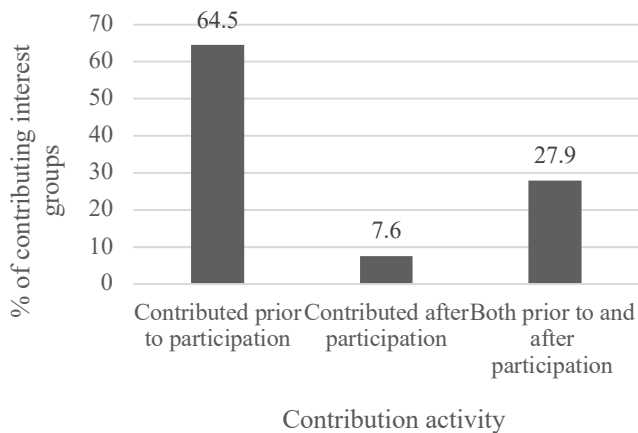
Fig. 6.6 Interest groups contributions to the governing party at the time of their committee participation.
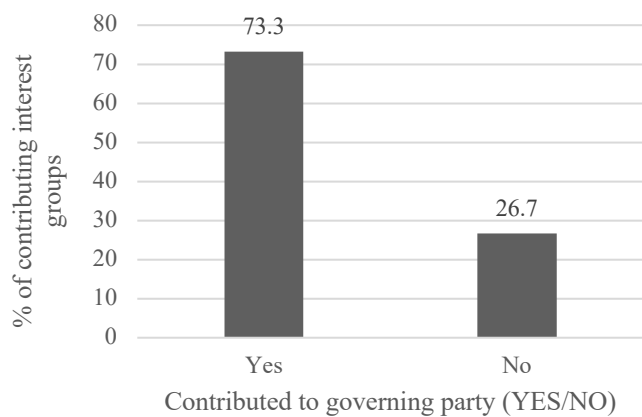
Across all country cases, the data showed that contributing interest groups were typically corporate groups. Among all the contributing interest groups that gave evidence to committees, 32.4% were businesses, 26.9% were trade associations, and 11.4% were professional associations (Table 6.4). Whereas, among evidence-givers that did not contribute to any party, 24.8% were governmental groups and 22.8% non-profit groups, and 12.5% were citizens (Table 6.4). Unsurprisingly, there were also apparent differences in the political finance activity of groups categorised as economically motivated compared to those categorised as issue motivated. Most of the contributing groups were economically motivated, whereas far fewer were issue-focused. Specifically, two-thirds of contributing groups were economically motivated whereas only 15.7% of contributing groups were issue-focused, and fewer

were governmental bodies or had unknown motivations (Fig. 6.7). Differences between interest group types and motivation types were also observed when examining contribution recipients. Corporate and economically motivated groups appear to concentrate their contribution efforts on those in power. As seen in Table 6.5, among those evidence-givers that contributed to a political party, businesses, trade associations, and professional groups were among the highest interest group types that donated to the governing party, whereas non-profit groups less frequently donated to the governing party. Moreover, over 81% of contributors who donated to the governing party were categorised as economically motivated groups, whereas only 9.7% were identified as issue motivated (Fig. 6.8). This suggests that corporate donations are less driven by ideological factors than their non-profit counterparts.

Fig. 6.7 Frequency of interest group motivation types and political finance contribution status.
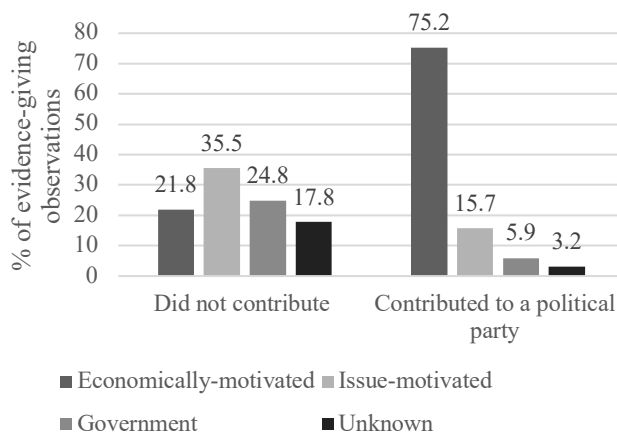
Fig. 6.8 Frequency of interest group motivation types and contributions to the governing party within contributing evidence-givers.
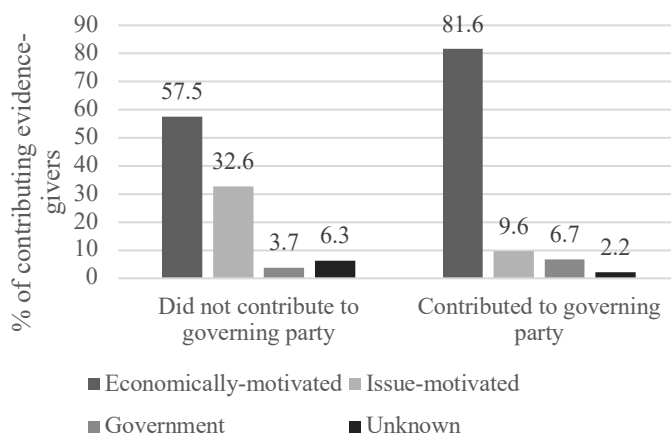
In addition to assessing contribution patterns across interest group types, this study found differences in contribution activity across the four policy areas and six policy topics. The proportion of contributing evidence-givers was larger for environment and energy and macro-economic committee inquiries. For instance, 43% of contributing evidence-givers participated in environment and energy inquiries, whereas only 6.1% of contributing evidence-givers participated in social welfare inquiries (Fig. 6.9). This is unsurprising considering environmental and energy issues are more critical to corporate groups, which are more likely to contribute to political campaigns.

Regarding specific policy topics, climate change inquiries featured the highest number of evidence givers that contributed to a political party, as nearly a quarter (23.8%) of contributing evidence-givers participated in climate change inquiries (Table 6.4). Both social welfare topics featured the lowest number of evidence-givers that contributed to a political party. Alcohol and tobacco regulation inquiries featured the third-lowest number of contributing evidence-givers, which is somewhat surprising considering previous literature that found tobacco regulation was a particular target for campaign contribution tactical lobbying in the past (Monardi and Glantz 1998; Holden and Lee 2009). However, the evolution of public demands for stricter tobacco and alcohol regulation over the past few decades may explain this finding.

Fig. 6.9 Interest groups that contributed to a political party and participated in committee inquiries discussing environment/energy, health, macro-economic, and social welfare issues.
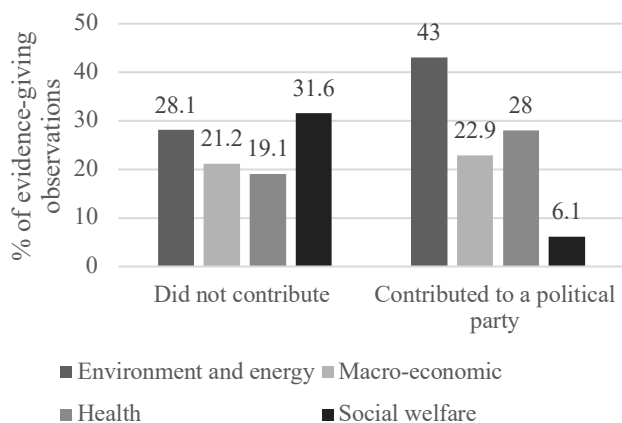
This study also examined the donation patterns of contributing interest groups. It was found that there was little difference between the proportion of contributing groups that donated to governing parties within each policy area. Donations to the governing party indicate a group is investment motivated. As seen in Fig. 6.9, the frequency of contributing evidence-givers that either did or did not donate to the governing party did not notably vary within each policy area. However, more notable differences were seen when examining each policy topic specifically. It appears issues of high corporate issue salience featured more investment-motivated interest groups. For instance, a higher percentage of contributing evidence-givers gave to the governing party if they participated in oil mining, pharmaceutical pricing, and corporate tax inquiries than evidence-givers participating in the remaining policy topics (Table 6.5).

Table 6.4 Interest groups that contributed to a political party and participated in committee inquiries discussing oil mining, climate change, pharmaceutical pricing, alcohol/tobacco regulation, banking regulation, corporate tax, social housing, and child welfare.

	Did not contribute to a political party (%)	Contributed to a political party (%)
Oil mining	11.1	19.2
Climate change	17.0	23.8
Pharmaceutical pricing	7.3	13.7
Alcohol and tobacco regulation	13.9	9.2
Banking regulation	12.9	17.2
Corporate tax	6.2	10.8
Social housing	11.9	3.1
Child welfare	19.7	3.1
	100.0	**100.0**

Table 6.5 Crosstabulation of policy topics and contributions to the governing party within contributing evidence-givers.

	Did not contribute to the governing party (%)	Contributed to the governing party (%)
Oil mining	17.6	19.6
Climate change	24.6	23.5
Pharmaceutical pricing	9.3	15.2
Alcohol and tobacco regulation	10.6	8.5
Banking regulation	22.6	15.6
Corporate tax	7.0	12.3
Social housing	4.7	2.4
Child welfare	3.7	2.9
	100.0	**100.0**

6.2.2 An analysis of individual donation data from committee participants

In addition to the primary dataset on interest group access, a secondary dataset was created to collect data on the political finance activity of contributing interest groups using each contribution as the unit of analysis. The dataset included 17,247 individual contributions made by interest groups identified as evidence-givers in the initial analysis of committee inquiries. The data show that participating interest

groups gave a total of £206,212,946.00 directly to political parties (Table 6.6). Australian and UK interest groups made over 95% of the total contributions (Table 6.6). The domination of Australian and UK interest groups' regarding the monetary values of donations was expected based on the theories of political finance regulatory stringency, whereby Australia and UK's meagre public financing and lax contribution limits is likely to increase political parties' reliance on private sources to fund their campaigns and general activity.

Table 6.6 Total interest group contribution amounts across each country case.

	Total contribution amount	Converted to GBP
Australia	167,527,181.00 (AUD)	92,151,973.50 [44.69%]
Canada	15,201,217.06 (CAD)	8,734,771.33 [4.24%]
Ireland	25,888.00 (EUR)	21,937.62 [0.01%]
UK	105,304,263.53 (GBP)	105,304,263.53 [51.07%]
Total (£)		**206,212,946.00**

Aside from storing data on contribution amounts, the political finance dataset included a categorical variable to measure whether the contribution had been given to a party in political power when the donation was made. The purpose of the variable was to give an insight into the possible motivations for contributing, specifically whether these donations were likely to have been given for strictly ideological purposes or were driven by the wish to influence powerful political actors. Governmental, non-profit, trade associations, professional associations, and research institutes contributed more times to political parties in power than to political parties not in power, whereas the opposite was observed in businesses, experts, citizens, and trade union groups (Fig. 6.10).

Furthermore, an assessment of the donation recipients determined whether certain interest group types were more likely to donate to multiple parties with different ideologies than other groups. The data found that 66.9% of business groups donated to multiple parties with different ideological platforms compared to 33.1% of businesses that had only donated to one political party (Fig. 6.11). This trend was observed in the other two corporate-related groups, trade associations and

professional associations, whereby 57.1% and 55.2% donated to multiple parties respectively when compared to others within the same interest group type. The frequency of corporate-related groups donating to multiple parties regardless of contradicting ideological platforms suggests these groups do not contribute to simply expressing an ideological preference. All other interest group types, of which many can be categorised as issue motivated groups, would typically donate to only one party. This suggests that these groups show a greater dedication to a single party and the ideological platforms proposed by these parties.

Fig. 6.10 Frequency of contributions to political parties in power within different interest group types.
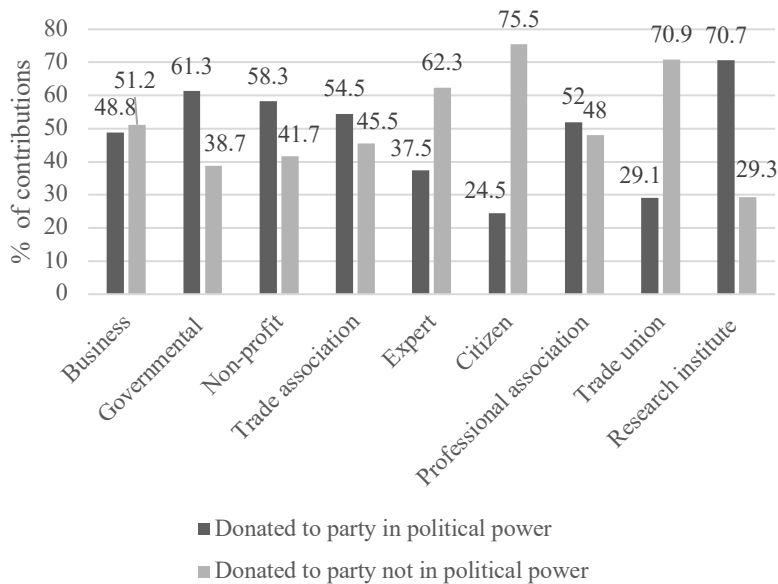
An analysis of donor recipients' ideological platforms shows donations were made to parties from across the political spectrum. However, most donations were made to centre-left parties (46.6%) and right parties (39.0%), which were parties that would typically hold political power in the four countries at one time within the past two decades. Unsurprisingly, those parties at the polar extreme of the ideological spectrum, notably far left and nationalist parties, received the fewest number of contributions (Table 6.7).

Fig. 6.11 Frequency of contributing groups that donated to multiple parties within different interest group types
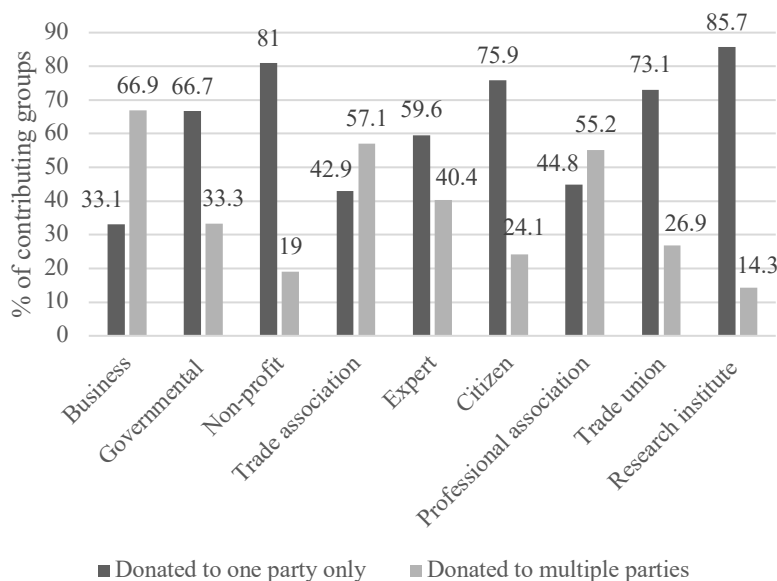
Table 6.7 Frequency of contribution across political ideology groups.

Donation recipient ideology	Number of contributions (%)
Green	0.8
Far left	0.2
Centre left	46.6
Centre	10.2
Centre right	2.2
Right	39.0
Nationalist	0.2
Independent	0.8
	100.0

6.2.3 Conclusion

This section presented the results of the descriptive analysis of the contribution patterns of interest groups that participated in legislative committees. The results revealed several noteworthy findings. Firstly, corporate groups contributed the most of all interest group types by a significant margin. This supports existing findings that profit-motivated groups are more likely to contribute to political parties (Adams and Hardwick 2002). Secondly, committee inquiries into climate change attract the highest number of contributing groups, which could suggest that this policy area is susceptible to political finance influence. Thirdly, economically motivated groups

target their donations to those in political power, while issue-based groups tend to donate to only one political party regardless of their governing status. As such, these results support the assumptions that contributions are typically made for investment purposes. However, further analysis needs to be conducted to assess whether there is an association between contributions and privileged access to committees. The following section presents the results of an analysis of these associations conducted using logistic regression modelling.

6.3 Regression results

The first two sections of this chapter presented a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the data. Examining the data using descriptive analysis was essential to summarise the data sample and identify patterns in the data. This section presents the second stage of the data analysis. This stage used inferential statistical techniques to explore possible associations between the political finance contributions and interest group access to committees across different countries. The analysis tests the two hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3 relating to the political finance level. It was predicted that interest groups that contributed to political parties would be more likely to receive invited access to legislative committees (H1). However, it was also expected that the strength of these trends would vary depending on the country (H2). Contributing groups were expected that have better access advantages in countries with low political finance regulatory stringency.

The regression results provide supporting evidence for these hypotheses. Overall, it was found that contributing groups are more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving formats, and therefore, receive better access advantages. However, these trends varied across country contexts. Australia, which had the lowest political finance stringency score, showed the strongest association between contributions and access advantages. Moreover, data from Ireland did not show any association. These results support the theory that stricter political finance regulations and more generous public financing could limit political finance influence. However, the results from Canada and UK contradicted this assumption.

The first sub-section details the logistic regression modelling techniques used to test the associations between the dependent and independent variables. The remaining sub-sections present the results of the logistic regression analysis.

6.3.1 Logistic regression techniques

Inferential statistics, specifically Null Hypothesis Significance Testing, allow researchers to examine the associations between two or more variables. It can help make more generalisable predictions of a particular phenomenon based on the representative sample of a particular study. The hypotheses presented in Chapter 3 make several assumptions regarding the possible associations between quantifiable concepts, which can be tested using inferential statistical techniques appropriate for the variable type.

To initially test these associations, Pearson's chi-square tests were conducted to investigate possible statistical associations between two categorical variables. These tests are extremely beneficial in identifying statistically significant associations that warrant further investigation. However, these tests are unable to measure the strength of these associations. While chi-square tests can recognise an association between political finance contribution status and access, the method cannot test the probability that a contributing group will achieve invited access compared to a non-contributing group. Therefore, logistic regression models were used to estimate the strengths of the associations between various dependent and independent variables.

This study used binary logistic regression techniques as the primary dependent variable, access, is dichotomous. The data distinguish between two evidence-giving formats, oral and written, that have different access implications. Binary logistic regression models require a dichotomous dependent variable, but predictor variables can include categorical variables with more than two categories. As a result, this technique is particularly suited to the analytical needs of this project. The models were estimated in STATA. Before constructing each model, steps were taken to ensure all relevant statistical assumptions were met to confirm that the model used correctly fitted the data. For instance, a binary logistic regression was only conducted if the dependent variable was dichotomous, there was more than one categorical or continuous predictor variable, and the dependent variable had mutually exclusive

categories. Robust standard errors were used as there is likely to have been repeated observations from the same interest group that has provided evidence to committees.

This section of the chapter will test each of the outlined hypotheses relating to the political finance level. This level uses political finance factors to explain access outcomes. This section will feature inferential statistical tests on the possible associations between political contribution activity and the primary dependent variable of access. Political finance contribution activity refers to whether an interest group has donated to a political party but also encompasses data on the recipient of this donation: specifically, whether an interest group has contributed to the political party governing at the time of their participation. Access is measured through the evidence-giving type variable that distinguishes whether an instance of evidence-giving was a written submission and therefore belongs to the 'open access' category of access, or an oral submission, which belongs to the 'invited access' category of access. These terms of access will be used interchangeably throughout this section. Each of the logistic regression models in this study will also include several control variables to exclude other potentially relevant factors that could impact the dependent variable. These control variables have been applied consistently throughout most of the logistic regression models. However, models relating to country-specific data feature different control variables if there was not enough variation in the data to use a control effectively.

6.3.2 Investigating the impact of contributions on levels of access to legislative committees

The primary research question of this thesis asks whether political finance contributions could impact the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees. To help answer this question, a series of chi-square tests were conducted on three categorical variables that denote an evidence-givers' political finance contribution status and the outcome variable of access levels. The results of these chi-square tests show a statistically significant association between all three indicators of political finance contribution status and access (Appendix X). Notably, these tests include data from all countries but also examine these relationships in country-specific contexts.

By analysing the data from each country separately, it was found that in the cases of Australia, Canada, and Ireland, the association between at least two of the indicators was statistically significant. In the case of Australia and Canada, all three of the indicators showed a statistically significant association with access. In contrast, Ireland did not show a significant association with the indicator that measures if an evidence-giver had donated to a political party after participating in a legislative committee inquiry. Notably, in the case of the UK, none of the indicators garnered statistically significant results, suggesting contribution activity is not associated with the levels of access interest groups receive to legislative committees in this country case. The chi-square results for Canada and UK data present the first deviation from H2, which predicted that countries with lower political finance regulatory stringency scores would show a more significant association between political finance contribution activity and access levels. This discrepancy was further explored through logistic regression models.

Several binary logistic regression tests were conducted to provide this additional information and test the links in country-specific contexts. Table 6.8 presents the binary logistic regression results relating to a model that used access (evidence-giving type) as the outcome variable and used an overall measure of political finance contribution status as the primary predictor variable. The predictor variable measured whether an evidence-giver had ever contributed to a political party before or after participating in the legislative committee. Several control variables were included in the model that could potentially impact levels of access, such as legislative ideology, government type, committee type, and committee subject type. It is important to note that this model excluded evidence-givers categorised as governmental organisations or anonymous, as these groups would not be permitted to donate or would not have been traceable through the political finance databases.

From the logistic regression model results, it was found that evidence-givers that contributed to a political party had greater odds of achieving invited access than groups that have never contributed to a political party when examining all data on evidence-giving (Table 6.8). Specifically, the model shows that contributing evidence-givers have 1.69 times increased odds of achieving invited access than non-

contributing evidence-givers. As such, contributing interest groups were ten percentage points more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving.

Table 6.8 Logistic regression model on types of access to legislative committees.

	All countries	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Political contributions					
Did not contribute to political party	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Contributed to political party	1.686** (0.134)	1.821** (0.182)	1.379* (0.220)	0.000 (0.000)	1.288 (0.393)
Committee type					
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.164 (0.156)	1.903** (0.303)	0.000 (0.000)	0.536 (0.178)	0.000 (0.000)
Government type					
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	1.071 (0.114)	0.634* (0.119)	5.632** (1.437)	0.000 (0.000)	0.606** (0.113)
Coalition	3.534** (0.507)	0.377** (0.084)	0.00 (0.00)	0.000 (0.000)	2.303** (0.351)
Legislative Ideology					
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.060** (0.013)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Centre right	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.00)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Right	0.195** (0.029)	0.000 (0.000)	1.569** (0.243)	0.000 (0.000)	0.138** (0.033)
Subject type					
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.165* (0.089)	2.006** (0.335)	0.940 (0.176)	4.145** (1.243)	1.026 (0.117)
Country					
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Canada	39.975** (6.499)				
Ireland	0.000 (0.00)				
UK	1.021 (0.090)				
N	6722	2767	1338	431	2131
Constant	0.561	0.603	1.671	1.243	1.216
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.187	0.0217	0.116	0.066	0.075

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standard Error)
N = Number of observations
Note: Observations of government and anonymous interest group types excluded.

Country-specific data also showed significant variances in the links between contribution activity on access across different countries. For instance, Australia was found to have the strongest association between contribution activity and levels of

access compared to the other country cases. Contributing evidence-givers in Australian committee inquiries were found to have 1.82 times increased odds, or were 14 percentage points more likely, of being invited access participants compared to non-contribution groups.

A similar but less strong association was found among Canadian evidence givers. The odds of being granted invited access were 1.38 times higher in contributing groups than groups that did not contribute to a political party. This equates to an increased likelihood of 5 percentage points. The statistically significant associations among Canadian evidence-givers are surprising, considering Canada has a higher political finance stringency score than the UK. Especially as Canada has notably strict contribution limits whereby corporations and trade unions have been banned from donating to political parties since the early 2000s, but it is important to reiterate that data on political finance contributions included all available data on record. In the case of Canada, data on political donations were first recorded in 1993. Therefore, this study featured 12 years of political finance activity before the first recorded inquiry in 2005. Furthermore, while restrictions were placed on contributions from organisations, individual contributions continue to be permitted in Canada, which is reflected in the contribution data collected for this study.

Following the chi-squared test results on the associations between political finance contribution activity and levels of access in the UK context, the logistic regression unsurprisingly showed no statistically significant link between contribution activity and levels of access. This suggests that those groups that donated to political parties were no more likely to achieve invited access to UK committee inquiries than groups that did not donate. The lack of statistical significance was also found in Ireland, whereby almost zero association was found between the primary predictor and outcome. In the case of Ireland, the disparity between the chi-square results and the results of the logistic regression analysis demonstrates the notably low instances of contribution activity among evidence-givers (Table 6.3)

The instances were so low that constructing a workable logistic regression model was challenging in several cases. This meant that Ireland data were sometimes excluded in other models examining country-specific data. While it is surprising that

Ireland garnered so few contribution activity results, this observation follows the outlined hypotheses on the impact of political finance contributions on access in countries with different political finance stringency scores. Among the selected countries, Ireland has one of the highest stringency scores due to the country's generous public finance system.

6.3.3 Investigating donation timeframes

To further examine the impact of political finance activity on access, additional logistic regression models were tested to examine the impact of specific political finance contribution status indicators. For instance, models were created using two primary predictor variables that measured whether an evidence-giver had ever contributed to a political party before or after participating in a committee. Distinguishing between these variables was necessary as each variable provides a different perspective of the donor-recipient relationship. If an interest group donates before their participation, it is more likely this contribution was influential to a committee's decision to grant the group invited access to the inquiry. However, if a group contributed after participating in a committee inquiry, this contribution cannot have influenced the committee's decision to grant invited access.

The results of the logistic regression analysis with the prior contributions predictor variable are displayed in Table 6.9. The results show that when examining all observations, there is a statistically significant association between whether an evidence-giver had donated before their participation and levels of access. Precisely, the odds of achieving invited access are 1.64 times higher if a group contributed to a political party before they participated in a committee (Table 6.9). Like the trends observed in the model relating to an evidence-giver's general political finance contribution status, this model also sees a difference in the effect of the predictor variable on the outcome depending on the country context. For instance, interest groups in Australia and Canada have increased odds of achieving invited access if they contributed to a political party before their committee participation. Notably, in Australia, a group is 71% more likely to be granted invited access if they had contributed to a political party before participating in the committee inquiry. While the UK and Ireland odds ratios results suggest a positive association, neither result was statistically significant.

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Table 6.9 Binary logistic regression model of political finance contribution status (prior to participation) and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type).

	All countries	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Political contributions					
Did not contribute to political party	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Contributed to political party before committee participation	1.642** (0.135)	1.705** (0.177)	1.412* (0.227)	0.000 (0.000)	1.326 (0.436)
Committee type					
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.188 (0.160)	1.956** (0.311)	0.000 (0.000)	0.536 (0.178)	0.000 (0.000)
Government type					
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	1.068 (0.113)	0.625* (0.116)	5.619** (1.432)	0.000 (0.000)	0.604** (0.113)
Coalition	3.527** (0.506)	0.375** (0.083)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	2.301** (0.351)
Legislative Ideology					
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.059** (0.013)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Centre right	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Right	0.193** (0.029)	0.000 (0.000)	1.576** (0.243)	0.000 (0.000)	0.138** (0.033)
Subject type					
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.160* (0.089)	1.941** (0.322)	0.939 (0.176)	4.145** (1.187)	1.027 (0.118)
Country					
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Canada	40.051** (6.503)				
Ireland	0.00 (0.00)				
UK	1.011 (0.090)				
N	6722	2767	1338	431	2131
Constant	0.576	0.638	1.664	1.243	1.217
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.187	0.019	0.117	0.066	0.075

$*P<0.05$ $**P<0.01$
OR (Robust Standard Errors)
N = Number of observations
Note: Observations of government and anonymous interest group types excluded.

Interestingly, the logistic regression results for the model that includes contributions after participation as the primary predictor variable are remarkably similar to the odds ratio results seen in the previous model. For instance, the results for all observations show the odds of providing evidence through an invited format is 1.89

times greater if a group had contributed after their participation than groups that did not contribute after their participation (Table 6.10). This is an interesting observation that could impact how one interprets the donor-recipient relationship; however, it is important to note that most contributing interest groups gave donations before participating in a committee (Fig 6.5).

Table 6.10 Binary logistic regression model of political finance contribution status (after participation) and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type).

	All countries	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Political contributions					
Did not contribute to political party	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Contributed to political party after committee participation	1.890** (0.215)	2.107** (0.262)	0.922 (0.367)	0.000 (0.000)	1.156 (0.508)
Committee type					
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.152 (0.156)	1.848** (0.296)	0.000 (0.000)	0.595 (0.197)	0.000 (0.000)
Government type					
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	1.082 (0.116)	0.640* (0.114)	5.676** (1.445)	0.000 (0.000)	0.607** (0.114)
Coalition	3.551** (0.510)	0.387** (0.081)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	2.310** (0.352)
Legislative Ideology					
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.059** (0.013)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Centre right	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Right	0.195** (0.029)	0.000 (0.000)	1.630** (0.253)	0.000 (0.000)	0.137** (0.033)
Subject type					
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.166* (0.089)	1.971** (0.331)	0.946 (0.178)	4.599** (1.315)	1.031 (0.118)
Country					
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Canada	44.803** (7.286)				
Ireland	0.000 (0.000)				
UK	0.996 (0.088)				
N	6722	2767	1338	454	2131
Constant	0.575	0.621	1.790	1.121	1.228
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.186	0.022	0.113	0.068	0.075

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standard Errors)
N = Number of observations
Note: Observations of government and anonymous interest group types excluded.

Regarding the data from other countries, there was no statistically significant association found between contributions after participation and access among Canadian evidence-givers. This deviates from the association between contributions before participation and access seen in the previous model (Table 6.9). However, as expected, both the UK and Ireland do not show any statistically significant results between the primary predictor variable and outcome in this model.

6.3.4 Investigating investment-motivated contributions

The logistic regression models discussed thus far have shown statistically significant associations between political finance contribution activity and levels of access to committees in Australian and Canadian contexts. This study also measured whether evidence-givers had ever donated to the governing party at the time of the committee inquiry. The purpose of this variable was to understand the relationships between contributions and access better. One would expect the governing party, who have the most control over policy direction, would be more likely to grant access to groups that specifically donated to their party. Of course, this does not necessarily mean a contribution donated to another party had no influence, as committees will include members from opposition parties. Nevertheless, this is a crucial variable to help decipher the motivations of donors.

Initially, chi-square tests were conducted to examine the possible associations between levels of access and contributions to the governing party. Notably, these tests excluded evidence-giving from non-contributing groups meaning only data from contributing groups were analysed. As a result, in the country-specific assessments, data from Ireland were omitted as the number of contributing groups was too low, and any inferential tests would lack the necessary statistical power. Therefore, chi-square tests were conducted using country-specific data for the remaining countries and the entire dataset. The results show Australian and the UK data garner statistically significant results between the independent and dependent variables in this case, while data from Canada and the overall cumulative data did not show statistically significant associations (Appendix X).

To further assess the strength of these associations, a logistic regression model was constructed using the level of access as the outcome variable and the donation

recipient variable as the primary predictor variable. This model included the same established control variables seen in the previous models. Similar to the related chi-square tests, the model excluded data from non-contributing groups. This meant the donation recipient variable was dichotomous; either a contributing evidence-giver had donated to the governing party, or they had not. As seen in Table 6.11, when examining the data overall and controlling for the other variables in the model, there is a statistically significant association between contributions to the governing party and levels of access. Specifically, the odds of achieving invited access are 1.80 times greater for contributing evidence-givers that donated to the governing party than contributing groups that did not (Table 6.11). This corresponds to an increased likelihood of 11 percentage points.

Furthermore, statistically significant associations were found across Australian and UK data that followed the trends seen in the previous chi-square tests. For instance, among Australian contributing evidence-givers, the odds of achieving access were found to be 1.71 times higher in groups that gave to the party governing at the time of their participation than those that did not. In the same scenario but among UK contributing groups, the odds were increased by a significant margin of over six times that of groups that did not contribute to the governing party.

The latter results relating to UK data are fascinating, considering the UK did not previously show a statistically significant association between political finance contribution status and levels of access. So, while contributions overall may not impact access in the UK, there appears to be a strong link between contribution recipients and levels of access, whereby donating to the governing party significantly increases a group's odds of achieving invited access. It is also worth noting that the opposite pattern was observed in the case of Canada, whereby lack of association between the specific donation recipient could weaken confidence in any causal link. However, in the case of Australia, the country with the lowest political finance stringency score, statistically significant links with all political finance predictor variables were found. This serves as a strong indicator of a possible link between contributions and access.

Table 6.11 Binary logistic regression model of contribution to governing party and control predictors of interest group access to committees (evidence-giving type).

	All countries	Australia	Canada	UK
Political contributions				
Did not contribute to governing party	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Contributed to governing party	1.798** (0.311)	1.710* (0.407)	1.775* (0.513)	6.079* (4.976)
Committee type				
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.227 (0.329)	1.640 (0.454)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Government type				
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	1.426 (0.300)	0.705 (0.204)	5.441** (2.165)	0.573 (0.532)
Coalition	3.539* (1.917)	0.557 (0.232)	0.000 (0.000)	1.351 (1.012)
Legislative Ideology				
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.174** (0.109)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Centre right	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Right	0.475 (0.265)	0.000 (0.000)	1.556 (0.459)	0.146* (0.139)
Subject type				
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	0.752 (0.160)	1.818 (0.696)	0.521 (0.179)	1.136 (0.723)
Country				
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA
Canada	25.423** (14.171)			
UK	0.688 (0.221)			
N	1112	547	479	86
Constant	0.443	0.595	2.638	0.466
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.161	0.015	0.125	0.168

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standard Errors)
N = Number of observations
Note: Observations of non-contributing groups excluded. Ireland cases omitted due to lack of contributing groups.

6.3.5 Conclusion

This section presented the logistic regression analysis results used to explore the associations between the political finance contributions and the levels of access interest groups receive to legislative committees. The logistic regression models investigated the effects of different political finance variables on the dependent variable across each selected country. From this analysis, several noteworthy results were found. A strong statistically significant association was found between contributions and privileged access to committees. An analysis of contribution recipients also provided supporting evidence that a dependent relationship between donors and policymakers may exist. Among contributing interest groups, it was found that those who donated to a party with governing power were significantly more likely to participate in invited access formats. Section 6.2 discussed the evidence that most donations are likely to be motivated for investment purposes. The results in this section suggest donations to powerful parties likely help groups reap political rewards. Ultimately, the analysis supports the notion that the committee process could be a valuable target for groups that lobby using political finance contributions. As such, this thesis provides an essential contribution to the political finance literature and presents a strong case that scholars analysing political finance influence should focus more on the early stages of the policy process.

This chapter also provided a much-needed comparative assessment by analysing the associations between contribution and interest group access across different country cases. The correlation between these variables was strongest in Australia and Canada. In Australia, contributing interest groups were ten percentage points more likely to have participated in invited access formats than non-contributing groups. The results from Australia and Ireland support the assumptions that political finance regulatory approaches may impact political finance influence. However, Canada showed a stronger correlation between contributions and interest group access than the UK despite having significantly stricter contributing limits. The results deviate from the expectations outlined in H2. However, the overall variation observed between countries presents a significant contribution to the comparative political finance literature and justifies the need for a broader comparative assessment.

6.4 Discussion

This chapter has presented the results of the data analysis that explored the links between political finance contributions and the level of access interest groups receive to legislative committees. The findings supported the assumptions outlined in Chapter 3 in several ways. Firstly, there is evidence that political finance contributions are likely associated with selecting committee hearing witnesses. Secondly, these associations are more dominant in Australia than other countries and no associations were found in Ireland. The results from Australia and Ireland corroborate the hypothesis that political finance influence would be more prevalent in countries with weak political finance regulation. However, the results from Canada and the UK contradict these claims.

This section will further deliberate about these findings and how they contribute to the existing knowledge on political finance influence. Firstly, the evidence of political finance influence within the agenda-setting and consultation phase will be discussed. Here it is argued that these associations align with the theory that political finance could influence early policy stages. Moreover, this thesis has presented evidence to support the key dependence theory mechanisms outlined in Chapter 2. However, these claims are made conservatively due to the challenges in determining causality in this case.

Secondly, this chapter will discuss the variance observed across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. The strongest associations between contributions and interest group access to committees were observed in Australia. In contrast, no such associations were found in Ireland. This is significant as Australia and Ireland represented juxtaposing levels of political finance regulatory stringency. However, contrary to expectations, data from Canada displayed stronger associations than the UK. A closer examination of the different political finance regulations and committee witness selection procedures of each country is used to provide crucial context to the findings. In particular, the loopholes in political finance regulation are investigated to help explain the possible reasons for the unusual results observed regarding Canada and the UK.

6.4.1 Evidence of political finance influence earlier in the policy process

A core contribution of this thesis was to examine political finance influence in a severely understudied area of the policy process. Historically, empirical exploration of political finance influence on legislative behaviour has examined final decision-making processes. These are decisions that typically occur during the policy legitimation stage. The focus on this stage is understandable, considering that this approach has several advantages. Firstly, the policy legitimation stage arguably has the most apparent consequences for policy direction and real-world impact. Therefore, scholars should examine whether political finance can influence such crucial decisions. Secondly, examining the final decision-making process has methodological advantages, as outcome variables can be more easily measured. For instance, the policy legitimation stage includes final roll call votes on bills. Roll call votes are a straightforward measure of a politician's policy positions. As such, it is unsurprising many previous studies have chosen to examine the impact of contribution on roll call votes (Bonica 2018; Constant 2006; Roscoe and Jenkins 2005; Warwo 2001). However, existing research has had notably mixed results regarding political finance influence during this stage (Ansolabehere 2003). This thesis argues that the lack of convincing evidence of political finance influence should be expected when examining the policy legitimation process. Instead, it is proposed that political finance influence is more likely to occur during earlier stages of the policy process.

Chapter 2 explored recent scholarly debate regarding the importance of the agenda-setting and consultation process in political finance research (Cotton 2012; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Peoples 2013). It was argued that legislative committees, which are essential within the agenda-setting and consultation process, could be susceptible to political finance influence for two reasons. Firstly, interest groups are likely to focus lobbying efforts at the agenda-setting and consultation stage. This is because interest groups can more effectively exert lobbying power to push forward their interests and block opposing interests (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Secondly, legislative decision-making at this stage carries significantly less public and media scrutiny. As such, politicians and interest groups could feel more emboldened to engage in *quid pro quo* exchanges.

But despite presenting convincing theoretical arguments, scholars have yet to test these theories through empirical research adequately. This thesis fills this gap by examining the impact of contribution within legislative committees. Legislative committees allow a rare opportunity for outside interests to have direct input in the formal policymaking process. Notably, the committee consultation process often features a clear hierarchy of access for participating groups. Interest groups that participate in oral evidence-giving are given a privileged form of access as opposed to interest groups that only participate in written evidence-giving. By examining whether contributions are associated with privileged access, this thesis provides a new perspective on political finance influence on legislative behaviour.

Following the existing theoretical arguments outlined, indications of political finance influence were expected to be observable at this stage. Significantly, this thesis confirmed strong indications of an association between contributions and interest group access at this early stage of the policy process. When controlling for country effects, contributing groups were significantly more likely to participate in privileged access formats than non-contributing groups. As such, this thesis has presented evidence to support the assumptions that committees could be susceptible to political finance influence. However, these results are not conclusive. Similar correlations were observed for interest groups that contributed to political parties before participating in committees and those who contributed after participating. This casts some doubt on the validity of the associations between contributions and access advantages. Nevertheless, the results indeed indicate elite advantages within the committee process, which warrants further examination of the agenda-setting and consultation stage to improve our understanding of political finance influence in western democracies.

6.5.2 Evidence to support the dependence theory mechanism
This thesis examined political finance influence at a stage of the policy process that receives less scrutiny than later stages. It was expected that there is an increased likelihood for *quid pro quo* exchanges during the committee process than the final ratification of legislation. The mechanism for politicians and donors to engage in legal *quid pro quo* exchanges is described by dependence theory (Jorgenson 2013). Understanding this mechanism was crucial in predicting the associations between

contributions and interest groups receiving privileged access. Chapter 3 detailed the principles of dependence theory and the mechanisms that create a mutual reliance between donor groups and political parties. Dependence theory argues that politicians pressured to raise significant amounts of money to run successful campaigns become dependent on wealthy donors for their financial support. Concurrently, donors are dependent on politicians to push their political interests. This mutually dependent relationship can result in donors exchanging their financial support for political favours. These political favours can come in many forms, such as winning government contracts, securing private meetings with politicians, or changing their votes on specific legislation. This thesis specifically investigated political favours in the form of privileged access to legislative committees. It was expected that the dependent relationship between politicians and donors would result in contributing interest groups receiving more privileged access to committees than non-contributing groups.

However, tangible evidence of a dependent relationship in this context cannot be attained through quantitative means. This is because of the sheer number of possible explanatory variables that can explain witness selection decisions. However, this thesis was designed to measure certain indicators that could provide supporting evidence for two key components of the dependent relationship. The first component is that interest groups donate to politicians to achieve political favours. In other words, political finance contributions are motivated by investment purposes. The second component is that politicians give favours to contributing groups.

To assess the first component, the contribution patterns of committee participants were analysed to provide an indicator of donor motivations. The purpose was to help differentiate between interest groups that donate for investment or ideological purposes. Several variables were created to collect data on donation recipients. One such variable recorded whether an interest group donated to parties governing at the time of their committee participation. This variable helps indicate whether interest groups donate more often to parties in political power. If interest groups donate primarily to parties in political power, it could suggest they are looking to reap higher value rewards in exchange for their donation. Another variable was used to record the party and ideological affiliation of the donor recipients. Groups motivated

by ideological purposes are unlikely to donate to parties with different ideological affiliations. Hence, these variables provided useful indicators of donor motivations in the absence of qualitative evidence.

The data analysis presented in this chapter supports the assumption that many donations are investment motivated. Most contributing interest groups would focus their donations on parties in political power. Moreover, certain group types would contribute to various political parties of different ideological affiliations. Notably, there was a clear differentiation between the donor motivations of interest groups focused on self-interest and profitability and those focused primarily on societal issues and non-profit causes. For instance, 70% of business groups were found to donate to more than one party compared to 19% of non-profit groups. This suggests that corporate groups are motivated to donate for investment purposes while non-profit groups donate to support a particular ideology.

To assess the second component, inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine the association between an interest group's contribution activity and the level of access they receive to committees. The significant statistical associations found between the dependent and independent variables provide evidence that an exchange of money for access could occur. Moreover, an additional assessment of the associations between contributions to governing parties and interest group access was particularly revealing. Within groups that contributed to a political party, interest groups that donated to the party governing at the time of their committee participation were 11 percentage points more likely to participate in oral hearings. This suggests that donating to powerful parties will likely reap better access rewards than donations to opposition parties. These results provide convincing supporting evidence that contributing to political parties probably help interest groups gain political favours at the agenda-setting and consultation stage.

However, it is important to note that the primary independent variable used to provide supporting evidence of a dependent relationship only categorised donors and non-donors. This thesis did not account for differences between contributing and non-contributing groups according to interest group type. As a result, there may be more to uncover regarding the access advantages between businesses that contribute

and those that do not. Especially, as one would expect right-leaning governments to prioritise the opinions of businesses. Therefore, it would be useful to know whether contributing businesses receive advantages above non-contributing businesses within committees controlled by right-leaning politicians. These comparisons could be explored in future research that expands the dataset to consider the ideological composition of each committee group.

6.5.3 Variance across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation

A dependent relationship between donors and politicians can only exist when politicians rely on donors for financial support to run their campaigns. As such, the dependent relationship can be strengthened or weakened if the pressure to raise money from private sources changes. Political finance regulation can alter these pressures in various ways. An obvious example is enacting a ban or limit on donations from specific sources, such as corporations or trade unions. Increasing the amount of public funding available for campaigns is another primary way of reducing the pressure to raise private funds.

As countries often adopt vastly different approaches to campaign finance regulation, it was predicted that the strength of the dependent relationship between donors and politicians would vary across different country contexts. This thesis compares four different western representative democracies: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. Chapter 4 detailed the process of selecting these countries to ensure acceptable variance in the level of regulatory stringency across the chosen cases. Selecting non-US countries was crucial as the literature on political finance influence is dominated by US case studies. Moreover, there are notably few existing comparative studies that explore the effects of political finance regulatory stringency. Several practical measures of regulatory stringency have been created, but scholars have yet to fully examine the potential consequences on legislative behaviour (Global Integrity 2005; Norris and Abel Van Es 2016; Witko 2005). As such, this thesis presents another vital contribution to the literature.

This thesis examined the associations between contributions and interest group access to committees across countries with different political finance regulatory

stringency levels. Chapter 4 outlined the index used to score the four countries according to their political finance regulatory stringency. The Political Finance Stringency Index (PFSI) scored countries based on the generosity of their public financing system and the level of state interventionism in their regulation of contributions, spending, and third-party limits. From this index, countries were ranked accordingly, beginning with the countries with the lowest stringency: Australia, UK, Canada, and Ireland. Ireland and Canada received the same overall score, but the scores differed in individual regulatory categories.

It was hypothesised that contributing interest groups would receive better access advantages in countries with low regulatory stringency (H2). Therefore, it was expected that Australia would show the strongest associations between contributions and access, while Canada and Ireland would show the weakest association. The data analysis presented in this chapter only confirmed these assumptions in the case of Australia and Ireland.

When examining data on evidence-giving in Australian committees, contributing groups were found to have an increased likelihood of participating in oral hearings of 14 percentage points. These findings correlate with the established hypotheses relating to the variance among countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. Australia was established as having the lowest level of regulatory stringency after assessing each country's political finance laws. For instance, Australia has no limits on the number or overall amount an interest group can directly donate to political parties. There are also no limits on political spending, which is likely to exacerbate a race between political parties to raise the most money for any given election. Furthermore, political parties in Australia are not as well supported by their public financing system as Ireland. For example, approximately only a quarter of the total political party funding given for legislative elections is sourced from public funds (Table 6.12). This lax approach to political finance regulation is likely to exacerbate a political party's dependence on private sources of income to fund their campaigns.

The findings also confirmed that the same associations between political finance contributions and access are not observed in countries on the opposite side stringency

scale. Due to Ireland's generous public financing system, it was expected that the impact of political finance contributions on levels of access would be weaker than the other countries. This study found no connection between contributions and levels of access in Irish contexts, and overall, very few evidence-givers were found to have donated to political parties. This was unsurprising considering Ireland has a generous public financing system whereby over 90% of party funding is often sourced from public funds (Table 6.12). This level of public funding would naturally dramatically reduce the pressure on politicians and political parties to persuade private entities to donate.

Comparing the witness selection procedures of Australia and Ireland can also help understand the observed differences in the political finance trends. The link between contributions and privileged access to committees could be exacerbated if the power to select committee witnesses is dominated by one party. If one party makes the decisions, witnesses that contributed to their campaign could be regularly prioritised. However, the number of opportunities to prioritise certain contributing groups would be limited in a bi-partisan selection process. This is noteworthy considering Australia has a distinctly different method of selecting witnesses than the other selected countries. In Australia, ministers of the committee's corresponding government department primarily select the witnesses invited to public hearings. In Australia, the alternative voting system is used to select political representatives, which results in varied legislative compositions. However, in most governments, the majority of cabinet ministers are from one party. As such, one party can have a monopoly over the selection of witnesses without adequate scrutiny or input from opposing parties. This can be problematic if a dependent relationship exists between donors and politicians.

However, in Ireland, official criteria for witness selection for Oireachtas committees are rather vague. Official guidance states, 'Invitations to public meetings are issued by each Committee based on the item or area of the Work Programme under consideration at the time, and the time available' (Oireachtas 2021), although, unlike in Australia, committee members are responsible for selecting witnesses to speak at public hearings. As discussed in Chapter 4, committee chairs are selected using the D'Hondt method, which is a mathematical method used to allocate committee

members proportionally according to the number of party seats in the legislature (Oireachtas Library and Research Service 2016). As Ireland has a single transferable vote proportional electoral system, multi-party coalition governments are the norm. As such, Oireachtas committees are not necessarily chaired by the governing party. This could limit the opportunities for committee members to engage in *quid pro quo* exchanges at this stage of the policy process.

While the Australia and Ireland data confirmed the main hypotheses, Canada and UK data yielded some unexpected results. It was expected that the UK would show a stronger association between contributions and levels of access than Canada. However, the opposite was observed in the data analysis. Contributing groups in Canada were found to have an increased likelihood of being granted invited access of 5 percentage points. UK groups had an increased likelihood of 4 percentage points, but this result was not statistically significant. The results are surprising because Canada and the UK have significantly different approaches to political finance regulation. Canada has had a ban on interest group donations since the early 2000s, while the UK allows donations from these private sources. Moreover, Canada provides more public funding for parties and candidates to use specifically for campaigning purposes.

However, there are several possible reasons for the lack of political finance influence observed in the UK. Firstly, the inability to advertise extensively on television in the UK may limit UK party dependence on donations compared to parties in other countries where political advertising is more prominent. Canada has similar political advertisements to the US whereby political advertisements can be purchased on commercial television (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006). Secondly, there has been a shift in UK fundraising patterns over the years. Typically, donations to the main political parties now come from a relatively small group of large donors and a much larger group of small donors, rather than a bloc of consistent donations from members and other dedicated interest groups (Pompl and Gherghina 2019). The change in donor composition may have reduced the chances that a broad array of donors would be witnesses in committee inquiries. Finally, large political donors in the UK may seek other political favours aside from access. For instance, scholars have found evidence that donations seem to play a role in House of Lord peerage nominations (Radford et

al. 2020). Therefore, while this study does not find evidence of political finance influence in the context of access to committees, donor influence may still exist in other contexts.

Moreover, the diverging trends seen in Canada and Ireland are puzzling considering the countries received the same high stringency score. But there are several possible factors to explain the results observed in Canada. For instance, the Canadian database of political finance donations included ten years of donation data before the reforms were made in 2000. Hence, the political finance dataset included a significant number of interest group donations to federal political parties recorded during this time. Furthermore, there is a notable loophole in Canada's contribution limits: corporate donations to regional parties are permitted. This is important as interest groups that supported Canada's federal parties before 2000 may be continuing their financial support through other avenues. However, the data on these donations were not included in the study to maintain consistency across country cases. Future studies may benefit from including regional donations.

Secondly, a deeper examination of the public funding trends in each country reveals distinct differences between Canada and Ireland. Table 6.12 compares the percentage of private and public funding available in the last legislative election in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. The data were obtained from official oversight bodies. The results show Canadian political parties use a much higher proportion of private funding to run their campaigns than their Irish counterparts. As such, this helps explain the significant lack of contributing interest groups that participated in Irish committees. This supports claims that generous public financing could still play a part in reducing political finance influence on legislative behaviour (Gerken and Tausanovitch 2014; Marziani et al. 2011). However, the data show UK political parties have the highest percentage of private funding (Table 6.12). This sheds further doubt on the assumptions relating to political finance stringency presented in this thesis.

Table 6.12 Public Vs. Private funding for the last legislative election in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.

Country	Election date	Private (%)	Public (%)	Total (%)
Australia	2016	75	25	100
Canada	2015	57	43	100
Ireland	2016	2	98	100
UK	2017	88	12	100

Sources: Australian Electoral Commission (2021), Elections Canada (2018), Electoral Commission (2021), National Post (2019), Standards in Public Office Commission (2016).

But it is interesting to note that while the data analysis found no association in the UK overall, contributing evidence-givers had significantly better access advantages if they gave to the party governing at the time of their participation. This trend was notably stronger in the UK than in the other countries. This suggests contributions may still play a role in witness selection across UK select committees, but perhaps on a smaller scale than some other countries included in the analysis.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the associations between political finance contributions and whether interest groups receive privileged access to legislative committees across Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. The first part of the chapter presented the results of the data analysis. The second part provided a discussion of the results. This section discussed how the findings relate to the theoretical assumptions outlined in Chapter 3.

Overall, the findings provide evidence of an association between interest group contributions and privileged access to legislative committees. Moreover, additional analysis of contribution patterns provides evidence to support the assumptions that most donations are given as an investment rather than to express an ideological preference. As such, this thesis indicates that there is a realistic possibility a dependent relationship between donors and politicians exists at the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process. This presents a significant contribution considering the lack of existing research on political finance influence in these contexts. The evidence that elite groups that donate to political parties likely have disproportionately greater direct access to committees is troubling considering the

potential effects on representational equality in legislative spheres. If interest groups can use contributions to lobby for better access to politicians at this pivotal stage, participatory inequality in these spheres will be exacerbated. Consequently, the policy decision-making is also likely to be skewed towards the political interests of those groups achieving direct access. As such, this thesis presents a critical first step in understanding the role of political finance contributions could play in maintaining elite dominance in the policy sphere.

However, the results across different country cases painted a complex picture. The thesis showed that the associations between contributions and interest group access to committees varied significantly depending on the country. However, the results did not provide strong evidence to support the hypothesis that the strength of these associations would be dependent on the level of political finance regulatory stringency adopted by a specific country. The hypothesis was only supported by data from Australia and Ireland that had juxtaposing regulatory strengths. These results gave credence to the hypothesis; however, the results for Canada and the UK contradicted these assumptions. As such, this thesis cannot conclusively claim that regulatory stringency matters. However, the results from Australia and Ireland certainly warrant further investigation, and future studies should consider expanding the data to include additional countries.

Due to the mixed results regarding the importance of political finance contributions, it was also important to consider other explanatory factors of access advantages within legislative committees. Therefore, the next chapter presents a further analysis of the datasets that focuses on the associations between interest group factors and access patterns.

Chapter 7 Understanding the impact of interest group factors on levels of access to legislative committees: Data analysis and discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data analysis results from two quantitative datasets on interest group access to committees and the political finance activity of committee participants. It focused specifically on predictors of access that relate to political finance. Several interesting observations provided supporting evidence of an association between political finance contributions and privileged access to legislative committees. However, as predicted, the strength of these associations varied depending on the country analysed. Political finance contributions were shown to be a useful predictor, particularly in Australian and Canadian committee proceedings. However, the associations between contributions and access were not found in the case of the UK and Ireland. These results affirm the need for researchers investigating political finance influence to focus on the earlier stages of the policy process and through a comparative lens.

While recognising the noteworthy findings relating to political finance, it is also important to observe that the committee witness selection process, and the policy process in general, remains incredibly complex. Other key factors could explain committee witness selection. The data collection process was designed to collect data on the type of interest group participating in a committee inquiry and their overarching motivations. This allows an examination of elite public policy and corporate power theories that argue certain groups and stakeholders receive priority access to influence the agenda-setting and consultation process. Previous empirical studies have already provided evidence of elitism within specific political contexts and have documented trends showing corporate groups are more likely to have direct access to legislators than non-corporate groups (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012;). This chapter provides a contribution to the existing literature by examining the association between interest group factors and levels of access to legislative committees in different country and policy contexts.

This chapter proceeds as follows: The first section presents several sets of descriptive statistics that provide a crucial overview of the data relating to interest group factors. The second section presents the results of the logistic regression analysis relating to interest group characteristics. The results are presented chronologically according to the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3. Hence, the first part investigates the association between interest group factors and invited access to legislative committees. The second part examines the variance in these trends across different policy contexts. The third part examines the role of interest group factors on contribution patterns to investigate whether certain group types are more likely to contribute to political parties than others. The third section discusses the findings of the quantitative analysis and explores their implications for elite influence within legislative committees. Here, the results present supporting evidence of the corporate dominance observed in several existing studies on interest group access. Moreover, this section discusses how the absence of non-profit groups, independent experts, and citizens indicates a lack of witness diversity in committee hearings, especially within inquiries discussing environmental and macro-economic issues.

7.1 Descriptive statistics

Before using inferential statistics to examine the associations between interest group factors and outcomes such as access and political finance contribution activity, it was important to first gather an overview of the relevant data. The data provided crucial context and gives a broad assessment of witness diversity within legislative committees. As seen in Fig 7.1, the number of evidence-giving observations differed significantly across different interest group types. Interest group types included businesses, governmental organisations, non-profit groups, trade associations, professional associations, trade unions, research institutes, individual experts, and citizens. Governmental departments, non-profit groups, businesses, and citizens gave the most evidence to committees. This evidence-giving includes written and oral formats. The specific frequencies of each interest group type across all countries were as follows: business (13.4%), governmental (22.5%), non-profit (20.6%), trade association (9.7%), expert (6.4%), citizen (11.3%), professional association (4.6%), trade union (1.4%), research institute (5.2%), other (0.8%), anonymous (4.2%).

Data on the number of oral and written evidence-giving observations across different interest group types show that the composition of interest groups varies depending on the participation format (Fig. 7.2). Businesses, governmental departments, trade associations, trade unions, and research institutions had a higher proportion of oral evidence-giving observations than written observations. However, the opposite was observed for non-profits, experts, citizens, and professional associations. These results indicate that certain group types achieve better access advantages than others across the analysed committees.

Fig. 7.1 Evidence-giving observations across different interest group types.
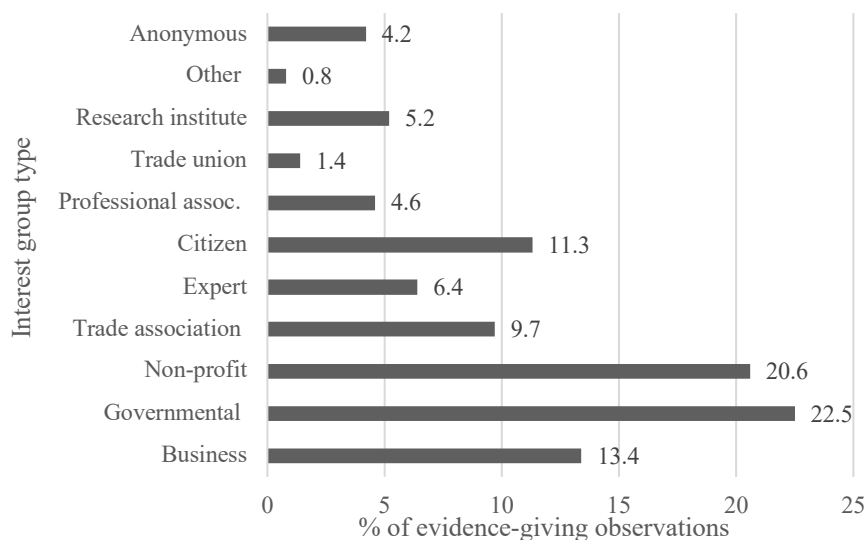
In addition to categorising interest groups based on their type, this study also categorised their primary motivations to assess whether the group was economically or issue motivated. Economically motivated groups are driven primarily by economic or self-interest. In contrast, issue motivated groups are mainly driven by an issue or cause. Across all country cases, 28.4% of evidence-giving was from economically motivated groups, 33.1% were from issue-motivated groups, 22.5% were from governmental groups, and 16.0% were from groups where the motivations were unknown (Fig. 7.3). Frequencies of interest group motivations observed in each country show the composition of interest group motivations differed depending on the country case (Fig. 7.4). For instance, Canada was the only country with more economically motivated groups that participated in committee inquiries than any

other motivation type. Among Ireland's interest group committee participants, governmental bodies garnered the highest number of evidence-giving observations, while issue-based groups were the highest evidence-givers in Australia and UK (Fig. 7.4).

Fig. 7.2 Written and oral evidence-giving across different interest group types.
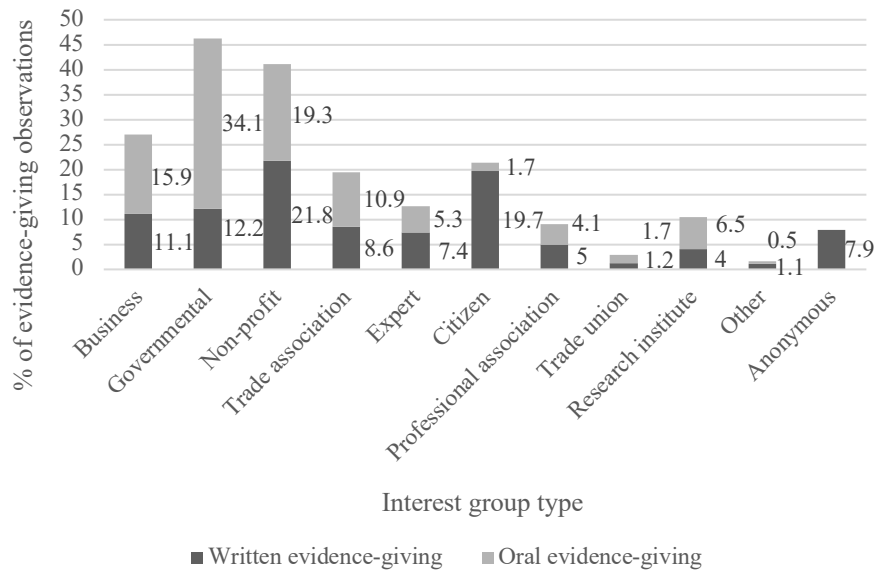
Fig. 7.3 Interest group motivation frequencies across all country cases.
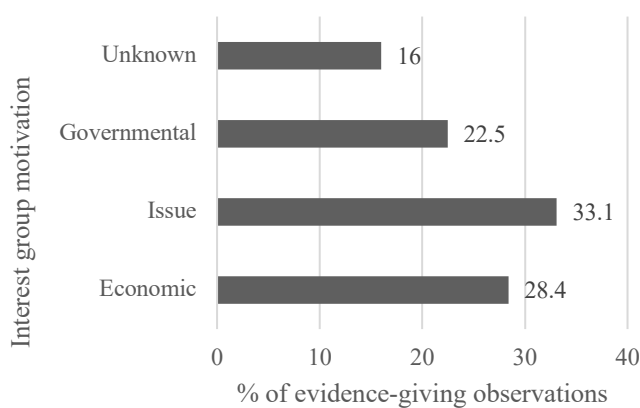
Fig. 7.4 Interest group motivation frequencies within each country.
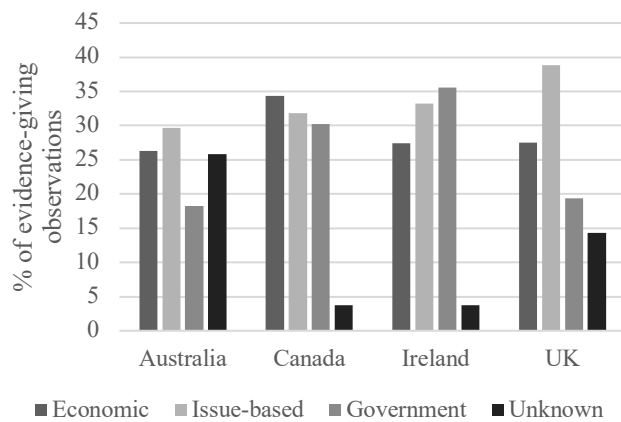
7.2 Regression results

This section presents the logistic regression models that used interest group factors to predict access to committees and political finance activity. Chapter 3 outlined several hypotheses relating to interest groups factors that were made based on corporate power and elite public policy theories. It was predicted that corporate groups would participate more in oral evidence-giving and hence enjoy better access to committees than non-corporate groups (H3). This hypothesis was based on the theory that corporate groups have particular influence over the policy agenda-setting process due to their importance in maintaining a healthy economy and delivering vital public services. Corporate groups could use these unique characteristics to leverage better access to committee hearings to influence a crucial stage of the policy process.

Moreover, elite groups could find it easier to maintain their privileged position through the networks and relationships with key policymakers over time. As such, it is expected that corporate groups can obtain and retain privileged access to committees (H3). However, the level of corporate dominance was expected to vary depending on the committee inquiry topic. For instance, committees discussing issues that typically interest corporate groups are likely to give access that favours corporate groups more frequently (H4). Existing research that examines the variance of elite influence across different policy contexts is limited. As such, the data analysis presented in this chapter provides an essential contribution to our understanding of elite influence in the policy process.

Further predictions were also made regarding the political finance activity of different interest group types. H5 predicts that corporate and economically motivated interest groups are more likely to contribute to political parties. This assessment was based on theories that highlight the resource inequalities between interest groups (Schattschneider 1960). Profit-motivated groups are likely to have better financial resources to spend on political lobbying, including contributing to political campaigns. An overview of interest group contributions patterns can be ascertained from analysing existing country datasets on donations. However, the data collected for this thesis allows an assessment of contributions from groups explicitly engaged in the political process as all the donors will have participated in legislative committees.

The three hypotheses were tested through logistic regression modelling. This section presents the results of these tests chronologically.

7.2.1 Investigating the associations between interest group factors and interest group access to legislative committees

As outlined in Chapter 3, corporate and economically motivated groups were expected to be more likely to be granted invited access than non-corporate and issue motivated groups (H3). Non-corporate and issue motivated groups were instead expected to be more likely to engage in open access formats. To assess these trends in the original dataset collected for this project, interest group organisation type and interest group motivations were used as predictor variables of access. Initial chi-square tests were conducted on the entire dataset to examine the possible association between the two interest group predictors and access separately. The tests demonstrate a clear association between both indicators and levels of access (Appendix X).

Following these initial tests, additional inferential statistics were conducted to measure the strength of these associations and examine the relationship within different country contexts. Firstly, a binary logistic regression model was constructed to assess the effects of interest group type on access (Table 7.1). This thesis used the following 11 distinct groups to categorise the interest group organisation type of each

identified evidence-giver: business, governmental, non-profit, trade association, expert, citizen, professional association, trade union, research institute/university, other, anonymous. Table 7.1 displays the results of the binary logistic regression for the entire dataset and each country.

The model includes data from all countries and shows the strength of the association between the interest group organisational structure of evidence-givers and the likelihood of achieving invited access. The odds of non-profit evidence-givers being granted invited access was markedly less than for business evidence-givers. Non-profits were six percentage points less likely to be invited to participate in oral hearings than business groups. This pattern was observed in each country but only with statistical significance in Ireland and the UK. In these countries, non-profit groups were found to have 80% and 31% lower odds of being granted invited access than businesses, respectively. Similar trends were also observed in Australia and Canada, but these results were not statistically significant.

Further comparisons between businesses and other group types also indicate corporate dominance over committee hearings. The overall data also show businesses have much higher odds of being granted invited access to committee proceedings than experts and citizen evidence-givers. Unsurprisingly, citizens wishing to participate in committee inquiries were over 90% less likely to be invited to testify at an oral hearing than business groups. These results were consistent across all countries. The lack of citizen representation in oral hearings is likely to be due to the informational gathering nature of committee inquiries. While citizen opinions are important to consider, committees are more likely to select groups that can offer specific expertise rather than opinions.

However, the data also show that experts had significantly lower odds of being granted invited access than business groups. But in the country-specific models, only Australia and the UK garnered statistically significant results in this case. Australian evidence-giving data showed experts were approximately 60% less likely to participate in invited access formats than business evidence-givers. UK experts were found to have even lower odds. This finding is noteworthy considering committee procedures on witness selection often highlight expertise and relevance as a key

criterion for selection. Therefore, it is surprising that businesses appear to have a particular advantage in achieving invited access over individual experts. Although, the results did show that research institutions/universities had greater odds of participating in invited access evidence-giving than businesses. However, this result was not statistically significant. Notably, the other interest group organisational types that did not yield statistically significant results were trade associations and trade unions, indicating minor differences in the odds ratio between these groups and businesses. This also suggests that these groups are more likely to achieve invited access than non-profit groups, experts, and citizens.

Unlike most other interest group organisational categories, governmental groups were more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving than business groups. Specifically, governmental groups were 13 percentage points more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving. Similar trends of high governmental participation in committee hearings were observed across all countries. This is unsurprising considering the importance of governmental departments in delivering crucial information on current and ongoing policy direction to legislative committees.

Table 7.1 Binary logistic regression model of interest group type and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type).

	All countries	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Interest group type					
Business	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Governmental	2.073**	1.813**	3.065**	1.502	2.028**
	(0.178)	(0.224)	(0.805)	(0.566)	(0.312)
Non-profit	0.721**	0.832	0.818	0.201**	0.609**
	(0.061)	(0.190)	(0.190)	(0.070)	(0.100)
Trade association	0.820*	0.766	1.311	0.319*	0.813
	(0.083)	(0.113)	(0.322)	(0.147)	(0.166)
Expert	0.440**	0.418**	0.799	0.698	0.264**
	(0.049)	(0.072)	(0.189)	(0.520)	(0.075)
Citizen	0.068**	0.111**	0.024**	0.057**	0.000
	(0.010)	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.031)	(0.000)
Professional association	0.793	1.088	0.321**	0.607	0.521*
	(0.102)	(0.184)	(0.109)	(0.327)	(0.134)
Trade union	0.958	0.604	1.519	0.000	0.768
	(0.186)	(0.213)	(0.724)	(0.000)	(0.285)
Research institute/university	1.205	1.056	1.244	0.285*	1.806**
	(0.159)	(0.206)	(0.392)	(0.134)	(0.377)
Other	0.757	0.484	0.000	0.000	0.665
	(0.199)	(0.293)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.235)
Government type					
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	0.989	0.692*	2.974**	0.000	1.039
	(0.087)	(0.109)	(0.726)	(0.000)	(0.165)
Coalition	3.073**	0.660*	0.000	0.000	2.652**
	(0.349)	(0.126)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.360)
Committee type					
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.019	1.589**	0.000	0.487*	0.000
	(0.128)	(0.239)	(0.000)	(0.152)	(0.000)
Legislative Ideology					
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.070**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.014)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Centre right	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Right	0.285**	0.000	2.737**	0.000	0.123**
	(0.036)	(0.000)	(0.460)	(0.000)	(0.026)
Subject type					
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.091	1.435*	0.594**	7.514**	0.913
	(0.074)	(0.205)	(0.115)	(2.438)	(0.099)
Country					
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Canada	34.212**				
	(4.952)				
Ireland	0.00				
	(0.00)				
UK	0.714**				
	(0.057)				
N	8780	3463	1912	688	2313
Constant	0.983	0.991	2.927	2.561	1.926
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.272	0.106	0.233	0.214	0.116

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

OR (Robust Standard Errors)

N = Number of observations

Note: Observations from anonymous interest group types excluded.

In addition to assessing interest group organisational structure as a predictor of access, a binary logistic regression model was also generated using interest group motivations as a predictor of access (Table 7.2). As the previous models demonstrated, there are trends to suggest corporate groups generally have a higher likelihood of achieving access than non-corporate groups. Therefore, a difference between economic and issue motivated groups was expected, as these categories often fall between corporate and non-corporate lines (H3). These assumptions were confirmed in logistic regression models that analysed the entire dataset and variables across country cases using interest group motivation as the primary predictor of access in addition to the set control variables. Issue-based groups were used as the reference category in this instance.

When examining the entire dataset, there is a clear and statistically significant association between interest group motivations and levels of access in all the variable categories. Economically motivated groups were found to be markedly more likely to be granted invited access than issue-motivated groups. Specifically, economically motivated groups were six percentage points more likely to be given invited access in oral hearings than issue-based groups. Examining this association with country-specific data yielded similar results; however, statistically significant results were only found in the case of Australia and Ireland. Among Australian evidence-givers, economically motivated groups were found to have 1.32 times higher odds of being granted invited access than issue-based groups. In Ireland, the odds were found to be over 2.65 times higher. This suggests that the dominance of economically motivated groups within legislative committees is not consistent across different representative democracies. But the results do confirm that governmental groups have privileged access across all countries. Following the patterns identified in the previous models (see Table 7.1), governmental groups had significantly higher odds of participating in a committee through oral evidence-giving than issue motivated groups (Table 7.2). This trend was observed across all country cases with statistical significance.

Table 7.2 Binary logistic regression model of interest group motivations and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type).

	All countries	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Interest group motivation					
Issue-based	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Economic	1.321**	1.321**	1.197	2.659**	1.221
	(0.082)	(0.119)	(0.184)	(0.677)	(0.144)
Governmental	2.961**	2.501**	3.515**	5.819**	2.900**
	(0.204)	(0.249)	(0.775)	(1.636)	(0.355)
Unknown	0.089**	0.094**	0.050**	0.283**	0.085**
	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.119)	(0.033)
Government type					
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	1.030	0.718*	3.229**	0.000	0.978
	(0.091)	(0.113)	(0.772)	(0.000)	(0.153)
Coalition	3.098**	0.664*	0.000	0.000	2.616**
	(0.353)	(0.126)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.346)
Committee type					
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.016	1.532*	0.000	0.612	0.000
	(0.124)	(0.229)	(0.000)	(0.181)	(0.000)
Legislative Ideology					
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.067**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.013)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Centre right	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Right	0.275**	0.000	2.463**	0.000	0.120**
	(0.035)	(0.000)	(0.400)	(0.000)	(0.025)
Subject type					
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.102	1.451**	0.581**	6.577**	1.054
	(0.074)	(0.208)	(0.112)	(1.854)	(0.107)
Country					
Australia	Ref.	NA	NA	NA	NA
Canada	36.343**				
	(5.182)				
Ireland	0.000				
	(0.000)				
UK	0.770**				
	(0.060)				
N	9161	3828	1916	708	2659
Constant	0.666	0.705	2.667	0.602	1.287
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.290	0.154	0.213	0.181	0.150

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standard Errors)
N = Number of observations

7.2.2 Investigating variance across policy areas with high and low importance to corporate groups

This thesis also sought to understand whether committee inquiries that discuss policy topics with higher corporate salience are more likely to feature corporate groups. Chapter 4 detailed the process of selecting policy areas with juxtaposing levels of

importance to corporate groups. Policy areas were selected using existing data from the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset (CCLD) that examined corporate lobbying activity (Bernhagen 2019). Environment/energy and macro-economic policy areas were established as issues of high corporate salience, whereas health and social welfare topics were established as issues of low corporate salience.

Several binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to test the expectations relating to corporate access across different policy contexts. The models used the interest group organisational structure and interest group motivation variables as predictors of access. Variance across policy areas was examined by executing the models on policy-specific data. Table 7.3 displays the results of the four logistic regression models conducted using policy-specific data using interest group organisation structure as the primary predictor variable. Following the similar regression model constructed previously, business interest groups were used as the reference category in this case.

The results show a clear difference in the strength of the association between interest group structure and levels of access depending on the policy context. This supports the assumptions outlined in H4 regarding issues of high corporate salience. In environment/energy and macro-economic inquiries, businesses were found to be more likely to be granted privileged access than all interest groups apart from governmental and trade union groups (Table 7.3). For instance, non-profit groups were shown to be 13 percentage points less likely to be granted invited access than businesses within environmental/energy and macro-economic committees.

Table 7.3 Binary logistic regression model of interest group type and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type) across each policy area.

	Environment and energy	Health	Macro-economic	Social welfare
Country				
Australia	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Canada	212.820**	1.261	58.060**	0.000
	(77.817)	(0.398)	(21.845)	(0.000)
Ireland	0.000	0.000	36.74**	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(43.857)	(0.000)
UK	1.408	0.310**	0.533**	0.880
	(0.263)	(0.057)	(0.081)	(0.189)
Interest group type				
Business	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Governmental	2.486**	3.926**	2.097**	1.357
	(0.407)	(0.730)	(0.385)	(0.354)
Non-profit	0.670*	1.510*	0.469**	0.640
	(0.112)	(0.298)	(0.104)	(0.161)
Trade association	0.767	1.580*	0.648*	1.675
	(0.141)	(0.331)	(0.124)	(0.627)
Expert	0.428**	0.712	0.860	0.220**
	(0.087)	(0.173)	(0.232)	(0.076)
Citizen	0.110**	0.016**	0.048**	0.089**
	(0.040)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.028)
Professional association	0.491*	1.847*	0.634	0.799
	(0.160)	(0.451)	(0.149)	(0.286)
Trade union	1.148	1.956	0.487	0.674
	(0.395)	(1.355)	(0.228)	(0.291)
Research institute/university	0.996	1.844*	0.795	3.521**
	(0.198)	(0.502)	(0.279)	(1.413)
Other	1.107	5.355	0.064	0.662
	(0.925)	(4.319)	(0.045)	(0.271)
Government type				
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	2.040**	0.304**	1.968**	0.571
	(0.376)	(0.064)	(0.469)	(0.148)
Coalition	10.863**	0.206**	3.280**	4.419**
	(4.000)	(0.068)	(0.829)	(0.835)
Committee type				
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.303	0.000	1.019	0.865
	(0.279)	(0.000)	(0.284)	(0.331)
Legislative Ideology				
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.028**	1.232	0.011**	0.000
	(0.010)	(0.482)	(0.006)	(0.000)
Centre right	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Right	0.118**	2.840**	0.295**	0.030**
	(0.040)	(0.975)	(0.080)	(0.012)
Subject type				
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.063	0.820	1.821**	1.416
	(0.151)	(0.152)	(0.342)	(0.261)
N	2741	1866	1761	2289
Constant	0.468	0.948	0.872	6.625
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.303	0.230	0.340	0.287

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

OR (Robust Standard Errors)

N = Number of observations

Note: Observations from anonymous interest group types excluded.

As predicted in H4, the opposite trend was observed when examining evidence-giving within health policy contexts. Across health inquiries, governmental bodies, non-profits, trade associations, professional associations, and research institutes were more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving. This suggests businesses do not have the same dominance over the oral evidence-giving in health committees as environmental and macro-economic committees. This is somewhat surprising considering the specific health topics chosen for analysis. Alcohol/tobacco regulations and pharmaceutical pricing would have a notable impact on relevant businesses. So, while health was deemed to be of low importance to corporates according to CCLD data, the lack of access advantages granted to businesses within these topic areas is noteworthy.

However, businesses were observed to be more likely to be granted privileged access in social welfare inquiries than non-profit groups. This was another puzzling observation that diverged from the predictions described in H4. The social welfare committee inquiries that were analysed discussed two topics: social housing and child welfare. These policy topics do not have the same clear links to business interests as the other topics analysed. As such, it is curious that businesses were more than six percentage points more likely to participate in closed access hearings than non-profit groups in this context. However, the results suggest that research institutes have an increased presence in social welfare committee hearings. Research institutions were more likely to achieve privileged access than businesses in health and social welfare inquiries. The increased odds for research institutes were 1.84 and 3.5 times for health and social welfare, respectively.

The model also highlights a significant disparity between the access privileges of experts and citizens compared to businesses. While citizens are not expected to be frequently invited to participate in oral committee hearings, experts ought to be regular participants due to their unique expertise. As inquiries are primarily conducted to gather information, individual experts are expected to be crucial participants during the oral hearings. However, this study found that among evidence-givers participating in environment and energy committee inquiries, experts were 50% less likely to be granted invited access than business groups. Lack of expert inclusion was observed in areas of low importance to corporate groups.

Data on social welfare evidence-giving show that experts had even lower odds of participating in oral testimonies than business groups. It is important to note that individuals were categorised as experts if they were not explicitly representing an organisation. These evidence-givers would have been recorded according to their associated organisation. As such, this method of categorisation could explain the lack of expert observations from oral hearings. However, the definition of expert used in this study would have still included experts that have independently reached out to participate in the committee. These were found to have a greater proportion of written evidence-giving observations than oral observations (Fig. 7.2). Therefore, these results indicate a lack of witness diversity across all committees regardless of the policy area, with businesses and other economically motivated groups typically receiving better access to committees.

However, while some variance was shown across policy areas when analysing the association between interest group structure types and levels of access, a clearer picture was obtained when interest group motivations were used as the primary predictor of access. As in the previous logistic models discussed, issue motivated groups were used as the reference category in logistic regression models to assess variance across policy contexts. Table 7.4 displays the binary logistic model of interest group motivation and control predictors of access across each policy area. The results show that while economically motivated evidence-givers have higher odds of participating in invited access formats across all policy areas, these advantages are most acute within environment and energy and macro-economic policy contexts. For instance, economically motivated groups had 1.38 times higher odds of participating in invited access formats than issue motivated groups within environmental policy contexts. In other words, economically motivated groups were six percentage points more likely to be given invited access than issue-based groups. Similar increased odds were found within macro-economic policy contexts. These results support the assumptions made in H4 regarding policy areas of high corporate issue salience.

Table 7.4 Binary logistic regression model of interest group motivation and control predictors of access (evidence-giving type) across each policy area.

	Environment and energy	Health	Macro-economic	Social welfare
Interest group motivation				
Issue-based	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Economic	1.380**	1.075	1.476*	1.449*
	(0.159)	(0.141)	(0.229)	(0.238)
Governmental	3.817**	2.992**	3.679**	2.060**
	(0.478)	(0.418)	(0.740)	(0.270)
Unknown	0.157**	0.029**	0.069**	0.100**
	(0.052)	(0.011)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Government type				
Majority	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Minority	2.096**	0.329**	1.948**	0.620
	(0.385)	(0.066)	(0.458)	(0.157)
Coalition	11.670**	0.230**	3.307**	4.164**
	(4.284)	(0.074)	(0.820)	(0.795)
Committee type				
Single chamber	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Joint	1.311	0.000	0.907	0.830
	(0.275)	(0.000)	(0.234)	(0.311)
Legislative Ideology				
Centre left	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Centre	0.026**	1.092	0.011**	0.000
	(0.009)	(0.413)	(0.006)	(0.000)
Centre right	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Right	0.109**	2.521**	0.283**	0.030**
	(0.037)	(0.860)	(0.075)	(0.012)
Subject type				
Bill-related	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Inquiry	1.082	0.827	1.917**	1.477*
	(0.151)	(0.150)	(0.352)	(0.260)
Country				
Australia	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Canada	234.649**	1.359	63.881**	0.000
	(85.705)	(0.419)	(23.943)	(0.000)
Ireland	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
UK	1.536*	0.336**	0.542**	1.052
	(0.281)	(0.060)	(0.085)	(0.221)
N	2748	1963	1850	2477
Constant	0.293	1.205	0.475	4.028
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.301	0.238	0.361	0.286

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standard Errors)
N = Number of observations

However, fewer convincing results were found across issues of low corporate salience. Results for health inquiries were not found to be statistically significant. This finding indicates that the associations between interest group motivations and

access are much weaker within health contexts. Although this cannot be confidently claimed due to the lack of statistical significance. Surprisingly, economically motivated groups appear to also have access advantages within social welfare contexts despite being of low importance to corporate groups. However, the issue of social housing may have attracted more participation from economically motivated groups that provide building and housing services for the government.

7.2.3 Investigating the contributing activity of different interest group types

The previous two sections have established interest group factors as a predictor of levels of access to legislative committees. Overall, corporate and economically motivated groups were found to have disproportionately privileged access to committees compared to some non-corporate and issue-motivated groups. This section examines whether corporate dominance is also observed when examining political finance contribution activity. A series of inferential statistical tests were conducted to examine the effect of interest group factors on political finance contribution activity. The dependent variable in this case measured whether an evidence-giver had ever donated to a political party.

Two logistic regression models were conducted to examine the two interest group predictors separately. The models include data from all four countries. Individual country models were not included because country-specific data on contributions from different interest group types did not provide enough statistical power. The same control variables were used as previous models that examined access as the outcome. There are logical reasons to suggest that each control variable could impact the susceptibility that an inquiry would be targeted by contributing groups. For instance, contributing groups could be more likely to target bill-related inquiries than general inquiries, as these inquiries are more likely to impact the policy area directly. Furthermore, contributing groups may participate more frequently in joint committee inquiries or during a coalition or minority government because bipartisan deliberation could result in more access points for interest groups. Finally, legislative ideology has been identified as an influential factor to explain political finance activity, and therefore, it has been deemed appropriate to control the legislative ideology of the governing party in this case (Ensley 2009).

Table 7.5 presents the results of a binary logistic regression model where the primary predictor of political finance contribution status is interest group type. The reference group used in this model is business. The regression results showed several statistically significant associations between interest group type and the likelihood that the group would contribute to a political party. Non-profit, governmental organisations and citizens have considerably lower odds of contributing to a political party than business groups. Specifically, the odds of any of these three groups contributing to a political party were found to be over 90% lower than business groups (Table 7.5). All the odds ratios generated for these three groups were statistically significant. Moreover, experts and research institutes were also found to be significantly less likely to contribute to a political party compared to business groups. While most groups were found to have decreased odds of contributing compared to businesses, trade unions were found to have 2.13 times increased odds.

Moreover, the results also indicate trade associations and professional associations would have higher odds of contributing to a political party than business groups, however, in this instance, the results were not statistically significant. Nevertheless, the logistic regression model indicates a trend whereby corporate-related groups are more likely to donate to political parties than non-corporate groups, which supports the assumptions of H5.

Table 7.5 Binary logistic regression model of interest group type and control predictors of political finance contribution status across all country cases.

	Model
Country	
Australia	Ref.
Canada	2.845**
	(0.716)
Ireland	0.000
	(0.000)
UK	0.169**
	(0.029)
Interest group type	
Business	Ref.
Governmental	0.062**
	(0.009)
Non-profit	0.083**
	(0.012)
Trade association	1.163
	(0.120)
Expert	0.293**
	(0.043)
Citizen	0.083**
	(0.016)
Professional association	1.217
	(0.158)
Trade union	2.132**
	(0.490)
Research institute/university	0.166**
	(0.032)
Government type	
Majority	Ref.
Minority	0.911
	(0.103)
Coalition	1.147
	(0.275)
Committee type	
Single chamber	Ref.
Joint	1.329
	(0.219)
Legislative Ideology	
Centre left	Ref.
Centre	0.320**
	(0.098)
Centre right	0.000
	(0.000)
Right	0.669
	(0.166)
Subject type	
Bill-related	Ref.
Inquiry	0.885
	(0.088)
N	8706
Constant	0.774
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.286

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

OR (Robust Standrd Errors)

N = Number of observations

This trend is explored further in the second logistic regression model that used interest group motivation as the primary predictor of political finance contribution status. In this model, issue-motivated groups were used as the reference category. As seen in Table 7.6, the logistic regression results show that the odds of economically motivated groups were substantially higher than issue motivated groups, confirming the assumptions in H5. The odds of contributing were 7.7 times higher in economically motivated groups than for issue motivated groups and were statistically significant. In other words, 31% of economically motivated groups were likely to donate to a political party compared to only 0.06% of issue-based groups. This distinct disparity could represent the financial inequalities between interest groups, particularly those with profit-motives instead of those who are issue-focused. It also provides additional evidence to support assumptions expressed in the previous chapter that contributions are made as an investment rather than to show ideological support. This is because issue-motivated groups, which will often have clear ideological preferences, are significantly less likely to donate to political parties than are economically motivated groups. Although, unsurprisingly, issue-based groups were found to have higher odds of contributing compared to the other two motivation categories: governmental and unknown. As previously stated, unknown categories were primarily used for citizen or anonymous groups. For government and unknown groups, the likelihood of contributing to a political party decreases by approximately 50% and 60%, respectively, compared to issue-based groups.

Table 7.6 Binary logistic regression model of interest group motivations and control predictors of political finance contribution status across all country cases.

	All countries
Country	
Australia	Ref.
Canada	2.902**
	(0.745)
Ireland	0.000 (0.000)
UK	0.177**
	(0.030)
Interest group motivation	
Issue-based	Ref.
Economic	8.036**
	(0.727)
Governmental	0.440**
	(0.066)
Unknown	0.423**
	(0.081)
Government type	
Majority	Ref.
Minority	0.911
	(0.104)
Coalition	1.129
	(0.269)
Committee type	
Single chamber	Ref.
Joint	1.341
	(0.222)
Legislative Ideology	
Centre left	Ref.
Centre	0.327**
	(0.100)
Centre right	0.000
	(0.000)
Right	0.660
	(0.162)
Subject type	
Bill-related	Ref.
Inquiry	0.889
	(0.088)
N	9161
Constant	0.109
McFadden's Pseudo-R2	0.285

*P<0.05 **P<0.01
OR (Robust Standrd Errors)
N = Number of observations

7.2.4 Conclusion

This section sought to examine three hypotheses relating to the associations between interest group factors, access advantages and political finance activity. Ultimately, the results signify that elite advantages are likely to exist in the agenda-setting and consultation process. Specifically, corporate groups were found to typically dominate oral committee hearings. There was substantial evidence to suggest these groups

often receive advantaged access to committees over other groups. However, some variance in corporate access advantages were observed across different country and policy contexts. For instance, these groups were more likely to receive privileged access to committees in Australia and Ireland. Moreover, while corporate groups were dominant across all policy contexts, their advantages were strongest in areas determined to be of the highest interest to corporate groups.

These results also demonstrated a notable absence of expert and citizen inclusion in committee hearings, indicating a lack of witness diversity across different groups, particularly those without a clear affiliation to an organisation. Moreover, the presence of research institutes and universities in oral hearings was also limited in environmental and macro-economic areas. This suggests that committee inquiries on these subjects lack representation from groups designed to produce evidence-led advice. This observation was further confirmed through additional analysis that examined the association between interest group motivations and committee access. Issue motivated groups were significantly less likely to be granted invited access across all policy areas. However, environmental and macro-economic areas displayed the highest disparity between motivation groups with statistical significance.

Moreover, corporate dominance was also displayed when analysing political finance contribution outcomes. Committee participants that were corporations, trade associations, trade unions and professional associations were significantly more likely to have contributed to a political party than any other group. Notably, these groups can typically be categorised as motivated by profit or self-interest. This corroborates results presented in the previous chapter that indicates contributions are likely investment motivated.

7.3 Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter support the assumptions that elite groups achieve greater access to the policy process. The analysis identified which interest group types typically receive privileged access to committees. Generally, across all country cases, corporate and other economically motivated groups dominated legislative committee hearings. Across all countries, economically motivated groups

were found to be 42% more likely to participate in invited access formats than issue-based groups. Organisations that were less driven by financial and self-interest, such as non-profit groups and individual experts, did not achieve the same access advantages granted to corporate groups. Specifically, non-profit groups and experts were 36% and 50% less likely to be granted invited access compared to business groups. The results support elitist public policy theories that argue financially elite groups often have better opportunities to influence policy (Lindblom 1977; Schattschneider 1960).

Moreover, these findings corroborate existing empirical research on interest group access to politicians across different western democracies. Previous studies have found that those representing private interests, such as corporations, typically receive more direct access to formal political spheres (Binderkrantz et al. 2017; Pedersen et al. 2015). This chapter also confidently confirmed the assumption that corporate and other economically motivated groups are more likely to donate to political parties. This corroborates past research that found the profitability of an interest group can be used to predict contribution patterns in the UK (Adams and Hardwick 2002).

This chapter revealed that the same trends of corporate dominance could be observed across Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK, although, the difference between business and non-profit access advantages was most notable in Ireland and the UK. This thesis did not examine the institutional factors that might explain the disproportionate composition of committee witnesses. However, Beswick and Elstub's (2019) examination of UK committee procedures found that committee chairs are often compelled to select the same types of witnesses due to a lack of time and resources dedicated to selecting new participants. Moreover, previous comparative research on legislative committees has shown that UK and Ireland committee chairs have significantly greater powers than other Western European democracies (Sieberer and Höhmann 2017). The power of committee chairs, and the resulting lack of power from oppositional parties in committees, could result in a more partisan witness selection process than in committees with weaker chairs.

However, the Australian selection process is highly partisan, as departmental ministers primarily select witnesses. But while less distinct differences between

business and non-profit access advantages were found in Australia, there were notable findings regarding groups with different core motivations. In Australia, economically motivated groups were seven percentage points more likely to participate in oral hearings than issue-based groups. Therefore, the institutional and procedural factors discussed could help explain the lack of witness diversity observed in this study. However, further research is needed to fully explore the mechanisms that allow committee inquiries to be dominated by elite groups.

This thesis did not analyse the content of the oral and written submissions, and consequently, cannot determine the policy preferences of participating interest groups. However, it is reasonable to assume economically motivated groups are more likely to participate in committee inquiries to promote their self-interest. As such, the increased presence of these groups in oral hearings, as opposed to groups categorised as primarily issue-motivated, is problematic. Expert, citizen, and non-profit representation was lacking across committees in all four policy areas but especially those of high corporate issue salience. Previous literature has not adequately analysed participation inequality across different policy areas. As such, these findings provide a crucial contribution to the literature on interest group access. Data showed that economically motivated groups dominate environmental and macro-economic committee inquiries. Economically motivated groups were six percentage points more likely to participate in invited access formats than issue-based groups in these policy contexts. This substantiates previous findings that businesses can more successfully lobby for access regarding economic policy than in other policy areas (Baumgartner and Leech 2001). The findings also support theories that the economic importance of corporate groups can result in unequal political power, particularly in discussions of economic issues (Fairfield 2010).

As noted in Chapter 2, the official committee procedures for witness selection for the four countries are vague. Most procedural guidelines do not list any criteria for selection beyond the witnesses holding some expertise in the subject of inquiry. This criterion should not explain or justify the levels of unequal access given to self-interest groups. Issue-based groups, such as non-profits and experts, are valuable sources of information. The grassroots connections built by non-profit groups mean they are a vital informational channel between the government and the public

(Maddison et al. 2004). However, scholars have argued that legislators often value technical expertise above public interest principles during policy consultations (Dür and de Biévre 2007; Hallstrom 2007). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the informational worth of non-profit groups also appears to be low in various national committee settings. The marginalisation of public interest groups was most acute in committee inquiries discussing environmental and macro-economic policy. This could have concerning repercussions for political representation, as the policy decisions regarding these topics have significant implications for many societal groups. Issues of climate change, oil mining, corporate tax and banking regulation certainly concern corporate groups but are also key public interest issues. The high number of written submissions from issue-based groups demonstrates their desire to participate in political debates on these issues.

The findings also showed that citizens are relatively well-engaged in the committee process and often participate through written submissions. Citizens accounted for almost 20% of the total written submission participants. This shows that citizens have a strong willingness to engage in the formal policy process. This contradicts existing evidence that many citizens are wary of participating in the formal parliamentary process due to their distrust of political elites (More in Common 2021).

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data analysis results relating to interest group level hypotheses. The interest group level hypotheses used interest group factors to predict access outcomes and political finance activity. The hypotheses were tested using a series of logistic regression models. Overall, the findings showed that financially elite groups, such as businesses and trade associations, receive better access to committees than other key interest group types. This chapter revealed that certain interest groups dominate the committee evidence-giving process. These groups are typically economically motivated and, therefore, more likely to have greater financial resources. As such, this thesis adds to the literature on interest group access by providing evidence of elite and corporate advantage within a crucial stage of the policy process.

This chapter also presented findings relating to the variance of interest group access across policy areas of different importance to corporate groups. This analysis provides a notable contribution to the literature on interest group access that has failed to examine patterns of elite advantage across various policy areas adequately. Statistically significant associations were found between interest group motivation and access within evidence-giving data on environment and energy and macro-economic committee proceedings.

Overall, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate a lack of witness diversity within committee hearings across Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. Typically, groups with primarily economic interests receive better access than those that are issue motivated. Non-profit organisations did not receive the same levels of priority access to committee hearings as corporate groups, especially within inquiries discussing environmental and macro-economic issues. This suggests that opportunities for political participation within formal spheres are often unequal. A lack of witness diversity in a vital area of policy consultation risks damaging representational equality, whereby policy outcomes better reflect moneyed interests, and the political disengagement of citizens is further exacerbated.

Chapter 8 Can money buy access to legislative committees? Conclusion

Introduction

Western governments continue to be marred with continuous accusations of permitting wealthy donors' undue political influence. The current British Conservative government has been publicly accused of granting their most affluent donors a variety of political advantages. One such advantage is allowing donors privileged access to top politicians, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, through regular private meetings and calls (Burgis et al. 2021). Similar cash-for-access stories have arisen in Australia, where political parties regularly host lavish fundraisers for party donors giving participants intimate contact with Australia's most powerful politicians (Ting 2021). The string of reports into political donors buying private access to key policymakers warrant additional questions as to whether donors can also receive access privileged in public political spheres.

Allowing elites to obtain privileged access to the policy process using political contributions would have undesirable consequences on the critical democratic values of equality of representation and participation. Western representative democracies are built on the foundation that citizens receive an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. Legislative committees give citizens and interest groups opportunities to participate in the formal political process beyond simply voting in elections.

While the realities of modern governance dictate that true equal participation is impossible, policy deliberative spheres should aim to be as inclusive as possible to ensure policy is reflective of the views of the broader society rather than a selected few. This thesis sought to examine participatory inequality at a specific point in the policy cycle, namely the agenda-setting and consultation phase. Legislative committees play a vital role in this phase and are responsible for deliberating policy problems and possible solutions. During the deliberation process, committees are tasked with gathering evidence and information from various interest groups and the

public. Committees use the information collated from external groups to make informed recommendations on policy.

This thesis recognised that interest groups primarily participate in legislative committees through two evidence-giving formats: oral and written. Oral evidence-giving occurs when interest groups provide oral testimony at a committee hearing. This is a closed-access format where interest groups must have an explicit invitation from a committee to participate in an oral hearing. Written evidence-giving is open-access and does not require an invitation meaning any group or individual can provide a written submission to a committee. Significantly, the two evidence-giving formats hold distinctly different access implications. As politicians gate-keep oral evidence-giving and only allow a selected few to participate in direct consultations, interest groups that participate in oral hearings receive privileged access to committees. Speaking at a recorded committee hearing gives an interest group the spotlight and platform to argue their case in a compelling and memorable way (Geddes 2018). Moreover, this form of access will likely result in better lobbying success, as interest groups participating in oral hearings have direct contact with policymakers (Huwyler and Martin 2021; Nownes and DeAlejandro 2009). This thesis aimed to track evidence-giving across different legislative committees and identify whether political finance or interest group factors were associated with the level of access interest groups received to legislative committees.

This thesis examined political finance influence during the committee process for several reasons. Firstly, evidence has shown that political contributions can affect legislative behaviour by altering politicians' policy positions on certain issues and influencing budgetary decisions (Flavin 2014; Hawkins et al. 2012; Monardi and Glantz 1998). Secondly, this early stage of the policy process has been overlooked in the literature despite arguments that political finance influence may be stronger in this context. It was argued that politicians and interest groups might feel more comfortable engaging in *quid pro quo* exchanges during the committee process, which is less publicly scrutinised and does not make final policy decisions. This thesis also examined the associations between different interest group factors and levels of access. This line of empirical inquiry was driven by existing literature on elite influence within the policy process, particularly past studies that found

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corporate groups often have disproportionate access to policymakers (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Dommett et al. 2017; Garsten and Sörbom 2017; Klüver 2012).

Examining associations between political contributions and the level of committee access granted to interest groups required a thorough data collection of oral and written evidence-giving across committees in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. Data were also collected on the political finance activity of participating groups using secondary data on political finance donations. Using descriptive and inferential statistics on the constructed datasets, this thesis found numerous inequalities in the level of privileged access different interest groups received. Evidence indicated that interest groups who contribute to political parties, particularly political parties in power, are more likely to participate in oral committee hearings. However, these trends were only observable with statistical significance in Australia and Canada.

Broader evidence of inequalities was presented in Chapter 7 that examined committee access across different interest group types. Profit-driven groups, including businesses and trade associations, were consistently more likely to participate in oral hearings than issue-based groups, such as non-profit organisations or individual experts. Corporate access advantages were observed across different country and policy contexts.

Ultimately, the evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7 provides a pivotal contribution to the literature on elite influence in the policy process. The findings lend credence to the theory that mutually dependent relationships between politicians and donors can exist, and political favours could be granted within committee proceedings. The thesis also presents the importance of approaching this topic through a comparative lens, considering the variance observed across country cases. Currently, there have been few attempts to examine political finance influence cross-nationally. Thus, this thesis provides a critical first step in building a comparative picture.

This conclusion is separated into five sections. The first section summarises the main findings and the thesis contribution. The second section discusses the key findings. The third section outlines several research limitations, including the data and

methodological limitations. The fourth section follows with a discussion on avenues for future research, and the final section concludes.

8.1 Thesis summary and contribution

This thesis investigated the impact of political finance contributions on interest group access to legislative committees in four countries. Alongside this primary research aim, this thesis sought to conduct a broader assessment of elite influence by measuring the impact of different interest group factors on committee access. In doing so, this thesis presents several theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. Firstly, the thesis provides a theoretical contribution by conceptualising political finance influence within the agenda-setting and consultation phase of the policy process. Secondly, a notable methodological contribution was made by constructing two original datasets using a bespoke automated coding program to return data on committee participants' political finance activity. Thirdly, this thesis presented several empirical contributions. It marks the first empirical study on the impact political finance contributions may have on interest group access to committees. Moreover, it presents the first comparative dataset of interest group participation in legislative committees across different western democracies. This section will elaborate on these contributions by summarising the main findings of each chapter.

This thesis was divided into two sections: theoretical and empirical. The theoretical section of the thesis was comprised of the first three chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the thesis and outlined the research puzzle. The chapter explained the importance of examining the role of political finance on interest group access. Fundamentally, this thesis addresses a core democratic principle: political equality. This principle holds that all citizens within a democracy should have equal opportunities to influence the political process. In recognising that representative democracies have limited avenues for external actors to participate in policy decision-making, this thesis examines political participation in legislative committees, which provide the primary opportunity for formal policy consultation. As such, this thesis marks the first comparative assessment of interest group evidence-giving in national committees.

Importantly, this thesis also examined various factors that could impact political equality at this key policy stage. Primarily, whether interest groups that give money to political parties are more likely to participate in oral hearings than non-contributing groups? Understanding the political finance influence in this context is crucial, as in many countries, political contributions from individuals and organisations are legal. Finding evidence that contributing groups receive greater access to agenda-setting and policy consultation could undermine the public's confidence in policy-making institutions and its trust that legislators are representatives for the common good. Moreover, this evidence could also spark discussion on the need for political finance reform. International organisations and political scholars have highlighted the risks to democracy posed by lax political finance regulations (Global Integrity 2005; Norris and Abel van Es 2016; OECD 2015). It is widely assumed that weaker regulations can cause political spheres to be flooded with private money that may influence political decision-making. But despite these concerns, existing research has yet to provide a comprehensive empirical assessment of political finance influence through a comparative lens. This thesis provided an important initial empirical step by identifying broad trends of political finance influence across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation.

Chapter 2 explored the literature on elite influence during the policy process, including literature on corporate power and the role of political finance in influencing legislative behaviour. Several observations were extracted from the literature review. Firstly, evidence of political finance influence on legislative behaviour exists, but evidence comes primarily from political decision-making at the end of the policy legitimation stage, and findings are often weak. Secondly, studies on political finance influence at earlier policy process stages are limited, although theories on political finance and agenda-setting support the view that these earlier policy stages could be more susceptible to *quid pro quo* exchanges (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Cotton 2012; Hacker and Pierson 2001; Peoples 2013; Schattschneider 1960). This is primarily because this stage includes crucial decision-making on the direction of policy that is typically under-scrutinised compared to later policy stages.

Thirdly, literature on elite influence and political access identify other factors, such as interest group characteristics, that may impact the level of witness diversity observed in legislative committee hearings (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Coen and Katsaitis 2018). Specifically, theories on corporate power identify several reasons why businesses and trade associations could receive unique access advantages. This includes the importance of corporate groups in delivering economic growth, stability, and vital public services (Garsten and Sörbom 2017). Exploring existing research into interest group access highlighted that corporate groups often receive privileged access to politicians (Dommett et al. 2017; Klüver 2012). Finally, literature on witness selection procedures in legislative committees highlights the need to have a diverse composition of witnesses to ensure the informational function of committees is maximised (Bochel and Berthier 2019; Bruckner et al. 2020; Holli 2012). However, existing investigations on witness diversity is currently limited to examining gender and ethnic diversity. While past research has examined witness diversity across different interest groups, a better understanding of elite participation in committee spheres is needed (Halpin et al. 2012). Moreover, while there are a limited number of single case studies specifically on committee access, comparative assessments are also lacking (Halpin et al. 2012; Pedersen et al. 2015; Vera 2021).

Two clear research gaps were identified following a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. Firstly, the theoretical arguments that link political finance influence with policy agenda-setting have not been thoroughly tested empirically. The need to explore new policy contexts is corroborated by the lack of consistent evidence of political finance influence in the current literature. Secondly, existing scholarship in this area has heavily focused on the US, resulting in a glaring knowledge gap of the impact of contributions in other western democracies. This thesis addressed both literature gaps.

This was achieved by examining the associations between political finance contributions and interest group access advantages during committees at the agenda-setting and consultation policy stage. The investigation required several hypotheses grounded in theory before constructing the appropriate research design. Chapter 3 used the theory discussed in the literature review to construct theoretical mechanisms and several testable hypotheses. The hypotheses were separated into two 'levels': the

political finance level and the interest group level. The former featured hypotheses using political finance factors, such as contributions or regulation stringency scores, as the primary predictors. The latter featured hypotheses using interest group factors, such as interest group type and motivation, as the primary predictors. The levels drew upon different literature strands to explain the theoretical mechanisms between the predictor factors and levels of committee access. The levels of access were categorised as oral-evidence giving and written evidence-giving, whereby the former represents privileged access, and the latter represents open access.

Within the political finance level, it was predicted that interest groups that contribute to political parties were more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving. This assumption was based on dependence theory that denotes the financial pressure of running modern electoral campaigns results in politicians relying on private sources of income. In exchange for donors' financial support, politicians provide donors with political favours. This thesis ties dependence theory with theories on agenda-setting to explain why these *quid pro quo* exchanges could be more likely in this case. It was argued that exchanging committee access favours for contributions is a less "risky" endeavour for politicians for several reasons. For instance, the media and public do not scrutinise committee procedures and decision-making as intently as later policy decisions, such as final bill votes or awarding government contracts. Moreover, granting interest group's privileged access could be seen as a less problematic exchange than a politician explicitly changing their policy position because of campaign contributions.

Chapter 3 also uses dependence theory to explain why significant variance in the associations between contributions and access was expected across countries with different political finance regulations. As the dependent relationships between politicians and donors are created by pressure to raise private money for campaigns, regulations that limit that pressure would also limit the strength of the dependent relationship. Generous public finance and restrictions on private contributions and political party spending were identified as political finance regulatory approaches that could reduce these pressures. As such, it was expected that the associations between contributions and privileged access to committees would be weaker in countries with strict political finance regulation.

This chapter also predicted other factors' effect on access, namely interest group characteristics. Following the literature on elite influence and corporate power explored in Chapter 2, this thesis expected corporate groups to participate in oral evidence-giving more frequently than other interest group types, as seen in previous studies. However, this thesis offers a new perspective on interest group access by examining its effects across different types of policy. As corporate groups were expected to have significant access advantages, assessing the associations in committee discussing policies of juxtaposing interest to corporate groups was essential. It was expected that corporations would be more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving discussing issues of high corporate salience. As such, the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3 present several conceptual contributions as they examine new associations yet to be explored in the political finance and interest group literature.

A carefully designed empirical study was needed to test the outlined hypotheses. The empirical section of the thesis was comprised of the final four chapters. Chapter 4 outlined the case study selection process necessary to produce a compelling comparative study. This included the systematic processes used to select the country and policy areas to analyse the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3. This included selecting countries with political finance regulations of varying strengths and policy areas with juxtaposing importance to corporate groups. The principles of Mill's Most Similar Systems Design informed the country selection process. Several selection criteria were constructed and applied to ensure countries were similar regarding their political system, democratic and economic status, but differed regarding their political finance regulations. This meant selecting countries that were representative democracies with high economic status and were aligned with the Westminster system of government. Practical criteria regarding data suitability were also applied to ensure the necessary data were widely available for all the selected countries. Using these criteria, four countries were shortlisted: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK.

A political finance stringency index (PFSI) was created to score the shortlisted country's political finance laws based on the level of state interventionism. This

index was a simplified version of the indexes created by Witko (2005) and Norris and Abel van Es (2016). Countries were given an overall score and individual scores for their laws on public financing, contribution limits, spending limits and third-party regulation. Scores were generated using information from IDEA's political finance database (2021) that gives reliable information on the current regulations for each country. The PFSI scores found an adequate level of variance between the countries. Australia was found to have the laxest regulations, while Canada and Ireland had the strongest. Although Canada and Ireland had the same overall score, the individual regulatory scores presented notable variance. Ireland has a more generous public financing system, while Canada has stricter contribution and spending limits.

In addition to selecting countries, four different policy areas and eight subsequent policy topics needed to be selected. The number of policy areas and topics was determined by the time and resources constraints of the research. The policy selection would inform the data collection process, as committee inquiries would only be used for analysis if they discussed the selected policy topics. To test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3, the policy areas needed to have varying importance to corporate groups. To achieve this, an existing large-N study on corporate lobbying was used. An analysis of the Corporate Citizenship and Lobbying Dataset found environmental and macro-economic issues were of high importance to corporate groups, while health and social welfare issues were of low importance (Bernhagen 2019). From these policy areas, eight sub-topics were selected. Then environmental topics were oil mining and climate change. The macro-economic topics were corporate tax and banking regulation. The health topics were pharmaceutical pricing and alcohol/tobacco regulation. The social welfare topics were child welfare and social housing.

Chapter 5 detailed the methodological processes used to collect the data on interest group evidence-giving in committees and the political finance activity of committee participants. A quantitative research design was used for several reasons. For instance, a broader analysis of trends was deemed the most valuable first step considering the lack of current empirical evidence of political finance influence over committee access. Quantitative methodologies allow for an efficient analysis of a large amount of numerical data to identify noteworthy trends. Additionally,

quantitative analysis can provide more generalisable results that help broaden our understanding of committee access across different country and policy contexts. Moreover, qualitative research can often be unreliable when examining political finance influence due to participants' reluctance to be forthcoming about their involvement in unsavoury political activity.

Two datasets were created using content analysis techniques to construct the numerical datasets. Content analysis techniques were used to allow qualitative documents to be coded into numerical data. Committee documents, such as oral hearings and written submissions, were coded using a tailored coding framework. The documents were manually coded to return several variables on interest group evidence-giving, such as interest group characteristics, the nature of the evidence-giving (oral or written), and other relevant information about the committee and political environment. This data composed the first dataset on interest group evidence-giving. A second dataset was created to record the contribution activity of committee participants. Data were collected using automated coding methods on official data on political party donors. A bespoke text-matching program was created to search the names of committee participants within the party donor databases and return data on their political finance activity. The program presents a notable methodological contribution that could be used in future studies wishing to broaden the committee or country analysis.

This second dataset on political finance activity included 17,247 donations from committee participants. Elements of this dataset were then merged with the first dataset to create a primary dataset ready for analysis. The primary dataset included 9163 instances of evidence-giving across the four countries. This dataset is the first comparative dataset on committee participation and associated political finance activity, presenting a significant empirical contribution to the literature.

The following chapters presented the quantitative data analysis results and the subsequent discussion of the findings. Chapter 6 detailed the statistical analysis relating to the political finance level hypotheses while Chapter 7 discussed the interest group level hypotheses. Chapter 6 detailed several main findings. Firstly, evidence was found to suggest contributions are associated with privileged access to

committees, particularly in Australia. This was noteworthy considering Australia had the weakest political finance regulation of all the selected countries. Moreover, evidence also indicated donations are target towards those in power. Most of the donations came from corporate groups and were given to parties in political power at the time. Furthermore, statistically significant associations were found between contributions to parties in political power and access advantages. However, these trends were only observed in Australia, Canada, and UK. No links between contributions and access were found in Ireland.

Chapter 6 discussed the implications of these findings. It must be emphasised that these associations only present a correlation between contribution and privileged access to committee in certain cases. However, the strength of the statistical associations, especially in the case of Australia, justifies the thesis' approach of assessing political finance influence at this policy stage. The findings provided supporting evidence for the dependence theory mechanism discussed in Chapter 3. Moreover, the variation across country cases also highlights the need for further comparative studies. However, the results from Canada and the UK contradicted the expectations for countries with varying political finance regulatory stringency. As such, more expansive comparative studies are needed to further explore the importance of different regulatory approaches.

Chapter 7 explored the association between different interest group factors and privileged access to committees. The evidence largely confirmed the assumptions that corporate and other economically motivated groups would be more likely to participate in oral evidence-giving. Trends of corporate access advantages were observed across different countries and policy areas. However, corporates were most dominant in Ireland and within committees discussing environment and macro-economic issues. Overall, the findings corroborate existing evidence observed in other areas of political access (Binderkrantz et al. 2017; Pedersen et al. 2015). The lack of non-profit, citizen, and expert inclusion observed in committee inquiry hearing discussing environment and macro-economic policy is concerning. Evidence suggests committees often lack the level of witness diversity expected during key policy consultations that discuss common good issues likely to affect a wide variety of societal groups.

This thesis has brought a new understanding of the potential impact of political contributions and elite influence on witness diversity within legislative committees. It has taken existing theories on financial dependence and corporate lobbying advantage to create new frameworks to examine their impact on interest group access to legislative committees. As such, this thesis provides a much-needed assessment of political finance influence at the agenda-setting and consultation policy stage. This thesis presented original data to provide this comprehensive empirical assessment.

The dependence theory framework was used to examine the role of political finance influence at this stage and explain how the pressures of electoral financing can encourage politicians to grant donors' political advantages (Jorgenson 2013). The empirical analysis has presented evidence to support the key components of the dependence theory mechanism. The mechanism has two components to explain how contributions can influence access advantages to committees. First, donors must give money with the intent to achieve political favours. Second, politicians must grant donor's favourable access. The results show that political finance donations are targeted towards the powerful regardless of their ideological position. Rather, this indicates that donations are given to obtain a return on investment. Moreover, evidence shows that contributions are associated with access advantages in some instances. While this evidence can only serve as an indicator that a dependence relationship likely exists, the identification of solid associations gives credence to the existence of political finance influence during the consultation stage. In doing so, the results provide empirical support for arguments that *quid pro quos* exchanges may occur more frequently in less-scrutinised policy processes (Cotton 2012; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Peoples 2013).

A vital component of the dependence theory framework is that the donor-politician relationship is contingent on financial pressure. Hence, political finance regulations can play an important role in exacerbating or diminishing the strength of the dependent relationship. As such, it was important to conduct a comparative study of nations with different approaches to campaign finance; Especially as most existing comparative studies have emphasised the importance of regulatory stringency without conducting a comprehensive assessment of regulatory effects on political

behaviour and outcomes (Global Integrity 2005; Norris and Abel Van Es 2016; Witko 2005).

The comparative results indicated that political finance regulations might impact contribution influence. Statistically significant associations between contributions and access were observed strongly in Australia, which has a low political finance regulatory stringency score. In contrast, Ireland did not have such associations, with a high stringency score and a generous public financing system. The trends support the hypothesis that regulatory stringency would reduce political finance influence. However, corroborating patterns were only observed in countries at juxtaposing ends of the political finance stringency index. UK and Canada results did not align with these assumptions. This could indicate that only significant regulatory stringency differences can cause notable variance in political finance influence. Regardless, this thesis highlights the importance of studying political finance during the agenda-setting and consultation process through a comparative lens and presents a crucial first step in doing so.

Aside from generating noteworthy results on the links between contributions and interest group access, this thesis also examined witness diversity in committee hearings across different interest groups. This study links theories on corporate power to privileged committee access to argue that the unique characteristics of corporations to provide economic and public services give them greater lobbying advantages. The empirical analysis found evidence of corporate dominance across most committee hearings. As expected, trends of corporate dominance were strongest in areas of high importance to corporate groups. Committees' inquiries discussing environmental and macro-economic policy displayed the most considerable difference in access advantages between corporate and non-profit groups. In contrast, non-corporate groups, such as research institutions, received significantly better access to health and social welfare hearings. The results indicate that witness diversity differs significantly depending on the policy areas; despite the relevance of the topics, such as climate change, to a wide range of societal groups beyond just corporations.

Fundamentally, the results showed that citizens are willing to participate in the formal policy process; however, this willingness has not resulted in citizens achieving better access to committees. The results showed an evident lack of citizen involvement in committee hearings across all countries. Only 1.7% of the total oral evidence-giving observations were from citizens acting independently from an organised group. A citizen's ability to give written evidence may assist in building some level of public engagement in national political decision-making. However, the lack of oral evidence-giving opportunities for citizens suggests the influence of regular citizens is limited within formal parliamentary spheres. As 'committee hearings are the places where evidence makes its biggest impact' and considering this study's findings, efforts should be made to improve witness diversity in these contexts or find alternative avenues for citizens to participate in the committee process (Geddes 2018, 290).

This thesis has produced several noteworthy findings on the issues of interest group access to legislative committees. The findings helped broaden our understanding of political finance and elite influence within the agenda-setting and consultation process. However, future studies must consider research limitations of this thesis. The following section will outline these limitations before discussing directions for future research.

8.3 Research limitations

The empirical research conducted for this thesis was carefully designed to ensure high data validity and reliability standards. Nevertheless, several limitations were identified throughout the research process. Recognising research limitations helps ensure data can be accurately interpreted. Moreover, it helps recognise data gaps and methodological flaws that could be resolved in future research. This section outlines the following three limitations and the associated implications. Firstly, this section assesses the limitations in explaining causality between political finance contributions and interest group access to committees. Secondly, this section outlines the data gaps in the political finance data collected from official electoral bodies in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. Thirdly, using automated coding could have led to some inaccurate data collection. The automated coding program was designed to save time, expand the scope of data analysis, and maximise data reliability.

8.3.1 Difficulty in obtaining causal links

This thesis conducted a large-N quantitative study of interest group access to legislative committees. The study was designed to examine the association between political finance contributions and interest group access. However, one notable disadvantage of examining these links in a broad quantitative study is the difficulty in obtaining causal links. Proving causation in any political science or public policy study is complex, but this task becomes especially challenging when examining political finance influences. While many studies will use triangulation methods to bolster assumptions of causality, the implementation of qualitative methods is more challenging in this context (Hammerton and Munafò 2021). Qualitative methods, such as interviews with committee members to investigate causal links, have some limitations . Participants would not be expected to be forthcoming and truthful in the role political finance may play in the decision to grant access to groups. Nevertheless, without explicit confirmation from relevant actors of the relevance of political finance on political behaviour, quantitative results provide patterns of association rather than causal links. Of course, these endeavours are still fruitful, especially when quantitative studies explore new policy process stages in different country contexts and use variables to bolster the ability to comment on causal links.

However, ultimately like many political finance studies, this thesis cannot provide solid causal links between contributions and access to legislative committees. There are many reasons why a particular interest group may be given invited access at any one time. For example, a group may have a specific expertise on one area of policy, or a group may have gained notable public and media attention lobbying for policy change. Moreover, obtaining firm conclusions on causality requires empirical repetition, whereby multiple observational studies conducted across representative samples produce similar associations to support sound theoretical assumptions (Marini and Singer 1988). Therefore, conducting a study in an understudied area, with the limited ability to compare results with existing studies, means any assumptions of causality must be made with caution.

As a result, this study focuses on the correlations between the dependent and primary independent variables. However, as previously discussed, identifying correlations is

still noteworthy and significant at this stage for the following reasons: Firstly, engaging in a comprehensive quantitative study of legislative committee activity allows one first to investigate if earlier stages of the policy process warrant further analysis. Secondly, the lack of comparative or non-US case studies on political finance means it is first fruitful to obtain a broad overview of the possible impacts of political finance in other countries to identify possible countries that require a more in-depth analysis.

8.3.2 Contribution data gaps

This thesis used secondary datasets on direct contributions to political parties and political candidates that were sourced from independent electoral bodies, or in Canada's case, from a reputable third-party source (Australian Electoral Commission 2021; Electoral Commission 2021; National Post 2021; Standards in Public Office Commission 2021). Secondary data were used to identify which committee participants had donated in the past and to collect associated data on their political finance contribution activity. Using official data on direct contributions were deemed the most appropriate approach for several reasons. Firstly, as this type of disclosure is regulated by law and overseen by official oversight bodies, it is often seen as a comprehensive and reliable account of direct contributions. Secondly, official datasets are often required to be updated annually, giving researchers easy access to current data. As such, this thesis used the most comprehensive and reliable data available.

However, even official political finance data still has three notable data gaps that can impact our understanding of political finance influence. The following gaps highlight that the donation data used in this thesis only presents a microcosm of the full scope of money in politics.

Firstly, most countries do not require extensive information on all direct contributions to political parties and candidates. Many countries have disclosure laws with a donation amount threshold that dictates which donations need to be officially recorded. For instance, the UK only requires political parties to disclose donations over £7500 or £1500 if a donor gives more than one donation a year (Electoral Commission 2021). Furthermore, Australia only requires donations over $14,500 to

be disclosed (approx. £7760.00) (Australia Electoral Commission 2021a). Disclosure thresholds are likely to result in a large portion of undisclosed donations. Although, the analysis of political finance data did show that many donations under this amount were recorded in the official contribution datasets. Regardless, disclosure thresholds prevent researchers from understanding the full scope of direct contributions.

Secondly, official political finance datasets can include errors and false information. Inaccuracies in donation reporting can be due to several factors. For example, numerous recorded instances of political parties, politicians, and campaigns fail to accurately report donations across different representative democracies (Cohen and Selyukh 2012; Knaus and Evershed 2018; Wintour and Hencke 2008). Failure to disclose donations can naturally create large gaps in a parties' campaign donation history. Moreover, inaccuracies can also occur because of flawed donation and reporting methods. For example, Ratcliff and Halpin's (2021) have recently created an expanded political finance dataset due to some inaccurate data reporting found in the official AEC data. Ratcliff and Halpin corrected several coding anomalies and standardised the names of donors to produce a clearer dataset. Unfortunately, this improved dataset was not available during the empirical stage of this thesis.

However, these problems in standardisation were recognised at the data collection stage and procedures were implemented to rectify this problem (see section 5.4.2). Upon an assessment of the secondary political finance datasets retrieved for each country, a list of common prefixes, suffixes, and other abbreviations used to record donor names was collated. A search and replace function was then used to amend the datasets and remove the words entirely or replace with the full, unabbreviated word. This resulted in secondary datasets that were well standardised and suitable for key-word matching.

Thirdly, most countries do not have a database that records indirect contributions. Indirect, or 'third party', contributions are financial transactions that occur for political purposes but are not given directly to political parties or politicians. An example of an indirect contribution would be an organisation running a television or newspaper advert in support of a political party without the input of the official campaign. But other forms of indirect contributions would be financial transactions

towards polling, campaign consultants, online campaigning. Typically, third-party donations do not need to be formally disclosed (Dimmery and Patterson 2016; Global Integrity 2005). As a result, these types of undisclosed donations have been dubbed as 'dark money contributions' (Dimmery and Patterson 2016). The importance of dark money contributions is beginning to receive greater scholarly attention (Rule 2017; Silak and Donnellan 2017). Moreover, concerns of dark money influence have been increasingly portrayed in the mainstream media in response to actions of the Leave campaign during the EU referendum (Archer 2018; Monbiot 2019). Journalists have investigated the large amount of undisclosed money used to fuel Facebook advertisements supporting Britain leaving the European Union, which could have proved crucial to the campaign's success (Geoghegan 2020).

However, despite the recognised importance of indirect political finance, trends in dark money contributions are difficult to monitor without comprehensive data. Some scholars have begun to create datasets on dark money contributions to improve the official political finance data produced from financial reports. For instance, Dimmery and Patterson (2016) have assessed the extent of non-disclosed donations of many non-profit organisations in the United States. While this is an important first step in categorising dark money contributions, significant gaps remain, especially regarding data in non-US countries. But future research should seek to fill this data gap by creating dark money datasets. In turn, this could help researchers understand the broader scope of money in politics and its subsequent impact on public policy.

8.3.3 Automated coding limitations

This thesis used automated coding techniques to collect data on committee participants' political finance contribution activity. A bespoke automated coding program was developed using Python. The program conducted a keyword search for each participant within existing secondary datasets on political finance donation data. This program then used this data to code and return several variables on political finance activity automatically. As discussed in section 8.2.2, the automated coding could not account for donations made by individuals affiliated with organisations that participated in the committee process. But it is important to note that there may have been other inaccuracies due to the automated coding method. Any type of content analysis, either through manual or automated coding methods, is highly

likely to contain some inaccuracies. In manual coding, this is likely to be due to human error or subjectivity (Lewis et al. 2012). Automated coding is designed to mitigate these specific flaws of manual coding (McGetrick et al. 2016). However, automated coding cannot guarantee complete accuracy. Especially as automated content analysis programs still require a level of subjectivity that can result in imprecise coding (Conway 2006).

The automated coding program used an approximate string-matching function called fuzzy search. Using fuzzy search function has significant advantages when dealing with non-standardised secondary data. This allows the program to recognise strings similar to the keyword being searched. Consequently, the automated coding can identify keyword matches that may have been misspelt or abbreviated. But to instruct the program on the level of approximation to apply, specific confidence ratios had to be set manually. This introduces researcher subjectivity into the automated coding process. Fuzzy search functions must have set confidence ratios to conduct the string-matching search, which presents a key limitation.

As discussed in Chapter 5, confidence ratios range from 0-100, with 100 representing an exact string match. If confidence ratios are set too high relevant matches could be missed. However, setting confidence ratios too low can cause irrelevant matches to be returned. Confidence ratio checks were conducted using sample political finance data to ensure the confidence ratios were set correctly to maximise accurate matching. However, even with these checks, it is likely that some matches were inaccurate. However, confidence ratios were set highly, meaning any inaccuracies would most likely relate to missed matches rather than incorrectly returned matches. But while a careful data collection design and robust implementation should have greatly mitigated the risk of inaccuracies, one must be aware that inconsistencies could exist in the manual and automated coding.

8.4 Avenues for future research

This section will highlight several possible avenues for future research that can be implemented to better our understanding of political finance influence at the agenda-setting and consultation stage. Firstly, our understanding would benefit from an expanded comparative analysis that included different country and policy contexts. A

broader comparative analysis can assess countries with different democratic standards and political systems and other factors that could encourage or limit political finance influence. Secondly, as this thesis found some interesting quantitative trends within Australian contexts, future analysis should also delve into a deeper qualitative analysis of political finance influence in Australia. A qualitative or mixed methods approach could assist in bolstering causal links between political finance contributions and interest group access to the policy process. This section will explore some ideas for future qualitative research. Thirdly, the literature would benefit from a broader assessment of committee inquiries discussing different policy topics within the policy areas found to report greater corporate access advantages. Moreover, future research should investigate how the evidence of corporate dominance found in this thesis could be linked to certain institutional factors, such as committee power and procedures.

8.4.1 Conduct an expanded comparative analysis

This thesis conducted a comparative study of four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the UK. The purpose of the comparative analysis was to examine variance in interest group access to committees across countries with different approaches to political finance regulation. A detailed case selection criteria were used to ensure the selected countries displayed variance in this area. The criteria also ensured the chosen countries presented similar characteristics in other factors that could impact political finance influence. As a result, this thesis selected four countries suitable for comparative analysis. Using Mill's Most Similar Systems Design to select the country cases allowed us to better assess whether the link between contributions and interest group access was stronger in countries with weak political finance regulation (Mill 1874).

But the case selection process also included a necessary assessment of the data suitability of each country. This assessment examined whether data on committee participants and political finance donations was comprehensive and publicly available. This led to a case study selection of four powerful western democracies with a wealth of data on legislative committees and contributions. However, part of the assessment also determined whether qualitative sources could be easily translated into English. The financial constraints of the project prohibited extensive translations

of non-English documents. As such, many countries were omitted from the case selection process (Appendix I). The practical limitations have hindered examining countries with more radical approaches to political finance regulation. Countries with little to no campaign finance regulations, such as Sweden, would have provided an intriguing comparison. Moreover, this thesis' resource and time constraints prevented a large-N comparative study. Comparative analyses typically include upwards of 100 countries to bolster a study's generalisability (Vis 2012). This study did conduct a comprehensive account of interest group access to committees within the selected policy topics. However, an exhaustive account of many different countries could not be realistically conducted. As a result, future research should explore expanding this comparative investigation using the same coding framework and methodological processes used in this thesis.

Moreover, as Australia was found to have the strongest associations between political contributions and invited access, a comparative analysis of the Australian state legislature could be enlightening. Australian states each have different regulatory approaches to political finance, including varying contributions limits for private donors. Therefore, researchers could effectively compare the associations between contributions and access within states with different regulatory stringencies but similar political environments by applying the same methodology to examine the state committee and political finance data. It could help determine whether the trends identified in this study are indicative of the Australian political culture or an indication of a broader problem with the federal regulation of political finance.

8.4.2 Implement a qualitative or mixed-method approach

This thesis presented a broad quantitative approach to understand the influence of political finance contributions on interest group access to committees. Identifying broad trends was deemed most appropriate considering the lack of data on political finance influence within the agenda-setting and consultation stage in non-US countries. As such, a broad quantitative approach was prioritised over a qualitative or mixed-methods approach. But the benefits of a qualitative approach are still noteworthy, and future research should expand on the findings of this study using different methodologies to deeper explore the links between contributions and access.

From this analysis, this thesis has identified Australia as a noteworthy case. Results suggest contributions likely give interest groups priority access to legislative committees in the Australian public policy process. This was particularly significant considering Australia had the weakest political finance regulation of the selected countries. The data analysis has found an association between contributions and committee witness selection in Australian legislative committees. This was an essential first step in identifying policy finance influence relating to interest group access to the agenda-setting and consultation stage. However, the decision to obtain a broader analysis of trends has meant the research cannot easily determine causal links between contributions and interest group access.

The traditional qualitative approach would include conducting interviews with interest groups and committee members. These interviews could provide more insight into whether an organisation donated to a political party to achieve political advantages. It could also investigate whether committee members have been inclined to select oral witnesses based on an organisation's past financial support to their party. Although previously highlighted, this approach has various associated challenges. For instance, politicians and organisations may wish to downplay the existence of political finance influence to avoid perceptions of corruption that could have damaging consequences to their reputations. If interview participants are reluctant to disclose their experiences fully, the reliability of any qualitative data would be in doubt. However, problems regarding reliability could be mitigated by interviewing individuals that have now left politics or the interest group organisation. Ex-politicians may be more willing to shed light on the pressures of campaigning and the need to gain financial support.

As traditional qualitative methods could result in unreliable data, future research on political finance influence could also benefit from more experimental methods. Past research from Kalla and Brookman (2016) implemented a unique method of investigating the role of political finance influence on political access. Their study emailed numerous US politicians using an alias organisation to arrange a formal meeting to discuss policy. A portion of the emails sent would mention that the organisation was a long-time donor. Researchers analysed the responses to the emails

sent mentioning donations and those that did not. Interestingly, researchers found that politicians and their staffers would agree to meet with donors more frequently than non-donors (Kalla and Brookman 2016, 545). This approach would be challenging to implement when analysing access in a committee context, as witness selection decisions need to go through formal channels. However, this method could be used to investigate access advantages to private meetings with politicians across countries other than the US (of course, researchers using these methods should be aware of the associated ethical challenges when engaging with individuals under false pretences).

8.4.3 Broaden the analysis of committees and the witness selection process
This thesis found evidence to suggest corporate and economically motivated groups often receive privileged access to committees, particularly within inquiries discussing environmental and macro-economic issues. This thesis represents one of the few studies to examine access to committees across different policy topics. Future research should build upon these findings and further examine the scope of corporate influence by broadening the research into other policy topics. Past research has identified that corporations can best influence regulatory and tax policy using contributions (Fellowes and Wolf 2004). This thesis did examine committee inquiries relating to banking regulation and corporate tax and found corporate access advantage was higher in these committee inquiries than those discussing health and social welfare policy. However, there are many other policy topics on regulation and tax worthy of exploration. As it was also found that corporations received high access advantages in environmental committees, greater scholarly attention should be given to corporate influence within committees discussing energy tax and regulation.

Moreover, future studies should further understand the institutional mechanisms that could impact elite influence in legislative committees. Public policy theories and literature on parliamentary committees emphasise the role of institutional factors in altering the extent interest groups can participate in policy decision-making, and the power committees can exert over the policy agenda (Chaqués-Bonafont and Marquez 2016; Peters 1993; Schofield and Fershau 2007). Researchers should examine the role that institutional factors could have in altering the witness selection process and how committee power can change the extent that elite groups are given better access

to inquiries. This thesis has shown that corporate dominance over committee hearings is reasonably consistent across different countries; however, the most acute examples of corporate access advantages were observed in Ireland and the UK. This thesis recognised the country-specific trends that could be associated with the power of committee chairs and the lack of time and resources allocated to committee proceedings in Ireland and the UK, uncovered in past studies (Beswick and Elstub 2019; Siberer and Höhmann 2017). However, scholars should observe the direct associations between these institutional factors and changes in corporate access advantages through further empirical exploration.

8.5 Concluding remarks

So, can money buy access? While this thesis cannot definitively answer this question, it has presented several important findings that suggest money is associated with access, particularly in countries with the weakest political finance regulation. This thesis sought to contribute to the political finance literature by exploring contribution influence within severely understudied contexts. This thesis succeeds in providing a broad exploration of the associations between political finance and interest group factors on privileged access to committees. In doing so, it has delivered a new understanding of political finance at the agenda-setting and consultation stage of the policy process across different western democracies. It is hoped that future research will continue to build upon our understanding of political finance in these contexts. We must push to understand further the extent of elite influence in our legislative institutions designed to produce policy that is inclusive and focused on the public good.

Appendices

Appendix I. Country selection supporting data

Table 1.a Data availability results for 36 OECD countries.

Country	Committee data availability	Political finance data availability
Australia	**Yes** – Committee transcripts publicly accessible. Consultation documents for proposed legislation are publicly accessible.	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Austria	**No** – Transcripts for committee meetings are not widely available nor are consultation documents. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties publicly accessible.
Belgium	**Yes** – Committee transcripts publicly accessible. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Canada	**Yes** – Committee transcripts publicly accessible. Consultation documents are publicly available.	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.
Chile	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Czechia	**Yes** – Committee transcripts appear accessible. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.
Denmark	**Yes**- Committee transcripts are available. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Estonia	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Finland	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
France	**Yes** – Committee transcripts appear available. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Germany	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties publicly accessible.
Greece	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Hungary	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Iceland	**No** - Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Ireland	**Yes** – Committee transcripts are publicly accessible.	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties are publicly accessible.
Israel	**Yes** – Committee minutes and 'motions of agenda' are publicly available. *Translation needed.*	**No** – No guarantee full list of political contributions to parties and candidates are publicly accessible.
Italy	**No** – Full committee transcripts not publicly available. However, committee reports have details of consultation documents. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Japan	**No** - Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.

Latvia	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Lithuania	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Luxembourg	**No -** Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Mexico	**No -** Committee and parliamentary transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**No** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible but not all parties accurately report.
Netherlands	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties are publicly accessible.
New Zealand	**No** – Committee transcripts do not appear publicly available. **A selection of consultation documents is publicly accessible.**	**Yes, but limited** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.
Norway	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties are publicly accessible.
Poland	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Portugal	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Slovakia	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.
Slovenia	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
South Korea	**No -** Committee and parliamentary transcripts appear unavailable	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Spain	**Yes** – Committee transcripts appear accessible. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties publicly accessible.
Sweden	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates publicly accessible.
Switzerland	**Yes** – Committee transcripts appear publicly accessible but difficult to access. *Translation needed.*	**No** – Political contributions to parties and candidates are not publicly accessible.
Turkey	**No** – Committee transcripts appear unavailable. *Translation needed.*	**No -** Political contributions to parties and candidates are not guaranteed to be publicly accessible.
United Kingdom	**Yes** – Committee transcripts are publicly accessible.	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.
United States	**Yes** – Committee transcripts publicly accessible.	**Yes** – Political contributions to parties and candidates (inc. third parties) publicly accessible.

Table 1.b Political finance criteria scores.

Public financing (PF)	Value
PF for both general and campaign	3
PF for campaigns only	2
PF for general use only	1
No PF	0
Corporate contributions	
Allowed	0
Banned	1
Unlimited spending	
Yes	0
No	1
Third party regulation	
Yes	1
No	0
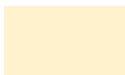
Appendix II. Coding framework

Table 1.c Coding framework.

Variable name	Label	Code
Ev_type	Evidence type (Access)	0 = Oral 1 = Written
Cont_pr	Interest group contributed before participation	0 = No 1 = Yes
Cont_aft	Interest group contributed after participation	0 = No 1 = Yes
Cont_prty	Donations contributed to governing party	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = N/A
IG_name	Interest group name	None (string)
IG_type	Interest group type	1 = Business 2 = Governmental 3 = Non-Profit 4 = Trade Association 5 = Expert 6 = Citizen 7 = Professional Association 8 = Trade Union 9 = Think tank/research 10 = Other 11 = Anonymous
IG_mov	Interest group motivation	0 = Economic/self interest 1 = Issue-based 2 = Government 3 = Unknown
Cntry_code	Country code	1 = Australia 2 = Canada 3 = Ireland 4 = UK
Pol_area	Policy area	1 = Environment & energy 2 = Health 3 = Macro-economics 4 = Social welfare
Pol_topic	Policy topic	1 = Oil mining 2 = Climate change 3 = Pharmaceutical pricing and insurance 4 = Alcohol and tobacco 5 = Banking regulation 6 = Corporate tax 7 = Social housing 8 = Child welfare

Date	Date of evidence	YEAR (string)
Gov_type	Government type	0 = Majority 1 = Minority 2 = Coalition
Gov_maj	Governing majority party	Party codes list (Appendix D)
Gov_ideo	Governing majority ideology	Part codes list (Appendix D)
Sub_type	Subject type	0 = Bill-related 1 = Inquiry
Cmmt_type	Committee type	0 = Single chamber 1 = Joint

Key

	Committee document
	Legislative codes list
	Interest group name search
	Political finance datasets

Appendix III. Political finance dataset variable list

Table 1.d Political finance dataset variable list.

Variable	Variable information	Code
PF_name	Name of donor	String
Cntry_code	Country	1 = Australia 2 = Canada 3 = Ireland 4 = UK
PF_amount	Amount of donation (currency dependent on country)	Numerical
PF_party	Name of donation recipient/political party	String
PF_date	Date of donation	Numerical
Prty_code	Political party code	See political party codes list
Prty_ideo	Political party ideology code	See political party codes list
PF_gov_prty	Donation made to a party in government	0 = No 1 = Yes

Appendix IV. Political party codes list

Table 1.e Political party codes list.

Party Code	Party Name	Party ideology
Australia		
11	Australian Labor Party	3
12	Australian Greens	1
13	Centre Alliance (Nick Xenophon Team)	7
14	Katter's Australian Party	7
15	Liberal Party of Australia	6
16	National Party of Australia	6
17	Australian Democrats	4
18	Christian Democratic Party	6
19	Australian Citizen Party	7
111	Democratic Labor	4
112	Liberal Democrats	5
113	One Nation	7
114	Palmer United Party	7
115	Progressive Labor	2
116	Socialist Alliance	2
Canada		
21	Bloc Québécois	7
22	Conservative Party of Canada	6
23	Green Party of Canada	1
24	Liberal Party of Canada	4
25	New Democratic Party	3
26	Reform Party of Canada	6
27	Progressive Conservative Party of Canada	5
28	Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance	6
29	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada	2
Ireland		
31	Labour Party	3
32	Fianna Fáil	6
33	Fine Gael	5
34	Green Party	1
35	Socialist Party	2
36	Sinn Féin	7
37	Anti-Austerity Alliance	2
38	People Before Profit Alliance	2
United Kingdom		
51	Democratic Unionist Party	7
52	Conservative Party	6
53	Labour Party	3
54	Liberal Democrats	4
55	Green Party	1
56	Plaid Cymru	9

57	Sinn Féin	**2**
58	United Kingdom Independence Party	**7**
59	Scottish National Party	**7**
511	British National Party	**7**
512	Cooperative Party	**3**
513	Scottish Socialist Party	**2**
514	Christian Peoples Alliance	**6**
515	The Peoples' Alliance/New Party	**6**
516	Socialist Labour Party	**2**
517	The Socialist Party of Great Britain	**2**
518	Scottish Green Party	**1**
519	Christian Party	**6**
521	The Respect Party	**2**
522	United Kingdom First	**7**

Ideology code	**Party ideology**
1	Green
2	Far left
3	Centre left
4	Centre
5	Centre right
6	Right
7	Nationalist

Appendix V. Legislature codes list

Table 1.f Legislature codes list.

	Date period	Gov_type	Leg_Maj	Leg_ideo
Australia	2004 – 2007	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
	(Nov) 2007 – 2010	Majority (0)	Labor (11)	3
	(Aug) 2010 - 2013	Minority (1)	Labor (11)	3
	(Sep) 2013 - 2016	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
	(Jul) 2016- 2019	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
Canada	(Jun) 2004 - 2005	Minority (1)	Liberal (24)	4
	(Jan) 2006 - 2008	Minority (1)	Conservative (22)	6
	(Oct) 2008 – 2011	Minority (1)	Conservative (22)	6
	(May) 2011 - 2015	Majority (0)	Conservative (22)	6
	(Oct) 2015 – 2019	Majority (0)	Liberal (24)	4
	(Oct) 2019 -	Minority (1)	Liberal (24)	4
Ireland	2002 – 2007	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(Jun) 2007 - 2008	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(May) 2008 - 2011	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(Mar) 2011 – 2016	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
	(May) 2016 – 2017	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
	(Jun) 2017 - 2020	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
United Kingdom	2005 – 2010	Majority (0)	Labour (53)	3
	(May) 2010- 2015	Coalition (2)	Conservative (52)	6
	(May) 2015- 2017	Majority (0)	Conservative (52)	6
	(Jun) 2017-2019	Minority (1)	Conservative (52)	6

Australia

Inquiry into Australia's Oil Refinery Industry (2013)

Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Projects (2019)

National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical and Other Benefits – Cost Recovery) Bill (2008)

Therapeutics Goods Amendment (2009)

Inquiry into proposals to life the professional, ethical and education standard in the financial services industry (2014)

Tax Laws Amendment (2009)

Families, Housing, Community Services and indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (2009)

Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Building on the Child Care Package) Bill (2019)

Canada

Offshore Health and Safety Act (2014)

Government's Climate Change Plan (2007)

Study on the Tobacco Production in Canada (2008)

Role of government and industry in determining drug supply in Canada (2012)

Potential Benefits and Challenges of Open Banking (2018)

Canada-Madagascar Tax Convention Implementation Act (2018)

Early Learning and Child Care Act (2007)

Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act (2009)

Ireland

Oil and Gas Exploration (2009)

Green New Deal Recommendation (2010)

Alcohol Consumption (2015)

Cost of Prescription Drugs (2015)

Matters relating to the banking sectors (2018)

Paradise Papers (2017)

Housing for People with Disability (2019)

Children First (2012)

<u>United Kingdom</u>

Energy Act (2008)

Investigation: Fracking (2019)

Health and Social Care Act (2008)

Alcohol minimum unit pricing inquiry (2018)

Access to Financial Services Inquiry (2019)

Financial Institutions – Too Important to Fail (2010)

Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016)

Child Poverty Act (2010)

Interest Group Access Project – Coder instructions

** Important note: Throughout this document, the term 'interest group' will include any group/individual featured in the IG_type variable i.e., experts, citizens, businesses etc. **

Project overview

The data coding to be conducted is for a PhD thesis titled 'Can money buy access? A cross-country comparative study on campaign finance contributions and interest group access to legislative committees.' The thesis aims to find any links between campaign finance contributions donated by interest groups and the level of access granted to these groups to legislative committee inquiries. Existing political finance literature has failed to find a link convincingly and consistently between campaign finance contributions and political outcomes, despite strong theoretical frameworks that suggest politicians can become dependent on political finance and are likely to support the policy wishes of donors over non-donors. The lack of evidence provided in the empirical literature to support such theories could be due to researcher's decision to focus on the more publicly scrutinised stages of the policy process, specifically the final policy outcome stage, as opposed to the agenda-setting and consultation stages. By examining interest group access to legislative committees, this thesis provides an original contribution that may prove more fruitful in linking campaign finance and political access.

This project is a comparative study that examines data from four countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. It is a quantitative study that collects data on interest group access to legislative committee inquiries and campaign finance data. The legislative committee inquiries featured in the data collection cover four policy areas and eight policy topics to allow for a wide spectrum of policy subjects for analysis. The four policy areas are: environment & energy, health, macro-economics, and social welfare. For each country, all of the legislative committee documents relating to these policy areas were collected. These documents included committee hearing transcripts that feature interest group testimonies or written evidence submitted to the committee. Each document was examined to identify the interest group(s) participating in the evidence-giving. The identified interest group would then be added as a line in the dataset, along with other independent and control variables (see variable list). This process was repeated for every document, which resulted in a dataset that included the names of every interest group that participated in the committee inquiries.

The primary coder has completed this data collection process. Now a subsection of this data (10%) must be re-coded by a second coder (you!) in order to measure the reliability of the coding framework and dataset. The following sections provide instructions on how to code and construct the dataset.

Task

As the secondary coder, you will aid in the measurement of data accuracy by coding a subsection of the overall data set.

You will view a sample of legislative committee documents, identify the interest group(s) that participate in each committee document, and code other independent and control variables. The variables are detailed in a later section.

Once you have coded the sample of committee documents, your finished data will be compared with the data collected by the primary coder to test the coding reliability.

If there are significant inconsistencies in the coding, the primary and secondary coder will discuss the discrepancies and rectify the data if necessary.

Types of documents
Legislative committees typically allow stakeholders to submit evidence in two ways – either by giving oral evidence during committee hearings or by submitting a written document that outlines their views on the issue at hand. Therefore, there are **two** types of documents that will be analysed:

1) Oral testimony transcripts
   Often multiple stakeholders will testify during one committee hearing. Stakeholder will need to be formally invited by the committee to engage in this type of evidence-giving.
2) Written submissions
   These documents will typically be submitted by only one groups, although sometimes multiple stakeholders will collaborate. This type of submission is open to anyone, including citizens.

Note: Not every inquiry will feature both types of documents.

Each document is coded in a specific way that details the country, policy topic, subject type and evidence type1 as seen below:

AI_1_3_2013_1

Country:	Subject type: I = Inquiry;	Policy topic:	Evidence type:	Date inquiry	Document list
A = Australia;	No letter = Bill-related	1 = Oil mining	2 = Oral evidence	finished	number
C = Canada;		2 = Climate change	3 = Written evidence		
I = Ireland;		3 = Drug prices			
UK = United		4 = Alcohol/tobacco			
Kingdom		5 = Banking			
		6 = Corporate tax			
		7 = Social housing			
		8 = Child welfare			
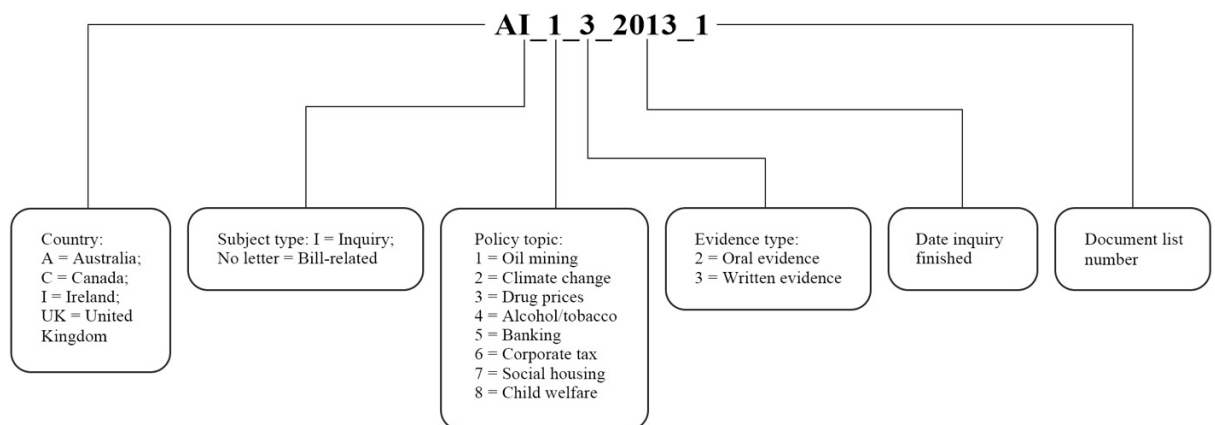
Variables to code

Variable name	Label	Code	Explanation
Data_code	File identifier	None (string)	Document file name e.g. A_1_3_2013_1
Cntry_code	Country code	1 = Australia 2 = Canada 3 = Ireland 4 = UK	Country code
Pol_area	Policy area	1 = Environment & energy 2 = Health 3 = Macro-economics 4 = Social welfare	Policy area being discussed. This can be determined by the file name, which includes policy topic code. Policy topic 1,2 = Environment and energy; 3,4 = Health; 5, 6 = Macro-economics; 7, 8 = Social welfare
Pol_topic	Policy topic	1 = Oil mining 2 = Climate change 3 = Pharmaceutical pricing and insurance 4 = Alcohol and tobacco 5 = Banking regulation 6 = Corporate tax 7 = Social housing 8 = Child welfare	Policy topic being discussed. This can be found in the file name.
Gov_type	Government type	0 = Majority 1 = Minority 2 = Coalition	The type of government in the legislature at the time of the inquiry. The codes for this variable are found in a separate list called the 'legislature codes list'
Gov_maj	Governing majority party	See party codes list	The party governing at the time of the evidence-giving. The codes for this variable are found in a separate list called the 'legislature codes list'
Gov_ideo	Governing majority ideology	See party codes list	The ideological affiliation of the governing majority party. The codes for this variable are found in a separate list called the 'legislature codes list'
Date	Date of evidence	Year (string)	Year of the hearing/submission. For the written submission just type in the date included on the file name. For oral hearings, type the year the specific hearing took place. Note: This date is used to find the correct codes for Gov_type, Leg_maj,

			Leg_ideo variables in the 'legislature codes list'.
Sub_type	Subject type	0 = Bill-related 1 = Inquiry	Whether the bill was related to a specific bill or is a general inquiry into a policy issue. This can be found in the file name.
Cmmt_type	Committee type	0 = Single chamber 1 = Joint	
Ev_type	Evidence type	0 = Oral 1 = Written	Whether the interest group participated in an oral hearing or through a written submission. This can be found in the file name.
IG_name	Interest group name	None (string)	The name of the interest group. If an individual has an affiliation with any organisation write **only** the organisation. If it is an expert/citizen with no affiliation, then write the individual's full name.
IG_type	Interest group type	1 = Business; 2 = Governmental; 3 = Non-Profit; 4 = Trade Association; 5 = Expert; 6 = Citizen; 7 = Professional Association; 8 = Trade Union; 9 = Think tank/research; 10 = Other; 11 = Anonymous	The type of interest group. Easiest way is to google the interest group. Determining between experts and citizens may require closer reading of the committee documents.
IG_mov	Interest group motivation	0 = Economic/self interest 1 = Issue-based 2 = Government 3 = Unknown	The primary motivation of the interest group. Most frequently, this variable follows closely with the interest group type. Whereby businesses, trade associations, professional associations, and trade unions are **Economic/self-interest motivated** and non-profit, experts, think tank/research organisations **are issue-based**. **Citizens** are categorised as **unknown**. **Note:** Outliers of this rule may occur if a trade association represents a group of non-profit organisations, whereby IG_mov would be coded as issue based.

Where to find the data

	File name
	Committee document
	Legislative codes list
	Google search of interest group name

Legislature codes list

	Date period	Gov_type	Leg_Maj	Leg_ideo
Australia	2004 – 2007	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
	(Nov) 2007 – 2010	Majority (0)	Labor (11)	3
	(Aug) 2010 - 2013	Minority (1)	Labor (11)	3
	(Sep) 2013 - 2016	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
	(Jul) 2016- 2019	Coalition (2)	Liberal (15)	6
Canada	(Jun) 2004 - 2005	Minority (1)	Liberal (24)	4
	(Jan) 2006 - 2008	Minority (1)	Conservative (22)	6
	(Oct) 2008 – 2011	Minority (1)	Conservative (22)	6
	(May) 2011 - 2015	Majority (0)	Conservative (22)	6
	(Oct) 2015 – 2019	Majority (0)	Liberal (24)	4
	(Oct) 2019 -	Minority (1)	Liberal (24)	4
Ireland	2002 – 2007	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(Jun) 2007 - 2008	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(May) 2008 - 2011	Coalition (2)	Fianna Fail (32)	6
	(Mar) 2011 – 2016	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
	(May) 2016 – 2017	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
	(Jun) 2017 - 2020	Coalition (2)	Fine Gael (33)	5
United Kingdom	2005 – 2010	Majority (0)	Labour (53)	3
	(May) 2010-2015	Coalition (2)	Conservative (52)	6
	(May) 2015-2017	Majority (0)	Conservative (52)	6
	(Jun) 2017-2019	Minority (1)	Conservative (52)	6

Method

1. **Open the empty dataset and familiarise yourself with the variable names/codes**
   The dataset is available on the shared drive with file name: 'Coder_2_dataset.xlsx'. It is an excel spreadsheet which has three tabs. The first tab features the table where the data will be recorded. The second tab featured the coding framework. The third tab features the coding information needed for the Gov_type/Leg_Maj/Leg_Ideo variables.
2. **Read through Example folder (Database example and committee documents) if you need a visual of how the data will look.**
3. **Find the documents to code on the shared drive**
   Documents are organised by country -> inquiry name. It would be easiest to start with Australia and work through each inquiry in turn. **Note:** Do not be alarmed at the number of documents on the shared drive. The data you will be pulling from each document is minimal.
4. **Go through each document in turn, identifying the interest groups included in the document.**
   In the written evidence documents, this should be obvious. In the oral transcripts, the witnesses are often listed in the first few pages of the document. In the Ireland documents, the chair often lists the witnesses at the beginning of the transcript.
5. <u>**For EACH interest group in the document,**</u> **create a new line in the dataset and code accordingly.**
   Do this even if the same organisation testifies multiple times i.e. If three individuals from one organisation testify at the same hearing, this will result in three separate lines in the dataset. **Note:** This can be trickier to decipher in Ireland docs where you have to read through the committee chair's opening statements to find the witnesses. Just make sure you identify the number of people associated with each organisation to know how many lines in the dataset you need.
6. **Google the names of the interest groups identified to decipher their type and motivation and code accordingly.**
7. **Code the rest of the variables, using the file name or legislative codes.**
   Save time by completing this step after you have collected the interest group names for all the documents in an inquiry. This is because most variables should have the exact same code if they are from the same inquiry.
8. **Repeat the process for all the documents on the shared drive.**
   I've added an empty folder in each document folder called 'completed'. It may help to move documents you've coded into this folder to you can easily keep track of the ones you've done.

Additional coding rules

1. If two separate interest groups/individuals submit same written evidence, code each group/person individually.

```python
import pandas as pd
import openpyxl
from fuzzywuzzy import fuzz

class Country:
    def __init__(self, xlname):

        xl = pd.ExcelFile(xlname)

        # load excel sheet into a dataframe object
        self.df = xl.parse("Sheet1")

        # get number of rows in dataframe object
        self.row_count = self.df.shape[0]

        # get number of columns in dataframe object
        self.col_count = self.df.shape[1]

    def countryadddata(self, xlname):
        # adds a spreadsheet to an existing country dataframe
        xl = pd.ExcelFile(xlname)

        dfnew =xl.parse("Sheet1")

        self.df = self.df.append (dfnew, ignore_index=True)

        self.row_count = self.df.shape[0]


    def printsearch(self, searchname):
        # search and print all data rows in dataframe object

        for x in range(self.row_count):
            name = self.df.iloc[x, 0]
            year = self.df.iloc[x, 3]
            if isinstance(year,str):
                donationyear = int(year[0:4])
            else:
                donationyear = year

            amount = self.df.iloc[x, 1]

            ratio = fuzz.token_sort_ratio(searchname.lower(),
name.lower())
            # if token sort fuzzy match > N %
            if ratio >= 90:
                print(name, " ", ratio, " ", donationyear, " ",
round(amount,2))

    def searchdata(self, searchname, searchyear, searchratio):

        # initialise function return variables
        donatedpriorflag = 0
        donatedafterflag = 0
        donatedprioramount = 0
        donatedafteramount = 0

        # search all data rows in dataframe object
```

```python
        for x in range(self.row_count):
            name = self.df.iloc[x, 0]
            year = self.df.iloc[x, 3]

            # check if 'year' data type is string
            if isinstance(year,str):
                donationyear = int(year[0:4])
            else:
                donationyear = year

            donationamount = self.df.iloc[x, 1]

            ratio = fuzz.token_sort_ratio(searchname.lower(),
name.lower())
            # if token sort fuzzy match > searchratio then match
found
            if ratio >= searchratio:
                # if donation year is same or prior to search year
then
                if  donationyear <= searchyear:
                    donatedpriorflag = 1
                    donatedprioramount = donatedprioramount +
donationamount
                else:
                    donatedafterflag = 1
                    donatedafteramount = donatedafteramount +
donationamount

        donatedprioramount = round(donatedprioramount,2)
        donatedafteramount = round(donatedafteramount,2)

        return donatedpriorflag, donatedafterflag,
donatedprioramount, donatedafteramount

# create country datasets
print("Loading Australia data")
australia = Country("Australia_PF_data.xlsx")
print("Loading UK data")
uk = Country("UK_PF_data.xlsx")
print("Loading Ireland data")
ireland = Country("ire_PF_data.xlsx")
print("Loading Canada data")
canada = Country("Canada_PF_data_1.xlsx")
canada.countryadddata("Canada_PF_data_2.xlsx")
canada.countryadddata("Canada_PF_data_3.xlsx")
canada.countryadddata("Canada_PF_data_4.xlsx")

# load IG spreadsheet
print("Opening IG Workbook")
ig_xl = openpyxl.load_workbook("IG_DATA.xlsx")

ig_sheet = ig_xl.active

# get number of rows in ig dataset
# print number of rows in IG data sheet
ig_count = ig_sheet.max_row + 1

print("Number of rows in IG Workbook: " + str(ig_count))

#for x in range(2, ig_count):
for x in range(5631, 5747):
```

```python
    ig_country = ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=2).value
    ig_name = ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=13).value
    ig_date = ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=9).value
    ig_type = ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=14).value

    print ("IG_Name: " + ig_name + " IG_Date: " + str(ig_date) + "
IG_Country: " + str(ig_country))

    # if IG country = Australia
    if ig_country == 1:
        if ig_type in [5, 6]:
            searchratio = 90
        else:
            searchratio = 95

        priorflag, afterflag, prioramount, afteramount =
australia.searchdata(ig_name,ig_date,searchratio)

        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=16).value = priorflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=17).value = afterflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=18).value = prioramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=19).value = afteramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=20).value = searchratio

    # else if IG country = Canada
    if ig_country == 2:
        if ig_type in [5, 6]:
            searchratio = 95
        else:
            searchratio = 90
        priorflag, afterflag, prioramount, afteramount =
canada.searchdata(ig_name,ig_date,searchratio)
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=16).value = priorflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=17).value = afterflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=18).value = prioramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=19).value = afteramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=20).value = searchratio

    # else if IG country = Ireland
    elif ig_country == 3:
        searchratio = 90
        priorflag, afterflag, prioramount, afteramount =
ireland.searchdata(ig_name,ig_date,searchratio)
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=16).value = priorflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=17).value = afterflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=18).value = prioramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=19).value = afteramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=20).value = searchratio

    # else if IG country = UK
    elif ig_country == 4:
        searchratio = 90
        priorflag, afterflag, prioramount, afteramount =
uk.searchdata(ig_name,ig_date,searchratio)
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=16).value = priorflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=17).value = afterflag
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=18).value = prioramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=19).value = afteramount
        ig_sheet.cell(row=x, column=20).value = searchratio

# save IG data workbook
```

```python
ig_xl.save("IG_DATA.xlsx")

#donorname = input("Enter donor name: ")
#participationyear = int(input("Particiation year: "))
#countrycode = int(input("Country Code: "))
#searchratio = int(input("Search Ratio: "))
```

Appendix IX. Committee inquiry document list

Australia
Environment and energy: Oil mining

Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Projects (2019)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_a
nd_Communications/MiningandResources/Report

Inquiry into Australia's Oil Refinery Industry (2013)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representat
ives_Committees?url=economics/oilrefineries/report.htm

Offshore Resources Legislation Amendment (Personal Property Securities) Bill
(2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4578

Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Greenhouse Gas Storage) Bill (2008)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r3030

Environment and energy: Climate change

Clean Energy (Excise Tariff Legislation Amendment) Bill (2012)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4822

Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4543

Carbon Credits (Consequential Amendments) Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4535

Clean Energy (Charges – Customs) Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4654

Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment Bill
(2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Res
ults/Result?bId=r4661

Inquiry into Australia's Biodiversity in a Changing Climate (2012)
https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representativ
es_committees?url=ccea/ccbio/index.htm

National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Bill (2007)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/greenhouse/report/index

Sustainability for Survival: Creating a Climate for Change (2007)
https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=environ/charter/report.htm

Health: Pharmaceutical pricing

National Health Reform Amendment (Independent Hospital Pricing Authority) Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4645

National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill (2010)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4431

Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives (Medicare Levy Surcharge) Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4147

Health Insurance Amendment (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4128

Private Health Insurance Legislation Amendment Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4130

Private Health Insurance (National Joint Replacement Register Levy) Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4131

Therapeutic Goods Amendment (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4172

National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical and Other Benefits – Cost Recovery) Bill (2008)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r3014

Health: Alcohol/tobacco regulation

Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill (2011)

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4613

Responsible Takeaway Alcohol Hours Bill (2010)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=s750

Inquiry into the Use and Marketing of Electronic Cigarettes and Personal Vaporisers in Australia (2018)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health_Aged_Care_and_Sport/ElectronicCigarettes/Report

Macro-economic: Banking regulation

Scrutiny of Financial Advice (2015)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Scrutiny_of_Financial_Advice/Public_Hearings

Matters relating to credit card interest rates (2015)
https://www.aph.gov.au/search/url/Hearing/26768_24961_Senate

Inquiry into proposals to lift the professional, ethical and education standards in the financial services industry (2014)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Corporations_and_Financial_Services/Financial_Adviser_Qualifications/Public_Hearings

Banking Amendment Bill (2010)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=s755

Banking Amendment (Keeping Banks Accountable) Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=s716

Financial Sector Legislation Amendment (Enhancing Supervision and Enforcement) Bill (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4086

Macro-economic: Corporate tax

Corporate Tax Avoidance (2018)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Corporatetax45th

Report on the Inquiry into Tax Deductibility (2017)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Economics/Taxdeductibility/Report

Tax Laws Amendment (Combating Multinational Tax Avoidance) Bill (2015)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Tax_Avoidance_2015

Tax Laws Amendment (Countering Tax Avoidance and Multinational Profit Shifting) Bill (2013)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Completed_inquiries/2010-13/tlabcounteringtaxavoidance2013/index

Tax Laws Amendment (Managed Investment Trust Withholding Tax) Bill (2012)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4855

Taw Laws Amendment (Stronger, Fairer, Simpler and Other Measures) Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4709

Taxation of Alternative Fuels Legislation Amendment Bill (2011)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4554

Tax Laws Amendment Bill (2010)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4305

Tax Laws Amendment (No.1) (2009)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4047

Tax Laws Amendment (2008)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r2989

Social welfare: Social housing

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (2010)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r4256

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (2008)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r2988

Social welfare: Child welfare

Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Building on the ChildCare Package) Bill (2019)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_LEGislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r6412

Breaking Barriers: A National Adoption Framework for Australian Children (2018)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Localadoption/Report

From Conflict to Cooperation: Inquiry into the Child Support Program (2015)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Child_Support_Program/Report

A Better Family Law System to Support and Protect those Affected by Family Violence (2017)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/FVlawreform/Report

Overseas Adoption in Australia (2005)
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=fhs/./adoption/report.htm

Canada
Environment and energy: Oil mining

The future of Canada's Oil and Gas (2017)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/RNNR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=8819008

Energy Safety and Security Act (2015)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=6392558

Pipeline Safety Act (2015)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=6802547

Cross-Canada benefit of developing the oil and gas industry of the energy sector (2014)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/RNNR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=8237867

Offshore Health and Safety Act (2014)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=6262331

Current state and future of Canada's energy sector (2012)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/enev/studiesandbills/41-1

Current and future state of oil and gas pipelines and refining capacity in Canada (2012)

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/RNNR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=5417431

Offshore oil and gas drilling (2010)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/RNNR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=3156976

Oil Sands and Canada's Water Resources (2010)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ENVI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=3052146

Indian Oil and Gas Act (2009)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3629244

Oil Sands and Canada's Water Resources (2009)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ENVI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=2624709

Environment and energy: Climate change

Federal Sustainable Development Act (2019)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=9057534

Clean Growth and Climate Change in Canada (2019)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ENVI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=10207809

Study the potential impact of climate change on agriculture (2018)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/AGFO/Briefs/42-1?oor_id=449611

Climate Change and water and soil conservation issues (2018)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/AGRI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=9741736

Climate Change Accountability Act (2009)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3643764

Climate Change Accountability Act (2008)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3073285

Federal Sustainable Development Act (2008)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3075383

Canada's Clean Air Act (2007)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=2397040

Government's Climate Change Plan (2007)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ENVI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=2077953

Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act (2007)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=2181701

Health: Pharmaceutical pricing

Barriers to Access to Treatment and Drugs (2019)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
10232313

Role of government and industry in determining drug supply in Canada (2012)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
7048036

Patent Act (2011)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=4328807

Prescription Drugs (2007)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
2222793

Study on Prescription Drugs (2005)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
1469043

Health: Alcohol/tobacco regulation

Pre-mixed drinks combining high alcohol (2018)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
10058427

Tobacco and Non-Smokers Health Act (2018)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=8616151

E-Cigarettes (2015)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
8465071

Review of Proposed Tobacco Regulations (2011)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
3896508

Tobacco Packaging Warning Labels (2010)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/HESA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
3601003

Tobacco Act (2009)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3912563

Study on the Tobacco Production in Canada (2008)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/AGRI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=
2432773

Macro-economic: Banking regulation

Potential Benefits and Challenges of Open Banking (2018)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/BANC/Briefs/42-1?oor_id=500636

Management of Systemic Risk in the Financial System (2017)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/BANC/Briefs/42-1?oor_id=464157

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2016)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/BANC/Briefs/42-1?oor_id=417374

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2013)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/41-2?p=2

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2011)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/41-1?p=2

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2010)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/40-3?p=2

Credit and debit card systems (2009)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/40-2

Municipal Modernization and Business Development Bank of Canada Act (2009)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=4772692

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2009)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/40-2

Amend the Financial Administration Act and the Bank of Canada Act (2008)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3333474

The present state of the domestic and international financial system (2007)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/banc/studiesandbills/39-2

Macro-economic: Corporate tax

Canada-Madagascar Tax Convention Implementation Act (2018)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=10085047

Tax Convention and Arrangement Implementation Act (2016)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=8560960

Tax Evasion and the Use of Tax Havens (2013)

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/FINA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=7674297

Technical Tax Amendments Act (2012)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=5839600

Tax Evasion and Offshore Bank Accounts (2011)
https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/FINA/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=3639620

Tax Conventions Implementation Act (2010)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=4370410

Tax Conventions Implementation Act (2006)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=2376303

Social welfare: Social housing

Secure Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act (2011)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=4327908

Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act (2009)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=3630084

Examine and report on current social issues pertaining to Canada's largest cities (2007)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/soci/studiesandbills/39-2

Social welfare: Child welfare

Mandatory reporting of internet child pornography (2011)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=4491489

Early Learning and Child Care Act (2007)
https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=2166674

The state of early learning and child care in Canada (2007)
https://sencanada.ca/en/committees/soci/studiesandbills/39-1

<u>Ireland</u>
Environment and energy: Oil mining

Hydraulic Fracturing Exploration: Discussion (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2019-10-09/

Petroleum and Other Minerals Bill (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/9/?tab=debates

Policy Issues arising from the exploration and extraction of onshore petroleum (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_communications_climate_action_and_environment/2017-01-31/3/

Oil and Gas Exploration (2009)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_communications_energy_and_natural_resources/2009-03-04/2/

Offshore Oil and gas Exploration (2008)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_communications_energy_and_natural_resources/2008-10-22/2/

Environment and energy: Climate change

Forestry and Climate Change Discussion (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2019-12-11/3/

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2019-10-16/

Third Report of the Citizens' Assembly (2018-19)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?page=2&datePeriod=all&debateType=committee&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Fclimate-action%2F&resultsPerPage=20

Climate Action Progress: Discussion – 30 Jan (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_communications_climate_action_and_environment/2018-01-30/2/

Climate Change (2013)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_environment_culture_and_the_gaeltacht/2013-05-21/2/

Climate Change Response Bill (2010)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2010/60/

Green New Deal Recommendation (2010)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_change_and_energy_security/2010-04-28/2/

Climate Change Policy (2008)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_change_and_energy_security/2008-07-16/2/

Climate Change and the Developing World (2008)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_change_and_energy_security/2008-03-19/

Climate Change Discussion (2007)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_environment_and_local_government/2007-02-28/

Health: Pharmaceutical pricing

Budget Management and Control of Health Expenditure (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_on_budgetary_oversight/2019-07-09/3/

Cost of Prescription Drugs (2015)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2015-03-05/

Medicines and Medical Products (2013)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2013-09-24/2/

Health Insurance Sector Discussion (2012)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2012-10-25/

Health Insurance Market (2009)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2009-12-17/

Health: Alcohol/tobacco regulation

Public Health (Alcohol) Bill (2015)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2015/120/

Alcohol Consumption (2015)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2015-04-23/

Alcohol Marketing: Discussion (2011)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_children/2011-12-15/

Macro-economic: Banking regulation

Central Bank Discussion (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_finance_public_expenditure_and_reform_and_taoiseach/2019-12-05/

Matters relating to the Banking sector (2019) 4 Apr – 28 May

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?page=2&datePeriod=all&debateType=committee&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Ffinance-per-taoiseach%2F&resultsPerPage=20

Matters relating to the banking sector (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?page=4&datePeriod=all&debateType=committee&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Ffinance-per-taoiseach%2F&resultsPerPage=20

Proposed Sale of Non-performing Loans (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_finance_public_expenditure_and_reform_and_taoiseach/2018-03-22/

Banking Sector in Ireland (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?page=6&datePeriod=all&debateType=committee&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Ffinance-per-taoiseach%2F&resultsPerPage=20

Irish Mortgage Market (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_finance_public_expenditure_and_reform_and_taoiseach/2017-06-20/

Banking Sector in Ireland (2016)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?page=8&datePeriod=all&debateType=committee&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Ffinance-per-taoiseach%2F&resultsPerPage=20

Macro-economic: Corporate tax

Fiscal Assessment Report: Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_on_budgetary_oversight/2019-12-04/3/

Tax Relief on Film Production (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_of_public_accounts/2019-11-28/7/

Scrutiny of Tax Expenditures (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_on_budgetary_oversight/2019-01-22/3/

Corporation Tax Regime (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_on_budgetary_oversight/2018-05-16/3/

Paradise Papers (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_finance_public_expenditure_and_reform_and_taoiseach/2017-11-29/3/

Ireland's Corporate Tax System (2014)

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_sub-committee_on_global_corporate_taxation/2014-05-28/2/

Social welfare: Social housing

Housing for People with Disability (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2019-07-10/3/

Family and Child Homelessness (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2019-06-12/3/

Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2019-03-06/

Affordable Housing (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2019-01-31/2/

Financing of Social Housing (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2018-12-06/

Right to Housing (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2018-06-12/3/

Housing for Older People (2018)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/2018-04-17/

Finance for Social Housing (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_community_and_local_government/2017-07-05/
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_community_and_local_government/2017-07-04/

Housing (Homeless Families) (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2017/100/

Evidence session on Housing and Homelessness (2016)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?debateType=committee&datePeriod=all&fromDate=04%2F05%2F2020&toDate=04%2F05%2F2020&term=%2Fie%2Foireachtas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F32&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F32%2Fhousing-and-homelessness%2F&member=

Social welfare: Child welfare

Impact of Homelessness on Children (2019)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_children_and_yout h_affairs/2019-07-09/

Foster care Services (2017)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_children_and_yout h_affairs/2017-07-12/5/

Child Protective Services (2015)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_childre n/2015-05-07/

Child and Family Support Agency: Discussion (2013)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_childre n/2013-02-28/

Children First (2012)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_childre n/2012-06-26/3/

Child Protective Services (2010)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_childre n/2010-07-27/2/

Child Protection Issues (2009)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health_and_childre n/2009-06-30/

Joint Committee on Child Protection (2006)
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?debateType=committee&datePeriod=all& fromDate=04%2F05%2F2020&toDate=04%2F05%2F2020&term=%2Fie%2Foireac htas%2Fhouse%2Fdail%2F30&committee=%2Fen%2Fcommittees%2F29%2Fcom mittee-on-child-protection%2F&member=

United Kingdom

Environment and energy: Oil mining

Investigation: Fracking (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry40/

Planning Guidance on Fracking Inquiry (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/planning-fracking-17-19/

Energy Act (2008)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2007-08/energy.html

Environment and energy: Climate change

Climate Change and Biodiversity (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/climate-change-and-biodiversity-17-19/

Climate Change Adaptation (2017)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry6/

Climate change adaptation (2014)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/climate-change-adaption/

Climate: Public understanding and its policy implications (2014)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/climate-change/

Climate Change Bill (2008)
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmpbclimate.htm#memo

Health: Pharmaceutical pricing

NHS Financial Sustainability (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/nhs-financial-sustainability-17-19/

NHS funding (2018)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-and-social-care-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/nhs-funding-inquiry-17-19/
Health Service Medical Supplies Cost Act (2017)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2016-17/healthservicemedicalsuppliescosts.html

Health Act (2009)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2008-09/healthhl.html

Health and Social Care Act (2008)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2007-08/healthandsocialcare.html

National Health Services Bill (2006)
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills/200506/national_health_service.htm

Health: Alcohol/tobacco regulation

E-cigarette inquiry (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/e-cigarettes-17-19/

Alcohol minimum unit pricing inquiry (2018)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/alcohol-minimum-unit-pricing-inquiry-17-19/

Tobacco Smuggling (2014)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/tobacco-smuggling/

Alcohol guideline (2012)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/alcohol-advice/

Government's Alcohol Strategy (2012)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/governments-alcohol-strategy/

Health Bill (2006)
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills/200506/health.htm

Macro-economic: Banking regulation

Access to Financial Services Inquiry (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/scottish-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/access-to-financial-services-17-19/

Financial Guidance and Claims Act (2018)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/financialguidanceandclaims.html

Access to basic retail financial services (2017)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/treasury-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2015/access-to-financial-services-16-17/

Access to Finance (2016)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-innovation-and-skills/inquiries/parliament-2015/access-to-finance-15-16/

Bank of England and Financial Services Act (2016)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2015-16/bankofenglandandfinancialservices.html

Financial Services Mis-selling: Regulation and Redress Inquiry (2016)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/financial-services-regulation-redress-15-16/

Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act (2013)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2013-14/financialservicesbankingreform.html

Financial Services Act (2012)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2012-13/financialservices.html

Financial Regulation Inquiry (2011)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/treasury-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2010/financial-regulation/

Financial Institutions – Too Important to Fail (2010)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/treasury-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2005/financial-institutions---too-important-to-fail/

Financial Services Act (2010)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2009-10/financialservices.html

Banking Act (2009)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2008-09/banking.html

Banking Reform (2008)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/treasury-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2005/banking-reform/

Macro-economic: Corporate tax

Finance Act (2019)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/financeno3.html

Finance Act (2018)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/financeno2.html

Corporate Tax Deals Inquiry (2016)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/corporate-tax-deals-15-16/

Finance Act (2016)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2015-16/finance.html

Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Act (2015)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2014-15/corporationtaxnorthernireland.html

Finance Act (2014)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2013-14/finance.html

Finance Act (2013)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2012-13/financeno2.html

Taxing corporations in a global economy: is a new approach needed? (2013)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/economic-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/taxing-corporations-in-a-global-economy-is-a-new-approach-needed/

Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland (2011)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/northern-ireland-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/corporation-tax-in-northern-ireland/

Finance Act (2011)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2010-12/financeno3.html

Finance Act (2008)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2007-08/finance.html

Social welfare: Social housing
Long-term delivery of social and affordable rented housing inquiry (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/social-housing-inquiry-17-19/

Future of supported housing inquiry (2017)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/future-of-supported-housing-16-17/publications/

Housing and Planning Act (2016)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2015-16/housingandplanning.html

Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2015-16/welfarereformandwork.html

Welfare Reform Act (2012)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2010-12/welfarereform.html

Housing and Regeneration Act (2008)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2007-08/housingandregeneration/stages.html

Social welfare: Child welfare

Two-child benefit limit inquiry (2019)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/two-child-benefit-limit-inquiry-17-19/

Childcare Inquiry (2018)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/treasury-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2017/childcare-17-19/

Children and Social Work Act (2017)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2016-17/childrenandsocialwork.html

Childcare Act (2016)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2015-16/childcare.html

Child Protection Inquiry (2016)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/child-protection-16-17/

Childcare Payments Act (2014)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2014-15/childcarepayments.html

Children and Families Act (2014)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2013-14/childrenandfamilies.html

Child Well-Being in England (2014)
https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/child-well-being-in-england/

Child Poverty Act (2010)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2009-10/childpoverty.html

Children, Schools, and Families Act (2010)
https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2009-10/childrenschoolsandfamilies.html

Appendix X. Chi-square results

Table 1.g Pearson Chi-square results of the association between political finance contribution status and access (evidence-giving type).

	X2	**P-value**
All data		
Contributed anytime	216.672	.000**
Contributed prior to evidence-giving	209.637	.000**
Contributed after evidence-giving	27.628	.000**
Australia		
Contributed anytime	44.653	.000**
Contributed prior to evidence-giving	33.676	.000**
Contributed after evidence-giving	47.822	.000**
Canada		
Contributed anytime	10.980	.001**
Contributed prior to evidence-giving	11.125	.001**
Contributed after evidence-giving	.532	.466
Ireland		
Contributed anytime	9.027	.003**
Contributed prior to evidence-giving	9.027	.003**
Contributed after evidence-giving	n/a	n/a
United Kingdom		
Contributed anytime	2.252	.133
Contributed prior to evidence-giving	2.187	.139
Contributed after evidence-giving	1.624	.202

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

Note: Observation of government and anonymous interest group types excluded.

Table 1.h Pearson Chi-square results of the association between contributions to governing party and access (evidence-giving type).

	X2	P-value
All data		
Contributed to the governing party	.177	.674
Australia		
Contributed to the governing party	4.898	.027*
Canada		
Contributed to the governing party	.183	.669
United Kingdom		
Contributed to the governing party	8.260	.004**

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

Note: Observations of non-contributing interest groups excluded.

Table 1.i Pearson Chi-square results of the association between interest group type and interest group motivations and access across all country cases.

	X2	P-value
Interest group type	1600.253	.000**
Interest group motivation	1510.992	.000**

*P<0.05 **P<0.01

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