

How To Measure Interest Group Influence: Italy's Professional Orders and Liberalization Policy

1. Introduction

One of the most problematic challenge in research on interest groups is how to measure their influence in the policy making (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Mahoney 2007; Beyers *et al.* 2008; Dür 2008). Yet, it is a key factor for understanding the role played by the groups in every democratic system: this role mainly depends upon the amount of power – that is the influence that they are able to exert in the decision-making – held by these groups, as well as the ways in which that amount of power is distributed among them (Dür & de Bievre 2007).

The discrepancy between the importance of the objective in question (the measurement of interest group influence) and the methodological tools used for this purpose, is still quite evident, despite the fact that political scientists have been debating this issue for decades (Truman 1955; Dahl 1961; Salisbury 1984; Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Mahoney 2007), and despite the use of more and more innovative measurement techniques (Arts & Verschuren 1999; Verschuren & Arts 2004). The reasons for these persistent difficulties are both theoretical – concerning the analytical definition of the concept of influence – and linked to the methods of empirical measurement at the same time.

The aim of this paper is to clarify both the conceptual and methodological issue. For this purpose, the first step is to recognize the trade-off between the level of generality of any concept and the precision with which that concept is empirically analyzed: the higher the level of generality characterizing that concept as well as the greater its extension, the less the average validity of its empirical indicators, and *vice-versa* (Sartori 1970). Therefore, in order to use valid and reliable indicators, it is necessary to establish some analytical and conceptual *caveats*, thus restricting the field of observable phenomena while increasing the accuracy of the data at the same time.

To this respect, I suggest reducing the level of generality at which the influence of interest groups is to be empirically analysed. For this purpose it is necessary to decompose the concept on the basis of two main dimensions: the direction of the lobbying mobilization (*pro-status quo* or *anti-status quo*) and the stage of the policy cycle (agenda-setting; decision-making; implementation). From this point of view, it is possible to give quantitative connotation to interest group influence only in the case of *pro-status quo* lobbying in the decision-making stage.

In what follows, this methodological approach is applied to the analysis of the liberalization process that took place in Italy in 2006: indeed, one of the first relevant political acts by the second Prodi government was the decision to approve the so-called ‘first *lenzuolata* of liberalization policy’ (Boitani 2007). Thus, my aim is to empirically detect (and quantitatively measure) how much influence Italian Professional Orders have been able to exert with respect to that policy process. I chose this particular case study in order to quantitatively test what has been repeatedly argued in the literature from a qualitative point of view, namely that Italian professional interest groups exerted a great deal of influence on that policy process (Berlinguer 2009; Liroso & Cinotti 2009). In other words, this paper wants to apply a new methodological approach to a paradigmatic case¹ of interest group influence, in order to analyze it quantitatively rather than qualitatively.

This paper is arranged as follows: in paragraph 2, the most important methodological literature on interest group influence is reviewed. In paragraph 3, the analytical coordinates for detecting and measuring such an influence are presented. In paragraph 4, the most valid and reliable measuring techniques are illustrated. Paragraph 5 consists of the empirical analysis, whereas in paragraph 6 I propose some concluding remarks as well as suggestions for future research.

2. The ‘question of interest group influence’

¹ With respect to what exactly a ‘paradigmatic case’ means (and with respect to case selection more broadly), see: Seawright & Gerring (2008).

2.1 Problems in conceptualizing influence

For over fifty years, the polysemous nature characterizing the concept of influence has caused serious conceptual and methodological problems. In greater detail, these problems mainly dealt with the level of ‘generality’² and, in turn, the empirical definition of that concept (March 1955).

As far as ‘generality’ is concerned, the first empirical studies on interest group influence tended to formulate *ad hoc* hypotheses and conceptualizations. In this sense, the most obvious issues were therefore the divergences – depending on the aims of the research – among the various operational definitions of influence, as well as the vague connection between these definitions and the more general concept of power (March 1955). In greater detail, these operational definitions were alternatively connected to the recognition of the attributed (or perceived) influence, to the change of opinion, and to attempts of influence.

However, soon all of these operational definitions were considered to be inadequate for fully understanding the semantic scope of the concept. To determine the influence of interest groups on the basis of their own perceptions is something illusory for two reasons: firstly, because those same perceptions may be incorrect, due to the cognitive limits of each individual who is required to value them (Simon 1947); and secondly because these individuals may respond insincerely for strategic reasons (Arts & Verschuren 1999). The belief that the concept of influence might be properly represented through the empirical measurement of an opinion change is not convincing, too. This is because in doing so, the exclusive emphasis on change would create indifference regarding all those relations of influence which tend toward maintaining the *status quo* rather than toward change (Bachrach & Baratz 1962). Finally, even to conceptualize influence as the number of empirical attempts through which individuals participating in the policy making contact each other is not free

² This term meaning the ability to achieve generalised – and not *ad hoc* – results.

from criticism: above all, there is no immediate correlation between the number of times that an individual has exerted pressure on another and the outcome of these attempts of pressure.

More recently, 'influence' has been alternatively conceptualized as: control over resources; control over actors; control over policy outputs (Hart 1976). To define interest group influence as control over resources means that each actor bases her/his influence on the particular share of the (economic, political, social) resources she/he holds. However, this approach creates a decisive disadvantage: it captures the existing situation *before* the interaction among players, rather than *after* its fulfilment.

On the other hand, to identify interest group influence as control over actors means to acknowledge that one actor influences another if and only if – given certain initial beliefs – the latter changes her/his policy position due to the interaction with the former. This approach has the undoubted merit of focusing on the final result of the relationship between actors. However, it is never possible to infer that any actor's change of policy position necessarily depends on the influence exerted by one individual on another. Indeed, it might be due to other causes as well.

As a result, the most recent studies (Lowery 2013; Pedersen 2013; Klüver 2013; Bunea 2013; Heaney & Lorenz 2013) tend to conceptualize influence as control over policy outputs, namely the distance between the outputs that have been produced (or have not been produced, in the case of *status quo* maintenance) in that specific policy field and the ideal points expressed by all actors. In this sense, the actor showing the shorter gap between her/his own preferences and the output of the decision-making exercises the greatest influence. This conceptualization follows a preference attainment approach, which has become the mainstream theoretical approach³ to detect and measure interest group influence (Bernhagen *et al.* 2014).

³ Preference attainment cannot be considered a method, such as process tracing which is a qualitative analytical tool used to study within-case variation (Gerring 2004; 2007).

However, even this approach is subject to some important limitations. First of all, it is indeed plausible to hypothesize that any interest group, in the bargaining process that concerns it, may decide to exaggerate its initial requests in order to achieve the best possible result⁴ (Dür & de Bievre 2007). This strategy avoids the ‘objective’ check of the spatial distance between the ideal point and the policy output. This in turn makes it impossible to measure the actual influence exerted by the group on policy making. Moreover, the influence of a group is not the only force shaping the policy making. For example, especially during the agenda setting stage a big role is played by public opinion, who can push policy makers toward the prioritization of a certain policy issue: if a group stresses a policy argument which is strongly supported by a vast majority of citizens, it will be much easier to get its instance acknowledged (or – at least – taken into account very carefully)⁵. The same may happen – for instance during the implementation stage – if bureaucrats, who are in charge to make legislation coming into force, exert their discretionary power (Huber & Shipan 2002) and, in turn, become a new actor in the bargaining game.

These considerations have led some authors to prefer the concept of ‘policy success’ to the concept of ‘policy influence’ (Mahoney 2007): since the policy process is too complex to actually recognize ‘who pushed for what, when and with which results’, the degree of preference attainment would appear to be a good measure for interest group success rather than interest group influence (McKay 2011; Dür *et al.* 2015). As already mentioned, these observations represent important limitations to the empirical detection (and measuring) of interest group influence. However, they do not completely prevent that possibility.

⁴ On the opportunity to style the interactions between decision-making actors on the basis of game theory, I would like to suggest: Ward (2004).

⁵ The discussion about the direction of the relationship is a matter of doubt: there is someone who considers that the positions of the public can be handled by interest groups (Becker 1983), and who instead identifies in the influence of public opinion evident traits of independence (Dür & de Bievre 2007).

2.2 Problems in ‘operationalizing’ and measuring influence

The main challenge concerning the preference attainment approach lies in spatially locating the policy positions of each individual who participate in policy making as well as the policy output itself. In this regard, scholars in recent years have developed three major content analysis techniques for extracting policy positions from political documents: hand-coding (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann *et al.* 2006); WORDSCORES (Laver *et al.* 2003); WORDFISH (Slapin & Proksch 2008; Proksch & Slapin 2009).

Manual hand-coding is probably the most widespread approach in text analysis. In this case, the researcher: *a)* develops a categorization scheme based either on theoretical assumptions or on inductive reasoning; *b)* divides the whole text into smaller units of analysis such as sentences or ‘quasi-sentences’; *c)* assigns text units to the coding categories⁶. This text analysis approach has been questioned especially due to its theoretical foundation⁷ and because it is very time-consuming and labor-intensive: this would make it difficult to analyze large amounts of texts. However, manual coding of a legislative text – especially if we only consider parts where a certain interest group is concerned – is not equal to the manual coding of party manifestos: firstly, texts to be coded are much smaller and less time-consuming and labor-intensive; secondly, they are hand-coded according to the issues in which they can be divided rather than to a comprehensive theoretical scheme driven by salience theory.

⁶ The most well-known and widely used dataset based on hand-coding has been produced by the ‘Comparative Manifesto Project’ (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann *et al.* 2006): they coded party positions (in left-right terms) by party manifestos.

⁷ Scholars argued that actors (parties, first of all, but also interest groups) do not compete by placing emphasis on different issues – as assumed by the salience theory that drives this approach – but that they seek direct confrontation on the same issues (Riker 1996).

The second major content analysis technique for extracting policy positions from political documents is WORDSCORES, which is a computer-based text analysis developed in recent years by Laver, Benoit, and Garry (2003): this method uses reference texts and reference values for predicting policy positions. The basic idea is that one can estimate policy positions by comparing two sets of texts: 'reference texts' and 'virgin texts'. Reference texts are documents pinpointing policy positions that are known to the researcher; by contrast, virgin texts are completely unknown in terms of policy positions. By comparing the relative frequency of words in the reference texts with the relative frequency in the virgin texts it is possible to gather information about which of the reference texts the virgin text most closely resembles⁸. In this second case, the researcher: *a*) has to define the policy dimension to be investigated; *b*) has to choose a set of reference texts with known policy position estimates; *c*) has to run the computer program which performs the estimation procedure explained above. Many scholars rightly claimed that the necessity to choose reference texts is the biggest disadvantage of this approach since one has to draw on an independent source for the policy position estimates (Klüver 2013).

The most recent approach in quantitative content analysis is WORDFISH (Proksch & Slapin 2008; Slapin & Proksch 2008): it is a statistical scaling model estimating policy positions of texts on a predefined policy dimension by drawing on relative word frequencies in texts. It does not require reference texts in contrast to WORDSCORES⁹. In this third case, the researcher: *a*) has to define the

⁸ WORDSCORES is based on a number of assumptions: first, policy positions are reflected in the relative frequency of words used within and across texts; second, word meaning remains stable over time; third, it assigns all words the same weight in the estimation process; fourth, it requires that all words of interest are contained in the reference texts (Klüver 2013, 68-69).

⁹ As already mentioned concerning WORDSCORES, even the WORDFISH approach is based on a number of assumptions: firstly, policy positions are reflected in the relative frequency of words used within and across texts; secondly, word meaning remains stable over time; thirdly, since the algorithm estimates the policy positions on a single dimension, documents used for the analysis have to be encyclopaedic statements of the actors' policy positions.

policy dimension to be studied, select documents dealing with this policy dimension and use a comparable pool of words; *b*) has to remove all text passages that do not refer to the policy dimension under investigation; *c*) has to produce a word frequency matrix which serves as input for the WORDFISH program.

While the process of hand-coding is generally associated with a high degree of validity and, on the contrary, with a low degree of reliability, computerized techniques such as WORDSCORES and, above all, WORDFISH, are most often considered to be very reliable, but not particularly valid (Klüver 2009, 537). However, a strong limitation characterizing both WORDSCORES and WORDFISH concerns the extension of the document to analyze: the shorter the document (the fewer words it contains), the less reliable the results of the automated coding as well as being scarcely valid. It is precisely for this reason that this type of statistical technique focuses almost exclusively on party manifestos (Laver *et al.* 2003; Slapin & Proksch 2008) and parliamentary debates (Proksch & Slapin 2009; Benoit & McElroy 2012): mostly very complex and multifaceted documents as well as completely *political* documents. It is much more difficult to apply these techniques to the analysis of the legislation with which interest groups are concerned: in this case the text to be analyzed is both too small and written in very legal terms. That makes it rather difficult to extract an underlying political dimension from the text. Furthermore, a questionable assumption of both WORDFISH and WORDSCORES is that only words count as a data source. Thus, applying these methods to content analysis requires removing from the texts any information conveyed with the help of numbers and figures; yet the exclusion of such information from policy documents is very problematic (Bunea & Ibenskas 2014).

3. Conceptual map: how to measure interest group influence

As already mentioned, there is always a trade-off between the generality degree of a concept and the average validity of its empirical indicators (Sartori 1970). In this sense, in order to increase the

validity and reliability of the data to empirically detect, it is necessary to dismantle the concept of ‘influence’ on the basis of multiple dimensions, thus identifying some sub-categories. For this purpose, I would like to point out two main criteria: the lobbying direction and the policy-making stage. As regards to the first criterion, interest groups can push policy makers in two directions: to maintain public policy *status quo* or to change it.

Concerning the second criterion, scholars of public policies are likely to split up the policy-making process into various stages (Lasswell 1956)¹⁰. In fact, the vast majority of scholars agree on a step characterized by the identification and planning of the policy problem (which not necessarily leads to the entrance of the issue in the political agenda), a real decision-making stage (generally corresponding to the parliamentary *iter* of the legislative measure) and finally, a step characterized by the implementation of the decision. On these bases, I therefore divide the policy making process into three consecutive stages: the agenda setting stage; the decision-making stage; the implementation stage.

For a better understanding see Table number 1, which identifies the six categories arising from the intersection between the lobbying direction (pro- or anti-*status quo*) and the policy cycle stage (agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation) in which it is carried out:

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Concerning the agenda setting, the activation of an interest group aimed at changing the public policy *status quo* is identified by the term ‘sponsorship’, since that group becomes the spokesperson of an issue which is deemed to require public debate. On the contrary, an interest group which lobbies policy makers to maintain the public policy *status quo* tries to exercise a ‘veto’ power, given that its main aim is not to politicize that issue. In the decision-making stage, insisting to change the public

¹⁰ The sequence of these stages generally corresponds to the logical steps of a rational decision-making process.

policy *status quo* gives rise to a form of legislative ‘support’¹¹ to policy makers, given the incentive experimented by interest groups to contribute to the definition of a policy output. On the other hand, a pro-*status quo* lobbying mobilization unfolds in forms of influence such as ‘negotiation’¹²: this negotiation can alternatively consist in a pure exercise of filibustering¹³ or in a real bargain¹⁴. Finally, as far as the implementation stage is concerned, if the interest group lobbies to modify the public policy *status quo*, this kind of mobilization gives rise to forms of influence oriented towards the ‘enforcement’ of the approved law: the interest group coordinates with bureaucrats to facilitate the effective implementation of the measures. On the opposite, a pro-*status quo* mobilization can be seen as an attempt to ‘boycott’ the law; indeed this case, the interest group’s main aim is substantially to make the measures approved by parliament as they were ineffective.

Out of those six forms of influence, the only one which can be quantitatively measured is ‘negotiation’. There are two main reasons for this conviction: first, the abovementioned distinction between interest groups’ *strategic* and *sincere* policy positions makes sense if and only if it is subordinated to the distinction of such interest groups in pro- or anti-*status quo*¹⁵. Indeed, anti-*status*

¹¹ In a recent work, Hall and Deardorff (2006) defined this practice by the term ‘legislative subsidy’.

¹² Bachrach & Baratz (1962) provide a Janus representation of power discussing two faces: the first face of power refers to open negotiations between actors when the political agenda is already set; the second face refers to actors’ ability to put a particular theme on the agenda, or to remove it from the agenda. ‘Sponsorship’ and ‘veto’ must be conceptualized with respect to the latter, whereas ‘support’ and ‘negotiation’ must be conceptualized with respect to the former.

¹³ If the interest group prefers to simply request the withdrawal of the legislative measure rather than to haggle it.

¹⁴ If the interest group decides to haggle sideline payments by policy makers in return to its consensus to a particular legislative measure.

¹⁵ Differently from the most recent literature (Bernhagen *et al.* 2014), I do not consider any differences between the *status quo ante* and the ‘reference point’, that is the (mostly hypothetical) final position in circumstances of no legislative agreement. Notwithstanding in some cases the *status quo* does not coincide with the reference point, this is especially true for distributive and redistributive issues; yet liberalizations are regulative policies. However, when analyzing distributive and redistributive policies, the reference point is preferable to the *status quo ante* (Dür 2008).

quo groups can rationally exaggerate their calls for policy change in order to maximize the likelihood that some (if not all) of them are accepted by policy makers. This is not true for pro-*status quo* interest groups: their ideal policy point coincides by definition with that same *status quo* (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009). Therefore, in all cases of reactive lobbying, the influence exerted by pro-*status quo* interest groups is the inverse of the ‘amount’ of the policy change eventually produced. Any reforming attempt which produces no policy change represents the maximum influence exerted by pro-*status quo* interest groups. By the contrary, any policy-making process which ends with a broader policy change than the one originally forecasted, means that the lobbying of pro-*status quo* interest groups was not sufficiently able to counteract the simultaneous pressure exerted on the policy makers by anti-*status quo* interest groups¹⁶. Thus, the influence of anti-*status quo* interest groups is not empirically measurable (Baumgartner & Leech 1998); yet this is not true in the case of pro-*status quo* interest groups. Therefore, it is important to look at the right column in Table 1.

As already mentioned, one of the drawbacks of conceptualizing influence as control over policy outputs is the possibility that policy change might depend on reasons other than interest group lobbying. However, this issue is not insurmountable. In more detail, it is more or less challenging on the basis of how much interest groups have to interact with different policy actors throughout the policy process. In this sense, it appears to be particularly appropriate to focus on the decision-making stage, especially if both the government and the parliamentary majority have the same political configuration, namely the same parties are both in office as well as they constitute the parliamentary majority sustaining the cabinet. In this case, it is thus reasonable to assume that policy makers act as an unitary actor; moreover, interest groups have to (directly) interplay only with political parties, whereas public opinion and – above all – bureaucrats are temporarily (and relatively) out of the picture.

¹⁶ However, we cannot infer the entity of this superior ability to exert influence, since groups pushing for policy change can strategically exaggerate their initial requests, in order to maximize the likelihood that some of these will be accepted.

Put it differently: the less conspicuous the political differentiation between governmental arena (the institutional *locus* in which begins the vast majority of the decision-making processes) and parliamentary arena (the institutional *locus* in which ends the vast majority of decision-making processes), the more likely it is that the only factors pushing towards a particular policy output deal with the lobbying influence by pro- and anti-*status quo* interest groups, and *vice-versa*. On the basis of these specifications, it is therefore possible to quantitatively measure interest group influence *if and only if*: a) they are pro-*status quo* interest groups; b) they face policy makers who do not change in their political characteristics during the interaction process¹⁷.

Finally, it is necessary to list the assumptions on which this methodological approach is built upon: first of all, as already claimed, in the decision-making stage both actors – policy makers and pro-*status quo* interest groups – are considered as unitary; secondly, each stage of the policy making is considered as a ‘new game’, without any legacies from the past or expectations for the future. On the one hand, interest groups are thus supposed to lobby in each moment of the process regardless of the results they have (not) been able to obtain in the previous stage of confrontation. On the other hand, they are also supposed to lobby regardless of the delayed payments which could have been promised to them for the subsequent stage of confrontation. Moreover, the choice of chopping the policy process into different (and subsequent) stages allows us to overcome the criticism about the government ‘sincerity/insincerity’ in proposing its initial policy measure¹⁸: the decision-making stage begins when the agenda-setting stage ends, thus the government’s initial policy proposal – also being

¹⁷ To this respect, even though a great deal of the newer interest group scholarship deals with interest group influence on EU policy making (Baumgartner & Bunea 2014), the fact that EU policy makers change throughout the process (Commission, Council, Parliament) rises some conceptual problems in analyzing interest group influence rather than interest group policy success (Mahoney 2007).

¹⁸ It could be argued that – like anti-*status quo* interest groups – also the government exaggerates its initial policy proposal in order to prevent reactive lobbying.

the result of lobbying efforts which went in diverging directions during the agenda-setting stage – cannot be strategically pinpointed by the government on its own.

4. Measurement techniques: qualitative and quantitative analysis of legislation through expert survey

The likelihood of measuring the influence of *pro-status quo* interest groups in the decision-making stage depends on the reliability and validity characterizing the identification of three fundamental policy positions, namely: the reforming project by the government; the public policy *status quo* (coinciding with the ‘ideal’ policy point of *pro-status quo* interest groups); the policy output of the decision-making process. While the public policy *status quo* – where regulatory policies are concerned¹⁹ – represents what happens if no policy change occurs, both the reforming project of the government and the final policy output must be quantified with respect to ‘how much’ policy change they imply. However, to decide how policy change is to be defined is not an easy task (Capano 2009). In the literature, there have been various suitable ways of rendering the concept of policy change operational, such as the tripartition suggested by Hall (1993) and by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), or the taxonomy by which Cashmore and Howlett (2007) design six possible orders of policy change. Yet these operational definitions are mostly qualitative rather than quantitative²⁰.

¹⁹ As I argued before, in case of distributive as well as of redistributive issues the concept of ‘reference point’ is rather preferable.

²⁰ More in detail, Hall (1993) distinguishes between ‘first order’ policy change (when the calibration of policy instruments changes within existing institutional and instrument confines), ‘second order’ policy change (which involved changes to instruments within an existing policy regime), and ‘third order’ policy change (when exogenous events lead to a change of policy paradigm). Cashore and Howlett (2007, 535-536) build on Hall’s seminal work by differentiating policy change with respect to two criteria: policy focus (on ends or means) and policy content (goals, objectives or settings): thus they discern six, rather than three, levels/orders of policy that can undergo change.

Therefore, in order to measure policy change quantitatively, I firstly decomposed legislative documents under scrutiny by manual hand coding: in so doing, I have been able to list all the policy issues interest groups had to react to. Secondly, I decided to ‘rate’ each policy issue with respect to their relative degree of policy innovation; thus, a survey of specialists on the policy field in question was carried out. The ‘amount’ of policy change characterizing the policy measure under scrutiny is thus individualized by summing up how much policy innovation each issue implies.

The first step in each survey is to identify the population of experts whose judgment is available. This selection must be performed very carefully: indeed, many scholars have correctly pointed out that the quality of expert survey data is directly influenced by the quality of the expert panel (Benoit & Laver 2006). The survey was carried out from June to November 2013: I started by contacting twenty-seven academics specializing in liberalization policy and judicial policy; twelve of them completed the questionnaire (response rate: 44.4%). Apart from the traditional criticisms usually received by expert surveys²¹, it is important to emphasize that the number of respondents was perfectly in line with what is generally considered as acceptable for party positioning (Laver & Hunt 1992).

Furthermore, it seems that to evaluate policy issues by means of an expert survey is less challenging than to resort to the same analytical tool in order to spatially place political parties. Firstly, one of the main reasons of criticism concerning the use of expert surveys in party positioning relates to the fact that whenever experts place parties on policy dimensions, they are affected by the parties’ political alliances. In other words, specialists are used to place parties joining a coalition very (too?) close together, while parties belonging to opposing alliances very (too?) far apart. Obviously, that is not a risk which characterizes the evaluation of policy issues. Secondly, since it is generally accepted that a country’s specialist is able to place a lot of (from three or four to more than ten) parties on a lot

²¹ See, on this point: Budge (2000, 103-104). In his view, major problems relate to: *a*) the ‘party’ whose position is being judged (is it the leaders, activists or voters or all three combined?); *b*) the criteria experts base their judgements on; *c*) whether judgements refer to intentions and preferences or overt behaviour; *d*) what time period are judgements of policy position based on? Answers to these points very much affect the uses to which expert surveys can be put.

of (usually from eight to twelve) very different policy dimensions (Benoit & Laver 2006), even more so her/his capability of evaluating a few issues within a well-defined policy field should be scarcely questionable. Notwithstanding, for the future the first prescriptive suggestion is to increase the number of experts called in to value the hand-coded issues: the greater the number of specialists/experts, the higher the level of reliability of the data (especially if the variability of their responses is not particularly high: therefore, it would be a very important signal of a certain homogeneity in valuing the policy issues under investigation).

In the questionnaire, the experts were asked to divide all the issues into four categories: ‘insignificant innovation’, ‘low significant innovation’, ‘significant innovation’, ‘very significant innovation’, depending on the evaluation of their impact on the public policy *status quo*²². All of these assessments were then accompanied by a growing cardinal label: 0.25²³; 0.50; 0.75; 1. The indicator ‘degree of innovation’ therefore derives from the arithmetic average of the experts’ evaluations, whereas the influence of pro-*status quo* interest groups is therefore identifiable through the following formula:

$$\% \text{ IG Influence} = [(\text{Government Proposal}) - (\text{Approved Law})] / (\text{Government Proposal}) * 100$$

In this sense, any decision-making process ending with a legislative output equal to the initial government policy proposal, as well as any decision-making process ending with a legislative output

²² The choice of recurring to an expert survey in order to evaluate the degree of policy innovation of each issue allows us to overcome the challenge of considering all issues as equally salient for pro-*status quo* interest groups (which would be a truly unrealistic assumption). Indeed, it is reasonable to hypothesize a direct relationship between saliency and innovation: the more an issue is innovative in policy terms, the more an interest group whose main policy goal is to maintain *status quo* will try to remove that issue from the overall policy proposal.

²³ To assign a value of 0 to an innovation considered by experts as being ‘insignificant’ does not fully reflect the empirical reality. Despite of its ‘insignificancy’, a change from the *status quo* has been still produced.

even wider and/or more innovative than what was originally foreseen in the government policy proposal, highlights the total lack of influence of pro-*status quo* interest groups.

If no issue is shelved during the decision-making stage under scrutiny, but a partial reformulation is experimented, its coding value would depend on the direction in which modifications are oriented: if these changes involve further policy innovation, coefficients would be positive, and would once again range between 0.25 (insignificant innovation) and 1 (very significant innovation); on the contrary, if the new regulatory content goes shoulder to shoulder with the wishes of the pro-*status quo* interest group, those same coefficients would assume a negative sign, varying between -0.25 and -1.

5. From d.l. 223/2006 to l. 248/2006: the influence of Italy's Professional Orders on liberalization policy

One of the first relevant political decisions taken by the second Prodi government, which took office following its electoral victory on April 10th, 2006, was the approval of the so-called 'first *lenzuolata* of liberalization policy' (d.l. 223/2006). Within this piece of legislation, article no. 2 and article no. 7 dealt with professional orders. On this point, see Table 2:

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Both article no. 2 as well as article no. 7 contain extremely innovative policy measures. More in detail, the government imposes the abolition of minimum fares and allows each professional to promote her/his office as well as to constitute a company with other professionals. In order to enforce those rules, government also requires the adjustment of each Professional Code within December 31st, 2006. In addition, notarial commissions on the buying and selling of cars are abolished. In particular, four out of these five issues appear to be extremely significant: they are, in a descending order of importance, the possibility of setting up professional companies and the abolition of

minimum fares; the cancellation of notarial commissions in buying and selling cars; the possibility of using advertising by professionals. The least significant issue is (rightly) considered the fact that Professional Codes had to formally adapt to those new policy measures within the end of 2006. Overall, the government policy proposal is therefore highly innovative. This, in turn, led to a great lobbying reaction from *pro-status quo* interest groups, in order to abolish, or – at least – to mitigate, large parts of the decree (Lirosi & Cinotti 2009). In order to evaluate the (eventual) results of that mobilization, see Table 3, which highlights how d.l. 223/2006 was converted into l. 248/2006:

[TABLE 3 HERE]

By examining Table number 3, it seems to be that all changes which were made between the governmental decree (d.l. 223/2006) and the policy output (l. 248/2006) lead towards reducing the amplitude of policy change and therefore must be deemed to be successful by *pro-status quo* interest groups. In more detail: the abolition of minimum fares is attenuated by recommending not to resort to them; the possibility of professional advertising, which was previously allowed without any limitation, must now be examined by the competent order; parliament also limits the business nature of professional companies, thus imposing barriers to their actual founding; as far as public procedures are concerned, fares are the main criterion for determining the fees of professional services; finally, parliament decides for adding some technical specifications with respect to the buying and selling of cars without any commission by notary. Apart from this last issue, which is rightly considered to be scarcely significant by the experts, all the other policy changes appear to be rather important: among these modifications, the most relevant one seem to be the fact that the parliament placed limits to the business nature of professional companies, as well as the fact that the abolition of minimum fares was attenuated in the recommendation not to resort to them. From a quantitative point of view, we can establish that the influence of *pro-status quo* interest groups in the decision-making process under investigation was equal to 46.1%.

6. Concluding remarks

Even though it is an absolutely central theme in research on interest groups, scholars' ability to measure interest group influence has always been very poor (Baumgartner & Leech 1998). This is because there was no concordance both with respect to the analytical limits with which to connote the concept of influence, as well as in relation to the specific techniques for empirically measuring that concept.

In this study, I proposed to establish these conceptual limits and to indicate some of the methodological techniques. Specifically, I suggested taking into consideration the inverse relationship between the level of generality of a concept and our ability to empirically measure it: the greater the degree of generality, the lower the average validity of its indicators, and *vice-versa*. In this sense, I therefore proposed to breakdown the general concept of influence on the basis of two criteria: the lobbying direction (pro-*status quo* or anti-*status quo*) and the stage of the policy cycle. In doing so, there are six different (sub-)concepts that can be linked to the more general concept: 'sponsorship' (anti-*status quo* lobbying; agenda setting stage); 'veto' (pro-*status quo* lobbying; agenda setting stage); 'support' (anti-*status quo* lobbying; decision-making stage); 'negotiation' (pro-*status quo* lobbying; decision-making stage); 'enforcement' (anti-*status quo* lobbying; implementation stage); 'boycott' (pro-*status quo* lobbying; implementation stage).

To conceptualize influence following the preference attainment approach (Dür 2008) implies that it is necessary to measure the distance between the policy output and actors' ideal points. Thus, it is possible to measure influence if and only if it is exerted by pro-*status quo* interest groups: indeed, in this case it is not affected by any strategic bias (bias that, on the contrary, affects the ideal policy

positions of anti-*status quo* interest groups, which have the rational incentive to exaggerate their initial requests). Moreover, decision-making actors must be the same during their interaction²⁴.

The manual coding of policy issues is also proposed. It should be quantitatively evaluated by policy specialists. In order to achieve this, I resorted to an expert survey of twelve academics who are specialized in both liberalization as well as judicial policy. Their assessments allowed for the identification of the innovation level of each issue and of the policy output in its entirety.

The application of this methodological structure for analysing the legislative process which converted d.l. 223/2006 into law n. 248/2006 appeared to be fruitful: it was therefore possible to quantitatively measure the influence exerted by Italian Professional Orders in reaction to the measures initially dismissed by the second Prodi government. This influence has repeatedly been said to be anything but marginal; however, it has only been affirmed in qualitative terms (Berlinguer 2009; Lirosi & Cinotti 2009). By applying this methodology, it is possible to take a step forward and try to determine these impressions quantitatively.

Notwithstanding, this study represents a very preliminary analysis. In order to accurately measure interest group influence, further research on a number of issues is required. First, it might be advisable to vary the panel of experts: not only academics, but also including professionals, interest group executives, policy makers and bureaucrats. From this point of view, it might be interesting to observe different response patterns supplied by different kinds of respondents: proving us with useful information concerning their strategic behaviour. Second, as already mentioned, the panel of experts should include a greater number of individuals than in this study: the higher the number of specialists/experts, the greater the reliability of the data.

²⁴ In order to minimize the possibility that the degree of preference attainment identifies interest group policy success rather than influence.

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Tables and Graphs:

Table 1 Typological breakdown of the concept of 'influence'

		<i>Lobbying direction</i>	
		<u>Anti-status quo</u>	<u>Pro-status quo</u>
<i>Policy cycle stage</i>	<u>Agenda-setting</u>	SPONSORSHIP	VETO
	<u>Decision-making</u>	SUPPORT	NEGOTIATION
	<u>Implementation</u>	ENFORCEMENT	BOYCOTT

Table 2 D.l. 223/2006: articles, issues, degree of innovation

<i>Article</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Degree of innovation</i>
2, Subsection 1	Abolition of minimum fares	0.85
2, Subsection 1	Advertising	0.77
2, Subsection 1	Possibility of constituting professional companies	0.85
2, Subsection 3	Adaptation of the codes within the 12.31.2006	0.69
7, Subsection 1	Cars buying and selling without any commission	0.79
	<i>Policy change:</i>	3.95

Table 3 Comparison between d.l. 223/2006 and l. 248/2006.

<i>Article</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Degree of innovation</i>
2, Subsection 1	Minimum fares no longer mandatory (but possible)	-0.46
2, Subsection 1	Advertisement transparency and truthfulness verified by the competent Order	-0.42
2, Subsection 1	Limits to the business nature of professional societies	-0.60
2, Subsection 2	In public procedures, minimum fares are the basis for the fee determination of professionals	-0.19
7, Subsection 1	Detailed (but not relevant) technical specifications	-0.15
	<i>'Further' policy change:</i>	-1.82

- a. Overall policy change after the decision-making process: $3.95 - 1.82 = 2.13$
- b. Maintenance of the government's policy proposal: $(2.13 / 3.95) * 100 = 53.9\%$
- c. Pro-status quo interest group influence: $100\% - 53.9\% = 46.1\%$