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Inclusiveness-Efficiency Configurations of Business Interest Associations with Access to Policymakers

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between business interest associations' (BIAs') governance configurations and their access to administrative officials and political heads of the European Union. We focus on how effective BIAs design their plenaries and boards to address the inclusiveness-efficiency tradeoff. By means of a qualitative comparative analysis, we find that most of the configurations related to administrative officials balance efficiency-inclusiveness tensions, one prioritizes inclusion while another focuses on efficiency. As for political heads, EU Commissioners seem to prioritize BIAs that successfully balance these contradictory poles while also paying attention to more inclusive BIAs.

Keywords

business interest associations, inclusiveness, efficiency, QCA, access to policymakers

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Introduction

Business interest associations (BIAs) affect markets and societies at large as well as their members by influencing and participating in policy and regulation discussions (Barnett, 2013). Prior research has explored how BIAs shape and form the public good: BIAs mobilize in the political realm, establish self-regulatory institutions, create markets, build industry reputation, and affect institutional maintenance and change processes. While BIAs' effects on the institutional environment have attracted most of the scant attention directed at these inter-organizational entities (Barley, 2010), less scholarly attention has focused on BIAs' organizational and managerial dimensions (Barnett, 2018; Lawton & Rajwani, 2018).

This internal BIA component is key to understanding how large numbers of businesses organize themselves to act collectively. Businesses and/or industry associations come together to create and sustain (through their membership fees) BIAs that promote private interests and provide information to policymakers and regulators (Lyon & Maxwell, 2004). As member-driven organizations, BIAs "seek to improve the conditions of members' business environment by pursuing policy initiatives and managing issues of reputation and legitimacy" (Lawton et al., 2018, p. 6). In this regard, they try to shape public policy to suit their members' interests. At the same time, BIAs provide services to their members as well as relevant market-related information that they can use in their own benefit. Additionally, BIAs often act as decision-making brokers among their members and frequently try to ensure that the different perspectives and interests within the organization are represented and advanced (Albareda & Fraussen, 2023). In doing so, BIAs also help construct a shared meaning of the purpose and function of the area of business they represent and thus "influence how firms understand their market activities, shaping their strategies and even the nature of market competition" (Lawton et al., 2018, p. 6).

Considering their roles and their intermediary position not only among members but also between members and policymakers (Albareda, 2018), BIAs can be conceptualized as goal-directed networks, defined as three or more organizations that come together to achieve a collective purpose (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Such intentionally assembled interorganizational networks include supply-chain networks, research consortia, innovation networks, entrepreneurial networks, regulatory networks, business support organizations, and meta-organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). These forms clearly contrast with "traditional organizational forms [that] employ hierarchical mechanisms as the primary means of control and coordination" (Fjeldstad et al., 2012, p. 735). While not new, these networked forms of organizing are growing rapidly in number.

BIAs—and other interorganizational network forms—experience an intrinsic tension between involving their members and achieving the BIAs' goal of influencing the policymaking process. Schmitter and Streeck (1999) refer to this tension by distinguishing the membership logic from the influence logic. On the one hand, BIAs have to actively involve their members to ensure both representativeness and commitment. On the other, they need efficient structures that enable them to effectively aggregate and transmit the BIAs' preferences to policymakers. The literature on goal-directed networks refers to this as the efficiency-inclusiveness tension (Provan & Kenis, 2008). In essence, this conflict alludes to the contradictory requirements of efficiently achieving their goals while including their membership in the goal-directed networks' functioning. Being inclusive is not only a normative question (that is, being responsive to the network members) but is often vital to ensure members' "loyalty" or allow them "voice" and ultimately avoid member "exit" (Hirschmann, 1970), thus ensuring the BIAs' survival (Lowery, 2007).

To understand how BIAs cope with the inclusiveness-efficiency tension, we focus on the two most important BIAs' statutory (or governance) bodies, namely, the plenary (general assembly) and executive board. The plenary gathers all BIA members and makes strategic (long-term) decisions. The board, in contrast, is where members (often a subset) make executive decisions and oversee the BIAs' secretariat (or central administrative office). We argue that larger plenaries and executive boards are more inclusive. Similarly, plenaries and boards that make decisions through consensual or super-majority rules also are more inclusive. In contrast, smaller-sized plenaries and boards focus on efficiency and make decisions through simple majority rules.

Ultimately, we are interested in understanding how the combination of different governance elements facilitates one core BIA function, gaining access to policymakers (see Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, on the influence logic). More specifically, we examine how different governance configurations affect access to European Union (EU) administrative officials (i.e., expert groups) and political heads (i.e., appointed politicians like EU Commissioners). Whereas previous research has studied how various of these conditions individually affect BIAs' access to policymakers, information on the intricate interplay between these organizational conditions and their relationship with BIAs' access to policymakers is still missing. Consequently, our research question is: *What governance configurations do BIAs with access to policymakers adopt to cope with the efficiency-inclusiveness tension?*

To answer this question, we conduct a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of 123 BIAs active at the EU level. We assume that BIAs are effective

if they have access to the EU Commission—either through their involvement in expert groups (i.e., administrative officials) or via meetings with Commissioners (i.e., political heads). With this, we start to fill a research gap regarding not only BIAs but also goal-directed networks in general. We contribute to understanding of an organizational form that is becoming increasingly common and can have important social and political effects. We do this by unpacking an under-researched tension and exploring an alternative empirical nonmarket context to that of the United States, the EU.

Theoretical Framework

Our subject matter in this study is BIAs (i.e., trade associations constituted by firms and/or associations of firms). Knoke (1990) already indicated "the potential a network approach could have in studying business associations" (p. 227), as they can be conceptualized as goal-directed networks (Provan & Kenis, 2008) or meta-organizations (Gulati et al., 2012; Reveley & Ville, 2010). BIAs are "organizations through which a group of interdependent firms [or associations of firms], typically in the same industry, pool their resources and coordinate their efforts so that they may "speak with one voice" on matters of shared interest" (Barnett, 2013, p. 214; see also Barnett, 2018; R. Greenwood et al., 2002). BIAs are usually industry-specific, that is, members primarily operate in one sector (Barley, 2010). Given that members tend to be rivals in the market space, they officially limit their coordination activities to the nonmarket environment (Greenberg & Baron, 2003).

The literature has identified four common BIA characteristics (see Boleat, 1996, 2003). Firstly, they are member-based organizations that companies join voluntarily. Secondly, they have governance and decision-making structures to represent their members. Thirdly, they (presumably) act in the common interest of their members. Lastly, they act as a representative or collective body, engaging with government regulators and policymakers, the media, and other opinion leaders.

As Lawton et al. (2018, p. 3) state, "the organizational characteristics of trade associations need more attention (. . .). Trade associations matter, as meta-organizations, as industry voices, and as a subject for further research in management and organization research." More importantly for our study, Lawton et al. (2018) continue, adding that "organization design (. . .) provide[s] rich theoretical pathways to frame and explain the roles and responsibilities of trade associations" (p. 4). Understood as organizational responses to collective action problems that markets and hierarchies fail to address (Powell, 1990), BIAs' governance structures are crucial to better understand how they function and what makes them more or less effective in the policy domain.

As any organizational form, BIAs can have different governance designs. In BIA governance "[. . .] the use of institutions and resources to coordinate and control joint action across the network [i.e., a BIA] as a whole [. . .] is critical for effectiveness" (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 231). Governance in goal-directed networks is an incipient area of research where much work remains to be done. Topics such as membership type and size, decision-making rules, and the secretariat's organizational structure require further research to gain more insights. In this regard, advances in network governance literature would represent a solid stepping-stone in the study of BIA design and governance.

The Efficiency-Inclusiveness Tension and Access to Policymakers

Despite the different tensions that BIAs may face (Berthod et al., 2016; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Saz-Carranza & Ospina, 2012; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999), we focus here on the efficiency-inclusiveness tension to understand the governance configuration of BIAs with access to policymakers. The efficiency-inclusiveness tension arises in goal-directed networks because of two simultaneous needs: to efficiently respond to external challenges and demands (e.g., policymakers requiring quick policy inputs on a specific regulation) and the need for member involvement through inclusive decision-making.

The need for efficiency hardly requires justification: BIAs have limited resources at their disposal, so they need to perform their tasks vis-à-vis their members and policymakers with little or no waste. Efficient BIAs are able to quickly react to policymakers' demands for information by producing and communicating clear messages (Albareda, 2018). Efficient BIAs often have professionalized organizational structures that enable them to gather and transfer policy information and expertise to policymakers that are pressured by time and have limited resources (Braun, 2013). In contrast, inclusiveness can be valuable to promote trust and commitment among BIA members (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Inclusiveness is necessary to generate "loyalty" among members, providing them with "voice" and avoiding their "exit" (Hirschmann, 1970). Inclusiveness is also important in the public policy context because it is more likely to offer a representative and encompassing view of its members' interests to policymakers who need input legitimacy when developing and passing legislation (Albareda, 2018). However, "the more that organizational participants are involved in the decision process, the more time consuming and resource intensive that process will tend to be" (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 242).

In other words, BIAs' efficiency and inclusiveness are two dimensions that often are difficult to reconcile, potentially leading to internal tension.

Although both elements are relevant to explain access to policymakers, we lack information on how BIAs address these somewhat contradictory demands and create governance structures that enable them to comply with a core function of BIAs: interacting with policymakers in need of information that is encompassing and efficiently provided (Boleat, 1996, 2003). Considering the relevance of both dimensions, BIAs that successfully cope with the efficiency-inclusiveness tension should perform better (in terms of access) than those that do not, *ceteris-paribus* (Provan & Kenis, 2008). However, it is not clear how BIAs with access to policymakers combine different organizational features related to the efficiency-inclusiveness tension.

Importantly, when it comes to having access, we distinguish between access to administrative officials (i.e., expert groups) and European Commission political heads (i.e., Commissioners) (for a similar approach, see Albareda et al., 2023). Whereas administrative officials are more in need of technical expertise and output legitimacy (Braun, 2013), political heads presumably require political information and input legitimacy, which might have consequences for the types of BIA they grant access to (for a pertinent discussion, see Coen & Katsaitis, 2019). Moreover, aside from traditional values such as impartiality, honesty, and integrity, efficiency has become a driving principle among civil servants (Rutgers, 2010). The primary role of administrative officials is to efficiently formulate sound regulations and legislation based on the guidelines provided by political heads using the technical expertise of stakeholders (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013). In contrast, political heads, appointed to lead an executive branch unit or a ministry, set and define the policy agenda and then determine the political strategy. Consequently, these political figures are in need of democratic legitimacy that facilitates the political acceptance of their policy initiatives (Eising, 2007). Hence, political heads are more likely to prioritize interactions with BIAs that invest in the inclusiveness dimension, as this would imply that these BIAs effectively represent a wide constituency. At the same time, both administrative officials and political heads need input from efficient BIAs, as policy issues are on the agenda for a limited period of time and have to be resolved quickly. As a result, policymakers tend to request timely input from stakeholders (Braun, 2013).

In summary, we expect that political heads will be particularly interested in broad political information from encompassing interests. That is, political heads will grant access to BIAs with large plenaries and boards that have consensus decision-making rules in the two statutory bodies. This might be less relevant for administrative officials, which are mostly focused on BIAs efficiently providing their technical expertise. In this respect, administrative officials are likely to grant access to BIAs with efficient governance structures:

small statutory bodies that rely on simple majority rules. The following section delves into these key governance structures related to the efficiency-inclusiveness tension. More specifically, we focus on the size and the decision-making processes adopted in the two statutory governance bodies to illustrate how BIAs with access to policymakers cope with the inclusiveness-efficiency tension in their governance design.

The Efficiency-Inclusiveness Tension and Governance Structure

Plenary/General Assembly Size. Interest groups that can speak on behalf of large constituencies, signaling broad coverage, can contribute to the democratic legitimacy of policies (Eising, 2007). Despite the difficulties associated with collective action and lowest common denominator problems (Beyers, 2008; Eising, 2007), having a large membership base (i.e., being more inclusive) strengthens BIAs' political relevance (Kohler-Koch et al., 2017). This inclusiveness increases the sectoral weight coverage of the interests relevant to their domain (Beyers, 2008) and simplifies the aggregation of encompassing interests. A large membership facilitates the gathering of information on encompassing interests and helps signal broad political support, which is advantageous to gain access to political officials. In other words, having a large number of members not only allows for a wide and diverse set of those members to be represented in the organization but also ensures that the organization acquires the necessary information to generate knowledge-based and politically-sound policy positions.

However, the downside of large membership has been well established in collective action scholarship: cooperation is more difficult with more members (Olson, 1965). The transaction costs of searching for possible agreements, negotiating costs and benefits, and monitoring results increase with size (Lubell et al., 2017). A larger group will probably increase the heterogeneity and diversity of members' assets, knowledge, preferences, and other factors, all of which can make collective action more difficult (Ostrom, 1990). Transaction costs are higher when the diversity of organizational types is greater (Fischer & Leifeld, 2015). In heterogeneous groups there is less observability and less familiarity between group members, limiting collective action (Poteete & Ostrom, 2004).

In summary, BIA plenaries with many members are likely to be more inclusive, yet their efficiency will be hampered due to collective action problems. In contrast, BIAs with fewer members might be less inclusive, but they probably are more efficient.

Relative Board Size. Previous studies have shown that board size is crucial for its effectiveness and their organizations' performance (Lipton & Lorsch, 1992). Small boards reduce communication and co-ordination costs (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Larger, presumably more inclusive boards are less efficient at carrying out their governance roles (deciding, advising, and monitoring the secretariat) (Lipton & Lorsch, 1992). The costs of shared decision-making increase in larger groups (Hackman, 1990). Larger boards are also less likely to foster discussion, since there is greater potential for dissent and making decisions becomes both more difficult and between time-consuming (Lipton & Lorsch, 1992).

Yet, while larger boards are less efficient due to communication, coordination, and decision-making problems (Eisenberg et al., 1998), resource dependence theory suggests that large boards—through their inclusive nature—enhance knowledge and experience acquisition (Dalton & Dalton, 2005). In this vein, executive board size can be understood as a rational organizational response to conditions in the external environment (Pfeffer, 1972). In complex environments, where information requirements are high, lobby groups with larger boards can get the necessary knowledge and expertise they need and thus have greater access to institutions (Boone et al., 2007). In addition to this potential benefit, larger boards are likely to more accurately represent the different perspectives and interests of their membership base, thus reinforcing the inclusive character of BIAs.

In this study, we focus on board size relative to the BIAs' entire membership, that is, the proportion of members that sit on the board, suggesting the extent to which all members have the opportunity to participate in the BIAs' decision-making processes. This is important because relative board size gives us an idea of the boards' inclusiveness. A larger relative board size means greater inclusiveness as more members become part of the boards; in contrast, a smaller relative board size indicates a focus on efficiency, as reducing the number of decision-makers facilitates faster board processes (Federo & Saz-Carranza, 2020).

Voting and Consensus. The decision-making system is critical for how members' interests are represented within BIAs (Binderkrantz, 2009). BIAs require a deliberation process in which member organizations provide input regarding their preferences and collectively agree on the interests that the group will represent when seeking access to political institutions. Decision-making systems requiring large majorities or consensus—despite increasing coordination costs, stasis, or internal tensions (J. Greenwood & Webster, 2000)—ensure internal alignment among association members and, therefore, better representation of the members' interests. Hence, decisions taken

by qualified majority or consensus are expected to reflect both higher levels of membership involvement and broader coverage of multiple membership interests than simple majority systems. Even though consensus may imply diluted or watered-down positions, the political significance of these decisions is stronger than the ones obtained through simple majority systems (Bouwen, 2004). We expect that BIAs with qualified or super majority voting systems in the plenary and in the board (particularly if the latter is large) are more likely to act in line with their members' interests. BIAs' general assemblies and boards are similar to governance units in nonprofit and public organizations, which can be conceptualized as decision-making groups (Hambrick et al., 1996), where the interests of diverse stakeholders compete (Tirole, 2001). If members have decision-making power in these statutory bodies, the decisions they take are less likely to go against members' interests. However, if the decision-making procedures in these bodies are based on a simple majority, then it is more likely that some decisions will not fully represent all the organizational members' viewpoints.

Although decision-making in network contexts usually is thought to be based on consensus rather than on voting (Saz-Carranza & Ospina, 2012), the latter is often the norm in multi-organizational settings with a large number of members—such as European regulatory networks and international governmental organizations (IGOs)—(Lockwood Payton, 2010). Scholars have found that IGOs often use simple majority rules to avoid blockage and promote efficiency (Federo et al., 2020; Snidal, 1985). Simple majority-voting procedures also are more likely to overcome the hurdles to collective action posed by "one member, one vote" or unanimity rules (Koremenos et al., 2001).

Contextual Conditions. In addition to these factors, we consider two contextual conditions: BIA staff and age. First, one aspect that affects organizational uncertainty and situational risk is the size of the BIAs' secretariat. A larger administrative office implies more resources contributed by the members and more capacity to produce collective benefits. Large secretariats can be seen as a potential solution to overcome the efficiency-inclusiveness tension, as their staff become central in making their organizations more efficient while paying attention to members' demands. However, sociological approaches have highlighted how a large staff might lead to the development of organizational cultures independent from the organizational members (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005). Beyond effects on the efficiency-inclusiveness tension, a larger staff often is seen to positively affect BIAs' access to policymakers, as these organizations have more policy capacities to offer (e.g., Dür & Mateo, 2013).

Second, time allows getting to know one's partners, their behavior, and their reputation for reciprocity, which in turn facilitates the development of trust. Older BIAs allow for process-based trust to develop (Zucker, 1986), as ongoing relationships generate familiarity among members and facilitate observability that helps build each member's reputation (Ostrom & Walker, 2003). Information on members' past actions vis-à-vis reciprocity is central to sustain collective action (Ostrom, 1990). More importantly, older BIAs are likely to have developed stronger relationships with policymakers, thus partially explaining their sustainability over time (Fraussen et al., 2015).

This article proposes examining how BIAs combine the factors discussed above and the implications for access to EU administrative officials and political heads. The limited research on this matter and the complex interrelationships among plenaries, boards, and voting systems complicates establishing configurations a priori. Accordingly, and as the following section details, we propose carrying out a QCA (see Campbell et al., 2016; Haxhi & Aguilera, 2017; Saz-Carranza et al., 2020)

Methodology

Configurational Approach

To identify the governance configurations of BIAs with access to policymakers, we conducted a QCA using the fsQCA software (Ragin & Davey, 2014). QCAs have become the prominent tool for the configurational approach in management research (Misangyi et al., 2017). They use set theory rather than correlations to analyze the complex relationship between the interplay of different conditions and a specific outcome (Fiss, 2007; Ragin, 2008). Consequently, QCAs allow researchers to identify the sufficiency and/or necessity of conditions within configurations that are associated with the outcome of interest. Our exploratory approach fits with the current study, since there is no previous research on this topic. By using a QCA, we specifically rely on configurational theorizing, as we bring forward substantive case knowledge and causal complexity assumptions to systematically understand the relationship in which we're interested (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Parente & Federo, 2019). Thus, we ultimately adopt an iterative approach based on empirical findings to explore potential typologies that characterize BIAs' governance configurations (e.g., Fiss, 2011).

The main advantage of using a QCA rests on its ability to capture the three principles of causal complexity. First, it assumes conjunction, which refers to the combinatory effect of multiple attributes for a specific outcome (Schneider

& Wagemann, 2012). In our study, we theorize that different BIA governance attributes are associated with said organizations' access to policymakers. Second, it explores equifinality, which suggests the possibility of having multiple configurations related to the same outcome (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Here, we assume that BIA governance structures come in different shapes and sizes that help grant access to policymakers. Third, a QCA analyzes the probable occurrence of asymmetry, which examines whether the inverse of the configurations associated with an outcome are related to the absence of the same outcome (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009). Our study, therefore, analyzes not only the governance configurations of BIAs with access to policymakers but those without that access.

Sample and Data

We took a random sample of European BIAs to study the effect of their organizational design on access. Since all operate at the EU level, studying them allows us to control for other aspects commonly associated with access to EU officials and to isolate the effect of organizational design more explicitly. The sample of BIAs obtained for our study is based on Wonka et al.'s (2010) article about measuring the size of the EU interest group population, compiling their list of interest groups from three different registries: European Parliament door pass holders (2008), the CONNECCS database (2007), and the commercial Landmarks European Public Affairs Directory (2007).

The combination of these three sources represents a holistic approach and offers a sample of EU-level interest groups that corrects for biases commonly associated with each of the individual databases (Berkhout et al., 2017). The Wonka et al. (2010) compilation contains 415 BIAs. For the purpose of our analysis, we extracted a random sample of 123 organizations, representing 30% of their database. The compilation dates from 2010, which could be seen as problematic in terms of accurately depicting the present EU interest community. Previous studies suggest, however, that the EU interest system is quite stable at the aggregate level (Berkhout et al., 2017), whereas we observe more volatility at the individual level in terms of persistent versus ad hoc presence, as indicated by Commission consultation and EU door pass registries (Berkhout & Lowery, 2011). We accounted for this individual-level volatility by using recent observations for the individual organizations.

The data sources we used to code the organizational characteristics include the websites of the 123 sample organizations and their bylaws [obtained either from their respective websites or *Moniteur Belge* (the Official Journal of the Kingdom of Belgium)]. We undertook the systematic coding of the

relevant variables for the study between 2014 and 2015. When the documents were not publicly available, one of the authors directly contacted the BIAs requesting their bylaws or statutes. To validate the coding process, the authors reviewed the documents and the coded variables of each BIA in the sample at least twice. The authors resolved any differences during the coding process to achieve full inter-rater agreement.

Outcomes and Explanatory Conditions

The following section describes the outcome and explanatory conditions we used in the analysis. We also discuss our set-calibration technique for each condition. We specifically use substantive case knowledge or the empirical distribution of the dataset when establishing the set thresholds (see Greckhamer et al., 2018).

Our outcomes concern access to EU policymakers. We define access as the ability to meet or to exchange information directly with policymakers (Braun, 2012, 2013; Halpin & Fraussen, 2017). In our study, we distinguish between access to expert groups and access to Commissioners to differentiate between administrative officials and political heads, respectively. Both forms of access are types of closed-access instruments, in the sense that they are relatively restrictive in terms of membership or participation (Binderkrantz et al., 2015).

Our dataset includes 824 expert groups originating from 28 Directorate-Generals. To operationalize access, we coded organizations as 0 when BIAs did not have access and 1 when they participated in at least one expert group. Second, we examined access to EU political heads through the meetings that the BIA representatives had with Commissioners between November 2014 and September 2016.[1] Again, we coded BIAs with access to political heads as 1, while those without access were coded as 0. These two measures of access have been previously used to assess interaction between interest groups and administrative officials (Rasmussen & Gross, 2015) as well as with political heads (Albareda et al., 2023). Importantly, the years covered by our outcome variable (2014–2016) match the years for the coding of the study's main conditions (2014–2015). This is key to ensure the link between the configurations obtained and the outcomes examined. It is also worth mentioning that the level of interaction between BIAs and policymakers is rather stable over time (see Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020), strengthening the generalizability of our findings to more recent times.

As discussed, we focus on the two statutory bodies that govern BIAs: The plenary (also known as the general assembly) and the (executive) board. The former gathers all organizational members and normally meets once a year,

where members decide on strategic issues concerning the organization. The executive board is a reduced version of the general assembly and may or may not include external representatives. That is, the board includes a limited number of all the BIAs' members. It is charged with overseeing the organization on a more frequent basis.

We specifically consider the following variables:

- Number of organizational members (either individual firms or associations) that are present in the plenary/general assembly;
- Decision-making procedures within the BIA's plenary/general assembly, captured by decision-making mechanisms established in the organizations' bylaws and operationalized as 0 if decisions are taken by simple majority (51%) and 1 in cases when a qualified majority or consensus is required;
- Board size in relation to the number of members in the plenary/general assembly; and
- Decision-making procedures within the executive board, operationalized as 0 when decisions are taken by simple majority (51%) or 1 in cases when a qualified majority or consensus is required.

We also take two other classical organization contingency variables—or firm-level contextual conditions—into account: BIAs' staff and age.

- BIAs' staff: In line with previous research, we anticipate that more resources will have a positive effect on performance—in this study, resources should affect the likelihood of gaining access to policymakers (Klüver, 2012).
- BIAs' age: As Hannan and Freeman (1989) argue, older associations "tend to develop dense webs of exchange, to affiliate with centers of power, and to acquire an aura of inevitability" (see also Fraussen & Beyers, 2016, p. 2019). Consequently, we expect older BIAs to be more likely to have access to EU policymakers.

Fuzzy Set Analysis

Following best practices when conducting QCAs, we first analyzed the necessity of the individual explanatory conditions for the outcomes (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). A condition is considered necessary if it is required in the configurations that are associated with a given outcome, meaning that the condition will always be a part of the configuration. We then identified the sufficiency of individual explanatory conditions and sets of these using fuzzy

set analysis, since our conditions comprise both crisp and fuzzy sets. An individual condition or a set of conditions is considered sufficient if it is consistently related to an outcome. Necessary conditions need to have a consistency score of at least 0.90, whereas sufficient conditions or sets of conditions need to have a consistency score of at least 0.80 (Ragin, 2006). The consistency score denotes how often the individual conditions or sets of conditions are associated with an outcome (Ragin, 2008).

During the sufficiency analysis, we built truth tables by considering a consistency threshold of 0.80, a proportional reduction in inconsistency of 0.65, and a frequency threshold of one case per configuration to maximize the dataset by capturing all the observations, coherent with our exploratory approach. In our analysis, we observed 40 configurations in relation to 64 total possible configurations. We then minimized the truth tables to generate the configurations that were sufficient for the outcome. Although three solutions emerged when conducting our QCA (i.e., parsimonious, intermediate, and complex), we focused especially on the intermediate solutions, as we account only for easy counterfactuals (i.e., those redundant conditions added to a set of conditions that are already related to the outcome) during the analysis (e.g., Fiss, 2011).

We subsequently included the configurations in a configuration table using the notation suggested by Ragin and Fiss (2008): solid circles (●) indicate that a given condition is "present"; crossed circles (⊗), "absent"; and blank spaces, "don't care," meaning that the condition is not relevant for the configuration in question. We also report the configurations' coverage scores, which indicate the empirical relevance of how the cases are distributed among the configurations (Ragin, 2006). In addition, we present the core and peripheral conditions in the configurations (e.g., Fiss, 2011). Core conditions (large circles) are those that are taken from both parsimonious and intermediate solutions, while peripheral conditions (small circles) are those that are eliminated from the parsimonious solutions. Core conditions are definitive ingredients of configurations, whereas peripheral conditions only contribute elements that can be removed from the configurations (Ragin & Fiss, 2008).

Results

In keeping with the conjunction principle, we found no sufficient condition that on its own always related to the outcomes (see Appendixes A and B). However, we found that decision-making in the general assembly based on majority votes is a necessary condition for lack of access to expert groups (with a consistency score of 0.92 and a coverage score of 0.46). Below we

Table 1. Governance Configurations of BIAs With Access to Administrative Officials.

	With access							Without access
Configurations	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8
General assembly								
Many members	⊗	●		●		⊗	●	
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	⊗	⊗			●	●	●	⊗
Board								
Large relative board size	⊗	●	●	⊗	⊗	●	⊗	⊗
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	⊗	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	⊗	●
Contextual conditions								
Large secretariat	●	●	●	●	●	⊗		⊗
Older organization			●	●	●	●	●	●
Consistency	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.91	0.95	0.93	0.85	0.96
Raw coverage	0.08	0.08	0.15	0.09	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.09
Unique coverage	0.04	0.01	0.06	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.09
Solution consistency				0.90				0.96
Solution coverage				0.42				0.09
Number of cases	5	5	10	7	5	4	8	4

Note. ●—present ⊗—absent. Blank space—don't care. Large circles are core conditions; small circles are peripheral conditions.

discuss the results by distinguishing between access to administrative officials (i.e., expert groups) and to political heads (i.e., Commissioners).

Access to Administrative Officials

Supporting the equifinality principle, having access to the Commission's expert groups entails seven governance configurations (see Table 1), with an overall consistency score of 0.90 and an overall coverage score of 0.42.

Most of the configurations balance elements of inclusiveness and efficiency in one way or another. More specifically, configurations A2, A3, A4, A5, and A7 combine elements related to inclusiveness dimensions with some conditions related to efficiency. Firstly, configurations A2 and A3 (with consistency scores of 0.89 and 0.91 and unique coverage scores of 0.01 and 0.06,

respectively) combine a rather large executive board—relative to the total number of members in the BIAs—with a majority-based decision-making system on those boards. However, in configuration A2, we also see that BIAs have large membership bases and their plenaries take decisions by simple majority. These configurations can be exemplified by the European Dredging Association (EUDA), with almost half of its members present on the board taking decisions based on a simple majority.

Secondly, configurations A4 (with a consistency score of 0.91 and a unique coverage score of 0.04) and A5 (a consistency score of 0.95 and a unique coverage score of 0.01) also reconcile the tradeoff between inclusiveness and efficiency. These two configurations have inclusive elements in their plenaries (either by having many members as shown in A4 or by relying on consensus procedures as seen in A5). At the same time, both have relatively small boards that make decisions through qualified majorities or consensus. An example of these configurations is the European Association of Motorcycle Manufacturers (ACEM), the trade association representing manufacturers of powered two- and three-wheelers as well as quadricycles in Europe, and encompassing many brands, vehicle manufacturers, and national associations that make decisions in the general assembly by consensus.

Thirdly, configuration A7 (with a consistency score of 0.85 and a unique coverage score of 0.07) requires BIAs to have a general assembly with many members deciding through consensus/qualified majorities, while a smaller board decides through majority voting. This configuration balances inclusiveness and efficiency at different levels (an inclusive general assembly and an efficient board). This configuration is exemplified by MUTUAL (Association Internationale de la Mutualité) that has a large membership base and consensual mechanisms in its plenary, but a small board with efficient decision-making mechanisms.

The other two configurations (A1 and A6) either prioritize efficiency or inclusiveness. On the one hand, configuration A1 (with a consistency score of 0.89 and a unique coverage score of 0.04) has elements of efficiency in both the BIA plenaries (i.e., a smaller membership base that takes decisions through simple majority voting) and boards (relatively small size and decisions based on simple majority voting). This configuration is exemplified by the European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC), with only 32 members across Europe that make decisions through simple majorities. On the other hand, configuration A6 (with a consistency score of 0.93 and a unique coverage score of 0.05), includes BIAs that, despite having rather a limited number of members in their plenaries, heavily invest in inclusive decision-making mechanisms and representative boards. More specifically, BIAs in configuration A6 rely on consensus or a qualified majority voting system in

their plenaries, they have large boards relative to the total number of members, and their boards make decisions using qualified majorities or consensus. The European Agricultural Machinery Industry (CEMA) is an example of this type. CEMA only has 11 national member associations and is characterized for having a large executive board that make decisions by consensus.

Lastly, only one configuration (A8, with a consistency score of 0.96 and a unique coverage score of 0.09) has no access to administrative officials. BIAs within this configuration have executive boards similar to configurations A4 and A5—balancing their small relative size with inclusive decision-making systems. The key differences in the A8 configuration are that BIA plenaries are not inclusive and the BIAs have very limited staff. Importantly, one of these two conditions (inclusive plenaries and/or large staff) is present in every configuration with access to administrative officials.

In line with the asymmetry principle, we found that the inverse of the conditions comprising the configurations associated with having access to EU Commission expert groups was not related to the configurations of BIAs without access to those groups. Only one configuration is consistent in this respect (with a consistency score of 0.96 and a unique coverage score of 0.09): an older BIA, with a smaller secretariat and with a general assembly whose members decide through majority voting and a smaller board deciding through consensus/qualified majority voting.

Access to Political Heads

To have access to political heads, we found three governance configurations (see Table 2), with an overall consistency score of 0.83 and an overall coverage score of 0.15. The three configurations are older BIAs with larger secretariats. However, we observe some variations in how these configurations combine the inclusiveness-efficiency conditions.

Similar to our findings regarding administrative officials, two of the configurations include elements of both dimensions to reconcile the inclusiveness-efficiency tension. Configuration B1 (with a consistency score of 0.82 and a unique coverage score of 0.08) has a large membership base; yet decisions in BIA plenaries are made through majority systems. Additionally, their boards are relatively small in size, though board members decide by consensus/qualified majorities. An example of this configuration is UNIFE, a large association that aggregates the entire European rail industry. Configuration B2 (with a consistency score of 0.86 and a unique coverage score of 0.03) is exemplified by Eurochambres, a business association with 46 members that is considered one of the EU's social partners. Although this configuration

Table 2. Governance Configurations of BIAs With Access to Political Heads.

	With access			Without access					
Configurations	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9
General assembly									
Many members	●	●	⊗		⊗	⊗		⊗	⊗
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	⊗	●	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	●	●
Board									
Large relative board size	⊗	●	●	⊗	⊗		•	●	⊗
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	●	⊗	●				●	•	•
Contextual conditions									
Large secretariat	●	•	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	●
Older	•	•	•	●		⊗	⊗	•	•
Consistency	0.82	0.86	0.84	0.87	0.92	0.98	1.00	0.89	0.80
Raw coverage	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.29	0.35	0.16	0.04	0.04	0.02
Unique coverage	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.14	0.14	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.02
Solution consistency		0.83				0.90			
Solution coverage		0.15				0.61			
Number of cases	3	1	2	27	33	12	4	4	1

Note. ●—present. ⊗—absent. Blank space—don't care. Large circles are core conditions; small circles are peripheral conditions.

mostly suggests investment in inclusiveness conditions, the corresponding BIAs have executive boards that decide by majority vote, thus reconciling the inclusiveness-efficiency tradeoff.

In contrast, configuration B3 (with a consistency score of 0.99 and a unique coverage score of 0.04) is exemplified by the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA), a BIA whose membership is restricted to big manufacturers that make decisions through consensus. Interestingly, this configuration is similar to configuration A7 and illustrates how BIAs with a limited number of members can more clearly invest in inclusiveness factors, i.e., deciding by qualified majority or consensus in both statutory bodies and maintaining relatively large executive boards.

We do not observe clear configurations of BIAs without access to EU Commissioners. However, two features seem to standout in configurations B4 to B9: on the one hand, all the BIAs without access lack a large membership-base—or this factor does not matter as found in configurations B4 and B7. One explanation for this could be the Commissioners' need for political,

all-encompassing information that represents the full constituency of the representatives they talk to (Albareda & Braun, 2019). Another feature of configurations without access to Commissioners (excluding configuration B9) is that all BIAs have small secretariats with few employees, hampering the BIAs' ability to obtain access, which requires investment and resources (Klüver, 2012).

Discussion

Overall, our results suggest how BIAs address the studied efficiency-inclusiveness tension. Most of the configurations we obtained from our analysis clearly show how their governance structures balance the tension to some extent (A2, A3, A4, A5, A7, B1, and B2), whereas other configurations fall more toward either the efficiency (A1) or the inclusiveness (A6 and B3) poles. Indeed, configuration A1 is the only one that is fully situated at one of the extremes by having all the conditions that make it an efficient configuration. When it comes to inclusiveness, no configuration is fully located at this end of the continuum.

Regarding access to administrative officials, configuration A1 potentially points towards the efficiency pole (both necessary conditions are efficiency-oriented: few members and board decisions made by simple majority). Interestingly, this efficiency-oriented configuration also has a large secretariat as a core condition, which may allow this governance configuration to overcome its internal (versus its members') and external (versus policymakers') legitimacy deficiencies. More importantly, this finding aligns with our broad theoretical expectations: access to administrative officials is mostly driven by efficiency reasons, that is, being able to respond in a timely and professional manner (e.g., via large secretariats) to policymakers' demands. In other words, this configuration is consistent with the idea that the civil servants' legitimacy rests on the quality of their proposals associated with notions of effectiveness and efficiency, focusing on output legitimacy (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013).

However, BIA configurations related to access to administrative officials mostly include mixed designs that combine elements of inclusiveness and efficiency (A2, A3, A4, A5, and A7). These configurations vary widely in terms of how they combine the different conditions. Configurations A2 and A3 reconcile this tradeoff mostly within their boards, as these are relatively large but rely on majority voting rules. Configurations A4 and A5 have the inverse combination in relation to the boards—these are relatively small yet make decisions by qualified majority or consensus—and they have inclusive plenaries. Interestingly, A7 is the only configuration

that copes with the efficiency-inclusiveness tension by clearly dissociating the poles between BIA plenaries (inclusive-oriented) and boards (efficiency-oriented). Importantly, we do not find any other configuration that balances this tension by having an inclusive board and an efficiency-oriented plenary. All in all, these configurations stress the importance for BIAs to balance the inclusiveness-efficiency tension (see also Schmitter & Streeck, 1999) in order to provide information that is aligned with their members in a rapid and efficient manner.

Finally, the configuration that can be more closely aligned with an inclusive structure is A6. Although BIAs in this configuration have small plenaries, hampering their ability to represent large constituencies, other elements within this configuration promote an inclusive character that might reinforce the BIAs' democratic and representative qualities. The BIAs' organizational structures in configuration A6 are likely to reinforce the ability to properly include and represent their membership base. That this configuration is related to access to administrative officials demonstrates that these bodies not only are focused on efficiency elements but also relate to the BIAs' ability to provide information that clearly represents their constituencies (Albareda & Braun, 2019).

Regarding access to political heads, configurations B1 and B2 require or allow for balancing the tension both within the plenaries or the boards themselves. This may point to the fact that the tension must be addressed within both governance bodies if they are to gain access to the Commission's political heads. The lack of a purely inclusive configuration among BIAs with access to political leaders nuances some of the theoretical arguments that explain access to these policymakers. Although it is true that political heads value representative information from inclusive BIAs (Albareda et al., 2023), our findings also suggest that these organizations need to be efficient in providing their policy inputs. Nonetheless, configuration B3 highlights the importance of BIAs being inclusive in order to gain access to political heads. Even if BIAs with this configuration do not have many members (i.e., small plenaries), all the remaining conditions point towards an inclusive configuration—similar to configuration A6.

All in all, our results show that BIAs with access to administrative officials are more diverse in terms of their configurational forms as they can emphasize efficiency (A1), inclusiveness (A6), or balance both dimensions (A2, A3, A4, A5, and A7). However, BIAs with access to political heads look more alike in terms of their governance structures. Two configurations obtained attempt to balance the efficiency-inclusiveness tension: configuration B1 does so in the corresponding BIAs' statutory bodies while configuration B2 does so by having inclusive decision-making systems in the plenaries

and large boards with simple majority decision-making systems. Lastly, configuration B3 features few members in BIA plenaries, though they have decision-making powers, and members have a greater presence on boards that use qualified majority or consensus decision-making rules, ensuring (the small number of) BIA members are properly represented.

In this regard, it is worth emphasizing that the configurations that more clearly invest in inclusiveness conditions (i.e., A6 and B3) have a limited number of members—which is consistent with assumptions in network governance literature (e.g., Provan & Kenis, 2008). In other words, configurations A6 and B3 can be categorized as inclusive; yet the BIAs cannot claim to represent encompassing interests and their sectoral weight coverage is likely to be affected by the limited number of members in their plenaries (Beyers, 2008). However, this finding clearly reflects that the difficulties associated to collective action diminish when BIAs have a limited number of members (Olson, 1965). Importantly, network governance literature tends to emphasize that greater inclusiveness leads to lower chances of success (i.e., access to policymakers) due to the time-consuming and resource intensive process that it entails (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Even so, our findings demonstrate that one BIA configuration that promotes inclusiveness structures has access to administrative officials and political heads, thus nuancing this predominance of efficiency trends (for similar findings, see Grömping & Halpin, 2019; Heylen et al., 2020). In other words, groups that are able to provide inclusive and representative information about their (limited) constituencies' interests can still gain access to policymakers (Kohler-Koch et al., 2017).

Regarding the contextual conditions, we observe that having a larger secretariat, a proxy for having more resources, is a core or contributing condition in 7 of the 10 configurations with access. Similarly, being an older—more experienced—BIA matters in 8 out of the 10 solutions with access. This finding is clearly aligned with previous research demonstrating the relevance of these two contextual factors when explaining access to policymakers (see for instance, Klüver, 2012).

Conclusion

This article sought to answer the question: "What governance configurations do BIAs with access to policymakers adopt to cope with the efficiency-inclusiveness tension?" Our QCA based on 123 BIAs mobilized at the EU level demonstrates the importance of exploring how effective BIAs cope with the inclusiveness-efficiency tension. We observe that BIAs with access to administrative officials have diverse governance structures that cover the different spectrums of the tension. However, this structural diversity is less present

when focusing on BIAs with access to political heads. In contrast to BIAs with access to administrative officials, no configuration clearly invests in efficiency conditions to help them gain access to political heads.

Importantly, our empirical focus centers on the EU. This in itself represents a contribution to the literature, as prior research has mostly focused on Anglo-Saxon national contexts. At the same time, this might hamper the generalizability of our findings due to the nested nature of the BIAs we analyzed. The BIAs we considered are what is known as "umbrella organizations," encompassing regional and/or national business associations. In this regard, their direct membership-bases are the associations themselves, and the findings could vary if we consider BIAs that exclusively have individual firms as members.

Moreover, we acknowledge that governance structure factors are not a guarantee that BIAs will be more inclusive or efficient, as many informal mechanisms shape how BIAs function internally. In this sense, our empirical approach does not allow us to establish a clear connection between members' preferences and BIAs' positions. However, we expect that these structural factors are an important pre-condition that shapes the BIAs' ability to be more or less efficient and/or inclusive. Future research could complement our findings by qualitatively unpacking the informal relationships within BIAs to explain how they resolve the inclusiveness-efficiency tension in daily practice (see, for instance, Albareda & Fraussen, 2023; Kröger, 2018; Rodekamp, 2014). Relatedly, future studies also might explore how conflict resolution mechanisms shape the inclusiveness-efficiency tradeoff. By focusing on conflictual situations, we could clearly unveil which of the two dimensions BIAs prioritize. If extra effort is made to resolve conflicts in a way that reflects everyone's positions and preferences, then inclusiveness is dominating. However, BIAs opting to resolve the issue through simple majority decisions in conflictual settings may indicate an efficiency-orientation (for a similar approach, see Albareda & Fraussen, 2023).

While acknowledging these limitations, our research makes important contributions to the literature by highlighting the relevance of internal BIA structures and the consequences for their political activity. Thus, this article calls for future research to further unpack how BIAs effectively manage the efficiency-inclusiveness tension and the ensuing consequences for gaining access and influence in political arenas. At the same time, it seems important to step back and ask: why do BIAs decide to prioritize one dimension over the other or try to strike a balance? Similarly, what role do their leaders and behavioral elements play? All in all, our study confirms that a governance analysis of BIAs and their capacity to manage the inclusiveness-efficiency

tension is a promising path to provide further insights on business management and other inter-organizational collective actions involved in policymaking processes.

Appendix A

Necessity Analysis: Access to Administrative Officials

Presence of access to experts	Consistency	Coverage
Many members	0.52	0.66
~Many members	0.48	0.56
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.31	0.85
~Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.69	0.54
Larger board	0.37	0.58
~Larger board	0.63	0.63
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.28	0.60
~Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.72	0.61
Large secretariat	0.52	0.79
~Large secretariat	0.48	0.49
Older	0.79	0.61
~Older	0.21	0.60
Absence of access to experts		
Many members	0.41	0.34
~Many members	0.59	0.44
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.08	0.15
~Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.92	0.46
Larger board	0.42	0.42
~Larger board	0.58	0.37
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.29	0.40
~Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.71	0.39
Large secretariat	0.21	0.21
~Large secretariat	0.79	0.51
Older	0.77	0.39
~Older	0.23	0.40

Appendix B

Necessity Analysis: Access to Political Heads

Presence of access to commissioners	Consistency	Coverage
Many members	0.63	0.44
~Many members	0.37	0.23
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.29	0.44
~Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.71	0.30
Larger board	0.38	0.33
~Larger board	0.62	0.34
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.32	0.37
~Directors deciding through consensus/ qualified majority	0.68	0.32
Large secretariat	0.67	0.57
~Large secretariat	0.33	0.18
Older	0.84	0.36
~Older	0.16	0.24
Absence of access to commissioners		
Many members	0.40	0.56
~Many members	0.60	0.77
Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.18	0.56
~Members deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.82	0.70
Larger board	0.39	0.67
~Larger board	0.61	0.66
Directors deciding through consensus/qualified majority	0.27	0.63
~Directors deciding through consensus/ qualified majority	0.73	0.68
Large secretariat	0.26	0.43
~Large secretariat	0.74	0.82
Older	0.75	0.64
~Older	0.25	0.76

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Data Availability Statement

The replication materials, including a dataset, are available in the Supplemental material.

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