

DRESSED FOR POLITICS

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### Abstract

Does publicity have the power to civilize politics? One of the most frequently prescribed remedies for fixing the democratic legitimacy problems of the European Union is increased transparency. And while there is some confusion in the democratic deficit literature about precisely *why* transparency is needed, making political elites 'behave well' is a common justification.

The most sophisticated formulation of a theory of publicity's civilizing effect has been developed within deliberative democratic theory. To deliberative theorists, behaving well implies refraining from using market behaviour. In the political sphere the proper way of reaching agreement is by convincing others with public-spirited arguments, rather than by bargaining from positions of self-interest. Transparency may promote that ideal.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine and test the theory of publicity's civilizing effect. The theory is tested on business lobbyists—presumably the most market-oriented actors in politics—trying to influence environmental policy decisions on two extreme points of the transparency scale: the notoriously opaque European Commission, on the one hand, and the Swedish government, with its centuries old 'publicity principle', on the other. The author begins by asking professional lobbying consultants to provide a guided tour of politics: how would they advise lobbyists to act in both private and public lobbying situations? The results of these interviews are compared and contrasted with an analysis of a unique sample of actual lobbying documents: previously confidential lobbying letters as well as public letters and press releases.

The results are disappointing for the theory of publicity's civilizing effect, in some ways even contrary. The theory seems to overrate the positive force of transparency and publicity. At the same time, however, the theory underestimates the inherent civilizing force of democratic politics itself. It is found that in order to be successful, even behind closed doors, business lobbyists must adapt to the political sphere. They must, the author argues, get *dressed for politics*.

**Keywords:** Transparency, publicity, deliberative democratic theory, negotiation theory, lobbying, interest groups, the European Union, Sweden, environmental policy.