Empirical Approaches to the Study of Access*

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June 20, 2020

Abstract

While organized interests employ a broad range of activities in pursuit of their goals, practitioners and scholars alike deem access, or direct contacts with policymakers, as the "gold standard" of activities. However, access is difficult for empirical researchers to study because scant records of direct contacts exist. In this essay, I discuss the role of access in studies of organized interests and policymaking and describe three common approaches to the empirical study of access: survey self-reports by organized interests and policymakers; experiments; and, on the rare occasions they exist, official records of access. In discussing each of these approaches, I identify their strengths and weaknesses, and I conclude by providing guidance and recommendations for empirical researchers using these approaches to study access.

Word Count: 4,951

*I thank Benjamin C.K. Egerod for helpful feedback.

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Organized interests engage in a wide range of activities to pursue their policy goals including making campaign contributions (Hall and Wayman 1990), testifying in legislative hearings (Hansen 1991), and mobilizing public support (Kollman 1998). Of these myriad activities, both practitioners and scholars identify access, or direct contacts with policymakers, as one of the most common and consequential (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). While organized interests' influence over the policymaking process is difficult to detect (De Figueiredo and Richter 2014), access is believed to be a key antecedent to influence (Wright 1996); through access, organized interests can most effectively convey information and expertise (Hansen 1991), mobilize policymakers to engage in activities amenable to their preferences (Hall and Deardorff 2006), and advance their preferred policy outcomes (Baumgartner et al. 2009).

Given its prominence as the "gold standard" of lobbying activities (Levine 2009, 7), access features in a variety of research questions in the study of organized interests and policymaking such as the strategies and tactics organized interests use to obtain access (e.g., Hojnacki and Kimball 1998; Schnakenberg 2017), to which policymakers interests have access (e.g., Alves 2020; Miller 2020), and whether access translates to influence (e.g, Ban and You 2019; Baumgartner et al. 2009). While some of these studies draw on qualitative methods (e.g., Levine 2009; Nownes 2006) or formal theory (e.g., Austen-Smith 1995; Grossman and Helpman 2001), most utilize quantitative analyses of real-world or experimental measures of access. However, these quantitative studies must grapple with a unique challenge: access is rarely observed, and hence difficult to empirically examine. Because most direct contacts between organized interests and policymakers occur out of public view and records of their occurrence are often inaccessible to the public, empirical researchers are often left to study access without direct measures of access itself.

In this essay, I provide an overview of how empirical researchers study organized interests' access to policymakers. My discussion focuses on approaches that concentrate on access itself as opposed to those that explore phenomena related to access.[1] In the remainder of this essay, I identify and

[1]The scope conditions for this essay are that studies must utilize measures of direct contacts (or experimental analogues) as outcomes or explanatory variables. While many studies examine access through related phenomena such as campaign contributions (Bertrand, Bombardini, and Trebbi 2014; Fouirnaies 2018; Fouirnaies and Hall 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016), network connections (McCrain 2018; Vidal, Draca, and Fons-Rosen 2012), and travel records (Finer n.d.), I exclude them from the essay because they do not face the central challenge I identify—how to study access empirically when direct measures are seldom available.

describe three common approaches used to study organized interests' access to policymakers: survey self-reports; experiments; and, on the rare occasions they exist, official records. While reviewing these approaches, I discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and, in the concluding section, I provide recommendations and guidance for using these approaches. Through this essay, I hope to motivate researchers to think critically about the tradeoffs associated with these approaches to studying access and take steps to address shortcomings in their research designs. Wile data scarcity cannot forestall all research on such a substantively and normatively important phenomenon, we must be cognizant of and strive to mitigate weaknesses in our studies as we work to accumulate knowledge.

Access as the "Gold Standard"

Despite its ubiquity in studies of organized interests and policymaking, "access" lacks a clear, universal definition; as Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers (2017, 308) note, "very few articles... offer an explicit definition of access," instead relying on "an intuitive understanding of access as some sort of (direct) contact" (see also Wright 1996). I do not here seek to arbitrate among different definitions of access (see Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers 2017),[2] but instead focus on the empirical study of one particular form of access—direct contacts between organized interests and policymakers. I focus on direct contacts for two reasons. First, though scholars may seldom offer definitions of access, direct contacts are central to their "intuitive understanding" of access. Access implies the capacity to communicate or interact with someone or something (e.g., Hall and Wayman 1990, 800, 803; Langbein 1986, 1053; Wright 1989, 714), and direct contacts, whether in-person or remote (e.g., email, phone), are quintessential opportunities for communication and interaction.

Second, while other lobbying activities, such as participating in committee hearings (Hansen 1991) or holding seats on administrative boards (Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers 2017), facilitate interaction, both organized interest representatives and policymakers report that direct

[2]Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers (2017, 307) propose a definition of access as present "when a group has entered a political arena (parliament, administration, or media) passing a threshold controlled by relevant gatekeepers (politicians, civil servants, or journalists)." While the authors indicate that direct contacts between organized interests and policymakers fall under this definition, they suggest that it encompasses other phenomena such as interests' seats on administrative boards and coverage in the media. While this more expansive definition of access may be appropriate in some contexts, I focus on access as direct contacts because the scarcity of information on direct contacts poses unique challenges for researchers that the measurement of these other phenomena do not given their public visibility.

contacts are the most frequent and effective means of interaction. In their survey of 315 organized interest representatives, Baumgartner et al. (2009) report that the most frequent tactic in which respondents indicated engaging was personal contact with rank-and-file members of Congress and their staffs (80.6%), and over half of respondents reported making personal contact with leaders or members on congressional committees relevant to their policy goals (see also Drutman 2015; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Further, when asked which lobbying activities they believed to be most effective, the vast majority of organized interest representatives participating in surveys conducted by Berry (1977) and Milbrath (1963) selected direct contacts with policymakers.

Direct contacts are important to organized interest representatives and policymakers for at least four reasons. Through direct contacts, policymakers and organized interests receive each other's attention, which enables them to share information and expertise more efficiently than they can through other means (Levine 2009; Nownes 2006). In addition, direct contacts makes the preferences of policymakers and interests more salient, or mentally accessible, such that both parties are more likely to consider each other's preferences and offer preferential treatment in the future (Miler 2010; Wright 1990). Further, access enables policymakers and interests to build interpersonal relationships that promote cooperation and trust (Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Finally, when communicating privately, interests and policymakers feel more comfortable engaging in candid discussions than they would in public view (Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Thus, direct contacts are not merely *a* form of access, but *the* form of access most valued by both parties.

Extant Empirical Approaches to Access

Despite its importance in the study of organized interests and policymaking, researchers are often hard-pressed to study access because direct contacts take place out of public view and records of their occurrence are rare. For example, the United States Congress does not disclose direct contacts between its members and outside entities and exempts itself from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) such that journalists, scholars, or concerned citizens cannot compel their disclosure. Again, when Binderkrantz, Pedersen, and Beyers (2017) asked members of the Danish Parliament to share their personal calendars in order to observe with which organized interests they interacted, only 33

of the 179 MPs agreed to provide these records, forcing the authors to find an alternative measure of access. Policymakers are likely reticent to release records of direct contacts not only because transparency might hinder the advantages afforded by direct contacts, but also because providing evidence of their relationships with organized interests could cause ire among a public skeptical of so-called "special interests" (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

Thus, researchers who study organized interests and their interactions with policymakers face a dilemma: how can we empirically study access when we can rarely observe it? Scholars have responded to this dilemma with three approaches including collecting survey self-reports of access from organized interests and/or policymakers, conducting experiments, and leveraging rare opportunities where official records are made public. While each approach can help us learn about access, organized interests, and policymaking, each also carries with it unique strengths and weaknesses.

Survey Self-Reports

Even if official records of access are not publicly available, the organized interest representatives and policymakers who are parties to direct contacts can divulge their occurrence. Thus, one popular approach to empirically studying access is to try to reconstruct those official records by soliciting survey self-reports of access from those participants. While these surveys differ in many ways, their common characteristic is that they ask organized interests and policymakers to indicate the degree to which they had direct contacts with their counterparts. This approach has been used to measure access in myriad institutional contexts including Congress (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Hall and Miler 2008; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998, 1999, 2001; Langbein 1986, 1993; Langbein and Lotwis 1990; Wright 1989, 1990), the presidency (Brown 2014; Peterson 1992), and the federal executive branch (Reenock and Gerber 2008; Yackee 2012) in the United States (see also Baumgartner et al. 2009) and the parliaments and bureaucracies of several European countries and the European Union (Beyers 2004; Beyers and Braun 2014; Chalmers 2013; Crepaz, Hanegraaff, and Salgado 2019; Eising 2007*a*,*b*; Hanegraaff, van der Ploeg, and Berkhout 2020). Among the research questions which scholars have probed with survey self-reports are which members of Congress lobbyists target (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998), what tactics interests

use to seek access across venues (Beyers 2004; Chalmers 2013), and how direct contacts influence final regulatory language (Yackee 2012).

The key strength of survey self-reports is that they help researchers recover the unobserved records of direct contacts between organized interests and policymakers. In an ideal world with full compliance from all organized interests or policymakers in the researcher's sampling frame, this approach would provide the same information conveyed by the official records that policymakers are reticent to disclose. Another strength of survey self-reports is that researchers can use the broader survey to efficiently collect other "hard to measure" quantities of interest. For example, Hojnacki and Kimball (1998) aim to explore whether organized interest characteristics, such as the number of employees who work on lobbying and the strength of an interest's base of support within each member of Congress' direct, inform interests' targeting strategies. While information on these characteristics is not disclosed in federal lobbying disclosure reports and not publicized by interests themselves, the authors were able to use their survey of organized interests to collect information on both interests' direct contacts and several types of organizational characteristics.

Because survey self-reports of access are observational data, studies using them face challenges to inference common in observational studies such as endogeneity. However, the central unique limitation associated with self-reports of access is that they are vulnerable to non-response and response bias. First, non-response bias describes how respondents' decision to not complete researchers' surveys can yield a sample of respondents whose characteristics and behavior are systematically different than those of non-respondents. For instance, if a researcher investigating interests' targeting of members of Congress for direct contacts receives more responses from high-resource interests than from low-resource interests, and if resources condition targeting strategies, then the researchers' empirical analyses could produce erroneous conclusions.[3]

Second, response bias describes the bias introduced when respondents' answers deviate from the truth. Researchers using survey self-reports depend on respondents offering accurate recollections of their direct contacts; when their accounts diverge from their realized direct contacts, they intro-

[3]Problems arising from survey non-response can be mitigated through sampling procedures or survey weights that yield random or representative samples (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Miller n.d.).

duce measurement error.[4] If these divergences arise from respondents' mistaken recollections, then this error will be random, yielding unbiased but inefficient inferences. However, social desirability concerns may lead respondents to systematically misreport direct contacts. For instance, organized interests might exaggerate their clout by overstating direct contacts with legislative leaders. Again, legislators might underreport their direct contacts with interests unpopular with their constituents for fear that their responses could become public (Li 2018). Unlike mistaken recollections, inaccurate reports motivated by social desirability introduce non-random error that biases researchers' analyses. Because researchers can rarely compare self-reports of access to even a subset of official records, the extent to which response bias affects self-reports is unknown.

Experiments

As an experimental revolution has worked its way into the study of political institutions in recent decades (Grose 2014), a small but growing set of experimental studies focusing on organized interests' access to policymakers has emerged. In contrast to other approaches to studying access, those using experiments do not draw on information about previous instances of access, but instead glean inferences through exercises that either simulate access-seeking or access-granting behavior or through randomized interventions that inform real-world requests for or provisions of access. Lab and survey experiments recruit organized interest representatives or policymakers to participate in a simulated task or respond to a series of questions that the respondents are aware are part of an academic study (Chin 2005; Chin, Bond, and Geva 2000; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2019; Miller n.d.). Differently, field experiments introduce and examine the effects of randomized interventions on the behavior of organized interests and policymakers who are unaware of their participation in the experiments (Brodbeck, Harrigan, and Smith 2013; Grose et al. n.d.; Kalla and Broockman 2016; Wiener n.d.). Extant studies use experimental approaches to investigate research questions such as which members of Congress organized interests target for direct contacts (Miller n.d.), what organized interest characteristics and tactics inform policymakers' provision of access (e.g., Brodbeck, Harrigan, and Smith 2013; Kalla and Broockman 2016; Wiener

[4]This concern also applies to self-reports of other quantities of interest that researchers might collect in the same surveys.

n.d.), and how direct contacts influence policymakers' preferences and activities (Grose et al. n.d.; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2019).

The key advantage of experiments is that they can identify causal relationships. By randomizing treatment assignment to organized interests and/or policymakers, all confounders are balanced across groups such that differences in outcomes can be attributed to the researchers' treatments. For instance, because interests' campaign contributions are endogenous to other considerations related to access, such as the correspondence between interests' and policymakers' preferences (Bonica 2013), it is difficult to identify the effect of contributions on direct contacts or subsequent behavior in observational studies (Wright 1990). However, with experiments, Kalla and Broockman (2016) are able to isolate the relationship between campaign contributions and access, and Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes (2019) can demonstrate that campaign contributions influence policymakers' preferences. Another advantage of experiments is that they allow researchers to study typically unobservable behaviors related to access such as the dynamics of lobbyists' targeting choices (Miller n.d.) and how policymakers' responses to requests for access are informed by the tactics interests use in making their requests (e.g., Kalla and Broockman 2016; Wiener n.d.). A final advantage of experiments is that they are less susceptible to social desirability bias than are survey self-reports. In the case of field experiments, because subjects are unaware that interventions are part of experiments, their responses are unlikely to deviate from their day-to-day actions. Additionally, some survey experimental tools, such as conjoint (Miller n.d.) and list experiments (Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2019), minimize social desirability bias because respondents are able to rationalize socially undesirable choices with other components of the experiment.

The central limitation of experiments is that, because researchers' interventions are not naturally occurring, they generate concerns about external validity (Grose 2014).[5] An experiment's external validity hinges on whether it elicits the same responses that subjects would elicit in their day-to-day activities; as an experiment deviates from a realistic scenario, its external validity suffers because its conclusions are less likely to generalize to the real-world phenomena of interest. For example,

[5]Lab and survey experiments also face the same survey non-response challenge as do survey self-reports. However, experiments' internal validity ensures that the treatment effects are unbiased for the sample of respondents, and researchers can use survey weights to assess the degree to which those effects generalize to the full population (see Footnote 3).

if organized interests always disclose whether they employ registered lobbyists or their members make campaign contributions, then experiments which find that the disclosure of this information leads to more or better access may be of lesser substantive value (Brodbeck, Harrigan, and Smith 2013; Kalla and Broockman 2016).

External validity concerns pose challenges for experimental design. The primary challenge to external validity in lab and survey experiments is that because respondents know the exercises are hypothetical, they may offer responses that differ from the decisions they make in their day-to-day work. To mitigate this challenge, researchers must craft survey experiments that resemble reality as closely as possible through exercises which mimic real-world tasks (e.g., Chin 2005; Miller n.d.). Though field experiments avoid this challenge by implementing interventions in the course of real-world activities, they are more difficult to execute because they typically require the cooperation of confederate organized interests who allow researchers to manipulate their behaviors toward policymakers (e.g., Grose et al. n.d.; Kalla and Broockman 2016). Because interests may be unwilling to facilitate experiments, researchers sometimes must employ deception, which prompts further ethical concerns (Wiener n.d.). Additionally, the range of behaviors which researchers can plausibly manipulate with the consent of their partners limits the scope of their projects. For instance, while Kalla and Broockman (2016) randomize the content of access requests sent from the liberal interest with which they partnered to Democratic members of Congress, they could not randomize the interest's ideology or the members' partisanship. Thus, while their conclusions indicate that a liberal interest receives better access to Democratic congresspersons when it discloses that its members make campaign donations, they are unable to consider whether the same dynamics hold for conservative interests' access to Republican members of Congress or interests whose ideology diverges from the members of Congress from whom they request access.

Official Records

While the preceding approaches to studying access are designed to work around the absence of official records, a few researchers have identified and exploited cases in which official records are available. Some of these records are routinely released to the public in compliance with statutes such

as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) (Ban and You 2019) and Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) (Hirsch et al. n.d.; You n.d.*a*). Others have been released as part of transparency initiatives implemented voluntarily by policymakers, such as Barack Obama's disclosure of the White House visitor logs (Brown and Huang 2017; Miller 2020) or the European Commission's disclosure of its meetings with lobbyists (Albareda 2020; Alves 2020; Egerod, van der Ploeg, and Rasmussen n.d.; see also Dommett, Hindmoor, and Wood 2017). Still others have been made public through responses to public records requests and lawsuits, such as the White House visitor logs released by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and the administration of President Donald Trump, respectively (Miller 2020). Finally, researchers have also acquired official records through personal requests to organized interests and policymakers (Rothenberg 1992; Smith 2015) and by scouring archives (Heberlig 2005). Scholars have used official records of direct contacts to explore research questions including which organized interests enjoy access to which policymakers (e.g., Alves 2020; Miller 2020), how revolving door lobbyists facilitate access for their clients (e.g., Hirsch et al. n.d.; Egerod, van der Ploeg, and Rasmussen n.d.), and how access helps organized interests and policymakers achieve their respective goals (e.g., Ban and You 2019; Miller 2020).

The primary strength of using official records to study access is that they directly encapsulate the phenomenon of interest. Unlike survey-self reports, official records communicate realized instances of access between organized interests and policymakers without inviting response bias concerns. Further, in contrast with experiments, official records embody naturally-occurring access, thereby forestalling external validity concerns. An additional strength of official records is that they often offer coverage for long periods of time; therefore, unlike survey self-reports and experiments, which only examine access for a small time window, official records enable researchers to explore how the dynamics of access vary with changes in the political environment (Egerod, van der Ploeg, and Rasmussen n.d.; You n.d.*a*). A final strength of official records is that they sometimes provide information about the substance of the contacts, such as the policies interests and policymakers discussed (e.g., Ban and You 2019; Egerod, van der Ploeg, and Rasmussen n.d.). These details allow researchers to examine not only which interests have direct contacts with which policymakers, but also the substantive implications of those contacts.

One important limitation of official records is that they are seldom available for contexts of interest to researchers. Further, even when official records of direct contacts are available, they may only provide information for a subset of direct contacts in a given context, thus spurring generalizability concerns. For instance, though many lobbying firms who represent foreign entities also lobby for domestic clients (You n.d.*b*), findings from studies drawing on direct contacts reported through FARA (Hirsch et al. n.d.; You n.d.*a*) may not apply to congressional lobbying more broadly because they focus on foreign clients lobbying predominantly on foreign policy issues. Another limitation of this approach is that official records are, like survey self-reports, observational data and thus cannot be used to make causal claims without a convincing identification strategy. A final limitation of this approach is that official records rarely provide insight on the access-seeking and accessing-granting behavior which preceded the direct contacts they identify. Without additional data collection and analysis to understand how access manifests (see Miller 2020), researchers' understanding of the data-generating process is often limited.

Guidance and Recommendations for Researchers

No approach to studying access is perfect; while each of the three approaches discussed here have unique merits, each is also accompanied by distinct drawbacks. However, scholars cannot allow these drawbacks to preclude research on access because this work not only contributes knowledge about organized interests and the policymaker process, but also provides insights about important normative issues such as representation and political equality (e.g., Gilens and Page 2014; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Thus, the goal for researchers is to use the approaches at hand in ways that emphasize their strengths while addressing and remaining cognizant of their weaknesses. I conclude with a series of recommendations that researchers studying access with empirical methods should consider in conducting their work. While some of these recommendations apply to only one of the approaches discussed, others speak to the study of access more broadly.

Draw on Other Data and Methods to Inform Empirical Research

The secrecy surrounding organized interests' access to policymakers not only limits our ability to observe access, but also obscures the antecedents and consequences of access that are of central concern in empirical studies. For instance, the process by which access occurs is often a "black box"; while researchers know that access stems from a confluence of interests' access-seeking behavior and policymakers' access-granting behavior, empirical data often sheds little light on the dynamics through which access manifests. Again, even official records of access seldom provide information about the substantive policies addressed (but see Egerod, van der Ploeg, and Rasmussen n.d.), such that it can be difficult to discern the policy consequences we should expect from access. Thus, empirical researchers are often unable to determine how well their research designs map onto the real-world processes leading to and flowing from access.

When empirical researchers confront these limits, other types of data and methods can help them augment their studies. For instance, though the theoretical linkages between access and other quantities of interest are sometimes unclear, formal theory can help researchers elucidate expectations and guide empirical tests. As an example, while the relationship between network connections and access is opaque, Hirsch et al. (n.d.) pair expectations from a formal model of revolving door lobbyists' ability to provide clients access to their connected policymakers with an empirical analysis of lobbyists' direct contacts with policymakers disclosed in their FARA reports (see also Austen-Smith and Wright 1994). Additionally, a resurgence in formal models of lobbying in recent years provides empirical researchers with ample predictions to test with real-world data (e.g., Awad 2020; Dellis n.d.; Ellis and Groll 2020; Groll and Prummer n.d.; Schnakenberg 2017).

Alternatively, researchers can draw on existing or original interviews and surveys to improve their contextual understanding of access and related phenomena. Scholars looking for insights on access from organized interest representatives and policymakers can benefit from recent qualitative studies that offer concise syntheses of the authors' interviews as well as ample direct quotes (e.g., Nownes 2006; Levine 2009). For those looking for more detailed primary source materials, Leech (2014) provides the full transcripts of interviews with 15 lobbyists discussing topics such as lobbying tactics and targeting strategies. Finally, Miller (2020) demonstrates how original surveys and

interviews can provide theoretical leverage for empirical research—specifically, the author illustrates how organized interests' access to the White House is driven primarily by the preferences and goals of presidents rather than of organized interests. Insights from organized interest representatives and policymakers can be particularly useful for experiments to augment their external validity. For instance, experimentalists might consult with practitioners to craft stimuli and treatment allocation mechanisms that mirror the real-world analogues they look to replicate.

Probe Bias in Survey Self-Reports

The extent of response bias in survey self-reports of direct contacts is unknown; because the motivation for using this approach is to collect otherwise missing data, the accuracy of the self-reports cannot be assessed with another data source. If researchers have strong beliefs about the directionality of the bias in self-reports, they can conduct sensitivity analyses to assess the robustness of their results across varying magnitudes of bias (e.g., Gallop and Weschle 2019). For instance, as discussed above, social desirability bias might induce organized interest representatives to exaggerate their clout by overstating their direct contacts with legislative leaders. Through sensitivity analyses, researchers who suspect this bias contaminates their data could re-estimate their results with simulated data to determine how large the upward bias concerning direct contacts with legislative leaders needs to be in order to alter their substantive conclusions.

Researchers can also investigate how problematic response bias is by including questions about organized interests' characteristics or activities for which public information exists and comparing respondents' answers with the known facts. For instance, researchers might ask respondents about their previous government experience, which can be verified through the Center for Responsive Politics' Revolving Door portal[6] or Columbia Books' Washington Representatives database.[7] While we might expect respondents to answer this question with complete accuracy, those with previous government experience might react to social desirability concerns surrounding public perception of revolving door lobbyists by concealing their work history. Respondents who misreport their previous government service are more likely to provide incorrect answers to subsequent questions

[6] `https://www.opensecrets.org/revolving/`
[7] `https://www.washingtonrepresentatives.com/`

on more sensitive topics, such as their interests' direct contacts with policymakers. While this technique cannot validate questions about access or other topics that cannot be verified with public information and would likely under-report the bias inherent in the survey responses,[8] it would help researchers get a sense of the reliability of respondents' answers and flag problematic respondents.

Be Creative and Dogged in the Search for Official Records

While official records of access are rare, the eclectic sources from which researchers have obtained them suggests that other official records lie in wait for scholars to find. Many of the official records of access examined in extant studies were released in accordance with statues or at policymakers' initiative, but others were discovered through formal requests or stumbled upon in archives. For instance, the White House visitor logs from the Clinton and Trump presidencies were only released after FOIA requests and lawsuits, respectively (Miller 2020). Additionally, the records of direct contacts between the AFL-CIO and members of Congress from which Heberlig (2005) draws were found in the organization's archives. Researchers with the perseverance to file information requests or dig through archival material might be rewarded for their determination with novel data.

Use Approaches Complementarily

While no approach to studying access is perfect, researchers can combine approaches in the same studies to address the weaknesses of each approach. The most natural way to complementarily pair approaches is to match observational data drawn from official records or survey self-reports with experiments. With observational data, researchers could demonstrate empirical relationships using naturally-occurring data to provide a basis to generalize similar patterns found in an accompanying experiment. Conversely, the experimental element of the study could causally identify the relationships established in the observational analysis or probe the mechanisms believed to underlie those relationships. Experiments can also help address response bias in survey self-reports by providing an additional venue to test researchers' expectations where social desirability is less likely. Finally,

[8] Because respondents are more likely to provide correct answers to questions where the information is verifiable and incorrect answers to questions where it is not, rather than the reverse, this technique would still allow for a non-negligible rate of "false negatives" (i.e., respondents who appear unaffected by response bias but go on to provide erroneous answers to more sensitive questions).

in cases where the observational data comes from a contextually narrow set of official records where generalizability is in question, researchers could incorporate experiments evaluating the same theories with a more broadly drawn sample of respondents to assess the findings' applicability in other contexts. By drawing on the strengths of multiple approaches, researchers can produce more robust insights on organized interests' access to policymakers and its consequences.

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