

The President Will See Who Now? Presidential Engagement with Organized Interests

David Ryan Miller



September 9, 2020

Presidents With Organized Interests



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Light, *The President's Agenda* (1999)

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“[T]he relevant studies have been episodic and limited. There is, for example, no book-length study explicitly focused on the linkages between presidents and organized interests. Given the myriad contacts between all modern presidents and a range of organized interests, such a gap is remarkable.”

Loomis, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* (2009)

Project Overview

- Presidents engage with organized interests to advance their goals
 - With which interests do presidents engage?
 - How do presidents benefit from engagement with interests?
 - How do presidents secure interests' cooperation?

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- Presidents engage with organized interests to advance their goals
 - With which interests do presidents engage?
 - How do presidents benefit from engagement with interests?
 - How do presidents secure interests' cooperation?
- Key Data Sources
 - More than 7 million White House visitor logs
 - Original survey of over 600 lobbyists
 - 15 original interviews with lobbyists and White House staff

What is Presidential Engagement?

- Consensual communication and coordination between presidents and organized interests concerning electoral and policy goals

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- Engagement is a presidency-driven process ▶ Inside-Out Lobbying

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- Consensual communication and coordination between presidents and organized interests concerning electoral and policy goals
- Engagement is a presidency-driven process ▶ Inside-Out Lobbying
- Presidents' motivations are key to engagement

Presidents as Coalition-Builders

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- Organized interests' resources make them attractive coalition-building targets
 - Electoral resources
 - Policy and political expertise
 - Congressional lobbying
 - Grassroots lobbying

Presidents' Engagement Dilemma

“We wanted [to engage with] everybody, but, at the end of the day, there are a million organizations out there and every single organization isn't going to be a part of everything.”

Personal interview with former White House staffer

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 - **High-resource interests**
 - Most efficiently influence the balance of resources for and against presidents

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Personal interview with former White House staffer

- Which types of interests best bolster presidents' coalitions?
 - **High-resource interests**
 - Most efficiently influence the balance of resources for and against presidents
 - **Copartisan interests**
 - Most receptive to presidents' entreaties

Engagement as White House Access

- Access is a valued method of engagement ▶ Importance of Access
 - Access is difficult to observe

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Engagement as White House Access

- Access is a valued method of engagement ▶ Importance of Access
 - Access is difficult to observe
- Exception—the White House visitor logs
 - Over 7 million records available for analysis
 - Clinton (1.3 million, January 1998-December 2000)
 - Obama (6 million, October 2009-September 2016)

Identifying Engagement through Visitor Logs

NAMELAST	NAMEFIRST	APPT_START_DATE	visitee_na	visitee_na
Molinar	Noelle	3/13/2013 9:00	OFFICE	VISITORS
Molinari	Susan	2/14/2013 9:00	Espinol	Victoria
Molinari	Susan	2/14/2013 12:00	Espinol	Victoria
Molinari	Susan	2/14/2013 13:00	Hidalgo	Patrick
Molinari	Vincent	2/19/2013 15:00	hidalgo	patrick
Molinari	Susan	3/20/2013 14:30	Reed	Bruce
Molinari	Susan	3/26/2013 14:00	Reed	Bruce
Molinari	Kelly	6/5/2013 15:30	Matusiak	Ari
Molinari	Vincent	6/4/2013 14:30	Rand	Doug
Molinari	Susan	11/14/2013 13:30	Wong	Nicole
Molinari	Susan	11/14/2013 9:00	McDonou	Denis
Molinaro	Joseph	1/15/2013 8:30	Gustavo	SFC
Molinaro	Joseph	2/26/2013 9:00	McGill	Maxwell
Molinaro	Joseph	3/19/2013 8:00	Gustavo	SFC
Molinaro	Joseph	5/21/2013 8:00	Gustavo	SFC
Molinaro	Peter	5/23/2013 10:00	Hidalgo	Patrick
Molinaro	Joseph	7/16/2013 8:00	Gustavo	SFC
Molinaro	Peter	8/1/2013 16:00	Zichal	Heather
Molinaro	Joseph	9/10/2013 8:00	Gustavo	SFC
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Obama Visitor Logs (2013)

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Obama Visitor Logs (2013)

18. Name of each individual who acted as a lobbyist in this issue area

First Name	Last Name	Suffix	
Susan	Molinar		
Johanna	Shelton		
Jennifer	Bernal		
Seth	Webb		
Andrew	Ladner		
Ed	An		
Lee	Dunn		
Sarah	Fisher		
John	Sullivan		
Stewart	Jeffries		
Frannie	LaSala		

Google Lobbying Disclosures Act
Report (2013 Q4)

► LDA Guidelines

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Measuring Organized Interests' Characteristics

- Policy Resources
- Electoral Resources
- Industry Partisan Alignment

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- Industry Partisan Alignment
 - Center for Responsive Politics' industry summaries

Estimation Strategy

- Separate models for each presidency
- Bayesian logistic multilevel models ▶ Model Specification
 - Levels ▶ Nesting Diagram
 - Organized interest
 - Industry
 - Time period

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▶ Descriptive Statistics

Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Clinton)

Lobbying Expenditures

1st Quartile (<\$10,000)

2nd Quartile (\$20,000)

Q2–Q1

3rd Quartile (\$80,000)

Q3–Q2

Campaign Contributions

None

1st Quartile (\$20,375)

Q1–None

2nd Quartile (\$66,025)

Q2–Q1

3rd Quartile (\$196,954)

Q3–Q2

Partisan Alignment

Democratic

Independent

Dem.–Ind.

Republican

Dem.–Rep.

0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75
Pr(Engagement)

–0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10 0.15
Difference in Pr(Engagement)

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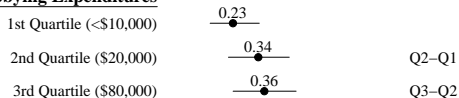
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Partisan Alignment

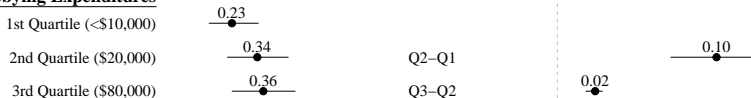


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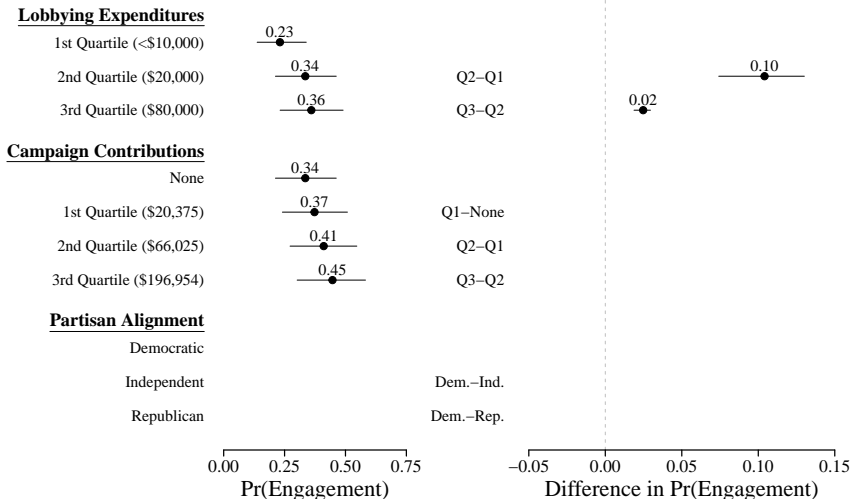
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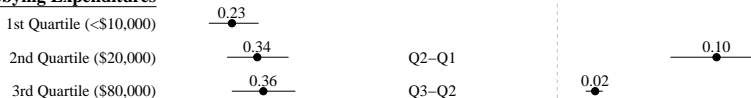
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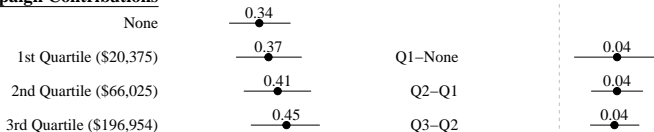


Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Clinton)

Lobbying Expenditures



Campaign Contributions



Partisan Alignment

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0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75
Pr(Engagement)

-0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10 0.15
Difference in Pr(Engagement)

Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Clinton)

Lobbying Expenditures

1st Quartile (<\$10,000)

0.23

2nd Quartile (\$20,000)

0.34

Q2-Q1

3rd Quartile (\$80,000)

0.36

Q3-Q2

0.02

0.10

Campaign Contributions

None

0.34

1st Quartile (\$20,375)

0.37

Q1-None

0.04

2nd Quartile (\$66,025)

0.41

Q2-Q1

0.04

3rd Quartile (\$196,954)

0.45

Q3-Q2

0.04

Partisan Alignment

Democratic

0.39

Independent

0.34

Dem.-Ind.

Republican

0.34

Dem.-Rep.

0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75

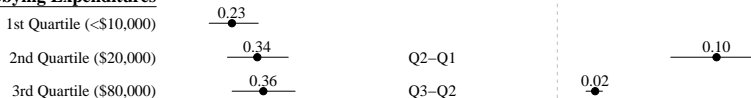
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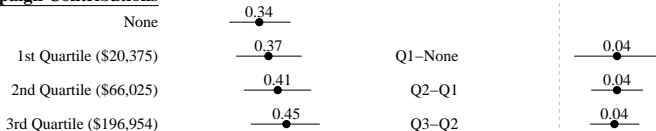
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Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Clinton)

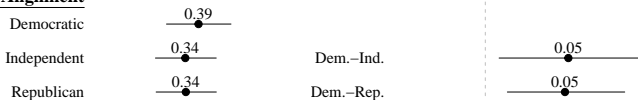
Lobbying Expenditures



Campaign Contributions



Partisan Alignment



0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75
Pr(Engagement)

-0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10 0.15
Difference in Pr(Engagement)

Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Obama)

Lobbying Expenditures

1st Quartile (<\$5,000)

0.06

2nd Quartile (\$20,000)

0.14

Q2-Q1

3rd Quartile (\$49,246)

0.15

Q3-Q2

0.01

0.08

Campaign Contributions

None

0.14

1st Quartile (\$28,891)

0.17

Q1-None

0.03

2nd Quartile (\$97,088)

0.20

Q2-Q1

0.02

3rd Quartile (\$337,000)

0.22

Q3-Q2

0.03

Partisan Alignment

Democratic

0.17

Independent

0.14

Dem.-Ind.

0.03

Republican

0.14

Dem.-Rep.

0.03

0.00 0.10 0.20 0.30
Pr(Engagement)-0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10
Difference in Pr(Engagement)

Conclusion

- Presidents engage with interests to bolster their coalitions
 - High-resource interests
 - Copartisan interests

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- Presidents engage with interests to bolster their coalitions
 - High-resource interests
 - Copartisan interests
- Substantive implications
 - Nature of presidential representation
 - Sources of inequalities in political voice

Thank You!

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Appendix

Theory

Engagement as Presidency-Centered

Data and Measurement

Engagement as Access

LDA Definitions

CF Scores

Model Specification

Descriptive Statistics

Data Structure

Main Model

Model Details

Additional Analyses

Approximate String Matching Results

Count Models

Quality Models

Alternative Ideology Measures

Engagement as Presidency-Centered

- Policymaker-organized interest relationships typically characterized by “outside-in” lobbying
- Exception: Presidents
 - Presidents have limited time and resources
 - Relative number of interests exceeds presidents’ ability to engage
 - Institutionalization of presidency-centered dynamics
 - E.g., Office of Public Liaison

Engagement as Presidency-Centered

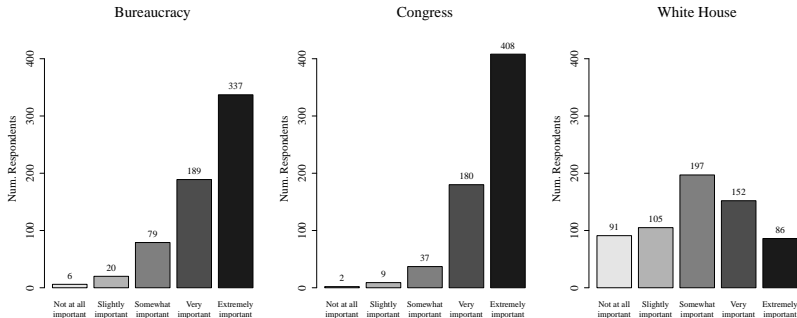
- Shared understandings of presidency-centered dynamics
 - “It works both ways, and it’s predominantly us reaching out to them... [but] they’re the drivers. They determine whether they want to be responsive or not.”—Personal interview with a policy advocate for a religious organization, May 3, 2018
 - “There are 535 opportunities in Congress and only one in the White House. You get an hour to present your case before each representative; you get fifteen minutes once a year with the president. Where would you put your effort?”—Light (1999; 94), interview with a former Johnson White House official

Engagement as Presidency-Centered

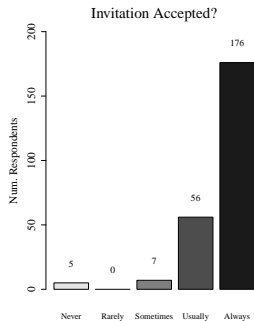
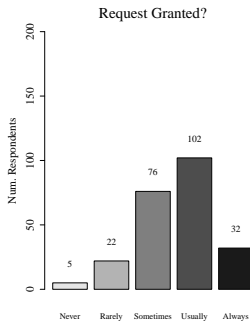
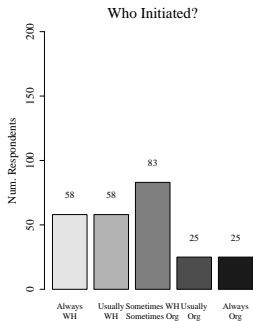
- Presidential requests do not go ignored
 - “I have not ever turned down a meeting. I always think of meeting as productive. In terms of getting the meetings, yes, it’s very challenging.”—Personal interview with a policy advocate for a water policy organization, August 28, 2019
 - “By and large, when the White House calls people take the call. People were generally always willing to meet.”—Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018

Importance of Lobbying Venues

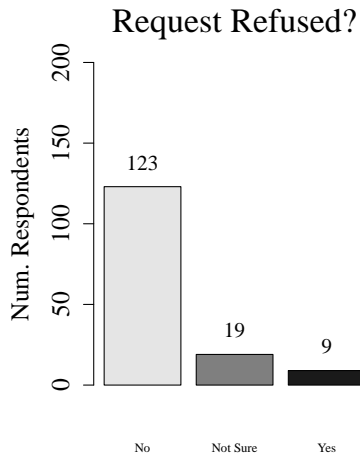
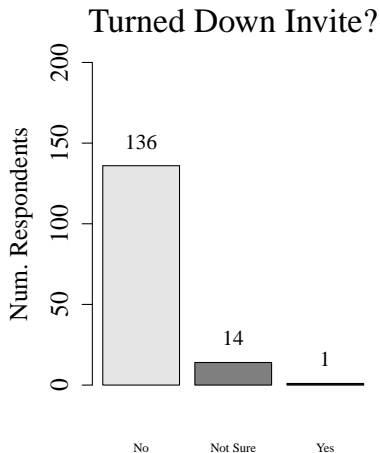
How important is it for your client to have direct contacts with individuals in the following political institutions as part of its overall lobbying strategy?



How Does Engagement Manifest?



Why Doesn't Engagement Manifest?

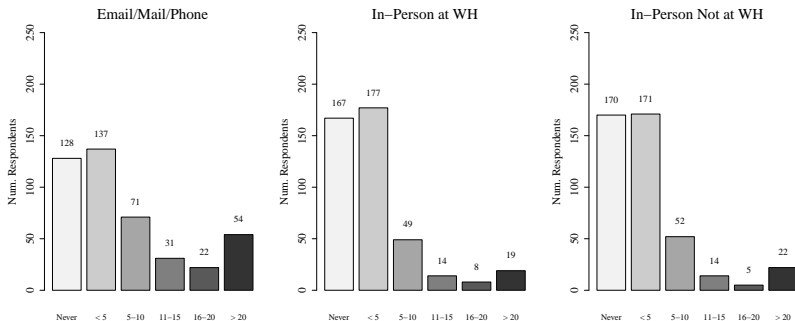


Engagement as Access

- Most valuable form of engagement—in-person access
 - Efficiently transmit resources
 - Make preferences more salient
 - “[In-person access] tends to be more effective in terms of sharing knowledge... and just sort of raising our issues.”—Personal interview with a policy advocate for an education organization
 - Cultivate interpersonal relationships
 - “[You] get a much better feeling for the person when you can read their body language and interact with them in human form.”—Personal interview with a policy advocate for a reproductive rights organization
- Strong signal of presidents’ engagement choices
 - More costly and rare than other mediums of engagement

Measures of Engagement

To the best of your knowledge, how frequently did lobbyists or other individuals affiliated with your client interact with President Barack Obama and members of his White House staff during his eight years in office via...



Correlation between remote and in-person at WH—0.77

Correlation between in-person at WH and outside WH—0.74

Self-Reported vs. Observed Access

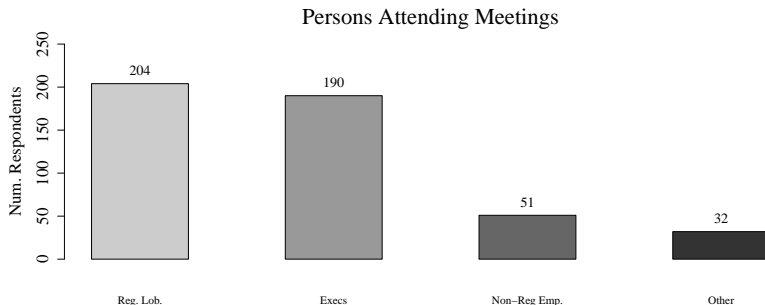
To the best of your knowledge, how frequently did lobbyists or other individuals affiliated with your client interact with President Barack Obama and members of his White House staff during his eight years in office via in-person meetings at the White House?

	No Access	Access
Reported No Access	57	24
Reported Access	94	231

- 71% of self-reports match visitor logs
- Mismatches trend against social desirability concerns

Attendees at White House Meetings

Which of the following types of individuals affiliated with your client typically attended in-person meetings at the White House complex under the Obama administration?

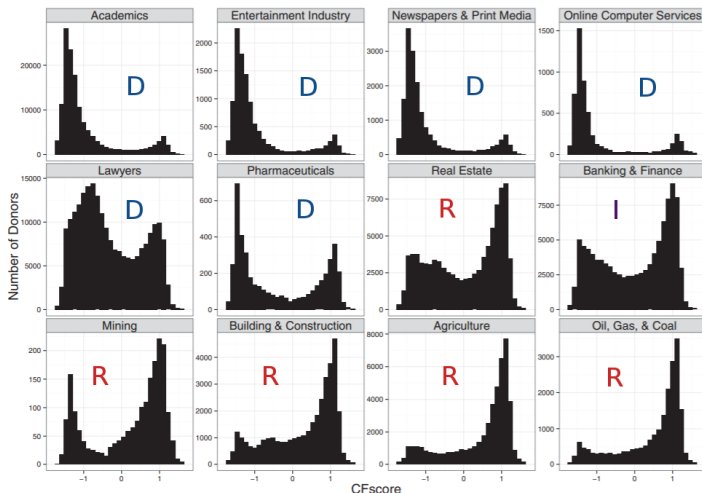


Lobbying Disclosure Act Regulations

- Quarterly filings required by all lobbyists on behalf of clients they represent
- Thresholds for registering as a lobbyist
 - Makes a “lobbying contact,” or “oral, written, or electronic communication” regarding public policy, with more than one “covered official”
 - Spends 20% or more of her time working for the client on lobbying activities
 - Client spends more than \$13,000 (if lobbying directly) or more than \$3,000 (if contracting) on lobbying activities

Comparison with CF Scores by Industry

FIGURE 7 Ideological Distributions of Industries/Occupations

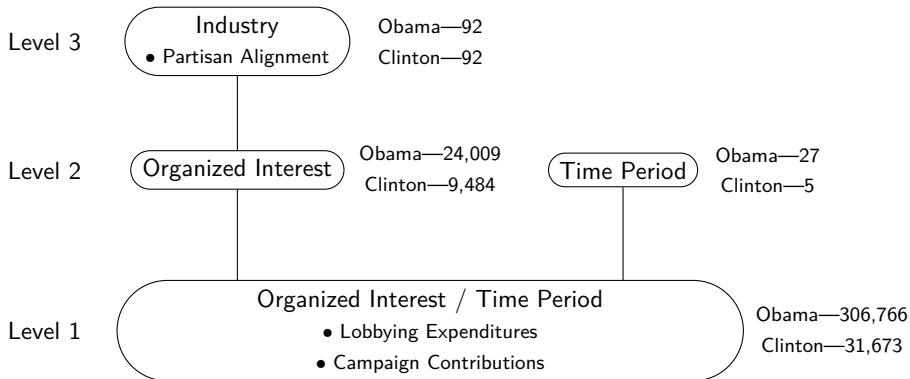


Note: Includes all donors from each industry/occupation who made contributions to at least two distinct recipients between 2003 and 2012.

Descriptive Statistics

	<u>Clinton</u>	<u>Obama</u>
Number of observations	31,673	306,766
Number of interests	9,484	24,009
Number of industries	92	92
Number of time periods	5	27
% of observations with engagement	51%	29%

Data Structure



Varying Intercepts Specification

$$\begin{aligned}
 Pr(\text{access}_{i,j,t} = 1) = & \text{logit}^{-1}(\alpha + \beta_1 \cdot \text{access}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \log(\text{lobby_exp})_{i,t-1} + \\
 & \beta_3 \cdot \text{any_contribs}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} + \\
 & \beta_4 \cdot \text{any_contribs}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} \cdot \log(\text{contrib_amt})_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} + \\
 & \xi \mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_{j[j]} + \gamma_{p[t]}) \text{ for all } i \text{ in } 1, \dots, N \\
 \alpha_j \sim & N(\mu_{\alpha,0} + \mu_{\alpha,1,k[j]}, \sigma_{\alpha}^2) \text{ for all } j \text{ in } 1, \dots, J \\
 \mu_{\alpha,1,k} \sim & N(\delta_{\mu_{\alpha,1}0} + \delta_{\mu_{\alpha,1}1} \cdot \text{pty_align}_k, \sigma_{\mu_{\alpha,1,k}}^2) \text{ for all } k \text{ in } 1, \dots, K \\
 \gamma_p \sim & N(\mu_{\gamma 0}, \sigma_{\gamma}^2) \text{ for all } p \text{ in } 1, \dots, P
 \end{aligned}$$

Model Details

- All models fitted using the No U-Turn Sampler (NUTS) algorithm in Stan (Carpenter et al. 2017)
 - 4 chains and 2000 iterations per chain (1000 for warmup, 1000 for sampling)
- Priors
 - $N(0, 10)$ for all β
 - Student- $t(3, 0, 10)$ for all σ
 - LKJCorr(1) for all Ω
- Convergence
 - No divergent transitions
 - \hat{R} statistics of ≤ 1.10 for all parameters

Approximate String Matching Results (Binary, Clinton)

	Perfect Matches	≤ 1 Edit	≤ 2 Edits	≤ 3 Edits
Lobby Exp.	0.06 [0.05; 0.06]	0.06 [0.05; 0.07]	0.05 [0.04; 0.06]	0.05 [0.04; 0.06]
Active Donor	-1.20 [-1.81; -0.57]	-0.90 [-1.53; -0.26]	-0.11 [-0.81; 0.60]	0.60 [-0.42; 1.64]
Donor:Contribs.	0.14 [0.08; 0.19]	0.11 [0.05; 0.17]	0.03 [-0.04; 0.10]	-0.05 [-0.15; 0.05]
Aligned GOP	-0.23 [-0.39; -0.06]	-0.23 [-0.40; -0.07]	-0.24 [-0.42; -0.05]	-0.12 [-0.35; 0.12]
Aligned Ind.	-0.24 [-0.45; -0.04]	-0.21 [-0.43; 0.00]	-0.21 [-0.42; 0.01]	-0.07 [-0.37; 0.23]
Num. obs.	31,673			
Num. interests.	9,484			
Num. industries	92			
Num. periods	5			

Approximate String Matching Results (Binary, Obama)

	Perfect Matches	≤ 1 Edit	≤ 2 Edits	≤ 3 Edits
Lobby Exp.	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]
Active Donor	-1.04* [-1.36; -0.72]	-1.04* [-1.35; -0.73]	-1.13* [-1.50; -0.77]	-0.48 [-1.02; 0.09]
Donor:Contribs.	0.12* [0.10; 0.15]	0.13* [0.10; 0.16]	0.14* [0.10; 0.17]	0.07* [0.02; 0.12]
Aligned GOP	-0.22* [-0.46; -0.00]	-0.20* [-0.36; -0.04]	-0.06 [-0.22; 0.09]	-0.09 [-0.29; 0.11]
Aligned Ind.	-0.26* [-0.44; -0.09]	-0.19 [-0.41; 0.02]	-0.11 [-0.32; 0.09]	-0.19 [-0.44; 0.05]
Num. obs.				306,766
Num. interests.				24,009
Num. industries				92
Num. periods				27

Patterns of Presidential Engagement (Counts)

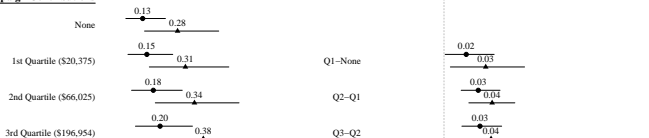
	Clinton	Obama
Lobby Exp.	0.05* [0.05; 0.06]	0.08* [0.07; 0.08]
Active Donor	-1.25* [-1.68; -0.80]	-0.54* [-0.74; -0.35]
Donor:Contribs.	0.15* [0.10; 0.19]	0.07* [0.05; 0.09]
Aligned Ind.	-0.21* [-0.42; -0.00]	-0.27* [-0.47; -0.08]
Aligned GOP	-0.20* [-0.36; -0.03]	-0.30* [-0.46; -0.14]
Num. interests	9,484	24,009
Num. industries	92	92
Num. time periods	5	27
Num. obs.	31,673	306,766

Visit Quality Model (Clinton)

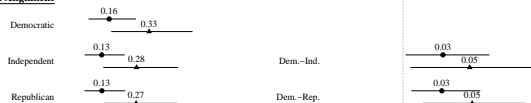
Lobbying Expenditures



Campaign Contributions



Partisan Alignment



0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75
Probability of Access

-0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10 0.15
Difference in Probability

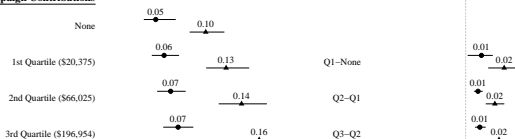
Access Quality
● High Quality
▲ Low Quality

Visit Quality Model (Obama)

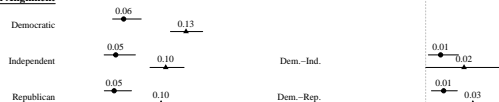
Lobbying Expenditures



Campaign Contributions



Partisan Alignment



0.00 0.10 0.20
Pr(Engagement)

-0.05 0.00 0.05 0.10
Difference in Pr(Engagement)

Access Quality
● High Quality
▲ Low Quality

Alternative Ideology Measures

	Clinton (CFscores)	Clinton (IGscores)	Obama (CFscores)	Obama (IGscores)
Lobby Exp.	0.12* [0.08; 0.16]	0.10* [0.06; 0.13]	0.20* [0.18; 0.23]	0.10* [0.09; 0.12]
Active Donor	-1.19 [-2.57; 0.08]	-2.11* [-3.58; -0.65]	-2.02* [-2.60; -1.44]	-1.85* [-2.44; -1.23]
Donor:Contribs.	0.11 [-0.00; 0.23]	0.22* [0.09; 0.35]	0.18* [0.13; 0.23]	0.20* [0.15; 0.25]
Ideology	-0.66* [-1.21; -0.14]	-0.36* [-0.60; -0.12]	-0.53* [-0.79; -0.27]	-0.36* [-0.48; -0.23]
Num. obs.	3,697	4,122	27,636	34,271
Num. interests	865	937	1,229	1,492
Num. industries	81	87	82	87
Num. periods	5	5	27	27