

The President Will See Whom Now?: Presidential Engagement with Organized Interests*

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Abstract

Presidents can accomplish many of their goals through unilateral powers, but their ultimate electoral, policy, and legacy success depends on their ability to build supportive coalitions. While previous studies focus on presidents' efforts to build coalitions among members of Congress and the mass public, few consider how presidents view organized interests as important coalition members. I posit that presidents engage with organized interests to bring them into their coalitions in order to leverage interests' valuable electoral and policy resources in service of presidents' goals. To maximize the share of resources at their disposal, I further argue that presidents focus their engagement on organized interests with large resource endowments and who are aligned with the incumbent president's party. I evaluate these expectations through an analysis of presidents' engagement with organized interests drawing on over 7 million White House visitor log entries from the Clinton and Obama presidencies. My results indicate that presidents' engagement decisions are informed by both organized interests' levels of electoral and policy resources and partisan alignment. These findings suggest that, through engaging with organized interests, presidents amplify the political voice of well-resourced and copartisan interests.

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Though polar opposites in most respects, both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have routinely cast organized interests as antagonists in the American democratic story and vowed to diminish or eliminate their influence.¹ In the first summer of his presidency, Barack Obama told attendees at a bill signing, “When I ran for President, I did so because I believed that despite the power of the status quo and the influence of special interests, it was possible for us to bring change to Washington.”² Similarly, at a rally in the first summer of his presidency, Donald Trump proclaimed that, as part of his “pro-worker agenda... we want to get the special interests out of politics for good.”³ In addition, both presidents issued executive orders in the early days of their administrations to limit the role of organized interests by restricting former lobbyists’ ability to serve in government.⁴ Contemporary scholars of the presidency suggest that the antipathy Trump, Obama, and other presidents direct toward organized interests is emblematic of the office’s relative isolation from the organized interest universe. For example, Light writes that, among the president and the White House staff, “there is a conscious effort to avoid interaction with most groups” (1999, 94). Further, Howell and Moe suggest that presidents’ “position of national leadership gives them far more freedom from special interest pressure... than their legislative counterparts” (2016: 102; see also Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Truman 1971; Wechsler 1954; Wilson 1961). Thus, in their public facing statements and actions, and in scholars’ appraisals of their behavior and institutional environments, presidents appear to minimize their interactions with organized interests.

However, contrary to these denunciations, presidents frequently engage with representatives of organized interests.⁵ While salient instances of engagement, such as President Bill Clinton’s provi-

¹I use the phrase “organized interests,” rather than the more common “interest groups,” to be inclusive in my terminology. Whereas the usage of “interest groups” typically implies that all entities are membership-based groups, “organized interests” also encompasses other entities that lack members but pursue collective goals through political action, such as corporations and non-profit institutions (see Schlozman and Tierney 1986, 9-10).

²Barack Obama, “Remarks on Signing the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009,” June 22, 2009, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/286991>.

³Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at a ‘Make America Great Again’ Rally in Huntington, West Virginia,” August 3, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/330949>.

⁴Barack Obama, Executive Order 13490, “Ethics Commitments by Executive Branch Personnel,” January 21, 2009 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-13490-ethics-commitments-executive-branch-personnel>; Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 13770, “Ethics Commitments by Executive Branch Appointees,” January 28, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-13770-ethics-commitments-executive-branch-appointees>.

⁵Similar to the notion of the “legislative enterprise” Salisbury and Shepsle (1981), I consider presidents as presiding over an organization of staffers accountable to them who facilitate the performance of their duties. Formally, the executive branch employees who fulfill this function are those employed by the Executive Office of the President

sion of nights in the Lincoln Bedroom and seats on Air Force One to wealthy donors⁶ and President Trump’s mingling with businesspersons and activists holding memberships at Mar-a-Lago and his other properties,⁷ often attract criticism, these anecdotes belie the White House’s commonplace engagement with a broad array of interests in public and behind closed doors. For example, over half of the nearly 150 participants President Obama invited to a March 2009 White House forum to kick off his healthcare reform campaign were representatives of organized interests,⁸ and media accounts of the Affordable Care Act’s path through the policymaking process point to the White House’s continued engagement with organized interests as key to its ultimate enactment.⁹ Accounts from White House staffers further substantiate the pervasiveness of White House engagements with organized interests. An aide to President Jimmy Carter recalls that the administration “tried to keep up very good relations with all the major interest group players in town... We tried to do it by... meeting with all of them or as many of them as we could on a regular basis...”¹⁰ Similarly, an aide to President Obama who worked in the Office of Public Engagement reports “represent[ing] the president and his priorities” to organized interests “all the time, every day.”¹¹ Despite the White House’s efforts to distance itself from organized interests in its public-facing behavior, an aide to President John F. Kennedy admits that “interest groups are in the woodwork, under the floors, in the hallways, and in the rose garden” (Light 1999, 95). Notwithstanding the reality that White House’s engagement with organized interests is commonplace, scholars seldom consider

(EOP), which includes not only the White House Office—home to familiar staffers such as the Chief of Staff—but other units such as the Office of Management and Budget. Consistent with the notion of the president as head of an “executive enterprise,” I consider engagement by any member of the EOP with organized interests to constitute “presidential engagement.”

⁶Glenn F. Bunting and Alan C. Miller, “Clinton Coffee Guests Gave DNC \$27 Million,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1997, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-01-28/news/mn-22891_1_clinton-coffee; Glenn F. Bunting and Ralph Frammolino, “Up to 900 Donors Stayed Overnight at the White House,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1997, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-02-09/news/mn-27120_1_white-house-official.

⁷“Presidential Profiteering: Trump’s Conflicts Got Worse in Year Two,” *Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.citizensforethics.org/presidential-profiteering-trumps-conflicts-got-worse/>.

⁸Office of the Press Secretary, “White House Forum on Health Reform Attendees and Breakout Session Participants,” *The White House*, March 5, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/white-house-forum-health-reform-attendees-and-breakout-session-participants>.

⁹“Obama’s Deal,” *Frontline*, April 13, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamasdeal/>.

¹⁰David Rubenstein, Interview with the Miller Center for Public Affairs, University of Virginia, March 6, 1982, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/bertram-carp-oral-history-deputy-assistant-domestic>.

¹¹Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

presidents’ relationships with organized interests—a gap that Loomis describes in the most recent *Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* as “remarkable” (2009, 405; but see Brown 2014; Holyoke 2004; Peterson 1992).

This paper begins to redress this gap by considering why presidents engage with organized interests and with which organized interests they engage. In brief, I posit that presidents engage with organized interests in order to bolster their supportive coalitions. Though presidents are endowed with expansive formal and informal powers with which to advance their electoral, policy, and legacy goals, they still require sufficiently-sized supportive coalitions to accomplish many of these goals. Organized interests are valuable coalition members for presidents because they possess myriad resources, such as lobbying capacity and campaign funds, that can subsidize presidents’ political and policy activities and build support among other political actors, such as members of Congress and the public. To maximize the amount of organized interest resources they marshal, I argue that presidents are more likely to engage with interests who offer them the highest expected rates of return for engagement—interests with large resource endowments and who are aligned with the incumbent president’s party. To evaluate these expectations, I leverage over 7 million White House visitor log entries from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama to identify instances in which the White House engaged with organized interests, along with data on organized interests’ electoral and lobbying activity and partisan alignment. In light of the scant extant knowledge of presidents’ engagement with organized interests, I also draw on an original survey of over 600 registered lobbyists and 15 original interviews with former White House officials and organized interest representatives to enrich my theoretical arguments and understanding of the data-generating process.¹² Taken together, my findings indicate that presidents are more likely to engage with organized interests with larger endowments of electoral and policy resources and who are copartisans of the incumbent.

In addition to enhancing our knowledge of the interactions between presidents and organized interests, this paper also contributes to key themes in the study of the presidency, organized interests, and representation. First, I advance the ongoing debate concerning presidential representation

¹²For details on the conduct of these interviews and this survey, please see Section A of the Supplemental Information.

by considering the representational priorities presidents exhibit through engaging with organized interests. Though scholars long asserted that presidents represent all interests within their national constituency (Moe and Howell 1999; Wechsler 1954; Wilson 1961), recent studies suggest that presidents instead provide more representation to subgroups that can best advance their goals, such as copartisans and the upper-class (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Kriner and Reeves 2015*a,b*; Wood 2009). Whereas these studies consider presidents' representation of the mass public, the current study reflects on presidents' representation of a distinct constituency—organized interests, who are both independent political actors and manifestations of the interests in the mass public. My results lend support to the notion that presidents provide better representation to preferred subgroups in society. Second, this paper provides new insights on the means by which organized interests influence outcomes in the American political process. While extant studies argue that organized interests, particularly those associated with the upper-class, exercise outsized influence in American politics (e.g. Gilens and Page 2014; Hojnacki et al. 2015; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012), some scholars have suggested that presidents, as nationally-elected representatives, temper the influence of powerful interests by engaging equally with all interests in their constituency (e.g. Bentley 1908; Truman 1971; Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Uslander 1998). My results cast doubt on this notion, suggesting instead that presidents contribute to inequalities in political voice present throughout the political system.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I consider how presidents engage with organized interests to build and maintain their supportive coalitions. In the third section, I describe how I use the White House visitor logs to identify presidents' engagement with organized interests and model the relationship between engagement and interests' resource endowments and partisan alignment. In the fourth section, I present my empirical results, which suggest that presidents are more likely to engage with interests with higher resource levels and from industries aligned with the president's party. In the final section, I situate my findings in extant scholarship on the presidency and organized interests and highlight pathways for future research.

Presidential Engagement with Organized Interests as Coalition Building

Presidents and organized interests interact in a number of well-documented ways, such as interests making contributions to and expenditures in support of presidents' campaigns (Lewis 2004), interests altering their activities in response to presidents' priorities (Baumgartner et al. 2011), and presidents and interests acknowledging each other in their public statements (Grossmann 2012; Whitesell 2019). This paper focuses on a particular type of interaction which I term "presidential engagement," or the consensual communication and coordination between presidents and organized interests concerning electoral or policy goals. A key distinguishing trait of presidential engagement is that it requires active participation from both actors; for instance, while interests can expend campaign resources or lobby on behalf of presidents' proposals unilaterally, presidential engagement requires a dialogue between presidents and interests.

Importantly, limits on the presidents' time and resources and standing institutional arrangements endow presidents, rather than organized interests, with primary authority to determine whether engagement takes place. As head of the executive branch and the sole nationally elected government official, presidents face an unceasing flow of demands for action that outpace the expansion in the formal powers, personnel, and resources available to them (Cronin 1980; Lowi 1986; Neustadt 1991). Consequently, presidents are constrained in their ability to engage with the tens of thousands of organized interests active in federal policymaking (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). As explained by one former Obama administration official, "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."¹³ Over time, these limits on presidents' ability to engage with interests have given rise to an "inside-out" lobbying arrangement; rather than organized interests pursuing engagement with presidents as in traditional "outside-in" lobbying accounts, presidential engagement more often arises from presidents reaching out to interests and trying to align interests' priorities and activities with those of the White House (Shaiko 1998; Tenpas 2005). This arrangement has been further institutionalized by the White House through

¹³Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 4, 2018.

the Office of Public Liaison, a unit created during the Ford administration that actively builds and maintains relationships with interests and serves as their primary point of contact with the White House (Loomis 2009; Pika 2009; Tenpas 2005).¹⁴ Thus, while interests can and do often seek engagement with the White House (see Brown 2014), the contours of the presidency enable presidents to take the lead in engagement decisions.

That presidential engagement is a presidency-driven process is commonly understood among organized interest representatives and White House staff. One organized interest representative reported that, though his organization more often tried to initiate engagement than did the White House, “they’re the drivers. They determine whether they want to be responsive or not.”¹⁵ A former White House official shared similar sentiments, expressing that while the White House must be selective in responding to engagement requests from organized interests, “by and large, when the White House calls, people take the call. People were generally always willing to meet.”¹⁶ Responses to my survey of organized interest representatives provide additional evidence consistent with a presidency-driven process. When asked how their in-person meetings with the Obama White House—a prized medium for engagement—were initiated, 53% of respondents who reported having meetings indicated that at least half of their meetings were initiated by the White House. Further, while 95.1% of these respondents “usually” or “always” accepted invitations to meetings at White House, only 56.5% reported that their requests for meetings were similarly “usually” or “always” granted, and only one respondent who reported never having a meeting indicated that they received but rejected an invitation. Therefore, to understand engagement between presidents and organized interests, we must focus on presidents’ incentives to undertake this engagement.

Presidential Incentives for Engagement

Presidents, like members of Congress (Mayhew 1974), judges (Epstein and Knight 2013), and other political elites, are goal-oriented actors, pursuing electoral success for themselves and their copartisans, good public policy, and favorable legacies (Light 1999). Though presidents enjoy extensive

¹⁴During the Obama administration, this unit was given a broader mandate and referred to as the Office of Public Engagement.

¹⁵Personal interview with a policy advocate for a religious organization, May 3, 2018.

¹⁶Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

unilateral powers with which to pursue these goals, including the issuance of executive orders (Howell 2003), the appointment of judges and executive branch officials (Lewis 2008; Nemacheck 2008), and ultimate control over the conduct of the bureaucracy (Moe 1985), the institutional design of American government requires that presidents secure the cooperation or assent of other political actors to achieve most of their aspirations. For example, presidents' electoral success ultimately rests in the voters' hands. Again, policy initiatives necessitating legislative change and most nominations to executive and judicial positions require sufficient congressional support. Further, because presidents must contend with myriad responsibilities and demands for action that stretch the limits of their office (Cronin 1980; Lowi 1986; Neustadt 1991), they often rely on political actors such as congressional leaders Beckmann (2010) and party organizations Galvin (2009) to subsidize their pursuits by providing own resources in service of presidents' goals.

Therefore, presidents' ultimate success depends on their ability to build and maintain supportive coalitions that can directly provide support at the ballot box, on the floors of the House and Senate, and in other political institutions on whose consent presidents rely, or indirectly subsidize presidents' pursuit of their goals (Cronin 1980; Neustadt 1991; Seligman and Covington 1989). While presidents' coalition-building endeavors often entail presidents trying to increase their own support in absolute terms, they also encompass presidents' efforts to strengthen their positions in relative terms by demobilizing coalitions opposed to their efforts (e.g., Beckmann 2010). Though previous studies of presidential coalition-building have focused primarily on the mass public and Congress (see Edwards 2000), they have largely neglected an additional class of political actors whose support or opposition can affect the success of presidents' initiatives: organized interests. Though organized interests lack formal powers, such as votes at the ballot box or on Capitol Hill, they possess a wide range of capabilities and resources through which they seek to influence political actors and the political system as a whole, such as cultivating relationships with policymakers, providing information and expertise, engaging in campaign finance, and engaging with their memberships and the public (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Thus, despite their lack of formal powers, organized interests constitute attractive coalition members whose resources presidents can direct

in pursuit of their goals.

The organized interest resources of significance to presidents manifest in two forms. First, organized interests can provide presidents with subsidies that directly support presidents' electoral, policy, and legacy goals (Hall and Deardorff 2006). For instance, to promote their electoral success, presidents can stimulate interests to provide them with campaign contributions, independent expenditures, and voter mobilization efforts (Peterson 1992; Pika 1999; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Again, presidents can draw on organized interests' policy expertise and political intelligence to improve the quality of their proposals, elucidate the preferences of other actors, and modify proposals to secure sufficient support (Haeder and Yackee 2015; Kumar and Grossman 1984; Peterson 1992; Pika 1999). Second, organized interests can indirectly assist presidents in pursuing their goals by exerting pressure on other political actors whose support is necessary for presidents' success. For example, because presidents' legislative success hinges on the strength of their party in Congress (Bond and Fleisher 1990), presidents can encourage organized interests to bolster their power on Capitol Hill by committing electoral resources to congressional candidates of the president's party. Additionally, to sustain a sufficient winning coalition in Congress, presidents can recruit organized interests' lobbying apparatuses to pressure members to support their initiatives (Beckmann 2008, 2010; Holyoke 2004; Loomis 2009; Peterson 1992). Further, presidents can spur organized interests to promote public support for themselves and their initiatives with grassroots lobbying targeting interests' membership bases and the public at large (Cohen 2012; Holyoke 2004; Loomis 2009; Peterson 1992). Taken together, presidents value organized interests' support because it both contributes to their own efforts to succeed electorally, make good policy, and craft favorable legacies, and bolsters their supportive coalitions in other audiences on whose favor they ultimately depend.

In some cases, presidents' mere requests for support may provide sufficient motivation for organized interests to cooperate; when asked about his client's general willingness to comply with White House requests, one organized interest representative reported that "if the White House asks, then you figure out a way to make that work for you... it's very hard to say no to a White House."¹⁷

¹⁷Personal interview with a chemical industry lobbyist, September 13, 2019.

However, should rhetoric alone fail to secure organized interests' cooperation, presidents expect engagement to be successful because they can leverage their robust stable of unilateral powers to reward interests who promote and commit higher levels of effort to presidents' ambitions. For example, the president can help organized interests realize desired outcomes by exercising influence over the bureaucracy (Haeder and Yackee 2015; Moe and Howell 1999), appointing preferred officials to executive and judicial positions (Lewis 2008; Nemacheck 2008), and employing unilateral action (Howell 2003; Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*). Again, presidents can utilize their bully pulpit to increase the salience of and support for organized interests' priorities (Cohen 1995; Edwards and Wood 1999); as Baumgartner et al. find, one of the strongest determinants for organized interest success in achieving or stifling policy change is the support of the president in the form of taking "an advocacy role in a public-policy debate" (2009, 238). Additionally, presidents can help organized interests perform institutional maintenance (Olson 1965) by bringing attention to them and enabling them to advertise connections with high-level government officials to their members and other stakeholders (Dark 2018; Peterson 1992). Thus, presidents have both the motivation to enlist and the capability to coax organized interests in their coalition-building efforts.

The Strategic Contours of Presidential Engagement

In cultivating support among organized interests, presidents face a constrained maximization problem: given the limited time and resources they can expend on engagement and the vast number of interests from which they can choose, with which interests should they engage to realize the highest rates of return on their efforts? General models of coalition building (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996) and studies of presidential coalition building in other substantive contexts (e.g., Beckmann 2010; Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*; Wood 2009) emphasize two characteristics of potential coalition members which likely inform presidents' strategies: the potential members' resource endowments and their partisan alignment.

First, presidents should focus their engagement efforts on interests with larger resource endowments in order to more efficiently augment the resources of their own coalition or diminish the resources of their opponents. Because the White House's costs to engage, such as the expenditure

of staff time to place a phone call or host an in-person meeting, are relatively fixed for any interest, presidents can more dramatically influence the balance of interest resources between their coalition and any opposing coalitions by targeting interests who wield more resources (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996). Presidents’ focus on well-resourced potential coalition members manifests in other contexts, such as their interactions with Congress and the mass public. For instance, rather than expending effort on lobbying each member of Congress, presidents tend to center their energies on congressional leaders who control the institutional levers of power and can pressure rank-and-file members on presidents’ behalf (Beckmann 2008, 2010; Beckmann, Chaturvedi, and Garcia 2017). Again, in attracting public and electoral support, presidents often tailor their rhetoric and policy decisions to appeal to citizens who have more political resources, such as those in higher socioeconomic strata (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Griffin and Newman 2016), and those whose votes and voices are more strategically valuable, such as those living in swing states (Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*). Thus, we should expect to see a similar approach in this context with more presidential engagement with well-resourced interests.

Second, presidents should concentrate their engagement on interests who are who are copartisans, or who are aligned with the incumbent’s party and share their preferences. This is not to say that presidents never engage with non-copartisan organized interests; indeed, engagement with such interests can help presidents by demobilizing opposition or eliminating threats to the integrity of their coalitions (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Groseclose and Snyder 1996). As a former White House official expressed, the White House engages with organized interests both to “increase the likelihood that you... maximize a positive reaction” and to “avoid a negative reaction”¹⁸ (see also Beckmann 2010). However, since copartisans are generally more receptive to coalition-builders’ entreaties (Cox and McCubbins 1986), presidents typically allocate more of their scarce coalition building effort on copartisans. For instance, presidents’ public messaging (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Eshbaugh-Soha and Rottinghaus 2013; Wood 2009) and policy decisions (Griffin and Newman 2016; Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*; Lowande, Jenkins, and Clarke 2018; Rogowski 2016) are often designed to appeal to copartisans in the mass public. Similarly, presidents direct their

¹⁸Personal interview with a former White House official, August 23, 2019.

coalition-building activities, such as distributive goods and lobbying effort, on copartisan members of Congress (Beckmann 2008, 2010; Beckmann, Chaturvedi, and Garcia 2017; Christenson, Kriner, and Reeves 2017). Therefore, we should expect that presidents should target interests whose shared partisanship predisposes them to react more favorably to engagement.

Research Design and Methods

The communication and coordination at the core of presidential engagement can take place through a variety of mediums, including electronic and physical mail, fax, phone, text message, and in-person meetings between presidents and their staff and organized interest representatives. To evaluate the preceding expectations about with which interests presidents engage, I focus on a subset of the last of these mediums—in-person meetings at, or access to, the White House. Despite technological advances enabling political actors to interact remotely in real-time, policymakers across institutions and organized interests alike perceive access as the most valuable means of engagement (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Access provides policymakers and organized interests with each other’s attention, enabling them to better transmit resources, such as information and expertise, than they can through other means (Hall and Wayman 1990; Kalla and Broockman 2016). Access also makes each other’s preferences more salient, or mentally accessible, such that policymakers and organized interests afford each other preferential treatment in future interactions and are more likely to consider their preferences in their decision-making processes (Miler 2010; Wright 1990). One organized interest representative echoed these two benefits of in-person access to the White House, reporting that, relative to other modes of communication, in-person access “tends to be more effective in terms of sharing knowledge... and just sort of raising our issues.”¹⁹ In addition, access encourages the cultivation of interpersonal relationships between the policymakers and organized interest representatives that can enhance cooperation and trust (Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Another organized interest representative underscored this point in suggesting that in-person access to a White House official allows her to “get a much better feeling for the person when you can read their body language and

¹⁹Personal interview with a policy advocate for an education organization, May 11, 2018.

interact with them in human form.”²⁰

While in-person meetings are a valuable medium for presidential engagement, they are also costly for the White House to facilitate. Unlike remote methods, in-person meetings require the White House to expend some of its finite time and effort on conducting security screenings for visitors and coordinating personnel to physically attend. As one former Obama administration official expresses, the cost of coordinating meetings at the White House is “not trivial,” as visitors need to be cleared by security and staffers need to find time “given the crush of work” to attend meetings.²¹ Consequently, the White House reserves in-person meetings for engagement with interests who presidents perceive as influential players in their coalition-building efforts. The same Obama administration official recounted that, because of the costs incurred by in-person meetings, “the default [medium for engagement] was typically email,” even though communicating in-person or, if that is not possible, by phone “is more effective.”²² My survey respondents corroborate the relative scarcity of in-person meetings; when asked how frequently their organized interest communicated with the Obama White House in an average year, 40.2% of respondents indicated communicating via phone or email five or more times, but only 20.7% reported attending in-person meetings at the White House with the same frequency. Therefore, focusing on which interests experience in-person White House meetings—a valuable, costly resource—provides a strong signal of presidents’ engagement priorities.

Traditionally, empirical studies of the access policymakers provide to organized interests have been hampered by data scarcity (see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 295-304; De Figueiredo and Richter 2014). In most contexts, instances of access, such as in-person meetings, take place behind closed doors and records of their occurrence are rarely made available, even after long periods of time have passed.²³ However, recent releases of over 7 million White House visitor logs records from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama provide a rare opportunity to directly observe in-person White House meetings attended by organized interest representatives.

²⁰Personal interview with a policy advocate for a reproductive rights organization, May 4, 2018.

²¹Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

²²Ibid.

²³For example, the records of members of Congress, who are most often the subject of studies of access, are not publicly available or subject to the Freedom of Information Act. As a result, scholars can rarely observe which members of Congress communicate with which organized interests (but see You n.d.).

Pairing these records with lobbying and campaign finance reports, I am able to assess how organized interests' resource endowments and partisan alignments inform presidents' engagement decisions.

Measuring Engagement with the White House Visitor Logs

As one of the most secure workplaces in the world, the White House closely screens and monitors all individuals entering and exiting the White House complex, which includes the White House itself and the adjacent Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB) and New Executive Office Building (NEOB). The comings and goings of individuals without permanent access passes, such as White House staffers and reporters, are recorded by the Secret Service in the Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES)—more commonly referred to as the White House visitor logs. Each record in WAVES contains information including the name of the visitor, the date and time of the visit, and the visitee (i.e., the person inside the White House that they are visiting). While many entries pertain to visitors attending tours or other social events, WAVES also contains the names of individuals visiting the White House on official business, such as organized interest representatives.

Prior to 2009, no sitting president had ever made public the White House visitor logs. However, in September of that year, Barack Obama fulfilled a campaign promise by announcing a voluntary disclosure policy under which the White House would release the visitor logs on a quarterly basis.²⁴ By the time President Obama left office, his administration had released nearly 6 million unique visitor records covering the time between September 15, 2009 and September 30, 2016. Additionally, starting in 2015, the Clinton Presidential Library began releasing the White House visitor logs for the final five years of the Clinton administration in response to Freedom of Information Act requests.²⁵ Because the earliest Lobbying Disclosure Act data on which I rely to identify organized interest representatives (described below) begins in 1998, I only utilize records from the Clinton administration for the final three years of the term, contributing an additional 1.3 million White

²⁴Norm Eisen, "Opening Up the People's House," *The White House*, September 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/09/04/opening-peoplesquos-house>; "White House Voluntary Disclosure Policy Visitor Access Records," *The White House*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/VoluntaryDisclosure>. Please see Section B of the Supplemental Information for details about the disclosure policy.

²⁵"Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1996-1998 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57587>; "White House Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1999-2000 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/44133>.

House visitor logs records. In total, my analyses make use of over 7 million White House visitor logs records from these two presidencies.²⁶

Because the White House visitor logs provide visitors' names but not their occupations or affiliations, supplemental data is required to determine which White House visits correspond to instances of engagement with which organized interests. To identify which visitors are representatives of organized interests, I draw on interests' filings under the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA), which requires interests to provide the names of their registered lobbyists in their semestral (through 2007) or quarterly (2008 and after) reports.^{27,28} Because LDA reports filed prior to 1997 are not digitized and publicly disseminated, I can only obtain the rosters of interests' lobbyists for the post-1998 period and must exclude the Clinton-era visitor logs from 1996 and 1997. I identify instances of presidential engagement with organized interests by matching the rosters of each interest's lobbyists in each reporting period with the names provided in the White House visitor logs during the same time period.²⁹ Finally, to remain consistent with the periodicity of LDA filings, I aggregate all instances of engagement associated with each organized interest for the relevant temporal unit—semestral for the Clinton era and quarterly for the Obama era—to construct binary indicators and counts of presidents' engagement with each interest in each time period. This level of observation—the organized interest-time period unit—constitutes the unit of analysis for my

²⁶Unfortunately, comparable White House visitor logs are not currently available for other recent presidents, such as George W. Bush and Donald Trump. Please see Section B the Supplemental Information for further details about their inavailability.

²⁷Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. §1601) https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby_Disclosure_Act/T0C.htm; Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance, January 31, 2017, <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/ldaguidance.pdf>. I utilize the Center of Responsive Politics' curated version of the raw LDA reports (available at <https://www.opensecrets.org/>). While not all interests with whom presidents might engage are required to file LDA reports, the relatively low thresholds for lobbying activity that trigger reporting force the vast majority of interests with more than a transient interest in federal policy to file; consequently, studies of organized interests at the federal level typically focus on the population or a subpopulation of interests filing LDA reports (e.g., Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Goldstein and You 2017; You 2017). Please see Section B of the Supplemental Information for details on reporting requirements under the LDA.

²⁸While interests' rosters of lobbyists does not include all individuals who might represent the interest at White House meetings, results from my survey indicate that the contingents interests send to White House meetings usually include at least one registered lobbyist. Because I identify instances of engagement at the organized-interest level, rather than the visitor-level, measurement error stemming from the scope of interest representatives provided in LDA reports should be minimal. For more information, please see Section B of the Supplemental Information.

²⁹All analyses presented in the main paper identify instances of presidential engagement through exact string matching of the names of registered lobbyists and White House visitors. Please see Section B of the Supplemental Information for details about the matching procedure and alternative specifications using measures developed with approximate string matching.

empirical models.

Measuring Organized Interest Resources and Partisan Alignment

To obtain measures of organized interests’ resource endowments and partisan alignments, I draw on quantitative and qualitative data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP). Because most organized interests specialize in either electoral politics or policymaking (Tripathi, Ansolabehere, and Snyder 2002), I incorporate measures of both organized interests’ electoral and policy resources. First, I measure organized interests’ electoral resources as the aggregate amount of campaign contributions they make to candidates for federal office. I focus on aggregate contributions rather than only contributions to the incumbent president because aggregate contributions reflect interests’ overall electoral resources, which presidents can channel in support of themselves and their copartisans. Using CRP’s compilation of the Federal Election Commission’s campaign contribution reports for the election cycles immediately preceding and including the time periods for which I have White House visitor logs records—1995-1996 to 1999-2000 for the Clinton records, and 2007-2008 to 2017-2018 for the Obama and Trump records—I generate a binary indicator for each organized interest-time period observation for whether the interest made any contributions in the preceding two years (i.e., the length of an electoral cycle) and a continuous measure of the amount of money it contributed to candidates for federal office in that period. By including both measures in my empirical models, I can distinguish between the effects of participating in electoral politics and the level of resources devoted to electoral politics. Second, I measure organized interests’ policy resources in a given time period with their reported amounts of lobbying expenditures in their LDA filings.³⁰ Under the LDA, lobbying activities for which expenditures must be reported include not only lobbying contacts themselves, but also “any efforts in support of such contacts, including preparation or planning activities, research, and any other background work that is intended, at the time of its preparation, for use in contacts, and coordination with the lobbying

³⁰The LDA requires filers to first indicate if their expenditures met a minimum threshold—\$10,000 for reports filed in 2007 or earlier, \$5,000 for reports filed in 2008 or later—and then to report a specific amount if in excess of that threshold. Thus, expenditures are left-censored at the threshold amounts. To account for this left-censoring, I subtract the threshold amount from the expenditures reported for each organized interest in each time period, such that the continuous measure indicates additional expenditures exceeding the threshold.

activities of others.”³¹ Thus, lobbying expenditures capture a wide range of organized interests’ policy resources, including staff salaries, accrued policy expertise and political information, and expenses incidental to their direct lobbying efforts. Given the right-skewedness of both campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures, I apply log transformations to both measures.

Measuring interests’ partisan alignment is relatively less straightforward. Few measures of organized interest partisanship or ideology exist, and those that do offer coverage for only a sliver of the interests who file LDA reports. For example, McKay (2008) uses organized interests’ evaluations of members of Congress roll call votes to scale their ideology, but can only do so for the 72 interests who offer such evaluations. Bonica (2013) and Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz (2020), who estimate ideology scores for interests using campaign contributions and positions taken on congressional bills, respectively, offer greater coverage for the population of interests filing LDA reports in the time periods of interest for the present study, but even their measures provide scores for only 1,416 (4.4%) and 1,565 (4.8%) of the 32,421 unique organized interests included in my analyses, respectively. In light of this data limitation, I classify the partisan alignment of the 92 industries into which CRP categorizes organized interests using CRP’s industry summaries and assign each interest the partisan alignment of its industry. For each industry, CRP provides a written summary of its political activity and policy preferences, and these summaries often provide qualitative statements of the partisan leanings of interests in the industry.³² If an industry’s summary expresses a clear preference for either the Democratic or Republican Party, then that industry is coded as being aligned with that party. If the summary does not express a clear preference for either party, then it is coded as Independent, or not aligned with either party. While this trichotomous classification scheme may misattribute the partisan alignment of some individual interests, studies using other measures of organized interest ideology find that the distributions of ideology within industries typically exhibit clear central tendencies (e.g., Bonica 2013; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020). Thus, industry-level partisan alignment is a imperfect but informative measure of individual interests’

³¹Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance, January 31, 2017, <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/ldaguidance.pdf>.

³²“Alphabetical Listing of Industries,” *Center for Responsive Politics*, <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/alphalist.php>.

partisan leanings that provides coverage for the full data set.³³

Estimation Strategy

The data structure poses non-trivial challenges for analysis. One set of challenges stems from inconsistencies in temporal units of measurement. While some time-varying components of the data are observed at granular daily levels, such as White House visitor log entries and campaign contributions, others are observed at less frequent intervals, such as organized interests LDA reports. Further still, because amendments to the Lobbying Disclosure Act implemented in 2008 changed the required frequency of filings from semestral to quarterly, the temporal units associated with data drawn from LDA reports vary across the Clinton and Obama and Trump presidencies. I address these disparities in two ways. First, given the temporal changes in LDA filing requirements between the Clinton and the Obama presidencies, I estimate models for each presidency separately. Second, to make units of measurement for all variables consistent within presidencies, I aggregate all data up to the temporal unit associated with contemporary LDA filing requirements—semestral for the Clinton presidency, and quarterly for the Obama presidency.

A second set of challenges stems from the time-series cross-sectional structure of the data. Each observation corresponds to a unique organized interest in a given time period, and each organized interest is further nested within one of CRP’s 92 industry groupings. One implication is that observations are not independent, as multiple observations correspond to the same organized interests, industries, and time periods. In order to recover unbiased parameter estimates and associated uncertainty measures, the analysis requires empirical techniques that accommodate this non-independence. Another issue arising from the data structure is that one of the key covariates—organized interests’ partisan alignment—is measured at the industry-level, such that it is repeated across observations nested within the same organized interests and industries. As a result, standard regression models cannot estimate parameters for both organized interest- and

³³In Section D of the Supplemental Information, I explore whether my substantive results hold when using the interest-level ideology scores provided by Bonica (2013) and Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz (2020) rather than industry-level partisan alignment. In doing so, I lose approximately 90% of the observations because they lack ideology scores. However, the results from these additional analyses are substantively similar to those presented here using industry-level partisan alignment.

industry-level effects and partisan alignment due to collinearity.

To account for the non-independence of observations and collinearity between group-specific effects and partisan alignment, I utilize Bayesian multilevel models (Gelman and Hill 2006). Multilevel models enable the researcher to explicitly account for nesting in data structures by allowing parameter estimates to vary for each grouping in the data, such as repeated observations of interests and industries. Additionally, multilevel models can feasibly estimate parameters for covariates nested at the group-level, such as industry-level partisan alignment. Each of the logistic multilevel models I use to generate the results presented below estimate a binary indicator of whether a given interest in a given time period experienced presidential engagement as a function of the interest’s lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions; the partisanship of the interest’s industry; a series of interest-level control variables drawn from LDA filings, such as the issues on which they report lobbying; and varying intercepts for each interest, industry, and time period.³⁴ All models are estimated in Stan (Carpenter et al. 2017) and report no divergent transitions during sampling and indicate convergence with \hat{R} statistics of ≤ 1.10 for all parameters.³⁵

Results

Interpreting results from multilevel models can be difficult because of the large number of parameters they estimate. To ease discussion of the results, I present the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement with fixed values of all covariates while varying each of my key covariates of interest—lobbying expenditures, campaign contributions, and partisan alignment—independently to demonstrate its marginal effect. This approach provides the added benefit of illustrating how the predicted probability of engagement changes across levels of the covariates and whether the differences in predictions across levels are distinguishable from each other.³⁶

³⁴Analogous negative binomial models using the number of times presidents engaged with each organized interests in a give time period are presented in Section D of the Supplemental Information; the substantive results of these alternative specifications are similar to those presented here.

³⁵Please see Section C of the Supplemental Information for details on the model specification and estimation process.

³⁶To determine whether the predicted probability of engagement given some fixed set of covariate values is distinguishable from the predicted probability of engagement given a change in one covariate, I obtain the posterior distributions of the probability of engagement for both sets of covariate values and difference the distributions. If the 95% credible interval for the distribution of differences does not include zero, I refer to the difference as distinguish-

In the left panes of Figures 1 and 2, I plot the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement with an organized interest with the levels of resources and partisan alignment specified on the far left during the Clinton and Obama presidencies, respectively. In the right panes of those figures, I present the differences in specific pairs of predicted probabilities plotted in the left panes as resource levels and partisan alignment vary, with all other covariates fixed.³⁷ Looking first at the predicted probabilities associated with varying levels of lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions—measures of policy and electoral resources, respectively—we observe consistent increases in the probability of engagement as an organized interest’s resource levels increase. For example, turning to the left pane of Figure 1, whereas the probability of the Clinton White House engaging an organized interest whose lobbying expenditures fell into the first quartile (less than \$10,000) is 0.23, this probability increases to 0.34 for an otherwise identical organized interest with the median level of lobbying expenditures (\$20,000)—an increase of over 40%. Further increasing lobbying expenditures from the median value to the third quartile value (\$80,000) is associated with a smaller increase in the probability of engagement of 0.02—an increase of 6%. Similarly, in the left pane of Figure 2, the probability the Obama White House engaging with an organized interest who did not make campaign contributions to candidates for federal office in the preceding electoral cycle experiencing engagement is 0.14, but an otherwise identical interest whose campaign contributions equal the first quartile value (\$28,891) had a probability of experiencing engagement of 0.17—an increase of 21%. Additional increases in campaign contributions to the median and third quartile values (\$97,088 and \$337,000, respectively) are also associated with additional increases in the probability of engagement. The right panes of both figures indicate that each of the stepwise increases in lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions is statistically distinguishable, as the 95% credible intervals for the differences do not include zero. Thus, in line with my empirical

able. Please see Section D of the Supplemental Information for more details about the calculation and interpretation of the predicted probabilities.

³⁷For each set of covariate values in Figures 1 and 2, the probability of engagement during the Clinton administration is roughly twice as high as during the Obama administration. At least two contextual factors explain this difference. First, the temporal range accounted for by each observation during the Clinton presidency is half as large as during the Obama presidency, such that each organized interest-time period observation during the Clinton presidency has twice as long to experience engagement. Second, the number of organized interests filing LDA reports during the Obama presidency is roughly two and a half times higher than during the Clinton presidency. Because the White House’s ability to engage with organized interests likely expanded at a slower rate or remained constant, the likelihood that any given interest would experience engagement is lower during the Obama presidency.

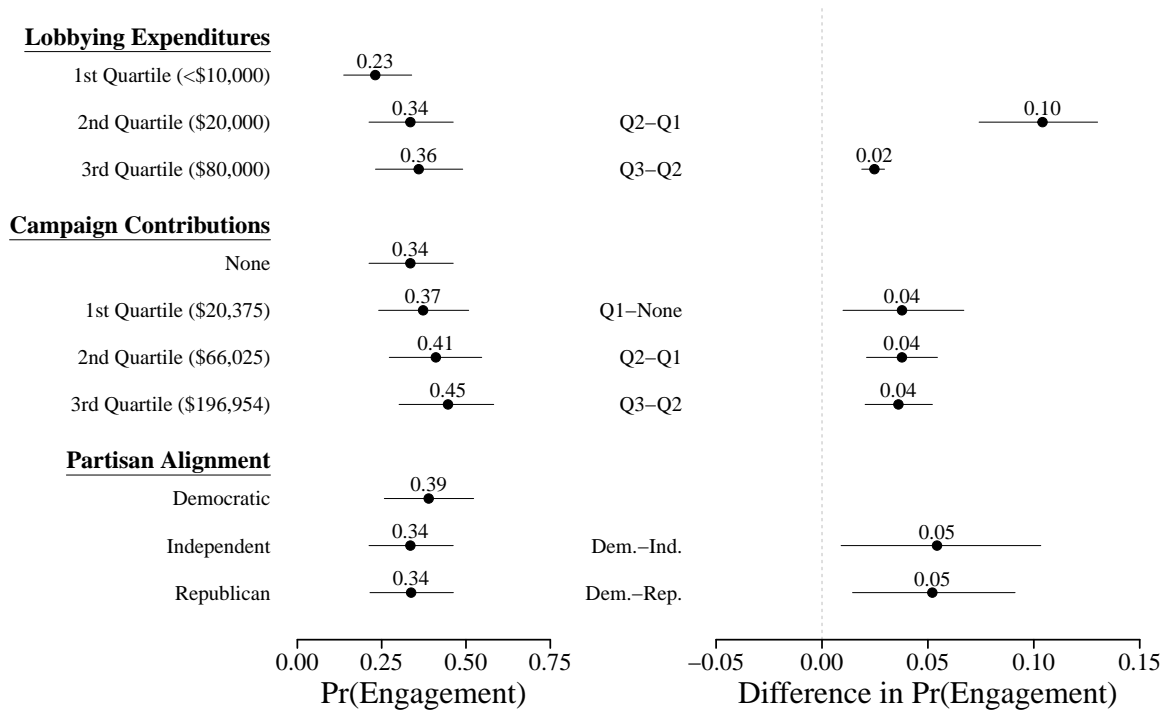


Figure 1: **Effect of Organized Interests' Resources and Partisan Alignment on Probability of Presidential Engagement (Clinton)** In the left pane, points and lines represent the posterior means and 95% credible intervals of the predicted probabilities calculated with parameter estimates from the sampling iterations stored from the model using data from the Clinton White House. For each of the three types of organized interest characteristics specified in bold and underlined, I calculate predicted probabilities of presidential engagement for each of the specified variable values while fixing other covariates values. In the right pane, I plot the differences in the distributions of predicted probabilities and their 95% credible intervals for pairs of predictions in the left pane, as specified by the labels on the left side of the right pane. For example, looking at the predicted probabilities of engagement across levels of lobbying expenditures, the three points in the left pane indicate the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to the first, second, and third quartile values, with campaign contributions fixed at None (the median value), partisan alignment fixed as Independent, and other variables fixed at their median or modal values. In the right pane, the two topmost points indicate the differences in the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to their first and second quartile values, and their second and third quartile values, respectively. Taking the predictions associated with lobbying expenditures together, we observe that organized interests with higher levels of lobbying expenditures have a distinguishably higher probability of experiencing presidential engagement. Please note that some differences indicated in the right pane may not equal the differences between the corresponding values in the left pane due to rounding.

expectations, presidents are more likely to engage with organized interests with larger endowments of electoral and policy resources.

The predicted probabilities associated with organized interests' partisan alignment indicate that presidents are more likely to engage with interests in industries aligned with the Democratic Party—the party of both Presidents Clinton and Obama. For the Clinton presidency, we observe

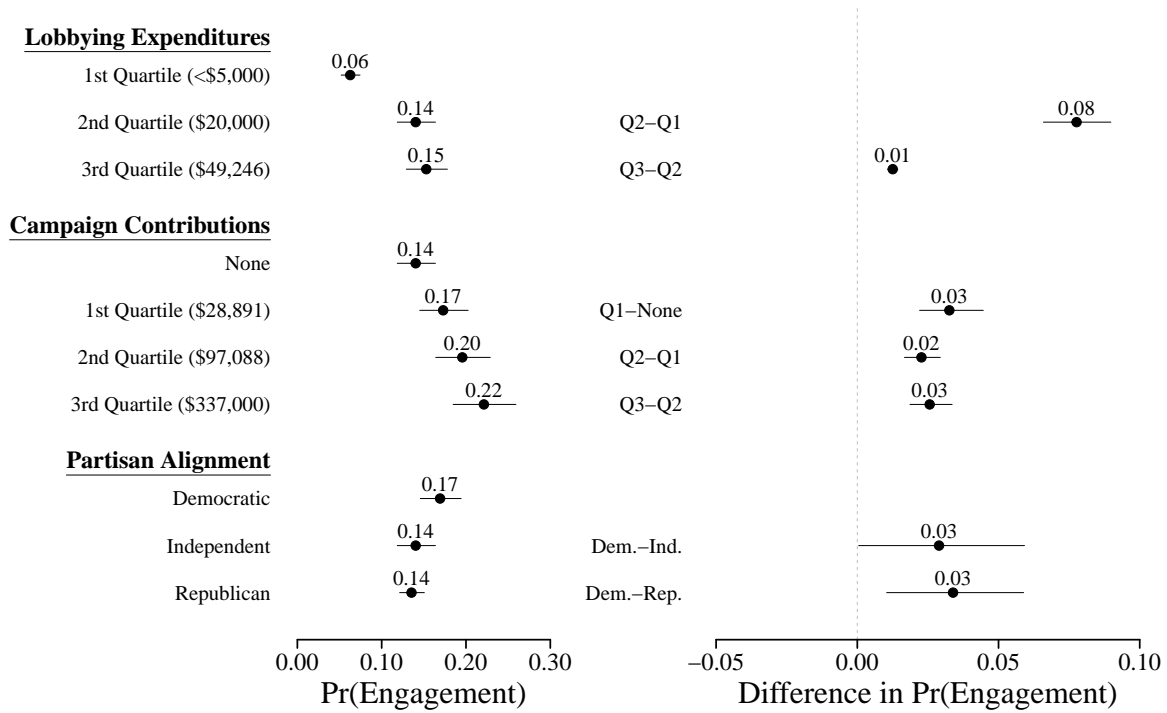


Figure 2: **Effect of Organized Interests' Resources and Partisan Alignment on Probability of Presidential Engagement (Obama)** In the left pane, points and lines represent the posterior means and 95% credible intervals of the predicted probabilities calculated with parameter estimates from the sampling iterations stored from the model using data from the Obama White House. For each of the three types of organized interest characteristics specified in bold and underlined, I calculate predicted probabilities of presidential engagement for each of the specified variable values while fixing other covariates values. In the right pane, I plot the differences in the distributions of predicted probabilities and their 95% credible intervals for pairs of predictions in the left pane, as specified by the labels on the left side of the right pane. For example, looking at the predicted probabilities of engagement across levels of lobbying expenditures, the three points in the left pane indicate the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to the first, second, and third quartile values, with campaign contributions fixed at None (the median value), partisan alignment fixed as Independent, and other variables fixed at their median or modal values. In the right pane, the two topmost points indicate the differences in the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to their first and second quartile values, and their second and third quartile values, respectively. Taking the predictions associated with lobbying expenditures together, we observe that organized interests with higher levels of lobbying expenditures have a distinguishably higher probability of experiencing presidential engagement. Please note that some differences indicated in the right pane may not equal the differences between the corresponding values in the left pane due to rounding.

in the left pane of Figure 1 that the predicted probability of engagement with an organized interest in an industry aligned with the Democratic Party is 0.39, but that the predicted probability of engagement with an otherwise identical interest in an industry aligned with the Republican Party or with neither party is 0.34—a difference of 15%. In the Obama presidency, we observe a similar effect in the left pane of Figure 2, as organized interests aligned with the Democratic Party have

a predicted probability of engagement of 0.17, but the predicted probability of engagement with interests in industries aligned with the Republican Party or with neither party is 0.14—a difference of 21%. In the right panes of both figures, we see that the differences in the predicted probabilities of engagement between interests in copartisan and non-copartisan industries are statistically distinguishable. This finding again accords with my empirical expectations, indicating that presidents are more likely to engage with organized interests aligned with the incumbent’s party.

Conclusion

Scholars have long acknowledged that presidents expend great time and effort to build coalitions whose support is integral to their success. While studies of presidents as coalition-builders typically focus on presidents’ efforts among members of Congress and the mass public (e.g., Beckmann 2010; Edwards 2000; Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*; Neustadt 1991), I highlight organized interests as another class of political actors who presidents seek to bring into the fold. While I emphasize that presidents are more likely to engage with organized interests with high levels of resources and who are aligned with the president’s party, my data more broadly indicates that presidential engagement with organized interests is quite common. For example, in the time period for which I have visitor logs records from the Obama White House, of the 24,009 unique organized interests that filed at least one LDA report, President Obama and his staff engaged at least once with representatives from 13,838 of these interests, or nearly 58%, and engaged with some interests much more frequently. Considering that each of these engagements requires non-negligible White House effort, presidents’ interactions with organized interests comprise an underappreciated activity that can enlighten future presidency research.

My findings not only improve our understanding of with which organized interests presidents engage, but also offer substantive implications for the study of presidents, organized interests, and political voice in the American policymaking process. First, contrary to the hopes expressed by some that presidents dampen the influence interests exercise in other political venues (e.g., Bentley 1908; Howell and Moe 2016; Truman 1971; Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Uslander 1998), I find that presidents engage more often with interests who represent the preferences of their copartisans and

the upper-class, and in doing so contribute to the disproportionate voice given to these constituencies in American politics (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). By emphasizing engagement with interests who represent these preferences, presidents, intentionally or unintentionally, heighten the salience of those preferences within the White House and consequently marginalize the preferences of other constituencies (Miler 2010); as Schlozman, Verba, and Brady write, “Public officials cannot consider voices they do not hear... if [the voices officials hear] come from an unrepresentative set of individuals and organizations, government policy is likely to reflect more fully the preferences and needs of the active part of the public” (2012, 6). Therefore, scholars and practitioners concerned about inequality in political voice must recognize presidents’ role in perpetuating this inequality.

Second, while recent studies of presidential representation stress that presidents use their office to satisfy the preferences of and materially benefit their copartisans (e.g., Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Kriner and Reeves 2015a; Wood 2009), my finding that presidents’ engagement decisions are also driven by organized interests’ resources suggests that presidents’ representational emphases may vary across political contexts (Griffin and Newman 2016). Most studies of presidential representation focus on the mass public, where each person possesses roughly equal resources they can provide the president; while some persons may be more willing or able to participate in politics, each can only provide the president with a single vote at the ballot box or a single nod of approval in a public opinion poll. However, when interacting with political elites, such as members of Congress or organized interests, presidents recognize that some actors are more influential than others, and thus focus their representational activities on these influential actors. In the case of organized interests, my results indicate that presidents’ engagement decisions are informed not only interests’ partisan alignment, but also by interests’ resource endowments. This finding bears similarity to that of Beckmann (2010), who demonstrates that presidents’ congressional coalition-building efforts focus on communicating with leaders from both parties rather than only on copartisan leaders. While copartisan leaders are more responsive to presidents’ entreaties, non-copartisan leaders hold important institutional powers and sway over their members, and presidents communicate with them to bargain over or demobilize opposition to presidents’ proposals (see also Beckmann 2008; Beckmann, Chaturvedi, and Garcia 2017). Future studies of presidential representation should explore how

presidents consider characteristics other than copartisanship, such as political clout, when deciding to which persons and groups to provide representation.

The theory presented in this paper posits that presidents' engagement with organized interests is not an end in itself, but is a mechanism by which presidents seek to obtain organized interests' cooperation with or assent to their aims. Future research should explore the downstream consequences of presidents' engagement with organized interests. For presidents, this means examining whether organized interests with whom they engage subsequently provide resources in furtherance of presidents' goals. While some resources of interest, such as organized interests' lobbying of members of Congress on presidents' behalf, are likely difficult to observe, others more feasibly lend themselves to empirical observation. For example, because presidents value organized interests' grassroots lobbying to bolster public support for their initiatives, one might investigate whether interests with whom presidents engage are more likely to communicate with their members and the general public in support of presidential actions (Cohen 2012; Kumar and Grossman 1984). Differently, for organized interests, researchers might focus on the political and policy resources that interests value and presidents can provide. For instance, just as presidents can channel federal grants to electorally important constituencies (Kriner and Reeves 2015*a*), they might also direct grants towards organized interests with whom they engage. Again, presidents might incentivize organized interests with whom they engage through appointing preferred candidates to bureaucratic or judicial positions. Further, presidents might bring attention to the interests with which they engage, which bolsters their political clout and helps them perform institutional maintenance, particularly if they depend on members' continued support. Additional investigation into the implications of presidents' engagement with organized interests would not only bring attention to an overlooked linkage between presidents and organized interests, but would also spotlight the importance of this linkage for scholars and observers of the presidency, organized interests, and American politics at large.

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Supplemental Information

The Supplemental Information contains descriptions of the original interviews and survey responses I draw on in the main paper, as well as additional detail about my empirical strategy, the data underlying my empirical analyses, the models which underlie the figures presented in the main paper, and alternative specifications that demonstrate the robustness of my results with different modeling approaches.

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A Interview and Survey Descriptions

Because presidents' engagement with organized interests has received scant attention in previous studies, our knowledge of basic facts, such as what engagement looks like, what determines whether it occurs, and why presidents and organized interests participate in engagement, is limited. As a result, I supplement my work with two additional first-hand data sources that contextualize presidents' engagement with organized interests. In this section, I explain how I conducted these interviews and the survey and present the summary results from the relevant survey questions.

Interviews Description

Between May 2018 and September 2019, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with former White House officials and organized interest representatives, seven of whom previously worked in the Clinton, Obama, or Trump administrations, and nearly all of whom worked in lobbying or policy advocacy at the time of their interview. The interviews lasted for between 30 to 60 minutes. Most were conducted in-person in the Washington, DC area, though a few were conducted via phone due to scheduling conflicts. Interviewees agreed to speak "on background," such that I anonymize the information they provided. In addition to the direct quotes I include in the main text of the paper, I draw on the full interview transcripts to orient and contextualize my theoretical exposition and empirical analysis.

In trying to arrange interviews, I strove to speak with individuals who have different perspectives on the relationships between presidents and organized interests. The seven former White House officials I interviewed had experience in a wide array of offices, including the Domestic Policy Council, the National Security Council, the Office of Legislative Affairs, the Office of Public Engagement, and the Office of the Press Secretary. My interviewees specialized in a diverse cross-section of policy areas, such as chemical manufacturing, education, the environment, healthcare, reproductive rights, telecommunications, and transportation.

Survey Description

I conducted a survey with a sample of organized interest representatives to collect information about their experiences with and perspectives on interacting with the Obama White House. This survey, fielded in late 2018, asked questions about the Obama and Trump White Houses. The survey did not include questions about the Clinton White House because, as the Clinton administration ended nearly 18 years prior to the fielding of the survey, I feared that most respondents would not have been working for their current employers or clients or would not clearly recall their experiences from that time. In the paper and the supplemental information, I only present information about the questions pertaining to the Obama White House, as responses to those about experiences from the Trump presidency may not reflect accurately on those presidencies for which I have access to White House visitor logs.

Sampling Procedure

The sample for this survey consisted of all persons listed as points of contact for lobbyists or organizations employing lobbyists who filed Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) reports between the first quarter of 2017 and the third quarter of 2018. While these points of contact can be persons who are not formally recognized as lobbyists under the LDA, nearly two-thirds of points of contact are

LDA lobbyists, and those individuals who are not LDA lobbyists often perform government relations or policy advocacy functions and are familiar with their employers' interactions with policymakers. For each unique individual, I selected his or her most recent appearance on a report so as to obtain the most up-to-date contact and employment information. In cases where the same individual was identified as the point of contact for more than one client in a given quarter, I randomly sampled one report on which that individual appeared as the point of contact. To minimize email bounces and improve response rates, the email addresses provided in the selected reports were screened to check for appropriate formatting and to identify duplicates. Some organizations, such as large lobbying firms, provided the same generic email address for all of their filings, such that many individuals were tied to the same generic email address; when such generic email addresses were identified, every effort was made to obtain a unique email address for that individual (searching the organization website, LinkedIn, other social media platforms, etc.). After de-duplicating the list of individuals and screening email addresses, the final sample consisted of 5,938 individuals.

Initial invitations to complete the survey were sent to all 5,938 individuals on November 15, 2018, and reminder emails were sent to all individuals who had not yet completed the survey on November 29, 2018 and December 13, 2018. Data collection ceased on December 31, 2018. Excluding the points of contact whose email addresses were identified as invalid when invitations were sent, the overall response rate for individuals who completed the demographic and background module of the survey, which asked general questions about their experience working for their current client, is 11.7% ($\frac{639}{5459}$). The response rate for individuals who worked for their current client during the Obama administration and reached the module of the survey which asked about their client's interactions with the Obama White House is 8.1% ($\frac{442}{5459}$).¹

The first question in the module focusing on the Obama administration asked respondents how frequently their current client interacted with the White House during that period in an average year in three ways: 1) by phone, email, or mail; 2) through in-person meetings at the White House; and 3) through in-person meetings outside of the White House. Respondents' answers for the second part of the question—the frequency with which their client had in-person meetings at the White House—determined what additional questions they were provided. If respondents indicated that their client “Never” had in-person meetings at the White House, they were asked three questions about not having meetings with the Obama White House. Other respondents indicating that their client had at least one in-person meeting at the White House (i.e., “Fewer than 5 times”) were asked seven questions about the meetings their client had with the Obama White House. Of the 433 respondents who answered that question, 167 (38.6%) reported that their client never had in-person meetings with the Obama White House, and 266 (61.4%) indicated that their client had at least one in-person meeting.

Evaluating Concerns about Response Bias

While this survey allows me to collect information from a large number of organized interest representatives, it is important to consider that the self-reports I solicit, like all survey responses, are susceptible to response bias, or the possibility that respondents' responses deviate from their realized experiences (see Miller n.d.*a,n*). For example, in the current case case, we might be concerned that respondents are vulnerable to desirability bias, where they answer survey questions so as to

¹105 respondents who progressed through the survey far enough to reach this module indicated in the demographic and background module that they did not start working for their current client until 2017. Therefore, they were not shown any of the questions in this module.

make themselves and their clients appear more politically influential than they are; this bias could manifest through respondents over-reporting the frequency of their contacts with the White House or the degree to which they benefitted from their relationship with the White House.

While it is difficult to determine the extent of this bias in the survey responses, I am able to get a sense of this bias by comparing respondents' self-reports of the frequency of their clients' in-person meetings at the White House with my observational measure of the frequency of their clients' in-person meetings at the White House. If the bias present for this question is minimal, then we should have confidence that the bias in responses to other questions is also minimal. Of the 434 responses to that question, I am able to match 406 to organized interests in my observational data.² In order to compare my quarterly measures of engagement across 7 years and the survey respondents' report of the frequency with which their client attending meetings at the White House, I recode both data sources. For my observational data, I code an organized interest as "1" if my data contains any instances of them experiencing presidential engagement at any time and "0" otherwise. For the survey data, I code an organized interest as a "1" if the respondent reports that their client attended an in-person meeting at the White House at least once (i.e., "Fewer than 5 times") and "0" otherwise. With this coding scheme, 288 of the 406 observations (70.9%) match, such that both my observational data and the survey self-reports indicate that the organized interest did or did not have in-person meetings at the White House. Of the remaining 118 observations, in 94 of the cases (23.2%) the survey self-report indicates that the client did not have in-person meetings at the White House but my observational data detects an instance of engagement, and in the remaining 24 cases (5.9%) the self-report indicates that the client had in-person meetings at the White House but my observational data does not detect any instances of engagement. These results should reassure us that response bias is minimal; in addition to matching reports of in-person meetings in both data sources in the vast majority of cases (70.9%), most of the mismatches are of the opposite character as would be expected if desirability bias is present, as mismatches arose more frequently when organized interest representatives reported that their client did not have in-person meetings at the White House than when they reported that they did.

Descriptive Sample Characteristics

It is difficult to assess the "representativeness" of my survey respondents and the interests they represent to the points of contact and clients in the sampling frame because scant information is available regarding the points of contact and the clients for which they work. Four pieces of information about the points of contact and their clients can be gleaned from their LDA filings and the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), which cleans and aggregates the LDA filings: the client's quarterly lobbying expenditures with that point of contact's employer (i.e. the client's own expenditures if the point of contact is employed directly, or the client's expenditures with a given firm if the point of contact is a contract employee); whether the filer is the client or a lobbying firm contracted by a client; the client's sector coding, as assigned by CRP; and whether the point of contact is a registered lobbyist under the LDA.³ Table SI.6 compares the distribution of these four

²Observations which do not match occur because the organized interest did not file LDA reports prior to 2017. These organized interests were likely active during the Obama administration, but did not meet the thresholds for filing LDA reports.

³The first three of these pieces of information are easily observable from CRP's aggregated LDA filings, but the fourth can only be determined by comparing the names of the points of contact provided on each LDA filing with the names of the registered lobbyists listed on the same LDA filing. To determine whether the point of contact listed is

characteristics in both the full sampling frame and the subset of 639 respondents who answered at least one of the questions I report here. These comparisons reveal some differences for each of the four characteristics that are substantively small but are statistically distinguishable at the $p < 0.05$ level using difference in means and χ^2 tests (where applicable). Thus, while the sample of respondents differs from the sampling frame, it contains a sizeable number of respondents with each unique level of these characteristics.

Table SI.7 provides information on the descriptive characteristics of the respondents. This descriptive information was collected as part of the survey, and thus only provides information about respondents. The high proportions of respondents who report education levels of “post-graduate degree” (67.8%), income levels of “\$200,000 or more” (57.4%), and experience levels of “more than 20 years” (41.8%) suggest that most survey respondents are themselves political elites who play a substantive role in lobbying, rather than low-level employees who may respond to emails but lack significant lobbying experience.

a registered lobbyist, I used approximate matching techniques to compare the name of the point of contact on each LDA filing to the names of all of the registered lobbyists also appearing on the filing, and visually inspected the best match for each LDA form to determine if the point of contact was also listed as a registered lobbyist.

Table SI.1: Self-Reported Contacts with Obama White House

Type of Contact	Never	Fewer than 5 times	5 to 10 times	11 to 15 times	16 to 20 times	More than 20 times
Mail, phone, or email	28.9% (128)	30.9% (137)	16.0% (71)	7.0% (31)	5.0% (22)	12.2% (54)
In-person at White House complex	38.5% (167)	40.8% (177)	11.3% (49)	3.2% (14)	1.8% (8)	4.4% (19)
In-person off of White House complex	39.2% (170)	39.4% (171)	12.0% (52)	3.2% (14)	1.2% (5)	5.1% (22)

Respondents were asked how frequently their organized interest had contacts with the Obama White House in a given year in each of the specified forms. This question was presented to all respondents who advanced to this module and who started working for their current client in 2016 or earlier.

Table SI.2: Types of Officials Attending White House Meetings

Type of Official	% of Respondents (N)
Registered lobbyists	76.4% (204)
Executives responsible for lobbying	71.2% (190)
Non-lobbyist government affairs employees	19.1% (51)
Other	12.0% (32)

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed types of officials with their organized interest attended meetings at the Obama White House. Respondents could select as many options as were applicable. This question was presented to all respondents who indicated that their client had in-person meetings at the Obama White House at least “Fewer than 5 times” in an average year.

Table SI.3: Types of Officials Attending White House Meetings

Response Option	% of Respondents (N)
Always the organization	23.3% (58)
Usually the organization, sometimes the White House	23.3% (58)
Sometimes the organization, sometimes the White House	33.3% (25)
Usually the White House, sometimes the organization	10.0% (25)
Always the White House	10.0% (25)

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their in-person meetings at the White House were more often initiated by their organized interest or by the Obama White House. This question was presented to all respondents who indicated that their client had in-person meetings at the Obama White House at least “Fewer than 5 times” in an average year.

Table SI.4: Frequency of White House Invitations Accepted and Meeting Requests Fulfilled

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Invitations accepted	2.0% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (7)	23.0% (56)	72.1% (176)
Requests fulfilled	2.1% (5)	9.3% (22)	32.1% (76)	43.0% (102)	13.5% (32)

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they accepted invitations to the White House when offered and how frequently the White House granted them meetings when they requested them. This question was presented to all respondents who indicated that their client had in-person meetings at the Obama White House at least “Fewer than 5 times” in an average year.

Table SI.5: Frequency of Invitations Turned Down and Meeting Requests Denied

	No	Yes	Not sure
Invitations turned down	81.5% (123)	6.0% (9)	12.6% (19)
Requests denied	90.1% (136)	0.1% (1)	9.3% (14)

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they turned down invitations to the White House when offered and how frequently the White House denied them meetings when they requested them. This question was presented to all respondents who indicated that their client “Never” had in-person meetings at the Obama White House at least.

Table SI.6: Comparison of Respondents with Sampling Frame

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>	<u>% of Sampling Frame (N)</u>
<u>Lobbyist Employer</u>		
Client	61.2% (391)	53.4% (2914)
Firm	38.8% (248)	46.6% (2545)
<u>Lobbying Expenditures</u>		
First Quartile	26.4% (169)	25% (1365)
Second Quartile	30.4% (194)	25% (1365)
Third Quartile	23.4% (150)	25% (1365)
Fourth Quartile	19.7% (126)	25% (1364)
<u>CRP Category</u>		
Agribusiness	4.7% (30)	4.2% (228)
Communications and Electronics	4.1% (26)	6.6% (360)
Construction	1.6% (10)	2.1% (112)
Defense	1.9% (12)	2.1% (117)
Energy and Natural Resources	6.9% (44)	8.1% (444)
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	7.7% (49)	9.6% (526)
Health	18.6% (119)	18.5% (1011)
Ideological and Single-Issue	12.8% (82)	9.2% (500)
Labor	1.9% (12)	2.1% (116)
Lawyers and Lobbyists	1.6% (10)	1.2% (66)
Misc Business	11.3% (72)	11.8% (645)
Other	5.9% (38)	6.2% (339)
Transportation	6.6% (42)	6.1% (332)
Unknown	14.6% (93)	12.1% (663)
<u>Registered Lobbyist</u>		
Yes	74.7% (478)	62.4% (3409)
No	25.3% (161)	37.6% (2050)

Table SI.7: Descriptive Statistics of Sample

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>
<u>Gender</u>	
Female	27.9% (178)
Male	71.8% (459)
NA	0.3% (2)
<u>Age</u>	
18-29	3.8% (24)
30-49	38.3% (245)
50-64	35.5% (227)
65 or over	22.2% (142)
NA	0.2% (2)
<u>Education</u>	
Some college, no 4-year degree	2.0% (13)
College graduate	30.0% (192)
Post-graduate degree	67.8% (433)
NA	0.2% (1)
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	
Asian	1.4% (9)
Black	3.3% (21)
Hispanic	2.0% (13)
White	90.0% (575)
Other	2.0% (13)
NA	1.3% (8)
<u>Income</u>	
Less than \$25,000	0.3% (2)
\$25,000-\$50,000	0.6% (4)
\$50,000-\$75,000	3.4% (22)
\$75,000-\$100,000	6.4% (41)
\$100,000-\$200,000	27.1% (173)
\$200,000 or more	57.4% (367)
NA	4.7% (30)
<u>Ideology</u>	
Very liberal	13.8% (88)
Somewhat liberal	21.6% (138)
Slightly liberal	14.7% (94)
Neither liberal nor conservative	16.7% (107)
Slightly conservative	14.4% (92)
Somewhat conservative	13.3% (85)
Very conservative	4.5% (29)
NA	0.9% (6)
<u>Party Identification</u>	
Strong Democrat	36.9% (236)
Democrat	8.0% (51)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>
Lean Democrat	8.1% (52)
Independent	11.1% (71)
Lean Republican	7.4% (47)
Republican	10.8% (69)
Strong Republican	13.6% (87)
Other	2.3% (15)
NA	1.7% (11)
<hr/>	
<u>Lobbying Experience</u>	
Less than 5 years	10.5% (67)
5-10 years	17.1% (109)
11-15 years	17.4% (111)
16-20 years	13.0% (83)
More than 20 years	41.8% (267)
NA	0.3% (2)
<hr/>	
<u>Past Government Experience</u>	
Member of Congress	4.7% (30)
Congressional staffer	42.7% (273)
Presidential appointee	8.1% (52)
EOP staffer	4.7% (30)
Civil servant	13.0% (83)
Other	14.6% (93)
No experience	34.1% (218)
<hr/>	
<u>Current Role with Client</u>	
Lobbyist	58.4% (373)
Executive officer responsible for lobbying	30.0% (192)
Executive officer not responsible for lobbying	4.1% (26)
Other	7.4% (47)
NA	0.2% (1)

B Data Description

In this section, I provide additional information about some of the data sources on which I draw for my empirical analyses in the main text and the Supplemental Information and the string matching procedure used to identify instances of presidential engagement using the White House visitor logs.

White House Visitor Logs

My empirical analyses leverage the White House visitor logs from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. In this subsection, I provide details about these visitor logs, as well as information about the inavailability of comparable data from other recent presidencies.

Clinton

In response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests 2007-0779-F and 2016-0727-F, the Clinton Presidential Library made available, pursuant to FOIA and the Presidential Records Act (PRA), the White House visitor logs for the 1999-2001 and 1996-1998 periods, respectively.⁴ These records are available electronically as comma-separated values files and were obtained from the Library via mail and in-person. Because the names of organized interests' registered lobbyists provided in Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) reports are only available starting in 1998, only the 1.3 million visitor log entries spanning from January 1, 1998 to December 31, 2000 are used. Because these visitor logs were disclosed pursuant to FOIA and PRA, some information, such as entrants' Social Security numbers and dates of birth, and some entries, such as those that would endanger national security, are withheld by the Library.

Obama

Fulfilling a campaign promise to increase White House transparency, the Obama administration implemented a voluntary disclosure policy in September 2009 whereby the White House visitor logs would be posted on the White House website on a monthly basis.⁵ Because the disclosure policy only applies to entries made starting on September 15, 2009, my analysis does not include entries from the first nine months of the Obama administration. Additionally, because the Obama administration was unable to finish disclosing visitor log entries before the expiration of the second term, my analysis concludes with entries made on September 30, 2016. Unlike the visitor logs provided by the Clinton Presidential Library, those provided by the Obama White House included a "Description" column, which allowed White House personnel to provide text entries indicating the nature of the visit. Using these text entries, I discard all visits that do not represent meaningful opportunities for engagement with organized interests, such as White House tours. After doing so, approximately 2.3 million of the nearly 6 million unique records remain.

⁴"Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1996-1998 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57587>; "White House Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1999-2000 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/44133>.

⁵Norm Eisen, "Opening Up the People's House," *The White House*, September 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/09/04/opening-peoples-quos-house>; "White House Voluntary Disclosure Policy Visitor Access Records," *The White House*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/VoluntaryDisclosure>.

Under the disclosure policy, the Obama White House reserved the right to withhold records related to “national security interests,” “purely personal guests of the first and second families,” and “a small group of particularly sensitive meetings,” such as the visits of Supreme Court nominees. These exemptions should not bias my analysis because few meetings with organized interest representatives fall into these categories. However, if the Obama White House used these exemptions to conceal engagement, they would likely conceal meetings with representatives from well-resourced and copartisan interests, as those meetings would be most likely to spark public backlash. Given that I expect that presidents are more likely to engage with well-resourced and copartisan interests, this concealment would bias downward the effect of resources and copartisanship in my analyses, making it more difficult to detect evidence for my expectations.

Bush 43

The White House visitor logs from the George W. Bush administration are the subject of a pending FOIA request.⁶ To date, the George W. Bush Presidential Library has made available a handful of records from January 20, 2001, and has no timetable for the release of additional records.⁷

Trump

Upon taking office, the Trump White House terminated the Obama administration’s voluntary disclosure policy and did not release any visitor log records. However, facing a lawsuit from Public Citizen concerning its refusal to release these records, the Trump administration agreed to a legal settlement whereby they would release visitor logs records for visitors to four units within the Executive Office of the Presidency (EOP) that are subject to FOIA, rather than PRA, due to their independent statutory authority and Senate-confirmed leadership: the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy.⁸

While visitors to these four EOP offices are also included in the Clinton and Obama logs, the absence of visitor logs records from the White House Office itself makes it difficult to compare presidential engagement in the Trump White House to that in the Clinton and Obama White Houses. Further, presidential engagement through these four EOP offices is likely characteristically different than that conducted by the White House as a whole. One relevant difference is that these offices have higher proportions of career civil servants than those in the White House Office; whereas nearly all officials in the White House Office serve at the pleasure of the president, over 80% of the personnel in these offices during the Clinton and Obama administrations are career civil servants. While civil servants are susceptible to presidents’ political influence (Moe 1985), they entertain other motivations that extend beyond the life of any administration, such as career advancement and designing and implementing good public policy (Carpenter 2001; Gailmard and Patty 2007; Lewis 2008), that might incentivize them to engage with interests differently than the president and his staff.

⁶“White House Visitor’s Log Records from January 20, 2001 - January 20, 2009,” *George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum*, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/en/Digital-Library---2/-/link.aspx?id=84B337B067DE460393D2AB6C7DE5132C&z=z>.

⁷Personal correspondence with an archivist at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, January 16, 2020.

⁸Josh Gerstein, “Trump Administration Agrees to Post Visitor Logs for Some White House Offices,” *Politico*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/15/trump-visitor-logs-white-house-413016>.

Because comparisons between the Trump visitor logs and the Clinton and Obama visitor logs may be misleading due to their differing scopes, I do not incorporate the Trump visitor logs into my analysis. However, they may prove useful for researchers studying other aspects of the presidency, and I encourage researchers to employ them in the future.

Lobbying Disclosure Act Reports

The Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) of 1995 and subsequent amendments require lobbyists or the entities who employ them to file regular reports with the House and Senate on the lobbying activities they conduct on behalf of their client(s).⁹ Under the LDA and subsequent amendments,¹⁰ Under the LDA, individuals are considered lobbyists if they, in working on behalf of a client, make a “lobbying contact,” or an “oral, written, or electronic communication” regarding public policy, with more than one “covered official,” which includes most members of the executive and legislative branches, and spends 20 percent or more of her time working for the client on lobbying activities in a given reporting period. As of January 2017, a lobbyist employed directly by a client spending less than \$13,000, or a lobbyist contracted by a client spending less than \$3,000, on lobbying activities in a given quarter is not required to file a report for that quarter. Lobbyists were required to file these reports, known as LD-2s, on a semestral basis until 2008, after which they have been required to file them quarterly.

LD-2 reports require filers to provide information about their clients including their address and contact information, their lobbying expenditures in the relevant period, the issues on which they have lobbied, the entities of the government they lobbied, and the names of the individuals who have performed lobbying work for the client in excess of the thresholds described above. In this section of the Supplemental Information, I focus on the details surrounding the listing of lobbyists.

One key concern about using filers’ list of lobbyists to identify instances of presidential engagement is that other persons affiliated with an interest who do not meet the thresholds to be listed as a lobbyist may attend White House meetings. For instance, a company’s CEO might attend a White House meeting, but, because the scope of their work for the company is sufficiently broad, they might not meet the definition of “lobbyist” under the LDA and thus not be identified on the company’s LD-2 report. If such non-lobbyists represent their clients at the White House often, we might be concerned about a high instance of false negatives, or cases where White House engagement is not detected because the individuals who attended the White House meetings were not registered lobbyists.

This measurement error should be minimal for at least two reasons. First, organized interests often send more than one person to White House meetings, and because I identify instances of engagement at the organized interest-level rather than the visitor-level, I detect engagement so long as at least one member of the interest’s contingent to the White House is a registered lobbyist. Second, I asked respondents to my survey of lobbyists who reported that their organized interests had meetings at the Obama White House to indicate which of the following types of employees attended these meetings: “executive officers,” “registered lobbyists,” “government affairs employees who were not registered lobbyists,” or “other” persons. 76.4% of respondents indicated that White House meetings were attended by registered lobbyists, and 71.2% reported that meetings were

⁹Center for Responsive Politics, <https://www.opensecrets.org/>.

¹⁰Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. §1601) https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby_Disclosure_Act/T0C.htm; Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance, January 31, 2017, <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/ldaguidance.pdf>.

attended by executive officers (who are often listed as lobbyists on LDA reports), suggesting that the vast majority of instances of engagement should be detected by looking for registered lobbyists' names in the White House visitor logs.

White House Visitor Logs-LDA Reports Matching Procedure

Because the White House visitor logs themselves do not identify instances of presidential engagement, I need to use the names of registered lobbyists to detect which White House visits are associated with engagement. Unfortunately, no key exists with which to perfectly match registered lobbyists to the names of visitors in the logs, and the spelling and punctuation of the name of the same individual in the White House visitor logs and the LDA filings may vary slightly, making the string-matching task nontrivial and raising the spectre of measurement error. To account for differences in the presentation of lobbyists' names in both data sources, I preprocess the names to remove punctuation and use approximate string matching, which identifies a match when the difference between the strings is below a specified tolerance threshold. Specifically, I use the `fuzzyjoin` package in R and match names using the Damerau-Levenshtein distance metric at four different tolerance thresholds—zero edits (i.e. exact matches), one edit, two edits, and three edits. Sometimes, the same White House visitor log entry may have multiple approximate matches with lobbyists listed in LDA filings; when this occurs, I retain only the match with the smallest edit distance.¹¹ Once I identify the “best” matches for each time period, I aggregate instances of White House engagement up to the organized interest-level.¹²

Using measures of engagement with lower or higher tolerance thresholds entail trade-offs. When the tolerance threshold is low, such as when using only exact matches, some false negatives (e.g., instances of engagement that are not counted because of minor differences in spelling) are inevitable. However, when the tolerance threshold increases, the rate of false negatives declines as the rate of false positives (e.g., visits incorrectly identified as instances of engagement) increases. Recognizing these trade-offs, the analyses in the main paper use a measure of presidential engagement which includes only exact matches, but I re-estimate my models using the more permissive tolerance levels in the Supplemental Information. In general, the results I present in the main paper continue to manifest at edit distance thresholds of ≤ 1 and ≤ 2 , but dissipate as the measure becomes more noisy when the threshold increases to ≤ 3 .

¹¹If multiple matches have the same edit distance, I randomly select one of these match to retain.

¹²To avoid overcounts stemming from multiple lobbyists from the same organization attending the same meeting, I use information in the White House visitor logs concerning the details of the meeting, such as the time, location, and the name of the visitee, to identify such instances and retain only one matched entry per meeting; thus, instances of presidential engagement are counted at the meeting-level, rather than the visitor-level.

C Estimation Strategy

Model Specification

As explained in the main paper, the structure of the data used in my analyses poses several challenges to inference—among them, repeated observations of organized interests, industries, and time periods and a key time-invariant covariate of interest measured at the industry-level—that make Bayesian multilevel models an appropriate empirical approach. Here, I present a representative specification of the multilevel models I estimate in the main paper and the Supplemental Information.

For the representative specification, I focus on the logistic regression model used with the data from the Clinton administration to generate Figure 1. This specification can be modified with few adjustments to represent those used for other analyses, such as those conducted with data from the Obama administration or examining a negative binomial distribution of the outcome measure.¹³ To symbolize the nesting structure of the data, each organized interest-time period observation—the central unit of observation—is subscripted i, t to correspond with its respective organized interest and time period, respectively. Each organized interest-time period observation is further nested in an organized interest j and a time period p , and each organized interest is further nested in an industry k . Given these subscripts, the model specification is:

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

The outcome measure, $\text{engagement}_{i,t}$, is a binary indicator for whether the president engaged with organized interest-time period observation i, t . The key covariates in the model are $\text{lobby_exp}_{i,t-1}$, the amount of lobbying expenditures reported by interest j in the preceding period; $\text{any_contrijs}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4}$, a binary indicator for whether interest j made campaign contributions to any candidates for federal office in the preceding four periods (i.e., the preceding two years); $\text{contrib_amt}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4}$, the amount of contributions made by interest j to candidates for federal office in the preceding four periods; and pty_align_k , a trichotomous indicator of the partisan alignment

¹³The only difference between the model specifications for the Clinton and Obama presidencies concerns the number of previous time periods for which campaign contributions are considered in the present period, t . Recall that the measures of whether an organized interest made any campaign contributions to candidates for federal office and the amount of those contributions are calculated by looking at the interest's campaign finance activity for the preceding two-year period, or the length of an election cycle. Because observations for the Clinton presidency are semestral, or twice a year, these measures require information from the preceding four periods. However, because observations for the Obama presidency are quarterly, or four times a year, these same measures require information from the preceding eight periods. Thus, the comparable model for the Obama presidency subscripts the variables for campaign finance activity to look back over the preceding eight time periods (i.e., $\text{any_contrijs}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-8}$ and $\text{contrib_amt}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-8}$).

of the industry k of which interest j is a member. To account for the dynamic nature of presidents' provision of access to interest j across periods, the model includes a lagged measure of the dependent variable, $\text{access}_{i,t-1}$. The model also includes a series of binary indicators drawn from interests' LDA filings for whether they retained their own in-house lobbyists or relied solely on lobbying firms and for which of 80 possible issue areas they reported lobbying on in the preceding period ($\xi \mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1}$). Finally, the model includes varying intercepts for the unique organized interests ($\alpha_{j[i]}$), industries ($\mu_{\alpha,1,k[j]}$), and time periods ($\gamma_{p[t]}$) in which each observation i is nested.

Estimation Process

To estimate these models, I use the R package **brms** (Bürkner 2017), an interface for using the C++ package Stan (Carpenter et al. 2017). All models are fitted using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm (Hoffman and Gelman 2014) with 4 chains and 2000 iterations per chain (1000 for warmup, 1000 for sampling). All models presented in the main paper and the Supplemental Information report no divergent transitions during the sampling phase and indicate convergence with \hat{R} statistics of ≤ 1.10 for all parameters.

D Empirical Analyses

In this section of the Supplemental Information, I discuss how the predicted probabilities shown in the main paper are calculated, present the summaries of the models used to generate those predicted probabilities in the main paper, and provide summaries from alternative model specifications.

Calculation of Predicted Probabilities

Figures 1 and 2 present predicted probabilities of presidential engagement as organized interests' resources and partisan alignment with the incumbent president vary. These predicted probabilities are calculated from the models whose summaries are presented in Table SI.8. To calculate the predicted probabilities, I fix the values of all covariates except the covariate whose effect I demonstrate, and then vary that covariate of interest across the levels indicated on the far left of the figures. For instance, in Figure 1, the top three predicted probabilities are calculated by fixing all covariates except for lobbying expenditures, and then varying lobbying expenditures across its first, second, and third quartile values. As described in Footnote 36, I determine if the shifts in the value of each covariate of interest are associated with distinguishable changes in the probability of presidential engagement by obtaining the posterior distributions of the predicted probabilities, difference the distributions, and assess whether the difference in distributions includes zero.

The values at which covariates are fixed at their median or modal values unless otherwise noted. More specifically, when fixed, covariates take on the following values:

- Lagged access—0 (modal value)
- Lobbying expenditures—\$20,000 (median value)
- Campaign contributions—\$0 (median value)¹⁴
- Partisan alignment—Independent (chosen so as to show the effect of non-partisanship)
- Self-lobbying—0 (modal value)
- Issue area—1 for Budget, 0 for all other binary indicators (i.e., Budget is the modal issue reported)

Alternative Model Specifications

To demonstrate the robustness of my results to alternative measurement perspectives and modeling choices, I conduct a series of alternative analyses presented on the following pages.

First, as discussed in Section B of the Supplemental Information, I re-estimate the models used to evaluate my empirical expectations in the main paper with measures of engagement which allow for higher string matching tolerance thresholds. I present these alternative models for the Clinton and Obama administrations in Tables SI.9 and SI.10. The results suggest that all inferences reported in the main paper persist when the creation of the presidential engagement measure allows

¹⁴The median values of campaign contributions indicated in the figures are median values *conditional on* making any campaign contributions; unconditional on contribution behavior, the median value for campaign contributions is \$0.

for matches of 1 edit distance, and that most of the effects continue to persist as the tolerance threshold for string matching increases to 2 and 3 edits.

Second, because presidents can engage with interests multiple times in the same period, I re-estimate my main models as negative binomial models measuring presidential engagement as a count variable. The results from these models, presented in Table SI.11, are substantively similar to those presented in the main models.

Third, given the coarseness of my measure of industry-level partisan alignment, I leverage two types of interest-level preferences measures—CFscores (Bonica 2013) and IGscores (Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020)—to investigate whether my results hold with more granular measures of interests’ preferences. While these measures provide ideology scores for each interest (negative values indicating liberalism, positive values indicating conservatism), they have some limitations. First, these measures provide scores for only approximately 10% of the interests in my analyses. Second, the subset of interests that have scores is not unique, such that sample selection may yield inferences that do not generalize to the full population of interests. For instance, because CFscores are generated using interests’ campaign contributions, only interests that make campaign contributions have ideology scores. Again, only interests who take public positions on congressional bills and whose positions are recorded by Maplight¹⁵ have IGscores. Thus, we might imagine that interests who partake in these types of activities have distinct characteristics from interests who do not, such as broader membership bases from which they can raise campaign funds and who they demonstrate their political action through public bill position-taking.

In Table SI.12, I present the alternative specifications that use these preference measures rather than my trichotomous indicator of partisan alignment. The results from these alternative specifications are substantively similar to those presented in the main paper.

¹⁵Maplight, <https://maplight.org/>.

Table SI.8: Main Paper Models

	Clinton WH	Obama WH
Intercept	-1.53* [-2.12; -0.99]	-2.94* [-3.11; -2.77]
Any Visits _{t-1}	1.30* [1.22; 1.38]	0.81* [0.79; 0.83]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) _{t-1}	0.06* [0.05; 0.06]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-4$	-1.20* [-1.81; -0.57]	
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-4$: log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to $t-4$)	0.14* [0.08; 0.19]	
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-8$		-1.04* [-1.36; -0.72]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-8$: log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to $t-8$)		0.12* [0.10; 0.15]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.24* [-0.45; -0.04]	-0.22* [-0.46; -0.00]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.23* [-0.39; -0.06]	-0.26* [-0.44; -0.09]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.03	1.47
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.21	0.28
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.55	0.19
Num. interests	9484	24009
Num. industries	92	92
Num. time periods	5	27
Num. obs.	31673	306766

This table provides the summaries of the models used to generate the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement during the Clinton and Obama administrations presented in the main text. The cell entry for each covariate presents the posterior mean and 95% credible interval from the Bayesian multilevel logistic regression model using data from the presidency indicated by the column heading. Coefficients denoted with * are those whose 95% credible intervals do not include zero. The models are fitted with the R package `brms`, which interfaces with `exttttrstan` to perform estimation using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm in Stan. Each model is fitted with 4 chains for 2000 iterations per chain (1000 iterations for warm-up, 1000 iterations for sampling). The table omits the following observation-level control variables: whether an organized interest employs lobbyists of its own and whether an organized interest indicates lobbying on each of 80 issues on its LDA filing in the previous time period.

Table SI.9: Clinton Administration Model with Different String Matching Tolerance Thresholds

	≤ 1 Edit	≤ 2 Edits	≤ 3 Edits
Intercept	-1.27* [-1.81; -0.76]	-1.00* [-1.48; -0.45]	-1.38* [-2.16; -0.63]
Any Visits _{t-1}	1.25* [1.16; 1.33]	1.78* [1.69; 1.87]	2.35* [2.22; 2.48]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) _{t-1}	0.06* [0.05; 0.07]	0.05* [0.04; 0.06]	0.05* [0.04; 0.06]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1 to t-4}	-0.90* [-1.53; -0.26]	-0.11 [-0.81; 0.60]	0.60 [-0.42; 1.64]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1 to t-4} : log(Contribution Amount _{t-1 to t-4})	0.11* [0.05; 0.17]	0.03 [-0.04; 0.10]	-0.05 [-0.15; 0.05]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.21 [-0.43; 0.00]	-0.21 [-0.42; 0.01]	-0.07 [-0.37; 0.23]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.23* [-0.40; -0.07]	-0.24* [-0.42; -0.05]	-0.12 [-0.35; 0.12]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.08	1.05	1.21
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.22	0.23	0.31
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.48	0.47	0.70
Num. interests	9484	9484	9484
Num. industries	92	92	92
Num. time periods	5	5	5
Num. obs.	31673	31673	31673

The cell entry for each covariate presents the posterior mean and 95% credible interval from the Bayesian multilevel logistic regression model using data from the Clinton presidency with the strong matching tolerance threshold indicated by the column heading. Coefficients denoted with * are those whose 95% credible intervals do not include zero. The models are fitted with the R package **brms**, which interfaces with **extttrstan** to perform estimation using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm in Stan. Each model is fitted with 4 chains for 2000 iterations per chain (1000 iterations for warm-up, 1000 iterations for sampling). The table omits the following observation-level control variables: whether an organized interest employs lobbyists of its own and whether an organized interest indicates lobbying on each of 80 issues on its LDA filing in the previous time period.

Table SI.10: Obama Administration Model with Different String Matching Tolerance Thresholds

	≤ 1 Edit	≤ 2 Edits	≤ 3 Edits
Intercept	-2.65* [-2.80; -2.49]	-2.15* [-2.31; -1.99]	-1.91* [-2.10; -1.72]
Any Visits _{t-1}	0.84* [0.81; 0.86]	1.15* [1.13; 1.18]	1.54* [1.51; 1.58]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) _{t-1}	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]	0.09* [0.09; 0.10]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1 to t-8}	-1.04* [-1.35; -0.73]	-1.13* [-1.50; -0.77]	-0.48 [-1.02; 0.09]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1 to t-8} : log(Contribution Amount _{t-1 to t-8})	0.13* [0.10; 0.16]	0.14* [0.10; 0.17]	0.07* [0.02; 0.12]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.19 [-0.41; 0.02]	-0.11 [-0.32; 0.09]	-0.19 [-0.44; 0.05]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.20* [-0.36; -0.04]	-0.06 [-0.22; 0.09]	-0.09 [-0.29; 0.11]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.46	1.70	2.12
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.26	0.23	0.28
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.21	0.24	0.26
Num. interests	24009	24009	24009
Num. industries	92	92	92
Num. time periods	27	27	27
Num. obs.	306766	306766	306766

The cell entry for each covariate presents the posterior mean and 95% credible interval from the Bayesian multilevel logistic regression model using data from the Obama presidency with the strong matching tolerance threshold indicated by the column heading. Coefficients denoted with * are those whose 95% credible intervals do not include zero. The models are fitted with the R package **brms**, which interfaces with **extttrstan** to perform estimation using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm in Stan. Each model is fitted with 4 chains for 2000 iterations per chain (1000 iterations for warm-up, 1000 iterations for sampling). The table omits the following observation-level control variables: whether an organized interest employs lobbyists of its own and whether an organized interest indicates lobbying on each of 80 issues on its LDA filing in the previous time period.

Table SI.11: Main Paper Models with Count Outcomes

	Clinton	Obama
Intercept	-0.77* [-1.21; -0.36]	-2.31* [-2.45; -2.16]
Any Visits _{t-1}	0.01* [0.01; 0.01]	0.07* [0.07; 0.08]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) _{t-1}	0.05* [0.05; 0.06]	0.08* [0.07; 0.08]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-4$	-1.25* [-1.68; -0.80]	
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-4$: log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to $t-4$)	0.15* [0.10; 0.19]	
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-8$		-0.54* [-0.74; -0.35]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to $t-8$: log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to $t-8$)		0.07* [0.05; 0.09]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.21* [-0.42; -0.00]	-0.27* [-0.47; -0.08]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.20* [-0.36; -0.03]	-0.30* [-0.46; -0.14]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.38	1.48
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.24	0.26
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.39	0.15
Num. interests	9484	24009
Num. industries	92	92
Num. time periods	5	27
Num. obs.	31673	306766

This table provides the summaries of models analogous to those used to generate the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement during the Clinton and Obama administrations presented in the main text, but which use counts of the number of times presidents engage with each interest in the specified time period rather than a binary indicator of engagement. The cell entry for each covariate presents the posterior mean and 95% credible interval from the Bayesian multilevel negative binomial regression model using data from the presidency indicated by the column heading. Coefficients denoted with * are those whose 95% credible intervals do not include zero. The models are fitted with the R package `brms`, which interfaces with `exttrstan` to perform estimation using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm in Stan. Each model is fitted with 4 chains for 2000 iterations per chain (1000 iterations for warm-up, 1000 iterations for sampling). The table omits the following observation-level control variables: whether an organized interest employs lobbyists of its own and whether an organized interest indicates lobbying on each of 80 issues on its LDA filing in the previous time period.

Table SI.12: Main Paper Models with Alternative Preference Measures

	Clinton	Clinton	Obama	Obama
Intercept	-1.57*	-1.47*	-3.57*	-2.34*
	[-2.21; -0.91]	[-2.00; -0.95]	[-3.97; -3.18]	[-2.58; -2.09]
Any Visits _{t-1}	0.96*	0.58*	0.86*	0.74*
	[0.65; 1.27]	[0.28; 0.86]	[0.78; 0.93]	[0.68; 0.81]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) _{t-1}	0.12*	0.10*	0.20*	0.10*
	[0.08; 0.16]	[0.06; 0.13]	[0.18; 0.23]	[0.09; 0.12]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to _{t-4}	-1.19	-2.11*		
	[-2.57; 0.08]	[-3.58; -0.65]		
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to _{t-4} : log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to _{t-4})	0.11	0.22*		
	[-0.00; 0.23]	[0.09; 0.35]		
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to _{t-8}			-2.02*	-1.85*
			[-2.60; -1.44]	[-2.44; -1.23]
Made Natl Contributions _{t-1} to _{t-8} : log(Contribution Amount _{t-1} to _{t-8})			0.18*	0.20*
			[0.13; 0.23]	[0.15; 0.25]
CFscore	-0.66*		-0.53*	
	[-1.21; -0.14]		[-0.79; -0.27]	
IGscore		-0.36*		-0.36*
		[-0.60; -0.12]		[-0.48; -0.23]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.66	1.72	1.41	1.40
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.71	0.47	0.49	0.53
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.37	0.33	0.22	0.21
Num. interests	865	937	1229	1492
Num. industries	81	87	82	87
Num. time periods	5	5	27	27
Num. obs.	3697	4122	27636	34271

This table provides the summaries of models analogous to those used to generate the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement during the Clinton and Obama administrations presented in the main text, but which use alternative measures of organized interests' preferences. The cell entry for each covariate presents the posterior mean and 95% credible interval from the Bayesian multilevel logistic regression model using data from the presidency indicated by the column heading. Coefficients denoted with * are those whose 95% credible intervals do not include zero. The models are fitted with the R package **brms**, which interfaces with **exttrstan** to perform estimation using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm in Stan. Each model is fitted with 4 chains for 2000 iterations per chain (1000 iterations for warm-up, 1000 iterations for sampling). The table omits the following observation-level control variables: whether an organized interest employs lobbyists of its own and whether an organized interest indicates lobbying on each of 80 issues on its LDA filing in the previous time period.

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