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How Do Interest Groups Seek Access to Committees?

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Abstract: *Concerns that interest groups use their financial resources to distort the democratic process are long-standing. Surprisingly, though, firms spend little money on political campaigns, and roughly 95% of publicly traded firms in the United States have never contributed to a political campaign. Do interest groups seek political access through their modest contributions, or are these contributions only a minor and forgettable part of the political process? In this article, we present comprehensive evidence that interest groups are extremely sophisticated in the way they make campaign contributions. We collect a new data set on U.S. state legislative committee assignments and legislator procedural powers from 1988 to 2014, merged with campaign finance data, in order to analyze over 440,000 candidate–committee observations across 99 legislatures. Using a series of difference-in-differences designs based on changes in individual legislators' positions in the legislature, we not only show that interest groups seek out committee members, but we also show that they value what we call indirect access. When a legislator gains procedural powers, interest groups reallocate considerable amounts of money to her. The results reveal how interest groups in a wide range of democratic settings seek to influence the policy process not only by seeking direct access to policy makers but by seeking indirect access to legislative procedure as well.*

Replication Materials: The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PGCVDP.

Academics, pundits, and politicians alike have long considered how interest groups might use their financial resources in an attempt to influence the political process. Despite how politically salient these concerns about campaign finance are, the overall amounts of money that interest groups donate are surprisingly modest. As a fraction of their operating budgets, U.S. corporations donate remarkably small amounts of money to politics, and roughly 95% of publicly traded firms in America have never made a contribution to any candidate in any campaign.[1] These facts suggest to some that interest groups contribute to campaigns mainly for consumption value. Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder (2003), for example, speculate that one reason firms might give is for the enjoyment of their executives.[2] On the other hand, a large and growing empirical literature in political science examines precisely how interest groups distribute their relatively modest campaign funds, finding that they donate in an access-seeking manner—that is, they contribute directly to officeholders who may be useful to them (e.g., Ansolabehere and Snyder 1998; Barber 2016; Fouirnaies and Hall 2014; Grimmer and Powell 2016;

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[1]These claims are based on the authors' own calculation. We merged the full data set of campaign contributions with a data set on all publicly traded firms. After careful cleaning of company names in the two data sets, roughly 5% of publicly traded firms are found in the contribution data.

[2]The authors write: "PAC contributions are solicited at events attended by prominent national politicians—people of celebrity status. Organizations' executives and managers may value being part of the Washington establishment" (127).

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Romer and Snyder 1994; Snyder 1992). Given this seeming paradox, exactly how strategic are interest groups when they contribute to political candidates?

In this article, we present new evidence that firms are highly strategic—probably even more so than previous literature has suggested. Specifically, we offer a new data set on over 440,000 committee assignments and campaign contribution portfolios in all 99 U.S. state legislatures over the past three decades. Using this dataset and a series of difference-in-differences designs based on individual legislators switching into and out of committee roles, we first show that interest groups seek out the committees with policy jurisdiction over their business interests. Moreover, the industries that seek the most access to state legislative committees appear to be those most affected by state rather than federal policy decisions.

Perhaps more importantly, we use these patterns to develop and test a theory of what we call indirect access. We argue that, if policy relevance in the form of committee membership is valuable to interest groups, and if interest groups are strategic actors, then they should also seek access to those in the legislature imbued with procedural power, including the power to make committee assignments. Consistent with this argument, we establish that *interest groups seek out members of the legislature with the power to make committee assignments*—that is, they not only pursue their policy interests directly, but they also seek access to those who can *indirectly* affect policy by means of legislative procedure. These results show just how sophisticated firms are in determining whom to support financially, which in turn implies significant human capital investments in understanding politics. Firms seem to find such activity to be economically valuable to them.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. In the next section, we review the literature on interest-group access and draw a distinction between direct access—which most previous literature is focused on—and indirect access, that is, access to legislators with procedural power. Subsequently, we describe the new data set we have collected to study the links between interest groups and legislative committees in the U.S. states, 1988–2014. Following that, we present empirical analyses of the effects of committee memberships on interest-group contributions. Because these analyses show that interest groups care about committee membership, this prompts an analysis of whether these same groups strategically seek to influence the committee assignment process itself. Accordingly, we turn to analyses of how interest-group donors value legislators who possess the power to make committee assignments. Finally, we conclude by discussing what our findings imply for our understanding of interest-group influence in the democratic process, and we argue that more research should take advantage of the U.S. states to develop and test ideas about legislative politics more generally.

Theoretical Overview: Direct vs. Indirect Access

Why do interest groups donate to political candidates at all, when the amounts they give are relatively small? In response to this seeming paradox, political scientists have developed more nuanced theories in which interest groups seek access to—rather than explicit quid pro quo exchanges from—legislators (Hall and Wayman 1990; Snyder 1992). In this view, "contributors must develop a relationship of mutual trust and respect with officeholders in order to receive tangible rewards for contributions" (Snyder 1992, 17).[3] They develop this relationship through sustained conversations and relationships, maintained by repeated political support and contributions, even if the size of these contributions is modest.[4] A number of empirical papers, focused on interest-group campaign contribution activity, find that interest-group behavior accords with this access hypothesis (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014; Grimmer and Powell 2016; Romer and Snyder 1994).[5] Romer and Snyder (1994), Grimmer and

[3]Do these contributions lead to access? A novel experiment presented in Kalla and Broockman (2016) suggests that they do. The authors show that interest groups who disclose to members of Congress that they are donors are more likely to receive a meeting with the members of Congress. Also consistent with this idea, though separate from the empirical approach taken in this article, studies indicate that the stock market appears to value firms that are connected to incumbents (Gaikwad 2013; Goldman, Rocholl, and So 2009).

[4]This relationship building is not the only strategy that groups can employ. For example, as Smith (2015) argues, groups can also pursue an "outside" strategy in which they mobilize voters directly.

[5]Although lobbying and direct effort subsidies (e.g., through drafting bills) are obviously important, and possibly more important than direct contributions to candidates, campaign contributions have several advantages for studying interest-group access. First, they are readily quantifiable, and, since reporting standards have been consistent and strict in recent decades, a long time series is now available. Second, because contributions are denominated in dollars, researchers can readily compare them across time and contexts in a cardinal manner. Third, because contributions are costly, they credibly reveal the underlying preferences of interest-group donors. Finally, contribution strategies appear to be highly correlated with other aspects of interest-groups' political strategies. Smith (2015), for example, reports that, for every group in the article's sample during the 2013 session of the Missouri legislature, "every interest group who made PAC contributions and supported one of the bills . . . also employed a lobbyist, and nearly all groups who do not make PAC contributions do not hire paid lobbyists"

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Powell (2016), and Berry and Fowler (2016b) all examine how committee membership affects an individual legislator's portfolio of campaign receipts, showing strong evidence that, at the federal level, political action committees (PACs) respond strategically to committee memberships—that is, interest groups direct money to legislators who join committees whose policy jurisdictions are relevant to the interest groups' businesses.[6]

In the first set of empirical analyses in our article, we extend these existing results on access-seeking behavior, widening the context in which the analyses are performed, increasing the sample size dramatically, and inspecting a larger variety of committee types. We continue to find the same strategic patterns of behavior. Interest groups clearly seek out members of committees whose jurisdictions pertain to their economic interests.[7] We realize that some will say these results are little more than a replication of results already found at the federal level, but we think they are important nonetheless. Recently, political scientists and other academics have begun to realize that little or no knowledge about politics accumulates in the academic record without efforts to replicate and to extend prior studies. Replicating existing findings in new contexts is the gold standard of scientific replication. That we find the same patterns of direct access behavior at the state level as previous scholars have at the federal level suggests that we have identified an underlying regularity in the way that interest groups interact with the political system.

Despite its consistent presence, direct access is only one possible strategy for interest-group donors. Legislative policy is not set only through jurisdiction-specific committees. As the Krehbiel (1992) idea of remote majoritarianism makes especially clear, choices over legislative procedure are themselves choices over policy since procedural choices map to choices over policies. As a consequence, the identities of those assigned to particular committees may matter. If committees provide interest groups with valuable access, then sophisticated interest groups should also seek *indirect* access to the individuals charged with making committee assignments in the legislature.[8] Interest groups may value this indirect access in several ways. If there is a set of legislators who are allied to a given interest group, and if committee service would offer these legislators the chance to influence policy in a manner favorable to the interest group, then ensuring that these allies obtain the proper committee assignments is of obvious value. In addition, if there are particular legislators *opposed* to a given interest group, preventing these members from sitting on relevant committees could be of equal or greater value too.

There are several reasons to believe that this indirect access might be as valuable as, or even more valuable than, direct access. For one thing, the power to assign committees is typically concentrated in a single individual to whom interest groups can donate, whereas each committee contains many members.[9] Second, and perhaps more importantly, influence over relevant policy committees is more obvious and more observable—and thus, possibly more politically risky for both donating groups and for politicians themselves—whereas influence over committee assignments is more abstruse and less obvious to voters outside the legislature.

Our intuitions about the value of indirect access also come from conversations with a variety of politicians and interest-group actors. One former U.S. state legislator, in particular, told us that it was a well-known fact in his legislature that becoming the president pro tempore—the person in charge of committee assignments in his legislature—was a sure path to collecting easy money from donors. Another former state legislator echoed these ideas, stressing how sophisticated and well-informed interest group donors tended to be in his experience, often learning details of the legislative process before he did.

(2). Thus, the patterns of donations are likely to be an observable proxy for a broader suite of interest-group influence strategies.

[6]We will examine the specific differences between our empirical approach and these papers' in the empirical section below.

[7]Barber, Canes-Wrone, and Thrower (2016) present novel evidence that this effect of committee "match" might extend to individual donors with clear occupational interests as well. Moreover, an examination of corporate executive donation behavior suggests that they, too, donate strategically for access (Gordon, Hafer, and Landa 2007).

[8]This logic only accords partially with the idea of remote majoritarianism. It is consistent in its focus on procedure as a clear extension of policy. However, in a truly majoritarian legislature, the de jure authority to make committee assignments should be meaningless because the median legislator should always hold the true power. If the committee assigner offers a slate of committee assignments contrary to the preferences of the median, a majority-rule vote should overrule the assigner's proposal. We suspect that this level of median control is beyond the power of normal, operating legislatures. Scarce plenary time necessitates delegation (Cox and McCubbins 2011), and the legislature may not be able to afford spending the calendar time to reconsider committee assignments on a regular basis (e.g., Palmer 2014). Although majoritarian rules may constrain the committee assigner to some degree, we suspect there is room for discretion—this room for discretion is, in turn, what may make the committee assigner an attractive target for interest groups.

[9]This is not an unambiguous prediction, however. If interest groups compete with one another over conflicting policy goals, then the price of access to a single individual might rise in response to this demand. On net, access to a single individual might therefore end up being more or less beneficial for groups in equilibrium.

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These anecdotes also accord with even a casual reading of the local news about legislative politics; every year, a bevy of articles pores over the committee assignment process, focusing on which legislators obtain which positions and why.[10] Voters are unlikely to scrutinize these dry articles, but those involved in politics surely do.

On the academic side, we are not the first to propose the idea that interest-group money can indicate the more subtle ways in which particular legislative institutions may be influential. Ansolabehere and Snyder (1998), in particular, argue that interest-group money can reveal a broad range of powerful actors in the legislature. However, we are able to improve on previous work concerning indirect access in an important way. Considering total contributions to a variety of legislative positions may indicate whether these positions are powerful or not, but it may also indicate the selection of high-quality, high-fundraising individuals for these positions. We need variation in who holds what positions in order to tease out the power of the position from these preexisting characteristics of the legislators who obtain the position. This is not possible at the federal level, in most cases, because there are so few positions and they are held for so long by the same individuals. Focusing on the state legislatures not only boosts our sample size and extends the study of access seeking to another important democratic context, but it also allows us to study indirect access in a cleanly identified manner not possible at the federal level.

Having motivated our study and our focus on state legislatures, we now discuss the new data we have collected in order to make the inquiry possible.

New Data on State Legislative Committees, 1988–2014

In order to study how interest groups seek access to legislative committees—and for a variety of related questions—we collected a new, comprehensive data set on committee assignments in the state legislatures using primary sources. The data set contains information on the members of all standing and joint committees in all of the 99 legislative chambers during the period 1988–2014. Our primary source is the quarterly *State Yellow Book*, covering the legislative sessions from 1988 to 2014 (Leadership Directories 2014). We supplement the information in these volumes with official minutes and records of proceedings obtained from the archives of the state legislatures.

On the basis of these sources, we first make a complete list of all legislators in a given session, and for each legislator we construct a vector where each element records the name of a standing or joint legislative committee on which the legislator served during the session in question. Then, on the basis of surname, party, and district, we match each legislator in the list to the unique candidate identifier in Klarner et. al.'s (2013) data set on legislative elections. Finally, we merge this dataset with the detailed state-level contribution data from Follow The Money . This approach allows us to track within-legislator variation in committee assignments and map them to electoral and campaign finance activity, and it will allow other scholars to explore the data with ease in the future. Table A.1 in the supporting information (SI) shows how the number of observations and level of industry donations vary across states.

For the purpose of this article, we need to make meaningful mappings between legislative committees and the donating firms and interest groups that operate within the purview of a given committee. Ideally, all state legislatures would apply the same naming conventions and use the same committee jurisdictions so that we could compute the effect of, for example, serving on the banking committee on contributions from the banking sector across states. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, the names and jurisdictions of committees vary widely across states and over time. Accordingly, we link donors and issue-specific committees across states and time by constructing a set of flexible search criteria for committee names based on the standardized donor industry codings provided in the Follow The Money data set.

Based on our reading of the detailed descriptions of committee jurisdictions for the 2010–12 session, we produced a list of sector-relevant word stems that often appear in the name of committees with policy relevance for a given sector. We then searched through the vector of committees for each legislator in order to determine whether the legislator is a member of a given sector-relevant committee. Table 1 outlines the mappings between interest-group sectors and committee name word stems.[11] The last two columns in the table show the percent of state-years in which we observe an issue-relevant committee; as the numbers indicate, we tend to find relevant committees in most cases. We should note that we do not expect to match committees in 100% of cases since not all legislatures have committees on all topics. To the

[10]For recent examples in the California state legislative context, see http://www.calnewsroom.com/2014/12/19/did-speaker-toni-atkins-assign-juice-committees-alphabetically-achadjian-bonilla-get-best-assignments/.

[11]In the SI, we list all the committee names that are matched to each of the 10 industry categories.

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TABLE 1 Linking Interest Groups to Committees by Issue Area

Interest-Group Sector	Committee Name Word Stems	House % State-Years	Senate % State-Years
Agriculture	agri; food; forest; livestock; fish; farm; ranch; rural	93.1	85.3
Banking	bank; finan	75.6	84.7
Business	commerce; busine; industry	94.1	86.8
Construction	construc; infrastru; hous; mainten; build	59.8	32.0
Defense	defe; armed; veteran; milit; homeland; border	67.4	53.8
Education	educ; school; universi; child; youth	99.6	98.3
Energy	energy; resources; oil; gas; renewab; coal; nuclea; utiliti; electric; mining	97.0	93.3
Health	health; hospi; medi	92.2	91.8
Insurance	insur	58.2	53.8
Transportation	transpor; highway; road	93.4	95.2

Note: We link sectors identified in the campaign finance data to issue-specific legislative committees by searching for sector-relevant word stems in the committee names.

extent we have missed relevant committees, however, the resulting measurement error should only bias the estimates downward, away from finding evidence for direct access.

Committee Membership Increases Contributions from Relevant Groups

We begin by estimating the effects of committee membership on donations from interest groups with a business interest connected to the jurisdiction of the committee. A simple tabulation of interest-group donations across committees is insufficient to discern whether these interest groups actually value committees themselves. This is because of clear issues of selection and omitted variables. For example, a legislator who cares about a particular issue of relevance to a given interest group may select onto the relevant committee; in the counterfactual world where this legislator did not sit on the relevant committee, the interest group might still want to contribute to her. A pooled comparison of interest-group contributions to relevant committees will conflate these types of selection with real differences driven by committee service per se.

To address these issues, we employ a difference-in-differences design in which we investigate the change in receipts from interest groups after a member switches onto a given committee. In so doing, we follow a series of empirical papers that study the effects of committees. This literature includes Romer and Snyder (1994) and Knight (2005). Most recently, Berry and Fowler (2016a) use an almost identical difference-in-differences design in the U.S. House to explore the effects of committee service on the provision of pork at the district level. Grimmer and Powell (2016) pursue a similar strategy in the U.S. House, but they focus specifically on cases of committee exile. While the more general difference-in-differences approaches in our article and the other papers cited above simply compare all individuals who switch onto or off of committees, the Grimmer and Powell (2016) approach zooms in on legislators who are kicked off of committees because of changes in committee size and proportions determined by electoral turnover. The advantage to this approach is that it isolates a particular source of variation in committee membership outside of the strategic control of the legislators themselves. While we cannot pursue this specific strategy at the state level, because we do not have the information on committee allocation rules across all states and years, we are able to validate the more general difference-in-differences design and show that its key identifying assumption is highly plausible for our sample.

The key value of the difference-in-differences design for our purpose is that it removes any time-invariant attributes of legislators that correlate with campaign receipts from particular interest groups. This avoids conflating a legislator's overall propensity to gain contributions from a given interest group with the actual effects of joining the relevant committee. In addition, by comparing the change in a "treated" legislator's receipts before and after joining the committee to the same trend among "control" legislators who do not change committee memberships over the same time period, the design also addresses the possibility that there is a trend in the propensity for certain interest groups to donate to legislators.

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The difference-in-differences design is not without assumptions, naturally. For the design to be valid, legislators who switch onto committees of interest must not be trending differently from comparison legislators; that is, had these legislators not switched onto these committees, the over-time change in their campaign receipts needs to be the same as the change we observe for the control legislators. The previous work cited above—in particular, Romer and Snyder (1994), Knight (2005), Berry and Fowler (2016a), and Berry and Fowler (2016b)—supports the validity of this assumption. More importantly, we validate it directly for our sample in several ways below.

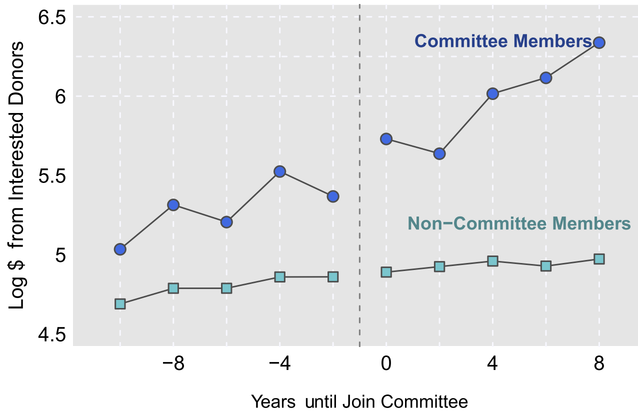
Under the parallel trends assumption, the difference-in-differences design isolates the causal effects of joining a committee on various kinds of interest-group contributions. Whether such effects represent the pure value of "access" is not quite clear. As Grimmer and Powell (2016, 12) point out, "when legislators are appointed to high-profile committees they not only gain the ability to exert broad influence on legislation, they also signal to PACs that the legislator is an effective and respected member of Congress." It is possible that the overall difference-in-differences estimates on overall interest-group money partially capture this signal effect, in addition to the pure access effect. This is one reason why we focus on contributions from matched interest groups—that is, on contributions only from the interest groups whose business sectors link them to a given committee's jurisdiction. These jurisdiction-specific effects are unlikely to include this sort of overall information-signaling value, and they are therefore likely to reflect the value of access.

Graphical Evidence for Direct Access Seeking

First, we investigate graphical evidence both for the effect of committee membership and for the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption. Figure 1 presents a simplified version of the regressions we will subsequently run. The graph considers contributions from "interested" interest groups to legislators that will serve on relevant committees—that is, it considers donations between interest groups and the committees that oversee the relevant issue areas in the legislature.

The first time series, in dark blue circles, presents these contributions to legislators who will go on to serve on the relevant committees. That is, starting at time 0 on the horizontal axis, these are legislators who have joined the committees of interest to interest-group donors (we pool over the different committees and their matched donors for the purpose of the graph; below, we disaggregate the effects by industry). To maintain comparability, after time 0, this time series only includes members who remain on the committee. This selection is necessary to make the plot. However, we would not want to apply any such posttreatment selection for a formal analysis; the regressions below make no such sample restriction.

FIGURE 1 Effect of Committee Membership on Contributions from Interested Donors



Note: The dark blue line (with circular points) plots contributions from interest-group donors to members of committees relevant to their industry, before and after each member joins the relevant committee. The light blue line (with square points) plots the contributions for the same interest-group industry for nonmembers.

The second time series, the light blue squares, presents the same contributions over the same time period for legislators who never serve on these committees but who are in the same state as the treated legislators. We construct an index of average contributions from the same set of donors to this alternate set of legislators, which we then average by year and pair with the treated observations, allowing us to rescale the graph in terms of time until "treatment" for the treatment group.[12]

The resulting graph suggests several important conclusions. First of all, legislators who will go on to serve on relevant committees are already receiving significantly higher amounts of money from interested groups before they join the committee. This is consistent with evidence presented at the House level in Berry and Fowler (2016a); clearly, there is selection into service on these committees. This selection is why the difference-in-differences design is important. A pooled, cross-sectional comparison of campaign receipts to committee members versus

[12]Because of the complicated manner in which this control set is generated, we do not attempt to place standard errors around the plot's lines. The regressions below, however, make it clear that they are very precisely estimated.

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other legislators would pick up the effects of committee membership, but it would also pick up significant preexisting differences between future committee members—who already raise considerable sums from the relevant donor groups—and legislators who will never serve on the relevant committees.

Moreover, this selection effect is also a main reason why we might expect indirect access to be valuable to groups. The fact that these members already raise extra money from relevant donors suggests that groups are aware that some members are more sympathetic to their causes than other members. By influencing the committee assignment process, groups may be able to direct these members to the relevant committees.

Second, there is clear evidence for a large effect of committee service on receipts from interested donors, even after accounting for the selection into committee service. There is a pronounced increase in contributions for members who join these committees, and no such increase is seen for the control legislators. This suggests that committee membership exerts its own effect on the donations of interested groups, separate from the selection of interested members onto these committees. The increase in donations downstream is also consistent with the finding that firms operating within the purview of a given committee target the chair of that committee more than other committees (Fouirnaies 2017).

Finally, the graph shows no evidence of any pretreatment trending for treated legislators. Although legislators who go on to join these committees have higher levels of contributions before they join, the over-time trend looks extremely similar between the two groups. This suggests that the parallel trends assumption is valid and gives plausibility to the design. We will probe the validity of the design in other ways after we present the formal regression results below. We turn now to these formal estimates.

Regression Results for Direct Access Seeking

First, we estimate the overall average effect of committee membership on contributions from relevant interest groups. For this purpose, after matching interest groups to relevant committees, we combine all the different interest group and committee pairs in a single analysis. After presenting these overall results, we will then estimate effects by industry.

Formally, we estimate difference-in-differences equations of the form

$$\log \textit{Donations from Interested Donors}_{ijt} = \beta_1 1\{\textit{On Committee } j\}_{it} + \gamma_{ij} + \delta_{it} + \epsilon_{ijt}, \quad (1)$$

TABLE 2 Effect of Committee Membership on Contributions from Interested Donors

	Log Group Contributions ($)		
On Committee	1.27	0.27	0.28
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Candidate × Industry FEs	No	Yes	Yes
Majority-Party Dummy	No	Yes	No
Party × Year FEs	No	Yes	No
Candidate × Year FEs	No	No	Yes
N	443,490	443,490	443,490

Note: FEs = fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate in parentheses.

where the outcome variable measures logged total contributions to incumbent i in election cycle t from interest-group donors whose industry places them in the jurisdiction of committee j. The variables γ_{it} and δ_{it} stand in for a variety of fixed effects, including Candidate × Industry fixed effects and some form of year fixed effects. In order to account for the possibility that becoming a member of the majority party might simultaneously get a member onto a committee and also boost donations, we sometimes use Party × Year fixed effects so that trends in donations are only compared to those for other members of the same party, thus holding majority party constant. The quantity of interest is β_1, which measures the average effect of incumbent i holding a committee position on contributions from interest-group donors in related industries.

Table 2 presents the estimated results. The first column presents a "naive" specification in which we pool all the data, including no individual or time fixed effects. Here we see that, on average, members of committees receive far more contributions from interest-group donors in industries related to committees' jurisdictions. But this estimate is clearly biased upward for the selection reasons discussed above.

The second column reflects the difference-in-differences estimate that addresses this source of selection, as in Figure 1. Here, we include Candidate × Industry dummies as well as Party × Year dummies. Hence, the resulting estimate is computed by comparing changes in the amount of money a candidate receives within a given industry before and after joining the relevant committee to the same types of within-industry, within-career changes for copartisan legislators who do not join the committee. Here we see a large, positive effect. Joining the committee appears to cause roughly a 27% increase in the amount of contributions from interest groups whose business interests correspond to the committee's policy jurisdiction.

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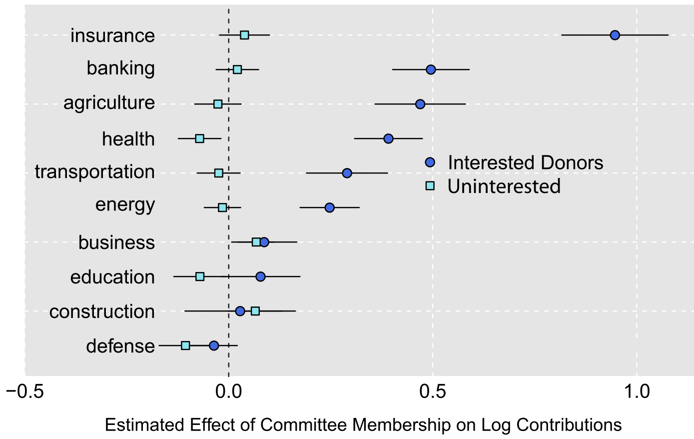
FIGURE 2 Effect of Committee Membership on Donations from Interest-Group Donors



Note: When they join new committees, legislators see a large increase in contributions from interest groups in industries related to the committee's jurisdiction (dark blue circles); no such increases are seen for donors in unrelated industries (light blue squares).

The final column shows the robustness of this estimate to specification. Here, we perform a similar difference-in-differences, but we use Candidate × Year fixed effects instead of Party × Year fixed effects so that we are comparing a candidate's donations within the interested industry to her donations from other industries (again, this holds majority-party status constant). We find a very similar point estimate using this alternative setup.[13] In all cases, joining a committee appears to cause a marked increase in contributions from relevant interest groups. This is consistent with the idea that interest groups seek direct access to legislators who wield influence in policy areas relevant to their business interests.

Effects Across Interest-Group Industries

Thus far, we have considered overall effects that pool across the different types of committees and interest-group industries. In this section, we disaggregate the estimates, computing separate difference-in-differences for each industry–committee pairing. Doing so provides further information on the potential motivations of interest groups. We find that direct access effects are particularly large for the policy areas in which state legislation has the most influence—a pattern that strongly suggests that interest groups seek direct access for policy reasons.

TABLE 3 Effects of Committee Membership on Contributions

	Estimate	SE	N
Overall	0.28	(0.01)	443,490
Insurance	0.95	(0.07)	44,349
Banking	0.50	(0.05)	44,349
Agriculture	0.47	(0.06)	44,349
Health	0.39	(0.04)	44,349
Transportation	0.29	(0.05)	44,349
Energy	0.25	(0.04)	44,349
Business	0.09	(0.04)	44,349
Education	0.08	(0.05)	44,349
Construction	0.03	(0.07)	44,349
Defense	−0.04	(0.03)	44,349

Figure 2 provides the results. The figure plots simple difference-in-differences estimates by industry, for both interested and uninterested donor groups, separately. The dark blue circular points are for interested donor groups; the light blue squares are for uninterested donor groups. Table 3 presents the formal estimates.

Focusing first on the dark blue point estimates, we see that there is a large, positive effect of joining relevant committees for interested donors in a large variety of industries. Insurance, banking, health, and agriculture are the industries that appear to value committees the most,

[13]Yet another possibility is to include Industry × Year fixed effects so that we compare a candidate's contribution changes to changes in the same industry's donations to other candidates. To preserve space, we do not report these results in the article, but they are extremely similar.

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on average. These large effects add further evidence that direct access seeking is specifically policy motivated; these are all policy areas in which the U.S. states have significant influence. In the state of California, for example, insurance, health, and banking are among the most important of the "juice" committees—so called because, according to journalists, they are "the legislative bodies that consider bills that directly affect the bottom lines of the most powerful special-interest groups."[14] As another article in the *Sacramento Bee* describes it, "insurance is generally seen as a desirable 'juice' committee providing access to campaign donors."[15] Naturally, we should be cautious in pushing this argument too far. Without a systematic way to measure which policy areas are more important at the state versus federal level, we can only attempt to read the tea leaves. While we have a strong sense that insurance, banking, and healthcare are all especially important at the state level, the small effect for education may be more surprising since states do play a large role in this policy area. Nonetheless, the overall pattern, and especially the large outlying effect for insurance, does suggest to us that interest groups are especially aggressive in more abstruse, state-level policy areas.

The non-effect for defense is also consistent with this idea. Defense is clearly a policy area in which interest groups may have more reason to seek access to the federal rather than the state government. Tellingly, the defense committee (formally, the Defense and Aerospace committee) is not considered to have "juice" in California.[16]

The light blue square point estimates can be thought of as a sort of placebo test where we evaluate whether donors value committees because of their specific policy jurisdictions. If committees are just generally valued, then uninterested donors—that is, interest groups not affiliated with the industries related to a particular committee's policy jurisdiction—should display effect sizes similar to those of interested donors. Instead, we see much smaller, typically zero, effects for uninterested donors. This points to the specific, policy-relevant value of committees. The gap between the estimates also provides a triple-difference estimate for the value of committee service. As we see, across almost all industries, there is a very large positive effect of committee membership on donations from interested groups and no effect on uninterested groups' donations.

In truth, this analysis has only scratched the surface of how the effects of committee membership vary across industries, across interest groups, and across states. In the SI, we offer a few more analyses on how effects vary across different types of state institutions, but there is much more work that could be done. The scale of the data is such that we cannot possibly present all of this variation in a single article in a principled way. We hope that future work will continue to investigate the variation in these effects, and the way they differ from those at the federal level, in more detail.

Effects for Top Committees

Thus far, we have explored policy-specific links between committees and interest groups. But some committees—often the most highly sought after—have jurisdictions broader than any particular industry. In particular, we might suspect a large swath of interest groups to care which legislators become members of appropriations, ways and means, and rules committees. The first two of these are top committees tasked, generally speaking, with coordinating fiscal and budgetary issues; the latter is a committee present in almost all legislatures that controls questions of legislative procedure. We should note, however, that the specific powers of these committees vary markedly across the states. Rules committees, in particular, possess widely different powers in different state legislatures. Nonetheless, to quote from the National Conference of State Legislature's overview of rules committees, "As the name implies, chamber rules often fall within the committee jurisdiction."[17] Generally speaking, estimating the effects of joining rules committees will give us insight into the value of procedural power, even if the precise procedural powers vary from state to state.

To estimate the effects of becoming a member of these top committees, we follow similar specifications as before, but we include all types of interest-group donations since there is no clear matching of any particular industries to these general-purpose committees. As a result, we no longer need Candidate × Industry fixed effects; instead, we use a variety of different fixed effects specifications that change the sets of observations used as

[14] See http://www.laweekly.com/news/worst-legislator-in-california-part-ii-2170841.

[15] See http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article4267094.html.

[16] Although precise definitions of "juice" committees vary, defense and education clearly do not rank. A recent listing of the juice committees includes the following committees: Appropriations; Banking and Finance; Business, Professionals, and Consumer Protection; Governmental Organization; Health; Insurance; Utilities and Commerce. See http://www.calnewsroom.com/2014/12/19/did-speaker-toni-atkins-assign-juice-committees-alphabetically-achadjian-bonilla-get-best-assignments/.

[17] See http://www.ncsl.org/documents/legismgt/ILP/97Tab4Pt4.pdf.

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TABLE 4 Value of Membership on Top Committees

	Log Group Contributions ($)		
Ways and Means/ Appropriations	0.001 (0.021)	0.003 (0.021)	0.013 (0.020)
Rules	0.271 (0.026)	0.275 (0.026)	0.244 (0.024)
N	44,349	44,349	44,349
Individual Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Majority-Party Dummy	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	No	Yes	No
Party-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	No	No
State-Chamber-Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes

Note: Interest groups place great value on members of committees with influence over the rules of the legislature. Robust standard errors clustered by legislators in parentheses.

controls for the difference-in-differences. These include simple year fixed effects, which compare trends across all legislators in all states; party-year fixed effects, which perform this comparison only within party to account for majority-party status; and state-chamber-year fixed effects, which perform this comparison only with legislative chambers.

Table 4 shows the results. Gaining membership to appropriations and ways and means appears to provide little increase in contributions (first row). This is consistent with the null findings presented in Berry and Fowler (2016a), although it may also be unrelated. That interest groups do not react to legislators' becoming members of these top committees may indicate that these committees convey no power to their members, as suggested for the federal case in Berry and Fowler (2016a); alternatively, it may only indicate that whatever power is conveyed is not of use to interest groups.

In contrast, becoming a member of the rules committee appears to be extremely important to interest groups. This indicates how strategic interest groups may be. The rules committee has no direct control over policy, but the decisions of the rules committee may nevertheless be important. In the U.S. House, we know that the rules that accompany a bill when it is considered on the floor are crucial. Whether a bill is considered with a closed versus open rule not only affects the content of the final bill and its likely outcome, but it also influences the decisions of committee members anticipating whether or not their bill will be edited on the floor (e.g., see Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987). As such, the rules committee may grant considerable procedural power—and therefore, indirect power over policy—to its members. In turn, it behooves interest groups to pay attention to who joins or vacates the rules committee.

In this section, we have explored the value of committee memberships to interest-group donors. Using a new data set on state legislative committee assignments, we have shown evidence that interest groups seek access to legislators who attain positions on committees that are relevant to their business interests. These findings are consistent with previous studies of interest groups and committees at the federal level, and they provide a clear picture of interest groups' seeking direct access to specific legislators. Going further, we have also shown preliminary evidence that groups are thinking strategically—in addition to seeking direct access to relevant legislators, they aggressively seek out members of the rules committee, one important form of procedural access.

Clearly, interest groups value committees. If interest groups are sophisticated, and if they put serious effort into the way they make campaign contributions, then the results in this section imply that they should also seek to influence the committee assignment process directly. We now turn to the topic of indirect access in greater detail.

How Interest Groups Seek Indirect Access to Committees

We have shown that interest groups seek direct access to legislators serving on committees relevant to their business interests. But do they also seek indirect access to legislators who affect the committee process? We now answer this question by investigating whether becoming the member of the legislature in charge of committee assignments causes an increase in contributions from interest-group donors.

The Committee Assignment Process: Data and Background

As the previous section has shown, committee membership matters. It is no logical leap to suspect, then, that who holds the power to make committee assignments matters too. Qualitative facts about the state legislative committee assignment process suggest that influencing it may be highly valuable to interest groups. Coverage of the committee assignment process clearly anticipates its value. For example, discussing the 2016 committee assignment process in California, the *Sacramento Bee* writes: "Depending upon the committee, the positions can boost a

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legislator's campaign account as special interest groups try to make nice with politicians to influence the outcome of bills."[18] Interest groups are surely aware of these ideas. Indeed, state legislators we have spoken to suggest that there is a frenzy of interest-group interest—and donations—centered on those in charge of the assignment process, up to the point when the assignments are announced. While typical voters are probably unaware of these assignments (generally, the assignment announcements are only quietly published in local newspapers, and then later posted on the legislature's website), interest groups seem to pay close attention to the process. Just to mention one arbitrarily chosen example, the Humane Society Legislative Fund lists "committee assignments" as one of its main political considerations when seeking to influence policy.[19]

A rich literature explores the process by which committee assignments are made at the federal level (e.g., Krehbiel 1990; Londregan and Snyder 1994; Shepsle 1978). In the state legislatures, a dazzling variety of assignment procedures come into play. We take advantage of this variation to explore the value committee assignment power holds for interest groups. In some states, the authority is delegated to a single legislator (e.g., the speaker of the house, the president or president pro tempore of the senate); in other states, a group of legislators are jointly responsible for assigning members to committees (e.g., decided in a joint process involving both the minority and majority leader, or delegated to a committee on committees or the rules committee); and in other states, committee membership is determined by seniority rule or decided in plenum. To study the assignment process, we compiled a data set describing the institutional features of the assignment procedures across states and years. For each state and year, we define a set of dummy variables indicating whether the responsibility for assigning legislators to committees is delegated to the speaker of the house, the president of the senate, the president pro tempore, the majority-party leader, the minority-party leader, the committee on committees, or the rules committee. Our primary source is the *Book of the States*, a yearly publication produced by the nonpartisan Council of State Governments (2014). Chapter 3 in this book describes the institutional features of the state legislatures in a given year. In cases where the information in the *Book of the States* was incomplete, we supplemented it with archival material from the relevant state legislative archives.

[18]See http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article122240389.html.

[19]See http://www.hslf.org/our-work/taking-action/be-a-citizen-lobbyist/what-influences-legislators.html.

Using these data in conjunction with information on the identity of various legislative leaders collected in Fouirnaies and Hall (2015), we identify the individual legislator who controls the assignment process. The dummies are not mutually exclusive, but are constructed to reflect the control of the assignment process as accurately as possible. If, for example, control over the assignment process in the upper chamber is shared between the majority- and minority-party leaders (as it currently is in Colorado and Iowa), both of these legislators are coded as 1. When the responsibility is delegated to a committee (committee on committees or the rules), our analyses focus on the chair of the committee.

If the procedural decisions were static over time and across states, it would be difficult to parse out the value of holding assignment power. Although we could take advantage of individual members' switching in and out of the roles that possess these powers, these roles typically come with other powers as well—for example, the president pro tempore often has the power to assign committees, but of course this role comes with many other de jure authorities. Fortunately for our purposes, there is substantial variation in the rules governing the authority to assign committee members. This variation allows us to cleave the value of assignment power from the value of other powers committee assigners often possess. To illustrate the variation, consider the allocation process in the upper chambers of Rhode Island and Connecticut. In Connecticut, the control of committee allocation was delegated to the president pro tempore up until 2006, at which point the Committee on Committees took over responsibility. In the upper chamber of nearby Rhode Island, the majority leader held the power during the period 1990–2003, after which the president of the senate obtained the power from 2004 to 2010. This type of *within-* and *between-state* variation in the process governing the allocation of committee membership is important because it enables us to compare the value of leadership institutions before and after control over the committee assignment process is stripped away from a leader's portfolio of parliamentary rights. We exploit this in our identification strategy and discuss it in further detail below. SI Table A.8 reports how these institutional rules vary across states and time.

Large Effects of Committee Assignment Power on Contributions

Empirically, we are interested in comparing contributions to a legislator who obtains control of the committee assignment process to the counterfactual amount of

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contributions that the legislator would have received had she not controlled the assignment process. In Equation (2), we define our main treatment dummy,

$$Assign_{it} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if legislator } i \text{ controls committee assignments prior to the election at time } t \\ 0, & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases} \qquad (2)$$

where i indicates a legislator and t refers to an election year.

The leader who is endowed with the institutional power to control committee assignments is clearly not randomly drawn from the pool of legislators. Hence, a simple cross-sectional comparison of contributions will only yield an unbiased estimate of the value of committee assignment control under very strong, implausible assumptions. There are at least two major concerns:

1. Leaders are systematically different from other legislators.
2. The process of assigning committee members is only one of many important tasks handled by legislative leaders (e.g., they may also refer bills to committees and set the legislative calendar).

Both of these problems will likely create an upward bias in the estimated effect because the quality that separates leaders from other legislators presumably also helps them attract contributions, and because the other tasks that leaders perform are probably also deemed valuable by campaign donors.

To isolate the value of committee assignment control, we exploit two sources of variation. First, to separate out the institutional value of various leadership positions, we leverage *within-legislator* variation induced by legislators' moving in and out of leadership positions (e.g., following shifts in majority-party status). Second, to disentangle the value of committee assignment control from other valuable institutional features of leadership positions, we exploit variation in the institutional rules governing the authority to appoint committee members.

Using OLS, we estimate the models of the following form

$$\begin{aligned} Log\ Money_{it} = {} & \beta_1 Assign_{it} + \beta_2 Speaker\ House_{it} \\ & + \beta_3 President\ Senate_{it} \\ & + \beta_4 President\ Pro\ Tem\ Senate_{it} \\ & + \beta_5 Majority\ Leader_{it} + \beta_6 Minority\ Leader_{it} \\ & + \beta_7 Chair\ of\ Rules_{it} \\ & + \beta_8 Chair\ of\ Committee\ on\ Committees_{it} \\ & + \alpha_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it}, \qquad (3) \end{aligned}$$

TABLE 5 Value of Committee Assignment Control

	Log Group Contributions ($)			
Assignment Control	0.83 (0.09)	0.50 (0.12)	0.50 (0.12)	0.49 (0.12)
N	45,389	45,389	45,389	45,389
Individual Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Majority-Party Dummy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Party-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	No
State-Chamber-Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
Seniority Fixed Effects	No	No	No	Yes
Leadership Dummies	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Interest groups invest in legislators who possess the power to make committee assignments. Robust standard errors clustered by legislators in parentheses.

where $Assign_{it}$ is the dummy variable as defined in Equation (2); *Speaker House*$_{it}$, *President Senate*$_{it}$, *President Pro Tem Senate*$_{it}$, *Majority Leader*$_{it}$, *Minority Leader*$_{it}$, *Chair of Rules*$_{it}$, *Chair of Committee on Committees*$_{it}$ are dummy variables taking on the value of 1 if legislator i is assigned to the leadership position in question during the term prior to the election at time t; a_i represents legislator fixed effects; δ_t indicates some type of year fixed effects; and finally, ε_{it} indicates the error term.

Table 5 presents the estimated results. In the first column, we estimate the overall effect of obtaining the position associated with making committee assignments; this estimate reflects both the actual value to interest groups of making committee assignments, *plus* any other attributes that come along with this position. To account for the possibility that becoming a member of the majority party makes a legislator more likely to obtain assignment control and more likely to get more contributions, we use state-party-year fixed effects so that we only make comparisons among members of the same party in the same state. As the estimate shows, obtaining this position is extremely valuable to interest groups.

In the next column, we add dummies for the various types of leadership in order to parse out the value of committee assignment power itself. Here, the hope is to hold membership in a given leadership position constant and alter who in the legislature holds the power to assign committees. As the estimate indicates, taking control of the committee assignment process appears to lead to a large increase in contributions from interest groups. The third and fourth columns explore

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alternate specifications for the difference-in-differences. While the second column uses simple individual fixed effects along with state-party-year fixed effects, the third and fourth use different specifications in which treated legislators are compared only to other legislators in their own state and chamber (column 3) and to only legislators in their own chamber with the same level of seniority (column 4). In all cases, a large and positive estimate is found. Comparing the fourth column's estimate to the first column's—which includes powers other than appointment power—it appears that appointment power is responsible for roughly 63% of the overall effect of obtaining the relevant leadership positions. Moreover, the estimated effect of 0.49 is substantially larger than the average effect for direct access (0.27 from column 2 of Table 2).

How do we interpret these results? They seem to indicate that a legislator receives a large amount of new money when she gains the power to make committee assignments. As the logged estimates show, as a proportion of her contributions these effects appear quite large. To see how large these effects are, we also reestimate them in actual dollars; SI Table A.5 presents the results. The levels are worth discussing in some detail.

Gaining the power to assign committees is estimated to increase contributions by approximately $190,000, on average. If we consider the estimated value of other legislative positions, it appears that assignment power is the most valuable power in the legislature. Becoming majority leader separate from the power to make committee assignments is estimated to bring roughly a $50,000 increase, on average (so someone who becomes the leader and can make committee assignments would be estimated to gain $240,000, on average). Minority leaders get roughly $80,000 extra, on average; effects for other leadership positions are smaller. In sum, the power to make committee assignments seems to be extraordinarily important to donors, and it may be the most important of a leader's portfolio of powers.

What about relative to the donors' political campaigns in total? In the SI, we reestimate these main results using the percentage of total money given in that state and year as the outcome variable. The results indicate that the effects are substantial; gaining the power to make committee assignments is estimated to cause roughly a 2.6 percentage point increase in a legislator's share of all contributions given in the legislature.

Could these results on indirect access be the result of a violation of the parallel trends assumption? It is possible that individuals seize power of the assignment process at a time when their interest-group contributions are trending upward in a manner systematically different from other legislators, which would produce an upward bias in our estimates. The use of differing sets of candidate and time dummies suggests this is not the case, but in the SI, we also go further and estimate leads of the treatment variable. SI Figure A.1 presents the resulting estimates, which show no evidence of pretreatment trending.[20]

It is also possible that becoming the committee assigner is a compound treatment—individuals who gain (or lose) the power to make committee assignments might gain (or lose) other procedural powers at the same time, in which case our estimates would not successfully isolate the value interest groups place on the committee assignment process itself. Relatedly, states where particular leadership positions are granted the power to make committee assignments could be states where those leadership positions are especially important for other reasons. While our analysis uses state fixed effects, interaction effects like ours, where we examine the effect of becoming the leader across states, still implicitly uses cross-state variation. To address these concerns, in SI Table A.4, we reestimate the same regressions but add control variables that capture some of the other powers leaders might have. The first variable is an indicator for whether each legislator possesses the authority to refer bills to committees. This is among the most important of the other procedural powers legislative leaders tend to possess, and it is one we are able to observe by recording the legislator who refers bills to committees in each chamber in a given year. This information is obtained from the annual publication *Book of the States* produced by the Council of State Governments (2015). The second variable is Mooney's (2013) index of speaker power. We use this variable to see whether, among speakers, gaining the power to make committee assignments is valuable to interest groups even holding fixed the power of the speaker, who may or may not be the committee assigner. In both cases, we continue to find highly similar results, which suggest that interest groups really do value the procedural power to make committee assignments itself. Although there is no perfect way to isolate this one mechanism, these results and the results from the previous section on rules committee membership suggest that interest groups are sophisticated in their contributions, seeking out those imbued with procedural power and particularly those with the power to influence the membership of the committees whose policies they care about.

[20]We would also like to follow best practices by estimating specifications that include individual-specific linear time trends. Unfortunately, the large number of individuals makes this computationally impossible as of now.

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Discussion and Conclusion

Campaign finance continues to rank among the most salient political concerns of American citizens. There seems to be a widely held view that business interests, in particular, are able to use their financial resources to alter the political process in ways that benefit them. Without understanding the specific mechanisms by which these interest groups attempt to influence the process, it is hard to assess how accurate such claims are, or to begin to consider their normative implications. We do not pretend to provide a full account of the complex interplay of voters, interest groups, and political actors in a single article, but we do pinpoint two particular strategies—direct and indirect access—by which interest groups seek access to legislators. These strategies are widespread, spanning the legislatures of all 50 U.S. states, and they are far-reaching, applying to a variety of committees and a range of different business interests.

The first of these two mechanisms, direct access, is well established in a long-standing literature in American politics. Drawing on the techniques from this literature, we have shown that the same patterns of access seeking persist in state legislatures. Indeed, these results point to the remarkable generalizability of the access hypothesis, not just across democratic contexts but across industries, since the state legislative data offer the opportunity to study a broader swath of industries and committees. The desire of interest groups to gain access to legislators is hardly limited to the big money, high-salience context of our federal legislatures. Moreover, the variation in these effects across industries suggests that the desire for access is motivated by policy interests; the industries we found to seek the most access to relevant committees—insurance, banking, and health—are precisely the industries most affected by state-level policy. This pattern of evidence makes clear that, at the very least, interest groups deploy their campaign funds as if they provide strategic value. An underappreciated implication of these results, we have argued, is that sophisticated interest groups should seek out procedural influence, given that they value committee membership so highly.

This leads us to the second mechanism, indirect access. We have argued that this latter type of access is at least as important a channel for interest-group influence. Interest groups are highly attuned to which legislators are sympathetic to their policy goals. The opportunity to help route these members to the proper committees is a clear strategic priority. Not only do the individuals in charge of making committee assignments possess a concentrated power of value to these groups, but because these decisions occur early in the session and are removed from policy decisions, they are likely to be less visible to the public.

To explore the value that interest groups place on indirect access, we began by investigating the effects of members' joining the rules committee, across all state legislatures. The effect of joining rules on interest-group contributions is large—larger than almost all the committee-specific direct access effects, and much larger than the effects for joining appropriations or ways and means. Clearly, interest groups value influence over legislative procedure. Going further, we used data on leadership positions in state legislatures to try to isolate the effects of a legislator's attaining the power to assign committees, aware of the possibility that committee assigners tend to be given other procedural powers at the same time. We documented a large, positive effect of obtaining the power to assign committees on interest-group contributions, indicating the value that strategic groups place on this procedural role in the legislature. In sum, interest groups' behavior shows that they are both highly aware and highly sophisticated when it comes to legislative politics. This, in turn, suggests large human capital investments and points to the value firms must find in the political marketplace.

Taking advantage of the rich variation in institutional structure across the U.S. states, we are also able to look, tentatively at least, at some of the ways in which indirect access differs from direct access. Though we omit these analyses from the body of the article, they are presented in the supporting information and may help to encourage future research about direct versus indirect access. As we show, term limits do little to erode the value of direct access to committee members, but they entirely remove the observed value of indirect access. We suspect that this may be due to the fact that access to the committee assignment process requires a longer time horizon, necessitating a relationship built and maintained over many electoral cycles in order to bear fruit. The value of indirect access also appears to be increasing in the professionalization of the legislature, as measured using the Squire (2012) index, consistent with the notion that access to procedural power is more valuable in contexts where these procedures are well established and regular. Again, this pattern is not found for direct access.

More generally, we hope that our study and the newly collected data that it offers will encourage more researchers to turn to the U.S. states for evidence on broad political phenomena. A long and fruitful literature has studied the state legislatures, but research in this vein is often regarded (sometimes unfairly) as being specific to the state context—akin to an area study. In fact, the U.S. legislatures offer an unparalleled opportunity to test and revise general theories about the democratic legislative process. For our particular theory of indirect access, the federal level would be insufficient to establish any meaningful empirical patterns, due to the low degree of variation in which legislators possess the power to make committee assignments. For this question, and for many others like it, the variation in the institutional structures of the 50 U.S. states provides an invaluable laboratory.

How, and how much, do interest groups influence the political process? This is a large and important question, and there is much more work to be done to answer this question with any confidence. However, the patterns of evidence we have presented strongly suggest that interest groups view access to incumbents as valuable. Indeed, interest groups seem to value access to legislative committees enough to contribute both to committee members directly and to those legislators who control the committee assignment process. Unless interest groups are systematically wasting money, the results therefore suggest that they gain at least some amount of influence over the policy process through this behavior.

At the same time, the overall amounts that these groups give seem small (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003). Our results, and the accumulated results of the empirical literature on which we are building, raise a paradox. On the one hand, interest groups invest surprisingly little money, overall, in the political process. On the other hand, they invest what little money they commit to the process very carefully. Clearly, they do not dispense these contributions on a whim. Instead, they carefully seek out the members whose legislative roles offer potentially useful influence. Although the total amount of money spent is small, the investments in human capital necessary to deploy these amounts so strategically are not. Squaring these two conflicting observations is perhaps one of the most important tasks for future work in this literature.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Table A.1: # observations by state and chamber.
Table A.2: Value of Committee Assignment Control.
Table A.3: Value of Committee Assignment Control and State-level Institutions.
Table A.4: Value of Committee Assignment Control.
Table A.5: Value of Committee Assignment Control.
Table A.6: Value of Committee Assignment Control and State-level Institutions.
Table A.7: Value of Industry-Specific Committee Membership and State-level Institutions.
Table A.8: Committee Assignment Control (% of years from 1988-2012).

Figure A.1: Testing for Pre-trending: Leads of the Treatment vs. Treat- ment Effect.

Figure A.2: How Industries Value Direct vs. Indirect Access.

Figure A.3: How Sub-Industries Value Indirect Access.

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