

Campaign Agendas and Issue Group Strategy in Congressional Primaries*

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Abstract

Which candidates do issue PACs support in House primaries? Competing theories suggest a focus on either friendly incumbents or new potential allies, yet evaluating divergent predictions requires information on candidates' agendas. I leverage original issue platform text from campaign websites, FEC receipts, and bill summaries to measure campaign attention, PAC funding, and legislative activity across nine major issue areas from 2016 to 2022. I use various within-candidate research designs to show that candidates who prioritize an issue raise more money from PACs related to the issue, and these "issue champions" enjoy a substantially larger incumbency advantage in issue PAC fundraising compared to others — a difference not attributable to differences in subsequent legislative activity. These results illuminate the beginning of legislator-group relationships by providing new evidence that issue groups rely on campaign rhetoric in primaries to identify and foster connections with potential champions of their cause.

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Issue-centric groups constitute many of the most widely recognized and longstanding political spending organizations in U.S. elections. Interest groups focused on a particular issue area, such as Planned Parenthood, the Sierra Club, and the National Rifle Association, are fixtures in congressional elections which themselves receive millions of dollars in contributions from individuals who share the groups' issue priorities.¹ Literature on extended party networks suggests that such groups are especially active and influential in primary elections, where candidate differences are less salient and voter information is low (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008). However, existing theories offer divergent predictions regarding how issue groups should use campaign contributions to achieve their policy goals, and candidate-side data limitations have hindered empirical efforts to assess them. This paper investigates how issue groups trade off between helping elect new potential champions of their cause and seeking access to friendly lawmakers.

Like corporate PACs, issue groups may generally fund incumbent candidates in hopes of “buying” favor, access, or influence (Denzau and Munger 1986; Gordon and Hafer 2005; Fourinaies and Hall 2014, 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016; Snyder 1990). However, unlike obscure corporate regulations, candidates are more likely to have already decided the extent to which they care about the more salient issues upon which issue groups are formed, rendering contributions inefficient. In a similar vein to theories of lobbying, issue groups could instead target contributions to incumbents who have already signaled a commitment to their issue in order to induce greater effort (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall and Deardorff 2006). However, to better ensure that they receive returns on their investments, group-centric theories of parties instead suggest that a more effective way for issue groups to achieve their policy goals is by helping to nominate and elect a true issue champion (Bawn et al. 2012).

One way for candidates to indicate their priorities is choosing to devote finite cam-

¹While I refer to them hereafter as *issue groups* or *issue PACs*, the same groups are elsewhere referred to as *single-issue interest groups* (e.g. Bonica 2013; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020), *issue advocacy groups* (e.g. Phillips N.d.), or *activist groups* (e.g. Blum and Cowburn 2023).

campaign attention to an issue. However, limited data on candidates' issue priorities have prevented large-scale empirical studies of whether issue groups' primary contribution strategies are responsive to these potentially low-cost signals. An accounting of campaign issue priorities is especially elusive for large swaths of primary candidates due to the price of running television advertisements and the *de minimis* media coverage of the vast majority of primary races, which existing work typically uses to capture campaign agendas (Banda 2015; Sides 2007; Sulkin 2005; Sulkin, Moriarty, and Hefner 2007; Spiliotes and Vavreck 2002). Evaluating issue PACs' contribution strategies in primaries is especially important given the decline of two-party district competition (Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning 2006), yet few studies have systematically examined interest group giving in congressional primaries specifically.² By focusing on the primary stage, I advance our understanding of how issue groups select among co-partisans, a particularly relevant calculus given many issue groups' increasing alignment with one political party (Barber and Eatough 2019; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020; Herrnson 2009; Lacombe 2019; Phillips N.d.).

To test the extent to which issue groups focus on access-buying versus helping elect new potential issue champions, I leverage an original collection of campaign platforms from the websites of candidates who ran in House primaries in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022. Combined with itemized contribution receipts, these textual data allow me to match campaign attention to issue group support across nine major issue areas: Guns, Abortion, Environment, Animal Rights, Police, Elderly, LGBTQ, Campaign Finance, and Israel.³ With observations at the candidate-issue-year level, I am able to employ a variety of within-candidate empirical approaches. First, I investigate whether candidates are more likely to receive contributions from PACs centered around their campaign priorities with candidate-year and issue-year fixed effects. I also consider whether these effects

²For some excellent exceptions, see Hassell (2016, 2023); Grumbach (2020); Patterson (N.d.).

³As discussed in Appendix D, I focus on issues which are sufficiently broad yet non-boilerplate, and whose interest groups' goals are primarily collective rather than particularistic.

vary by electoral context. Second, I further examine how issue groups' respond to office-holding status and campaign prioritization of their issue using a triple-differences design that estimates change in issue PAC fundraising associated with change in incumbency status among candidates who did and did not campaign on the PACs' issue. Third, I assess the extent to which groups respond to legislators' campaign rhetoric versus legislative activity on their issue, again using two-way fixed effects to isolate within-legislator-year variation.

My results are consistent with issue groups relying on campaign rhetoric to identify potential issue champions during the primary election stage, and continuing to cultivate relationships with them once in Congress. In general, primary candidates are substantially more likely to receive contributions from PACs centered around the issues on which they chose to campaign. I find that absolute campaign attention effects are largest among incumbents, while effects relative to baseline rates of issue group fundraising are largest among non-incumbents. To more explicitly characterize how issue PACs respond to incumbency and issue attention, I show that the incumbency advantage in issue group fundraising — measured as the difference in changes in contributions between those who did and did not experience a change in incumbency — is disproportionately concentrated among those who campaigned on the group's issue as non-incumbents. These differences in issue PAC financial incumbency advantage by candidates' previous issue attention are not driven by differences in congressional activity: PAC contributions are more responsive to campaign attention than to legislative attention.

This article makes four contributions to the study of interest groups, congressional elections, and legislative behavior in the United States. First, I join a growing literature elucidating the dynamics of primary elections (Blum and Cowburn 2023; Hassell 2023; Hirano and Snyder 2019; Lockhart and Hill 2023; Thomsen 2022). While research on congressional races has traditionally focused on the general election stage, the decline of two-party competition means that electoral outcomes are increasingly determined at the pri-

mary stage. Second, I advance our understanding of the strategies adopted by single-issue interest groups, which are widely recognizable fixtures in American elections yet are typically lumped together with general ideological interest groups (e.g. Bonica 2013; Grumbach 2020) and have received far less scholarly attention than corporate PACs and individual donors (e.g. Barber 2016; Fowler, Garro, and Spenkuch 2020; Kujala 2020; Meisels, Clinton, and Huber 2024; Thieme 2020). Third, I illuminate the *beginning* of the legislator-group life cycle by investigating connections formed before candidates make it into office. Moving beyond legislator-group interactions within the legislative arena provides insight into how issue groups initially decide with whom to work. Finally, these findings provide additional evidence of the connection between electoral and legislative behavior (Sulkin 2011; Schnakenberg 2016), as well as key stakeholders' responses to each.

Theoretical Foundations of Issue Group Primary Strategy

Donating to campaigns is one of the most critical electioneering activities in which interest groups can engage. While strong fundraising is no guarantee that a candidate will win an election, money is a prerequisite for hiring staff and consultants, nearly every aspect of campaigning, and signaling viability and strength — particularly in primary elections (Biersack, Herrnson, and Wilcox 1993; Epstein and Zemsky 1995; Jacobson 2015; Maestas and Rugeley 2008; Thomsen 2022). The importance of campaign contributions and the incentives that they create for candidate behavior are reflected by a sustained scholarly focus on the potential distorting effects of money in politics (Canes-Wrone and Gibson 2019; Francia et al. 2003; Kalla and Broockman 2016; Kujala 2020; Powell 2012).

Issue groups have collective policy goals,⁴ and existing theories suggest different primary campaign contribution strategies that such groups might employ to best achieve them. The first approach centers around seeking access to legislators directly, akin to cor-

⁴This contrasts with corporate PACs, trade groups, and groups oriented around particularistic benefits for members which are tailored as narrowly as possible to their organization or sector.

porate PACs contributing to legislators with the greatest policymaking influence over their industry (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014, 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016; Romer and Snyder 1994). However, a wide range of unorganized interests are indifferent to obscure corporate regulations, the minutiae of which fly under the political radar and are unlikely to activate the public (Arnold 1990; Denzau and Munger 1986). This contrasts with the more salient and controversial policies around which issue groups are formed, making it a much taller order to influence legislators' opinions on the same. As such, formal theories of lobbying suggest that issue groups should target like-minded legislators in hopes of inducing greater legislative effort on their mutual goals (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall and Dardorff 2006). In the context of modern primary elections, issue priority may be a more relevant indicator of like-mindedness than shared preferences, as co-partisans' specific preferences are relatively homogeneous (Levendusky 2009).⁵

However, focusing contribution strategies on access to incumbents constrains issue groups to form relationships with those already in office, who may be insufficiently reliable allies. Group-centric theories of political parties suggest that a more efficient way to ensure a return on investment is by getting "a genuine friend nominated and elected to office" (Bawn et al. 2012, 575). Because of low participation and widespread voter apathy toward the relatively small differences between co-partisans, special interests are thought to exert especially strong influence at the primary stage (Bawn et al. 2023; Grumbach 2020; Hassell 2016; Karol 2009; Masket 2009).⁶ At the same time, co-partisans with relatively similar ideological stances can attempt to distinguish themselves via issue priorities. Because co-partisan (or co-ideologue) candidates are relatively unlikely to face opponents actively hostile to most of their general positions,⁷ polarized groups have a real opportu-

⁵For this reason, my analyses exclude nonpartisan or multiparty primaries (see Appendix C).

⁶Another key tenet of this theoretical tradition is coordination among coalitions of different interest groups (e.g. Cohen et al. 2008; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz N.d.; Hassell 2023; Patterson N.d.), which some have called into question (e.g. McCarty and Schickler 2018). While I largely set aside the possibility of such dynamics here, Figure 3 suggests some co-occurrence of primary contributions by different issue groups — but this does not appear to be related to co-occurrence of campaigning upon the different issues.

⁷For example, a modern pro-abortion Democratic candidate is relatively unlikely to face a primary opponent who is both anti-abortion and would exert substantial effort to enact anti-abortion policy.

nity to identify and support a true friend. By helping to elect a genuine issue ally whose priorities are aligned with theirs, groups can reduce the need for costly oversight, monitoring, and discipline (Stratmann 1998).

In most cases, however, identifying a true champion is no easy task for issue groups. Even for incumbents, who have records of activity in the legislative arena of interest, it may be challenging to separate legislators' priorities from their strategic response to dynamics of agenda control (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Denzau and Mackay 1983), temporal changes in windows of legislative opportunity on an issue (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Krehbiel 1998; Romer and Rosenthal 1978), and individual ability to marshal bills through the legislative process (Hitt, Volden, and Wiseman 2017; Volden and Wiseman 2014). And while some non-incumbent primary candidates have mayoral or state legislative experience, the extent to which these records predict future priorities in the federal legislative setting is unclear. Moreover, relying upon such records precludes comparison between candidates with and without prior officeholding experience — the latter of which have become increasingly viable contenders in recent years (Porter and Treul 2023).

On the other hand, campaigns provide a relatively level playing field for candidates to more cleanly signal their issue priorities.⁸ Campaign platforms are selected on the basis of factors such as national and district issue salience, personal importance of an issue, and constituency composition (Druckman et al. 2010; Sides 2006; Spiliotes and Vavreck 2002). Candidates choosing of their own volition to campaign on an issue suggests that they find it important, whether for personal, electoral, or representational reasons. To the extent that they are constrained in the number of issues upon which they can campaign (perhaps because campaigning on fewer issues is more effective than campaigning on many), candidates can expend costly campaign focus to reveal their “type” — whether they are an issue champion or not — across issues. However, groups' responsiveness to such rhetoric likely depends upon how costly, and therefore informative, of a signal they

⁸This is true even for incumbents, who may be partially constrained by their past legislative activity.

believe it to be.

Existing theories also suggest divergent implications for whether issue groups should respond more strongly to incumbents' versus non-incumbents' issue priorities. If issue PACs most value access to friendly lawmakers, responsiveness to incumbents' issue priorities should be especially strong. This could either be due to the reinforcing relationship between legislators' campaign and legislative priorities (Sulkin and Swigger 2008; Sulkin 2009, 2011), or the informativeness of rhetoric itself as a less-mediated signal of incumbents' priorities (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). Moreover, incumbents' *a priori* higher likelihood of election to office than non-incumbents (Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning 2006) heightens the stakes of their (implicit) campaign promises due to increased possibility of electoral accountability and punishment in the subsequent election.⁹ Conversely, group-centric theories of party nominations suggest that the effect of campaign issue attention on issue group support should be strongest among non-incumbents. Precisely because non-incumbents do not have prominent officeholding records, campaign rhetoric may constitute an especially important source of information for issue groups to draw on when seeking to identify new issue champions.

The extent to which issue groups prioritize access-seeking versus electing new potential issue allies also suggests different levels of responsiveness to campaign priorities by district competitiveness. If issue groups most value access to like-minded legislators, their contributions should be more strongly influenced by shared priorities in districts safer for candidates' parties. Similar to the logic of corporate PAC funds flowing disproportionately to favored candidates (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014), those in safe districts face a more certain victory in the general election. This means that issue PACs can attempt to financially bolster candidates during the primary, after which the electoral outcome is relatively secured. If issue groups instead prioritize electing new issue allies, they should gamble on candidates in competitive districts who share their priorities, as these contributions have the

⁹This remains true even at very low levels of future accountability.

greatest marginal impact on legislative composition all else equal. Moreover, this riskier strategy can potentially offer a higher return on investment, as nominees are in greater need of a financial edge in competitive general elections.¹⁰

To summarize, existing theories offer different predictions about issue group contribution strategy in modern primaries. Access-centered approaches suggest that issue groups should target incumbents and electorally safe primary candidates who have demonstrated shared issue priority. Group-centric theories of parties instead suggest that issue groups should prioritize electing new issue champions by targeting non-incumbents and primary candidates in competitive districts who have demonstrated shared issue priority. However, the extent to which issue groups should rely upon candidates' rhetoric to identify issue allies is also unclear. While incumbents' campaign platforms may reflect their real legislative priorities, other candidates' platforms could be too "cheap" to constitute meaningful signals of issue priorities.

Data

While transaction-level receipts of issue PACs' contributions to House primary candidates are readily available via the Federal Election Commission (FEC),¹¹ capturing candidate-side issue priority is a much taller order. The cost of television advertisements, which previous studies have used to examine candidates' campaign priorities (Banda 2015; Sides 2006, 2007; Sides and Karch 2008; Sulkin and Swigger 2008; Sulkin 2009, 2011; Spiliotes and Vavreck 2002), is prohibitive for most House primary candidates and not a worthy investment for those in all but the most competitive races. Others have employed media coverage of campaigns to identify candidates' issue priorities (Sulkin 2005), yet these characterizations of campaign priorities are mediated by a third party and, likewise, only offer

¹⁰Primary-designated contributions not spent during the primary election are legally allowed to go toward general election expenditures.

¹¹To identify PACs focused on single issue areas, I merged in OpenSecrets' PAC information, which includes issue codes and descriptions as well as the unique FEC identifiers.

coverage of races that clear some threshold of newsworthiness.

To characterize House primary candidates' issue priorities, I hand-collect data on campaign website issue platforms of all candidates who appeared on the ballot in a Democratic or Republican primary in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022.¹² Campaign website platforms constitute a uniquely well-suited source of data on primary candidates' issue priorities. The vast majority of websites contain a page or section clearly delineated as a collection of issue stances, resembling a stated policy platform more closely than any other campaign activity. Additionally, the priorities and positions found on websites are selected and articulated by candidates themselves,¹³ in contrast to media interviews, televised debates, and newspaper writeups. Websites also provide candidates an opportunity to present a more comprehensive campaign platform than purchased advertisements in newspapers or on television (Sulkin, Moriarty, and Hefner 2007). Finally, creating and maintaining a website is easy and far cheaper than fundraising, sending mailers, and running television advertisements, making campaign platforms a more inclusive data source with regard to candidates' resources. For these reasons, scholars have long recognized candidate websites' value for studying campaign strategy in general (e.g. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020; Nyhan and Montgomery 2015) and issue platforms in particular (Druckman et al. 2010; Porter, Treul, and McDonald 2023; Milita, Ryan, and Simas 2014).¹⁴

I focus on whether each campaign platform includes nine key issue areas: Guns, Abortion, Environment, Animal Rights, Police, Elderly, LGBTQ, Campaign Finance, and Israel. Out of all issue areas on which candidates actively campaigned and PACs actively spend

¹²This effort includes 6,274 unique candidate-year observations, over 60% (3,816) of which hosted campaign websites with issue content. Appendix C provides a detailed explication and examples of each step of the data collection process, as well as evidence of the representativeness of candidates with and without platforms. While incumbents and those who garnered more than a *de minimis* share of their primary's total fundraising create websites with campaign platforms at a higher rate, the magnitude of missingness among candidates without viable fundraising is relatively quite modest considering the large portion of non-incumbents who did not even file pre-primary fundraising reports.

¹³This remains true in the case of political consultant influence (e.g. Nyhan and Montgomery 2015), as candidates can ultimately fire consultants advocating strategies with which they disagree.

¹⁴As Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin put it: Campaign websites "provide an unmediated, holistic, and representative portrait of messages aimed at voters in general" (2009, 346-347).

in House races over the period, these met a few important criteria. First, issues are broad enough to have PACs formed around them and candidates across the nation meaningfully considering whether to campaign on them.¹⁵ Second, issues are narrow enough that candidates do not feel uniformly compelled to take boilerplate positions on the issue.¹⁶ Third, issues with a predominant “economic” interest group base of organizations concerned with members’ material interests are excluded, as union and trade groups’ structures and goals are distinct from other issue PACs’ (Barber and Eatough 2019; Phillips N.d.; Welch 1980). The issue selection process is described further in Appendix A.

To identify campaign attention, I create a dictionary of terms associated with each issue to string-match in the platform text. For example, terms associated with Guns include 2nd amendment, nra, rifle, ammunition, firearm, gun, and shooting, with the full collection of each issue’s terms reported in Appendix D.¹⁷ Candidates’ rates of campaigning on each of the nine issues are displayed on the left side of Figure 1. There is substantial heterogeneity in issue prevalence both between and within parties. As an example of the former, Democrats out-campaigned Republicans on LGBTQ and campaign finance issues, consistent with work on partisan differences in issue coalitions and perceived “ownership” (Banda 2016; Lacombe 2019; Noel 2012).¹⁸ As an example of the latter, however, far fewer Democrats campaigned on campaign finance than on the environment. The intra-party differences in attention across issues, as well as most rates falling far short of 100%, suggest that even candidates of the same party do not consistently campaign on the same issues.

While the differences in shares of candidates campaigning on each issue on the left side of Figure 1 implies significant individual-level variation across issues, the right panel of Figure 1 also reveals considerable individual-level temporal stability *within* issues. From

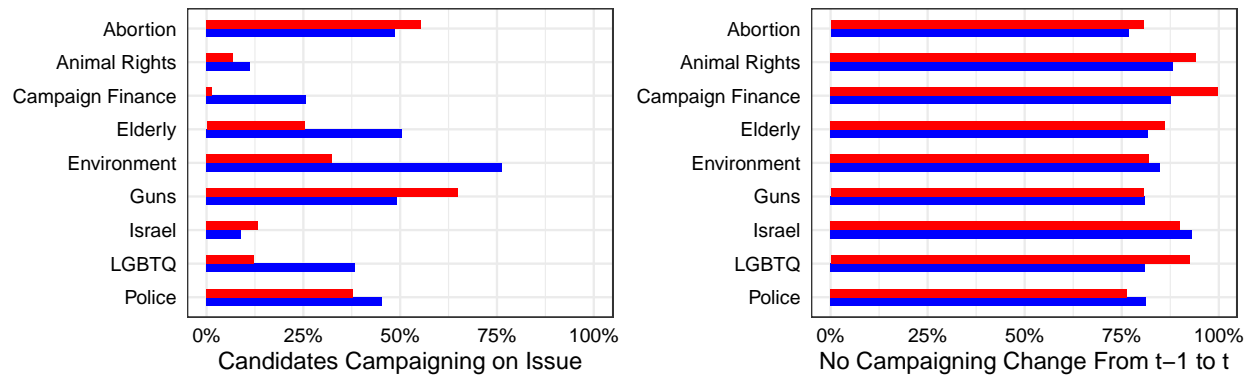
¹⁵For example, platforms which include curbing the invasiveness of Asian carp (or Copi) are highly localized to areas around the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes, and no PACs are currently formed around the issue.

¹⁶For example, macroeconomic policy such as taxes and government spending is so widespread among platforms that it is infeasible for economic policy PACs to factor issue attention into their strategies.

¹⁷Terms were selected by reviewing all tokens occurring in over 100 separate platforms (about 4%).

¹⁸Additionally, it highlights the necessity of accounting for candidates’ partisanship, which is absorbed by candidate fixed effects in the analyses that follow.

Figure 1. Primary Campaign Issue Prevalence and Continuity, 2016 – 2022



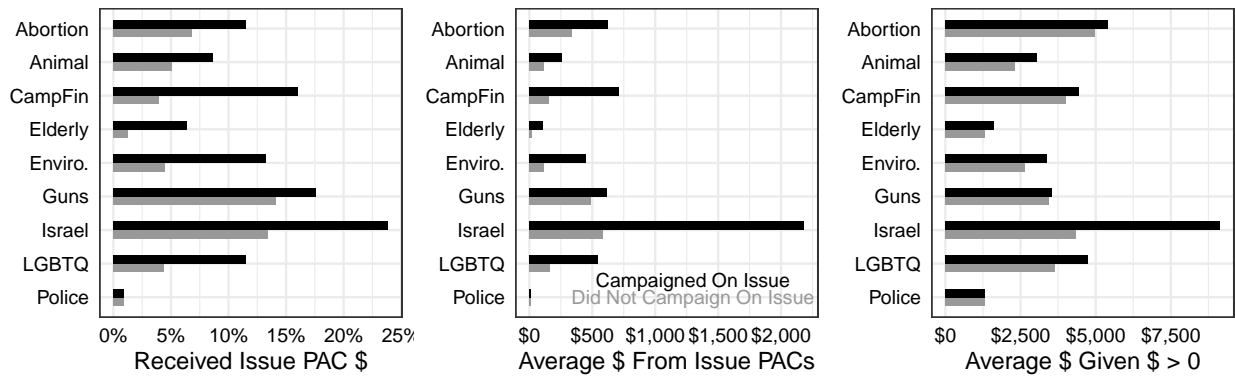
Note: Shares of candidate–year observations including issue in platform and candidates with platforms in consecutive campaigns who did not add or delete issue. Republicans in red and Democrats in blue.

one election to the next, over 75% of candidates in both parties maintained their choice to campaign on or omit each of the nine issues. In other words, if candidates choose to announce a position on an issue (or not) in a given election, they are empirically likely to make the same choice again in the following election. This suggests that issue agendas tend to be stable, like roll call voting behavior over time (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).¹⁹ Importantly for the analyses that follow, issue agendas appear to be more akin to a fixed candidate characteristic than something changing endogenously. Nevertheless, I examine the possibility of such “reverse” causality in Appendix C and do not find evidence of candidates adapting their campaign agendas based on issue PAC funding.

Turning to issue groups, Figure 2 plots primary election contributions from PACs across issue areas by candidates who did and did not campaign on the issue, with all included PACs and their respective issue areas listed in Appendix B. Across each issue area, the three subplots provide descriptive, aggregate–level evidence that issue groups give more financial support to primary candidates who choose to campaign on their issue. First, the left plot shows that a larger share of candidates who campaigned on an issue received contributions from the issue’s groups than candidates who did not campaign on the issue. Additionally, the center plot demonstrates that on average, candidates who campaign on

¹⁹This may be due to either candidates’ motivations for campaigning on issues — whether due to personal or constituency importance — remaining relatively stable from election to election, or the potential negative electoral consequences of instability on these “principled” policy issues (Tavits 2007).

Figure 2. Issue PAC Primary Fundraising by Campaign Attention

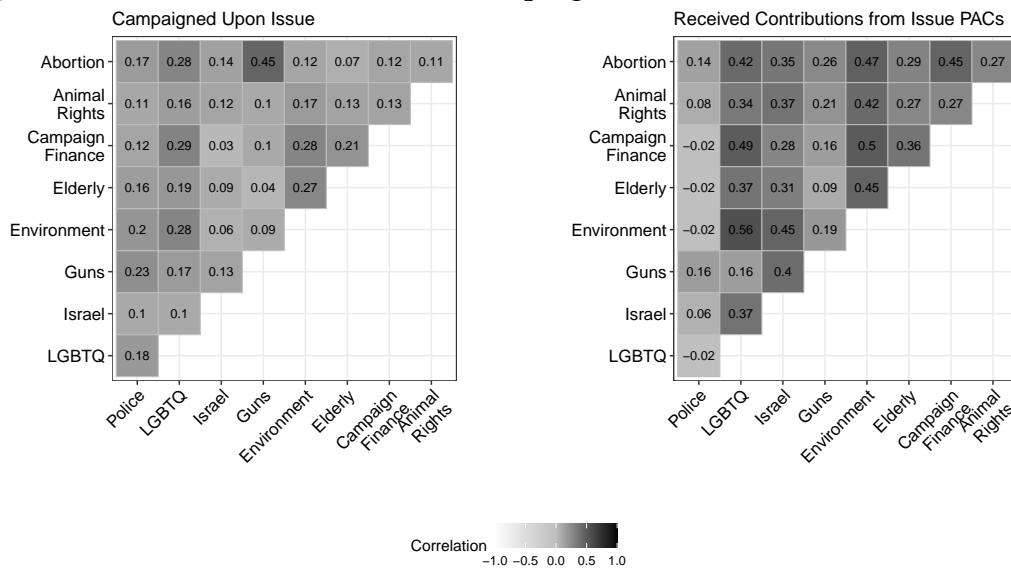


Note: Candidate–year level observations in black if campaigned on the issue, and gray otherwise.

an issue receive more total funds from groups related to the issue than candidates who did not campaign on the issue. However, as evidenced by the left plot, these averages include a large number of candidates who raised \$0 total from groups related to a given issue. On the right side, even selecting on cases where candidates received positive contributions from issue groups produces higher average contribution totals among candidates who campaigned on the issue compared to candidates who did not.

When examining the relationship between campaign attention to an issue and contributions from issue groups, it is important to also consider potential relationships between campaigning on different issues and between fundraising from groups related to different issues. In particular, if there are issues that “go together” — in that candidates who tend to campaign on one issue tend to campaign on the other, and PACs formed around that one issue tend to contribute similarly to PACs formed around the other issue — this may induce a spurious relationship between campaign issue attention and issue PAC contributions. Figure 3 presents pairwise correlations between campaigning on different issue areas as well as receiving funds from PACs related to different issue areas. Most correlations are positive, suggesting that candidates who tend to campaign on any of these issues also tend to campaign on others, and that candidates who raise funds from groups related to one issue tend to raise funds from groups related to others. However, the correlations are not overwhelmingly strong. There exists a 0.45 correlation between campaign atten-

Figure 3. Issue Correlations Within Campaign Attention and PAC Contributions



Note: Includes 2016–2022 House primary candidates with campaign website platforms. Correlations between campaigning on issues (left) and between receiving issue PAC contributions (right).

tion to guns and abortion, yet other campaign attention correlations between issues are far smaller. And while a couple of issues are correlated at or above 0.5 for PAC funding, these do not systematically appear to be the issues with the strongest correlations for campaign attention. The lack of similarity between issues with the strongest campaign attention correlations and PAC funding correlations casts doubt on the idea that there are simply issues which “go together” in both domains and would subsequently induce a relationship between campaign attention and group contributions.

Issue PAC Response to Campaign Rhetoric

Aggregate descriptive patterns suggest that primary candidates garner greater contributions from issue PACs related to their campaign priorities, but this may be partly driven by differences across candidates and district contexts. For instance, candidate quality may confound the relationship as higher quality candidates may both have more issue-focused campaigns and be better fundraisers than lower quality candidates. To hold such char-

acteristics constant, I leverage a within-candidate design which relies upon cross-issue variation within candidates' campaigns in a given year to investigate whether campaigning on an issue in the primary is associated with garnering more primary contributions from PACs related to the issue. I estimate the following equation:

$$f(\text{Contributions}_{ijt}) = \mathbf{M}(\text{Campaign}_{ijt}) + \alpha_{it} + \phi_{jt} + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where $\text{Contributions}_{ijt}$ is candidate i 's total itemized contributions from PACs associated with issue j during the primary election in year t . The function $f(\cdot)$ maps these contributions into two dependent variable measures: $I(\text{Contributions}_{ijt} > 0)$, an indicator for any positive contributions, and $\log(\text{Contributions}_{ijt} + 1)$ given the inclusion of many zeroes and data skewedness. Fixed effects at the candidate-year level (α_{it}) and the issue-year level (ϕ_{jt}) control for all observed and unobserved election-specific candidate attributes and issue-specific time trends, respectively. Importantly, this means that β captures the change in candidate i 's contributions from PACs centered around issue j in election t associated with candidate i campaigning on issue j in election t . I examine binary and continuous functions of campaign attention, measured respectively as presence and number of issue words,²⁰ the associated effects of which are represented by \mathbf{M} . Coefficients, then, are estimated by comparing the same candidate's PAC contributions across issues for which they did and did not campaign upon in a given primary.²¹ As stated previously, this design ensures that issue-invariant differences in candidates' attributes and electoral contexts — such as incumbency status, unidimensional ideology, race competitiveness, or election newsworthiness — do not confound the relationship between campaign attention to an issue and campaign contributions from groups associated with the issue.

²⁰I do not divide by total words or total number of issues, as platform-level characteristics are already absorbed by the candidate-year fixed effect α_{it} .

²¹Given that this specification relies upon within-candidate-year variation in issue attention, β is assumed to be constant across issues. In Appendix J, I report results from regressions run separately by each issue area (with party-year fixed effects only).

Table 1. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.036***		0.127***		0.279***	
	(0.004)		(0.011)		(0.031)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002***		0.009***		0.019***
		(0.000)		(0.002)		(0.004)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	34,380	34,380	9,873	9,873	34,376	34,376
Adjusted R ²	0.307	0.305	0.255	0.248	0.310	0.308

Note: Observations are candidate–issue–year. Candidate–clustered standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 1 reports estimated effects of campaigning on an issue on issue PAC contributions from the two–way fixed effects models. The first four columns use a linear probability model with an indicator for having received any contributions, while the middle columns follow Beck’s (2020) recommendation for grouped linear probability models by excluding candidates who either did not receive contributions from PACs in any issue area or received contributions from PACs in all issue areas.²² The last two columns use a log transformation of contribution amount as the dependent variable. In addition to these specifications, I also perform analyses at the candidate–PAC–year level²³ (Appendix H) and break results out by party (Appendix I) and issue (Appendix J).²⁴

Across specifications, candidates receive significantly more contributions from PACs centered around issues they campaign upon than PACs centered around issues they do not campaign upon. As a baseline, note that a contribution occurred for 6% of all candidate–issue combinations where candidates chose not to campaign on the issue. Given the coefficient in Column 1 of Table 1, this means that the rate of issue PAC contributions increases to almost 10% for candidates who campaigned on their issue — a 60% increase from the

²²Beck (2020) suggests reporting results from observations with only a mix of zeroes and ones in the dependent variable, as groups with known zero marginal effects violate the constant marginal effects assumption of grouped linear probability models.

²³While this is the more natural level of observation, as giving happens at the PAC level, aggregating up to the candidate–issue–year level helps to minimize potential biases induced by the possibility of PACs within the same issue area coordinating their giving strategies — e.g. serving as strategic substitutes — and/or some PACs adopting rules against giving to certain types of candidates or in certain types of races.

²⁴Given that the two–way fixed effects models rely on variation across issues, I employ only party–year fixed effects in the supplemental issue–specific analyses.

baseline. Column 3 suggests that these relative effects are similar among candidates who received funds from PACs in some but not all issue areas, as a coefficient of 13 percentage points likewise constitutes almost a 60% increase over their respective baseline (22%). Moreover, Column 5 suggests that the relationship is not limited to binary presence of funding: campaigning on an issue is associated with an increase in contribution amount of over 30% from the issue’s PACs.²⁵ Beyond the dichotomous choice of whether or not to campaign on an issue, the even-numbered columns also suggest that the marginal effect of each additional issue word included in candidates’ platforms is significantly associated with increased contributions from issue groups.²⁶

The parameter estimates in Table 1 seem especially large considering aspects of the analysis which may lead to underestimation of effect sizes. I pool candidates who campaigned on any side of an issue into the “treated” category, even though many issue groups would not consider contributing to candidates who take stances opposed to their own, regardless of such candidates’ attention to their issue. Similarly, while the analyses include all candidate–year–issue combinations, PACs in certain issue areas (and perhaps in certain cycles) may adopt rules against contributing to certain types of candidates, such as those unopposed or primary challengers. For these reasons, estimates of β may be significantly biased toward zero by including observations where the possibility of “treatment” effects were precluded. Additionally, I focus solely on one manifestation of support — direct contributions — while issue groups and their affiliates may also use independent expenditures or official endorsements to bolster candidates who prioritize their issue.

²⁵In specifications with logged dependent variable and non-logged independent variable, a 1 unit increase in x is associated with a $100(e^\beta - 1)\%$ change in Y (Angrist and Pischke 2014). As such, $100(e^{0.279} - 1) = 32.18073\%$.

²⁶Importantly, the candidate–year fixed effect accounts for platform–level characteristics such as total number of words, while the issue–year fixed effect accounts for cycle–specific differences in average word counts across issues.

Issue PAC Strategy: Campaign Rhetoric and Access

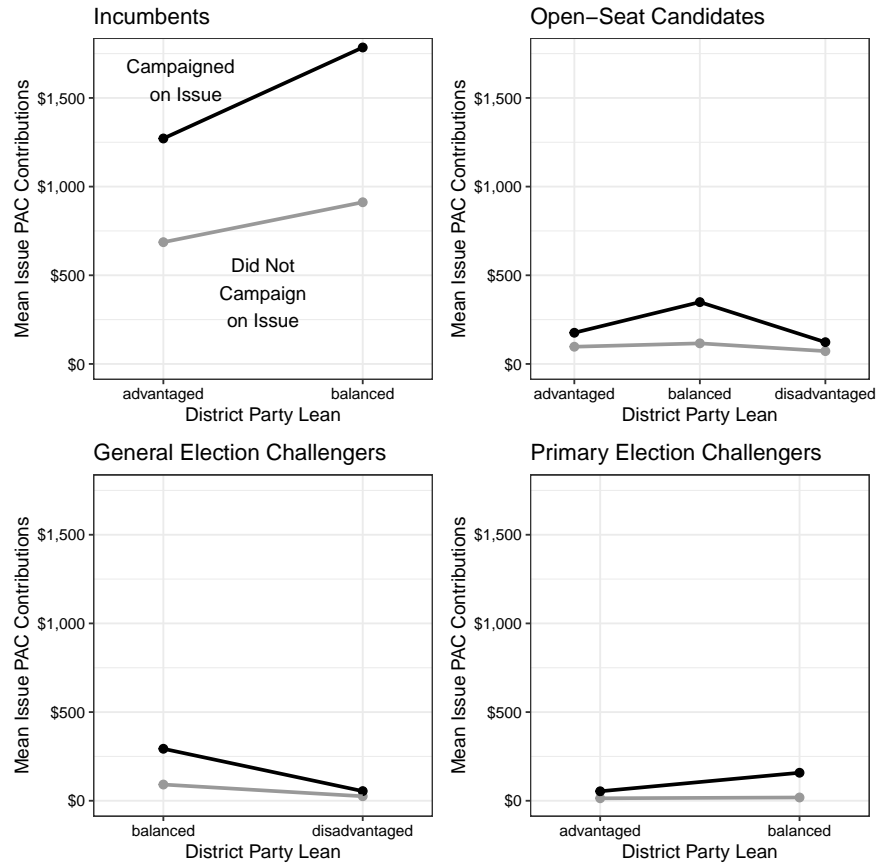
Having demonstrated a general relationship between campaigning on an issue and fundraising from the issue's PACs, I evaluate competing theoretical predictions about where this relationship should be largest. In particular, access-centered approaches suggest that effects should be strongest among incumbents and those in safe districts, while group-centric theories of parties suggest stronger effects among non-incumbents and in competitive districts. Figure 4, which plots average issue-level PAC contributions by candidate type, district lean, and campaign attention to the issue, reveals three notable patterns.²⁷ All else equal and on average, 1) those who campaigned on an issue receive greater contributions from PACs related to that issue than those who did not campaign on the issue, 2) incumbents garner substantially higher contributions than non-incumbents, consistent with findings on the financial incumbency advantage (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014), and 3) candidates in more competitive districts (parties balanced) tend to have higher fundraising than those in less competitive districts (party advantaged or disadvantaged).

To quantify the magnitudes of these heterogeneous relationships at the individual level, Table 2 reports the results of Equation 1 estimated separately by candidate type and whether the district is a "toss-up" or leans toward one party.²⁸ For ease of interpretation, I focus on a binary specification of the independent and dependent variable, with estimates from the alternative specifications introduced in Table 1 reported in Appendix E. Overall, Table 2 suggests that the pooled result in Table 2 is not concentrated solely among certain candidate types or levels of district competitiveness, as coefficients are statistically significant and positive across each subset of candidates. The absolute effects of issue attention on issue PAC contributions are much larger for incumbents than for non-incumbents, yet

²⁷Following Hirano and Snyder (2019), I consider districts advantaged for the candidate's party if the party's nominee received over 57.5% of the two-party vote share in the most recent presidential election, disadvantaged if they received under 42.5%, and balanced if their vote share was somewhere in between.

²⁸Given the similar average contribution patterns between primary election challengers and prospective general election challengers in Figure 4, I collapse challengers into one category, and I collapse districts advantaged and disadvantaged for the party into districts that lean toward one party for the same reason.

Figure 4. Average Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs by Electoral Context and Campaign Issue Attention



Note: Party-disadvantaged incumbents and primary election challengers and party-advantaged general election challengers omitted due to small samples.

Table 2. Issue Attention and Issue PAC Fundraising by Candidate and District Type

	DV: Presence of Contribution					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
Campaigned on Issue	0.124*** (0.021)	0.091*** (0.016)	0.026** (0.009)	0.020** (0.006)	0.017*** (0.005)	0.008*** (0.002)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,853	5,040	3,708	4,878	6,552	11,331
Adjusted R ²	0.391	0.300	0.222	0.200	0.228	0.206

Note: Observations are candidate-issue-year. Candidate-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

differences between their respective baseline rates of receiving issue PAC contributions are even greater. These baseline rates imply that, in swing districts, the increase in likelihood of receiving issue PAC contributions associated with campaigning on the issue is just over 53% for incumbents, 108% for open-seat candidates, and 106% for challengers.²⁹ In districts leaning toward one party, incumbents see a 43% increase while the increase is 96% and 156% for open-seat candidates and challengers, respectively.³⁰ Although the *absolute* increase in issue PAC funding associated with campaign attention is greatest among incumbents, the proportional increase relative to the baseline is twice as large for non-incumbents. Finally, comparing within candidate type suggests small effect differences between swing and leaning districts, yet none are statistically distinct at traditional levels.

These results are consistent with issue PACs responding especially strongly to non-incumbents' campaign prioritization of their issue in primaries. However, as highlighted by their vastly different baseline rates of receiving issue PAC contributions, making comparisons between incumbents and non-incumbents is difficult due to systematic differences in quality, campaigning skills, strategic positioning, and more. To quantify the relative effects of incumbency, campaign issue attention, and their interaction on primary contributions from the issue's PACs, I employ a triple-differences design to estimate a within-candidate incumbency advantage in issue PAC fundraising among candidates who did versus did not campaign on the issue as non-incumbents. The specification is as follows:

$$f(\Delta_t \text{Contribute}_{ijt}) = \beta_1 \Delta_t \text{Incumbency}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1} + \beta_3 (\Delta_t \text{Incumbency}_{it} \times \text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}) + \epsilon_i. \quad (2)$$

The outcomes represented by $f(\Delta_t \text{Contribute}_{ijt})$ capture the change in candidate i 's binary and logged contributions from PACs centered around issue j from year $t-1$ to

²⁹Respectively, their baseline rates are 0.236, 0.024, and 0.016.

³⁰These baseline rates are 0.211, 0.021, and 0.005.

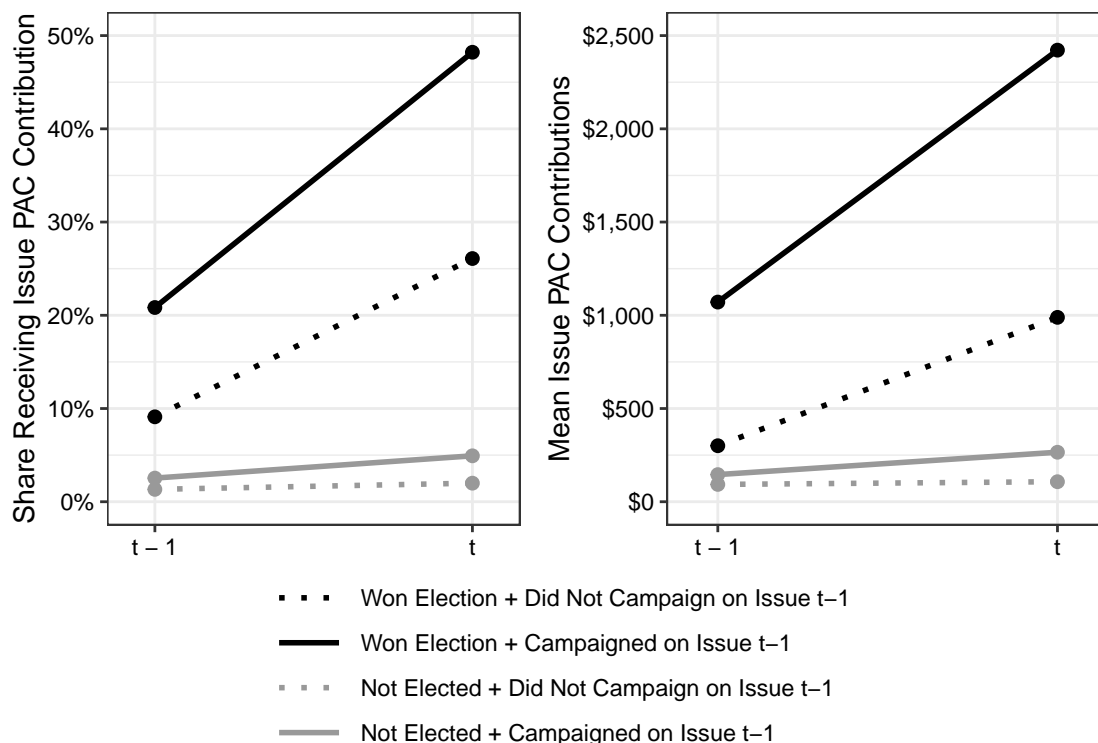
year t ,³¹ i.e. $I(\text{Contribute}_{ijt} > 0) - I(\text{Contribute}_{ijt-1} > 0)$ and $\log(\text{Contribute}_{ijt} + 1) - \log(\text{Contribute}_{ijt-1} + 1)$. The main treatment variable $\Delta_t \text{Incumbency}_{it}$ takes the value of 1 if candidate i ran as a non-incumbent in t_{-1} and an incumbent in time t , and a value of 0 if she ran as a non-incumbent in both t_{-1} and t . Since the “treatment” is winning election for the first time, candidates who ran as incumbents in both years are excluded, but it may be the case that existing incumbents are more similar to eventual-winners than to perpetual losers. In Appendix F, I report results instead using incumbents as the “counterfactual” group. For candidates i who campaigned on issue j in t_{-1} , $\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}$ is equal to 1, and $\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}$ is equal to 0 otherwise. Finally, I include an interaction between change in incumbency and choosing to campaign on the issue in the previous election.

Given this interaction, β_1 estimates a within-candidate incumbency advantage in issue PAC primary fundraising among candidates who did *not* campaign on the issue in the previous election by comparing the issue PAC fundraising changes among candidates elected to office to those who were not elected. Conversely, β_2 estimates the effect of campaigning on the issue in the previous election on change in issue PAC fundraising among candidates who were not elected to office. Lastly, the sum of all three β coefficients represents the change in issue PAC primary fundraising associated with both incumbency and prior issue attention, with β_3 capturing any additional effect of both.

To illustrate, Figure 5 plots the temporal change in share of primary candidates receiving issue PAC contributions and average issue PAC contribution amount by whether candidates campaigned on the issue in the previous election and went from a non-incumbent to an incumbent. Consistent with access-seeking behavior, the increase in issue PAC contributions is far larger for candidates running as incumbents in the next period (black) than for those running again as non-incumbents (gray). However, among candidates who went from non-incumbents to incumbents (black), Figure 5 shows that those who chose

³¹Given the short time frame, I include candidates’ non-consecutive elections if they did not run for office in the intervening years (e.g. candidates who ran in 2016 and 2020 but not 2018 are included). Such cases constitute less than 8% of the sample and results are robust to including only sequential years.

Figure 5. Change in Issue PAC Funding by Previous Electoral Success and Issue Attention



Note: Includes primary candidates who were not incumbents at $t - 1$. Line color represents whether candidate won election $t - 1$ and line type represents whether candidate campaigned on issue in primary at $t - 1$.

to campaign on an issue as non-incumbents (solid) saw an even larger average increase in funding from that issue's PACs than those who did not campaign on the issue (dotted).

The results in Table 3 suggest that there exists an incumbency advantage in issue PAC fundraising that is disproportionately concentrated among candidates who campaigned on the PACs' issue. Compared to those who lost and did not campaign on the issue at $t - 1$, candidates who went from non-incumbents to incumbents but did not campaign on the issue nevertheless experienced an 18 percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving contributions from the issue's PACs. While even those who did not devote attention to an issue enjoy an incumbency boost in fundraising from PACs related to the issue, this incumbency-associated increase is far larger for candidates who did campaign on the issue. The coefficient on the interaction term suggests that candidates who go from non-incumbents to incumbents are an *additional* 9.5 percentage points more likely to re-

Table 3. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.180*** (0.024)	1.702*** (0.207)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.013 (0.007)	0.201* (0.082)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.095** (0.033)	1.224*** (0.312)
Observations	2,826	2,826
Adjusted R ²	0.143	0.196

Note: Observations are candidate–issue–years. Includes candidates who were non–incumbents at $t - 1$. Candidate–clustered standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

ceive funding from issue groups if they campaigned on the issue as non–incumbents. In terms of contribution amounts, candidates who go from non–incumbents to incumbents see over a 400% increase³² in issue PAC contributions if they did not campaign on the issue as non–incumbents and more than a 2000% increase³³ if they did campaign on the issue. As such, these triple–difference results demonstrate that issue champions enjoy an incumbency advantage in issue PAC contributions that is substantially larger than that of non–champions.

Legislative and Financial Implications of Campaign Rhetoric

Taken together, the findings presented thus far are consistent with issue groups contributing to primary candidates who choose to campaign on their issue and continuing to maintain relationships with those who successfully make it into office. In particular, results from Table 3 demonstrate that newly elected incumbents who championed an issue in their non–incumbent campaigns see an even greater increase in contributions from the issue’s groups in their next primary compared to those who did not campaign on the issue as non–incumbents. This suggests that issue PACs seek access to legislators who have already

³² $100(e^{1.702} - 1)\% = 448.4906\%$ increase in issue PAC contributions.

³³Adding together the non–interacted and interacted coefficients yields $100(e^{1.702+0.201+1.224} - 1)\% = 2180.546\%$.

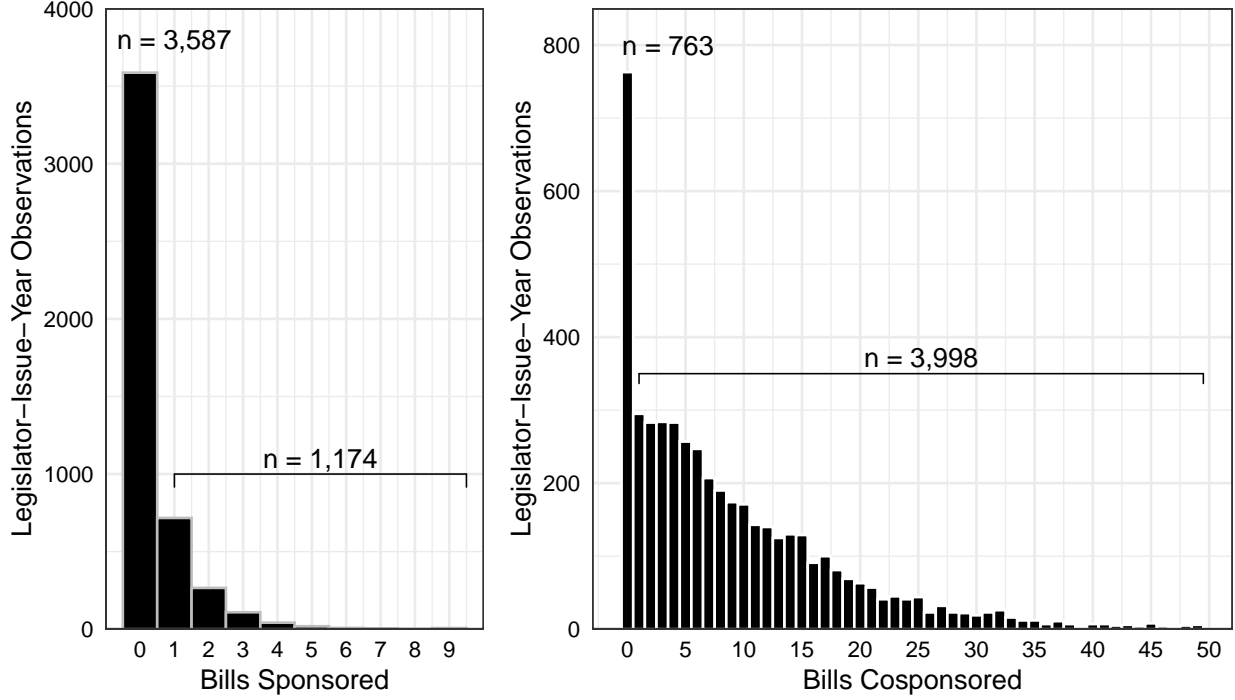
signaled shared priorities. One potential explanation is that campaign priorities serve as a meaningful signal of future legislative activity (Schnakenberg 2016; Sulkin 2011), which issue groups subsequently reward. Candidates may campaign upon issues that they intend to prioritize in office, follow through by disproportionately focusing on such issues, then receive comparatively greater financial support from PACs centered around those issues.

On the other hand, the findings in Table 3 could also be consistent with PACs responding to campaign rhetoric itself, which they may value for a number of reasons. First, groups may believe that they will benefit from the increased salience resulting from their issue's prominence in campaigns (Berry and Wilcox 2015; Kollman 1998). Second, issue groups can point to the strong issue rhetoric of candidates to whom they contributed when soliciting additional funds from donors who previously gave to the organization. Finally, in polarized eras, when there is little opportunity to advance legislation on contentious issues, simply having issue allies in office may be the best that groups can hope for (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Krehbiel 1998; Lee 2016). In contrast to "lobbying as legislative subsidy" (Hall and Deardorff 2006), wherein interest groups exchange informational resources for legislative effort, modern issue group contributions to issue champions may serve as little more than signals of appreciation and desire to maintain relations.

To investigate the extent to which campaign attention predicts legislative attention and how issue PACs respond to both, I compile data on bills' summaries, sponsors, and cosponsors from `congress.gov`. Applying a dictionary string-matching approach to the bill summary text similar to that employed in the campaign platform text, I identify whether each H.R. introduced during the 115th, 116th, and 117th congresses³⁴ pertained to the nine issue areas or not. Figure 6 plots the distribution of number of bills sponsored and cosponsored by members in a given congress on a given issue. Across all combinations of legislators, congresses, and issues, the overall rate of sponsorship was about 25% over the

³⁴Although the sample includes candidates elected in 2022, the 118th congress does not end until 2025.

Figure 6. Congress-Specific Rates of Legislators Sponsoring and Cosponsoring Issue Bills



Note: Histograms binning the number of legislators who sponsored (left) and cosponsored (right) each number of bills on a given issue in a single Congress. Annotation reports the number of legislators who did and did not sponsor and cosponsor any bills on an issue in a given Congress.

period and members who sponsored any bills on an issue tended to sponsor just one. On the other hand, the overall cosponsorship rate was nearly 85%, with a median number of 8 bills cosponsored on a given issue in a given congress among those who cosponsored any bills, and a standard deviation of over 9 bills.

To test whether issue groups increase funding to incumbents who previously campaigned on their issue due to campaign rhetoric or legislative activity, I perform two sets of analyses. First, I investigate the within–legislator relationship between campaigning on an issue and bill sponsorship activity on the issue in the subsequent House session. I estimate the equation:

$$\text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt} = \mathbf{M}(\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}) + \alpha_{it} + \phi_{jt} + \epsilon_i. \quad (3)$$

I consider two outcome variables represented by $\text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt}$: an indicator for whether House member i sponsored any legislation pertaining to issue j during congress t , and the number of bills she cosponsored on issue j in congress t . I use a binary specification of the sponsorship variable and a continuous specification of the cosponsorship variable because, as discussed previously, Figure 6 makes clear that the meaningful variation in sponsorship is in whether or not a member sponsored any bill, whereas the meaningful variation in cosponsorship is in how many bills a member cosponsored. The explanatory variable $\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}$ indicates whether legislator i campaigned on issue j in election year $t - 1$, representing the election immediately preceding the legislative session in year t . Once again, α_{it} and ϕ_{jt} are respective legislator-year and issue-year fixed effects, which ensure that differences in legislators' effectiveness, institutional power, committee assignments, and overall productivity levels do not drive results. As such, \mathbf{M} stands in for the within-legislator-year differences in bill sponsorship and cosponsorship activity, respectively, on issues that she did and did not campaign upon while also controlling for issue-specific time trends.

Table 4 reports the key parameter estimates from Equation 3 separately for freshmen and non-freshmen legislators, as the former allows us to determine whether patterns hold specifically for the "treated" candidates driving the results in Table 3, and the latter can inform us about whether the patterns hold more generally. Additionally, Appendix G reports results from models using number of issue words as the independent variable, a continuous specification of the sponsorship dependent variable, and a binary specification of the cosponsorship dependent variable. It is evident that both freshmen and non-freshmen legislators tend to be more active on issues upon which they most recently campaigned. Campaigning on an issue is associated with almost a 10 percentage point increase in likelihood of introducing legislation on an issue among non-freshmen, while there is a somewhat smaller (and not statistically significant) relationship among freshmen.³⁵ And

³⁵The baseline rates among freshmen and non-freshmen are not much different: non-freshmen introduced at a rate of 19 percentage points while freshmen introduced at a rate of 15 percentage points.

Table 4. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue

	Sponsored Bill (0/1)		# Bills Co-Sponsored	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.093*** (0.021)	0.063 (0.041)	3.000*** (0.379)	3.026*** (0.533)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.261	0.180	0.566	0.558

Note: Observations are legislator–issue–congress. Legislator–clustered standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

for both freshmen and non–freshmen, campaign attention to an issue is associated with cosponsoring about 3 additional bills on the issue.

Having found evidence that members are more active on issues upon which they previously campaigned, we can also try to see how responsive issue PAC primary contributions are to prior campaign attention versus bill sponsorship on their issue. To evaluate the extent to which issue groups reward campaign rhetoric versus legislative activity, I estimate parameters of the equation:

$$\text{Contribute}_{ijt+1} = \beta \text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1} + \mathbf{X}(\text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt}) + \mathbf{N}(\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1} \times \text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt}) + \alpha_{it} + \phi_{jt} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (4)$$

where $\text{Contribute}_{ijt+1}$ takes the value of 1 if and only if legislator i received positive contributions from PACs centered around issue j in election year $t + 1$, the election immediately proceeding legislative session t . Legislator i 's campaign attention to issue j in previous election year $t - 1$ is captured by $\text{Campaigned}_{ijt-1}$. Given the fixed effects α_{it} and ϕ_{jt} and an interaction term, the parameter β represents the within–legislator–year relationship between previously campaigning on an issue and receiving contributions from the issue's groups in the following election for those who were not legislatively active on the issue. Conversely, $\mathbf{X}(\text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt})$ contains the coefficients corresponding to the rela-

tionships between introducing and cosponsoring legislation on an issue and subsequent contributions from PACs related to the issue among legislators who did not campaign on it. Lastly, N includes any additional increase in issue PAC primary funding associated with both campaigning on the issue and introducing or cosponsoring legislation on it.³⁶ Appendix G presents additional estimates from models using number of campaign platform issue words, number of bills sponsored, a binary specification of cosponsorship, and a logarithmic transformation of contributions.

The results reported in Table 5 suggest that legislators' previous campaign attention to an issue matters for primary campaign funding independent of subsequent legislative activity on the issue. In all four models, campaigning on an issue (without introducing legislation on it) is significantly associated with an increase in the likelihood of receiving contributions from the issue's PACs in the next primary election, with a magnitude of 10 percentage points for non-freshmen and estimates ranging from 11 to 19 points for freshmen. On the other hand, only one point estimate associated with legislative activity on an issue (without having campaigned on it beforehand) is statistically distinct from zero at the traditional 95% level. Cosponsoring one additional bill on an issue is associated with a 1.1 percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving issue PAC support. However, a -1.2 percentage point coefficient on the interaction term in the same model means that there is no additional benefit to cosponsoring bills on an issue for legislators who already campaigned upon it. These findings are consistent with issue PACs systematically rewarding rhetorical attention to their issue during primaries while responding far less strongly to bill sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

³⁶Similarly to the problem of "bad controls" (Angrist and Pischke 2009), the inclusion of both previous campaign attention and subsequent legislative activity on the right hand side of Equation 4 may attenuate β toward zero, as Table 4 suggests that legislative activity on an issue can result from campaign attention to the issue.

Table 5. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.098*** (0.019)	0.115** (0.036)	0.101*** (0.023)	0.184*** (0.046)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.034 (0.024)	0.082 (0.046)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.033 (0.035)	-0.106 (0.063)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.002 (0.002)	0.011*** (0.003)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.003)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.343	0.448	0.343	0.455

Note: Observations are legislator–issue–congress. Legislator–clustered standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion and Conclusion

Single-issue interest groups are some of the most recognizable organizations active in American elections, receiving millions of dollars in congressional races each election cycle from members of the public who ostensibly share the groups' priorities. Despite their ubiquity, little is known about issue groups' contribution strategies with regard to the factor which distinguishes them from other moneyed interests: prioritization of a salient issue. Leveraging original data on issue agendas drawn from House primary candidates' websites, I have shown that candidates are more likely to receive support from PACs related to their campaign issues, and successfully elected candidates enjoy an incumbency advantage in issue PAC fundraising that is substantially larger among those who campaigned on the issue compared to those who did not — with differences not attributable to differences in legislative activity on the issue. Taken together, these results provide new evidence that issue groups rely on campaign rhetoric at the primary stage to identify and

cultivate relationships with potential champions of their cause.

Determining precisely why issue groups respond more strongly to campaign rhetoric than to (short-term) legislative activity is beyond the scope of this paper. However, bill sponsorship, bill cosponsorship, and campaign rhetoric all constitute relatively “cheap” signals of priorities, yet campaign platforms tend to be *clearer* signals due to *de minimus* institutional constraints. As such, groups may prefer to rely on potentially less-mitigated campaign rhetoric, which also allows for a more uniform standard of evaluation across the entire pool of candidates. Issue PACs’ apparent responsiveness to campaign attention over legislative activity on their issue may also shed light on conflicting findings regarding the feasibility of long-term alliances between politicians and organized interests (McCarty and Rothenberg 1996; Snyder 1992). Advancing a formal model which offered a resolution to this debate, Hall and Deardorff (2006) concluded that “money buys access only to one’s allies, and the behavioral consequence is greater legislative effort on behalf of a shared objective” (80). However, given the preclusion of meaningful progress for legislation on controversial issues during eras of unorthodox and partisan lawmaking (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Lee 2016; Sinclair 2016), simply having an ally with shared priorities in the contemporary Congress is likely the best for which many issue groups can hope.

These data introduced here highlights the potential for new avenues of research which can extend, build upon, and further clarify our understanding of the role of issue agendas in congressional elections. This paper focuses on nine issue areas that map cleanly onto candidates’ selective campaign attention, PACs’ organizational priorities, and legislative activity. While I exclude macroeconomic issues due to many candidates making boilerplate campaign statements on them, future studies could capture not just issue attention but specificity or substantive content of campaign appeals in order to test whether, for instance, conservative tax organizations support candidates who announce similarly conservative positions on tax policy. Additionally, this paper only analyzes issue PACs’ direct contributions, which are one of a number of avenues of influence moneyed interests can

pursue to support candidates or attempt to influence the policymaking process. Subsequent research could examine whether issue groups also engage in lobbying and make independent expenditures for those who have rhetorically prioritized an issue in their campaigns, as well as how these various activities may be used similarly or differently.

Broadly, this work contributes to a number of literatures which are only growing in importance due to recent trends in American politics. While moneyed interests' motivations have traditionally been viewed through the lens of access versus partisanship and ideology, the results presented here advance ongoing efforts to illuminate the heterogeneity of strategy and motivations among both organized interests and individual donors (Barber, Canes-Wrone, and Thrower 2017; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020; Grumbach 2020; Gordon, Hafer, and Landa 2007; Li 2018; Stuckatz 2022). Moreover, I focus on issue groups' strategies during primaries, the stage of the election which is becoming increasingly consequential for electoral outcomes *and* where existing theoretical work suggests groups may be able to exercise the most influence (Bawn et al. 2012). In doing so, this paper joins a growing body of work (e.g. Hirano and Snyder 2019; Thomsen 2022; Blum and Cowburn 2023) seeking to shift the predominant scholarly emphasis from the general to the primary stage of congressional elections in order to better understand the unique dynamics which characterize intraparty contests.

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Appendix

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A Issue Selection

I identified PACs coded by OpenSecrets with an “Ideological/Single–Issue” (versus “Labor” or “Business”) sector code which contributed to any House primary elections in 2016, 2018, 2020, or 2022. I then dropped PACs with general ideological, leadership PAC, and candidate committee OpenSecrets industry codes as these are not centered around one single issue. Next, I used industry codes and organization names to drop PACs associated with issue areas insufficiently broad or narrow to feasibly be campaigned upon by some but not all candidates across the nation, as well as those with primarily electoral or representational goals rather than policy goals.

Within OpenSecrets’ “Women’s Issues” industry code, for example, many organizations such as Women Under Forty PAC leverage contributions in order to increase the number of women legislators, young women legislators, or women legislators of a certain party — a primary aim distinct from that of championing a particular issue. In contrast, abortion–centric organizations center a particular issue that some may consider a “women’s issue.” Likewise, while a number of PACs devoted to particular foreign policy matters exist, many of these (such as anti–Castro organization US–Cuba Democracy PAC) pertain to issues that are campaigned upon by vanishingly few candidates. However, organizations related to policy and treatment toward Israel are included, as the US’ partnership with Israel and geopolitical issues pertaining to Israel make the issue salient enough for candidates across the country to feasibly adopt stances on it.

Additionally, I exclude issues for which the main organized interests are primarily oriented toward furthering their members’ material interests, such as trade organizations and unions. These include agriculture, education, labor, and corporate business.

B Issue PACs

Table B1. Included Issue PACs

PAC Name	Issue
Ocean Champions	Environment
Humane Society Legislative Fund	Animal Rights
Safari Club International	Guns
League of Conservation Voters	Environment
Human Rights Campaign	LGBTQ
National Cmte to Preserve Social Security	Elderly
National Rifle Assn	Guns
Joint Action Cmte for Political Affairs	Israel
Desert Caucus	Israel
Sierra Club	Environment
Planned Parenthood	Abortion
New Jersey Republican Pro-Life Coalition	Abortion
SunPAC	Israel
JStreetPAC	Israel
New Jersey Right to Life	Abortion
To Protect Our Heritage PAC	Israel
I-PAC JAX	Israel
Citizens Organized PAC	Israel
EMILY's List	Abortion
National Assn for Gun Rights	Guns
Maryland Assn for Concerned Citizens	Israel
National Action Cmte	Israel
End Citizens United	Campaign Finance
National Pro-Life Alliance	Abortion
Protectseniors.org	Elderly
National Shooting Sports Foundation	Guns
Tri-state Maxed Out Women	Abortion
Florida Congressional Cmte	Israel
Center for Coastal Conservation	Environment
Grand Canyon State Caucus	Israel
Washington PAC	Israel
Gun Owners of America	Guns
Republican Jewish Coalition	Israel
National PAC	Israel
Americans for Good Government	Israel
LGBTQ Victory Fund	LGBTQ
Susan B Anthony List	Abortion
Log Cabin Republicans	LGBTQ

Americans United in Support of Democracy	Israel
NRDC Action Fund	Environment
MaggiePAC	Abortion
American Principles	Israel
NARAL Pro-Choice America	Abortion
Louisianans for American Security	Israel
Bi-County PAC	Israel
Equality PAC	LGBTQ
Republican Majority for Choice	Abortion
Mid Manhattan PAC	Israel
Sustainable Energy & Environment Coalition	Environment
America's Conservation PAC	Environment
Illinois Right to Life	Abortion
L PAC	LGBTQ
Americans For Law Enforcement	Police
Friends of the Earth	Environment
Voter Education PAC	Abortion
Environment America	Environment
Giffords PAC	Guns
Ohio Gun Collectors Assn	Guns
White Coat Waste	Animal Rights
Democratic Conservation Alliance	Environment
Partnership for Conservation	Environment
Texas Right to Life	Abortion
Washington Women for Choice	Abortion
Social Security Works	Elderly
Because I Care PAC	Israel
City PAC	Israel
Protect Life PAC	Abortion
Sanctity of Life PAC	Abortion
Action Coalition PAC	Abortion
National Gun Rights PAC	Guns
Protect Our Future	Abortion
Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund	Guns
Population Connection	Abortion
Brady PAC	Guns
Police Action Fund	Police
Environmental Defense Action Fund	Environment
Pride Fund to End Gun Violence	Guns
Animal Wellness Action	Animal Rights
Pro-Israel America PAC	Israel
Pro-Life PAC	Abortion

Tri-State Maxed Out Women	Abortion
Alliance for Retired Americans	Elderly
American Unity Fund	LGBTQ
White Coat Waste Project	Animal Rights
To Protect Our Heritage PAC	Israel
US Israel PAC	Israel
LGBT Democrats of Virginia	LGBTQ
Grand Canyon State Caucus	Israel
National Wildlife Federation Action Fund	Environment
Sunrise PAC	Environment
Democratic Majority for Israel	Israel
Energy Innovation PAC	Environment
Equality California Majority Fund	LGBTQ
End the Occupation	Israel
Citizens for Law Enforcement	Police
C6 Project	Environment
American Horse PAC	Animal Rights
Illinois Citizens for Life	Abortion
End Litter Now PAC	Environment
End the New Apartheid	Israel
Fannie Lou Hamer PAC	Abortion
Wilderness Society Action Fund	Environment
Grass Roots NC/Forum for Firearms Educ	Guns
JVP Action	Israel
Jane Fonda Climate PAC	Environment
American Israel Public Affairs Cmte	Israel
Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life	Abortion
Americans for Action On Climate Fund	Environment

C Campaign Platform Collection

Identifying relevant candidates. I used Ballotpedia.com to identify all candidates who appeared on a Republican or Democratic primary ballot in each district in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022, as well as take down the primary election date and candidate type (incumbent/open seat/challenger). Independent, write-in, and dropout candidates were excluded, as well as candidates who ran in the primaries in the table below.

Table C1. Excluded Primary Races

Locale	Reason
Alaska, 2022 only	Top-4
California	Top-2
Connecticut	Party Convention
Louisiana	Top-2
Utah	Party Convention
Virginia, 2016, Democratic: Districts 5,7,1,6,9,10	Party Convention
Virginia, 2016, Republican: Districts 3,8,5,11,7	Party Convention
Virginia, 2018, Democratic: District 5	Party Convention
Virginia, 2018, Republican: District 5,8,3,7,6	Party Convention
Virginia, 2020, Democratic: District 9	Party Convention
Virginia, 2020, Republican: District 8,5,10,11,4,7	Party Convention
Virginia, 2022, Republican: District 8,5,10,11	Party Convention
Washington	Top-2

Source: Footnotes of FEC primary date calendars.

Searching for campaign websites in real time. Data on 2022 primary candidates were collected in real time. Candidates' web pages were accessed as immediately as possible before their primary, always within a week of the election date. I first performed a web search for "[candidate name] for Congress [election year]". Official governmental websites and social media sites were ignored. If no website appearing to be the candidate's campaign website appeared in the first page of search results, I added the district (e.g. "AL-1") to the search terms. If nothing appeared, I then consulted Politics1.com and Ballotpedia.com, which compile fairly reliable lists of candidates' campaign websites at various levels of government. If no non-social media website or non-governmental campaign website was found, I moved on to the next candidate. Although it is possible that some candidate websites eluded this data collection process, websites that were not found while deliberating searching via numerous steps were not readily accessible to members of the public, activists, or journalists, who would almost certainly devote less effort to find them.

Searching for archived campaign websites. For candidates who ran in 2016, 2018, and 2020, the process was identical to that outlined above, with an added step of accessing the archived website as it appeared at the relevant time via the Wayback Machine (archive.org). I first performed a web site for "[candidate name] for Congress [election year]". Some candidates ran in more recent elections and maintained a new website at

the same URL which hosted their campaign website during the election year of interest. Because many candidates delete their campaign websites after losing election, I likewise consulted historic versions of Politics1.com and Ballotpedia.com. Once a potential historic campaign website URL was identified, I pasted it into the Wayback Machine and accessed the snapshot of the website most immediately before the date of the primary. While these archives ranged in time from very close to the primary to months before the primary, I also recorded the date of the archive version.

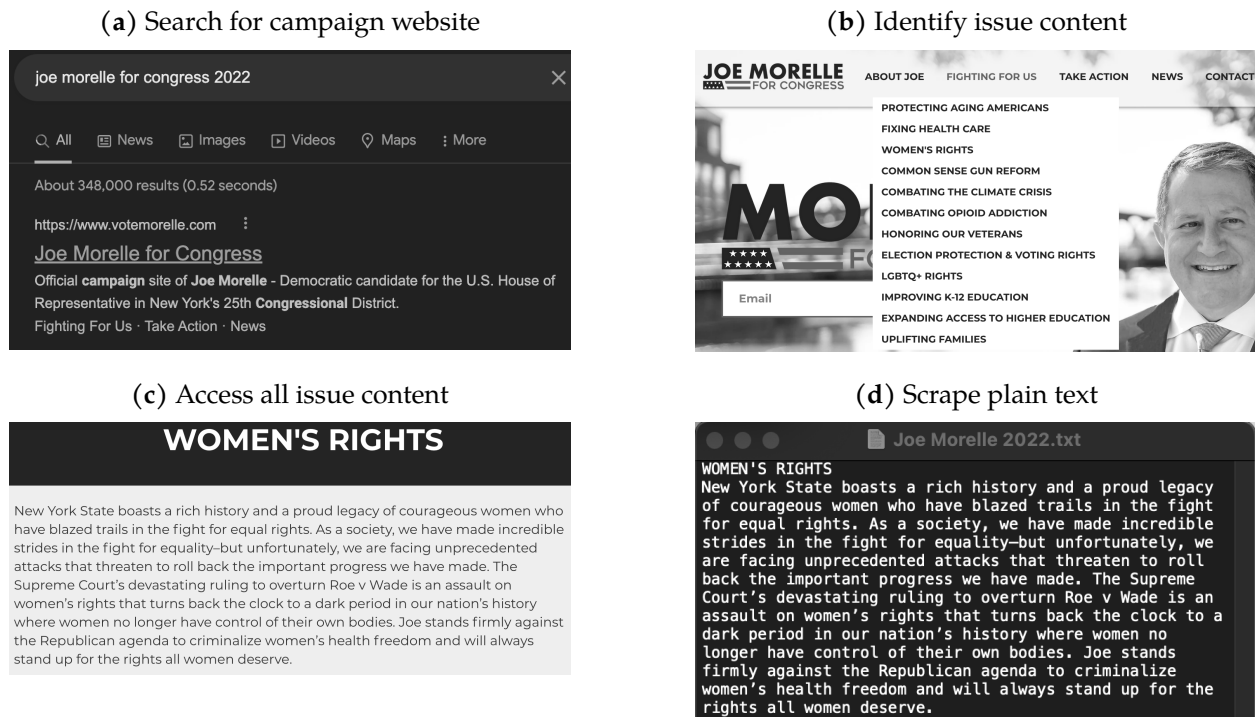
Identifying issue positions. The vast majority of campaign websites had clearly delineated pages or sections for policy platforms, issue positions, or candidate priorities. If the area devoted to positions was not readily obvious in the website architecture, I surveyed the entirety of the website for other places where one might find issue positions. I do not consider candidate biographies, endorsement lists, campaign updates, or volunteer/donation pages to be issue positions. Many incumbent candidates (and some candidates with state legislative experience) devoted a section of the website to their legislative achievements, and these were nearly always separate from issue position pages. I excluded pages devoted exclusively to legislative achievements, but some candidates relate positions on their issue pages to legislative achievements, all of which I include as issue positions. If a campaign website with issue position content was successfully accessed, the URL was recorded in a spreadsheet.

Collecting issue position text. Once issue position content was identified, I manually copied and pasted all of the associated positioning text — including the section header, issue stances, and candidate quotes — from each sub-issue page or section into one .txt file titled the candidate’s name and election year. I also captured the website content exactly as it appeared with a combination of manual screen capture and automated screen capture via the Awesome Screenshot extension on Google Chrome.

Representativeness. Table C2 reports relationships between the binary presence of campaign website positions and observable candidate, election, and district characteristics thought to relate to candidates’ willingness and ability to announce a platform. I estimate models separately by incumbency status due to different meanings of missingness in the data: incumbents virtually all hosted primary campaign websites over the period, but some omitted positions, whereas some non-incumbents lacked a website altogether, but those with websites nearly all included positions. Data on fundraising are from FEC pre-primary reports and presidential vote shares are from Daily Kos, which include 2020 election results for post-census 2022 districts. Competition is captured by indicators for whether the primary was unopposed or financially uncompetitive (with financially competitive as reference category), defined as financially competitive if the top fundraiser garnered under 57.5% of the total receipts in the primary, as well as the party’s advantage in the district, defined as a party advantage if their nominee received over 57.5% of the vote share in the most recent presidential election, disadvantaged if they received under 42.5%, and swing if their vote share was somewhere in between. In the non-incumbent model, I also indicate state legislative experience and whether a candidate raised under 10% of the total receipts in the primary.

Table C2 indicates high rates of campaign website position-taking, especially (and unsurprisingly) among incumbents and those who garnered more than a *de minimis* share of their primary’s total fundraising. Non-incumbents who raised under 10% of the total re-

Figure C1. Example Data Collection Workflow



Note: Visual depiction of simplified steps involved in collecting Representative Joe Morelle’s 2022 primary campaign issue positions from www.votemorelle.com. Appendix C describes each component of the data collection in detail.

ceipts are 15 percentage points less likely to have website positions than those who raised more. However, the magnitude of this missingness is relatively modest considering that nearly 40% of sample non-incumbents did not even file pre-primary fundraising reports, and a substantial portion of such candidates likely did not actively campaign after filing to run. Overall, the results do not suggest that large swaths of candidates are systematically excluded from data on campaign website priorities on the basis of candidate type, electoral competitiveness, or even resources.

Table C2. Determinants of Primary Campaign Website Positions, 2016—2022

	Campaign Website Positions Present	
	Incumbents	Non-Incumbents
(Intercept)	0.866*** (0.068)	0.775*** (0.028)
Republican	0.025 (0.027)	−0.014 (0.014)
Unopposed Primary	−0.087 (0.065)	−0.054 (0.028)
Uncompetitive \$ Primary	−0.050 (0.065)	−0.014 (0.017)
Advantaged District	−0.076** (0.028)	
Receipts < 10%		−0.146*** (0.015)
State Legislator		0.025 (0.026)
Open Advantaged		0.001 (0.025)
Open Disadvantaged		−0.068* (0.034)
General Challenger Swing		−0.009 (0.024)
General Challenger Disadvantaged		−0.092*** (0.023)
Primary Challenger Advantaged		−0.046 (0.025)
Primary Challenger Swing		−0.029 (0.033)
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓
Observations	1,213	4,939
Adjusted R ²	0.012	0.100

Note: Linear probability models predicting presence (1) or absence (0) of campaign website issue positions during primary. Reference value for primary competitiveness is financially competitive, district type in incumbent model is swing, and district-candidate type in non-incumbent model is open-seat swing. HC3 standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Reverse causality — platform change in response to previous funding. While we cannot directly test the presence of reverse causality, the panel structure of the data allows for investigation into temporal changes in campaign platforms. After wrangling the data into observations at the candidate–issue–year–pair level (e.g. AOC, environment, 2018–2020) for candidates who ran in multiple cycles from 2016 to 2022, I calculated the net changes in issue word use between the two elections as well as whether they added the issue to their platform between the two elections. Figures C2 and C3 suggest that candidates who received funding from issue PACs in the previous election were not systematically more likely to increase attention (i.e. binary or word count based) to the issue in the next election. For the issues of police and campaign finance, a much larger proportion of candidates who received funds campaigned on the issue in the next election compared to candidates who didn’t receive funds. However, a much larger proportion of candidates who didn’t receive abortion–related funds campaigned on abortion in the next election compared to candidates who did receive funds. The other six issues do not show major differences, and the differences are not consistently in the direction of candidates who received funding being more likely to campaign on the issue in the next election. Finally, Table C3 explicitly tests whether candidates who receive contributions from PACs related to an issue are more likely to campaign on the issue in their next election or increase the number of words associated with the issue in their campaign platform in their next election. Candidates who received PAC money are only an estimated 0.4% more likely to add the issue than candidates who didn’t receive PAC money, however, this is not even close to statistically distinct from 0% at traditional levels of significance. Likewise, receiving issue PAC money is only associated with a campaign platform change of one tenth of a word associated with the issue — a similarly very small, very imprecisely estimated relationship in the *opposite* direction than expected.

Table C3. Reverse Causality: Issue PAC Funding and Change in Issue Attention

	Added Issue From t-1 to t	Word Count Change From t-1 to t
Received Issue PAC \$ at t-1	0.004 (0.010)	-0.100 (0.177)
Observations	6,237	6,237
Adjusted R ²	0.000	0.000

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure C2. Net Campaign Issue Word Change By Previous Issue PAC Funding

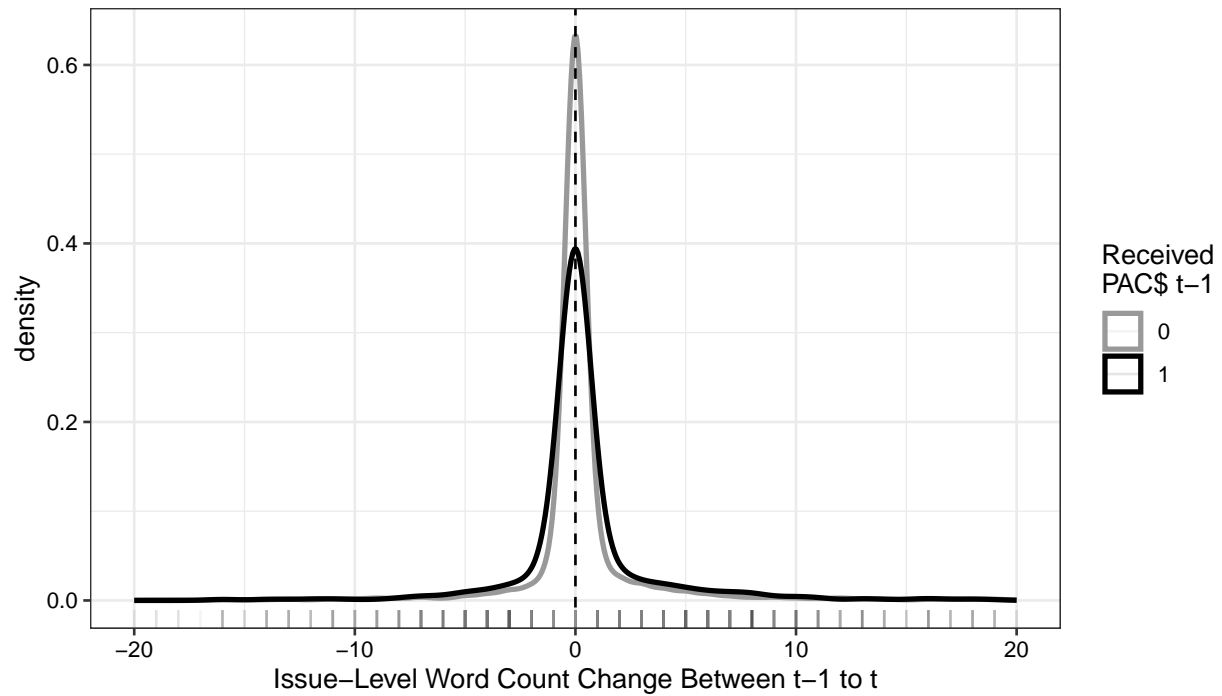
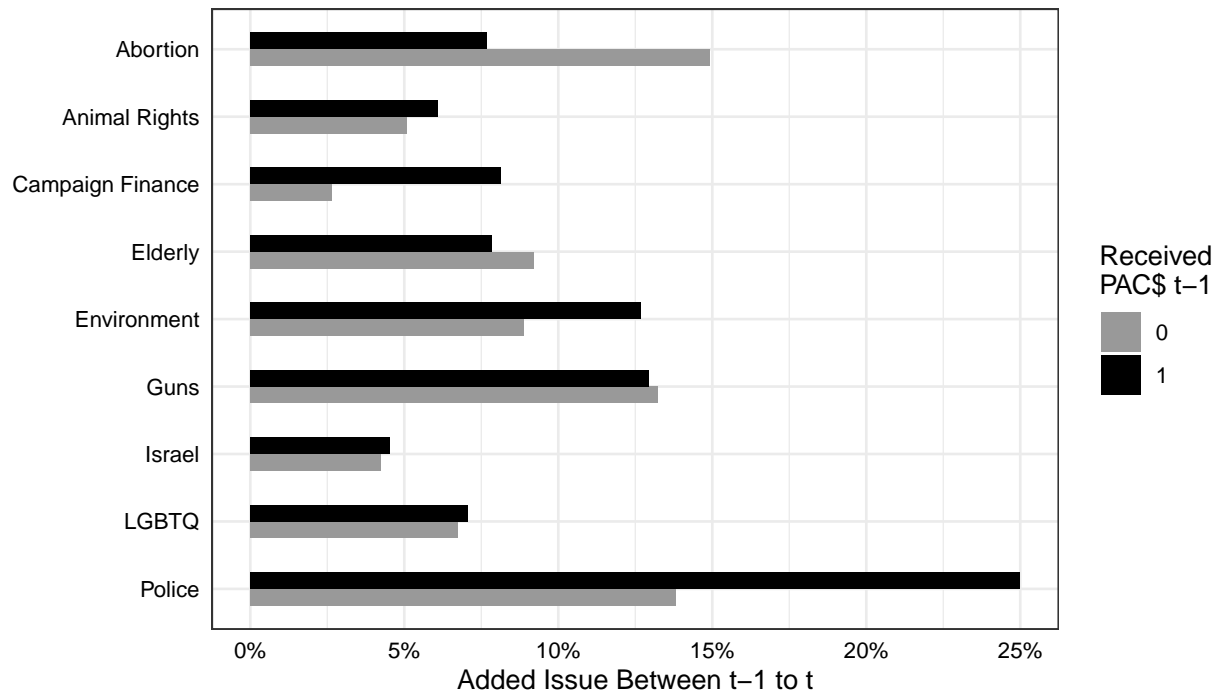


Figure C3. Rate of Campaign Issue Addition By Previous Issue PAC Funding



D Campaign Issues

Abortion Terms: "sanctity of life", "unborn", "pro-life", "fetus", "abortion", "abort", "nabal", "global gag", "planned parenthood", "terminate", "rape", "right to life", "right to choose", "pro-choice", "pregnancy", "roe", "hyde", "family planning", "reproductive"

Abortion Example: “Women’s reproductive rights are under assault by the Trump Administration. A woman’s right to choose is a healthcare issue and economic empowerment issue, which is why it is crucial that we take action to protect women’s rights and reproductive freedom. Marilyn strongly supports a woman’s right to choose and will fight attempts to restrict access to birth control and women’s healthcare. In Congress, she will protect funding for Planned Parenthood and access to birth control, and will fiercely oppose attempts to overturn Roe v. Wade.” — Marilyn Strickland (WA-10-2020)

Gun Terms: "2nd amendment", "infringe", "right to bear arms", "militia", "second amendment", "self-defense", "nra", "rifle", "rifles", "ammunition", "firearm", "firearms", "gun violence", "shooting", "shootings", "shooter", "assault rifle", "automatic rifle", "automatic rifles", "automatic weapons", "assault weapon", "automatic weapon", "background checks", "background check", "bump stock", "high-capacity magazine", "gun", "guns", "high-capacity magazines"

Guns Example: “When it comes to protecting our right to bear arms, there has been no greater champion than Matt. Marion Hammer, past President of the NRA, has called Matt “one of the most pro-gun members of the Florida Legislature.” Matt successfully sponsored legislation banning local governments from infringing on our 2nd Amendment rights, and led the fight to bring Open Carry to Florida. When many called for the repeal of Florida’s Stand Your Ground Law, Matt fought to ensure that “not one damn comma” of the law was changed. Matt killed all taxes on gun club memberships, and passed legislation stopping insurance companies from discriminating against gun owners. Matt is once again leading the fight for our 2nd Amendment Rights in Congress by cosponsoring nationwide Concealed Carry Reciprocity legislation.” — Matt Gaetz (FL-1-2018)

Animal Terms: "animal", "animals", "pet", "pets"

Animal Example: “I would also champion the promotion of humane animal treatment. I would fight to make sure the next President enforces, funds, and keeps in place current protections for animals and wildlife. I’d work to close loopholes like those in the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and others designed to benefit the few and risk animals and their habitats. And we need to establish and enforce stronger regulations on puppy mills and other inhumane commercial breeding facilities. Our pets are members of our families, and wildlife are an important part of our ecosystem. I am currently the mom of a dog named Winston, and have had pets throughout my entire childhood. As a child, I volunteered at Free Flight Exotic Bird Sanctuary, Helen Woodward Animal Center, and beach clean ups, in addition to supporting conservation efforts and taking wildlife classes at the San Diego

Zoo. I would bring this lifelong commitment to our environment, animals, and wildlife, which I know so many people in the 53rd District also share, to my work in Congress.” — Sara Jacobs (CA-53-2020)

LGBTQ Terms: "religious freedom", "marriage equality", "traditional marriage", "same sex marriage", "same-sex marriage", "traditional marriages", "same-sex marriage", "gay", "same sex", "same-sex", "sexual orientation", "lgbt+", "lgbt", "lgbtq", "lgbtq+", "transgend", "sanctity of marriage", "conversion therapy", "gender affirming", "gender-affirming"

LGBTQ Example: “I believe that marriage is between one man and one woman. It is important to our culture that it be defined as such. I believe in a constitutional amendment that would protect traditional marriage. Why is a constitutional amendment necessary? It is necessary because of the increasing number of liberal state legislatures pushing for state laws that permit unconventional marriage to occur, and activist judges are sanctioning those laws with increasing regularity. The attack on traditional marriage is an attack on the fundamental core of our society.” — Charles Fleischmann (TN-3-2016)

Elderly Terms: "senior", "seniors", "retiring", "retired", "retire", "retires", "retirees", "retirement", "older americans", "old-age", "old age"

Elderly Example: “In Congress, I will always honor our commitments to seniors and protect the Social Security and Medicare programs that they have worked hard to fund. I oppose voucher schemes and support reforms that will ensure appropriate cost of living adjustments that account for the rising costs our seniors face. I’ve fought hard to improve service and cut costs by supporting efforts backed by the AARP and other organizations that represent older Americans. I was named a Medicare Advantage Champion by the Coalition for Medicare Choices, and I will continue these efforts to provide our most valued citizens with the health care and peace of mind they deserve. I’ve also advocated for a Caregiver’s Tax Credit to help families give their elderly loved ones the attention they need in the comfort of home. This effort is strongly supported by the AARP because it provides a tax credit for qualifying caregivers and recognizes the enormous contribution they make to their families and our healthcare system.” — Donald Norcross (NJ-1-2020)

Israel Terms: "israel", "israeli", "palestine", "palestinian", "israeli-palestinian"

Israel Example: “Israel is one of our strongest allies not only in the Middle East region but across the globe. Under President Trump, American-Israeli relations made great progress, but the Democrats in Congress and the Biden Administration threaten our partnership. With anti-Semitic activities on the rise, both nationally and in New York, it is the duty of our elected officials to properly and swiftly defend our allies. When he gets to Congress, Robert will join the fight to eradicate hate in all forms starting with his efforts to: Push legislation that clearly defines antisemitism and constructs clear punishments for those found engaging in antisemitic activities. Reaffirm and support legislation that maintains funding for Israel, our strongest ally in the Middle East and a beacon of democracy in the

region. Fight back against the Radical Left's crusade against Israeli sovereignty and their efforts to villainize American Jews. As we've seen across Long Island, New York, and the United States, anti-semitic activities and anti-Israeli sentiments are on the rise. We need to remember who our allies are and to make sure those relationships are reaffirmed. While in Congress, Cap will be vocal in standing by Israel and her right to protect the Israeli people from any outside influence or attacks." — Robert Cornicelli (NY-2-2022)

Campaign Finance Terms: "citizens united", "campaign finance", "financial disclosure"

Campaign Finance Example: "Raja opposes the unfettered influx of corporate and special interest money in politics made possible by the Supreme Court's wrong-headed Citizens United decision. In Congress, Raja will work to make sure that the voices of working people and the poor aren't drowned out by special interests. First, Raja supports a constitutional amendment to overturn the effects of Citizens United by stipulating that the rights guaranteed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights are only inherent to natural persons – not to corporations — and that spending unlimited money in elections is not the same as exercising free speech. Second, Raja will work to eliminate so-called "dark money" from our elections by requiring all organizations to disclose their contributions – including those that currently hide their activities by claiming they are for "social" or "educational" purposes. This huge loophole is enabling wealthy individuals and interest groups to hijack our elections without revealing their true identities or purpose. We must return transparency to our elections, so voters can know who is behind the ads and other spending designed to influence their vote. Third, Raja will push for campaign finance reforms that enables more citizens to participate in our democracy. He will advocate for increased public financing of elections, broader access to our public airwaves for credible candidates, and he will encourage such practices as matching funds for small donations to candidates who agree to spending-limits. This will empower ordinary voters and reduce the over-reliance on special interests that skews our politics in favor of the few over the many." — Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-8-2016)

Environment Terms: "clean energy", "environment", "environmental", "climate change", "global warming", "greenhouse", "pollution", "polluting", "pollutants", "polluters", "fossil fuel", "fossil fuels", "carbon", "clean fuel", "ecosystem", "planet", "solar energy", "solar panels"

Environment Example: "Our nation's increasing need for energy must be addressed in ways that balance our economy with the stewardship of our environment. Striking this balance is one of the most vital issues facing the United States. Climate Change, as the experts have proven, is a real problem that requires pro-active solutions from the federal government. We need programs that help the private sector explore new business models that can deliver clean energy and energy efficiency at lower cost. If elected to Congress, I will seek out and support appropriate solutions that put our country on a realistic and sustainable path to address this challenge. We need to increase funding for research & development of sustainable energy sources, support tax credits for the development and production of renewable energy like solar, wind, and more efficient and electric vehicles,

explore user fees to reduce pollution, and increase funding for mass transit. On a personal note, I grew up on the St. Clair River. Summers of boating, floating on the river in an inner tube, and the thrill of catching that big fish — be it perch, pickerel, bass or walleye — remain fresh in my memory. But the issue of protecting our fresh water supply is a serious one. The Great Lakes are a precious resource for our region and contain 20 percent of all freshwater on the planet. They face serious threats from invasive species, toxins, water diversion, wetland destruction, sewage overflows and Climate Change. I am committed to working with all communities to protect this valued asset of our region.” — Debbie Dingell (MI-12-2020)

Police Terms: "defund the police", "abolish", "law enforcement", "policing", "back the blue", "police", "protect and serve", "profiling", "incarcer", "officer", "officers"

Police Example: “We can’t have Law & Order without law enforcement. We all have seen the movies where the bad guys have a certain respect for cops — the attitude of “don’t kill a cop” because the entire weight of law enforcement would come down and eliminate them. Sadly, since the Obama terms, law enforcement has been vilified, attacked, and disrespected to the point where law enforcement officers have actually been assassinated, and lured into ambushes for harm. Never in my life have I seen this until the last few years. Most law enforcement is at the State and local levels. However, I will do my part to ensure that Federal and local law enforcement work together — one team, one dream! I will publically support law enforcement to renew the respect and honor they deserve. Be vocal!” — Marvin Boguslawski (NC-6-2022)

E Alternative Specifications: Electoral Context Results

Table E1. Issue Attention and Issue PAC Fundraising by Candidate and District Type, Mixed DV Only

	DV: Presence of Contribution					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
Campaigned on Issue	0.143*** (0.022)	0.101*** (0.017)	0.125** (0.041)	0.146*** (0.038)	0.097** (0.030)	0.129** (0.041)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,583	4,572	702	666	828	522
Adjusted R ²	0.390	0.294	0.172	0.124	0.248	0.222

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table E2. Issue Attention and Issue PAC Fundraising by Candidate and District Type, with Logged DV

	DV: log(Contributions + 1)					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
Campaigned on Issue	0.990*** (0.165)	0.692*** (0.123)	0.196** (0.076)	0.157** (0.052)	0.145*** (0.040)	0.060*** (0.017)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,851	5,038	3,708	4,878	6,552	11,331
Adjusted R ²	0.412	0.324	0.229	0.199	0.236	0.215

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table E3. Issue Attention and Issue PAC Fundraising by Candidate and District Type, Word Count

	DV: Presence of Contribution					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
# Issue Words Used	0.010** (0.004)	0.007** (0.002)	0.003* (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.001* (0.000)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,853	5,040	3,708	4,878	6,552	11,331
Adjusted R ²	0.384	0.298	0.222	0.199	0.228	0.207

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

F Alternative Specifications: Triple Differences Models

Table F1. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention, First-Period Incumbents as Control

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.114*** (0.025)	0.661** (0.216)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.030** (0.010)	0.349** (0.111)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.078* (0.034)	1.076*** (0.316)
Observations	4,158	4,158
Adjusted R ²	0.038	0.033

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

G Alternative Specifications: Legislative Activity Results

Table G1. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue

	# Bills Sponsored		Co-Sponsored Bill (0/1)	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.246*** (0.047)	0.155* (0.067)	0.061*** (0.009)	0.041* (0.020)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.241	0.176	0.560	0.592

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table G2. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue, Word Count

	Sponsored Bill (0/1)		# Bills Co-Sponsored	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
# Issue Words $t-1$	0.011*** (0.003)	0.011*** (0.003)	0.368*** (0.065)	0.264* (0.104)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.262	0.197	0.570	0.566

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table G3. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding, Word Count

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
# Issue Words Used t_{-1}	0.007 (0.004)	0.000 (0.003)	0.009* (0.004)	0.003 (0.005)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.035 (0.021)	0.049 (0.037)		
Words * Sponsored	0.006 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.004)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.002 (0.001)	0.007* (0.003)
Words * Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.341	0.442	0.340	0.446

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table G4. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.092*** (0.018)	0.098** (0.035)	0.079 (0.043)	0.180** (0.066)
# Bills Sponsored	0.032* (0.013)	0.046 (0.030)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.018 (0.015)	-0.033 (0.033)		
Co-Sponsored Bill (0/1)			0.109*** (0.021)	0.190*** (0.048)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.028 (0.047)	-0.106 (0.062)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	954	3,807	954
Adjusted R ²	0.350	0.447	0.345	0.453

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table G5. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: log(Contribution +1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.726*** (0.147)	1.003*** (0.279)	0.745*** (0.180)	1.592*** (0.349)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.306 (0.185)	0.786* (0.391)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.226 (0.267)	-0.955 (0.516)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.011 (0.013)	0.081** (0.026)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.005 (0.014)	-0.099*** (0.025)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,807	952	3,807	952
Adjusted R ²	0.375	0.485	0.374	0.490

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

H Alternative Specifications: Candidate–PAC–Year–Level Results

Table H1. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PAC

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.005*** (0.001)		0.018*** (0.002)		0.040*** (0.005)	
# Issue Words Used	0.000*** (0.000)		0.001*** (0.000)		0.001** (0.000)	
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	393,460	393,460	103,824	103,824	393,439	393,439
Adjusted R ²	0.079	0.079	0.142	0.141	0.080	0.080

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table H2. Issue Attention and Issue PAC Fundraising by Candidate and District Type

	DV: Presence of Contribution					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
Campaigned on Issue	0.025*** (0.004)	0.014*** (0.003)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.001** (0.000)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	32,651	57,680	42,436	55,826	74,984	129,677
Adjusted R ²	0.207	0.172	0.059	0.039	0.065	0.040

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table H3. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	log(Δ Contributions + 1)
Δ Incumbency	0.027*** (0.004)	0.243*** (0.029)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.002* (0.001)	0.022* (0.011)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.016** (0.005)	0.179*** (0.043)
Observations	32,342	32,203
Adjusted R ²	0.016	0.028

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table H4. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.018*** (0.003)	0.028*** (0.006)	0.019*** (0.004)	0.039*** (0.008)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.011* (0.005)	0.015 (0.011)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.018 (0.014)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	0.003*** (0.001)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.001)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	42,539	10,918	42,539	10,918
Adjusted R ²	0.175	0.274	0.175	0.275

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

I Heterogeneity: Results by Party

Table I1. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs, Democrats Only

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.029***		0.089***		0.241***	
	(0.006)		(0.015)		(0.045)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002***		0.007***		0.018***
		(0.001)		(0.002)		(0.004)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	16,065	16,065	4,905	4,905	16,064	16,064
Adjusted R ²	0.392	0.392	0.290	0.289	0.394	0.394

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table I2. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs, Republicans Only

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.007		0.040**		0.049	
	(0.005)		(0.014)		(0.042)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002*		0.010***		0.018*
		(0.001)		(0.002)		(0.009)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	18,315	18,315	4,968	4,968	18,312	18,312
Adjusted R ²	0.221	0.221	0.466	0.469	0.223	0.223

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table I3. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention, Democrats Only

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.380***	3.422***
	(0.048)	(0.399)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.018	0.256*
	(0.010)	(0.121)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	-0.099	-0.057
	(0.060)	(0.528)
Observations	1,449	1,449
Adjusted R ²	0.205	0.280

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table I4. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention, Republicans Only

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.094*** (0.020)	0.962*** (0.180)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	-0.006* (0.003)	0.020 (0.045)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.181*** (0.033)	1.423*** (0.288)
Observations	1,377	1,377
Adjusted R ²	0.135	0.146

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table I5. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue, Democrats Only

	Sponsored Bill (0/1)		# Bills Co-Sponsored	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.065* (0.028)	0.061 (0.060)	1.308* (0.519)	2.292** (0.765)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,719	450	1,719	450
Adjusted R ²	0.282	0.233	0.695	0.678

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table I6. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue, Republicans Only

	Sponsored Bill (0/1)		# Bills Co-Sponsored	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.106*** (0.031)	0.013 (0.062)	2.473*** (0.467)	1.930** (0.666)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,088	504	2,088	504
Adjusted R ²	0.255	0.157	0.585	0.553

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table I7. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding, Democrats Only

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.041 (0.025)	0.031 (0.049)	0.030 (0.033)	0.052 (0.061)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.058 (0.037)	0.013 (0.081)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.028 (0.050)	0.016 (0.091)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.004* (0.002)	0.008 (0.005)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.004)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,719	450	1,719	450
Adjusted R ²	0.338	0.555	0.340	0.560

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table I8. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding, Republicans Only

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.040 (0.023)	0.064 (0.052)	0.057 (0.035)	0.121* (0.056)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.036 (0.024)	0.011 (0.050)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.013 (0.039)	-0.067 (0.079)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.010*** (0.003)	0.015** (0.005)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			-0.004 (0.003)	-0.012* (0.005)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,088	504	2,088	504
Adjusted R ²	0.552	0.422	0.559	0.433

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

J Heterogeneity: Results by Issue

Table J1. Abortion Attention and Primary Fundraising From Abortion PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.059*** (0.009)		0.489*** (0.075)	
# Issue Words Used		0.005*** (0.001)		0.039*** (0.008)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.049	0.045	0.053	0.048

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J2. Animal Rights Attention and Primary Fundraising From Animal PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.029* (0.013)		0.247* (0.097)	
# Issue Words Used		0.015*** (0.003)		0.124*** (0.023)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.010	0.014	0.009	0.015

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J3. Campaign Finance Attention and Primary Fundraising From Campaign Finance PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.059*** (0.011)		0.504*** (0.094)	
# Issue Words Used		0.019*** (0.003)		0.168*** (0.028)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.082	0.083	0.082	0.084

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J4. Elderly Attention and Primary Fundraising From Elderly PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.036*** (0.006)		0.263*** (0.043)	
# Issue Words Used		0.008*** (0.001)		0.056*** (0.006)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.047	0.058	0.047	0.058

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J5. Environment Attention and Primary Fundraising From Environment PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.019 (0.010)		0.166* (0.077)	
# Issue Words Used		0.003*** (0.001)		0.026*** (0.005)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,818	3,818
Adjusted R ²	0.088	0.092	0.087	0.092

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J6. Guns Attention and Primary Fundraising From Guns PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.016 (0.012)		0.128 (0.095)	
# Issue Words Used		0.001 (0.001)		0.009 (0.006)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.062	0.062	0.063	0.063

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J7. Israel Attention and Primary Fundraising From Israel PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.114*** (0.018)		0.982*** (0.146)	
# Issue Words Used		0.006*** (0.002)		0.056*** (0.012)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,818	3,818
Adjusted R ²	0.021	0.015	0.025	0.018

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J8. LGBTQ Attention and Primary Fundraising From LGBTQ PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.031***		0.231**	
	(0.009)		(0.072)	
# Issue Words Used		0.010***		0.076***
		(0.001)		(0.011)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.064	0.074	0.063	0.071

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table J9. Police Attention and Primary Fundraising From Police PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.004		0.023	
	(0.003)		(0.021)	
# Issue Words Used		0.000		0.000
		(0.000)		(0.002)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,820	3,820	3,820	3,820
Adjusted R ²	0.056	0.056	0.049	0.049

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001