

Campaign Agendas and Issue Group Strategy in Intraparty Elections*

Mellissa Meisels[†]

Abstract

Which candidates do issue-focused groups support? Longstanding theories suggest an emphasis on either accessing friendly incumbents or helping elect new potential allies, yet systematic evaluation requires information on candidate-side issue priorities. I combine an original dataset of all available House primary candidates' policy platforms spanning 2016 through 2024 with FEC receipts and bill summaries to measure campaign attention, PAC contributions, and legislative behavior across 42,000 candidate-issue-year observations. Using a series of within-candidate research designs, I first demonstrate that candidates raise more money from groups related to their campaign issues. Leveraging changes in officeholder status, I then show that a substantially larger incumbency advantage in issue group fundraising is afforded to such "issue champions" — a difference not explained by actual legislative activity. These results provide new evidence that policy-demanding groups use campaign rhetoric to identify and foster relationships with potential champions of their cause during the increasingly important primary stage of congressional elections.

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[†]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Yale University: mellissa.meisels@yale.edu.

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, 2022, and 2024. Combined with itemized contribution receipts, these textual data allow me to match campaign attention to interest 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, issue-year, and district-issue fixed effects. I also consider whether

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.

these effects vary by electoral context. Second, I further examine how issue groups respond to officeholding 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 previously campaign on the groups' issue. Third, I use a within-member design to assess the extent to which groups respond to legislators' campaign rhetoric versus legislative activity on their issue.

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 groups centered around the issues on which they chose to campaign. While absolute campaign attention effects are largest among incumbents, I find that effects relative to baseline rates of issue group fundraising are largest among non-incumbents. To more explicitly assess how issue groups 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. This difference does not appear to be driven by differences in issue-related activity in the intervening Congress, as issue group 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 intraparty electoral dynamics in the United States (Blum and Cowburn 2023; Hassell 2023; Hirano and Snyder 2019; Lockhart and Hill 2023; Thomsen 2023). While research on congressional races has traditionally focused on the general election stage, the decline of two-party competition means that electoral outcomes are frequently determined at the primary 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). As such groups increasingly align with one party or the other, their real decision ultimately becomes *which* copartisans to support (Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz N.d.). Third, I illuminate the beginnings of the legislator–group life cycle by investigating connections formed prior to entrance to 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 evidence of the connection between electoral and legislative behavior in the current era, as well as an assessment of key stakeholders’ responses to each (Sulkin 2011; Schnakenberg 2016).

Theoretical Foundations of Issue Group Strategy

Although strong fundraising is no guarantee that a candidate will win an election, money is a prerequisite for any large-scale electioneering effort, enables the hiring of staff and consultants, and signals viability and strength — particularly in primary elections (Biersack, Herrnson, and Wilcox 1993; Epstein and Zemsky 1995; Jacobson 2015; Maestas and Rugeley 2008; Thomsen 2023). The importance of campaign contributions and the incentives that they create for candidate behavior are reflected by a sustained scholarly focus on the potentially 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 intra-party contribution strategies that such groups might employ to best achieve them. The first approach centers around seeking access to legislators directly, akin to corporate PACs con-

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.

tributing to legislators with the greatest policymaking influence over their industry (Fournaies and Hall 2014, 2018; Powell and Grimmer 2016; Romer and Snyder 1994). However, many electeds lack the technical expertise required to have well-formed opinions on relatively obscure regulations, the minutiae of which fly under the political radar and are also unlikely to activate the public (Arnold 1990; Denzau and Munger 1986). This contrasts with the more salient, controversial, and “easy” policies around which many issue groups are formed, making it less realistic to influence politicians’ behavior on the same. As such, formal theories of lobbying suggest that issue groups should target like-minded legislators in hopes of inducing greater effort on their mutual goals (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall and Deardorff 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 Democratic 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 congressional candidates have prior officeholding experience, the extent to which these records would predict future priorities in the federal legislative setting is unclear. Moreover, relying upon past records precludes comparison between candidates with and without prior officeholding experience.

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; Meisels 2025*b*; 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 there exist strategic constraints on the number of issues upon which candidates can or should campaign (perhaps because campaigning on fewer issues is more effective than campaigning on many), campaign attention can be expended 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 believe campaign attention to be.

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

Existing theories also have divergent expectations about 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 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 campaign rhetoric 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 electorally advantaged candidates (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014), those in safe districts face a more certain victory in the general election. This means that issue groups 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 greatest marginal impact on legislative composition all else

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

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 candidates are readily available via the Federal Election Commission (FEC),¹¹ capturing candidate-side issue priorities is a greater challenge. 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 coverage of races that clear some threshold of newsworthiness.

To overcome these limitations, I collect issue platform text on all available campaign

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

¹¹I supplement this with data from OpenSecrets to identify PACs primarily oriented around a single issue.

websites of candidates who appeared on a Democratic or Republican House primary ballot from 2016 to 2024.¹² 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; Milita, Ryan, and Simas 2014).¹⁴

I identify whether each campaign platform includes nine key issue areas: Guns, Abortion, Environment, Animal Rights, Police, Elderly, LGBTQ, Campaign Finance, and Israel. Out of all possible issue areas on which candidates actively campaigned and groups actively contributed in congressional elections over the period, these met a few important criteria. On the one hand, they are broad enough for PACs to have formed around them and for candidates across the nation to meaningfully consider whether to campaign on

¹²This effort includes over 7,000 unique candidate-year observations, nearly two-thirds (4,703) 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. Unsurprisingly, incumbents and those who garnered more than a *de minimis* share of their primary field's total fundraising create websites with campaign platforms at a higher rate. However, the magnitude of missingness among candidates without viable fundraising is actually quite modest considering the large portion of non-incumbents who did not even file a pre-primary fundraising report.

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 noted by Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin, campaign websites "provide an unmediated, holistic, and representative portrait of messages aimed at voters in general" (2009, 346-347).

them.¹⁵ On the other hand, these issues are narrow enough that candidates do not feel uniformly compelled to take boilerplate positions on them.¹⁶ Third, I exclude issues which have an interest group base predominantly concerned with their members' material interests, as union and trade groups' structures and goals are distinct from other issue groups' (Barber and Eatough 2019; Phillips N.d.; Welch 1980). More information about the issue selection process is provided 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 environmental issues, consistent with work on partisan differences in issue coalitions and perceived "ownership" (Banda 2016; Lacombe 2019; Noel 2012). 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 did not consistently campaign on the same issues.

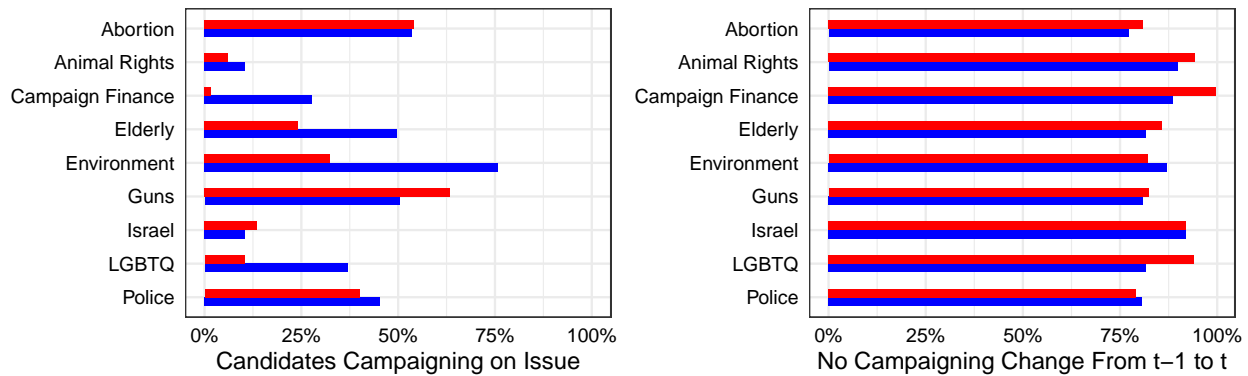
In addition to the significant individual-level variation across issues implied by the left panel of Figure 1, the right panel also reveals considerable individual-level temporal stability *within* issues. From one election to the next, over 75% of candidates in both parties maintained their choice to 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

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, campaigning on macroeconomic policy — such as taxes and government spending — is so widespread that economic policy PACs are likely precluded from considering whether to factor issue attention into their strategies.

¹⁷Terms were selected via manual review of all tokens present in at least 100 separate platforms.

Figure 1. Campaign Agenda Issue Prevalence and Continuity



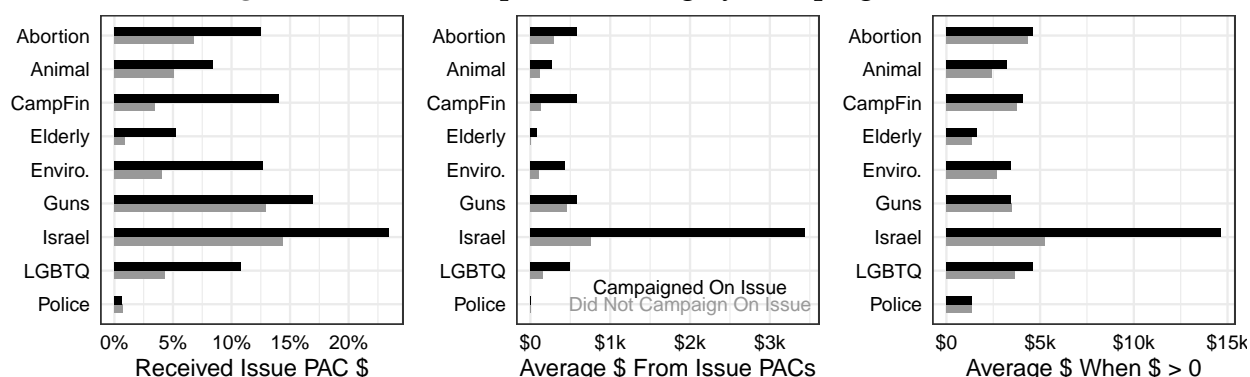
Note: Shares of candidate–year observations including issue in platform and candidates with platforms in consecutive campaigns who did not add or delete issue. Republicans in red and Democrats in blue.

are empirically likely to make the same choice again in the following election. This suggests that issue agendas may be similar to roll–call voting in that they are a relatively static characteristic rather than a highly dynamic behavior (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).¹⁸ In Appendix C, I also find little evidence of candidates systematically adapting their campaign platforms in response to receiving issue group contributions.

Figure 2 plots primary election contributions from groups across issue areas by whether recipient candidates campaigned 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 offer more financial support to candidates who choose to campaign on their issue. First, the left plot shows that the share of candidates receiving contributions from issue groups is consistently greater among candidates who campaigned on the issue compared to candidates who did not. Additionally, the center plot demonstrates that on average, candidates who campaign on 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 did not receive contributions from groups focused on a given issue. On

¹⁸This might be the case because candidates’ motivations for campaigning on issues — due to personal or constituency importance — remain relatively stable from election to election. Candidates may also seek to avoid potentially negative electoral consequences of positioning change, especially on these mostly “principled” policy issues (Tavits 2007).

Figure 2. Issue Group Fundraising by Campaign Attention

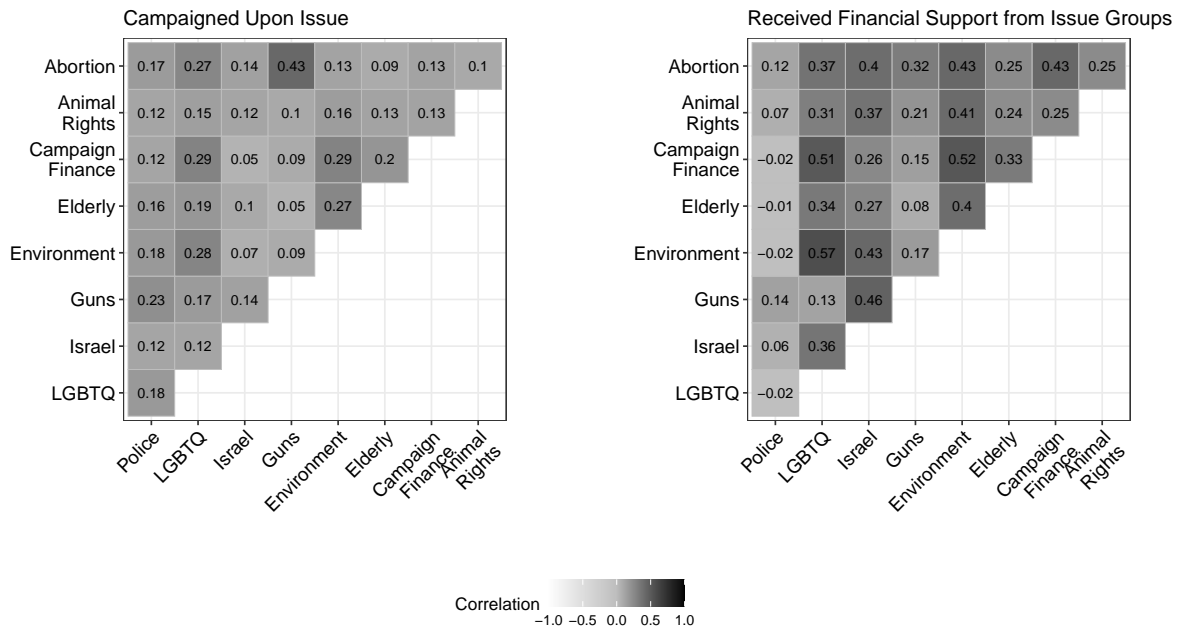


Note: Candidate–year level observations in black if campaigned on the issue, and gray otherwise. Rightmost facet plots average amount among candidates who received a contribution.

the right side, even conditional on receiving contributions, those who campaigned on the issue tend to receive greater amounts compared to those who did not.

When examining the relationship between campaign attention to and contributions from groups related to particular issues, it is important to also consider potential relationships between different issues within the realms of both activities. There may be issues which simply “go together” in that candidates who tend to campaign on Issue *A* also tend to campaign on Issue *B*, and Issue *A* groups also tend to give to similar candidates as Issue *B* groups. Figure 3 assesses this possibility by presenting pairwise correlations between campaigning on different issue areas as well as receiving funds from groups related to different issue areas. Unsurprisingly, most correlations are positive, suggesting that candidates who tend to campaign on any of these issues also tend to campaign on the 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. The strongest campaign attention correlation is between guns and abortion at 0.43, yet the correlations between attention to other issues are far smaller. Moreover, while the issue group funding correlation is slightly above 0.5 for a few issues, there does not appear to be much overlap between issue areas with the strongest correlations in the realms of campaign attention and financial support. At minimum, this casts doubt on the idea that a

Figure 3. Campaigning and Fundraising Issue Correlations



relationship between campaign priorities and fundraising could simply be due to certain issues “going together” in both domains.

Issue Group Response to Campaign Rhetoric

Aggregate descriptive patterns suggest that candidates receive greater financial support from issue groups related to their campaign priorities, but this is likely due in part to differences across candidates and district contexts. For instance, it may be the case that candidate quality drives both issue focus in campaigns and fundraising success. 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 issue group contributions. I estimate the following equation:

$$\text{Contribution}_{ijt} = \beta \text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt} + \alpha_{it} + \phi_{jt} + \lambda_{dj} + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

On the left-hand side, $\text{Contribution}_{ijt}$ indicates whether candidate i 's received any contributions from groups associated with issue j during the primary election in year t . On the right-hand side, $\text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt}$ indicates whether candidate i campaigned on issue j in primary election t . The fixed effect α_{it} absorbs any observed and unobserved candidate-year-level shocks to PAC fundraising which are shared across all issue areas. This accounts for election-specific candidate characteristics which exert an influence on group contributions common to all issue areas.¹⁹ Additionally, issue-year fixed effect ϕ_{jt} and district-issue fixed effect λ_{dj} control for issue-specific time trends common to all candidates and time-invariant differences in issue salience by district. In this design, β is estimated based on variation in the same candidate's PAC contributions across issues upon which they did and did not campaign in a given primary. Standard errors are clustered at the candidate level.

Table 1 reports the relationship between campaign attention and contributions from issue groups across all combinations of fixed effects as estimated via linear probability model. The basic cross-sectional relationship demonstrates that campaigning on a given issue is associated with a 5.3 percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving funds from the issue's groups. To contextualize the substantive size, the baseline rate of contribution occurrence across all candidate-issue-year combinations where the candidate chose not to campaign on the issue is under 6%. Accordingly, this suggests that campaigning on an issue is associated with a nearly 100% increase over the baseline chance of receiving issue PAC contributions. While magnitudes vary, the basic relationship between campaign issue attention and issue group support remains sizable and statistically significant at tra-

¹⁹Conversely, α_{it} does not account for factors varying *across* issues which confound the relationship between candidate-side characteristics and issue group contributions.

Table 1. Relationship Between Binary Specifications of Issue Attention and Financial Support from Issue Groups

	<i>Dependent Variable: Issue Group Contribution (0/1)</i>							
Campaigned on Issue	0.053*** (0.004)	0.039*** (0.004)	0.054*** (0.005)	0.050*** (0.005)	0.038*** (0.004)	0.050*** (0.005)	0.033*** (0.003)	0.033*** (0.003)
Candidate-Year FE		✓			✓		✓	✓
Issue-Year FE			✓		✓	✓		✓
District-Issue FE				✓		✓	✓	✓
Observations	42,327	42,327	42,327	42,327	42,327	42,327	42,327	42,327

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

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

ditional levels regardless of which fixed effects are included in the models. Unsurprisingly, the inclusion of candidate–year fixed effects appears to be the most consequential for the differences across models. Nevertheless, my preferred specification with all three sets of fixed effects still implies that campaigning on an issue is associated with a 55% increase over the baseline likelihood of issue group funding.

Beyond demonstrating that candidates are generally more likely to receive financial support from groups related to their campaign issue priorities, we can also examine whether such a relationship exists with regard to continuous measures of candidates’ issue prioritization and financial support. In addition to the indicator for receiving any positive contributions, Table 2 includes estimates using two alternative dependent variables. 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.²⁰ The last two columns log-transform contribution amounts, which are known to be highly right-skewed. Likewise, across all three dependent variable specifications, I also replace the main binary independent variable for a continuous measure of campaign attention, represented by the number of words related to issue j found in candidate i ’s campaign platform in year t .²¹ Finally, I

²⁰Beck (2020) recommends 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.

²¹Note that factors like total platform length are already accounted for by candidate–year fixed effect α_{it} .

Table 2. Alternative Specifications of Relationship Between Issue Attention and Financial Support From Issue Groups

	Contribution (0/1)		Contribution (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.033***		0.100***		0.257***	
	(0.003)		(0.013)		(0.027)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002***		0.005**		0.017***
		(0.000)		(0.002)		(0.003)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District-Issue FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	42,327	42,327	11,700	11,700	42,322	42,322

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

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

perform analyses at the candidate–PAC–year level²² (Appendix G) and break results out by party (Appendix H) and issue (Appendix I).

It is clear from the results reported in Table 2 that campaign attention is consistently related to PAC support across variable measurements and samples. In addition to the coefficient from the model with binary independent and dependent which implied a 55% increase over the baseline rate of contributions, campaigning on an issue is associated with a 10 percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving issue group support among candidates who received group support in some but not all issue areas. Given the substantially higher issue group contribution rate of 0.22 among such candidates who did not campaign on the issue, this represents an estimated 45% increase over the baseline. Moreover, the relationship is not limited to the likelihood of simply receiving a contribution: campaigning on an issue is associated with around a 30% increase in real dollars contributed from relevant issue groups.²³ Beyond candidates’ dichotomous choice of whether or not to campaign on an issue, the bottom row in Table 2 demonstrates that the number of times an issue-related term is found in candidates’ platforms is also meaningfully related to candidates’ likelihood of financial support or real dollars raised from issue groups.

²²While 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 — i.e. serving as strategic substitutes — and/or some PACs adopting rules against giving to certain types of candidates or in certain types of races.

²³Note that this is obtained via $100(e^{0.257194} - 1) = 29.3296\%$.

Issue Group Strategy: Campaign Rhetoric and Access

Having demonstrated a general relationship between issue campaign attention and issue group fundraising, I evaluate competing theoretical predictions about where this relationship should be largest. In particular, access-centered approaches suggest that such relationships should be strongest among incumbents and those in safe districts, while group-centric theories of parties suggest strongest relationships among non-incumbents and in competitive districts. I re-estimate Equation 1 separately by candidate type and district competitiveness, with the latter following Hirano and Snyder (2019)'s categorization of swing districts as those where the party's nominee received between 42.5% and 57.5% of the two-party vote share in the most recent presidential election. These heterogeneous estimates should be interpreted more cautiously than those reported in Table 2 for two reasons. First, I omit district-year fixed effects due to a lack of relevant variation when subsetting to incumbents.²⁴ Second, comparing estimates across models subset by candidate and district characteristics effectively re-introduces the differences which candidate-year fixed effects accounted for in Table 2. I address the limitations of this approach in subsequent analyses.

Overall, Table 3 suggests that the relationship between campaign issue attention and financial support from issue groups exists across candidate and district types.²⁵ While coefficient sizes appear larger among incumbents than non-incumbents, proportional increases relative to baselines are substantially greater among non-incumbents. Baseline rates imply that, in swing districts, campaigning on an issue is associated with an increase in the likelihood of issue group contributions of around 50% for incumbents, 130% for open-seat candidates, and 90% for challengers.²⁶ In districts leaning toward one party, in-

²⁴Because there is nearly always just one incumbent per district-year, a district-issue fixed effect essentially collapses into a candidate-issue fixed effect in incumbent-only models.

²⁵For ease of interpretation, I focus on binary specifications of the independent and dependent variables, with estimates from other specifications in Table 2 reported in Appendix E.

²⁶Respectively, their baseline rates are 0.254, 0.022, and 0.021.

Table 3. Relationship Between Issue Attention and Financial Support From Issue Groups by Candidate and District Type

	<i>Dependent Variable: Issue Group Contribution (0/1)</i>					
	Incumbents		Open Seat		Challengers	
	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean	Swing	Lean
Campaigned on Issue	0.118*** (0.020)	0.118*** (0.014)	0.028*** (0.008)	0.020*** (0.005)	0.019*** (0.005)	0.004** (0.002)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,979	6,282	4,257	6,705	7,425	14,679

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

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

cumbents see about a 55% increase while the increase is 115% and 130% for open–seat candidates and challengers, respectively.²⁷ Although the *absolute* increase in issue PAC funding associated with campaign attention is greatest among incumbents, the proportional increases relative to baselines appear to be roughly twice as large for non–incumbents. Finally, comparing levels of district competitiveness within candidate types suggest only modest and mostly statistically insignificant differences between swing versus leaning districts.

These results are consistent with issue groups 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 responsiveness of issue group contributions to incumbency, campaign issue attention, and their interaction, 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:

²⁷These baseline rates are 0.220, 0.017, and 0.003.

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

The two outcomes represented by $f(\Delta_t \text{Contribute}_{ijt})$ capture the change in candidate i 's binary and logged contributions from PACs related to issue j from year t_{-1} to year t .²⁸ The main independent 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 . 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. Given the inclusion of an interaction term, β_1 estimates a within-candidate incumbency advantage in issue PAC 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 association between previous campaign attention and change in issue group funding among candidates who were not elected to office — essentially, capturing any difference in contribution time trends between losing candidates who did and did not campaign on an issue. Lastly, the sum of all three β coefficients represents the change in financial support from issue groups associated with both incumbency and prior issue attention, with β_3 capturing any additional financial incumbency advantage accrued solely to those who campaigned on an issue.

The results in Table 4 suggest that potential issue champions enjoy a disproportionate incumbency advantage in issue group fundraising. Among candidates who did not campaign on a given issue at t_{-1} , going from a non-incumbent at t_{-1} to an incumbent at t is nevertheless associated with an increase of 20 percentage points in the likelihood of

²⁸Given the relatively short time frame, I also 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 12% of the sample.

Table 4. Triple Difference Estimates of Incumbency Advantage in Financial Support From Issue Groups By Prior Issue Attention

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.201*** (0.021)	1.871*** (0.178)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.017** (0.006)	0.220*** (0.063)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.073* (0.030)	0.884** (0.268)
Observations	4,273	4,273

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

receiving contributions from groups related to the issue. While this echoes past findings on the general financial advantages of incumbency (e.g. Fournaies and Hall 2014), candidates who prioritized the issue prior to entering office appear to enjoy significantly greater advantages than those who ignored the issue. Combining all three coefficients suggests that the increase in likelihood of issue group support associated with going from a non–incumbent to an incumbent is nine percentage points higher among candidates who had campaigned on the issue compared to candidates who did not. In terms of contribution amounts, the coefficients from the second column likewise imply an incumbency advantage in issue group fundraising of over 500% among candidates who chose not to campaign on an issue compared to an increase of nearly 2000% among issue advocates. Taken together, these triple–difference estimates provide strong evidence that non–incumbents who signal issue prioritization in primaries receive substantially greater financial support from issue–connected groups once in office compared to those who did not prioritize the issue prior to being elected.

Legislative and Financial Implications of Campaign Rhetoric

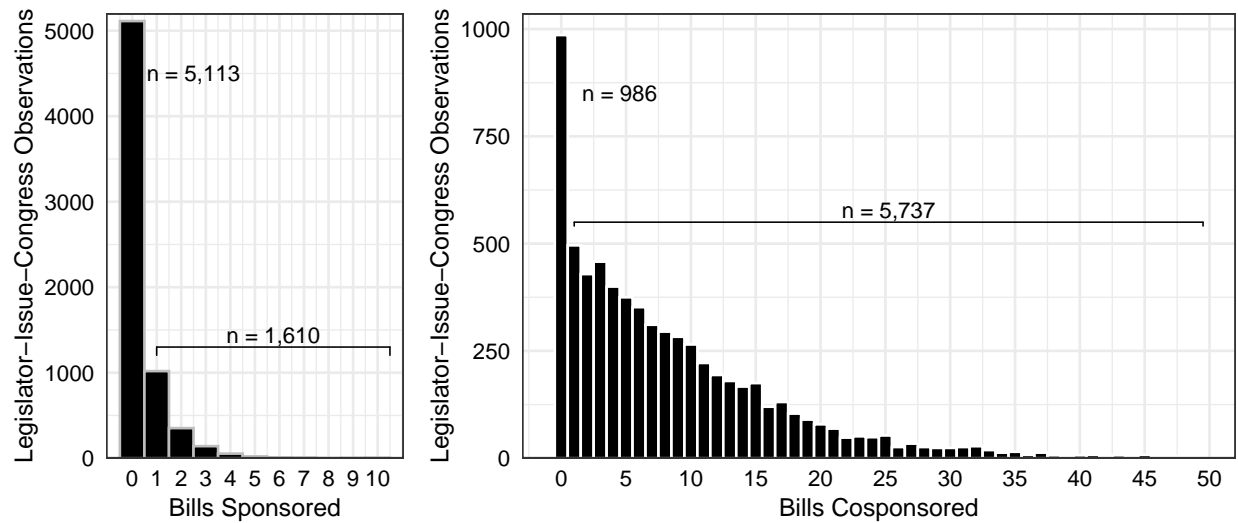
Taken together, the findings presented thus far are consistent with issue groups supporting primary candidates who choose to prioritize their issue and continuing to maintain

ties with those who successfully make it into office. In particular, results from Table 4 show that newly elected incumbents who championed an issue in prior campaigns see an even greater increase in contributions from issue groups in their next primary compared to those who newly elected incumbents who ignored the issue. This suggests that issue groups may seek access to legislators who have previously signaled shared priorities. One potential explanation is that campaign agendas serve as a meaningful signal of future legislative activity (Schnakenberg 2016; Sulkin 2011), which issue groups subsequently reward. Candidates may campaign upon the issues they intend to prioritize in office, follow through by disproportionately focusing on such issues, and then receive comparatively greater financial support from groups centered around those issues.

On the other hand, the findings in Table 4 could also be consistent with groups responding to the 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 precedes legislative attention and how issue groups respond to both, I compile data on bill summaries, sponsors, and cosponsors from `congress.gov` to supplement the campaign platform and issue group contribution data. 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.

Figure 4. 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.

introduced during the 115th through 118th congresses²⁹ pertained to the nine issue areas or not. Figure 4 shows 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 period, and members who sponsored any bills related to an issue tended to sponsor just one. On the other hand, the overall cosponsorship rate was over 85%, with a median number of 8 bills cosponsored and a standard deviation of almost 9 bills cosponsored among members with any cosponsorship activity on an issue in a particular congress.

To assess whether the incumbency advantage differences found in Table 4 are more consistent with issue groups responding to campaign or legislative issue attention, 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. I estimate the equation:

²⁹ Although the sample includes candidates elected in 2024, the 119th congress does not end until 2027.

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

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 4 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 $\text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt-1}$ 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 so long as groups respond similarly to them across issues j . As such, β estimates the within-legislator-year differences in (co)sponsorship activity on issues that she did and did not campaign upon while also accounting for issue-specific time trends.

Table 5 reports results from Equation 3 estimated separately for freshmen and non-freshmen legislators, as the former is informative of whether patterns hold among the new legislators upon which Table 4 relies while the latter is informative of whether patterns hold among legislators more generally.³⁰ Both freshmen and non-freshmen legislators tend to be more active on their previous campaign issues. Specifically, campaigning on an issue is associated with an 8.5 percentage point increase in the likelihood of introducing legislation on the issue and cosponsoring between two and three additional bills

³⁰ Appendix F reports results from all legislative analyses 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.

Table 5. Relationship Between Campaign Issue Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue

	Sponsored Bill (0/1)		# Bills Co-Sponsored	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.085*** (0.017)	0.084** (0.031)	2.692*** (0.315)	2.518*** (0.406)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

Note: Observations are member–issue–year. Member–clustered standard errors in parentheses.

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

on the issue. Members therefore appear to be more legislatively active on the issues they championed in their campaign platforms than on issues they ignored in their campaigns.

Issue groups' increased contributions to issue champions after their initial election may be due to either the campaign rhetoric itself or greater legislative activity on the issue between the initial and subsequent elections. I provide evidence regarding the plausibility of both of these explanations by evaluating the extent to which issue PAC funding is associated with campaign rhetoric versus legislative activity:

$$\text{Contribute}_{ijt+1} = \beta_1 \text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt-1} + \beta_2 \text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt} + \beta_3 (\text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt-1} \times \text{LegislativeActivity}_{ijt}) + \alpha_{it} + \phi_{jt} + \epsilon_i. \quad (4)$$

$\text{Contribute}_{ijt+1}$ takes the value of 1 if and only if legislator i received positive contributions from groups 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 $\text{CampaignAttention}_{ijt-1}$. Given the fixed effects α_{it} and ϕ_{jt} and an interaction term, the parameter β_1 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, β_2 represents the within-legislator relationship between legislative activity on an issue and subsequent contributions from PACs related to the issue in the absence of campaign attention. I estimate separate models operationalizing legislative activity as either binary bill sponsorship or number of bills cosponsored. Lastly, β_3 captures any additional issue group support associated with both campaign attention and legislative activity on the issue.³¹

The results reported in Table 6 suggest that legislators' previous campaign attention to an issue is highly consequential for their issue group fundraising, regardless of their legislative activity on the issue.³² In all four models, campaigning but not legislating on an issue is significantly associated with an increase in the likelihood of receiving contributions from issue groups in the next primary election, with magnitudes ranging from 12 to 24 percentage point increases depending upon type of legislative activity and legislator seniority.

On the other hand, relationships between legislative activity and issue group fundraising appear to be weaker. For issues on which non-freshmen did not previously devote campaign attention, bill sponsorship is associated with under a 5 percentage point increase in likelihood of receiving contributions from issue groups, which is less than half the size of the coefficient associated with campaigning in the absence of sponsorship. Among freshmen, the estimated relationship between bill sponsorship and issue PAC support remains smaller than that of campaign attention and issue PAC support (although the two are not statistically distinct at traditional levels). Comparing increases in likelihood of receiving issue group support associated with campaign attention versus cosponsorship, moreover, implies that non-freshmen would need to cosponsor more than 25 bills and freshmen would need to cosponsor more than 20 for estimated relationships to be equiv-

³¹Similarly 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_1 toward zero, as Table 5 suggests that legislative activity on an issue can result from campaign attention to the issue.

³²Appendix F presents additional estimates from models using number of campaign platform issue words, number of bills sponsored, a binary specification of cosponsorship, and logged contributions.

Table 6. Legislative Issue Activity, Campaign Issue Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	<i>Dependent Variable: Issue Group Contribution (0/1)</i>			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.124*** (0.017)	0.166*** (0.029)	0.132*** (0.019)	0.238*** (0.038)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.044* (0.020)	0.107* (0.042)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.016 (0.031)	-0.131* (0.054)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.005*** (0.002)	0.011*** (0.003)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			-0.001 (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.003)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

Note: Observations are member–issue–year. Member–clustered standard errors in parentheses.

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

alent. Both freshmen and non–freshmen who chose to cosponsor any bills on an issue in a given congress cosponsored a median of just 8 bills, suggesting that the magnitude of campaign attention is quite large compared to that of cosponsorship. Finally, the negative (and relatively large) coefficients on interaction terms in freshmen models suggest that first–term legislators who devote campaign and legislative attention to an issue are only rewarded for one or the other. These results are consistent with issue groups targeting resources more strongly on the basis of campaign attention to their issue than legislative attention to their issue.

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 provide systematic evidence 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, the analyses 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 minimis* 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.

The 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. Future work could capture not just candidate–group alignment in issue prioritization, but leverage prominent issue groups’ public stances to directly measure candidate–group proximity (e.g. Lyon, Malcolm, and Dickerson 2001). Additionally, these analyses focus solely on direct contributions, which are just one of multiple financial levers interest groups have at their disposal to attempt to influence policymaking. Given recent work demonstrating the systemic and sequential links between groups’ potential avenues of influence, subsequent research should examine whether issue groups also engage in lobbying and making independent expenditures on behalf of those who have rhetorically prioritized an issue in their campaigns, and whether these activities appear complementary or substitutable (Kim, Stuckatz, and Wolters 2025).

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. Blum and Cowburn 2023; Hirano and Snyder 2019; Meisels 2025*a, b*; Thomsen 2023) elucidating the unique dynamics of intraparty elections, for which well–established theories of elections tend to have less traction.

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Appendix

Contents

A Issue Selection	1
B Issue Groups	2
C Campaign Platform Collection	6
D Campaign Issues	12
E Alternative Specifications: Electoral Context Results	18
F Alternative Specifications: Legislative Activity Results	19
G Alternative Specifications: Candidate–PAC–Year–Level Results	22
H Heterogeneity: Results by Party	24
I Heterogeneity: Results by Issue	27

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. Because OpenSecrets data are not yet available for 2024, I included all previously coded PACs and supplemented these with any new PACs who contributed to the 2024 sample candidates and met the below criteria based on either the PAC’s name, or — if the name was uninformative — their organization’s public documents, when available. 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 candi-

dates 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 Groups

Table B1. Included Issue PACs

PAC Name	Issue
National Rifle Assn	Guns
NARAL Pro-Choice America	Abortion
Desert Caucus	Israel
Citizens Organized PAC	Israel
Americans United in Support of Democracy	Israel

Safari Club International	Guns
Florida Congressional Cmte	Israel
Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life	Abortion
Sierra Club	Environment
To Protect Our Heritage PAC	Israel
Washington PAC	Israel
Americans for Good Government	Israel
Joint Action Cmte for Political Affairs	Israel
Friends of the Earth	Environment
Illinois Right to Life	Abortion
Louisianans for American Security	Israel
National Action Cmte	Israel
National PAC	Israel
Mid Manhattan PAC	Israel
National Cmte to Preserve Social Security	Elderly
City PAC	Israel
EMILY's List	Abortion
Maryland Assn for Concerned Citizens	Israel
Bi-County PAC	Israel
Human Rights Campaign	LGBTQ
League of Conservation Voters	Environment
New Jersey Right to Life	Abortion
Gun Owners of America	Guns
Illinois Citizens for Life	Abortion
Planned Parenthood	Abortion
Ohio Gun Collectors Assn	Guns

Susan B Anthony List	Abortion
Republican Jewish Coalition	Israel
Republican Majority for Choice	Abortion
Grass Roots NC/Forum for Firearms Educ	Guns
National Pro-Life Alliance	Abortion
Washington Women for Choice	Abortion
SunPAC	Israel
Because I Care PAC	Israel
Ocean Champions	Environment
New Jersey Republican Pro-Life Coalition	Abortion
Log Cabin Republicans	LGBTQ
Texas Right to Life	Abortion
Protectseniors.org	Elderly
Center for Coastal Conservation	Environment
Alliance for Retired Americans	Elderly
JStreetPAC	Israel
Environment America	Environment
National Gun Rights PAC	Guns
Humane Society Legislative Fund	Animal Rights
Environmental Defense Action Fund	Environment
Grand Canyon State Caucus	Israel
National Wildlife Federation Action Fund	Environment
LGBTQ Victory Fund	LGBTQ
National Shooting Sports Foundation	Guns
National Assn for Gun Rights	Guns
Tri-State Maxed Out Women	Abortion

American Principles	Israel
L PAC	LGBTQ
Pro-Life PAC	Abortion
Giffords PAC	Guns
NRDC Action Fund	Environment
Equality PAC	LGBTQ
America's Conservation PAC	Environment
I-PAC JAX	Israel
LGBT Democrats of Virginia	LGBTQ
Population Connection	Abortion
American Unity Fund	LGBTQ
MaggiePAC	Abortion
End Citizens United	Campaign Finance
Voter Education PAC	Abortion
Sustainable Energy & Environment Coalition	Environment
Pride Fund to End Gun Violence	Guns
Americans For Law Enforcement	Police
Partnership for Conservation	Environment
White Coat Waste	Animal Rights
Sanctity of Life PAC	Abortion
Protect Life PAC	Abortion
Action Coalition PAC	Abortion
Social Security Works	Elderly
Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund	Guns
Protect Our Future	Abortion
Citizens for Law Enforcement	Police

Democratic Conservation Alliance	Environment
Brady PAC	Guns
Sunrise PAC	Environment
Animal Wellness Action	Animal Rights
Energy Innovation PAC	Environment
Pro-Israel America PAC	Israel
Democratic Majority for Israel	Israel
Equality California Majority Fund	LGBTQ
End the Occupation	Israel
JVP Action	Israel
American Horse PAC	Animal Rights
Fannie Lou Hamer PAC	Abortion
C6 Project	Environment
Americans for Action On Climate Fund	Environment
End the New Apartheid	Israel
End Litter Now PAC	Environment
Wilderness Society Action Fund	Environment
American Israel Public Affairs Cmte	Israel
Jane Fonda Climate PAC	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, 2022, and 2024, 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

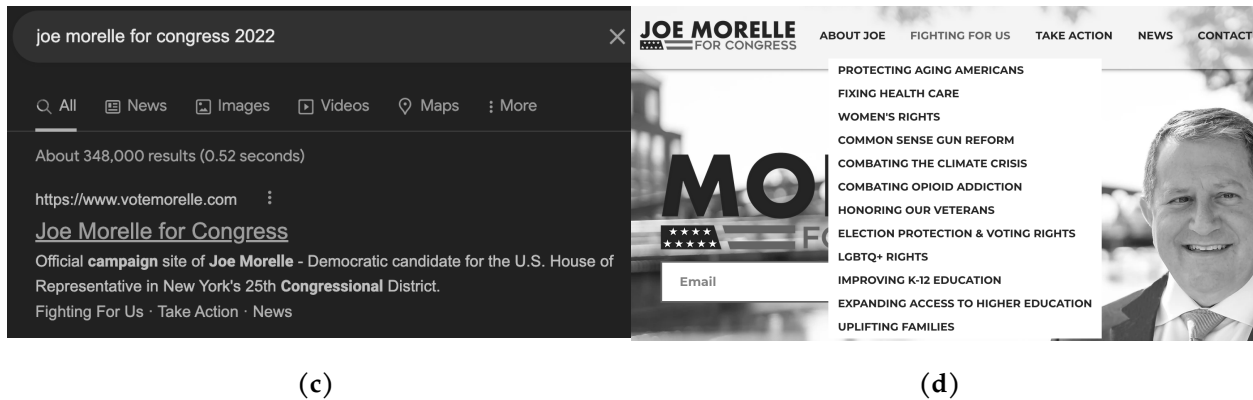
Locale	Reason
Alaska, 2022 and 2024	Top-4
California	Top-2
Connecticut	Party Convention
Louisiana	Top-2
Utah	Party Convention
Virginia, 2016, Democratic: Districts 5,7,1,6,9,10	Party Convention
Virginia, 2016, Republican: Districts 3,8,5,11,7	Party Convention
Virginia, 2018, Democratic: District 5	Party 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. As depicted in Figure C1, data on 2022 and 2024 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 access-

Figure C1. Example Data Collection Workflow
(a) (b)



ing 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 sur-

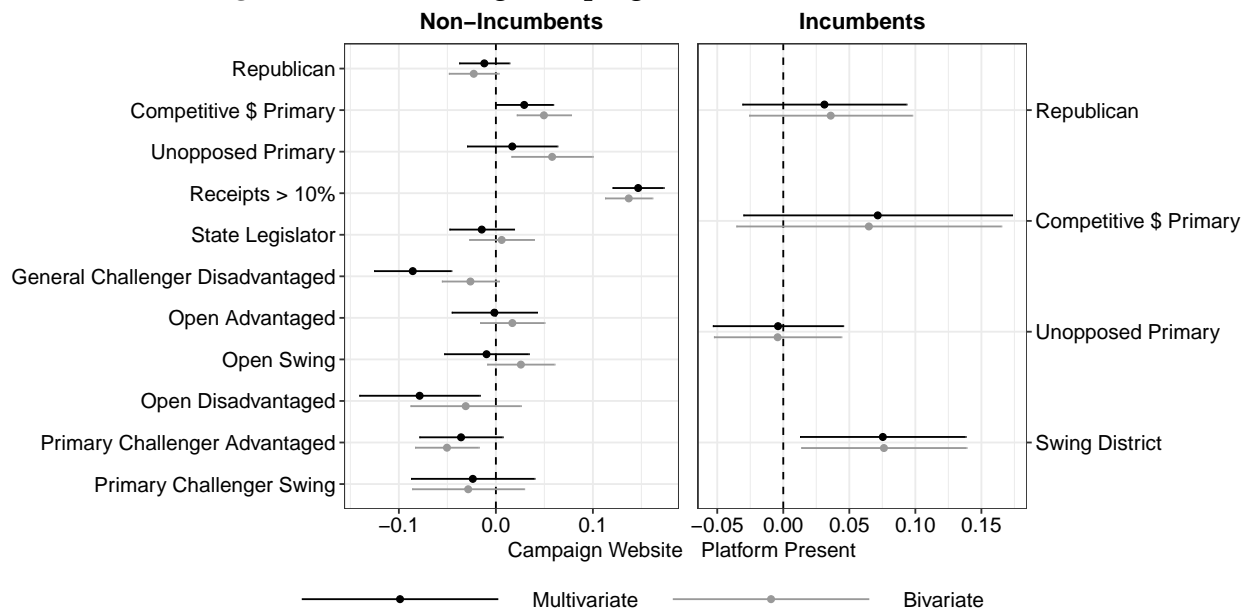
veyed the entirety of the website for other places where one might find issue positions. I do not consider candidate biographies, endorsement lists, campaign updates, or volunteer/donation pages to be issue positions. Many incumbent candidates (and some candidates with state legislative experience) devoted 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. Figure C2 reports plots point estimates and 95% confidence intervals based on candidate-clustered standard errors from multivariate and bivariate linear probability models predicting whether candidates hosted websites with campaign platforms. Regressions are run separately by incumbency status, as missingness among incumbents is nearly always due to hosting a campaign website without any policy platform content whereas missingness among non-incumbents was nearly always due to an absence of a campaign website altogether.

Incumbents are about 8 percentage points more likely to include a campaign platform on their website if they are running in a swing district. Non-incumbents are more likely to have a campaign website with a platform if they raised more than a *de minimis* share of their primary field’s total funds, and less likely if they are running in a district where their party is likely disadvantaged in the general election. Overall, the results do not suggest that large

Figure C2. Predicting Campaign Website Platform Presence



swaths of candidates are systematically excluded from data on campaign agendas on the basis of candidate type, electoral competitiveness, or even resources.

Reverse causality — platform change in response to previous funding. While the presence of reverse causality cannot be directly tested in this context, 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 2024, 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 C3 and C4 suggest that candidates who received funding from issue PACs in the previous election were not much more likely to increase attention (i.e. binary or word count based) to the issue in the next election. While Figure C3 shows that more of the candidates who did not receive issue PAC funding also did not change the number of words in their campaign platform associated with the issue in the next election, candidates who received issue PAC funding appear equally likely to reduce or add words associated with the issue in the next election. Figure C4 shows that for the issues of animal rights, campaign finance, and the environ-

ment, a substantially greater proportion of candidates who received funds campaigned on the issue in the next election compared to candidates who didn't receive funds. However, the other six issues either suggest no major differences or a reversed relationship where candidates who did not receive issue group funds added the issue at a higher rate. Finally, Table C2 more formally 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. The sign of the coefficients suggests that candidates who received PAC money are, if anything, expected to decrease the number of words associated with the issue and less likely to take up the issue in the next election. However, these point estimates do not come remotely close to reaching traditional levels of significance. To the extent that candidates would appear to *drop* issues from their campaign platforms in response to issue group support, estimates in the paper will be biased toward zero.

Figure C3. Net Campaign Issue Word Change By Previous Issue PAC Funding

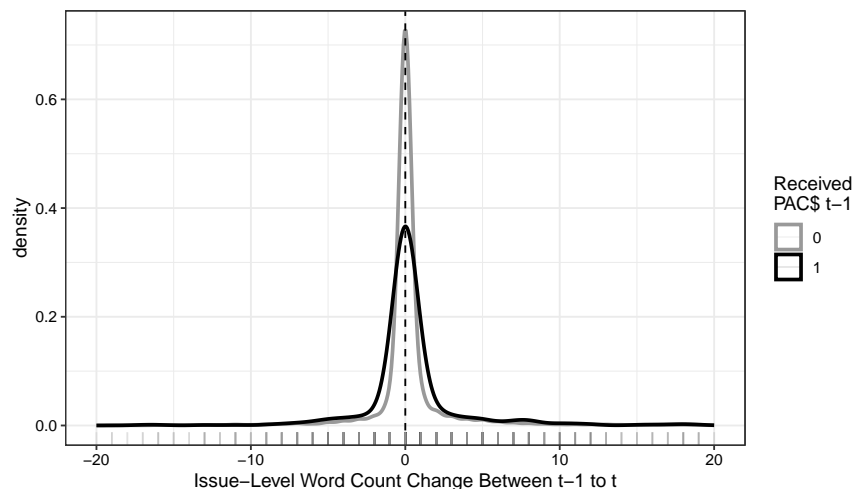


Figure C4. Rate of Campaign Issue Addition By Previous Issue PAC Funding

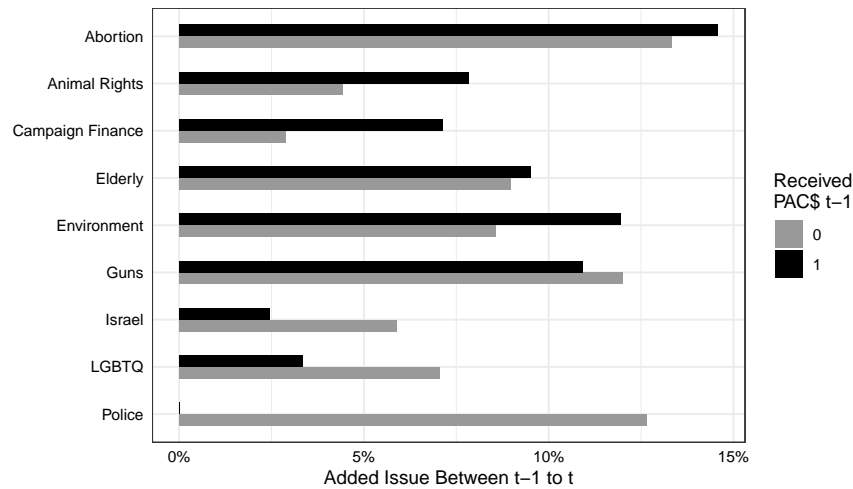


Table C2. Reverse Causality: Issue PAC Funding and Change in Issue Attention

	Added Issue From t-1 to t	Word Count Change From t-1 to t
Received Issue PAC \$ at t-1	-0.004 (0.012)	-0.051 (0.209)
Observations	7,924	7,924

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

D Campaign Issues

Abortion Terms: "sanctity of life", "unborn", "pro-life", "fetus", "abortion", "abort", "nawal", "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	0.134*** (0.021)	0.126*** (0.015)	0.149*** (0.040)	0.133*** (0.032)	0.108*** (0.029)	0.115* (0.045)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,718	5,814	738	891	1,071	468

* 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	0.958*** (0.160)	0.884*** (0.108)	0.213** (0.066)	0.159*** (0.042)	0.156*** (0.042)	0.035** (0.012)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,977	6,279	4,257	6,705	7,425	14,679

* 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	0.013*** (0.003)	0.005* (0.002)	0.002* (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,979	6,282	4,257	6,705	7,425	14,679

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

F Alternative Specifications: Legislative Activity Results

Table F1. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue

	# Bills Sponsored		Co-Sponsored Bill (0/1)	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.195*** (0.037)	0.174*** (0.051)	0.059*** (0.008)	0.041** (0.015)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

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

Table F2. 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}	0.010*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.003)	0.284*** (0.056)	0.239** (0.076)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

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

Table F3. 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}	0.006 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.007 (0.004)	0.010 (0.005)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.051** (0.019)	0.072* (0.035)		
Words * Sponsored	0.002 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.004)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.006*** (0.001)	0.008** (0.002)
Words * Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

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

Table F4. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: Presence of Contribution (0/1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.113*** (0.016)	0.150*** (0.029)	0.095** (0.037)	0.207*** (0.061)
# Bills Sponsored	0.020 (0.013)	0.054 (0.028)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.029 (0.016)	-0.046 (0.029)		
Co-Sponsored Bill (0/1)			0.127*** (0.019)	0.234*** (0.040)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.033 (0.040)	-0.081 (0.060)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,364	1,359	5,364	1,359

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

Table F5. Legislative Activity, Campaign Attention, and Subsequent Issue Group Funding

	DV: log(Contribution +1)			
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue $t-1$	0.945*** (0.131)	1.448*** (0.231)	1.017*** (0.151)	2.066*** (0.293)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.410* (0.159)	1.002** (0.348)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.059 (0.237)	-1.219** (0.441)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.036** (0.013)	0.073** (0.022)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			-0.010 (0.013)	-0.103*** (0.023)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	5,363	1,357	5,363	1,357

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

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

Table G1. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PAC

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.003***		0.013***		0.025***	
	(0.000)		(0.002)		(0.004)	
# Issue Words Used		0.000***		0.001*		0.001**
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District-Issue FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	484,409	484,409	97,644	97,644	484,389	484,389

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

Table G2. 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	0.019***	0.011***	0.001	0.002*	0.003***	0.000*
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	39,449	66,538	52,118	73,336	95,996	156,972

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

Table G3. Triple Difference Estimates: Incumbency Advantage in Issue PAC Fundraising By Prior Issue Attention

	Δ Contribution (0/1)	$\log(\Delta \text{ Contributions} + 1)$
Δ Incumbency	0.018*** (0.003)	0.140*** (0.021)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.002 (0.001)	0.017* (0.008)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.011** (0.004)	0.086** (0.031)
Observations	49,739	49,739

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

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}	0.012*** (0.002)	0.019*** (0.004)	0.012*** (0.003)	0.028*** (0.006)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.008* (0.004)	0.012 (0.007)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.012 (0.010)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.000 (0.000)	-0.002*** (0.000)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAC-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	57,886	14,111	57,886	14,111

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

H Heterogeneity: Results by Party

Table H1. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs, Democrats Only

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.020***		0.094***		0.172***	
	(0.005)		(0.022)		(0.039)	
# Issue Words Used		0.001**		0.005*		0.011**
		(0.000)		(0.002)		(0.004)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District-Issue FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	19,359	19,359	5,742	5,742	19,357	19,357

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

Table H2. Issue Attention and Primary Fundraising From Issue PACs, Republicans Only

	Contributions (0/1)		Contributions (0/1), Mixed		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.002		0.019		0.014	
	(0.004)		(0.016)		(0.035)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002*		0.004		0.014*
		(0.001)		(0.004)		(0.007)
Candidate-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District-Issue FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	22,968	22,968	5,958	5,958	22,965	22,965

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

Table H3. 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	0.434*** (0.039)	3.758*** (0.342)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.020* (0.009)	0.282** (0.102)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	-0.177** (0.054)	-0.885 (0.489)
Observations	1,936	1,936

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

Table H4. 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	0.103*** (0.015)	1.073*** (0.134)
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.006 (0.006)	0.078 (0.048)
Δ Incumbency * Issue	0.195*** (0.027)	1.563*** (0.228)
Observations	2,337	2,337

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

Table H5. Campaign Attention and Subsequent Legislative Activity on Issue, Democrats Only

	$\text{Sponsored Bill (0/1)}$		$\# \text{ Bills Co-Sponsored}$	
	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen	Non-Freshmen	Freshmen
Campaigned on Issue t_{-1}	0.070** (0.023)	0.082 (0.045)	1.225** (0.410)	1.809** (0.557)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,358	657	2,358	657

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

Table H6. 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}	0.089*** (0.025)	0.044 (0.049)	2.264*** (0.444)	2.062*** (0.518)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,006	702	3,006	702

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

Table H7. 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}	0.055** (0.021)	0.090* (0.040)	0.047 (0.027)	0.095 (0.053)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.063 (0.033)	0.091 (0.066)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	0.024 (0.044)	-0.095 (0.078)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.005* (0.002)	0.009* (0.004)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.004)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,358	657	2,358	657

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

Table H8. 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 $t-1$	0.057** (0.019)	0.049 (0.037)	0.063* (0.027)	0.089* (0.040)
Sponsored Bill (0/1)	0.046* (0.019)	0.032 (0.041)		
Campaigned * Sponsored	-0.016 (0.031)	-0.082 (0.060)		
# Bills Co-Sponsored			0.012*** (0.002)	0.014** (0.004)
Campaigned * Co-Sponsored			-0.004 (0.003)	-0.011** (0.004)
Member-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,006	702	3,006	702

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

I Heterogeneity: Results by Issue

Table I1. Abortion Attention and Primary Fundraising From Abortion PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.071*** (0.009)		0.552*** (0.069)	
# Issue Words Used		0.006*** (0.001)		0.049*** (0.007)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I2. Animal Rights Attention and Primary Fundraising From Animal PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.029*		0.243**	
	(0.012)		(0.091)	
# Issue Words Used		0.012***		0.109***
		(0.003)		(0.022)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I3. Campaign Finance Attention and Primary Fundraising From Campaign Finance PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.050***		0.428***	
	(0.010)		(0.078)	
# Issue Words Used		0.013***		0.111***
		(0.002)		(0.019)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I4. Elderly Attention and Primary Fundraising From Elderly PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.031***		0.225***	
	(0.005)		(0.035)	
# Issue Words Used		0.006***		0.043***
		(0.001)		(0.005)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I5. Environment Attention and Primary Fundraising From Environment PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.022*		0.193**	
	(0.009)		(0.067)	
# Issue Words Used		0.003***		0.027***
		(0.001)		(0.005)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,701	4,701

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

Table I6. Guns Attention and Primary Fundraising From Guns PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.026*		0.203*	
	(0.010)		(0.083)	
# Issue Words Used		0.002**		0.014**
		(0.001)		(0.005)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I7. Israel Attention and Primary Fundraising From Israel PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.091***		0.814***	
	(0.016)		(0.132)	
# Issue Words Used		0.006***		0.053***
		(0.001)		(0.011)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,700	4,700

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

Table I8. LGBTQ Attention and Primary Fundraising From LGBTQ PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.023**		0.175**	
	(0.008)		(0.064)	
# Issue Words Used		0.009***		0.064***
		(0.001)		(0.010)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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

Table I9. Police Attention and Primary Fundraising From Police PACs

	Contributions (0/1)		log(Contributions + 1)	
Campaigned on Issue	0.002		0.016	
	(0.002)		(0.017)	
# Issue Words Used		0.000		0.000
		(0.000)		(0.002)
Party-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4,703	4,703	4,703	4,703

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