

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

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## Abstract

Though presidents often publicly criticize organized interests, they also expend substantial effort engaging with those interests. Utilizing original elite interviews, a survey of lobbyists, and large- $N$  administrative data, I consider how engagement manifests, what motivates presidents to engage interests, and with which interests presidents engage. Unlike in other institutions, presidents, not interests, exercise primary control over engagement decisions, and they engage to mobilize interests' institutional resources in service of their goals. To optimize mobilization, presidents focus engagement on interests with large resource endowments and who share presidents' preferences. Pairing over 7 million White House visitor log entries from two presidencies with lobbying and campaign finance records, I demonstrate that presidential engagement is informed by interests' electoral and policy resources and partisan alignment. My findings highlight coalition-building with interests as an under-appreciated utensil in the presidential toolkit and suggest that presidential engagement amplifies the political voice of well-resourced and copartisan interests.

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Though polar opposites in most respects, both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump routinely criticized organized interests and vowed to curb their influence.<sup>1</sup> In the first summer of his presidency, Barack Obama told attendees at a bill signing, “When I ran for President, I did so because I believed that despite the power of the status quo and the influence of special interests, it was possible for us to bring change to Washington.”<sup>2</sup> At a similar point in his presidency, Donald Trump proclaimed that his administration “want[ed] to get the special interests out of politics for good.”<sup>3</sup> Both presidents also took action to limit the power of organized interests in their administrations, such as issuing executive orders restricting former lobbyists’ ability to serve in government.<sup>4</sup> Presidency scholars suggest that Trump, Obama, and other presidents do not express antipathy towards and distance themselves from interests as a matter of personal preference, but rather as a consequence of the office’s isolation from the organized interest universe. Howell and Moe posit that this isolation emerges from institutional design, as presidents’ “position of national leadership gives them far more freedom from special interest pressure... than their legislative counterparts” (2016, 102; see also Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Truman 1971; Wilson 1961). Further, Light suggests that this isolation also stems from deliberate choices by presidents, describing “a conscious effort [by the White House] to avoid interaction with most groups” (1999, 94). Consequently, scholars have traditionally afforded scant attention to presidents’ supposedly limited interactions with organized interests (but see Brown 2014; Brown and Huang 2020; Holyoke 2004; Peterson 1992).

However, a closer look at the White House’s day-to-day activities reveals that presidents frequently engage with organized interests.<sup>5</sup> While salient instances of engagement, such as President

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup>Similar to the notion of the “legislative enterprise” Salisbury and Shepsle (1981), I consider presidents as presiding

Bill Clinton’s provision of nights in the Lincoln Bedroom to wealthy donors, often attract criticism,<sup>6</sup> such anecdotes belie the White House’s commonplace engagement with interests in public and private settings. Recounting the whirlwind of activity at the outset of his presidency, Barack Obama describes in his memoir “an endless flow of meetings with various constituency groups... to address their concerns and solicit their support” (Obama 2020, 285-286). Similarly, an aide to President Jimmy Carter recalls that the administration “tried to keep up very good relations with all the major interest group players in town... [by] meeting with [them]... on a regular basis.”<sup>7</sup> Though the White House may distance itself from interests in its’ public-facing behavior, an aide to President John F. Kennedy admits that “interest groups are in the woodwork, under the floors, in the hallways, and in the rose garden” (Light 1999, 95). Considering this discrepancy between the prominence of organized interests in the White House and the “episodic and limited” attention scholars have paid to presidents’ interactions with interests, Loomis notes in the most recent *Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* that “such a gap is remarkable” (2009, 404-405).

This paper begins to redress this gap by probing with which organized interests presidents engage. In exploring this research question, this paper must also consider two antecedent questions: the extent to which presidents or interests determine whether engagement occurs and what motivations drive engagement decisions. While these questions remain under-explored in large part because scholars have deemphasized the linkage between presidents and organized interests, they have also been overlooked because “the requisite data are difficult to amass” (Loomis 2009, 421). These questions require data on both the dynamics by which engagement between presidents and organized interests manifests and the occurrence of engagement; however, both phenomena typically transpire behind closed doors and presidents and organized interests seldom disclose details about engagement in systematic ways.

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over an organization of staffers accountable to them who facilitate the performance of their duties. Formally, the executive branch employees who fulfill this function are those employed by the Executive Office of the President (EOP). Consistent with the notion of the president as head of an “executive enterprise,” I consider engagement by any EOP member with organized interests to constitute “presidential engagement.”

<sup>6</sup>Glenn F. Bunting and Ralph Frammolino, “Up to 900 Donors Stayed Overnight at the White House,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1997, [http://articles.latimes.com/1997-02-09/news/mn-27120\\_1\\_white-house-official](http://articles.latimes.com/1997-02-09/news/mn-27120_1_white-house-official).

<sup>7</sup>David Rubenstein, Interview with the Miller Center for Public Affairs, University of Virginia, March 6, 1982, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/bertram-carp-oral-history-deputy-assistant-domestic>.

I investigate these research questions by drawing on original interviews, survey responses, and administrative data that shed light on presidents' engagement with organized interests. First, I consider the degree to which presidents and interests exert influence over the decision to engage with insights from 15 interviews with former White House officials and organized interest representatives and a survey of over 700 lobbyists. In contrast to the traditional "outside-in" model of lobbying, whereby interests pursue access to policymakers, my interviews and survey responses demonstrate that presidential engagement is better characterized by an "inside-out" model in which presidents take a leading role in providing access to interests (Shaiko 1998; Tenpas 2005). Second, given presidents' primacy in the engagement process, I describe presidents' motivations for engaging with interests and provide empirical expectations for which interests they are most likely to engage. In brief, organized interests' institutional resources, such as their lobbying capabilities and campaign contributions, make interests important targets of presidents' coalition-building efforts; through engagement, presidents hope to recruit interests to their cause or discourage interests from opposing them. To maximize the share of interest resources they marshal, presidents are more likely to engage with interests who offer the highest expected rates of return for engagement—interests with large resource endowments and who share presidents' partisan and ideological preferences. Third, I evaluate these expectations by leveraging over 7 million White House visitor log entries from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and contemporary lobbying records to identify instances in which the White House engaged with organized interests and modeling this engagement as a function of interests' electoral and policy resources and partisan alignment. Taken together, my findings indicate that presidents are more likely to engage with interests with larger endowments resource endowments and who are copartisans.

My findings highlight the importance of presidents' interactions with organized interests and contribute to key themes in the study of the presidency, organized interests, and representation. While recent studies of presidential power focus on tools presidents wield independently, such as unilateral action (Lowande and Rogowski 2021), the disbursement of selective benefits (Kriner and Reeves 2015), and appointments outside the advise and consent process (Kinane 2021), this study highlights how presidents' toolkits also include their ability to build and mobilize coalitions of

outside actors to promote their goals. Further, my findings speak to the ongoing debate concerning presidential representation by considering the representational priorities presidents exhibit through engaging with organized interests, who are both independent political actors and manifestations of the interests in the mass public. By engaging more with interests who possess larger resource endowments and align with the president's preferences, my results suggest that presidents provide more representation to subgroups that can best advance their goals (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Kriner and Reeves 2015) rather than serving as national representatives (Moe and Howell 1999; Wilson 1961). Finally, my findings illuminate a neglected pathway by which organized interests induce biased outcomes in the policymaking process; though some posit presidents, as nationally-elected representatives, might temper the outsized influence that upper-class interests enjoy in other institutional venues (Bentley 1908; Truman 1971; Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Uslander 1998), my findings show that presidents' engagement decisions contribute to inequalities in political voice present throughout the political system.

## **Presidents as Engagers-in-Chief**

Presidents and organized interests interact in a number of well-documented ways, such as interests making contributions in support of presidents' campaigns, interests altering their activities in response to presidents' priorities (Baumgartner et al. 2011), and presidents and interests acknowledging each other in public statements (Grossmann 2012). This paper focuses on a specific type of interaction I term "presidential engagement," or reciprocal communication and coordination between presidents and organized interests concerning electoral or policy goals. A key distinguishing trait of presidential engagement is that it requires active participation from both actors; for instance, while interests can expend campaign resources or lobby in support of presidents unilaterally, presidential engagement requires dialogue between presidents and interests. Though presidential engagement can take place through many mediums of direct contact, such as phone calls and emails, my theoretical exposition and empirical analysis focuses on engagement through in-person White House meetings because they are a highly valued type of direct contact for both parties and because the high cost the White House pays to facilitate them provides a strong signal

of its engagement priorities.<sup>8</sup>

Framing these interactions as *presidential* engagement presupposes that presidents exert critical influence over their manifestation and conduct. This assertion diverges from the commonly understood “outside-in” lobbying dynamic characterizing other institutions, such as Congress, where organized interests’ motives for and strategic behavior to gain access to policymakers take precedence (e.g., Hall and Deardorff 2006; Miller 2021; You n.d.). However, several descriptive accounts promote the primacy of presidents’ motivations and strategic choices in their interactions with organized interests through an “inside-out” lobbying dynamic whereby presidents take the lead in interacting with interests (Loomis 2009; Peterson 1992; Shaiko 1998; Tenpas 2005). Unfortunately, description and anecdotes aside, scant systematic evidence exists demonstrating that presidents exert more control over interactions with interests than do other political elites. Substantiating this dynamic is an important component of my theoretical argument because presidents must have and exercise decisionmaking power over engagement in order for their incentives to influence with which interests they engage.

In this section, I augment extant descriptive studies with original interviews and survey responses from organized interest representatives and White House officials to demonstrate that presidents wield important control over engagement with organized interests.<sup>9</sup> My interviews, which I conducted with 15 organized interest representatives and former White House officials in 2018 and 2019, provide detailed insight on the dynamics governing White House engagement from actors on both sides of the relationship. Additionally, my survey responses, collected from over 700 lobbyists in 2018, illustrate how well these insights characterize the experiences of the broader population of organized interests with the White House. This novel data provides a window into typically unobservable mechanisms of elite decisionmaking surrounding the White House’s interactions with organized interests that provide presidents important influence over engagement.

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<sup>8</sup>See Supplemental Information Section B for a discussion of mediums of engagement and the unique features of in-person meetings.

<sup>9</sup>See Supplemental Information Section A for interview and survey details including descriptions of participants, question wordings, and weighting procedures.

## Conditions Empowering Presidents

Explanations for the relative prominence of inside-out lobbying at the White House fall into three categories. First, physical and logistical barriers make outside-in lobbying difficult for organized interests while providing the White House with control over access (Peterson 1992; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). One key distinction between the White House and other policymaking venues is the restrictions on physical access; whereas organized interests can freely enter Congress and many federal agencies to attend public events and drop in on policymakers unannounced, access to the White House is only possible with prior clearance. The security considerations surrounding access not only create distance between interests and the White House, but also exact transaction costs on White House staff, who must collect and submit visitors' personal information to the Secret Service for review in advance meetings; thus, the White House is disinclined to provide access. As one former White House official describes, "Going to a meeting at the White House is not trivial. You have to go through security, you have to get cleared in. There's... care given to who is coming into the building..."<sup>10</sup>

Second, the White House faces stronger time and resource constraints on its ability to engage with organized interests than other institutions. While all policymakers shoulder important responsibilities, presidents, as head of the executive branch and the sole nationally elected official, face an unceasing flow of demands for action that exceed their powers and capabilities (Cronin 1980; Neustadt 1991). Further, the small size of the White House's staff as compared to that of the 535 members of Congress and the hundreds of federal agencies leaves the White House little capacity for interpersonal interaction with the tens of thousands of organizations that populate the organized interest universe (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012).<sup>11</sup> Given a choice between fighting for a sliver of the White House's attention or pursuing more accessible policymakers whose incentives and powers might make them more instrumentally valuable, interests tend to forsake the White

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<sup>10</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

<sup>11</sup>For the final full fiscal year of the Obama administration (2016), the Executive Office of the President estimated that it employed nearly 1,900 people ("Fiscal Year 2017 Congressional Budget Submission," *Executive Office of the President*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/fy2017eopbudgetfinalelectronic.pdf>), compared to the Office of Management and Budget's estimate of approximately 34,000 legislative branch employees and 2.68 million civilian workers in the broader executive branch ("Analytical Perspectives Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2017." *Office of Management and Budget*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2017/assets/spec.pdf>).

House and train their outside-in lobbying on congresspersons and bureaucrats (Loomis 2009). As an aide to President Lyndon Baines Johnson explains, “There are 535 opportunities in Congress and only one in the White House. You get an hour to present your case before each representative; you get fifteen minutes once a year with the president. Where would you put your effort?” (Light 1999, 94).

Third, the White House has responded to the challenges of interacting with organized interests with institutional developments that increase its control over engagement. The most prominent of these developments is the Office of Public Liaison (OPL), a unit in the White House Office created during the Gerald Ford administration responsible for building and maintaining relationships with interests (Loomis 2009; Pika 2009; Tenpas 2005).<sup>12</sup> An Obama administration staffer who worked in this unit described it as “the door to the White House... Our job was to work with organized interests all the time, every day. Our role was to represent the President for these interests.”<sup>13</sup> Importantly, OPL functions as the White House’s primary point of contact with interests, centralizing the White House’s engagement efforts and serving as a clearinghouse for information flowing to and from interests. While this latter feature helps the White House engage more efficiently, it often stymies interests’ outside-in lobbying to reach White House officials beyond OPL, leading them to lobby in other venues where policymakers of interest are more reachable.<sup>14</sup> Thus, through institutional developments like OPL, the White House has accumulated control over engagement with interests.

## **Evidence of Inside-Out Lobbying**

Because presidential engagement is the product of behind-closed-doors actions by myriad actors inside and outside of the White House, marshaling evidence illustrating every dimension of the engagement process is difficult. However, by collecting insights from political elites on both sides of the relationship, I can evaluate the veracity of several claims central to the argument that, relative to other policymaking institutions, the White House’s interactions with organized interests

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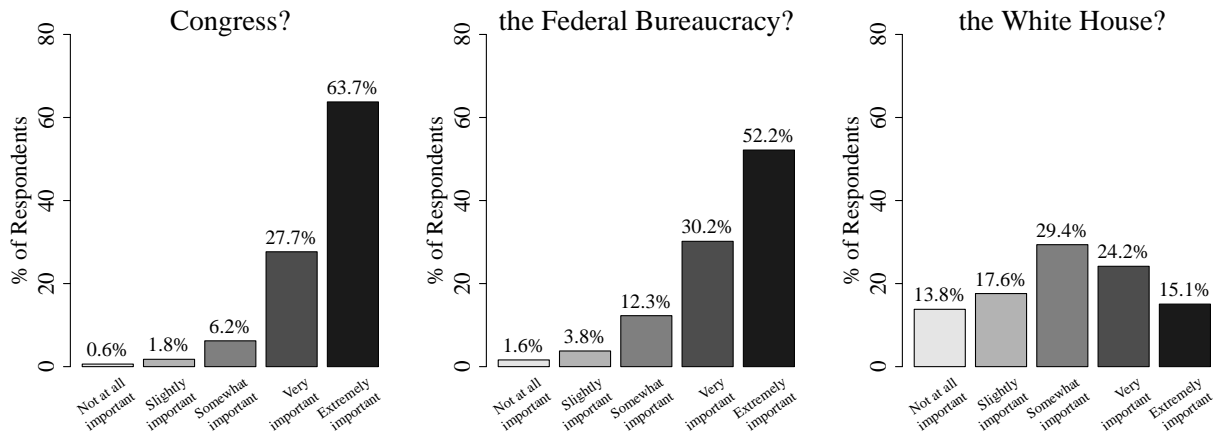
<sup>12</sup>During the Obama and Biden administrations, OPL has enjoyed a broader mandate and been renamed the Office of Public Engagement.

<sup>13</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

<sup>14</sup>Personal interview with a former White House official, August 23, 2019.



## How important are direct contacts with...



**Figure 1: Importance of Direct Contacts for Organized Interests Across Institutions** Bar graphs indicate how important survey respondents reported having direct contacts with officials in Congress (left pane), the federal bureaucracy (center pane), and the White House (right pane) is for their overall lobbying strategies. Responses are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the sampling frame (see Supplemental Information Section A). Responses may not sum to 100% due to rounding. *N* between 709 and 714 per question.

are more commonly governed by an inside-out lobbying dynamic. Specifically, I use my interviews and survey responses to show that: organized interests focus more lobbying attention on Congress and the bureaucracy than the White House; the White House takes an active role in initiating engagement with interests; and interests are more responsive to the White House than vice versa. While this evidence is not definitive proof of the White House’s primary influence over engagement with interests, its consistency with extant descriptive accounts substantiates the argument that presidents’ motivations are key to understanding engagement.

First, I assess whether organized interests allocate less lobbying attention to the White House, thereby enabling the White House to exert more influence over engagement. In Figure 1, I present the distributions of lobbyists’ responses to survey questions asking how important direct contacts with officials in Congress, the federal bureaucracy, and the White House are to their lobbying strategies. The distributions for Congress (left pane) and the federal bureaucracy (center pane) accord with traditional accounts of outside-in lobbying, with the vast majority of respondents indicating that direct contacts are “very” or “extremely” important (91.4% for Congress, 82.4% for the federal bureaucracy). However, only about a third of respondents (39.3%) assigned similar

importance to direct contacts with the White House. Because organized interests are rational actors who allocate resources according to expectations of success, this disconnect implies that interests devote more effort to lobbying Congress and the federal bureaucracy than with the White House. By consequence, the White House must exercise greater initiative to conduct engagement with interests who focus their access-seeking behavior elsewhere.

Second, I explore the extent to which the White House initiates engagement with interests. In my survey, I asked respondents who reported attending White House meetings during the Obama or Trump administrations the degree to which those meetings were initiated by their organization or the White House.<sup>15</sup> The distribution of survey responses, provided in the top row of Figure 2 for the Obama (left column) and Trump (right column) administrations, indicate that a large share of meetings arise from the White House's initiative; the majority of respondents (52.6%) reported that the Obama administration either took the lead or shared responsibility for initiating meetings, while a smaller but still sizable proportion of respondents (38.8%) reported a similar dynamic in the Trump administration.<sup>16</sup> Former White House officials echoed that both presidents and interests initiate interactions, but stressed that they and their colleagues exerted significant effort to cultivate and sustain engagement; one former official explained that they "tried to be affirmative in engaging groups, companies, businesses, you name it... [and] it was also fairly regular for groups, voices, corporate actors, constituency groups, etc., to ask and request meetings or engagements or conversations. So it's definitely both."<sup>17</sup> However, several interest representatives suggested that engagement was more commonly initiated by the White House; one lobbyist recalled that the "majority [of meetings arose from] the White House bringing people in,"<sup>18</sup> and another indicated that "more often than not... [the White House] called stakeholders in."<sup>19</sup> Further, even when interests request direct contacts, the White House retains discretion over which interests

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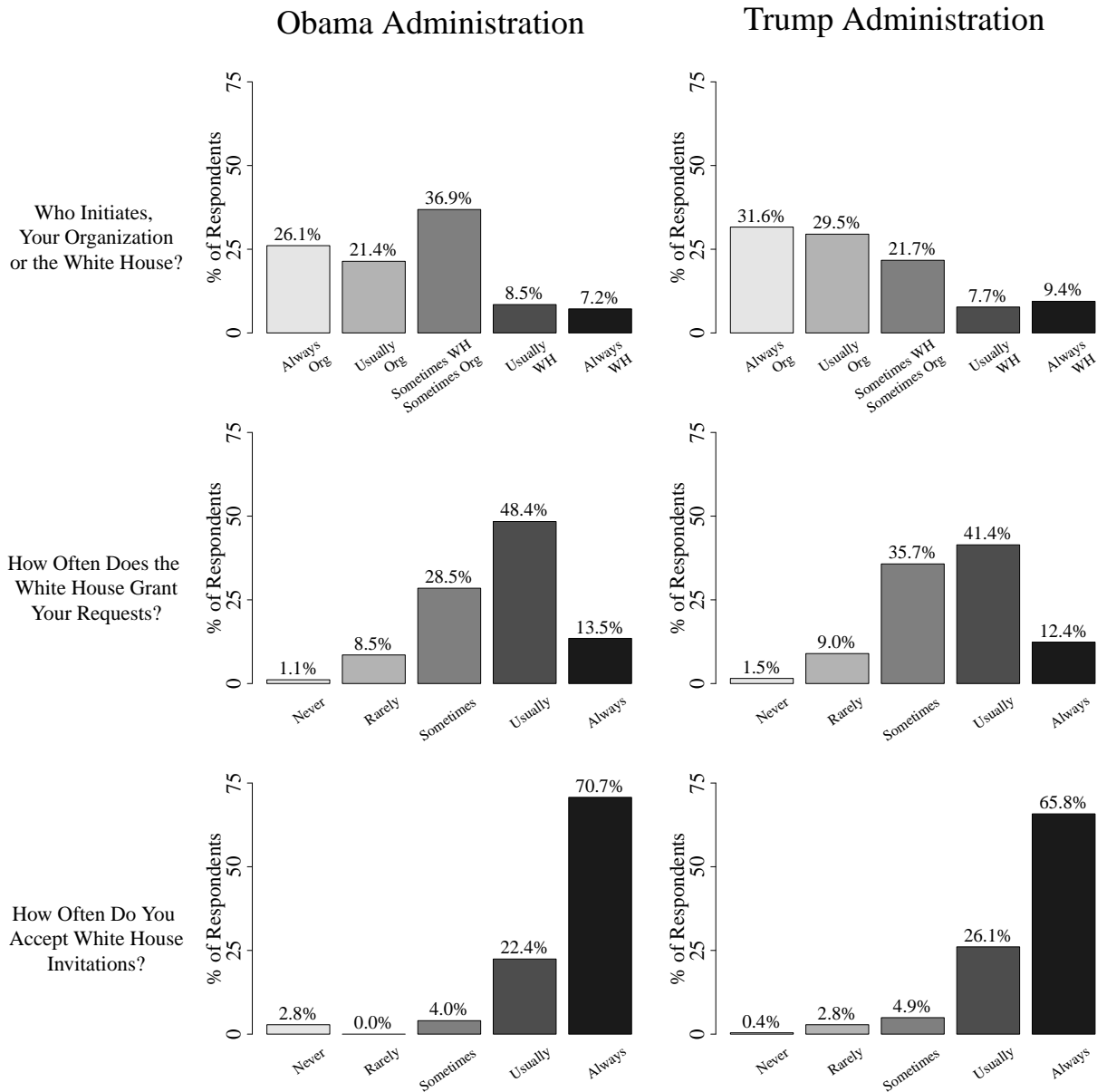
<sup>15</sup>If respondents reported not attending White House meetings during the Obama or Trump administrations, I asked questions about their lack of engagement (see Supplemental Information Section B).

<sup>16</sup>Several interviewees indicated that the Trump administration was less active in engaging with interests than previous administrations. A former Trump administration official attributed this discrepancy to the administration's lack of experience and preparation: "Early on, there wasn't a whole lot of organization... we didn't have some of the support groups [like the Office of Public Liaison] set up yet" (Personal interview with a former Trump White House official, September 5, 2019).

<sup>17</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, September 25, 2019.

<sup>18</sup>Personal interview with an education lobbyist, May 11, 2018.

<sup>19</sup>Personal interview with a water resources lobbyist, August 28, 2019.



**Figure 2: Dynamics of White House Engagement with Organized Interests** Bar graphs indicate respondents' perceptions of some of the dynamics underlying White House engagement during the Obama (left column) and Trump (right column) administrations. Panes in the top row indicate the degree to which respondents thought direct contacts arose from organizations' requests versus White House invitations, and panes in the center and bottom rows indicate the frequency with which the White House granted organizations' meeting requests and organizations accepted White House invitations, respectively. These questions were posed only to respondents who reported attending White House meetings during each administration. Responses are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the sampling frame (see Supplemental Information Section A). Responses may not sum to 100% due to rounding.  $N$  between 231 and 248 per question.

to ultimately engage. Together, the survey responses and interviews indicate that while some engagement is a product of interests' outside-in lobbying efforts, the White House plays a more substantial role in manifesting engagement than anticipated by traditional lobbying accounts.

Third, I investigate the degree to which the White House and organized interests respond to each others' engagement entreaties. The center and bottom rows of Figure 2 present the distributions of responses to questions concerning the frequency with which the White House acceded to interests' requests for access and interests accepted invitations from the White House, respectively, during each administration. These results demonstrate that interests are more responsive to the White House than the White House is to interests; while approximately three-quarters of respondents indicate that the Obama and Trump White Houses "sometimes" or "usually" granted their organizations' requests for access, over 90% replied that their organizations "usually" or "always" accept invitations from the White House. My interviewees unanimously agreed that White House invitations are heeded more often than interest requests. Former White House officials corroborated this dichotomy, with one recounting that he rejected most meeting requests because "I just didn't have a whole lot of time to sit around and talk to people about whatever,"<sup>20</sup> while another relayed that "[w]hen the White House calls, people to take the call. People were generally always willing to meet."<sup>21</sup> A lobbyist mirrored these sentiments, explaining that "I have not ever turned down a meeting. I always think of meeting as productive. In terms of getting the meetings, yes, it's very challenging."<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that the White House's interactions with organized interests differ fundamentally from those characterizing other institutions; unlike Congress and the federal bureaucracy who are besieged by interests' outside-in lobbying, the White House enjoys first- and second-mover advantages that provide more discretion over its engagement with interests. As a first-mover, the White House conducts inside-out lobbying through institutionalized structures that enable it to manage engagement with interests. As a second-mover, the White House's physical isolation and sparse staff resources allow it to be selective in fielding engagement requests. To

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<sup>20</sup>Personal interview with a former Trump White House official, September 5, 2019

<sup>21</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 5, 2018.

<sup>22</sup>Personal interview with a water resources lobbyist, August 28, 2019.

be sure, organized interests' outside-in lobbying sometimes motivates presidential engagement; however, because presidents exercise primary influence over with whom they engage, presidents can prioritize engagement with some interests over others. As put by one lobbyist asked to explain the relative influence of the White House and his organization in manifesting engagement, "It works both ways, and it's predominantly us reaching out to them... [But] they're the drivers. They determine whether they want to be responsive or not."<sup>23</sup>

## Presidents' Motivations for Engagement

Because White House engagement with organized interests is presidency-driven, presidents' motivations for conducting engagement are key to understanding with which interests they engage. Presidents, like all political elites, are goal-oriented actors, pursuing electoral success for themselves and their copartisans, good public policy, and favorable legacies (Light 1999). While they enjoy extensive unilateral powers to pursue their goals, the institutional design of American government requires presidents to secure the cooperation or assent of others to achieve many important aspirations. For example, presidents' electoral success ultimately rests in voters' hands. Again, policy initiatives necessitating legislative change and most executive and judicial nominations require congressional approval. Further, faced with myriad responsibilities and demands for action that stretch the limits of their office (Cronin 1980; Neustadt 1991), presidents often rely on other actors, such as congressional leaders (Beckmann 2010) and party organizations (Galvin 2009), to provide resources to subsidize presidents' pursuits.

Thus, presidents' ultimate success hinges on their ability to build and maintain coalitions that can directly provide support at the ballot box, on the floors of the House and Senate, and in other political institutions on whose consent presidents rely, or can subsidize presidents' pursuit of their goals (Cronin 1980; Neustadt 1991; Seligman and Covington 1989). In building coalitions, presidents not only seek to increase the ranks of their supporters but also to temper opposition, as both absolute and relative gains in support improve their standing (Beckmann 2010). Though previous studies of presidential coalition-building primarily focus on the mass public and Congress

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<sup>23</sup>Personal interview with a lobbyist for a religious organization, May 3, 2018.

(Edwards 2000), they largely neglect another type of political actor whose support or opposition can affect presidents' success: organized interests. Organized interests lack formal powers, such as votes at the ballot box or on Capitol Hill, but they can be valuable targets of presidents' coalition-building efforts because the institutional resources they use to influence other actors in the political system, such as their campaign funds, policy expertise, and lobbying capabilities, can help or hinder presidents' aims (Galvin 2012). Through engagement, presidents can mobilize interests' resources in directions favorable to presidents' goals.

Organized interests' institutional resources attract presidents' curiosity for two reasons. First, interest resources can subsidize presidents directly as they pursue their electoral, policy, and legacy goals (Hall and Deardorff 2006). For instance, presidents can promote their electoral success by stimulating interests to deploy campaign contributions, independent expenditures, and voter mobilization efforts in support of their campaigns (Peterson 1992; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Again, presidents can draw on interests' policy expertise and political intelligence to improve the quality of their proposals, elucidate stakeholders' preferences, and modify proposals to secure support among relevant actors (Haeder and Yackee 2015; Peterson 1992). Second, organized interests can indirectly aid presidents' pursuits by exerting pressure on political actors whose support is necessary for presidents' success. For example, because presidents' legislative success hinges largely on their party's strength in Congress (Bond and Fleisher 1990), presidents can direct interests' electoral resources to copartisan congressional candidates. Additionally, to assemble a winning coalition in Congress, presidents can leverage interests' lobbying capacity to pressure members to support their initiatives (Beckmann 2010; Peterson 1992). Further, presidents can co-opt interests' grassroots lobbying apparatuses to promote support for their initiatives among interests' membership bases and the public at large (Cohen 2012; Peterson 1992). In both cases, presidents engage with interests to marshal their institutional resources in service of presidents' electoral, policy, and legacy aims—either by encouraging interests to deploy resources in support of or avoid utilizing resources in opposition to those aims.

In some cases, presidents' mere engagement sufficiently motivates organized interests to cooperate; when asked about his client's willingness to comply with White House requests, one lobbyist

reported that “if the White House asks, then you figure out a way to make that work for you... it’s very hard to say no to a White House.”<sup>24</sup> However, should rhetoric alone fail to secure interests’ cooperation, presidents can leverage their unilateral powers to coax interests into using their resources in ways consonant with presidents’ goals. For example, presidents can help interests realize desired outcomes by exercising influence over the bureaucracy (Moe and Howell 1999), appointing preferred officials to executive and judicial positions (Lewis 2008; Nemacheck 2008), and employing unilateral action (Howell 2003). Again, presidents can utilize their bully pulpit to generate attention and support for interests’ priorities; as Baumgartner et al. find, one of the strongest determinants for organized interest success in achieving or stifling policy change is presidential support in the form of taking “an advocacy role in a public-policy debate” (2009, 238). Presidents can also help interests perform institutional maintenance by bringing attention to them and enabling them to advertise connections with high-level government officials to members and stakeholders (Brown 2014). Thus, presidents have both the motivation and means to induce interests’ compliance with their coalition-building activity.

### **Engagement Strategy as Constrained Optimization**

While presidents’ limited time and resources and the vast number of interests upon whom they might call helps solidify their control over engagement, these institutional features also constrict the range of interests with which presidents can engage; as one Obama administration official explains, “We wanted [to engage with] everybody, but, at the end of the day, there are a million organizations out there and every single organization isn’t going to be a part of everything.”<sup>25</sup> Presidents’ engagement decisions are a product of a constrained optimization problem wherein they must determine which subset of interests, if engaged, would provide presidents with the highest rate of return. General models of coalition building (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996) and studies of presidential coalition building in other contexts (e.g., Beckmann 2010; Kriner and Reeves 2015) which require decisionmakers to navigate similar constrained optimization scenarios highlight two characteristics of potential coalition members which should inform

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<sup>24</sup>Personal interview with a chemical industry lobbyist, September 13, 2019.

<sup>25</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 4, 2018.

presidents' engagement strategies: organized interests' resource endowments and shared preferences with the incumbent.

First, presidents focus their engagement efforts on interests with larger resource endowments to efficiently bolster the resources of their own coalition or diminish those of their opponents. Because the costs to engage, such as the staff time required to convene a meeting, are relatively fixed, presidents can more dramatically shift the balance of interest resources arrayed for and against them by targeting interests who wield more resources (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1996). Presidents' focus on well-resourced potential coalition members manifests in other contexts, such as their interactions with Congress and the mass public. For instance, rather than expending effort on lobbying each member of Congress, presidents focus on congressional leaders who control institutional levers of power and can pressure members on presidents' behalf (Beckmann 2010). Again, in attracting public support, presidents often tailor their rhetoric and policies to appeal to citizens with more political resources, such as those in higher socioeconomic strata (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Griffin and Newman 2016), and those whose votes and voices are more valuable, such as those in swing states (Kriner and Reeves 2015). Thus, presidents should take a similar approach in this context by focusing engagement efforts on well-resourced interests.

Second, presidents engage more often with interests who share their partisan or ideological preferences. This is not to say that presidents never engage with interests with divergent preferences; indeed, engagement with such interests can help presidents demobilize opposition or eliminate threats to their coalitions (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Groseclose and Snyder 1996). As a former White House official expressed, presidents engage with interests both to “increase the likelihood that you... maximize a positive reaction” and to “avoid a negative reaction”<sup>26</sup> (see also Beckmann 2010). However, because coalition-builders' entreaties are often better received by those with similar preferences (Cox and McCubbins 1986), presidents typically allocate more effort on targets who share their partisan or ideological preferences. For instance, presidents' public messaging (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Eshbaugh-Soha and Rottinghaus 2013; Wood 2009) and policy decisions (Griffin and Newman 2016; Kriner and Reeves 2015; Lowande, Jenkins, and Clarke

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<sup>26</sup>Personal interview with a former White House official, August 23, 2019.



2018; Rogowski 2016) are often designed to appeal to partisan and ideological allies in the mass public. Similarly, presidents center their congressional coalition-building activities on copartisans (Beckmann 2010; Christenson, Kriner, and Reeves 2017). Therefore, we should expect presidents to engage with interests whose partisan and ideological similarity predisposes them to react favorably to engagement.

## Research Design and Methods

Presidents engage with organized interests through a variety of mediums including phone calls, emails, and in-person White House meetings. While the same strategic considerations confront presidents when using each of these mediums, I focus my empirical analysis on the last—in-person White House meetings—for two reasons. First, across institutions, policymakers and organized interests alike perceive in-person direct contacts, or access, as the most effective medium for gaining their counterparts' attention, making their preferences salient, and building relationships (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Levine 2009). Second, because in-person White House meetings are among the most costly form of engagement for presidents to conduct, records of with whom the White House meets provides a strong signal of its engagement priorities. While all engagement mediums require effort, a White House official can complete scores of emails and phone calls in the same time it takes to hold an in-person meeting. Because White House meetings are a context where constraints on presidents' ability to engage are high, presidents' strategic considerations exert strong influence over engagement decisions.<sup>27</sup>

Traditionally, empirical studies of direct contacts between policymakers and organized interests have been hampered by data scarcity (see De Figueiredo and Richter 2014; Miller Forthcoming; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 295-304). In most contexts, direct contacts take place behind closed doors and records of their occurrence are rarely disclosed. However, recent releases of over 7 million White House visitor logs records from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama provide a rare opportunity to observe in-person White House meetings attended by organized

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<sup>27</sup>See Supplemental Information Section B for more information on the different mediums of engagement and how in-person meetings are uniquely suited to test my empirical expectations.

interest representatives. By pairing these records with lobbying and campaign finance reports, we can assess how interests' resource endowments and preferences inform presidents' engagement decisions.

## The White House Visitor Logs

As one of the most secure workplaces in the world, the White House closely monitors all individuals entering and exiting the White House and adjacent office buildings. The comings and goings of individuals without permanent access passes are recorded by the Secret Service in the Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES)—more commonly referred to as the White House visitor logs. Each record in WAVES contains information including the name of the visitor and the date and time of the visit. While many entries correspond to tours or social events, WAVES also contains the names of individuals entering the White House on official business, such as organized interest representatives.

Prior to 2009, no sitting president had made public the White House visitor logs. However, in September 2009, Barack Obama fulfilled a campaign promise by announcing that his administration would voluntarily release the visitor logs every quarter.<sup>28</sup> By the time President Obama left office, his administration had released nearly 6 million records spanning September 15, 2009 to September 30, 2016. Additionally, in 2015, the Clinton Presidential Library began fulfilling Freedom of Information Act requests by releasing the visitor logs for the final five years of the Clinton administration.<sup>29</sup> Since the Lobbying Disclosure Act data on which I rely to identify organized interest representatives begins in 1998 (described below), I utilize the 1.3 million White House visitor logs records from the final three years of Clinton's presidency. In total, my analyses use over 7 million records from these administrations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Norm Eisen, "Opening Up the People's House," *The White House*, September 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/09/04/opening-peoplesquos-house>. See Supplemental Information Section C for disclosure policy details.

<sup>29</sup>"Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1996-1998 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57587>; "White House Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1999-2000 - Collection Finding Aid," *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/44133>.

<sup>30</sup>Unfortunately, comparable visitor logs are not available for other recent presidents (see Supplemental Information Section C).

Because the only information the White House visitor logs provide about each visitor is their name, we cannot discern which visitors were representatives of which organized interests using the visitor logs alone. Rather, to detect instances of presidential engagement with specific interests, we need data providing the names of persons representing each interest for the time periods contemporaneous with the visitor logs. I obtain this information from reports filed by organized interests under the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA), which requires interests to provide the names of their registered lobbyists, or those primarily responsible for interests' political advocacy.<sup>31,32</sup> Using these rosters of interests' representatives, I identify instances of engagement by matching the names of lobbyists provided in each interest's semestral (through 2007) or quarterly (2008 and after) LDA reports with the names of visitors listed in the White House visitor logs for the corresponding time periods.<sup>33,34</sup> Then, I aggregate all instances of engagement associated with each organized interest for each time period in which they filed an LDA report—semestral for the Clinton administration and quarterly for the Obama administration—to construct binary indicators and counts of presidents' engagement with them. This level of observation—the organized interest-time period unit—constitutes my unit of analysis.

## Organized Interests' Resources and Preferences

To obtain measures of organized interests' resource endowments and preferences, I draw on data from the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP). Because most interests specialize in either electoral

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<sup>31</sup>Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (as amended), [https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby\\_Disclosure\\_Act/TOC.htm](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby_Disclosure_Act/TOC.htm). I utilize the Center of Responsive Politics' curated database of LDA reports (available at <https://www.opensecrets.org/>), which cleans and standardizes information from all reports since 1998. While not all interests with whom presidents might engage file LDA reports, the low thresholds for lobbying activity that require reporting force interests with more than a transient interest in federal policy to file; consequently, studies of organized interests at the federal level typically focus on the population of interests filing LDA reports (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009). See Supplemental Information Section C for details on LDA reporting requirements.

<sup>32</sup>While interests' rosters of lobbyists do not include all individuals who might represent them at White House meetings, lobbyists participating in my survey indicate that interests' contingents to White House meetings usually include at least one registered lobbyist (see Supplemental Information Section C).

<sup>33</sup>The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 changed the required frequency of LDA filings from semestral to quarterly.

<sup>34</sup>Analyses in the main paper utilize exact matches of the names of registered lobbyists and White House visitors to measure presidential engagement. In Supplemental Information Sections C and E, I describe the matching procedure and alternative approximate matching techniques and reestimate my models using measures of engagement which incorporate approximate matching. The substantive results from these alternative specifications are consistent with those presented here.

politics or policymaking (Tripathi, Ansolabehere, and Snyder 2002), I incorporate measures of both electoral and policy resources. First, I measure interests' electoral resources as the aggregate amount of campaign contributions they make to candidates for federal office. I focus on aggregate contributions rather than only contributions to the incumbent president because aggregate contributions reflect interests' overall electoral resources, which presidents can channel in support of themselves and their copartisans. Using CRP's compilation of the Federal Election Commission's campaign contribution reports for the election cycles immediately preceding and including the time periods for which I have White House visitor logs—1995-1996 to 1999-2000 for the Clinton administration, and 2007-2008 to 2015-2016 for the Obama administration—I generate a binary indicator for each organized interest-time period observation for whether the interest made any contributions to candidates for federal office in the preceding two years (i.e., the length of an electoral cycle) and a continuous measure of the amount of money it contributed in that two-year period. Second, I measure interests' policy resources with the lobbying expenditures they report on their LDA filings in the previous time period.<sup>35</sup> Under the LDA, lobbying activities for which expenditures must be reported include not only lobbying contacts themselves, but also “any efforts in support of such contacts, including preparation or planning activities, research, and any other background work.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, lobbying expenditures capture a wide range of interests' policy resources, including staff salaries, policy expertise, and political intelligence. Given the right-skewedness of campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures, I apply log transformations to both measures.

Measuring interests' partisan or ideological preferences is less straightforward. Few measures of organized interests' preferences exist, and those that do offer coverage for few interests filing LDA reports. For example, McKay (2008) uses interests' evaluations of members of Congress' roll call votes to scale their ideology, but can only do so for the 72 interests making evaluations. Bonica (2013) and Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz (2020), who estimate ideology scores for interests using campaign contributions and positions on congressional bills, respectively, offer broader coverage

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<sup>35</sup>LDA filers must indicate if their expenditures met a minimum threshold—\$10,000 for reports filed in 2007 or earlier, \$5,000 for reports filed in 2008 or later—and report a specific amount only if above that threshold. To account for this left-censoring, I subtract the threshold amount from any specific amount an interest reports, such that the measure indicates expenditures exceeding the threshold.

<sup>36</sup>“Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance,” *US House of Representatives*, January 31, 2017, <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/ldaguidance.pdf>.

of the interests filing LDA reports. However, their measures provide scores for only 1,416 (4.4%) and 1,565 (4.8%) of the 32,421 unique interests included in my analyses, respectively. Given this limitation, I use qualitative information provided by CRP to construct a categorical measure of the partisan alignment of each of the 92 industries into which they sort organized interests.<sup>37</sup> For each industry, CRP provides a written summary of its political activity and policy preferences, and these summaries often provide assessments of the partisan leanings of interests in the industry.<sup>38</sup> If an industry’s summary expresses a clear preference for the Democratic or Republican Party, I code that industry as aligned with that party. If the summary does not express a clear preference for either party, I code it as Independent, or not aligned with either party. While this classification scheme may misattribute the preferences of some individual interests, studies using other measures of interest preferences find that the distributions of preferences within industries typically exhibit clear central tendencies (e.g., Bonica 2013; Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz 2020). Thus, industry-level partisan alignment is an imperfect but informative measure of interests’ preferences that provides coverage for the full data set.<sup>39</sup>

## Estimation Strategy

The data structure poses non-trivial challenges for analysis. One set of challenges stems from inconsistencies in temporal units of measurement. While some time-varying components of the data are observed at daily intervals, such as White House visitor log entries and campaign contributions, others are observed less frequently, such as organized interests’ lobbying expenditures. Further, because amendments to the Lobbying Disclosure Act changed the required frequency of filings from semestral to quarterly in 2008, the temporal units associated with data drawn from LDA reports

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<sup>37</sup>By focusing on partisanship to describe interests’ preferences, this measure does not account for distinctions in ideological preferences among interests who share partisan inclinations. However, in politically polarized environments such as those characterizing the Clinton and Obama administrations, organized interests tend to associate with one party (Krimmel 2017) and often expand the scope of their advocacy to include policies and positions that party prioritizes (Fagan, McGee, and Thomas 2021).

<sup>38</sup>“Alphabetical Listing of Industries,” *Center for Responsive Politics*, <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/alphalist.php>.

<sup>39</sup>In Section E of the Supplemental Information, I reestimate my empirical models using interest-level ideology scores from Bonica (2013) and Crosson, Furnas, and Lorenz (2020) to measure interests’ preferences. While I lose approximately 90% of the observations who lack ideology scores, the results from those analyses are substantively similar to those presented here using industry-level partisan alignment.

vary across the Clinton and Obama administrations. I address these disparities in two ways. First, given the changes to LDA filing requirements, I estimate separate models for each presidency. Second, to make temporal units of measurement consistent for all variables, I aggregate all data up to the temporal unit associated with contemporary LDA filing requirements—semestral for the Clinton presidency, and quarterly for the Obama presidency.

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

To account for the non-independence of observations and collinearity between group-specific effects and partisan alignment, I utilize Bayesian multilevel models (Gelman and Hill 2006). Multilevel models account for nesting in data structures by allowing parameter estimates to vary for each grouping in the data, such as repeated observations of interests and industries. Additionally, multilevel models can estimate parameters for covariates measured at the group-level, such as industry-level partisan alignment. Each of the logistic multilevel models I use to generate the results presented below estimates a binary indicator of whether a given interest in a given time period experienced presidential engagement as a function of its lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions; the partisanship of its industry; a series of interest-level control variables drawn from LDA filings, such as the issues on which it reports lobbying; and varying intercepts for each interest, industry, and time period.<sup>40</sup> All models are estimated in Stan (Carpenter et al. 2017) and report

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<sup>40</sup>Analogous negative binomial models using the number of times presidents engaged with each organized interest in a given time period as the outcome variable are presented in Supplemental Information Section E; the substantive results of these specifications are similar to those presented here.

no divergent transitions during sampling and indicate convergence with  $\hat{R}$  statistics of  $\leq 1.10$  for all parameters.<sup>41</sup>

## Results

Interpreting results from multilevel models can be difficult because of the large number of parameters they estimate. To ease discussion of the results, I present the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement using an observed-value approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013), fixing the covariate values of all observations to their observed values while varying each of my key covariates of interest—lobbying expenditures, campaign contributions, and partisan alignment—independently to demonstrate its marginal effect. Through this approach, I illustrate how the predicted probability of engagement changes across levels of the covariates.

The left panes of Figures 3 and 4 present the predicted probabilities of presidential engagement for interests with the levels of resources and partisan alignment specified by the far left labels during the Clinton and Obama presidencies, respectively.<sup>42</sup> To determine whether specific pairs of these predicted probabilities are statistically distinguishable, we cannot rely on direct visualization among points in the left pane; rather, we must assess the differences between the distributions from which these predicted probabilities are calculated. The right panes of Figures 3 and 4 present these differences for specific pairs of predicted probabilities, as indicated by the labels on the left side of the pane. If the 95% credible intervals for these differences do not include zero, I refer to those differences as statistically distinguishable.<sup>43</sup>

Looking first at the predicted probabilities associated with varying levels of lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions—measures of policy and electoral resources, respectively—we

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<sup>41</sup>See Supplemental Information Section D for details on model specification and estimation.

<sup>42</sup>For each set of covariate values in Figures 3 and 4, the probability of engagement during the Clinton administration is roughly one and a half times to two times as high as during the Obama administration. Two contextual factors explain this difference. First, the temporal range accounted for by each observation during the Clinton presidency is twice as large as during the Obama presidency, such that each organized interest-time period observation has twice as long to experience engagement. Second, the number of organized interests filing LDA reports during the Obama presidency is roughly two and a half times higher than during the Clinton presidency. Because the White House’s ability to engage with organized interests did not expand at the same rate, the baseline probability of engagement during the Obama presidency is lower.

<sup>43</sup>See Supplemental Information Section E for more details about the calculation and interpretation of the predicted probabilities.

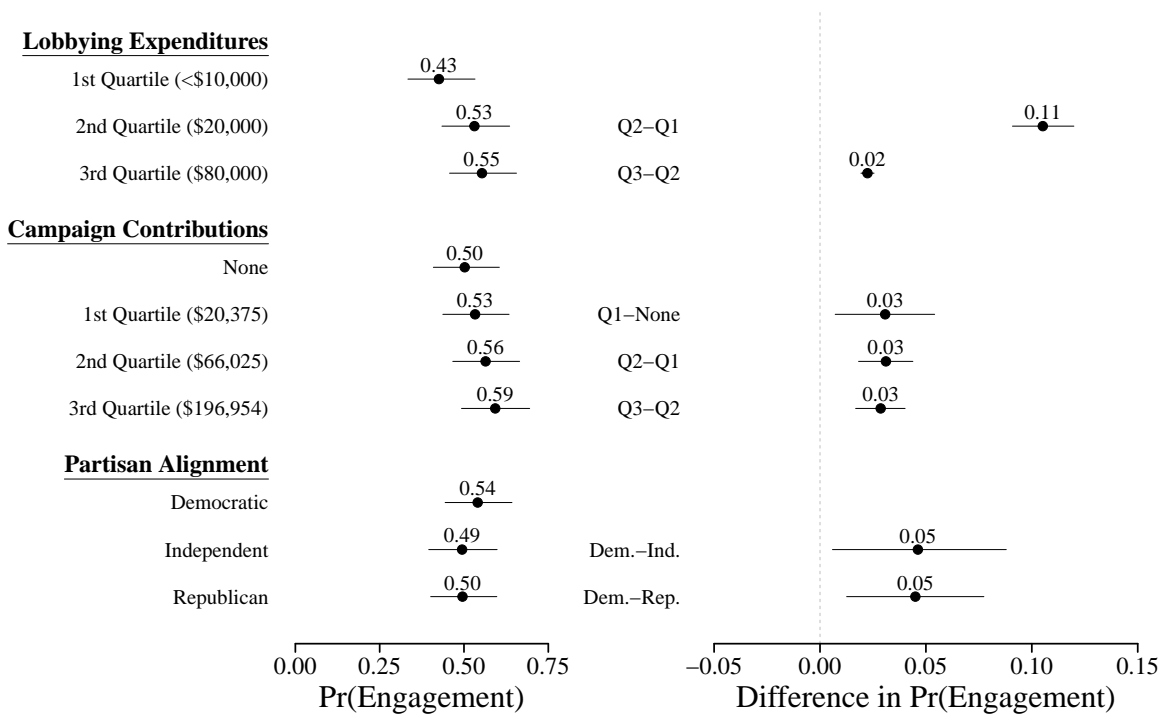


Figure 3: **Relationship between Organized Interests' Resources and Partisan Alignment on Presidential Engagement (Clinton)** In the left pane, points and lines represent the means and 95% credible intervals of the distributions of predicted probabilities calculated using an observed-value approach with parameter estimates from the model using data from the Clinton White House (see Table SI.4). For each of the three types of organized interest characteristics, I calculate the predicted probabilities of engagement for all observations for each of the specified variable values while fixing the other covariates to each observation's observed values. In the right pane, I plot the means and 95% credible intervals for the differences between specific pairs of these distributions of predicted probabilities as indicated by the labels on the left side of the pane. For example, looking at the predicted probabilities across levels of lobbying expenditures, the three points and credible intervals in the left pane indicate the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to the first, second, and third quartile values. In the right pane, the two topmost points and credible intervals indicate the differences in the distributions of predicted probabilities when lobbying expenditures are set to their first and second quartile values and their second and third quartile values, respectively. The predictions associated with lobbying expenditures collectively indicate that organized interests with higher levels of lobbying expenditures have a distinguishably higher probability of experiencing engagement. Discrepancies between the differences indicated in the right pane and differences between the corresponding values in the left pane are attributable to rounding.

observe consistent increases in the probability of engagement as an interest's resource levels increase. For example, in the left pane of Figure 3, whereas the probability of the Clinton White House engaging an interest when its lobbying expenditures fall into the first quartile (less than \$10,000) is 0.43, this probability increases to 0.53 when its lobbying expenditures increase to median value (\$20,000)—an increase of 23%. Further increasing lobbying expenditures from the median value



to the third quartile value (\$80,000) is associated with a smaller increase in the probability of engagement to 0.55. Similarly, in the left pane of Figure 4, while the probability of the Obama White House engaging with an interest that did not make campaign contributions in the preceding electoral cycle is 0.30, this probability of engagement increases to 0.35 when campaign contributions increase to the first quartile value (\$28,891)—an increase of 17%. Additional increases in campaign contributions to the median (\$97,088) and third quartile (\$337,000) values are associated with additional but smaller increases in the probability of engagement. The right panes of both figures indicate that each stepwise increase in lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions is statistically distinguishable, as the 95% credible intervals for the differences between the distributions of predicted probabilities do not include zero. Therefore, in line with my empirical expectations, presidents are more likely to engage with organized interests with larger endowments of electoral and policy resources.

Turning to the predicted probabilities associated with organized interests' partisan alignment, we see that presidents are more likely to engage with interests in industries aligned with the Democratic Party—the party of both Presidents Clinton and Obama. For the Clinton presidency, we observe in the left pane of Figure 3 that the probability of engagement with an interest in an industry aligned with the Democratic Party is 0.54, but that shifting its industry's alignment to the Republican Party or neither party leads to a decrease in the probability of engagement to 0.50 and 0.49, respectively—differences of 7% and 9%. In the Obama presidency, we see a similar effect in the left pane of Figure 4, as the probability of engagement when interests are aligned with the Democratic Party is 0.33, but this predicted probability decreases to 0.30 when interests are aligned with the Republican Party or neither party—a difference of 10%. In the right panes of both figures, we see that the differences in predicted probabilities for interests when in Democratic and Republican industries for both presidencies, and for interests when in Democratic and Independent industries for the Clinton presidency, are statistically distinguishable. This finding also supports my empirical expectations, indicating that presidents are more likely to engage with interests aligned with the incumbent's party.

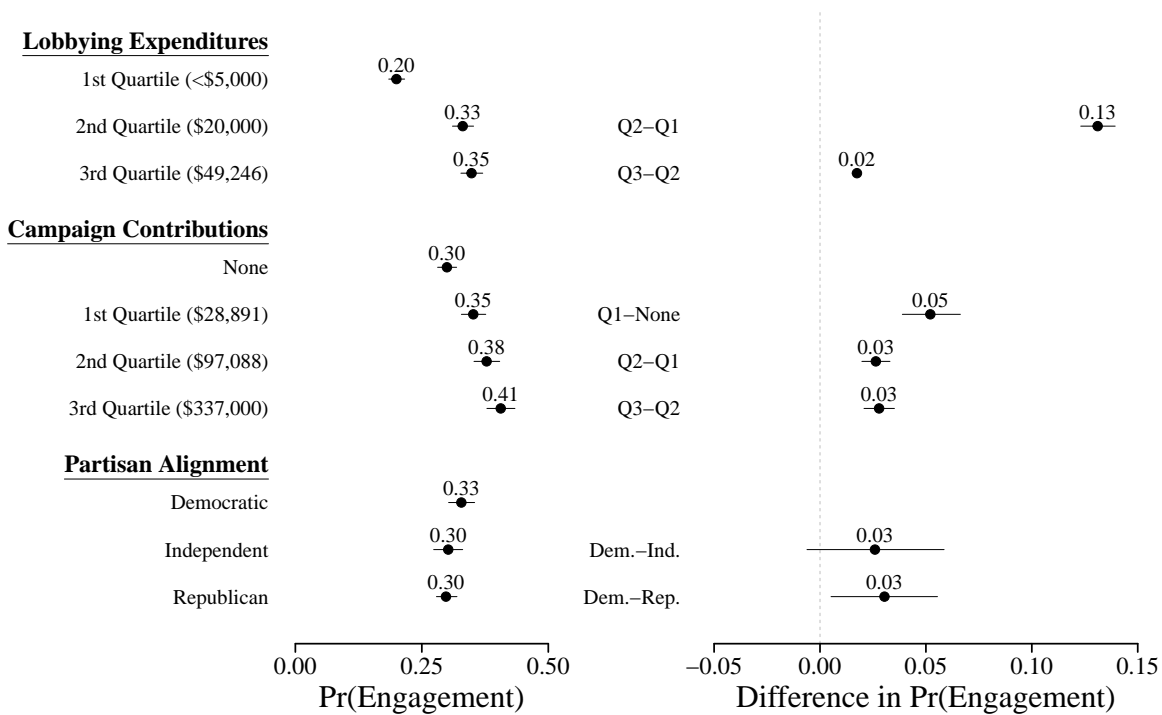


Figure 4: **Relationship between Organized Interests' Resources and Partisan Alignment on Presidential Engagement (Obama)** In the left pane, points and lines represent the means and 95% credible intervals of the distributions of predicted probabilities calculated using an observed-value approach with parameter estimates from the model using data from the Obama White House (see Table SI.4). For each of the three types of organized interest characteristics, I calculate the predicted probabilities of engagement for all observations for each of the specified variable values while fixing the other covariates to each observation's observed values. In the right pane, I plot the means and 95% credible intervals for the differences between specific pairs of these distributions of predicted probabilities as indicated by the labels on the left side of the pane. For example, looking at the predicted probabilities across levels of lobbying expenditures, the three points and credible intervals in the left pane indicate the predicted probabilities of engagement when lobbying expenditures are set to the first, second, and third quartile values. In the right pane, the two topmost points and credible intervals indicate the differences in the distributions of predicted probabilities when lobbying expenditures are set to their first and second quartile values and their second and third quartile values, respectively. The predictions associated with lobbying expenditures collectively indicate that organized interests with higher levels of lobbying expenditures have a distinguishably higher probability of experiencing engagement. Discrepancies between the differences indicated in the right pane and differences between the corresponding values in the left pane are attributable to rounding.

## Conclusion

Presidents have long cast organized interests as villains who exercise “unwarranted”<sup>44</sup> and “undue influence”<sup>45</sup> in American politics and have “made a living bleeding our country dry.”<sup>46</sup> However,

<sup>44</sup>Jimmy Carter, “Interview with *U.S. News & World Report*,” September 13, 1976, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/interview-with-us-news-world-report>.

<sup>45</sup>Bill Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals,” February 17, 1993, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-congress-administration-goals>.

at the same time presidents publicly cast organized interests as foils, they cultivate their cooperation in furtherance of presidents' goals. Data inavailability long concealed this inconsistency. By leveraging original interviews, survey responses, and administrative data, this paper demonstrates not only that presidents frequently interact with interests, but also that presidents engage with these interests largely of their own volition. Just as presidents build coalitions among members of Congress and the mass public, they actively court members of the organized interest universe to provide support or withhold opposition, and they focus these coalition-building efforts on interests with large endowments of institutional resources and who share presidents' preferences.

These findings have several implications for our understandings of the presidency, organized interests, and representation in American politics. First, while recent discussions of the presidential toolkit focus on powers presidents can exercise independently (e.g., Kinane 2021; Kriner and Reeves 2015; Lowande and Rogowski 2021), this study spotlights engagement with organized interests as an important instrument of presidential power. Because presidents stand to benefit from drawing on interests' institutional resources in virtually all contexts, from campaigning to policymaking and managing public opinion, incorporating organized interests into studies of presidential activities may provide new insights into how presidents advance their aims. For instance, while many studies suggest that presidents have little power to influence congressional roll call votes (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Edwards 2012; but see Cohen 2019), finding ways to account for presidents' marshaling of organized interests to lobby members of Congress on their behalf may reveal a pathway for presidents' congressional influence. Again, though presidents' ability to "go public" has waned with increasing polarization and media saturation (Kernell 2006), studies of presidential opinion leadership might find that presidents instead persuade and mobilize members of the public through outreach efforts conducted with organized interests (Cohen 2012). The linkage between presidents and organized interests offers fertile ground to explore contested or heretofore unanswerable questions about the American presidency.

Second, though recent studies of presidential representation stress that presidents use their of-

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<sup>46</sup>Donald J. Trump, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for the Republican Presidential Nomination in 2020," June 18, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-announcing-candidacy-for-the-republican-presidential-nomination-2020>.

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

Third, this study offers a rare opportunity to assess how presidents' engagement priorities contribute to organized interests' ability to bias political outcomes. Interests representing businesses and the upper-class, who tend to enjoy large resource endowments, pervade and exercise disproportionate influence in Congress and the federal bureaucracy (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012), but many scholars have speculated that presidents' impulse for national representation should dampen the influence of these privileged interests and provide a more friendly venue for interests "not effectively represented in the existing government" (Bentley 1908, 345; see also Howell and Moe 2016; Truman 1971; Quirk and Nesmith 2005; Uslander 1998). However, by emphasizing engagement with high-resource interests, presidents perpetuate disparities in political voice that benefit business and

upper-class interests and marginalize the preferences of other constituencies; as Schlozman, Verba, and Brady write, “Public officials cannot consider voices they do not hear... if [the voices officials hear] come from an unrepresentative set of individuals and organizations, government policy is likely to reflect more fully the preferences and needs of the active part of the public” (2012, 6). Because we lack comparable information on the access other policymakers, such as members of Congress, afford interests, it is difficult to contextualize the magnitude of the representational bias presidents afford privileged interests. For instance, while interests are 37% more likely to experience engagement during the Obama administration when they make \$337,000 in campaign contributions to candidates for federal office rather than \$0 (see Figure 4), the return on contributions may be significantly larger for members of Congress. However, the presence of any representational bias not only dashes hopes that presidents might counteract biases present in other policymaking venues, but also implies that presidents’ incentives for engagement with organized interests help perpetuate inequalities in political voice.

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# Supplemental Information

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

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## **A Interview and Survey Descriptions**

Learning about the dynamics governing presidents' engagement with organized interests is difficult because the process by which it occurs and most instances of engagement itself occur behind closed doors. I collected novel interview and survey data from former White House officials and organized interest representatives to shed light on these dynamics to both demonstrate the primacy of presidents' motivations in engagement decisions and check assumptions about the data-generating process underlying the White House visitor logs. In this section, I explain how I conducted these interviews and the survey and describe the characteristics of each sample.

### **Interviews Description**

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

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

### **Survey Description**

To gain insights on the relationships between presidents and organized interests from a broader population of organized interests, I conducted a survey of organized interest representatives asking about experiences with and perspectives on interacting with the then-current Trump White House and the recently-departed Obama White House.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The sample for this survey consisted of all persons listed as points of contact for lobbyists or organizations employing lobbyists who filed Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) reports between the first quarter of 2017 and the third quarter of 2018. While these points of contact can be persons who are not formally recognized as lobbyists under the LDA, nearly two-thirds of points of contact are LDA lobbyists, and those individuals who are not LDA lobbyists often perform government relations or policy advocacy functions and are familiar with their employers' interactions with policymakers. For each unique individual, I selected his or her most recent appearance on a report so as to obtain the most up-to-date contact and employment information. In cases where the same individual was identified as the point of contact for more than one client in a given quarter, I randomly sampled one report where that individual appeared as the point of contact. To minimize email bounces and improve response rates, the email addresses in the selected reports were screened to check for

appropriate formatting and identify duplicates. Some organizations, such as large lobbying firms, provided the same generic email address for all of their filings; when such generic email addresses were identified, every effort was made to obtain a unique email address for that individual (searching the organization website, LinkedIn, other social media platforms, etc.). After de-duplicating the list of individuals and screening email addresses, the final sample consisted of 5,938 individuals.

Initial invitations to complete the survey were sent to all 5,938 individuals on November 15, 2018, and reminder emails were sent to all individuals who had not yet completed the survey on November 29, 2018 and December 13, 2018. Data collection ceased on December 31, 2018. Excluding the points of contact whose email addresses were identified as invalid when invitations were sent, the overall response rate for individuals who completed the demographic and background module of the survey, which asked general questions about their experience working for their current client, is 13.2% ( $\frac{719}{5458}$ ). The response rate for those who reached the module of the survey asking about their clients' interactions with the Obama and/or Trump White Houses is 10.2% ( $\frac{557}{5458}$ ).<sup>1</sup>

The questions about the Obama and Trump administrations were identical save the identities of the presidents mentioned. These questions were asked as separate blocks for each president and presented consecutively with the block order randomized across respondents. The first question in each block asked respondents how frequently their client interacted with the White House during that administration in an average year in three ways: 1) by phone, email, or mail; 2) through in-person meetings at the White House; and 3) through in-person meetings outside of the White House. Respondents' answers for the second part of the question—the frequency of in-person White House meetings—determined what additional questions they were provided for each administration. If respondents indicated that their client “Never” had in-person meetings at the White House, they were asked questions about not having meetings with the Obama or Trump White House. Respondents indicating that their client had at least one in-person meeting at the White House (i.e., “Fewer than 5 times”) were asked questions about the meetings their client had with the Obama or Trump White House. Of the 433 respondents who answered this question for the Obama administration, 167 (38.6%) reported that their client never had in-person meetings with the Obama White House, and 266 (61.4%) indicated that their client had at least one in-person meeting. Of the 541 respondents who answered this question for the Trump administration, 269 (49.7%) reported that their client never had in-person meetings with the Trump White House, and 272 (50.3%) indicated that their client had at least one in-person meeting.

### **Evaluating Concerns about Response Bias**

While this survey allows me to collect information from a large number of organized interest representatives, the self-reports I solicit, like all survey responses, are susceptible to response bias, or the possibility that respondents' responses deviate from their realized experiences (see Miller Forthcoming, 2021). For example, we might be concerned that respondents are vulnerable to desirability bias, providing answers that make themselves and their clients appear more influential than they are by over-reporting the frequency of their White House contacts.

While it is difficult to determine the extent of this bias in the survey responses, I am able to get a sense of this bias by comparing respondents' self-reports of their clients' in-person meetings at the Obama White House with my observational measure of their clients' in-person meetings at

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<sup>1</sup>106 respondents who progressed through the survey far enough to reach this module indicated in the demographic and background module that they did not start working for their current client until 2017. Therefore, they were shown only questions for the Trump administration in this module.

the Obama White House. If the bias present for this question is minimal, then we should have confidence that the bias in responses to other questions is also minimal. Of the 433 responses to this question, I am able to match 406 to organized interests in my observational data.<sup>2</sup> In order to compare my quarterly measures of engagement across 7 years of the Obama administration and the survey respondents' reports of their clients attending meetings at the White House, I recode both data sources. For my observational data, I code an organized interest as "1" if my data contains any instances of it experiencing presidential engagement at any time and "0" otherwise. For the survey data, I code an organized interest as a "1" if the respondent reports that it attended an in-person meeting at the White House at least once (i.e., "Fewer than 5 times") and "0" otherwise. With this coding scheme, 284 of the 406 observations (70.0%) match, such that both my observational data and the survey self-reports both indicate that the organized interest did or did not have in-person meetings at the Obama White House. Of the remaining 122 observations, in 102 of the cases (25.1%) the survey self-report indicates that the client did not have in-person meetings at the White House but my observational data detects instances of engagement, and in the remaining 20 cases (4.9%) the self-report indicates that the client had in-person meetings at the White House but my observational data does not detect instances of engagement. These results should reassure us that response bias is minimal; in addition to matching reports of in-person meetings in both data sources in the vast majority of cases (70.0%), most of the mismatches are of the opposite character as would be expected if desirability bias is present, as mismatches arose more frequently when organized interest representatives reported that their client did not have in-person meetings at the White House than when they reported that they did.

## Descriptive Sample Characteristics

It is difficult to assess the representativeness of my survey respondents and the interests they represent to the points of contact and clients in the sampling frame because scant information is available for the points of contact and the clients for which they work. Four pieces of information can be gleaned from their LDA filings and the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), which cleans and aggregates the LDA filings: the client's quarterly lobbying expenditures with that point of contact's employer (i.e. the client's own expenditures if the point of contact is employed directly, or the client's expenditures with a given firm if the point of contact is a contract employee); whether the filer is the client or a lobbying firm contracted by a client; the client's CRP sector coding; and whether the point of contact is a registered lobbyist under the LDA.<sup>3</sup> Table SI.1 compares the distribution of these four characteristics in the full sampling frame and the 719 respondents who answered at least one of the survey questions reported in the main paper. These comparisons reveal some differences for each of the characteristics that are substantively small but statistically

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

<sup>3</sup>The first three of these pieces of information are easily observable from CRP's aggregated LDA filings, but the fourth can only be determined by comparing the names of the points of contact provided on each LDA filing with the names of the registered lobbyists listed on the same LDA filing. To determine whether the point of contact listed is a registered lobbyist, I used approximate matching techniques to compare the name of the point of contact on each LDA filing to the names of all of the registered lobbyists also appearing on the filing, and visually inspected the best match for each LDA form to determine if the point of contact was also listed as a registered lobbyist.

distinguishable at the  $p < 0.05$  level using difference in means and  $\chi^2$  tests (where applicable).<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the sample of respondents differs from the sampling frame, it contains a sizable number of respondents with each unique level of these characteristics.

To account for the small but statistically distinguishable imbalance between my respondents and the sampling frame, I weight the survey responses I present in Figures 1, 2, and SI.1 using these four characteristics provided by CRP’s cleaned and aggregated LDA reports for all respondents in the sampling frame. For Figure 1, I weight responses among the 719 respondents who answered general questions about their experience working for their current client. For Figures 2 and SI.1, I weight responses among the 557 respondents who reached the module of the survey asking about their clients’ interactions with the Obama and/or Trump White Houses.

Table SI.1: Comparison of Respondents with Sampling Frame

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>	<u>% of Sampling Frame (N)</u>
<u>Lobbyist Employer</u>		
Client	60.6% (436)	53.4% (2913)
Firm	39.4% (283)	46.6% (2545)
<u>Lobbying Expenditures</u>		
First Quartile	26.6% (191)	25% (1365)
Second Quartile	30.2% (217)	25% (1364)
Third Quartile	24.1% (173)	25% (1365)
Fourth Quartile	19.2% (138)	25% (1364)
<u>CRP Category</u>		
Agribusiness	4.5% (32)	4.2% (228)
Communications and Electronics	3.9% (28)	6.6% (360)
Construction	1.4% (10)	2.1% (112)
Defense	2.2% (16)	2.1% (117)
Energy and Natural Resources	7.1% (51)	8.1% (444)
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	8.2% (59)	9.6% (526)
Health	18.9% (136)	18.5% (1011)
Ideological and Single-Issue	13.1% (94)	9.2% (500)
Labor	1.8% (13)	2.1% (116)
Lawyers and Lobbyists	1.5% (11)	1.2% (66)
Misc Business	10.6% (76)	11.8% (645)
Other	6.1% (44)	6.2% (339)
Transportation	6.5% (47)	6.1% (331)
Unknown	14.2% (102)	12.1% (663)
<u>Registered Lobbyist</u>		
Yes	74.1% (533)	62.5% (3409)
No	25.9% (186)	37.5% (2049)

<sup>4</sup>The  $|t|$  and  $\chi^2$  test statistics for each of the comparisons are:  $|t| = 4.27$  for Lobbyist Employer;  $\chi^2_3 = 21.08$  for Lobbying Expenditures;  $\chi^2_{13} = 33.21$  for Lobbying Expenditures; and  $|t| = 7.55$  for Registered Lobbyist.

Table SI.2 provides information on the descriptive characteristics of the 719 respondents who answered general questions about working for their current client. This information was collected as part of the survey, it is only available for respondents. The high proportions of respondents who report education levels of “post-graduate degree” (67.7%), income levels of “\$200,000 or more” (58.3%), and experience levels of “more than 20 years” (41.4%) suggest that most respondents are political elites who play a substantive role in lobbying, rather than low-level employees who may respond to emails but lack significant lobbying experience.

Table SI.2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>
<u>Gender</u>	
Female	28.9% (208)
Male	70.4% (506)
NA	0.7% (5)
<u>Age</u>	
18-29	4.0% (29)
30-49	38.9% (280)
50-64	35.3% (254)
65 or over	21.3% (153)
NA	0.4% (3)
<u>Education</u>	
Some college, no 4-year degree	1.9% (14)
College graduate	29.9% (215)
Post-graduate degree	67.7% (487)
NA	0.4% (3)
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	
Asian	1.4% (10)
Black	3.3% (24)
Hispanic	1.7% (12)
White	89.7% (645)
Other	2.5% (18)
NA	1.4% (10)
<u>Income</u>	
Less than \$25,000	0.3% (2)
\$25,000-\$50,000	0.7% (5)
\$50,000-\$75,000	3.5% (25)
\$75,000-\$100,000	6.3% (45)
\$100,000-\$200,000	26.3% (189)
\$200,000 or more	58.3% (419)
NA	4.7% (34)
<u>Ideology</u>	
Very liberal	13.2% (95)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Respondents (N)</u>
Somewhat liberal	22.0% (158)
Slightly liberal	14.5% (104)
Neither liberal nor conservative	16.7% (120)
Slightly conservative	13.8% (99)
Somewhat conservative	14.2% (102)
Very conservative	4.6% (33)
NA	1.1% (8)
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<u>Party Identification</u>	
Strong Democrat	36.4% (262)
Democrat	8.2% (59)
Lean Democrat	8.2% (59)
Independent	10.6% (76)
Lean Republican	7.0% (50)
Republican	10.3% (74)
Strong Republican	15.0% (108)
Other	2.4% (17)
NA	1.7% (14)
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<u>Lobbying Experience</u>	
Less than 5 years	10.3% (74)
5-10 years	17.5% (126)
11-15 years	17.1% (123)
16-20 years	13.2% (95)
More than 20 years	41.4% (298)
NA	0.4% (3)
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<u>Past Government Experience</u>	
Member of Congress	4.9% (35)
Congressional staffer	42.7% (307)
Presidential appointee	7.9% (57)
EOP staffer	4.5% (32)
Civil servant	13.6% (98)
Other	14.5% (104)
No experience	33.9% (244)
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<u>Current Role with Client</u>	
Lobbyist	57.7% (415)
Executive officer responsible for lobbying	30.2% (217)
Executive officer not responsible for lobbying	4.5% (32)
Other	7.4% (53)
NA	0.3% (2)



## Question Wordings

The wordings of the survey questions asking respondents about lobbying for their clients and interacting with the Obama and Trump White Houses are provided below.<sup>5</sup> For each question, I identify where in the main paper or Supplemental Information where results are presented.

1. How important is it for [your client] to have direct contact with individuals in the following political institutions as part of its overall lobbying strategy? (*Asked separately for Congress; the White House; and the federal bureaucracy*) (Results in Figure 1)
  - Not at all important
  - Slightly important
  - Somewhat important
  - Very important
  - Extremely important
2. To the best of your knowledge, how frequently did lobbyists or other individuals affiliated with [your client] interact with President [Barack Obama/Donald Trump] or members of his White House staff in an average year...? (*Asked separately for via mail, email, or phone; via in-person meetings at the White House complex; via in-person meetings outside of the White House complex*) (Results in Figure SI.1)
  - Never
  - Fewer than 5 times
  - 5 to 10 times
  - 11 to 15 times
  - 16 to 20 times
  - More than 20 times
3. Which of the following types of individuals affiliated with [your client] typically attended in-person meetings at the White House complex under the [Obama/Trump] administration? Select all that apply (Results discussed in Supplemental Information Section C)
  - Executive officers
  - Registered lobbyists
  - Government affairs employees who were not registered lobbyists
  - Other [text box to specify]
4. When individuals affiliated with [your client] attended in-person meetings at the White House complex under the [Obama/Trump] administration, which side tended to initiate those meetings? (Results in Figure 2)
  - Always the White House
  - Usually the White House, but occasionally [my client]
  - Sometimes the White House, sometimes [my client]
  - Usually [my client], but occasionally the White House
  - Always [my client]

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<sup>5</sup>As noted above, all respondents reaching the module asking about interactions with the Obama and Trump White Houses saw questions about the Trump White House, but only those respondents who reported working for their client prior to 2017 saw questions about the Obama White House.

5. When [your client] was invited to an in-person meeting at the White House complex under the [Obama/Trump] administration, how frequently did they attend the meeting? (Results in Figure 2)
    - Always
    - Usually
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
  6. When [your client] requested an in-person meeting at the White House complex under the [Obama/Trump] administration, how frequently did the White House fulfill the meeting request? (Results in Figure 2)
    - Always
    - Usually
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
  7. Has [your client] turned down invitations from the [Obama/Trump] administration for in-person meetings at the White House complex? (Results discussed in Supplemental Information Section B)
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure
  8. Has the [Obama/Trump] administration turned down requests for in-person meetings at the White House complex from [your client]? (Results discussed in Supplemental Information Section B)
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure
- 

## B Mediums of White House Engagement

The communication and coordination at the core of presidential engagement can take place through a variety of mediums, including electronic and physical mail, fax, phone, text message, and in-person meetings between the White House and organized interest representatives. However, despite technological advances enabling political actors to interact remotely in real-time, policymakers across institutions and organized interests alike perceive direct contacts as the most valuable means of engagement (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2009; Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). In addition, because direct contacts in the form of White House meetings are costly for the White House to provide, who presidents choose to include in meetings provides a strong signal of their engagement priorities. For these two reasons, on which I elaborate below, I focus my theoretical exposition and empirical analysis on presidential engagement in the form of White House meetings.

First, both policymakers and organized interests assign a higher value to direct contacts relative to other forms of access. In extant surveys and interviews, organized interests indicate that direct contacts with policymakers are among their most common and important lobbying tactics (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Drutman 2015; Levine 2009; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). At least three features of direct contacts make them a prized medium of access. First, access provides policymakers and organized interests with each other’s attention, enabling them to better transmit resources, such as information and expertise, than they can through other means (Hall and Wayman 1990). Second, access makes each other’s preferences more salient, or mentally accessible, such that policymakers and organized interests afford each other preferential treatment in future interactions and are more likely to consider their preferences in their decision-making processes (Miler 2010). Third, access encourages the cultivation of interpersonal relationships between the policymakers and organized interest representatives that can enhance cooperation and trust (Levine 2009).

While much of the previous work on direct contacts focuses on Congress, qualitative insights from my interviewees suggest that these perceptions carry over to the White House. For instance, one lobbyist echoed the first and second benefits of in-person access to the White House by reporting that, relative to other modes of communication, in-person access “tends to be more effective in terms of sharing knowledge... and just sort of raising our issues.”<sup>6</sup> Another lobbyist indicated that in-person access to a White House official allows her to “get a much better feeling for the person when you can read their body language and interact with them in human form.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, a third interviewee indicated a benefit of in-person meetings that is unique to the White House: the opportunity to walk through an exclusive, hallowed government institution and conduct institutional maintenance by broadcasting to members that they gained access to this rarefied building.<sup>8</sup>

Second, in-person White House meetings are stronger signals of the White House’s engagement priorities because they are costlier to provide than other mediums of engagement. In the main paper, I describe how the White House’s physical and logistical barriers and the time and resource constraints presidents and their staffs face limit their ability to facilitate in-person meetings. Because of these limitations, the White House often utilizes alternative, less costly mediums of engagement such as emails and phone calls that enable it to more easily reach interests but are less effective for the White House and organized interests. One former Obama White House official indicated that “given the crush of work” in the White House, the “default [medium of communication] was typically email” because other mediums, such as phone calls or in-person meetings, were “just too darn time-consuming.”<sup>9</sup> Another former Obama administration official relayed that when the White House is abuzz with activity, “unless it’s a real priority, you’re just not... going to set up a whole meeting... maybe phone calls, for sure.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, while the same presidential motivations influence White House engagement with organized interests across mediums, they manifest most strongly in the case of in-person White House meetings because the expected value of the meeting must be sufficiently high to justify its use relative to a cheaper medium.

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<sup>6</sup>Personal interview with a lobbyist for an education organization, May 11, 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Personal interview with a lobbyist for a reproductive rights organization, May 4, 2018.

<sup>8</sup>Personal interview with a telecommunications lobbyist, August 22, 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, May 3, 2018.

<sup>10</sup>Personal interview with a former Obama White House official, August 24, 2019.

## Comparing Mediums of White House Engagement

While qualitative evidence suggests that presidential engagement in the form of White House meetings is more scarce than other means of engagement, scant data exists comparing mediums of engagement. Understanding the relative frequency with which different types of engagement occur is important for both substantive and empirical reasons. Substantively, knowing how often the White House engages through different mediums would enable us to investigate whether and to what degree White House meetings are more scarce than lower-cost alternatives, such as emails, and would offer a better sense of how often the White House and organized interests are in contact with each other (i.e., the full scope of engagement activities).

Empirically, knowing more about how different mediums of engagement correlate would provide insight into how well information on in-person White House meetings describes the White House's engagement with individual interests. This empirical wrinkle was spotlighted by a series of reports during the Obama administration alleging that White House staffers arranged meetings with lobbyists and other political actors at sites just outside the White House complex to keep them off of the visitor logs.<sup>11</sup> While the White House denied these meetings were intended to skirt ethics policies, these stories raise the concern that presidents and their staffs might sometimes conduct engagement in ways that conceal their activity (e.g., setting meetings outside the White House to keep them off the visitor logs, using phone calls instead of emails so as to not create a paper trail).

To gain insight into the relationships among different mediums of engagement, I asked respondents about the frequency with which they experienced engagement in an average year with the Obama and Trump White Houses through three mediums: remote communications (mail, phone, or email); in-person meetings at the White House; and in-person meetings outside of the White House. Figure SI.1 presents respondents' answers to these questions for the Obama (top row) and Trump (bottom row) administrations. Glancing at the distributions, we note that each is right-skewed, with most respondents indicating that they experienced each medium of engagement fewer than 5 times in an average year; this reinforces my overarching claim that engagement is rare. However, comparing the distributions for remote communications (left panes) to those for in-person meetings at the White House (center panes) or outside of the White House (right panes), the right-skew of the distributions for in-person meetings is more pronounced than those for remote communications. For instance, while 23.4% of respondents indicated that their interest experienced 11 or more remote communications with the Obama White House in an average year, only 9.8% of respondents indicated experiencing a similar number of in-person White House meetings. Together, these responses indicate that in-person engagement is more scarce than remote engagement.

To get a sense of how closely these three mediums of engagement are related, I examined the correlations among the survey responses within each administration. For the Obama administration, the correlation between the frequency of engagement through remote communications and in-person White House meetings is 0.77, and the correlation between the frequency of engagement through in-person meetings at the White House and in-person meetings not at the White House is also 0.77. For the Trump administration, the magnitude of these correlations are smaller but still substantively large (0.61 for remote communications and in-person White House meetings, 0.59 for in-person meetings at the White House and in-person meetings not at the White House). These correlations indicate that the White House's mediums of engagement with organized interests work in concert, such that interests experiencing one type of engagement often experience other types as

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<sup>11</sup>Eric Lichtblau. "Across From White House, Coffee With Lobbyists." *The New York Times*, June 24, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/us/politics/25caribou.html>.

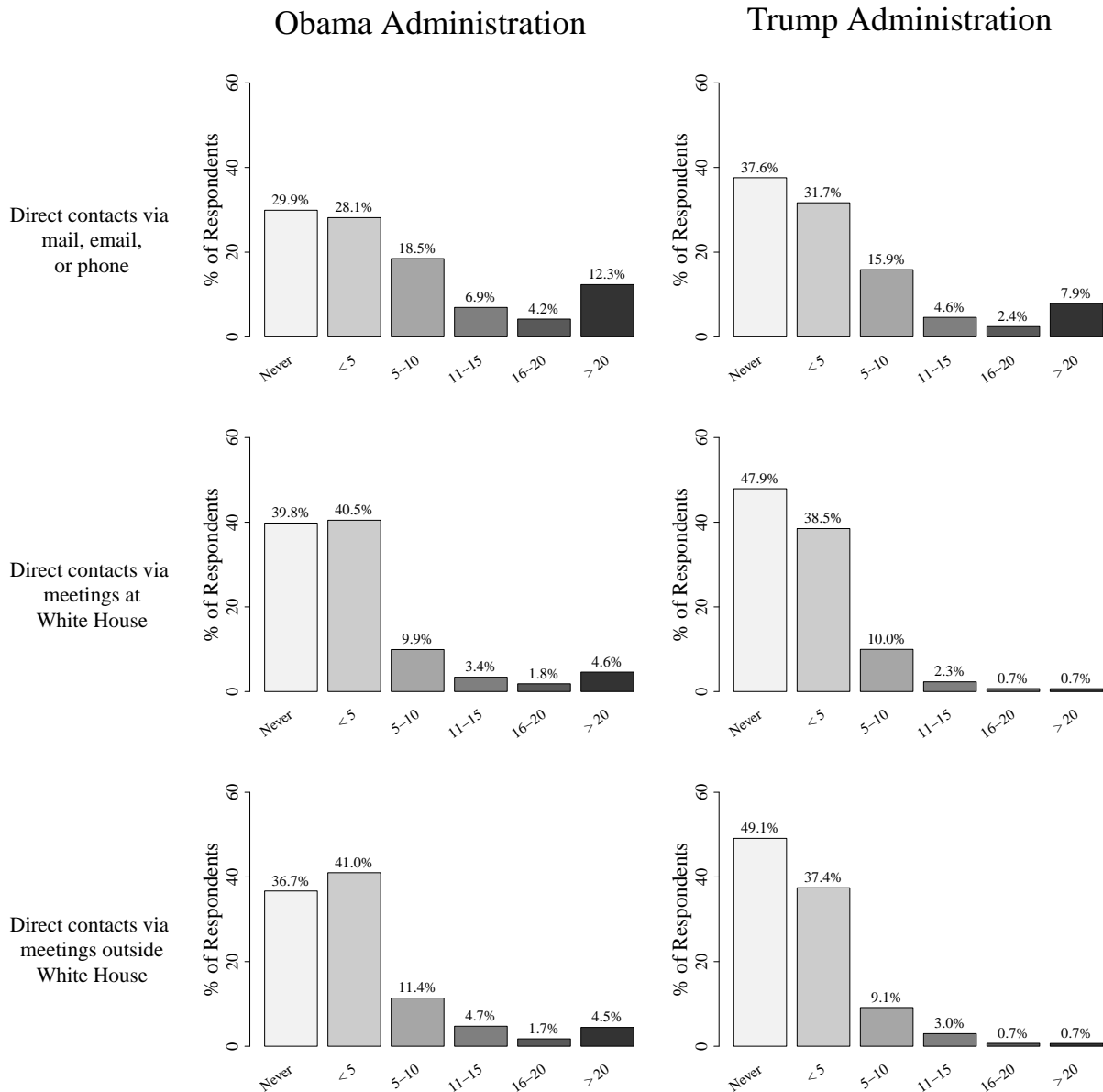


Figure SI.1: **Relationships Between Mediums of Presidential Engagement** Bar graphs indicate how frequently respondents indicated the Obama (left column) and Trump (right column) administrations engaged with their organized interests through remote communications (top row), in-person White House meetings (center row), and in-person meetings outside of the White House (bottom row). These questions were asked only of respondents who reached the survey module asking about their interactions with the Obama and/or Trump White Houses. Responses are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the sampling frame (see Supplemental Information Section A). *N* between 433 (535) and 442 (544) per question for the Obama (Trump) administration.

well. Therefore, data on any one type of engagement—in the current case, in-person White House meetings—provides an informative signal of the White House’s overall engagement activity.

## When Engagement Does Not Occur

By focusing on only those organized interests who experienced in-person White House meetings—for instance, the dynamics by which presidential engagement occurs (see Figure 2)—we may reach inaccurate conclusions through selection bias (i.e., learning how engagement works from those who experience engagement). To guard against selection bias, I asked respondents who indicated not experiencing engagement through in-person White House meetings for one or both administrations two questions about their perceptions of why they did not experience engagement. First, I asked respondents if their interest had turned down invitations for White House meetings. Second, I asked respondents if the White House had turned down their requests for meetings.

The responses to these questions are consistent with engagement as a presidency-driven process. With respect to the first question, only 1 of 151 respondents indicated that their interest had turned down an invitation from the Obama White House, and only 2 of 256 respondents indicated that their interest had turned down an invitation from the Trump White House. These responses suggest that presidents have a strong first-mover advantage with respect to engagement; as many of my interviewees suggested, when the White House asks an interest to meet, they meet. With respect to the second question, respondents indicated that they had rarely asked the White House for an in-person meeting (only 9 of 151 respondents for the Obama White House and 15 of 254 respondents for the Trump White House). These responses imply that interests not experiencing engagement are not expending outside-in lobbying resources trying to obtain it, but instead are turning their efforts to other venues and leaving the president to choose whether to engage.

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## C Data Description

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

### White House Visitor Logs

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

#### Clinton

In response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests 2007-0779-F and 2016-0727-F, the Clinton Presidential Library made available, pursuant to FOIA and the Presidential Records Act (PRA), the White House visitor logs for the 1999-2001 and 1996-1998 periods, respectively.<sup>12</sup> These records are available as comma-separated values files and were obtained directly from the Library. Because the names of organized interests' registered lobbyists provided in Lobbying Disclosure Act

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<sup>12</sup>“Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1996-1998 - Collection Finding Aid,” *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57587>; “White House Worker and Visitor Entry System (WAVES), 1999-2000 - Collection Finding Aid,” *Clinton Digital Library*, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/44133>.

(LDA) reports are only available starting in 1998, only the visitor log entries spanning from January 1, 1998 to December 31, 2000 are used. The 1,293,975 million entries in this time period correspond to 813,535 unique appointments.<sup>13</sup> Because these visitor logs were disclosed pursuant to FOIA and PRA, some information, such as entrants' Social Security numbers and dates of birth, and some entries, such as those that would endanger national security, are withheld by the Library.

## Obama

Fulfilling a campaign promise to increase White House transparency, the Obama administration implemented a voluntary disclosure policy in September 2009 whereby the White House visitor logs would be posted on the White House website on a monthly basis.<sup>14</sup> By the time President Obama left office, his administration had posted over 5,901,105 visitor log entries on the White House website covering 1,599,210 unique appointments.<sup>15</sup> Because the disclosure policy only applies to entries made starting on September 15, 2009, my analysis does not include entries from the first nine months of the Obama administration. Additionally, because the Obama administration was unable to finish disclosing visitor log entries before the expiration of the second term, my analysis concludes with entries made on September 30, 2016.

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

## Bush 43

The White House visitor logs from the George W. Bush administration are the subject of a pending FOIA request.<sup>16</sup> To date, the George W. Bush Presidential Library has made available a handful of records from January 20, 2001, and has no timetable for the release of additional records.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Because the Clinton visitor logs do not include a unique identifier for each appointment, I use information in the logs that are ostensibly identical for all persons in the same appointment, such as the time and date of the appointment and the name of the person scheduling the appointment, to create appointment identifiers.

<sup>14</sup>Norm Eisen, “Opening Up the People’s House,” *The White House*, September 4, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/09/04/opening-peoplerequos-house>; “White House Voluntary Disclosure Policy Visitor Access Records,” *The White House*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/VoluntaryDisclosure>.

<sup>15</sup>Because the Obama visitor logs do not include a unique identifier for each appointment, I use information in the logs that are ostensibly identical for all persons in the same appointment, such as the time and date of the appointment and the name of the person scheduling the appointment, to create appointment identifiers.

<sup>16</sup>“White House Visitor’s Log Records from January 20, 2001 - January 20, 2009,” *George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum*, <https://georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/Digital-Library---2/FOIA-Requests-2014/2014-0237-F-Digitized>.

<sup>17</sup>Personal correspondence with an archivist at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, January 16, 2020.

## Trump

Upon taking office, the Trump administration terminated the Obama administration's voluntary disclosure policy for White House visitor log records. However, facing a lawsuit concerning its refusal to release these records, the Trump administration entered into a legal settlement whereby they would release visitor logs records for four units in the Executive Office of the President (EOP) subject to FOIA, rather than PRA, due to their independent statutory authority and Senate-confirmed leadership: the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy.<sup>18</sup>

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

Because comparisons between the the Clinton and Obama visitor logs and more limited Trump visitor logs may be misleading, I do not incorporate the Trump visitor logs into my analysis. However, they may prove useful for future researchers studying other aspects of the presidency.

## Biden

The Biden administration revived the Obama administration's practice of releasing its visitor logs on a rolling basis through a voluntary disclosure policy.<sup>19</sup> As of the time of this writing, the White House has released visitor logs for January and February 2021.

## Lobbying Disclosure Act Reports

The Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) of 1995 and subsequent amendments require lobbyists or the entities who employ them to file reports with the House and Senate on the lobbying activities they conduct on behalf of their client(s).<sup>20</sup> Under the LDA, individuals are considered lobbyists if they, in working on behalf of a client, make a "lobbying contact," or an "oral, written, or electronic communication" regarding public policy, with more than one "covered official," which includes most members of the executive and legislative branches, and spends 20 percent or more of her time working for the client on lobbying activities in a given reporting period. As of January 2017, a

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<sup>18</sup>Josh Gerstein, "Trump Administration Agrees to Post Visitor Logs for Some White House Offices," *Politico*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/15/trump-visitor-logs-white-house-413016>.

<sup>19</sup>"Biden-Harris Administration Reinstates Visitor Log Policy, Will Be First Administration to Post Records from First Full Year in Office," *The White House*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/disclosures/2021/05/07/biden-harris-administration-reinstates-visitor-log-policy-will-be-first-administration-to-post-records-from-first-full-year-in-office/>

<sup>20</sup>Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. §1601) [https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby\\_Disclosure\\_Act/TOC.htm](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby_Disclosure_Act/TOC.htm); Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance, January 31, 2017, <https://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/ldaguidance.pdf>.



lobbyist employed directly by a client spending less than \$13,000, or a lobbyist contracted by a client spending less than \$3,000, on lobbying activities in a given quarter is not required to file a report for that quarter. Lobbyists were required to file these reports, known as LD-2s, on a semestral basis until 2008, after which they have been required to file them quarterly.

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

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

This measurement error should be minimal for at least two reasons. First, organized interests often send more than one person to White House meetings, and because I identify instances of engagement at the organized interest-level rather than the visitor-level, I detect engagement so long as at least one member of the interest's contingent is a registered lobbyist. Second, I asked my survey respondents who reported that their organized interests had meetings at the Obama and Trump White Houses to indicate which of the following types of employees attended these meetings: "executive officers," "registered lobbyists," "government affairs employees who were not registered lobbyists," or "other" persons. 76.5% and 72.4% of respondents indicated that meetings were attended by registered lobbyists, and 71.1% and 68.7% reported that meetings were attended by executive officers (who are often listed as lobbyists on LDA reports) during the Obama and Trump administrations, respectively. These responses suggest that most instances of engagement should be detected by looking for registered lobbyists' names in the White House visitor logs.

## White House Visitor Logs-LDA Reports Matching Procedure

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

with the smallest edit distance.<sup>21</sup> Once I identify the “best” matches for each time period, I aggregate instances of White House engagement up to the organized interest-level.<sup>22</sup> The number of visits and unique appointments which match with the names of organized interest representatives in contemporary LDA filings at each edit distance threshold are provided in Table SI.3.

Table SI.3: Number of Matches Identified in the White House Visitor Logs

	Number of Visits (%)	Number of Appointments (%)
<b>Clinton</b>		
Exact matches	21435 (1.7%)	15333 (1.9%)
Edit distance $\leq 1$	28,324 (2.2%)	20,553 (2.5%)
Edit distance $\leq 2$	67,971 (5.3%)	52,181 (6.4%)
Edit distance $\leq 3$	375,674 (29.0%)	296,989 (36.5%)
<b>Obama</b>		
Exact matches	71893 (1.2%)	40731 (2.5%)
Edit distance $\leq 1$	97,516 (1.7%)	50,118 (3.1%)
Edit distance $\leq 2$	281,580 (4.8%)	117,305 (7.3%)
Edit distance $\leq 3$	1,748,113 (29.6%)	653,653 (40.9%)

This table provides the number and proportion of visits and unique appointments in the Clinton and Obama visitor logs with visitor names that matched the names of registered lobbyists in contemporaneous LDA reports at each edit distance threshold.

Using measures of engagement with different thresholds entail trade-offs. When the threshold is low, such as when using only exact matches, some false negatives (e.g., instances of engagement not counted because of minor differences) are inevitable. However, when the threshold increases, the rate of false negatives declines as the rate of false positives (e.g., visits incorrectly identified as instances of engagement) increases. Recognizing these trade-offs, the analyses in the main paper use a measure of presidential engagement which includes only exact matches, but I re-estimate my models using the more permissive tolerance levels in Supplemental Information Section E.

## D Estimation Strategy

### Model Specification

As explained in the main paper, the structure of the data poses several challenges to inference—among them, repeated observations of organized interests, industries, and time periods and a key time-invariant covariate of interest measured at the industry-level—that make Bayesian mul-

<sup>21</sup>If multiple matches have the same edit distance, I randomly retain one match.

<sup>22</sup>To avoid overcounts stemming from multiple lobbyists from the same organization attending the same meeting, I use my appointment identifiers (see Supplemental Information Footnotes 13 and 15) to group matches for the same organization and retain only one matched entry per appointment; thus, instances of presidential engagement are counted at the meeting-level, rather than the visitor-level.

tilevel models an appropriate empirical approach. Here, I present a representative specification of the multilevel models I estimate in the main paper and the Supplemental Information.

For the representative specification, I focus on the logistic regression model used with the data from the Clinton administration to generate Figure 3. This specification can be modified with few adjustments to represent those used for other analyses, such as those conducted with data from the Obama administration or examining a negative binomial distribution of the outcome measure.<sup>23</sup> To symbolize the nesting structure of the data, each organized interest-time period observation—the central unit of observation—is subscripted  $i, t$  to correspond with its respective organized interest and time period, respectively. Each organized interest-time period observation is further nested in an organized interest  $j$  and a time period  $p$ , and each organized interest is further nested in an industry  $k$ . Given these subscripts, the model specification is:

$$\begin{aligned}
Pr(\text{engagement}_{i,t} = 1) = & \text{logit}^{-1}(\alpha + \beta_1 \cdot \text{engagement}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \log(\text{lobby\_exp})_{i,t-1} + \\
& \beta_3 \cdot \text{any\_contributes}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} + \\
& \beta_4 \cdot \text{any\_contributes}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} \cdot \log(\text{contrib\_amt})_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4} + \\
& \xi \mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_{j[i]} + \gamma_{p[t]}) \text{ for all } i \text{ in } 1, \dots, N \\
\alpha_j \sim & N(\mu_{\alpha,0} + \mu_{\alpha,1,k[j]}, \sigma_{\alpha}^2) \text{ for all } j \text{ in } 1, \dots, J \\
\mu_{\alpha,1,k} \sim & N(\delta_{\mu_{\alpha,1}0} + \delta_{\mu_{\alpha,1}1} \cdot \text{pty\_align}_k, \sigma_{\mu_{\alpha,1,k}}^2) \text{ for all } k \text{ in } 1, \dots, K \\
\gamma_p \sim & N(\mu_{\gamma_0}, \sigma_{\gamma}^2) \text{ for all } p \text{ in } 1, \dots, P
\end{aligned}$$

The outcome measure,  $\text{engagement}_{i,t}$ , is a binary indicator for whether the president engaged with organized interest-time period observation  $i, t$ . The key covariates in the model are  $\text{lobby\_exp}_{i,t-1}$ , the amount of lobbying expenditures reported by interest  $j$  in the preceding period;  $\text{any\_contributes}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4}$ , a binary indicator for whether interest  $j$  made campaign contributions to any candidates for federal office in the preceding four periods (i.e., the preceding two years);  $\text{contrib\_amt}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-4}$ , the amount of contributions made by interest  $j$  to candidates for federal office in the preceding four periods; and  $\text{pty\_align}_k$ , a trichotomous indicator of the partisan alignment of the industry  $k$  of which interest  $j$  is a member. To account for the dynamic nature of presidents' provision of access to interest  $j$  across periods, the model includes a lagged measure of the dependent variable,  $\text{access}_{i,t-1}$ . The model also includes a series of binary indicators drawn from interests' LDA filings for whether they retained their own in-house lobbyists or relied solely on lobbying firms and for which of 80 possible issue areas they reported lobbying on in the preceding period ( $\xi \mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1}$ ). Finally, the model includes varying intercepts for the unique organized interests ( $\alpha_{j[i]}$ ), industries ( $\mu_{\alpha,1,k[j]}$ ), and time periods ( $\gamma_{p[t]}$ ) in which each observation  $i$  is nested.

<sup>23</sup>The only difference between the model specifications for the Clinton and Obama presidencies concerns the number of previous time periods for which campaign contributions are considered in the present period,  $t$ . Recall that the measures of whether an organized interest made any campaign contributions to candidates for federal office and the amount of those contributions are calculated by looking at the interest's campaign finance activity for the preceding two-year period, or the length of an election cycle. Because observations for the Clinton presidency are semestral, or twice a year, these measures require information from the preceding four periods. However, because observations for the Obama presidency are quarterly, or four times a year, these same measures require information from the preceding eight periods. Thus, the comparable model for the Obama presidency subscripts the variables for campaign finance activity to look back over the preceding eight time periods (i.e.,  $\text{any\_contributes}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-8}$  and  $\text{contrib\_amt}_{i,t-1 \rightarrow t-8}$ ).

## Estimation Process

To estimate these models, I use the R package `brms` (Bürkner 2017), an interface for the C++ package Stan (Carpenter et al. 2017). All models are fitted using the NUTS (No-U-Turn Sampler) algorithm (Hoffman and Gelman 2014) with 4 chains and 2000 iterations per chain (1000 for warmup, 1000 for sampling). Inferences are based on the 4000 posterior samples. All models report no divergent transitions during the sampling phase and indicate convergence with  $\hat{R}$  statistics of  $\leq 1.10$  for all parameters.

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## E Empirical Analyses

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

### Calculating and Testing Hypotheses with Predicted Probabilities

Figures 3 and 4 present predicted probabilities of presidential engagement as organized interests' resources and partisan alignment with the incumbent president vary. These predicted probabilities are calculated from the models whose summaries are presented in Table SI.4 using an observed-value approach (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). Under this approach, I fix the values of all covariates except the covariate whose effect I seek to demonstrate at their observed values, and then vary each covariate of interest independently across the levels indicated on the far left of the figures. For instance, in Figure 3, the top three predicted probabilities are calculated by fixing all covariates except for lobbying expenditures at their observed values and varying lobbying expenditures across its first, second, and third quartile values.

To determine if the shifts in the value of each covariate of interest are associated with distinguishable changes in the probability of presidential engagement, we are interested not in visual comparisons of the predicted probabilities plotted in the left panes, but rather the differences between the distributions of predicted probabilities calculated for each set of variable values (see Shikano 2019, for a discussion of hypothesis testing in a Bayesian framework). To walk through an example, focus on the difference between the probability of engagement when interests are situated in a Democratic industry rather than a Republican industry during the Obama presidency. As indicated in the left pane of Figure 4, the predicted probability of engagement when situated in a Democratic industry is 0.33, while the predicted probability of engagement when the industry's partisan alignment is Republican is 0.30. To determine whether this difference of 0.03 is statistically distinguishable at the 95% level, use the parameter estimates in each of the 4000 posterior samples to calculate the difference between the predicted probability of engagement when partisan alignment is set to Democratic versus Republican, holding all other covariates at their fixed values. Upon obtaining this difference for each of the 4000 posterior samples, we then have a distribution of the difference in the predicted probability of engagement for interests when situated in a Democratic industry versus a Republican industry. The bottom-most point and line in the right pane of Figure 4 indicates the mean and 95% credible interval for this distribution of differences; because the credible interval does not include zero, we can conclude that the difference in the probability

of engagement for interests when situated in a Democratic industry versus a Republican industry is distinguishable.

## Alternative Model Specifications

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

First, as discussed in Section C of the Supplemental Information, I re-estimate the models presented in the main paper with measures of engagement which allow for higher string matching tolerance thresholds. I present these alternative models for the Clinton and Obama administrations in Table SI.5. In general, the coefficients for organized interests' resources and partisan alignment maintain the same signs and similar magnitudes when using an outcome measure of engagement with an edit distance thresholds of  $\leq 1$  and  $\leq 2$ , though a few coefficients do not maintain their statistical significance. As the engagement measure becomes more noisy at an edit distance threshold of  $\leq 3$ , the coefficient estimates become much more noisy.

Second, because presidents can engage with interests more than once per period, I repeat my analyses with negative binomial models measuring engagement as a count. The results from these models, presented in Table SI.6, are substantively similar to those presented in the main models.

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

In Table SI.7, I present the alternative specifications that use these preference measures rather than my trichotomous indicator of partisan alignment. The results from these alternative specifications are substantively similar to those presented in the main paper.

Table SI.4: Main Paper Models

	Clinton WH	Obama WH
Intercept	-1.50*	-2.65*
	[-2.00; -0.98]	[-2.81; -2.49]
Any Visits <sub>t-1</sub>	1.25*	0.84*
	[1.16; 1.32]	[0.82; 0.86]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) <sub>t-1</sub>	0.06*	0.09*
	[0.05; 0.07]	[0.09; 0.09]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub>	-1.20*	
	[-1.80; -0.60]	
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> )	0.14*	
	[0.08; 0.19]	
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub>		-0.95*
		[-1.28; -0.62]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> )		0.12*
		[0.09; 0.15]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.24*	-0.16
	[-0.46; -0.03]	[-0.36; 0.04]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.23*	-0.19*
	[-0.40; -0.07]	[-0.35; -0.03]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.01	1.49
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.22	0.25
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.51	0.26
Num. interests	9484	24009
Num. industries	92	92
Num. time periods	5	27
Num. obs.	31673	306766

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

Table SI.5: Main Paper Models with Different String Matching Tolerance Thresholds

	Clinton			Obama		
	$\leq 1$ Edit	$\leq 2$ Edits	$\leq 3$ Edits	$\leq 1$ Edit	$\leq 2$ Edits	$\leq 3$ Edits
Intercept	-1.25*	-1.02*	-1.21*	-2.37*	-1.95*	-1.97*
	[-1.77; -0.77]	[-1.59; -0.48]	[-1.84; -0.60]	[-2.56; -2.17]	[-2.16; -1.73]	[-2.21; -1.73]
Any Visits <sub>t-1</sub>	1.20*	1.73*	2.15*	0.91*	1.18*	1.54*
	[1.11; 1.28]	[1.64; 1.81]	[2.03; 2.27]	[0.89; 0.94]	[1.15; 1.21]	[1.50; 1.58]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) <sub>t-1</sub>	0.06*	0.05*	0.05*	0.09*	0.10*	0.09*
	[0.05; 0.07]	[0.04; 0.06]	[0.04; 0.06]	[0.09; 0.10]	[0.09; 0.10]	[0.08; 0.09]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-4</sub>	-0.93*	-0.20	0.41			
	[-1.52; -0.35]	[-0.90; 0.48]	[-0.56; 1.42]			
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-4</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-4</sub> )	0.11*	0.04	-0.03			
	[0.06; 0.17]	[-0.03; 0.10]	[-0.12; 0.06]			
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-8</sub>				-0.81*	-0.74*	-0.68*
				[-1.14; -0.49]	[-1.14; -0.33]	[-1.27; -0.08]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-8</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1</sub> to <sub>t-8</sub> )				0.11*	0.10*	0.09*
				[0.08; 0.14]	[0.06; 0.13]	[0.03; 0.14]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.21	-0.20	-0.07	-0.13	-0.11	-0.17
	[-0.42; 0.01]	[-0.43; 0.03]	[-0.36; 0.22]	[-0.34; 0.08]	[-0.31; 0.09]	[-0.44; 0.09]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.24*	-0.22*	-0.14	-0.13	-0.05	-0.10
	[-0.41; -0.07]	[-0.40; -0.04]	[-0.38; 0.10]	[-0.29; 0.03]	[-0.22; 0.11]	[-0.31; 0.10]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.07	1.02	1.17	1.53	1.79	2.12
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.22	0.24	0.31	0.25	0.24	0.30
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.47	0.49	0.61	0.35	0.46	0.46
Num. interests	9484	9484	9484	24009	24009	24009
Num. industries	92	92	92	92	92	92
Num. time periods	5	5	5	27	27	27
Num. obs.	31673	31673	31673	306766	306766	306766

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

Table SI.6: Main Paper Models with Count Outcomes

	Clinton	Obama
Intercept	-0.82*	-1.90*
	[-1.23; -0.44]	[-2.05; -1.75]
Any Visits <sub>t-1</sub>	0.02*	0.07*
	[0.01; 0.02]	[0.07; 0.07]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) <sub>t-1</sub>	0.05*	0.07*
	[0.05; 0.06]	[0.07; 0.07]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub>	-1.24*	
	[-1.64; -0.84]	
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> )	0.14*	
	[0.10; 0.18]	
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub>		-0.47*
		[-0.64; -0.30]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> )		0.06*
		[0.05; 0.08]
Aligned with Neither Party	-0.20	-0.21*
	[-0.41; 0.01]	[-0.41; -0.02]
Aligned with Republicans	-0.19*	-0.24*
	[-0.36; -0.03]	[-0.38; -0.09]
<i>σ<sub>organization</sub></i>	1.27	1.41
<i>σ<sub>industry</sub></i>	0.24	0.24
<i>σ<sub>timeperiod</sub></i>	0.36	0.19
Num. interests	9484	24009
Num. industries	92	92
Num. time periods	5	27
Num. obs.	31673	306766

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



Table SI.7: Main Paper Models with Alternative Preference Measures

	Clinton	Clinton	Obama	Obama
Intercept	-1.57*	-1.47*	-3.11*	-2.09*
	[-2.17; -0.96]	[-1.98; -0.98]	[-3.51; -2.72]	[-2.35; -1.83]
Any Visits <sub>t-1</sub>	0.96*	0.54*	0.91*	0.86*
	[0.65; 1.26]	[0.26; 0.82]	[0.82; 0.99]	[0.79; 0.92]
log(Lobbying Expenditures) <sub>t-1</sub>	0.12*	0.10*	0.19*	0.10*
	[0.08; 0.16]	[0.07; 0.13]	[0.17; 0.22]	[0.08; 0.11]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub>	-1.39*	-2.00*		
	[-2.65; -0.12]	[-3.45; -0.56]		
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-4</sub> )	0.12*	0.21*		
	[0.01; 0.24]	[0.08; 0.34]		
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub>			-1.82*	-1.90*
			[-2.42; -1.23]	[-2.53; -1.25]
Made Natl Contributions <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> : log(Contribution Amount <sub>t-1 to t-8</sub> )			0.17*	0.21*
			[0.12; 0.22]	[0.15; 0.26]
CFscore	-0.60*		-0.41*	
	[-1.11; -0.11]		[-0.68; -0.14]	
IGscore		-0.39*		-0.27*
		[-0.62; -0.16]		[-0.39; -0.15]
$\sigma_{organization}$	1.54	1.67	1.48	1.42
$\sigma_{industry}$	0.65	0.47	0.45	0.49
$\sigma_{timeperiod}$	0.32	0.28	0.32	0.29
Num. interests	865	937	1229	1492
Num. industries	81	87	82	87
Num. time periods	5	5	27	27
Num. obs.	3697	4122	27636	34271

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

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