

# Campaign Contributions Buy Access to Congressional Offices: Evidence from Foreign Lobbying

## **Abstract**

Do campaign contributions buy access to government officials? I answer this question with newly available data on foreign lobbying in the U.S. government from 1998 to 2019, which contain information on lobbyists' campaign contributions and contact with officials, in combination with data on lobbyist ideology inferred from their previous political careers. Using supervised machine learning models to identify lobbyist requests for access to members of Congress and classify them as successful or unsuccessful, I find that campaign contributions are positively related to requests for access. I also find that contributions increase lobbyists' chance of successfully gaining access to congressional offices given a request, but mostly for ideologically similar copartisan legislators. Moreover, given success in getting access, lobbyists that contributed are more likely to get access to legislators themselves rather than their staff.

Word count: 9,313

Large portions of the American public across the political spectrum believe there is too much money in political campaigns and that wealthy individuals and groups can purchase influence over politicians' behavior and policy outcomes by contributing money to their campaigns.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, majorities believe that corruption is a serious problem in Congress,<sup>2</sup> an institution they routinely hold in low regard. Observers suspect that the dependence of members of Congress on large donors' contributions in order to win elections forces them to prioritize issues of concern to large businesses, if only to motivate them to keep contributing money (Lessig 2011).

Are these popular worries warranted? In order to examine whether campaign contributions buy political influence, scholars have produced a large literature on whether contributions matter for legislators' behavior in Congress. It has yielded famously mixed findings on whether contributions affect roll call voting, legislators' most visible policy action (Ansolabehere, De Figueiredo and Snyder Jr. 2003; Stratmann 2005; Roscoe and Jenkins 2005). This is puzzling in light of the public's overwhelming belief that money buys influence as well as research showing that the political system is highly responsive to wealthy people's policy preferences at the expense of accountability to the middle-income and poor (Gilens 2012).

That the wealthy enjoy disproportionate access to legislators presents a solution to this puzzle. Compared to roll call votes, legislators' contact with constituents is more removed from the attention and judgment of the public and the media, and manifestations of donor influence on access are on more solid ethical and legal ground than exchanging votes for money (Powell and Grimmer 2016). This suggests a potential to uncover a more consistent

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<sup>1</sup>One recent study showing this was done by the Pew Research Center in May of 2018 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/08/most-americans-want-to-limit-campaign-spending-say-big-donors-have-greater-political-influence/>).

<sup>2</sup>A collection of related public opinion polls can be found at <https://www.pollingreport.com/politics5.htm>.

effect of contributions on access. A prized resource, access to legislators is a prerequisite for constituents to influence their consequential actions starting with the drafting and committee markup of bills (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall 1998). Mostly on a theoretical level, the literature has debated whether campaign contributions should be expected to help constituents gain access to legislators (Lohmann 1995; Austen-Smith 1995). Empirical research, however, has been limited by the poor availability of data on contact between legislators and constituents (Langbein 1986), notwithstanding recent experimental evidence that contributions do facilitate access (Kalla and Broockman 2016).

In this paper, I use novel data on foreign organizations' lobbying activity in the United States to examine the link between contributions and access to government officials. The Foreign Agent Registration Act of 1938 (FARA) provides a legal channel for foreign governmental and non-governmental entities to lobby the U.S. government, provided that U.S.-based agents handle their political operations. These agents can either be in-house staff, especially for organizations with U.S. offices, or contracted professionals in U.S. lobbying firms, law firms, or consulting firms specializing in public relations and media affairs (You N.d.*b*). FARA requires foreign agents to submit semi-annual reports to the Department of Justice in which they must disclose their contact with U.S. government officials and campaign contributions they make, including the officials these activities aimed at. Due to this requirement, FARA data permit direct observational analysis of how contributions relate to contact with officials, an emergent line of research (You N.d.*a*).

I advance this research by using a valuable additional layer of information extracted from the FARA data - lobbyists' requests for access to congressional offices and whether they succeed in obtaining it. This information offers two advantages - one conceptual and one methodological. Conceptually, by showing how contributions matter for both requests for access and success in getting it, I analyze both the intent and effectiveness of contributions. Methodologically, by identifying members of Congress to whom lobbyists requested access and examining whether contributions facilitated access to these rather than all sitting

members, I ameliorate the endogeneity problem with measuring the effect of contributions: Rather than contributing money to randomly selected legislators, donors strategically make contributions in a way that correlates with anticipated political outcomes including access, making inference of the effect of contributions based on statistical associations incorrect (Kalla and Broockman 2016).

Using supervised machine learning models, I classify foreign agents' requests for access as successful or unsuccessful based on key words in report language that indicate as much. I then link this information to contributions that the same foreign agents made to congressional candidates, also disclosed in FARA reports, and analyze the relationship between the two activities by all registered foreign agents from 1998 to 2019. This study features the broadest sample and longest time frame to date in existing social science research drawing on the FARA data, with a frequent focus on international trade (Kee, Olarreaga and Silva 2004; Gawande, Maloney and Montes Rojas 2009; Montes-Rojas 2018; Kang and You 2016; You N.d. *a*).

I find that campaign contributions are very strongly and positively related to requests for access, suggesting the intent of contributions as a tactic to gain access. Do contributions help lobbyists gain access to legislators, then? Due to endogeneity, simply measuring the statistical relationship between contributions and success in gaining access would yield an incorrect answer. Rather than randomly selecting candidates for contributions, donors strategically contribute to some candidates and not others for reasons related to access after successful candidates take office, causing a spurious correlation between the two actions. This correlation can either overstate or understate the causal effect of contributions on access. Donors' decisions to contribute may reflect their shared ideology and policy preferences. If legislators are more likely to meet with allied constituents regardless of contributions, the correlation between contributions and access will overstate the causal effect. Conversely, if legislators strategically give access to constituents who had not contributed in the hope that they will in the future, the correlation between the two actions will understate the causal

effect of contributions (Kalla and Broockman 2016).

Information in the FARA data on lobbyists' requests for access and success in getting it substantially ameliorates this endogeneity problem. Lobbyists likely share some policy positions with the legislators they seek access to. Consequently, requests for access define a sample of legislators whose *a priori* propensity to give access is much higher and more homogeneous than the full set of all incumbents. Since shared preferences are likely responsible for a spurious correlation between contributions and access and a major source of endogeneity, the potential influence of this confounding variable is significantly reduced by excluding from analysis legislators that lobbyists do not attempt to access.

I find that the tactic of contributing money is effective as intended. Given a request for access, I find, contributions are strongly and positively related to success in getting access to a congressional office. Conditional on this success, I show a large effect of contributions on access to legislators themselves rather than their staff, which constitutes a greater investment of time and attention by legislators and a more noteworthy achievement for lobbyists. Important to note, among those congressional offices to whom lobbyists do request access, lobbyists may still select for campaign contributions those members they believe are most likely to give it. In other words, the fundamental issue of selection into the "treatment" of contributions persists to some degree among the legislators whom lobbyists try to access. I address the residual endogeneity concern by performing propensity score matching of members of Congress. Within each year, I match members who have similar likelihood of receiving campaign contributions from lobbyists based on observable member and lobbyist characteristics but differ in whether they received contributions in reality. Achieving balance on observable covariates via matching boosts one's confidence in estimating the impact of contributions on access to legislators although it does not truly establish causal inference by design.

Furthermore, I examine whether this effect is conditioned by the ideological difference

between lobbyists and legislators, contributing to the literature on which officials organized interests target for access in theory and in practice. According to a number of existing studies, particularly those that theorize lobbying as the transfer of information between interest groups, including in the form of “legislative subsidy” (Hall and Deardorff 2006), the primary legislative targets of lobbying efforts are allied legislators (Kollman 1997; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Holyoke 2003; Austen-Smith and Wright 1994). A second set of targets is undecided or marginal legislators (Heberlig 2005; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998). While these models of lobbying generally find opposed legislators to be the least sensible lobbying targets, some argue that it is important for groups to lobby their allies in order to match - or counteract - lobbying efforts by opposing groups (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Holyoke 2003), making lobbying opponents a given fact if not a strategic mandate. Taken together, existing work on the targets of lobbying paints a picture where interest groups lobby legislators with various issue and ideological positions but emphasize allies.

Consistent with this literature, I link the FARA data to lobbyists’ ideological positions as inferred from their career histories, and find that the targets of lobbyist access seeking include both legislators of their party and the opposing party and cover a wide ideological range. The effect of contributions on success in gaining access, however, is concentrated on allies. Contributions are associated with a greater likelihood of gaining access only to legislators of the same party and with similar ideology. Money does not facilitate access to more ideologically distant copartisan members or members of the opposing party. That money helps open the door exclusively to “friends” in Congress suggests that it may signal the value and quality of information supplied by lobbyists to its most naturally receptive and trusting audiences in government but does not compensate for fundamental disagreements between lobbyists and legislators. This finding is consistent with the theory that contributions can reduce officials’ uncertainty about donors’ policy preferences (Austen-Smith 1995).

# 1 Campaign Contributions and Access to Officials

Constituents value opportunities to communicate their opinions and concerns to government officials through direct contact. Securing officials' attention is an essential first step in persuading them to undertake desired policy actions (Hall and Wayman 1990; Hansen 1991), but all those who want officials' attention cannot receive it. Members of Congress, in particular, have a finite amount of time they can spend with constituents to receive their input and must selectively allocate their time and attention among the many who demand them (Hall 1998). Central to the societal concern about the influence of money in Washington is the theory that campaign contributions facilitate access to officials for their donors. Scholars have provided some evidence for it observationally (Langbein 1986) and experimentally (Kalla and Broockman 2016). As moneyed interests and wealthy individuals have different policy preferences than the general public (Gilens 2012; Page, Bartels and Seawright 2013), that their contributions buy disproportionate access to officials can explain their clear advantage in the political system, which is highly responsive to the wealthy's preferences (Gilens 2012).

Patterns in interest groups' political giving suggest that they contribute at least partly in order to secure access to officials. Many interest groups direct their campaign contributions strongly toward incumbents (Fournaies and Hall 2014; Barber 2016), and companies exposed to more regulatory risks donate more money to incumbents (Fournaies and Hall 2015). Private money's focus on incumbency contributes to incumbents' significant fundraising advantage (Jacobson and Carson 2019; Krasno, Green and Cowden 1994). But why might legislators choose to give more access to donors? There are two main explanations. One, money helps them get reelected. For vulnerable incumbents in close races, campaign spending can be decisive in securing reelection (Gerber 2004; Caughey and Sekhon 2011), and contributions can help them win by paying for much needed campaign expenditures such as advertising. For more secure incumbents, having abundant campaign funds - a plentiful war

chest - helps deter high-quality challengers from entering the race (Box-Steffensmeier 1996). Knowing the importance of money, incumbents spend large amounts of time fundraising for their reelection efforts (Powell 2012; Lessig 2011).<sup>3</sup> By meeting with donors, officials can return the favor by hearing their concerns in the hope that they will contribute again in the future. Two, officials often need input from outside groups as a source of valuable policymaking information (Hall and Deardorff 2006; Bauer, Pool and Dexter 1963). Campaign contributions may signal to officials that their donors share their policy objectives and preferences and can therefore be trusted to provide good information and advice (Lohmann 1995; Austen-Smith 1995).

If campaign contributions can serve as a persuasive signal of helpful policy-relevant information, should money help donors to different degrees depending on their ideological positions? Propositions generated by formal models help develop expectations regarding this question, and central to these models is whether donors' preferences align with legislators' preferences. Lohmann (1995) argues that groups make contributions as a payment in order to overcome the misalignment between their interests and those of legislators' electoral constituencies, suggesting that contributions should mostly help groups with dissimilar preferences gain access but confer no extra advantage on groups with perfectly aligning preferences. Austen-Smith (1995) highlights the consideration that legislators do not always know donors' preferences before access is granted. Incorporating imperfect information into his theoretical model, he argues that contributions may enhance the likelihood of getting access only if legislators are uncertain about donors' preference alignment whether or not their preferences align in reality. Conversely, contributions should appear to be counterproductive - that is, inversely related to success in getting access - if legislators know donors' preferences perfectly in the first place. Empirical findings on the positive link between contributions and

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<sup>3</sup> *Vox* has published journalistic accounts of constant fundraising by members of Congress, including one published in January of 2016 (<https://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2016/1/8/10736402/congress-fundraising-miserable>).

access lend stronger support to the presence imperfect information (Langbein 1986; Kalla and Broockman 2016).

How does legislators' knowledge of donors' alignment of preferences matter for the ability of contributions to help different lobbyists access legislators? In highly polarized modern American politics, legislators can hardly expect ideologically distant lobbyists to have aligning preferences. Lobbyists derive their value to clients and earning potential from the trust of incumbent politicians (Levine 2009; Hirsch et al. 2019), suggesting that they can ill afford to tarnish their ideological reputations by providing policy-relevant and electorally beneficial information to partisan and ideological adversaries. This causes legislators' *a priori* uncertainty regarding ideologically distant lobbyists' policy preferences to be low; both can safely assume that their preferences do not align. If lobbying is the transmission of information from interest groups to their natural allies in government (Hall and Deardorff 2006), contributions may help ideologically similar lobbyists gain access to legislators. With the alignment of ideological and electoral interests more or less dismissed as a source of mistrust, contributions can signal lobbyists' possession of quality policymaking information. Taken together, I expect ideologically closer lobbyists, especially copartisans, to reap the most gain from their contributions.

## 1.1 Hypotheses

The hypotheses I test in this paper, listed as follows, reflect the two stages of lobbyist access-seeking - requests for access and success in obtaining it. Based on reasoning above as to why legislators give more access to donors (Gerber 2004; Box-Steffensmeier 1996; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Lohmann 1995; Austen-Smith 1995), I expect that strategic lobbyists' requests for access should be strongly concentrated among recipients of their campaign contributions (Hypothesis **H1**), and that contributions should help them gain access given requests (**H2**). In line with reasoning above about the effect of money in relation to ideology and prefer-

ence uncertainty (Austen-Smith 1995; Hirsch et al. 2019), I expect contributions to be most helpful for accessing ideologically similar copartisan members of Congress (**H3**).

**H1** Lobbyists' campaign contributions to members of Congress are positively related to requests for access to them.

**H2** Given requests for access, lobbyists' campaign contributions to members of Congress are positively related to success in getting access to them.

**H3** The positive relationship between campaign contributions and success in getting access should be greater if lobbyists are ideologically close to the members they try to access than if they are ideologically distant, especially for members of their own party.

## 2 Data

Congress passed FARA in 1938 to monitor propaganda activity by European fascist and communist governments in the U.S., particularly Nazi Germany. During the postwar years, the intent of FARA has since lost its wartime emphasis on Anti-American activity as Congress replaced “propaganda” with “informational materials” in the statute.<sup>4</sup> Recent controversies related to foreign interference surrounding the 2016 presidential campaign and the Trump presidency have given FARA renewed public attention. Now international trade is by far the most prevalent issue of interest to registered foreign lobbying clients (Kee, Olarreaga and Silva 2004; Montes-Rojas 2018; You N.d.a). Since the passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, lobbyists representing foreign commercial entities are allowed to report their lobbying activity under the LDA, and those with completely non-political objectives - i.e., religious, scholastic, academic, scientific or fine arts - are exempt from FARA reporting

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<sup>4</sup>Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice, “Audit of the National Security Division’s Enforcement and Administration of the Foreign agents Registration Act,” September, 2016 (<https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1624.pdf>).

altogether.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, a large portion of registered foreign principals are now foreign governments or political organizations such as parties (You N.d.*b*).

Taken together, the substantive scope of this paper is lobbying by foreign political actors with explicitly political goals. The link between money and political access in this slice of lobbying bears particularly important implications for the role of special interests in American politics. As these entities try to influence U.S. policy but hail from beyond the nation's borders and electorate, finding that money indeed facilitates access to congressional officials is especially consequential. Ethical concerns regarding members of Congress allowing foreign interests to influence their actions through contributions by proxy likely motivate them to conceal this effect and make it difficult to observe than in domestic lobbying if comparable data were available.

The Department of Justice prepares the FARA data for bulk download online at <https://efile.fara.gov/ords/f?p=107:21:::NO:::><sup>6</sup> These data contain links to FARA reports as image scans as well as information on the registrants that filed them and the lobbyists involved. The following figures illustrate these pieces of information contained in “supplemental reports” filed by registrants on a semi-annual basis after their initial registration with the Justice Department in which they report political activities.<sup>7</sup> In the two excerpts in Figure 1, the registrants detail their contact with congressional staffers, these staffers' member affiliation, and the nature of contact. Figure 2 shows a lobbying firm's listing of its recent campaign contributions. I collect the text of these reports, often by performing optical character recognition (OCR), and then extract information from the text

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<sup>5</sup>ibid.

<sup>6</sup>The DOJ makes FARA reports searchable and available for viewing at <https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara>.

<sup>7</sup>Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice, “Audit of the National Security Division's Enforcement and Administration of the Foreign agents Registration Act,” September, 2016 (<https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1624.pdf>).

on campaign contributions and lobbyist access seeking. Different organizations' patently different reporting conventions and formats require a flexible and robust approach to collecting contact data, and I describe a machine learning strategy below.

Figure 1: Excerpts of FARA Reports on Lobbyist Contact with Officials

(a)

On February 6, 1998, the Registrant attended a breakfast meeting at which Deputy Chief of Mission Benjamin William met with Greg Elias, Professional Staff Member, Office of Senator Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC); Joel Oswald, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senator Michael B. Enzi (R-WY); Karen Day, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA); and Dan McGirt, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senator Paul Coverdell (R-GA) to discuss international relations and trade matters involving the United States and the Republic of Singapore.

On February 25, 1998, the Registrant attended a breakfast meeting at which Deputy Chief of Mission Benjamin William met with Andrew Ehrlich, Legislative Director, Office of Representative Rick A. Lazio (R-NY); Jennifer McCulloch, Senior Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Peter T. King (R-NY); Jon Kenney, Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative William F. Goodling (R-PA); and Jamie Jones, Principal Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Matthew G. Martinez (D-CA) to discuss international relations and trade matters involving the United States and the Republic of Singapore.

Note: Filed by APSO Associates Inc. (<https://efile.fara.gov/docs/4561-Supplemental-Statement-19980331-EUGD1E04.pdf>)

(b)

2/12/2019	Email	Senator Dan Sullivan	Avery Fogels and Liz Banicki	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator David Perdue	Gabriele Forsyth and Caitlin Poling	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Kevin Cramer	Rachel Buening and Jason Stverak	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Martha McSally	Kate Chaudoin	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Rick Scott	Scheduler	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Marsha Blackburn	Grace Burch and Sean Farrell	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Josh Hawley	Ellen James and Eric Teetsel	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Ranking Member Jack Reed	Rosanne Haroian and John Nobrega	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Jeanne Shaheen	Megan Darcy and Naz Durakoglu	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Kirsten Gillibrand	Kinsey Spears and Moran Banai	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister
2/12/2019	Email	Senator Richard Blumenthal	Dana Sandman and Kim Quarentello	Meeting Request for KRG Foreign Minister

Note: Filed by Kurdistan Regional Government - Liaison Office - USA (<https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5783-Supplemental-Statement-20190728-25.pdf>)

Figure 2: Excerpt of a FARA Report on Lobbyist Campaign Contributions

DATE	AMT	CAMPAIGN
1/26/2010	\$1,000.00	McCarthy for Congress
1/5/2010	\$750.00	Great Land PAC
1/5/2010	\$250.00	Great Land PAC
1/5/2010	\$500.00	Ted Deutch for Congress
1/11/2010	\$1,000.00	Martha Coakley
1/12/2010	\$1,000.00	Martha Coakley for Senate
1/12/2010	\$250.00	Coakley for Senate
1/14/2010	\$1,000.00	Martha Coakley for Senate
1/15/2010	\$5,000.00	AGSHF PAC
1/19/2010	\$1,200.00	Allyson Schwartz for Congress (in-kind)
1/19/2010	\$750.00	Joe Wilson for Congress
1/19/2010	\$1,000.00	Mike Thompson for Congress
1/19/2010	\$15,000.00	NRCC
1/19/2010	\$750.00	Pete Stark Re-Election Committee
1/19/2010	\$500.00	Richard Burr for Senate (in-kind)
1/26/2010	\$2,500.00	Majority Committee
2/1/2010	\$5,000.00	Blue Dog PAC
2/1/2010	\$1,000.00	Gwen Moore for Congress

Note: Filed by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer Feld, LLP (<https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3492-Supplemental-Statement-20100722-14.pdf>)

## 2.1 Classifying Lobbyist Access-Seeking and Contributions

In order to identify lobbyists’ requests for access to members of Congress and then classify them as successful or unsuccessful, it is crucial to understand the context surrounding legislator mentions. In the first example above in Figure 1a, the past-tense verb “attended” strongly indicates successful attempts to gain access. In the example in Figure 1b, the phrase “meeting requests” suggests that the lobbyists requested but did not achieve access to the legislators of interest at the time of reporting. Subsequent reports then indicated the eventual outcomes of these requests (not shown), and the data collected reflect as much. To collect such information on lobbyist access-seeking, I first extract all mentions of congressional incumbents from the FARA reports between 1998 and 2019 along with the immediate context surrounding them (150 characters on both sides). This step produced over 70,000 records. This large quantity of data makes it impractical to manually classify all mentions

of legislators in FARA reports as fulfilled or unfulfilled attempts at access. To code this information systematically and reliably, I build two machine learning models, one for determining whether each mention pertains to access-seeking requests and one for determining their results, with a training set consisting of manually coded legislator mentions. After validating these models on an additional set of manually coded mentions, I then use them to classify the remaining vast majority of legislator mentions.

Two undergraduate research assistants were given the same 2,000 randomly selected legislator mentions along with context and manually identified instances of access-seeking and their results. I compared their determinations against one another, found the intercoder reliability to be 91.2 percent, and reconciled the disagreements. I randomly select 75 percent of the reconciled manual entries to form a training set to build the two machine learning models based on the Random Forest algorithm which, in combination, classify legislator mentions as describing no request for access, a currently unfulfilled request, or a fulfilled one. I validate these models on the remaining 25 percent of manually coded entries by comparing model predictions with manual classifications. Both models yield correct predictions over 90 percent of time.<sup>8</sup>

Another type of information on lobbyist contact that I collect from FARA report language is whether requests for access target members of Congress themselves or their staff (You N.d.a). I do so by detecting whether the context surrounding legislator mentions include any congressional staff titles such as Chief of Staff, Legislative Assistant, and Legislative Correspondent, and so on.<sup>9</sup> I also gather any disclosure of campaign contributions that lobbyists made to members, the basis for the main independent variable in this study.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix A for a detailed description of the machine learning models and their validation, including their precision and recall scores.

<sup>9</sup>See Appendix B for a full list of congressional staff titles I detect.

<sup>10</sup>See Appendix C for a full list of words and phrases I detect to identify campaign contributions.

## 2.2 Dyads of Members of Congress and Lobbying Registrants

To examine how lobbyists' campaign contributions relate to their requests for access to members of Congress, I create panel data containing unique dyads of members of Congress and lobbying registrants for each year. Registrants typically make contributions and contact officials as a collective, at least on paper. This is the case even though in reality only one specific lobbyist (the most influential or connected one, in all likelihood) may be solely responsible for these actions. Accordingly, FARA reports often do not show which lobbyists make contributions or contact. In figures 1 and 2 above, for example, all lobbyists working for their clients are treated as acting collectively. In some cases, however, lobbying registrants consist of a single lobbyist, thus allowing their actions to be traced unmistakably to that lobbyist. I make use of this desirable feature of single-lobbyist registrants and analyze this subset as a supplement to analyzing all FARA data obtained to strengthen the findings.<sup>11</sup>

From 1998 to 2019, 981 distinct registrants represented foreign clients. Merging these lobbying transactions with all sitting members of Congress by year results in 1,535,352 member-registrant-year combinations which may contain campaign contributions, requests for access (successful or unsuccessful), or both. Organizing member-registrant dyads by year, I take account of the fact that lobbying is an ongoing process and that activities disclosed in one report may continue through a subsequent one. Practically, this means that a request for access disclosed in one report can prove successful by the time the registrant files its next one, and that a contribution to a legislator may be connected to a request for access listed in a later report.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>I choose not to use "lobbying firms" to replace "lobbying registrants" for two reasons. One, the in-house lobbying arms of foreign entities are not lobbying firms and should not be labeled as such. Two, for contracted lobbying firms, especially large firms, not all lobbyists within them represent the foreign entities reported.

<sup>12</sup>As calendar years have effectively coincided with sessions of Congress since the 1930s, organizing member-registrant dyads by year should sufficiently allow requests for access to

### **2.2.1 Member and Lobbyist Characteristics**

I gather several key attributes of members of Congress as control variables - their vote shares in their last elections, their party affiliation, whether their party was the chamber majority, whether they served in the House or the Senate, whether they occupied party leadership positions in Congress, and whether they sat on some of the most powerful committees (the House Ways and Means Committee and the House and Senate appropriations committees) as well as the committees principally in charge of foreign relations matters (the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the House and Senate Homeland Security committees). I interact whether members won close races (receiving less than 55 percent of the two-party vote) with contributions for much of the analysis in anticipation of possible differential effects of contributions on access-seeking behavior and outcomes (Snyder Jr. 1990; Romer and Snyder Jr. 1994).

I also gather members' first-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores in order to calculate their ideological distance from lobbyists, an additional independent variable in part of the analysis, to examine how it conditions the effect of contributions on access. Furthermore, I control for registrant characteristics including whether they were in-house operations or contracted firms, how many lobbyists they consisted of, and how many clients they served in total. The last two registrant characteristics are often time-variant for even the same registrants.

## **2.3 Lobbyist Ideology Based on Past Congressional Positions**

For lobbyists who had served in Congress as members or members' staff before representing foreign interests, I infer their ideological positions from their past congressional service. For data on lobbyists' career histories, I collect all "revolving door" career profiles on political play out. In Appendix D.1, however, I further collapse the data from year-level to Congress-level as a robustness check to assuage remaining concerns.

figures prepared and published online by the Center for Responsive Politics. These profiles include individuals' previous service in government, including congressional positions.<sup>13</sup> In order to get information on any past congressional positions held by lobbyists in the FARA data, I first searched for lobbyists among the career profiles automatically by name. My undergraduate research assistants then verified whether these matches were correct by browsing Internet search results on the matched individuals. With lobbyists linked to "revolving door" profiles, the FARA data contain a total of 9,498 distinct lobbyists who represented foreign clients, of whom 495 served in Congress. Within these 495 lobbyists, 87 held elective office as Representatives or Senators while 408 served as congressional staff. As one might expect, the lobbyists who previously held congressional office were invariably part of contracted firms rather than in-house lobbyists working for foreign organizations.

One foreign agent with previous congressional experience is two-term Democratic Congressman Jim Bacchus. After leaving Congress in 1995 and chairing the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body for eight years, Bacchus became Chair of Global Practice at law firm Greenberg Taurig.<sup>14</sup> In this role Bacchus represented governmental bodies from countries including Mexico, El Salvador, and Belarus. More common than legislators-turned-lobbyists are former congressional staff. Andrew McKechnie, for example, served as Legislative Assistant to Senator Norm Coleman and as Health Policy Advisor to Senator Chuck Grassley before joining Peck Madigan Jones as a lobbyist.<sup>15</sup> While at Peck in 2011, McKechnie represented a Colombian government agency to promote foreign tourism, trade, and invest-

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<sup>13</sup>An alternative data source for lobbyist career histories is lobbyists' disclosure of past government employment in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act. For this paper, I opt for profiles prepared by the Center for Responsive Politics because it is a more complete source, particularly in foreign lobbying. Lobbyists who represented foreign clients but never represented domestic clients would never appear in the LDA data.

<sup>14</sup>See Bacchus's "revolving door" profile at [https://www.opensecrets.org/revolving/rev\\_summary.php?id=30321](https://www.opensecrets.org/revolving/rev_summary.php?id=30321).

<sup>15</sup>See McKechnie's "revolving door" profile at <https://www.opensecrets.org/revolv>

ment. The ideological positions of former members of Congress are summarized by their first-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores, and those of former congressional staff are summarized by the NOMINATE scores of the members they worked for. The ideological estimates for those who worked for more than one members are taken to be the NOMINATE scores of the members they served last.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Campaign Contributions and Requests for Access

The FARA data present strong evidence for all three hypotheses generated by the theory that campaign contributions facilitate access to government officials. Like the hypotheses, the presentation of findings starts with lobbyists' intent when making campaign contributions and proceeds to their effectiveness. Do lobbyists make contributions in order to seek access to members of Congress? The data strongly suggest that they do, in support of Hypothesis **H1**. In Table 1, I show the percentage of Representatives and Senators whom lobbyists attempted to access depending on whether they contributed to their campaigns during the same year. Lobbyists requested access to three out of ten members of Congress to whom they had made campaign contributions in contrast with less than one percent of the other members. On this differential, the two houses of Congress closely resemble each other.<sup>16</sup> This differential remained large and highly stable from 1998 to 2019.

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[ing/rev\\_summary.php?id=76344](#).

<sup>16</sup>A large differential persists when including less recent campaign contributions - made at any time during members' current terms in office. I show a systematic robustness check using this more inclusive tally of contributions in Appendix D.2. In this case, lobbyists requested access to about 18 percent of both the Representatives and Senators they had contributed to and, again, close to none of the other legislators.

Table 1: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Lobbyist Requests for Access, 1998-2019

Chamber	Contributed to Campaign	All Members	Requested Access (Percentage of All Members)
House	Yes	8,504	2,624 (30.9%)
	No	1,237,735	6,770 (0.5%)
Senate	Yes	3,836	1,150 (30.0%)
	No	285,277	2,677 (0.9%)

Logit regression analysis displayed in Table 2 demonstrates lobbyists' tendency to request access almost exclusively to recipients of their contributions. Estimated based on dyads of Congress members and lobbying registrants by year, all equations have a binary dependent variable indicating whether lobbyists requested access to a member. All equations control for year fixed effects and cluster standard errors by member. Equation 1 estimates the relationship between contributions and requests for access. Equation 2 interacts contributions with whether members fought in close races; this setup can capture lobbyists' tendency to target electorally vulnerable or secure legislators for access. Equation 2 also controls for member characteristics including their party affiliation (being a Republican rather than a Democrat or minor party member), chamber of service (being a Senator rather than a Representative), majority status (being in the chamber majority rather than the minority), and membership in party leadership structures, the particularly powerful committees, and committees that oversee foreign affairs. It also controls for whether the registrants were in-house operations rather than contracted firms, their total number of foreign clients, and how many lobbyists they included. Equation 3 estimates the main effect, with member and registrant controls, on the subset of just one-person registrants, cases where decisions can be attributed precisely to a single lobbyist.

Table 2: Logit Regressions - Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Lobbyist Requests for Access, 1998-2019

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Request for Access		
	All Member-Registrant Dyads		One-Lobbyist Registrants
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Contribution	4.174*** (0.036)	3.898*** (0.051)	4.765*** (0.097)
Close Race		0.016 (0.054)	0.110 (0.080)
Contribution × Close Race		−0.228** (0.092)	−0.359* (0.197)
Republican		−0.233*** (0.064)	−0.268*** (0.086)
Senator		0.265*** (0.076)	0.189* (0.113)
Majority		0.019 (0.040)	−0.016 (0.068)
Leadership		1.193*** (0.091)	1.333*** (0.133)
Power Cmte.		0.296*** (0.068)	0.376*** (0.090)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.		0.982*** (0.064)	1.015*** (0.084)
In-House		−1.000*** (0.050)	−0.830*** (0.070)
No. Clients		0.123*** (0.003)	0.137*** (0.011)
No. Lobbyists		−0.003** (0.001)	
Constant	−5.884*** (0.089)	−6.379*** (0.106)	−6.863*** (0.194)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y

Observations	1,535,352	1,082,779	396,222
R <sup>2</sup>	0.162	0.216	0.198
$\chi^2$	23,679.320***	21,191.800***	3,917.632***

*Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Regression results underscore that campaign contributions to members of Congress are strongly and positively related to lobbyist requests for access. This effect remains strong when controlling for member and registrant characteristics and for one-person lobbying contingents. The control variables in equations 2 and 3 obtain mostly expected coefficient estimates. The connection between contributions and requests for access is greater for electorally secure members than for electorally vulnerable ones, as shown by the negative estimate for the interaction term between contributions and the close race variable. This suggests that contributions for vulnerable members try to influence elections, and those for secure members are more intended for access-seeking.

Members' positions on party leadership structures, power committees, and foreign affairs committees are all positively related to requests for access, as is registrants' total number of clients. In-house lobbyists were less likely to request access than contracted lobbyists. Among recipients of their campaign contributions, lobbyists requested access to about 43 percent of party leaders and about 43 percent of members of foreign affairs committees, in contrast with the overall proportion of 30 percent. The estimates also show that on average lobbyists were more likely to request access to Democrats than Republicans and more likely to target Senators than Representatives.

### 3.2 Campaign Contributions and Success in Gaining Access

That lobbyists requested access to 30 percent of legislators they had contributed to but hardly any other legislator strongly suggests that contributions are at least partially intended to

secure access to successful candidates. As a tactic, then, do contributions achieve the goal? To answer this question, I measure the effect of contributions among those members to whom lobbyists requested access. Lobbyists likely perceived these members to be at least minimally amenable to demands for access, and analyzing only these members' access giving alleviates - though it does not resolve - the fundamental issue of selection into the treatment of contributions, as explained earlier.

Given requests for access, campaign contributions indeed appear to have facilitated access to legislators as intended. Overall, lobbyists successfully gained access to just over a third (34.8 percent) of the legislators they attempted to access, but lobbyists who contributed to the members of Congress they tried to access were rewarded with a greater likelihood of success by an average of 8.4 percentage points. The data thus provide evidence for Hypothesis **H2**, although the effect of contributions is relatively modest in practice. Important to note, not making contributions by no means eliminates the possibility of access, and contributions by no means guarantee it. As shown in Table 3, the House and the Senate again exhibit a similar boost from contributions, though Representatives were more likely to give access to lobbyists than Senators by a few percentage points whether or not they had received contributions from them.

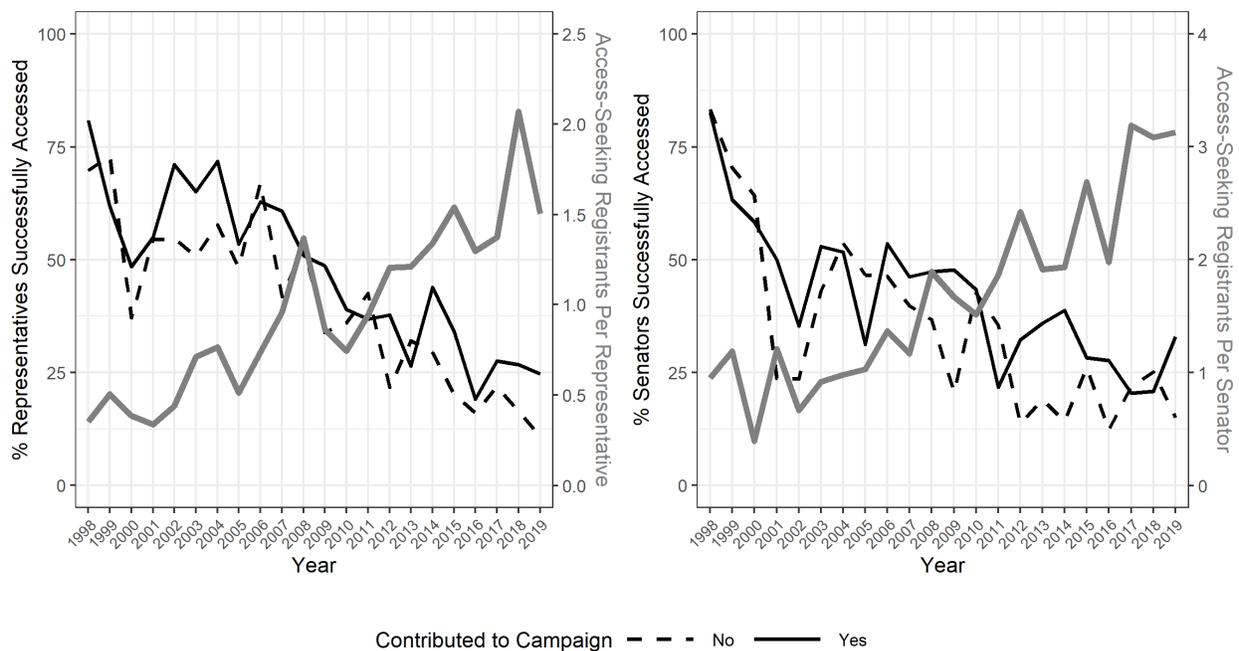
Table 3: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Success in Gaining Access, 1998-2019

Chamber	Contributed to Campaign	Requested Access	Gained Access (Percentage of Requests)
House	Yes	2,624	1,120 (42.7%)
	No	6,770	2,264 (33.4%)
Senate	Yes	1,150	420 (36.5%)
	No	2,677	799 (29.8%)

Success in gaining access favored donors for most of the period between 1998 and 2019. Figure 3 displays this differential over time in the House and the Senate. In most years,

contributions were associated with a greater likelihood of getting access to both Representatives and Senators. This differential persisted as legislators over the years became overall less likely to give access to lobbyists that requested it due to steadily rising demand. I include gray lines to chart rising demand for access, measured by the average number of lobbying registrants that requested access per Representative or Senator, which maintained a course of linear increase and more than tripled over the 22-year period in both chambers. In 2018-2019, two registrants representing foreign interests requested access to the average Representative, and three requested access to the average Senator.

Figure 3: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Success in Gaining Access, Conditional on Requests for Access, 1998-2019

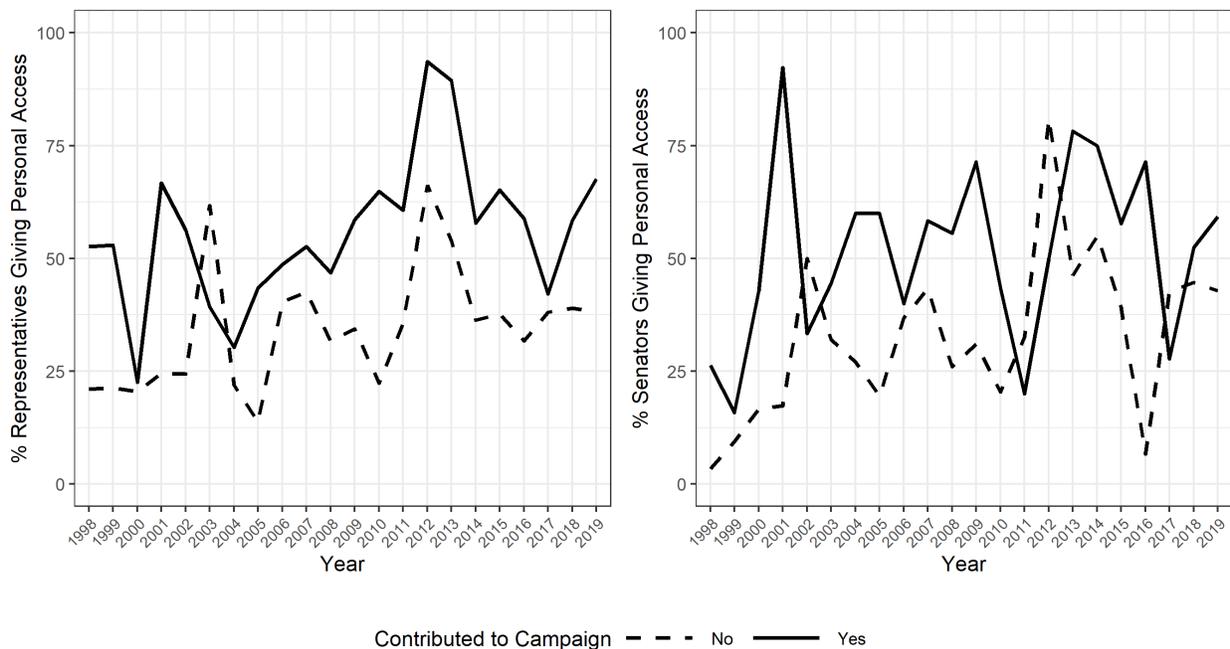


Note: Gray lines, corresponding to gray axes and labels on the right side of each graph, indicate lobbyists' demand for access to members of Congress, measured by the average number of lobbying registrants in the FARA data that requested access, per member, in the House and the Senate, respectively.

As previously discussed, the FARA data distinguish between lobbyist requests to access members of Congress themselves or their staff, and personal contact with members demands

more time and attention from members and is therefore more consequential gains for lobbyists. In addition to a greater likelihood of successfully getting access, lobbyists' campaign contributions are associated with a greater chance of obtaining personal rather than staff access. I plot this effect in Figure 4, again separately for the two chambers. On average, contributions translate into a sizable 20-percent increase in the chance of personal access assuming that lobbyists obtained either type - a much better shot at a scarce resource.

Figure 4: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Personal Access, Conditional on Success in Gaining Access to Office, 1998-2019



Logit regressions displayed in Table 4 confer strong statistical significance on the effect of contributions on success in getting access. They also show that, first, the positive relationship between campaign contributions and access does not depend on members' electoral circumstances, unlike lobbyists' decision to request access in the first place; electorally vulnerable legislators were not more eager to reciprocate financial help with access as one may reasonably expect (Snyder Jr. 1990). Second, this effect is robust to control variables and testing on the one-lobbyist subset. The relationship between contributions and personal ac-

cess to members in particular has the same qualities. Equation 1 estimates the relationship between contributions and gaining success, controlling only for year fixed effects. Equation 2 adds the same set of member and registrant control variables. Equation 3 shifts the dependent variable to success in obtaining personal access to legislators rather than through staff given access of either type is achieved. Equations 4 and 5 replicate the last two on the subset consisting solely of one-person registrants for the advantage of linking contributions and access seeking to a specific lobbyist.

Table 4: Logit Regressions - Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress and Success in Gaining Access, 1998-2019

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	All Member-Registrant Dyads			One-Lobbyist Registrants	
	Gaining Access	Personal Access	Personal Access	Gaining Access	Personal Access
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Contribution	0.370*** (0.043)	0.373*** (0.061)	0.770*** (0.089)	0.313** (0.155)	1.670*** (0.277)
Close Race		0.068 (0.076)	-0.098 (0.110)	0.338** (0.150)	-0.228 (0.242)
Contribution × Close Race		-0.183 (0.146)	0.315 (0.212)	-0.306 (0.397)	-0.030 (0.583)
Republican		0.245*** (0.057)	0.132 (0.087)	0.151 (0.127)	-0.148 (0.227)
Senator		-0.228*** (0.080)	-0.389*** (0.143)	0.246 (0.185)	-0.571* (0.312)
Majority		0.012 (0.056)	-0.029 (0.092)	-0.061 (0.130)	-0.202 (0.218)
Leadership		-0.035 (0.131)	0.066 (0.133)	0.121 (0.228)	-0.206 (0.365)
Power Cmte.		0.041 (0.065)	-0.0004 (0.094)	0.011 (0.140)	0.181 (0.218)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.		0.031 (0.054)	-0.296*** (0.081)	-0.044 (0.117)	-0.588*** (0.219)
In-House		1.582*** (0.100)	0.391*** (0.129)	0.734*** (0.179)	0.042 (0.267)
No. Clients		-0.035*** (0.010)	0.019 (0.015)	-0.033 (0.050)	-0.337*** (0.086)
No. Lobbyists		0.0001 (0.004)	0.013 (0.008)		
Constant	1.106*** (0.149)	1.106*** (0.200)	-1.225*** (0.231)	-0.101 (0.381)	0.718 (0.649)

Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	13,221	8,746	3,238	1,545	670
R <sup>2</sup>	0.148	0.206	0.137	0.203	0.351
$\chi^2$	1,500.291***	1,427.361***	347.737***	254.104***	202.196***

*Note: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

According to the estimates for the control variables, Republicans were more likely to grant access given a request than Democrats, and Representatives were more likely to grant access than Senators. Other control variables bear weaker or less stable relationships with access. As discussed earlier, leveraging requests for access in the data does not completely resolve the endogeneity problem with campaign contributions. To further alleviate this concern, I conduct an additional robustness check based on propensity score matching with incumbents' receipt of contributions as the treatment, shown in Appendix D.3. Admittedly, matching can only maximize the balance between members of Congress who received campaign contributions and those who did not on observable characteristics I have collected on members and access-seeking registrants. While it fundamentally cannot establish causal inference about the effect of contributions on access, it boosts confidence in the main analysis by reducing model dependence on these observable characteristics (Ho et al. 2007).

### 3.3 Contributions, Ideology, and Access

Ideology emerges as an important mediator of the effectiveness of campaign contributions for gaining access to members of Congress. Consistent with Hypothesis **H3**, contributions only improved lobbyists' chances of successfully accessing copartisan members with similar ideological stances but not ideologically more distant copartisans or members of the opposing party. In order to reliably measure member-lobbyist ideological distances, for this analysis I use only the subset of the data consisting of one-lobbyist registrants with previous congressional work experience - and thus ideology scores.

In seeking access to incumbents, lobbyists unsurprisingly showed a strong preference for

copartisans in a pattern of lobbying allies (Kollman 1997; Hojnacki and Kimball 1998; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Holyoke 2003; Austen-Smith and Wright 1994). By party affiliation and the record of campaign contributions, Table 5 shows how many members of Congress lobbyists sought access to, successfully or unsuccessfully. Lobbyists cast a much wider net for copartisan legislators, attempting to access more than twice as many copartisans (394) as opposing party members (192). Lobbyists’ success in getting access and its relationship with contributions exhibits different dynamics across the party divide. For copartisans, lobbyists gained access to 38 percent of those they had contributed to, 17 percentage points more than those they had not contributed to. The pattern disappears for the opposing party to the point of reversal, however; lobbyists gained access to 53.6 percent of opposing party members they had contributed to and 61 percent of those they had not. Not only did lobbyists achieve more success with opposing party legislators than with copartisans regardless of contributions, contributions appear futile at best and slightly counterproductive at worst for gaining access to opposing party members.

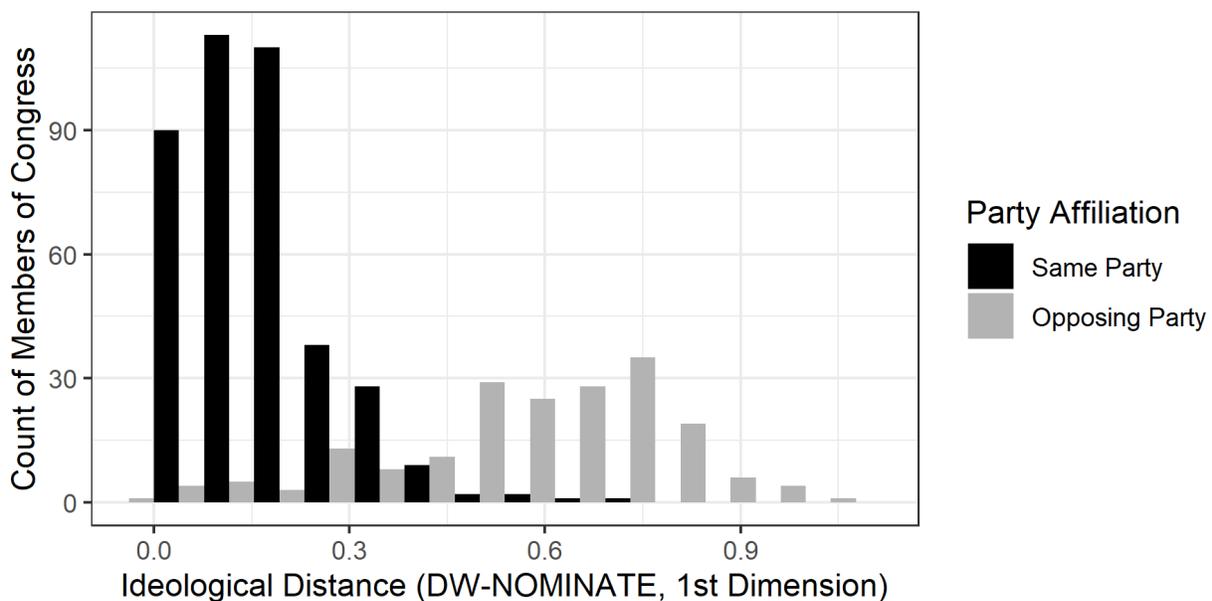
Table 5: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress, Access Seeking by Party Affiliation 1998-2019

Party Affiliation	Contributed to Campaign	All Members	Requested Access	Gained Access (Percentage of Requests)
Same Party	Yes	236	100	38 (38%)
	No	17,660	294	62 (21.1%)
Opposing Party	Yes	97	28	15 (53.6%)
	No	18,073	164	100 (61.0%)

Figure 5 shows the distribution of ideological distance for copartisan members and opposing party members to whom lobbyists requested access. Lobbyists’ targets for access covered a wide ideological range, and lobbyists attempted to access many members of the opposing party, who are presumably predisposed to disagree with their preferences (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994). The finding that lobbyists, conditional on requests, were more likely to gain

access to opposing party incumbents regardless of campaign contributions certainly comes as a surprise. In light of lobbyists' targeting of a smaller number of opposing party legislators for access compared to copartisans, their greater success with the former suggests a more selective approach in which lobbyists request access to opposing party legislators who they are fairly confident will grant it based on prior beliefs.

Figure 5: Ideological Distance Between Lobbyists and Members of Congress They Attempted to Access



That campaign contributions relate positively to lobbyists' success in getting access only to copartisans reflects the mediating effect of ideology on whether money facilitates access. In Figure 6, I plot the differential rate of success between lobbyists who contributed to the members they attempted to access and those who did not across the range of ideological distance, divided into equal-sized quintiles. On the whole, a positive differential leaning toward contributors exists for the two lowest quintiles. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 7, the differential decreases as ideological distance increases among copartisan members of Congress and largely does not exist for members of the opposing party regardless of ideological distance. Here ideological distance is divided into quintiles for both copartisans

and opposing party members.

Figure 6: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress, Ideological Distance, and Success in Gaining Access

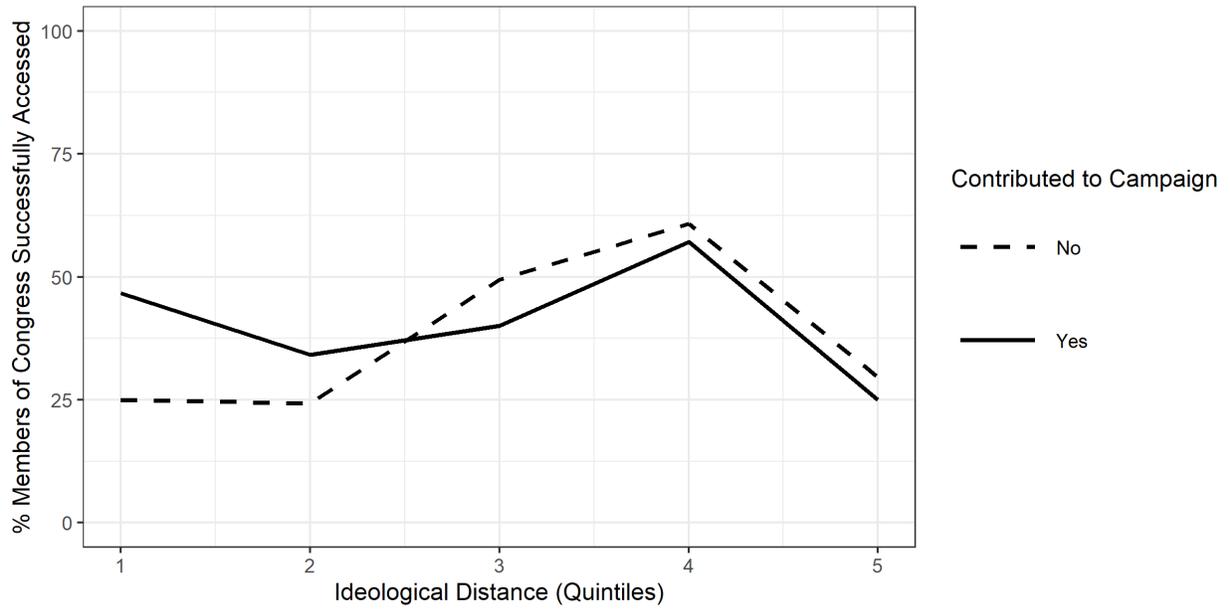
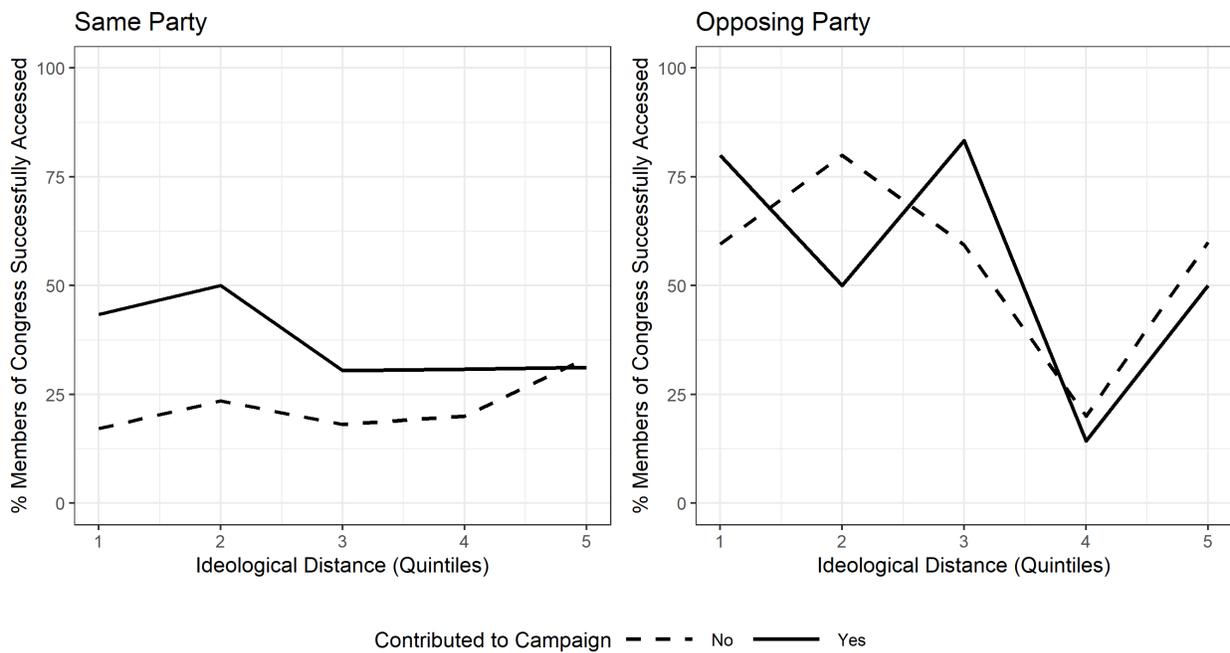


Figure 7: Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress, Ideological Distance, and Success in Gaining Access by Party Affiliation



Figures 6 and 7 yield some additional patterns worth noting. Setting contributions aside, increasing ideological distance does not considerably reduce the likelihood for copartisan legislators to give access to lobbyists, but it closes the gap between donors and non-donors. For legislators of the opposing party, however, greater ideological distance is associated with rapidly diminishing chances of getting access for both donors and non-donors. Across the two partisan groups, lobbyists achieved the highest rate of success with ideologically similar opposing party members. This observation is consistent with the speculation above that lobbyists selectively targeted particularly receptive opposing party legislators. It is conceivable that moderate partisans in Congress found policymaking information from moderate lobbyists of the other party particularly welcome. Most of the legislators who crossed over the party divide to give access to opposing party lobbyists (about 61 percent) were Democrats.

As before, I systematically present the main finding related to campaign contributions and access in regression analysis. In logit regressions drawing on single-lobbyist cases, displayed in Table 6, I test how the association between contributions and successfully gaining access varies with the ideological distance between lobbyists and legislators by interacting the two. In equations 1 to 3, the dependent variable is successful access given a request. Equations 4 and 5 shift the dependent variable to gaining access to legislators personally rather than their staff given success in achieving access of either kind. Equation 1 includes this interaction term and its additive components, as well as year fixed effects. Equation 2 adds the usual set of member and registrant controls. Equation 3 replicates Equation 2 among copartisan legislators as patterns seen above suggest similar findings within this group. Equation 4 regresses personal access to legislators on the full set of independent variables, and Equation 5 replicates it for copartisans.<sup>17</sup>

Table 6: Logit Regressions - Campaign Contributions to Members of Congress, Ideological Distance, and Success in Gaining Access, 1998-2019

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<sup>17</sup>These equations do not include the “In-House” dummy variable as it only has zeros in this sample.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	All Members		Copartisans	All Members	Copartisans
	Gaining Access			Personal Access	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Contribution	2.827*** (0.581)	3.153*** (0.618)	3.539*** (0.916)	2.585* (1.385)	19.959*** (1.244)
Ideo. Distance	1.540*** (0.576)	1.473* (0.779)	2.082 (2.238)	-0.280 (1.239)	5.670 (6.380)
Contribution × Ideo. Distance	-4.944*** (1.342)	-5.124** (2.074)	-10.312** (4.734)	7.173 (7.583)	21.011*** (7.767)
Republican		-0.573 (0.994)	-1.513 (1.368)	-0.293 (0.825)	-51.379*** (5.026)
Senator		0.847 (0.562)	0.771 (0.682)	2.167*** (0.723)	8.849*** (2.405)
Majority		0.412 (0.926)	2.360* (1.260)	0.194 (0.796)	18.172*** (2.857)
Leadership		0.748 (0.717)	0.890 (0.728)	0.254 (0.799)	-5.403*** (1.163)
Power Cmte.		-0.097 (0.374)	0.033 (0.475)	0.752 (0.972)	0.660 (1.811)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.		-0.564 (0.374)	-1.357** (0.618)	0.428 (0.770)	-7.176*** (0.877)
No. Clients		-1.915** (0.874)	-0.967 (0.593)	-1.576*** (0.596)	-16.146*** (1.855)
Constant	-1.884*** (0.668)	2.058 (1.928)	0.497 (1.508)	-9.254*** (1.845)	11.406 (7.226)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	586	551	378	205	97
R <sup>2</sup>	0.696	0.768	0.734	0.857	0.959
χ <sup>2</sup>	416.654***	455.621***	261.323***	210.832***	122.892***

Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Due to the interaction term involving campaign contributions and ideological distance, the additive term for contributions now measures their effect on the likelihood of gaining access when a lobbyist requests access to an ideologically identical member of Congress. Likewise, the additive term for ideological distance measures its effect on gaining access when the lobbyists have not contributed to the legislator. The interaction term measures the differential effect of contributions as ideological distance increases. Taken together, then, contributions are positively related to the likelihood of gaining access to ideologically

identical members, but this effect dwindles as ideological distance increases. Contributions become negatively associated with getting access when ideological distance increases, but ideologically disparate dyads are also rare (Figure 5). For lobbyists who did not make campaign contributions, legislators' ideological distance from them is positively related to the likelihood of gaining access. This surprising finding is driven by lobbyists' greater success overall with opposing party members noted above, but it weakens in statistical significance with the addition of control variables and loses it altogether when only copartisans are examined.

Finally, turning the focus to getting personal access to members of Congress rather than their staff, equations 4 and 5 in Table 6 show that contributions have a helpful effect, particularly for copartisans. The effect of contributions, however, does not vary with ideological distance, which does not emerge as a significant predictor on its own either. Senators, party leaders, and legislators sitting on foreign affairs committees are less likely to grant personal access to copartisan lobbyists than others as they experience greater demand for it, as are Republicans, but these effects generalize poorly to the full data of both copartisans and opposing members.

## 4 Conclusion

The idea that wealthy organizations and individuals may motivate government officials to make policy that favors them by contributing money to their campaigns ought to worry anyone that cares about the health of representative government. From this point of view, it is perhaps comforting that research has uncovered only inconsistent evidence that contributions influence how elected legislators vote on bills. If it is far from clear that legislators' most salient action is driven by private money, why does the public view campaign contributions with so much disapproval, and why do policy outcomes align much better with the preferences of the wealthy? Increasingly, scholars pay close attention to the influence that moneyed

interests may wield over legislators' less publicized activities. They reason that campaign contributions may facilitate donors' effort to obtain access to legislators, which is crucial for influencing their policy decisions. This theory, however, has received scarce empirical testing due to the difficulty of collecting data on outside actors' access to legislators.

Novel data on foreign lobbying made available under the Foreign Agents Registration Act are well suited for examining whether contributions facilitate access to officials. The statute requires lobbyists acting on behalf of foreign entities to disclose the campaign contributions they make to U.S. political candidates and their contact with U.S. officials. The FARA data provide an extra piece of useful information as lobbyists indicate the results of their requests for access to officials through the language they use in reports. This information constitutes a novel and crucial dimension of lobbyists' access-seeking behavior with respect to Congress - the distinction between members of Congress to whom they did not seek access, those they sought access to but unsuccessfully, and those to whom they successfully obtained access. Making use of these actions and outcomes, I study the relationship between lobbyists' contributions and access-seeking in foreign lobbying from 1998 to 2019 in a systematic effort to test the link between money and access.

Organizing the data based on members of Congress and lobbyists, I analyze the linkage between campaign contributions and access-seeking in two sequential stages. First is the intent of contributions - whether contributions relate to which legislators lobbyists sought access to. Second is the effectiveness of contributions - whether contributions helped lobbyists obtain the access they requested. I also ask whether contributions made it more likely for lobbyists to get access to legislators personally rather than their staff, as well as how lobbyists' ideology matters for their ability to get access. The findings lend strong support to the theory that contributions facilitate access and that donors understand as much. In terms of intent, clearly a major purpose of contributions is seeking access to successful candidates; lobbyist requests for access focused strongly on recipients of their contributions. They attempted to access about 30 percent of the legislators they had contributed to but

almost none of the others. With respect to results, contributions demonstrably work; given a request for access, contributions on average elevated lobbyists' chance of gaining access by 8.4 percentage points and provided a strong boost for personal access. Regarding the mediating influence of ideology, by linking lobbyist ideology - as inferred from their past experience working in Congress as members or staffers - to contributions and access-seeking, I show that contributions are most helpful for lobbyists to gain access to ideologically similar copartisan members of Congress.

Research on the effect of campaign contributions on legislators' behavior faces a fundamental endogeneity problem: If donors strategically make contribution decisions in consideration of how likely their money will induce desired behavior from different legislators, this selection into treatment will introduce bias into the statistical association between contributions and legislator behavior, causing it to overstate or understate the causal effect of money. Information in the FARA data on lobbyists' requests for access to members of Congress helps ameliorate the endogeneity problem to a considerable degree. Lobbyists likely requested access to legislators whom they believed to have a reasonable chance of granting access. The findings, therefore, are not driven by members who were very unlikely to give access and to whom lobbyists accordingly chose not to contribute money, anticipating that it would likely be futile. I address what endogeneity concern remains with propensity score matching on legislators predicted to have similar likelihood of receiving lobbyist contributions based on member and lobbyist characteristics.

The issue scope of foreign lobbying arguably boosts one's confidence in the link between contributions and access. Residing outside the electoral constituencies of members of Congress but interested in affecting U.S. government policy, foreign entities arguably carry a stigma of illicit foreign interference when interacting with U.S. officials, a concern with image and reputation that officials should heed. If this concern, all else equal, makes members of Congress less likely to be swayed by the campaign contributions of foreign entities' U.S. agents, it should make it more difficult to find an effect of contributions in foreign lobbying

than in domestic lobbying, thus making the findings of this paper more remarkable.

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Supplemental Information for

“Campaign Contributions Buy Access to Congressional  
Offices: Evidence from Foreign Lobbying”

# Appendix

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## A Classifying Access Seeking

Independently from each other, two undergraduate research assistants manually coded the same 2,000 mentions of members of Congress in FARA reports randomly sampled from a total of over 70,000, along with the context surrounding them (150 characters on both sides), and determined whether these mentions indicated lobbyist requests for access and, if so, whether these requests were fulfilled. Their codings agreed 91.2 percent of the time and I reconciled their differences. Using 75 percent of these reconciled manual entries I built two machine learning models based on the Random Forest algorithm, one identifying requests for access and the other classifying the outcomes of these requests as indicated by context. I then tested these models on the remaining 25 percent of manually coded entries by comparing model predictions with manual determinations. Table 7 displays the results, including the rate at which machine codings agree with human coding and are therefore “correct,” as well as two common metrics - precision and recall. Precision measures the proportion of the data points classified as relevant by the algorithms which are actually relevant, and recall expresses their ability to find all relevant instances in the data.

Table 7: Validation of Machine Learning Models for Classifying Lobbyist Contact

### (a) Identifying Requests for Access

Human Coding	Machine Coding Correctness Rate
No Access Seeking	89.5%
Access Seeking	95.3%

- Precision =  $\frac{\text{True Positives}}{\text{True Positives} + \text{False Positives}} = \frac{223}{223 + 27} = 89.2\%$
- Recall =  $\frac{\text{True Positives}}{\text{True Positives} + \text{False Negatives}} = \frac{223}{223 + 11} = 95.3\%$

### (b) Classifying Results of Requests for Access

Human Coding	Machine Coding Correctness Rate
Unfulfilled Request	96.6%
Fulfilled Request	92.4%

- Precision =  $\frac{\text{True Positives}}{\text{True Positives} + \text{False Positives}} = \frac{280}{280 + 16} = 94.6\%$
- Recall =  $\frac{\text{True Positives}}{\text{True Positives} + \text{False Negatives}} = \frac{280}{280 + 10} = 96.6\%$

Given the overall satisfactory rate of correct predictions, I used the models to classify the remaining legislator mentions.

## B List of Congressional Staff Titles

In order to determine whether lobbyist requests for access were intended for members of Congress themselves or their staff, I detect the following congressional staff titles in report language in descriptions of contact.

- Chief of Staff
- Deputy Chief of Staff
- Legislative Director
- Senior Legislative Assistant
- Legislative Assistant
- Legislative Counsel
- Legislative Correspondent
- Press Secretary
- Communications Director
- Congressional Aide
- State Director
- District Director
- Deputy District Director
- District Representative
- Projects Coordinator
- Grants Coordinator
- Caseworker
- Constituent Services Representative
- Staff Assistant
- Executive Assistant
- Personal Assistant
- Office Manager
- Scheduler
- Office of [Member of Congress]

## C List of Words and Phrases Indicating Campaign Contributions

In order to identify lobbyists' campaign contributions to members of Congress, I detect the following word stems, words, and phrases in report language in descriptions of contact.

- Campaign
- Contribution
- Donat
- PAC
- Elect
- for President
- for Congress / Senate / House
- People for / Citizens for / Friends of

## D Robustness Checks

I conduct three robustness checks - organizing the data by Congress rather than year, broadening the variable for campaign contributions to include any contribution made during members' present terms in Congress, and propensity score matching of members by their propensity to receive contributions from lobbyists. In each one I alter the data in a particular way and then perform logistic regression analysis which mirrors that in the main analysis. Rationales and descriptions for the robustness checks can be found in the main text.

### D.1 Organizing the Data by Congress

Table 8: Logit Regressions - Contributions, Ideology, and Access to Members of Congress, 1998-2019 (Data Organized by Congress)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Request for Access (1)	Gaining Access (2) (3)		Personal Access (4)
Contribution	3.889*** (0.048)	0.391*** (0.059)	1.826*** (0.554)	2.806** (1.412)
Close Race	0.032 (0.053)	0.070 (0.079)		
Ideo. Distance			0.666 (0.572)	-0.263 (1.308)
Contribution $\times$ Close Race	-0.287*** (0.092)	-0.144 (0.146)		
Contribution $\times$ Ideo. Distance			-3.687** (1.672)	15.325* (8.510)
Republican	-0.220*** (0.063)	0.208*** (0.056)	-0.608 (0.581)	-0.095 (0.926)
Senator	0.238*** (0.074)	-0.169** (0.079)	0.273 (0.406)	2.197*** (0.706)
Majority	0.022 (0.039)	-0.017 (0.054)	0.479 (0.534)	0.130 (0.797)
Leadership	1.141*** (0.084)	0.007 (0.128)	0.021 (0.563)	0.736 (0.930)
Power Cmte.	0.299*** (0.067)	0.062 (0.064)	0.263 (0.323)	0.696 (0.793)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.	0.981*** (0.063)	0.070 (0.054)	-0.230 (0.288)	0.472 (0.737)

In-House	-0.888*** (0.050)	1.540*** (0.099)		
No. Clients	0.131*** (0.004)	-0.030*** (0.009)	0.877 (0.552)	-2.707*** (0.812)
No. Lobbyists	0.001 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.004)		
Constant	-6.456*** (0.106)	1.084*** (0.199)	-3.248*** (1.245)	-7.076*** (2.228)
Congress FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	831,713	7,920	500	198
R <sup>2</sup>	0.239	0.183	0.602	0.835
$\chi^2$	20,526.860***	1,144.408***	294.078***	194.657***

Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## D.2 Broadening Campaign Contributions

Table 9: Logit Regressions - Contributions, Ideology, and Access to Members of Congress, 1998-2019 (Alternative Variable for Contributions)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Request for Access	Gaining Access		Personal Access
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Contribution	3.422*** (0.046)	0.356*** (0.058)	2.788*** (0.565)	1.850** (0.805)
Close Race	0.036 (0.054)	0.103 (0.080)		
Ideo. Distance			1.450* (0.753)	-0.340 (1.232)
Contribution $\times$ Close Race	-0.204*** (0.076)	-0.242* (0.135)		
Contribution $\times$ Ideo. Distance			-4.410** (1.835)	-1.129 (2.827)
Republican	-0.229*** (0.060)	0.246*** (0.057)	-0.445 (0.973)	-0.495 (0.838)
Senator	0.137** (0.070)	-0.232*** (0.081)	0.511 (0.534)	2.007*** (0.720)
Majority	0.053 (0.038)	0.014 (0.055)	0.388 (0.939)	0.220 (0.779)
Leadership	1.039*** (0.077)	-0.050 (0.132)	0.697 (0.729)	-0.193 (0.762)
Power Cmte.	0.270*** (0.063)	0.037 (0.065)	-0.192 (0.377)	0.720 (0.942)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.	0.955*** (0.060)	0.032 (0.054)	-0.491 (0.376)	0.041 (0.733)

In-House	-0.982*** (0.049)	1.584*** (0.100)		
No. Clients	0.100*** (0.004)	-0.038*** (0.010)	-1.901** (0.874)	-1.392*** (0.537)
No. Lobbyists	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.0003 (0.004)		
Constant	-6.322*** (0.103)	1.106*** (0.201)	1.871 (1.914)	-10.401*** (1.789)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	1,082,779	8,746	551	205
R <sup>2</sup>	0.218	0.205	0.763	0.842
$\chi^2$	21,393.750***	1,425.824***	451.017***	204.760***

Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

### D.3 Analysis of Matched Samples

For each year in the data, I match members of Congress who have similar propensities to receive campaign contributions from lobbyists requesting access to them. These propensities are predicted probabilities generated by a logit equation with receiving campaign contributions as the dependent variable. The analysis in Table 10 draws on matched member-registrant dyads from all of the FARA data. The independent variables going into the propensity scores are member characteristics including party affiliation, chamber of service, most recent vote shares, majority status, positions in party leadership structures, seats on the most powerful committees, lobbying registrants’ in-house status, number of clients, and number of lobbyists. The analysis in Table 11 draws on matched member-registrant dyads from the subset consisting of single-lobbyist registrants who served in Congress and therefore have ideology estimates. Correspondingly, the independent variables additionally include the ideological distance between legislators and lobbyists but exclude lobbyists’ total number of clients. For the propensity score matching procedure, I adopt a caliper of .25 standard deviations of the logit of the propensity scores; only matches similar enough to fall inside this caliper are deemed acceptable. The procedure achieves balance between dyads with contributions (“treated” units) and dyads without contributions (“control” units) on most

independent variables (no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the .05 level).

Table 10: Logit Regressions - Contributions and Access to Members of Congress, 1998-2019 (Sample Obtained by Propensity Score Matching)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	All Member-Registrant Dyads			One-Lobbyist Registrants	
	Gaining Access	Personal Access	Personal Access	Gaining Access	Personal Access
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Contribution	0.266*** (0.073)	0.323*** (0.085)	0.946*** (0.133)	0.060 (0.206)	1.930*** (0.411)
Close Race		0.053 (0.147)	0.256 (0.241)	0.319 (0.298)	-0.043 (0.487)
Contribution × Close Race		-0.161 (0.197)	-0.130 (0.288)	-0.065 (0.456)	-0.277 (0.694)
Republican		0.306*** (0.085)	0.124 (0.123)	0.830*** (0.217)	-0.459 (0.328)
Senator		-0.209* (0.115)	-0.218 (0.206)	-0.070 (0.320)	-0.318 (0.457)
Majority		0.049 (0.086)	0.029 (0.136)	-0.242 (0.210)	0.347 (0.365)
Leadership		0.104 (0.175)	0.099 (0.341)	0.352 (0.255)	0.262 (0.774)
Power Cmte.		-0.042 (0.090)	-0.099 (0.134)	0.061 (0.250)	-0.265 (0.316)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.		-0.078 (0.078)	-0.611*** (0.128)	-0.257 (0.196)	-0.933** (0.423)
In-House		1.652*** (0.166)	0.387* (0.209)	1.137*** (0.277)	-0.365 (0.436)
No. Clients		-0.026* (0.014)	-0.007 (0.022)	-0.044 (0.067)	-0.472*** (0.120)
No. Lobbyists		0.010 (0.009)	0.008 (0.011)		
Constant	1.112*** (0.316)	1.092*** (0.339)	-0.772*** (0.342)	-0.212 (0.707)	1.378 (0.972)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4,948	4,948	1,938	820	371
R <sup>2</sup>	0.141	0.195	0.169	0.229	0.466
χ <sup>2</sup>	544.221***	769.715***	261.826***	153.688***	159.044***

Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 11: Logit Regressions - Contributions, Ideology, and Access to Members of Congress, 1998-2019 (Sample Obtained by Propensity Score Matching)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Gaining Access		
	All Members		Copartisans
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Contribution	2.662*** (0.973)	2.194** (1.038)	4.609** (2.345)
Ideo. Distance	0.296 (1.377)	-3.403 (4.094)	8.133 (11.084)
Contribution $\times$ Ideo. Distance	-3.640 (2.719)	-2.372 (3.637)	-16.855 (13.744)
Republican		3.334* (1.922)	11.216* (6.201)
Senator		-4.615*** (0.930)	2.730 (2.874)
Majority		-6.376*** (1.150)	1.841 (3.864)
Leadership		0.777 (1.317)	0.036 (1.853)
Power Cmte.		-0.058 (0.827)	0.271 (1.065)
Foreign Aff. Cmte.		-2.285*** (0.883)	-2.588** (1.083)
No. Clients		13.310*** (1.687)	12.851*** (2.288)
Constant	-1.159 (1.034)	-21.516*** (2.605)	-21.208*** (3.624)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Observations	160	160	140
R <sup>2</sup>	0.662	0.727	0.722
$\chi^2$	98.587***	112.715***	92.643***

*Notes: Logit estimates, standard errors clustered by member of Congress in parentheses.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01