

## Social Lobbying

Christian R. Grose (University of Southern California)

Pamela Lopez (American University)

Sara Sadhwani (University of Southern California)

Antoine Yoshinaka (University at Buffalo, SUNY)

**Abstract:** Does direct social lobbying cause legislators to support interest group-preferred policy? We theorize that direct social lobbying - the meeting of a lobbyist and public official outside of a formal office visit - persuades government officials to publicly support policy initiatives favored by interest groups. Social lobbying influences public officials because the social environment allows for greater receptivity to interest group messages. A lobbyist conducted a randomized field experiment in a legislature. Legislators randomly assigned to be socially lobbied were more likely to take positions supporting the interest group's preferred policy than were legislators lobbied in their offices or not contacted by the lobbyist. Legislators who were ideological allies of the interest group were most likely to be persuaded by social lobbying. The implications are significant, as political elites are influenced by the social environment; and interest group direct lobbying is influential when conducted in places not easily observed or regulated.

“In the first place our rulers will enforce the laws and make new ones where they are wanted.... You, as legislator, have...selected the men...[who will] have their meals in common.” –Plato (from Jowett 1871, 52)

Interest group lobbyists wine and dine public officials in democracies in the United States and across the globe. Lobbyists attempt to shape elite debate and affect public policy outcomes by hosting legislators, staff, and other public officials at receptions, restaurants, and bars. It is extremely common for lobbyists and interest groups to meet socially with legislators and staff in spaces away from the formal institutions and buildings of governance. For instance, members of the U.S. Congress, their staff, and lobbyists are regularly spotted dining together at Charlie Palmer steakhouse, just a short walk from the U.S. Capitol. U.S. executive branch officials meet lobbyists at coffee shops a few blocks from the White House.<sup>1</sup> The association of lobbyists to the European Parliament maintains a list of private dining spaces preferred by lobbyists and MPs.<sup>2</sup>

The ability for organized elite interests to influence policy outcomes has concerned political scientists for generations (Truman 1951; Gilens and Page 2014), and ordinary citizens have long been “aggressively suspicious of lobbyists” and the “pressure” these lobbyists apply to legislators (Matthews 1960). Lobbying privileges niche elite interests with resources over less organized interests in the legislative process (Kousser 2012, 121). Direct lobbying, in particular, is often conducted in less-transparent social settings hidden away from the media and without public knowledge or attention. Good government groups express concern that interest groups can directly advocate to public officials through social meetings that are not available to members of the general public. As we argue and show, these concerns may be warranted.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric Lichtblau, “Across from White House, Coffee with Lobbyists.” *New York Times* 24 June 2010. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/us/politics/25caribou.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/us/politics/25caribou.html?_r=0)>.

<sup>2</sup> “Where to Eat: Lobbyists’ Preferred Restaurants.” *AALEP* <<http://www.aalep.eu/where-eat>>.

Can an interest group influence legislators to publicly support policies it favors?<sup>3</sup> Does direct social lobbying – defined as the meeting of a lobbyist and public official outside of a formal office visit – cause legislators to support interest group-preferred public policy? Many scholars argue that direct lobbying, which is an in-person meeting where an interest group lobbyist makes a policy request of a legislator or legislative staffer, is not effective at persuading legislators to support a policy. We theorize that direct lobbying can cause a legislator to support a policy, but unlike other scholars we direct attention to the common practice of social lobbying in legislatures.

In our *theory of social lobbying*, we argue that lobbyists can be more influential when the “ask” occurs in social settings such as restaurants. We argue that direct social lobbying is effective at persuading legislators to support the interest group’s agenda because it cultivates a relationship with the legislators or their staff. Social lobbying also creates an environment that is comfortable so that public officials hear and act on the request. When lobbying occurs in an office, the interaction is more formal and in an environment where the official’s attention may be pulled towards other concerns. Outside of an office, lobbyists and officials may feel less constrained in their interactions and engage in more informal talk that can lead to agreement. Direct lobbying is most effective when public officials and lobbyists meet in a social setting.

The theory of social lobbying is tested with a field experiment of direct legislative lobbying.<sup>4</sup> In this experiment a contract lobbyist conducted a lobbying campaign for an interest group in a U.S. state legislature. One treatment group of legislative staff was randomly assigned and invited to

---

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this article, we interchangeably refer to legislators and legislative staff. While these concepts are not identical, they are similar, especially when one considers legislators as part of a broader “enterprise” of a legislative office and staff (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981; Miler 2010, 27). Lobbyists interact with legislative *enterprises* – and they directly lobby legislators and/or staff – in order to receive an outcome from the legislator. Thus, legislators, legislative enterprises, and legislative staff are treated as one theoretical concept even though the legislator is the unit of analysis.

<sup>4</sup> A pre-analysis plan was registered with EGAP, and the analysis in this article is directly from the pre-analysis plan. In addition, the pre-analysis was presented at a conference prior to the experiment being fielded by the lobbyist.

a meeting with the lobbyist in the legislators' formal offices in the capitol building. Another group was randomly assigned to be invited to a meeting with the same lobbyist in a social setting, at a restaurant near the capitol. Remaining legislative staff were in a control group not contacted.

The results show that legislators randomly assigned to the social lobbying group are more likely to agree to the lobbyist's "ask" to support the interest group's preferred policy in public and social media. The effect is greatest when we consider those who comply with the meeting requests and are actually treated: legislators in the social treatment group are approximately 26 percentage points more likely to support the public policy relative to both the office meeting treatment group and the control group. In particular, we find that ally legislators (those who have previously tended to agree with the interest group on policy) are most responsive to direct social lobbying. This suggests that social lobbying persuasion is less about brute force conversion to a policy position, but more about activating legislators to move toward their latent ideological preferences. In contrast, we find no effect of direct office lobbying on legislator support for the group-preferred policy relative to the control group of legislators.

The implications of this study are significant on theoretical, methodological, and practical grounds. Theoretically, our study stands in stark contrast to the dominant strain of research suggesting that direct lobbying is used primarily for informational purposes. Instead, we theorize that direct social lobbying can, in addition to providing information, cause legislators to be more inclined to take public positions supporting an interest group's preferred policy. Methodologically, field experiments are an influential method in the study of political behavior, but are less common in the study of political institutions (Butler 2014; Grose 2014; Stoker and John 2009). Some have examined interest group grassroots lobbying and access (Bergan 2009; Bergan and Cole 2014; Brodbeck, Harrigan, and Smith 2013; Han 2016; Kalla and Broockman 2016; Öhberg and Naurin

2015; and Richardson and John 2012).<sup>5</sup> Our study is the only field experiment, to our knowledge, utilizing direct in-person lobbying as the treatment, and it is the only study to examine the impact of social lobbying on legislator behavior (though see Rogowski and Sinclair 2012, who examined randomized social networks among members of Congress on legislative outcomes).<sup>6</sup> Even though “the aim of lobbying...is to influence public policy,” scholars have “avoided studying” interest group influence on legislators “at all costs” as it is difficult “to measure the concept quantitatively” (Mahoney 2007) because interest groups tend to take non-random meetings with a small number of legislators. We are able to quantitatively and causally identify the impact of social lobbying on legislator support for public policy. Finally, the findings suggest effective strategies for lobbying firms to employ, and may be of interest to policy practitioners.

### **Can Direct Lobbying Persuade Legislators?**

There is a longstanding debate in political science on the extent to which interest groups are able to influence legislative behavior, with no consensus on the effectiveness of direct lobbying. Schattschneider (1960), as summarized by Baumgartner and Leech (1998), suggests that interest groups put “pressure on legislators to do whatever the groups desired...,” yet other work suggests that interest groups exert much less ability to influence legislators’ public position-taking directly and instead serve to provide information (Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963). Others suggest that when direct lobbying occurs, elected officials respond by sending the requests to other officials instead of being directly responsive to the interest group (Richardson and John 2012).

---

<sup>5</sup> While not examining legislator responses to lobbying, there is important work examining legislator responsiveness to constituents (Bol et al. 2015; Butler 2014; Butler and Broockman 2011; Butler and Nickerson 2011; Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; De Vries, Dinas, and Solaz 2015; Mendez 2016) or differences between legislators and ordinary citizens (Butler and Kousser 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Others have considered whether lobbyists focus on the venue of the legislative branch, the bureaucracy, or the courts (Holyoke 2003; McKay 2010), but no one has examined the effectiveness of lobbying in social spaces.

Most scholars doubt that direct lobbying can persuade legislators to take actions requested by lobbyists or interest groups. The rationale underlying this scholarly conventional wisdom is that interest groups and lobbyists spend inordinate amounts of time with only a handful of legislators. Interest groups often “take the easy path of lobbying friendly legislators and bypassing potential opponents” (Hojnacki and Kimball 1999). This is a puzzling result because a majority coalition must be formed in order to pass legislation, which would suggest that interest groups should directly lobby both ally legislators and those pivotal legislators closer to the center of the ideological spectrum (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994). Furthermore, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of direct lobbying (Gray, Lowery, and Wolak 2004; Mahoney 2007), which would imply a greater number of legislators can be reached by interest groups. If interest groups are not frequently observed directly lobbying a large number of legislators, one might conclude that direct lobbying cannot affect legislator behavior and position-taking.

This conventional view asserts that, instead of direct persuasion, interest groups provide information and expertise to legislators by working closely with legislative allies who benefit from this expertise (Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hall and Miler 2008). In this sense the group does not engage in direct persuasion of allies, but instead provides assistance or communicates information (Wright 1996). Others argue that interest groups indirectly persuade other legislators to lobby on their behalf (e.g., Ainsworth 1997), or demonstrate that groups effectively engage in citizen grassroots efforts (Bergan 2009; Bergan and Cole 2014; Klingler 2016). When interest groups or lobbyists are shown to have an impact on legislators, it is argued not that they influence via direct lobbying campaigns but that they have greater *access* to legislators and legislative staff than typical citizens due in part to campaign contributions (Brodbeck, Harrigan, and Smith 2013; Chin, Bond, and Geva 2000; Heberlig, Hetherington, and Larson 2006; Kalla and Broockman 2016; Powell 2012). This research on campaign donations does not assess whether this direct access yields

legislative support for policy. Further, research on direct lobbying is plagued by the fact that lobbyists do not typically lobby legislators at random, thus rendering difficult the task of estimating the causal impact of lobbying on legislator behavior.

### **Theory: Direct Lobbying Influences Legislators to Take Policy Positions**

We agree that interest groups engage in subsidy to legislators by providing expertise and information; and that interest groups have greater access to legislators than regular citizens.

However, *we theorize that direct lobbying persuades legislators and their staff to publicly commit to a policy position.* In addition to providing information, lobbyists can activate legislators to support interest group-preferred policy through direct lobbying.

More specifically, interest groups generate support for policy by directly lobbying legislators to commit publicly to a policy proposal early or mid-way through the policy process (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Craig 2014). During the agenda-setting stages of the legislative process, direct lobbying by interest groups can be particularly effective in persuading legislators (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1993). The insertion of provisions into bills as they are being drafted, the determining of funding amounts in budgets, and the shaping of legislative language are most susceptible to direct lobbying by interest groups before the final legislative proposal has congealed (Evans 1996; Hojnacki and Kimball 1999), especially if the proposed policy change is incremental (Ainsworth and Hall 2010). Before a bill is voted on, legislators may choose to take positions on policy (Mayhew 1974), and this position-taking can create a commitment mechanism if the policy ultimately comes to a floor vote (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001). Other legislators prefer to hedge with ambiguous positions, take broad positions, or remain silent on the issue (Grose, Malhotra, and Van Houweling 2015; Somer-Topcu 2015; Yoshinaka and Grose 2011) in order to maintain flexibility as the policy process moves forward.

Because legislators can choose to publicly take positions prior to roll-call votes, interest groups seek to persuade legislators to support group-endorsed policy proposals. With non-roll-call position-taking, the legislator has fewer institutional and party constraints and can decide individually whether to publicly support a policy. In this realm, the interest group's direct lobbying can exert substantial influence. Interest groups can directly lobby on roll-call votes later in the process as well, reminding legislators of their earlier public commitments to a bill or policy. Still, when individual legislators endorse specific legislation or policy proposals publicly, the interest group's aims in the early part of the legislative process are met as there is an emerging elite perception of increasing support for the interest group's preferred policy.

#### **Social Lobbying: Receptivity Outside of the Office Activates Legislators to Support Policy**

Direct social lobbying is a crucial strategy that interest groups use to convince legislators to support a group-preferred position. Some effective lobbyists are successful at direct lobbying of legislators when they are able to *socially lobby* legislators or legislative staff. When studying informational lobbying, legislative subsidy, or grassroots lobbying; scholars have traditionally focused on the legislator's office as the locus of lobbying efforts. After all, roll calls are held and policy is crafted in the chambers of a legislature; and much legislative work is done in the offices of legislators with their staff. However, one of the most widespread lobbying strategies – though not systematically studied by scholars – is social lobbying. It is extremely common for interest groups to meet with legislators, executive branch officials, or staff in “private settings” (Garlick 2016, 3).

One of the best places to engage in direct lobbying so as to get the undivided attention of a legislator or staff member is to meet outside of the legislature. The day-to-day business of legislators pulls them in many directions, leading to short attention on some matters given their full schedules. In their offices, legislators and their staff are busy drafting legislation, working on bills,



attending hearings, and meeting with constituents. When legislators or staff meet with interest groups or lobbyists in legislators' offices, the time devoted to such meetings is often limited.

Strategically, it makes sense for a lobbyist to meet with a legislator or staffer out of a government building away from the attention-deficit-inducing environment inside the capitol. In the context of a social environment, as opposed to the office, connections developed between a lobbyist and legislator or staffer may be stronger and persist longer. In a less formal setting, legislators and staff may speak more openly to lobbyists than they could have in their offices.

Most importantly, the person who is lobbied will be more receptive in a social environment. The office space is not as conducive to legislators carefully hearing what an interest group wants in a public policy. Distracted and busy legislators or staff in their offices may perfunctorily take meetings, but not give their undivided attention to the interest group. Other legislators may pay attention during office meetings, but will forget what the interest group requested when legislators immediately turn to more meetings and tasks in an office filled with a voluminous amount of requests. In contrast, social lobbying is different as it takes the legislator or staff member out of the office, thus potentially making the experience more memorable.

Being in a social setting can create stronger connections that can make it easier for the legislator or legislator's staffer to say "yes" when asked directly for something by the lobbyist. By simply requesting the meeting and then holding it in a social location, the legislator or legislative staffer may feel that the lobbyist is signaling that their relationship is strong and thus is more receptive to the persuasive ask made by the lobbyist. Away from the office, there is a space created for the legislator or staffer to listen.

### **The Social Psychology of Social Lobbying**

In addition to social lobbying allowing the interest group to create greater attention and receptivity to their policy requests by moving legislators or staff out of the office, the act of lobbying

in a social setting can directly influence legislators for individual psychological reasons as well. The social psychology of this form of lobbying is that individual meetings at a restaurant or tavern, for instance, would be much more casual and potentially enjoyable for the lobbied. Social influence and social context can persuade ordinary people to change their behavior (Addonizio, Green, and Glaser 2007; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Han 2016; Panagopoulos 2010; Sinclair 2012) and solidary, social benefits can lead individuals to join interest groups or engage in collective action (Berry 1978; Clark and Wilson 1961; Olson 1965; Salisbury 1969). Most of this work on the importance of the social environment on changing behavior has been on regular citizens, but social considerations can also influence political elites. Legislators and their staff have cognitive, temporal, and perceptual constraints (Fenno 1978; Miler 2010; Ramey, Klingler, and Hollibaugh 2017) and social lobbying allows a request to break through and be acted upon by the legislator.

Interpersonal influence is likely to be higher in a social setting, as the level of comfort for both parties may be higher. When a meeting is held in a friendly environment where participants feel comfortable, more “informal talk” can ensue (Walsh 2004). Through less formal conversations, the lobbyist and legislative representative may be more willing to compromise or reach an agreement where the legislator supports a policy. In contrast, in the formal office environment, the lobbyist may communicate the same request, but the legislator or staffer may engage more formally. The casual, relaxed setting creates a perception of likability and friendship. These personal ties between interest groups and legislators have been asserted as central to the lobbying enterprise. As Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, 76) state, “...interest groups try to activate people they know personally and professionally” (see also, e.g., Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1972; Carpenter, Esterling, and Lazer 1998, Kollman 1997; McElroy 2006, 17). Direct lobbying in a social setting signals new social capital between the lobbyist and those who are lobbied. The social

lobbying process has the potential to succeed by creating a social – and not just a professional – connection between the lobbyists and legislators.

### **Social Lobbying in the United States and Around the World**

Social meetings are commonplace in the lobbying processes in legislatures in the United States and around the globe. Rosenthal (1986, 847), describing his studies of the Florida legislature, noted that he observed legislators and their staff “conducting business over drinks and meals” with an increased willingness to explore new policy areas. Lobbyists can create stronger relationships with legislators and legislative outcomes can be forged in “less formal surroundings, as members gathered after the day’s work for dinner and drinks and a night on the town....” (Blair and Stanley 1991, 499-500). Similarly, in California, across the street from the state capitol building, legislators, staff, and lobbyists are often found “[w]hen the day ends....at a steakhouse/bar... [that is] the de facto capitol clubhouse.”<sup>7</sup> Similar socializing between lobbyist and lobbied occurs in other states, such as in Missouri where “restaurants and commandeered storefront bars” are venues for lobbyists being “gregarious with...the politicians they court.”<sup>8</sup> In the Illinois legislature, then-state-senator Barack Obama and other state legislators engaged with lobbyists over poker and in other social settings (McGrath 2013). In almost all U.S. state capitals, lobbyists “wining, dining, [and] schmoozing” legislators is the norm (Nownes 2013, 123).

At the U.S. national level, as early as the first few Congresses of the late 1700s, lobbying took place “at private homes or social gatherings” (Pasley 2002, 90-91). In the contemporary era, it has remained common for interest groups to engage in lobbying of members of the U.S. Congress

---

<sup>7</sup> Hillel Aron, “What Happens When a Random Citizen Becomes a California Legislator?” *Los Angeles Weekly* 15 June 2015. < <http://www.laweekly.com/news/what-happens-when-a-random-citizen-becomes-a-california-legislator-5683157>>.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin McDermott, “Missouri Legislators Serve Hors D’oeuvres, Lobbyists Pass the Envelopes.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 21 September 2015. < [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/missouri-legislators-serve-hors-d-oeuvres-lobbyists-pass-the-envelopes/article\\_25786739-f633-59ff-b59e-5935ed75bfc6.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/missouri-legislators-serve-hors-d-oeuvres-lobbyists-pass-the-envelopes/article_25786739-f633-59ff-b59e-5935ed75bfc6.html)>.

outside of the office “under the guise of social visits” (Ornstein and Elder 1978, 97; quoted from McGrath 2006, 72). In the U.K., legislators are regularly lobbied in social settings, where MPs have reported that lobbyists procure drinks in a “crowded bar” in exchange for “listen[ing] to their spiel.”<sup>9</sup> Heather Podesta, discussing her lobbying activities in Washington, notes that “[t]he real work happens after hours...,” suggesting a social component that is crucially important to lobbyists.<sup>10</sup> U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, in arguing for stricter regulations on lobbying, explained the social setting in which lobbying occurs: “...it is not uncommon for lobbyists to perch themselves at the end of a bar and buy drinks for any congressional staffer who comes by” (Congressional Record 2005, V. 151, Part 12, p. 16014, July 14, 2005). Interest group lobbyists explain that “location and ambiance is key.”<sup>11</sup>

While social meetings and associated “asks” are commonly conducted by lobbyists when interacting with legislators and their staff, systematic research that examines direct lobbying has not considered the role of social lobbying on legislative behavior. Since interest groups have no way of enforcing a contract with a legislator (Fox and Rothenberg 2011), groups must turn to informal mechanisms of social interactions in order to persuade and enforce legislator support for interest group policy goals.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, we argue that social lobbying is more likely to result in the lobbyist persuading a legislator or legislative staffer to take a policy action because (1) the meeting is casual, social and

---

<sup>9</sup> James Forsyth, “The Lobbyists’ Web Still Threatens the Reputation of MPs, Parliament, and Politics.” *The Spectator* 23 February 2015. <<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2015/02/the-lobbyists-web-still-poses-a-threat-to-the-reputation-of-ministers-parliament-and-politics/>>.

<sup>10</sup> “Drinking and Talking Learns How Lobbyists Make and Scare Friends in Washington.” *Huffington Post* 31 July 2014. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/31/drinking-and-talking-lobbyists\\_n\\_5600225.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/31/drinking-and-talking-lobbyists_n_5600225.html)>.

<sup>11</sup> Megan R. Wilson. “15 Places in DC Where Lobbyists Talk Turkey.” *The Hill* 28 November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> It is possible that repeated social interactions could compel legislators and their staff to comply with interest group demands in the absence of a formal contract.

open, creating a comfortable environment in which to make a request; and (2) the act of holding a meeting in a social location makes the legislator more receptive to listening to the lobbyist than if the request were made in the office. This leads to the first hypothesis, which suggests that legislators are successfully lobbied directly by interest groups:

*Social lobbying hypothesis:* Direct social lobbying by interest groups increases the likelihood that a legislator will take a position supporting the interest group's preferred policy (relative to office lobbying or no lobbying by the interest group).

### **Activating Allies: Heterogeneous Effects of Social Direct Lobbying**

We also theorize that the effect of direct social lobbying on legislator willingness to support the interest group's policy is conditional on whether the legislator is an ideological ally of the interest group. While direct social lobbying is a tactic lobbyists use to persuade legislators, this persuasion is more likely to be effective with those legislators open or predisposed to the lobbyist request. For instance, a legislator who sometimes or often supports pro-choice positions is more likely to be persuaded by a direct social lobbying effort by the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) than is a legislator who always votes pro-life.

As we have argued above, social meetings create and reinforce strong ties between interest groups and legislators. While all meetings with legislators in a social setting may be more relaxed and comfortable, thus creating greater receptivity of the legislator to the message, those legislators with ideological preferences already in line with the interest group are most likely to be persuaded. The social lobbying technique activates ally legislators to support the interest group's preferred policy publicly. Though different from the legislative subsidy argument (Hall and Deardorff 1995) for why interest groups spend so much time with ally legislators, an implication is that direct social lobbying is most likely to work with those legislators who are ideological allies - or perhaps fence sitters - but not with ideological opponents of the interest group.

The social meetings in particular are most effective with ally legislators because the meetings are less about strenuous conversion to a position, but more about activating the legislators to move toward their pre-existing ideological positions. The social environment further activates the legislators by making it clear that this is a meaningful “ask” by the lobbyist, and this may be more apparent to allies of the interest group when the meeting is in a social setting. Had the meeting been in the office, it would have signaled that the request was not unusual; when the meeting is in a social setting to which one has been invited, it signals an intimacy and partnership between interest group and lobbyist that will cause the ally legislators to pay attention. In this instance, direct social lobbying will be most effective with legislators who are predisposed toward the lobbyist on account of being an ally of the interest group. Furthermore, the comfort level at a bar or restaurant will be greater when the interest group lobbyist knows the legislator is an ally.

This leads to the following conditional hypothesis:

*Ally legislators and social lobbying hypothesis:* Direct social lobbying by interest groups will cause legislators who are ideological allies of the interest groups to support group-preferred policy more than legislators who are not allies.<sup>13</sup>

**Alternative hypothesis: direct social lobbying will have no impact**

Many would argue, however, that direct contact by interest groups does not persuade legislators. It is not “the content of the message as such, but rather the characteristics of the interest group that induces potential changes in the policymaker’s behavior” (Potters and Van Winden 1992). Further, it is possible that the setting of the “ask” will have no impact. The strength of the existing ally relationship between group and legislator may be the only factor associated with the effectiveness of lobbying efforts (e.g. Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963). This alternative view suggests

---

<sup>13</sup> In addition, we also examine whether the legislator and lobbyist have a prior personal relationship separate from whether the legislator is an ally. Social lobbying may also conditionally affect support for the group-preferred policy, with legislators with strong preexisting personal relationships being more influenced by social lobbying than those with weaker personal relationships.

that the meetings – formally in legislator offices or informally outside of the offices – are unlikely to influence a one-shot request for legislators to engage in a policy activity. Perhaps repeated interactions and the strengthening of ties between interest groups and legislators would eventually lead to changes in policy support by legislators, but a one-time direct social lobbying meeting may not yield any effect.<sup>14</sup>

### **Study Design and Empirical Strategy: A Field Experiment Directly Lobbying Legislators**

To test our theoretical expectations, a between-subjects field experiment was conducted by a lobbyist where legislators in the California legislature were the unit of analysis.<sup>15</sup> The experiment’s pre-analysis plan was registered and the design and analyses presented in this paper are the same as those laid out in the pre-analysis plan.<sup>16</sup> A single lobbyist working for an interest group embedded the experiment in a direct lobbying campaign for a policy proposal because the lobbying firm was interested in learning ways to improve upon its effectiveness. The interest group client was an urban school district in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, and thus the interest group does not engage in partisan political activity. The lobbying firm has often worked for clients who push for increased state education spending, and thus, prior to the experiment, cultivated ties with members of both parties but particularly the majority party.

---

<sup>14</sup> If social lobbying was seen as an “investment” to be reaped later when a lobbyist finally makes an “ask” after many social meetings, then this would attenuate the immediate effects that we posit are caused by social lobbying. However, we argue that social lobbying even in a one-shot setting can affect policy positioning by legislators.

<sup>15</sup> The California legislature is an excellent case that generalizes to other major legislatures. Because California’s legislature is highly professionalized, direct lobbying in the California legislature will be similar to that found in the U.S. Congress and other major legislatures outside of the United States. California also has extensive rules regarding direct lobbying and has a large number of lobbying firms and interest groups (Kousser 2012, 110), thus making this lobbyist’s experimental interventions with legislative staff very common (and potentially biasing toward null effects given the large numbers of lobbyists competing for the attention of legislators and staff). California is also the most populated state in the U.S., and its public policies affect more than 10 percent of the U.S. population.

<sup>16</sup> In addition, the research design and analysis plan were presented for public consumption at a political science conference.

While the interest group is nonpartisan, its policy agenda is to maintain or increase state spending for education, including for non-citizens and non-English speakers. This policy position has historically been more frequently favored by liberals and Democrats in the state legislature, and Democrats have held the majority of both chambers since 1997. In this lobbying campaign in which the field experiment was embedded, the interest group sought to maintain the status quo level of spending for adult education in the state budget of 2015 (spending on adult education includes programs such as English-language training, citizenship courses, and job training). The lobbying effort to maintain adult education spending was in response to a proposed reduction in funding for adult education programs.

The lobbyist fielded the experiment in April and May of 2015. Specifically, in the treatment groups (discussed below), the lobbyist contacted the legislative staff member who focused on education policy; and in the control group the lobbyist did not contact the legislator or staff member. Each legislator was randomly assigned to one of three groups. The first group, the *Office lobby treatment*, was assigned to 40 legislators. The second group, the *Social lobby treatment*, was assigned to another 41 legislators. The third group, the *Control condition*, was assigned to the remaining 38 legislators (total n=119).<sup>17</sup> All treatment interventions were scheduled and conducted within a period of two months. The time frame was this long to allow for the substantial number of one-on-one direct lobbying meetings in both treatment conditions, but it was also short enough to limit any heterogeneity due to the passage of time.

*Outcome variable.* Conceptually, the outcome variable of interest is a legislator's willingness to support publicly an interest group-preferred policy. This sort of behavior falls under Mayhew's (1974) definition of position-taking activity. Instead of assessing the legislator's choice on

---

<sup>17</sup> The California Assembly has 80 members, and the California Senate has 40 members. There was one vacancy during the period and thus the total sample size was 119.



a roll call, we measure position-taking earlier in the legislative game. We do so for several reasons. First, the interest group and lobbyist wanted legislators to publicly support or praise adult education programs. The particular policy supported by the interest group, to maintain current levels of adult education spending, was unlikely to be put up for a separate vote or amendment, and was not ultimately subject to an individual floor vote. The interest group's goal was to build momentum among legislators by getting some to publicly support continued funding for adult education programs in the budget, to praise adult education programs in their districts, or to highlight the importance of state adult education programs broadly. The final budget bill ultimately favored the interest group's position and did not include a reduction in adult education funding. The budget bill passed on a nearly party-line vote.<sup>18</sup>

Second, much research on legislative lobbying focuses on committee or floor roll calls, but it is also important to analyze the effect of lobbying during earlier periods in the policy-making process. After all, the agenda-setting stage of state budget-making and associated legislator position-taking are crucial early steps in the policy-making process. Third, it is substantively and theoretically important to study legislative communications, as these communications can shape support for the final policy choices on the floor.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the legislator's decision to enunciate a position in support of the policy is much less likely to be affected by other considerations such as party pressure and logrolling. It offers a cleaner test of our hypotheses than a budget roll call where the interest group's education funding item may or may not be central to the final passage vote.

---

<sup>18</sup> Our pre-analysis plan focused on legislator position-taking on the policy as the dependent variable and not the final roll-call vote, and consistent with that plan, we do not analyze the budget roll call. There was no roll call on the individual policy item of interest, as the interest group lobbyist had anticipated.

<sup>19</sup> We do not consider willingness to co-sponsor the legislation as an outcome variable, as there is a limit on the number of co-sponsors a bill can have in the legislature being studied. In addition, since the policy item of interest is a specific line for funding in a broader bill, the policy item that the interest group cares about is not amenable to co-sponsorship analysis.

The dependent variable for this conceptual variable of interest is *Public support for interest group's preferred policy*, which we measure as whether the legislator publicly commits to supporting continued funding for adult education programs or publicly supports adult education more generally. As described below, the intervention by the lobbyist asks specifically for a statement of public support from the legislator on his/her web site, Twitter, and/or Facebook in support of adult education programs. The dependent variable *Public support for interest group's preferred policy* is coded 1 if the legislator publicly supports the policy item, and 0 otherwise (this is the absence of a position, as no legislator explicitly opposed this policy item). Supporting the policy includes specific mentions of continued funding for adult education, or statements endorsing the importance of adult education programs. To measure this dependent variable, a research assistant monitored all legislators' websites, online press releases, Twitter feeds, and Facebook sites on a weekly basis following the administration of the lobbying interventions until the budget bill passed near the end of the 2015 regular legislative session.

*Independent variables: Treatment and control conditions.* The key independent variables of interest are two treatment variables relative to a control group of legislators where there is no contact. The first independent variable, *Office lobby treatment*, is coded 1 for legislators randomly assigned to be contacted for an in-office meeting. For this group of legislators, the lobbyist requested a meeting with the legislative aide assigned to the relevant policy area to be held in the legislator's office. All of these invitations were sent by the lobbyist's assistant by email on the same day, and a follow-up invitation was sent to all legislative staff that did not respond to the initial request. Appendix A displays the text of this invitation, which was written by the lobbyist. In total, 68% of legislators complied with the request for an in-office meeting with the lobbyist.

During the office visit, the lobbyist presented a written summary of the policy that the interest group favored, and included an explicit written request that the legislator publicly support

the policy on their web site, in a press release, on Twitter, or on Facebook.<sup>20</sup> The lobbyist also verbally asked in each meeting that the legislator explicitly support the policy and attempted to keep the pitch to the legislative aide relatively constant across all offices receiving the *Office lobby treatment*, though the conversation between lobbyist and lobbied was obviously semi-structured.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the same lobbyist took part in every meeting with legislative staff, creating consistency across legislators due to just one lobbyist holding all meetings.<sup>22</sup>

The second treatment variable is the *Social lobby treatment*, which was conducted by the lobbyist with the legislators randomly assigned to receive this treatment. This variable is coded 1 if the legislator was assigned to this treatment, and 0 if not. In this case, the lobbyist requested a meeting with the relevant legislative staffer outside of the capitol buildings and in a social location. The text of the invitation sent to all legislative staff assigned to the social lobby treatment group is displayed in Appendix A (the invitation was written by the lobbyist). Specifically, for those who agreed to the invitation to meet in the social location, meetings were conducted in a restaurant that is one block from the state capitol. All social meetings were conducted at the same restaurant and by the same lobbyist who conducted the office treatment meetings. This restaurant is known as a

---

<sup>20</sup> Specifically, this written statement noted the importance of maintaining funding levels for adult education in the state budget, and included a list of schools in the legislator's district that benefited from the funds. It also included a specific request that the legislator support adult education publicly.

<sup>21</sup> One of the advantages of field experiments is the realism and external validity that is yielded in studies embedded in the real-world of politics (Green and Gerber 2004). Obviously, though, we face a trade-off in this study between external validity and internal validity. The lobbyist attempted to keep the verbal statements as constant as possible during meetings in both treatment groups, but realistically this is hard to assess and the verbal conversations were of course not identical across individual legislators. The written request was presented to every legislative staff member in all treatment conditions thus enhancing the level of constancy and internal validity across lobbyist-legislator visits. Of course, the fact that the interactions and informality may have been different in the office versus the social setting is part of what the social lobbying theory expects.

<sup>22</sup> There is a tradeoff between the heterogeneity of the treatment and the ability to schedule a large number of meetings. We opted to go with a single lobbyist rather than a team of lobbyists in order to hold constant, as much as possible, lobbyist effects. We recognize that using a larger number of lobbyists may have given us more statistical power in a within-subjects framework. Yet, as a first-ever study of its kind, we opted for the less onerous approach of delegating this task to a single lobbyist in a between-subjects experiment.

frequent gathering place for legislators, staff, and lobbyists. Because of California's gift ban laws, lobbyists are not allowed to spend more than \$10 per person per month. Given these strict restrictions, legislative staff typically purchase their own food or drinks during social meetings with lobbyists. Thus, we are confident this treatment is picking up the social setting and not some sort of *quid pro quo* relationship where a lobbyist purchases a meal for a staffer, and then makes a request.

The lobbyist verbally made the same request for the legislator to support adult education programs broadly or to support the specific budget line item in the *Social lobby treatment* group meetings, though again the conversations were semi-structured. In this treatment condition, the lobbyist presented a written summary, including the same written request that the legislator publicly support the policy on his/her web site, a press release, Twitter, or Facebook. Thus, the written text of the request presented in person during the *Social lobby treatment* is the same as the request presented in the *Office lobby treatment*, and the content of the verbal requests was also similar in office and social treatment conditions.

The key variation is the setting of the request, and the associated environment and context of the different settings. In the social lobbying treatment group, 44% of legislative staff complied with the request for a meeting at the restaurant. An email was sent to all staffers in the social treatment group on the same day that the office treatment group received their invitations. Like the office treatment group, a follow-up invitation was sent to those who did not reply to the social meeting invitation. These two treatment variables are contrasted to the *Control condition*. In the control group, legislators received no contact from the interest group. This control condition serves as the reference category in the statistical analyses.

We examine both intent-to-treat (ITT) and treatment on the treated (TOT). We first examine all legislators assigned to either the *Office lobby* or *Social lobby* treatments and compare

their behavior to the *Control condition* legislators. We conduct difference of means tests and estimate OLS for some analyses (Freedman 2008 argues that linear models should be estimated on experiments as “randomization does not justify logistic regression”). We also estimate a 2SLS model to examine the magnitude of the effects of those legislators actually treated given that all legislators did not comply with the request for a meeting. We use the treatment assignments to the *Office lobby* and *Social lobby* treatments as instrumental variables in the 2SLS model.

*Testing heterogeneous treatment effects.* In our theory, we anticipated that legislators who are allies of the interest group lobbyist will be more likely to be activated or persuaded by the lobbyist intervention, particularly the social lobbying treatment. We measured pre-treatment whether a legislator is an ally of the interest group. We conducted a pre-treatment survey with the interest group lobbyist rating each legislator on a 5-point scale as to whether the legislator is an ally of the interest group. The variable *Ally of interest group* was constructed from a question asked pre-treatment: “In your opinion, how well does the phrase “ally of the interest group” describe the legislator? [1=not well at all; 2=slightly well; 3=moderately well; 4=very well; 5=extremely well]. We recoded these responses so that *Ally of interest group* ranges from 0 to 1 (for ease of interpretation). We then include the multiplicative interaction terms *Social lobby treatment x ally of interest group* and *Office lobby treatment x ally of interest group*. We estimate an OLS model including these variables and the treatment variables.

A second conditional relationship pertains to the lobbyist’s own connections with either the legislator or legislative staff. The variable *Personal relationship with lobbyist* was created from a question asked to the lobbyist pre-treatment: “How well would you rate your relationship with the legislator and his/her staff? 1=very negative; 2=somewhat negative; 3=neutral or nonexistent; 4=somewhat positive; 5=very positive.” This variable was then rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (again, for ease of interpretation). Finally, we interact this *Personal relationship with lobbyist* variable with

our treatment variables to assess the conditional relationship of direct social lobbying. We estimate another OLS model including these variables, the ally and ally interaction variables, and the treatment variables.

For robustness purposes, we also measure whether the legislator is an *Ideological ally of the interest group*. Because the pre-treatment ally measure is a subjective coding from the lobbyist, we also wanted an exogenous, more objective measure to test the conditional expectations of the legislator being an ally of the interest group. Another measure of whether a legislator is allied with an interest group is the legislator's revealed ideological preference. In this instance, since the interest group pushes for increased education spending, especially for adults, immigrants, and non-English speakers, more liberal legislators are allies while more conservative legislators are likely not to be allies (Connolly and Mason 2016; McElroy and Benoit 2010). In this robustness analysis, we measure *Ideological ally of the interest group* as the ideology estimate based on revealed preferences from all roll calls cast by state legislators as computed by Shor and McCarty (2011, 2015). In an additional model, we include the variables *Ideological ally of the interest group*, *Social lobby treatment x ideological ally* and *Office lobby treatment x ideological ally* to test the conditional treatment effects of being an ally legislator. One advantage of using these revealed ideology measures is that they are directly comparable across chambers. A drawback, however, is that we lose all first-term legislators who were not scaled by Shor and McCarty (they only scaled legislators serving prior to 2015), thus reducing the sample size. The ideology score ranges from -2.6 (most liberal) to 2.4 (most conservative). Given our theory, we should expect that ally legislators who have more liberal ideological records will be most likely to be affected by the lobbyist treatment meeting.

*Block randomization.* We conducted block randomization within two groups (with legislators with strong preexisting relationships defined as those above the median of the *Personal*

*relationship with lobbyist* measure, and legislators with weaker preexisting relationships defined as those below the median of the *Personal relationship with lobbyist* measure). Appendix B presents a randomization check on co-variates, which shows we were able to achieve balance in the conditions (the means were not statistically different from one another). Further, a multinomial logistic regression of treatments on observables confirms this (likelihood-ratio  $\chi^2=8.84$ ,  $p=0.36$ ).

The randomization in which legislators were assigned into one of the treatment or control groups means that, in expectation, all other potential confounding explanations are controlled for via the randomization. For this reason, we do not need to include any additional “control” variables that would typically be included in associational studies of legislator position-taking.

*Ethics.* Finally, we also want to reiterate that the lobbying firm conducted these interventions on behalf of an interest group in order to test the effectiveness of different lobbying strategies. Ethically, this is different than recent scholarly-led interventions with fictitious constituents contacting elected officials to test questions of responsiveness bias, as an actual interest-group lobbyist engaged in interventions. Grose (2015) argues that real-world political groups should conduct experiments for scholars to analyze, when feasible, so as to avoid deception of public officials (though current U.S. IRB regulations do not require this, as public officials are considered exempt categories of research). This research study was submitted and formally exempted by multiple IRBs.

### **Results: Social Lobbying Leads Legislators to Support Interest Group Policy**

We find that direct social lobbying causes legislators to support the policy preferred by the interest group. Table 1 compares the mean percentage of legislators assigned to the social lobbying treatment group who supported the public policy; the mean percentage of legislators assigned to the office lobbying treatment group who supported the public policy; and the mean percentage of legislators assigned to the control group (who received no contact) who supported the public

policy. The legislators in each group include both compliers (legislators whose staff accepted the invitation to meet with the lobbyist at the requested location) and non-compliers (legislators whose staff did not agree to the lobbyists' requested meetings). As these include all legislators based on assignment to treatment regardless of compliance, these are estimates of ITT effects. Given that compliance was lowest among the social lobbying treatment, the true individual effect of the meeting between lobbyist and legislative staffer will be larger.

As shown in Table 1, 19.5% of legislators in the *Social lobby treatment* group publicly supported the policy favored by the interest group. In the *Control condition*, where legislators were not lobbied in any setting, only 7.9% of legislators expressed support. In the *Office lobby treatment* group, 7.5% of legislators expressed support. A difference-of-means test between the *Social lobby treatment* and the *Control* group shows a statistically significant and large increase in legislators supporting the interest group policy (11.6 percentage-point difference,  $p = 0.067$ ). The difference of means between the *Social lobby treatment* and the *Office lobby treatment* was also of a very large magnitude (12.0 percentage-point difference,  $p = 0.059$ ). Given that these are ITT estimates and that the sample is relatively small, this is a significant finding. Social lobbying is an effective strategy for interest groups to garner policy support from legislators.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Next, we examine the effects of the two treatments among those who were actually treated - meaning those who agreed to have the meeting with the interest group lobbyist at the requested location - relative to other legislators. To assess the individual effect of treatment on the treated (TOT), we estimated a 2SLS model with the assignment-to-treatment as the instrumental variables for being treated. We report the second-stage regression in Table 2, where the dependent variable is again 1 if the legislator expressed support for the interest group policy and 0 if not, and the coefficient on each variable is the magnitude of the effect of being treated.



[Insert Table 2 about here]

This 2SLS analysis indicates that the size of the effect of the *Social lobby treatment* on those actually treated by the social meeting is quite large. The coefficient of 0.265 in Table 2 shows that legislators who were socially lobbied supported the policy 26.5 percentage points more often than those legislators in the control group. In addition, a test of the difference between the two treatments shows that legislators who were socially direct lobbied supported the policy at a higher rate than legislators who were lobbied in their office. The coefficient for the *Office lobby treatment* in the 2SLS model is essentially zero, indicating no direct lobbying effect when the meeting occurs in a legislative office. These results provide support for the predictions of the theory of social lobbying, and also provide the first causal evidence in political science of the effect of direct lobbying by lobbyists. In contrast to much of the literature on interest group lobbying, we find evidence of direct lobbying affecting legislator support for policy. Social lobbying is clearly an effective way for interest groups to convince legislators to publicly communicate support for items favored by the interest group. Both legislators assigned to the social lobbying group and those actually treated by the social meeting were more likely to support the interest group's policy than those in the other two conditions.

The lobbyist also recorded her quantitative, subjective assessments of each meeting on the dimensions of comfort, formality, and tone after the meetings concluded. These measures, while unavailable for the control group since there were no meetings, provide some additional insights as to whether the social psychological differences of the meeting venues mattered. The lobbyist reported that the social lobbying meetings were more comfortable and less formal, though there was no difference in tone. Interestingly, the lobbyist also recorded the length of the meetings, finding that the office meetings took about 15 minutes and the social meetings took about 28 minutes, on average (given our theory, we may expect that office meetings would be shorter as the

social setting is more comfortable and allows for greater attention to the lobbyist from the legislative staff). The survey questions on formality, comfort and tone answered by the lobbyist post-meeting; and their mean responses are available in Appendix C (as is time-in-meeting data).

### **Social Direct Lobbying Moves Ally Legislators to Support Interest Group Policy**

In Table 3, we present the results examining the effects of the social and office lobbying treatments conditional on the pre-treatment measure of whether the legislator is rated an *Ally of the interest group*. These results are intent-to-treat (ITT) results based on the legislators being assigned to the *Social lobby* and *Office lobby* treatments, and these treatment variables are interacted with the pre-treatment measures assessing legislative allies and the strength of the relationship between the legislator and lobbyist.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

In the first model (which tests only the ally legislator hypothesis), we find that the effect of direct social lobbying is stronger among ally legislators. Recall that the ally variable ranges from 0 to 1 according to how allied each legislator is with the group. Among legislators not perceived as allies, direct lobbying makes no difference (since both treatment coefficients are not distinguishable from zero). However, as the ally measure increases in value, the effect of social lobbying becomes significant above the control condition and above the office lobbying treatment.

Figure 1 shows the ITT effect of direct social lobbying conditional on the value of the pre-treatment ally legislator rating (based on model 1 in Table 3). Both in relation to the control group (Figure 1a) and the office treatment group (Figure 1b), we see that direct social lobbying has a significant and increasing impact conditional on ally legislators. In fact, the two 90% confidence intervals show that the effect is statistically significant (above the 0 line in the figure) at moderately high values, which encompass a majority of the cases in the data. Legislators predisposed to the interest group were much more likely to support when asked to do so in a social setting. This

supports the activation mechanism identified in our theory. The social lobbying is effective as it creates a level of comfort and relaxation for the lobbyist and lobbied. The direct social lobbying persuades those legislators most likely to be allied with the interest group and its policy agenda, and thus social lobbying is as much about moving ally legislators into action as it is convincing legislators to change their policy positions. The interest group request in a social setting was less effective with those legislators who were not identified as allies, suggesting that the power of direct social lobbying as persuasion only goes so far. For those non-ally legislators, the social lobbying intervention was no more effective than the office lobby or control condition. In short, direct social lobbying is effective, particularly with legislators who share the group's policy preference.

[Insert Figure1 about here]

In model 2 in Table 3, we also test the treatment effects of lobbying conditional on the prior relationship between legislator and lobbyist in addition to the treatment effects conditional on ally legislator to assess if the conditional ally treatment effects still hold. The results are consistent with those of model 1 in Table 3. Once again, the effect of social lobbying is conditional on whether the legislator is seen as an ally of the interest group. However, there are null interactive effects of the lobbyist's prior relationship and the treatments.

### **Social Direct Lobbying Influences Ideological Allies of the Interest Group**

For robustness purposes, recall that we also measured whether the legislator was an *Ideological ally of the interest group* using legislator ideology measures from Shor and McCarty (2011, 2015). Table 4 replicates models 1 and 2 in Table 3 using legislator ideology estimates rather than the lobbyist's pre-treatment assessment of legislative allies. More liberal legislators are allies, and more conservative legislators are not allies. In Table 4, both models 1 and 2 show that the effect of direct social lobbying is higher when the legislator being lobbied is a liberal ally rather than a conservative legislator. In model 1 of Table 4, the negative interaction between social

lobbying and legislator ideology coupled with the positive lower-order term for social lobbying shows that at most negative (more liberal) values on the legislator ideology scale, social lobbying has a strong and positive effect relative to both the control group and the office treatment group (since the two interaction coefficients are significantly different from one another at  $p < 0.01$  and of different sign). In the legislature studied, a significant number of legislators are liberal and have negative ideological scores, and thus would be ideological allies of this group.

[Insert Table 4 and Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 displays the conditional ITT effects of direct social lobbying based on model 1 in Table 4. Even with this more exogenous measure of ally and a smaller sample size, we see that direct social lobbying is quite effective among liberal legislators who are more allied with the interest group's policy agenda. The effect is significant relative to both control group (Figure 2a) and office treatment (Figure 2b). This effect is entirely consistent with our previous measure of ally legislators. Legislators who are ideologically closer or allied with the interest group are the ones most easily persuaded by any social direct lobbying campaign. These legislators are already receptive to the policy on ideological grounds, but need to be persuaded to publicly support the policy. In contrast, legislators who are not ideological allies are not persuaded by social lobbying.

### **Conclusion**

Direct social lobbying matters. Interest groups and lobbyists frequently meet with public officials in social locations in order to attempt to persuade and activate legislators into supporting public policy. Our theory is novel by moving beyond the assumption that direct lobbying is an office-centric endeavor. We theorized that interest group lobbying is much more effective when the group contact is done socially. When legislators and their staff are lobbied in social environments, the interest group is more likely to be successful than when the lobbying occurs in a more traditional office environment. Social meetings at bars and restaurants between legislative

staff and lobbyists are more effective for interest groups' policy goals because legislative staff are attentive, relaxed, and more open to the proposal of the group. Just as regular citizens can be influenced and persuaded to act politically by social messages (Sinclair 2012), we show that legislators and their staff are influenced by social lobbying. We are the first to show that direct lobbying works to persuade legislators in a social setting, rather than in an office setting; and the first to demonstrate causal evidence of direct lobbying on legislator behavior.

Interestingly, in the field experiment, social lobbying was more effective than office lobbying. However, compliance with the social lobbying request relative to the office lobbying request was lower. Following the experiment, the lobbyist speculated that some legislators and legislative staff may be more hesitant to agree to social meetings. Thus, while the social lobbying strategy is an effective way for interest groups to persuade legislators to support policy, its effectiveness may be tempered by unwillingness on the part of some legislative staff to meet in social locations. Additional research should examine what legislative staff expect from social meetings. Are certain legislators and staff more or less likely to take meetings in a social setting, and if so, what are the implications for democratic and institutional decision-making?

Legislators who are allies of the interest group are most responsive to direct social lobbying. This result helps solve a puzzle in the literature on interest group lobbying and legislatures. Some work had argued that interest groups spend time mostly with a small number of ally legislators, and that the interest groups are subsidizing the legislators (Hall and Deardorff 1995). Other work has shown that direct lobbying is a strategy employed by interest group lobbyists, but its effectiveness is questioned given that empirically lobbyists do not frequently meet with those who are not allies. Our research suggests that lobbyists may devote their resources most effectively toward legislative allies and those legislators who, if not quite allies, are close to the group's preferred policy agenda. Direct lobbying is an effective strategy for persuading legislators, but it works best at activating those

most likely to be ideologically predisposed to support the interest group's policy preferences. Thus, it is not surprising that observational studies of lobbying in legislatures find that lobbyists do not frequently spend time with legislators who are not allies.

Policy representation by legislators is often studied as a dyadic relationship between legislators and constituents, examining whether legislators' policy preferences and decisions reflect constituent preferences or interests. Our research suggests that to understand representatives' decisions, we must consider that "legislators respond to too 'great a complexity and plurality of determinants' for citizen preferences to be a driving force in legislative decisions" (Disch 2011, 106, quoting Pitkin 1967, 214). Elite decision-making can be swayed by interest groups through political communication, meaning that citizens' views are not always central to legislator support for policy. Future work should analyze how ordinary citizens react to this interest group influence. Are citizens dismayed that a meeting in a social setting leads legislators to endorse a policy?

Normatively, our theory that social lobbying affects legislator behavior could be alarming for those concerned about the role of niche interests in government decision-making. A contract lobbyist working for an interest group used meetings away from the capitol, where the work of government is done, to convince legislators to express support for the group's policy. While the social meetings accomplished the interest group's goals, the fact that the influencing is most effective when away from the normal spaces of government business is concerning from the standpoint of transparency. The public does not have the ability to wine and dine their elected officials, and unorganized interests are not able to conduct social meetings. What is done out of sight of the legislature in a social setting, while effective, is harder to regulate and observe by watchdogs or by voters themselves. It may also privilege resource-rich groups with the means to employ or hire lobbyists to hold informal meetings away from the confines of capitol offices.

## References

- Addonizio, Elizabeth M., Donald P. Green, and James M. Glaser. 2007. "Putting the Party Back Into Politics: An Experiment Testing Whether Election Day Festivals Increase Voter Turnout." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 4:721-27.
- Ainsworth, Scott H. 1997. "The Role of Legislators in the Determination of Interest Group Influence" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22:517-33.
- Ainsworth, Scott H. and Thad Hall. 2010. *Abortion Politics in Congress: Strategic Incrementalism and Policy Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder, Jr. and Charles Stewart III. 2001. "The Effects of Party and Preferences on Congressional Roll-call Voting." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26:533-72.
- Austen-Smith, David and John R. Wright. 1994. "Counteractive Lobbying." *American Journal of Political Science* 38:25-44.
- Bauer, Raymond A., Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis A. Dexter. 1963. *American Business and Public Policy*. New York: Atherton Press.
- Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones. 1991. "Agenda Dynamics and Policy Subsystems." *Journal of Politics* 53:1044-74.
- Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baumgartner, Frank R. and Beth L. Leech. 1998. *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and Political Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bergan, Daniel E. 2009. "Does Grassroots Lobbying Work? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effects of an E-mail Lobbying Campaign on Legislative Behavior." *American Politics Research* 37: 327-352.
- Bergan, Daniel E. and Richard T. Cole. 2014. "Call Your Legislator: A Field Experimental Study of the Impact of a Constituency Mobilization Campaign on Legislative Voting." *Political Behavior* 37: 27-42.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. 1978. "On the Origins of Public Interest Groups: A Test of Two Theories." *Polity* 10:379-97.
- Blair, Diane D. and Jeanie R. Stanley. 1991. "Personal Relationships and Legislative Power: Male and Female Perceptions." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16:495-507.
- Bol, Damien, Thomas Gschwend, Thomas Zittel, and Steffen Zittlau. 2015. "The Electoral Sources of Good Government: A Field Experiment on German MPs." Paper presented at the European Political Science Association.

- Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M., Dino P. Christenson, and Alison Craig. 2014. "Interest Group Signals from Dear Colleague Letters." Paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association.
- Brodbeck, Josh, Matthew T. Harrigan, and Daniel A. Smith. 2013. "Citizen and Lobbyist Access to Members of Congress: Who Gets and Who Gives?" *Interest Groups & Advocacy* 2: 323-42.
- Butler, Daniel M. 2014. *Representing the Advantaged: How Politicians Reinforce Inequality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, Daniel M. and David Broockman. 2011. "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55:463-77.
- Butler, Daniel M. and Thad Kousser. 2015. "How do Public Goods Providers Play Public Goods Games?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 40:211-240.
- Butler, Daniel M. and David Nickerson. 2011. "Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6:55-83.
- Carpenter, Daniel P., Kevin M. Esterling, and David M.J. Lazer. 1998. The Strength of Weak Ties in Lobbying Networks." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 10:417-44.
- Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. 2016. "Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 60:383-400.
- Chin, Michelle L., Jon R. Bond, and Nehemia Geva. 2000. "A Foot in the Door: An Experimental Study of PAC and Constituency Effects on Access." *Journal of Politics* 62:534-49.
- Clark, Peter B. and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6:129-166.
- Connolly, Jennifer M. and Dyana P. Mason. 2016 "Ideology and Local Public Expenditure Priorities." *Political Research Quarterly*, forthcoming.  
<<http://prq.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/08/22/1065912916665702.abstract>>.
- De Vries, Catherine, E., Elinas Dinas, and Hector Solaz. 2015. "You Have Got Mail: A Field Experiment on Legislative Responsiveness in the European Parliament." Paper presented at the Southern Political Science Mini-conference on Field Experiments and Political Elites.
- Disch, Lisa. 2011. "Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 105:100-114.
- Evans, Diana. 1996. "Before the Roll Call: Interest Group Lobbying and Public Policy Outcomes in House Committees." *Political Research Quarterly* 49: 287-304.
- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. 1978. *Home Style*. Boston: Little, Brown.



- Fox, Justin and Lawrence Rothenberg. 2011. "Influence without Bribes: A Noncontracting Model of Campaign Giving and Policymaking." *Political Analysis* 19:325-341.
- Freedman, David A. 2008. "Randomization Does Not Justify Logistic Regression." *Statistical Science* 23:237-49.
- Garlick, Alex. 2016. "When Lobbying Polarizes." Paper presented at the American Political Science Association.
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102:33-48.
- Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens" *Perspectives on Politics* 12:564-81
- Gray, Virginia, David Lowery, and Jennifer Wolak. 2004. "Demographic Opportunities, Collective Action, Competitive Exclusion, and the Crowded Room: Lobbying Forms among Institutions." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 4:18-54.
- Green, Donald P. and Alan S. Gerber. 2004. *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Grose, Christian R. 2014. "Field Experimental Work on Political Institutions." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17:355-70.
- Grose, Christian R. 2015. "Field Experiments on Elected and Public Officials: Ethical Obligations and Requirements." In Scott Desposato, ed., *Ethics and Experiments: Problems and Solutions for Social Scientists and Policy Professionals*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Grose, Christian R., Neil Malhotra, and Robert P. Van Houweling. 2015. "Explaining Explanations: How Legislators Explain their Policy Positions and How Citizens React." *American Journal of Political Science* 59:724-43.
- Hall, Richard L. and Alan Deardorff. 2006. "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy." *American Political Science Review* 100:69-84.
- Hall, Richard L. and Kristina C. Miler. 2008. "What Happens After the Alarm? Interest Group Subsidies to Legislative Overseers." *Journal of Politics* 70:990-1005.
- Han, Hahrie. 2016. "The Organizational Roots of Political Activism: Field Experiments on Creating a Relational Context." *American Political Science Review* 110:296-307.
- Heberlig, Eric, Marc Hetherington, and Bruce Larson. 2006. "The Price of Leadership: Campaign Money and the Polarization of Congressional Parties." *Journal of Politics* 69:992-1005.

- Hojnacki, Marie and David C. Kimball. 1999. "The Who and How of Organizations' Lobbying Strategies in Committee." *Journal of Politics* 61:999-1024.
- Holyoke, Thomas T. 2003. "Choosing Battlegrounds: Interest Group Lobbying Across Multiple Venues." *Political Research Quarterly* 56:325-36.
- Jowett, B. 1871. *The Dialogues of Plato Translated Into English with Analyses and Introductions*, Volume 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kalla, Joshua and David E. Broockman. 2016. "Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 60:545-58.
- Klingler, Jonathan. 2016. "Political Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Presidential Grassroots Lobbying Organizations in the Obama Administration." SSRN manuscript, Vanderbilt University.
- Kollman, Ken. 1997. "Inviting Friends to Lobby: Interest Groups, Ideological Bias, and Congressional Committees." *American Journal of Political Science* 41:519-44.
- Kousser, Thad. 2012. *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*. New York: Sage.
- Mahoney, Christine. 2007. "Lobbying Success in the United States and the European Union." *Journal of Public Policy* 27:35-56.
- Matthews, Donald R. 1960. *U.S. Senators and Their World*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- McElroy, Gail. 2006. "Committee Representation in the European Parliament." *European Union Politics* 7:5-29.
- McElroy, Gail and Kenneth Benoit. 2010. "Party Policy and Group Affiliation in the European Parliament." *British Journal of Political Science* 40:337-98.
- McGrath, Conor. 2006. "The Ideal Lobbyist." *Journal of Communication Management* 10:67-79.
- McGrath, Conor. 2013. "They Are Not My People: Barack Obama on Lobbying and Lobbyists." *Journal of Public Affairs* 13:308-28.
- McKay, Amy M. 2011. "The Decision to Lobby Bureaucrats." *Public Choice* 147:123-38.
- Mendez, Matthew S. 2016. "Who Represents the Interests of Undocumented Immigrants? A Field Experiment." SSRN <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=2592754>>.
- Miler, Kristina. 2010. *Constituency Representation in Congress: The View from Capitol Hill*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nownes, Anthony J. 2013. *Interest Groups in American Politics*. New York: Routledge.

- Öhberg, Patrik and Elin Naurin. 2016. "Party-constrained Policy Responsiveness: A Survey Experiment on Politicians' Response to Citizen-initiated Contacts." *British Journal of Political Science*, available on CJO2015. doi:10.1017/S0007123415000010.
- Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ornstein, Norman J. and Shirley Elder. 1978. *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Policymaking*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Panagopoulos, Costas. 2010. "Affect, Social Pressure and Prosocial Motivation: Field Experimental Evidence of the Mobilizing Effects of Pride, Shame, and Publicizing Voting." *Political Behavior* 32:369-86.
- Pasley, Jeffrey L. 2002. "Private Access and Public Power: Gentility and Lobbying in the Early Congress." In Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon, eds., *Seeking Justice and Influencing Congress in the 1790s*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Pitkin, Hanna. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Potters, Jan and Frans van Winden. 1992. "Lobbying and Asymmetric Information." *Public Choice* 74: 269-92.
- Powell, Lynda W. 2012. *The Influence of Campaign Contributions in State Legislatures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ramey, Adam J., Jonathan D. Klingler, and Gary Hollibaugh, Jr. 2017. *More Than a Feeling: Personality, Polarization, and the Transformation of the U.S. Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Richardson, Liz and Peter John. 2012. "Who Listens to the Grass Roots? A Field Experiment on Informational Lobbying in the U.K." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 14: 595-612.
- Rogowski, Jon C. and Betsy Sinclair. 2012. "Estimating the Causal Effects of Social Interaction with Endogenous Networks." *Political Analysis* 20:316-28.
- Rosenstone, Steven and John M. Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: MacMillan Publishing.
- Rosenthal, Alan. 1986. "Soaking, Poking, and Just Wallowing in It." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 4:845-50.
- Salisbury, Robert H. 1969. "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups." *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13:1-32.

- Salisbury, Robert H. and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 1981. "U.S. Congressman as Enterprise." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 6:559-76.
- Schattschneider, E.E. 1960. *The Semisovereign People*. Holt: Rinehart and Winston.
- Shor, Boris, and Nolan McCarty. 2011. "The Ideological Mapping of American Legislatures." *American Political Science Review* 105: 530-51.
- Shor, Boris, and Nolan McCarty. 2015. "Individual State Legislator Shor-McCarty Ideology Data, June 2015 update." <http://dx.doi.org/10.7910/DVN/THDBRA>, Harvard Dataverse, V1 [UNF:6:yYhmXwI1JvPI6PUPdwX9Wg==]
- Sinclair, Betsy. 2012. *The Social Citizen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Somer-Topcu, Zeynep. 2015. "Everything to Everyone: The Electoral Consequences of the Broad-appeal Strategy in Europe." *American Journal of Political Science* 59:841-54.
- Stoker, Gerry and Peter John. 2009. "Design Experiments: Engaging Policy Makers in the Search for Evidence about What Works." *Political Studies* 57:356-73.
- Truman, David B. 1951. *The Governmental Process*. New York: Knopf.
- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2004. *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, John R. 1996. *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*. Boston: Allyn, Bacon.
- Yoshinaka, Antoine and Christian R. Grose. 2011. "Ideological Hedging in Uncertain Times: Inconsistent Legislative Representation and Voter Enfranchisement." *British Journal of Political Science* 41:765-94.

Table 1: The effect of social lobbying on legislator support for policy: differences of means

	% legislators supporting policy*	Difference of means: Treatment minus control	Difference of means: Social minus office
Control group (no contact)	7.9%	-----	-----
Office lobby treatment	7.5%	-0.4 ( $p = 0.526$ )	-----
Social lobby treatment	19.5%	11.6 ( $p = 0.067$ )	12.0 ( $p = 0.059$ )

\*This column displays the percentage of legislators assigned to each experimental treatment or control group that publicly supported the interest group's policy (intent-to-treat).

N=119 legislators

Table 2: The effect of social lobbying on legislator support for policy

	Average treatment on treated effect (2SLS)
Social lobby treatment	0.265 (0.166)*
Office lobby treatment	-0.006 (0.108)
Constant	0.079 (0.052)
N	119

\* $p = 0.06$  (1-tailed test). The dependent variable is coded 1 if the legislator supported the interest group's policy; and 0 if not.

Table 3: The effect of social lobbying on support for policy proposals, conditional on the legislator being an ally of the interest group (intent-to-treat)

	Model 1 – treatment effects conditional on ally	Model 2 – treatment effects conditional on ally and personal relationship
Social lobby treatment	-0.28 (0.25)	-0.30 (0.27)
Office lobby treatment	-0.20 (0.19)	-0.38 (0.23)*
Ally of interest group	-0.00 (0.47)	0.06 (0.52)
Social lobby treatment × ally	1.20 (0.72)**	1.15 (0.76)*
Office lobby treatment × ally	0.48 (0.51)	0.42 (0.56)
Personal relationship with lobbyist	-----	-0.08 (0.29)
Social lobby treatment × personal relationship	-----	0.07 (0.36)
Office lobby treatment × personal relationship	-----	0.37 (0.35)
Constant	0.08 (0.16)	0.10 (0.18)
N	119	119

OLS models. \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \* $p \leq 0.10$  (1-tailed tests). The ally measure in this table is based on a pre-treatment survey done by the interest group lobbyist, where positive values indicate the legislator is more likely to be an ally of the interest group.

Table 4: The effect of social lobbying on support for policy proposals, conditional on legislator ideology (intent-to-treat)

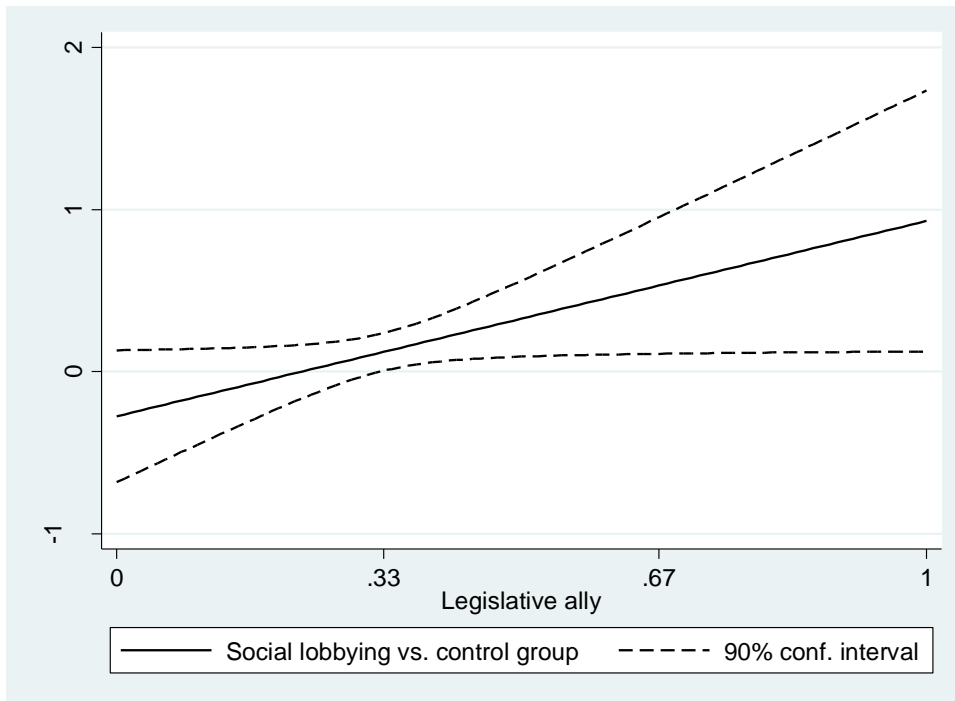
	Model 1 – treatment effects conditional on legislator ideology	Model 2 – treatment effects conditional on legislator ideology and personal relationship
Social lobby treatment	0.19 (0.08)**	0.07 (0.18)
Office lobby treatment	0.05 (0.09)	-0.18 (0.18)
Ideological ally of interest group	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Social lobby treatment × ideological ally	-0.08 (0.05)*	-0.08 (0.05)*
Office lobby treatment × ideological ally	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.06)
Personal relationship with lobbyist	-----	-0.18 (0.23)
Social lobby treatment × personal relationship	-----	0.23 (0.29)
Office lobby treatment × personal relationship	-----	0.42 (0.30)*
Constant	-0.02 (0.07)	0.08 (0.14)
N	86	86

OLS models. \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \* $p \leq 0.10$  (1-tailed tests). The ally measure in this table is based on ideological estimates from Shor and McCarty (2011, 2015), where negative values indicate the legislator is more likely to be an ideological ally of the interest group.



Figure 1. Direct social lobbying effects on legislator support for policy, conditional on ally legislators (predicted values using model 1 in table 3; higher x-axis values are ally legislators)

(a)



(b)

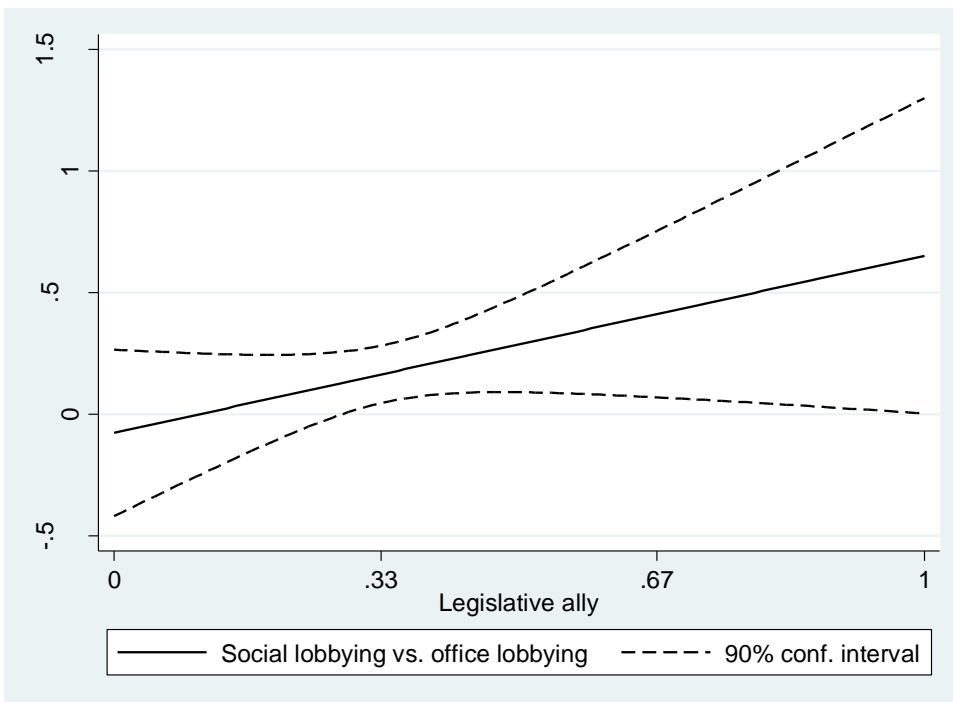
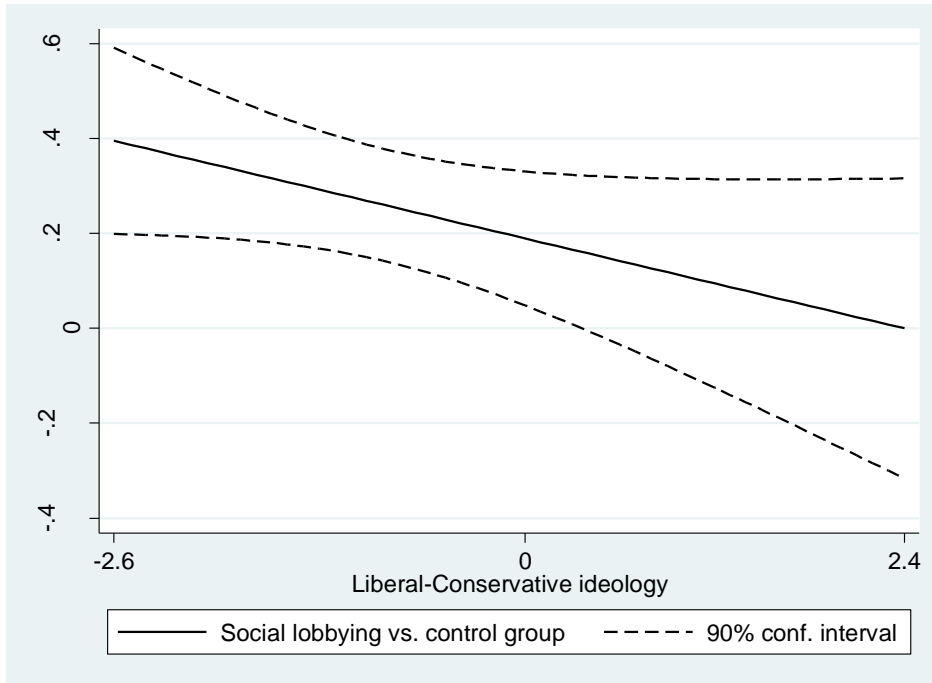
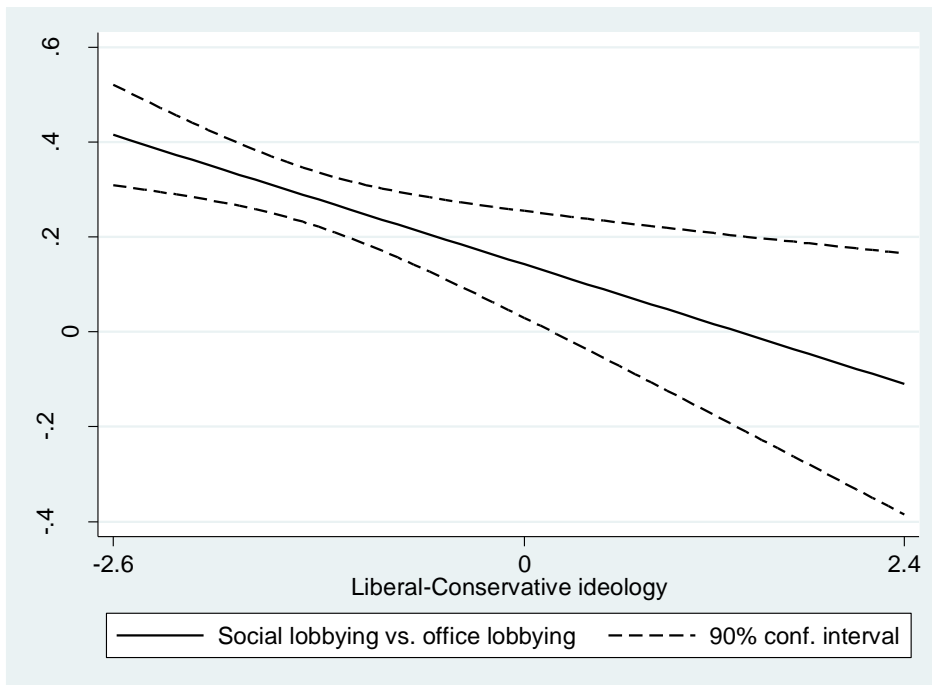


Figure 2. Direct social lobbying effects on legislator support for policy, conditional on legislator ideology (predicted values using model 1 in table 4; negative x-axis values are ally legislators)

(a)



(b)



Online Appendix A: Texts of email invitations to legislator staff member

The lobbyist's administrative assistant sent the following email to the legislative staff assigned to the *Office lobby treatment* group. The bolded text differs from the social lobbying treatment, and legislators in the *Control condition* received no contact from the lobbyist:

Dear [legislative staffer name],

[Name of lobbyist], principal at [lobbying firm name], is requesting a meeting to provide some information about education issues that are important to many of our education clients. **Are there some good times in the next couple of weeks when they can come to your office?**

In the next couple of weeks, they are available at [dates and times]. Do any of these times work for you? Hopefully we can find a good time when your schedules line up.

Thank you very much for your time and attention!

[Name of administrative assistant in lobbying firm]

The lobbyist's administrative assistant sent the following email to the legislative staff assigned to the *Social lobby treatment* group. The bolded text differs from the office lobbying treatment, and legislators in the *Control condition* received no contact from the lobbyist:

Dear [legislative staffer name],

[Name of lobbyist], principal at [lobbying firm name], is requesting a meeting to provide some information about education issues that are important to many of our education clients. **They're hoping to get a chance to get out of the building and enjoy the beautiful spring time! Any chance you're free to meet them for happy hour at [name of restaurant/bar] in the next couple of weeks?**

In the next couple of weeks, they are available at [dates and times]. Do any of these times work for you? Hopefully we can find a good time when your schedules line up.

Thank you very much for your time and attention!

[Name of administrative assistant in lobbying firm]

Online Appendix B: Randomization check – balance across treatments on co-variates

Co-variate	Legislators in social treatment	Legislators in office treatment	Legislators in control group
Democ. legislator (=1)	0.6	0.6	0.7
Female legislator (=1)	0.2	0.3	0.3
Senator (=1)	0.3	0.3	0.3
Personal relationship	3.6	3.6	3.6
Ally of interest group	3.0	3.2	3.0

Online Appendix C: Lobbyist-recorded mean ratings in social lobbying and office lobbying visits

	Social lobbying meetings	Office lobbying meetings	Difference of means test
Comfort level of meeting*	5.1	4.6	$p=0.09$
Formality of meeting**	3.9	4.9	$p=0.02$
Tone of meeting***	5.9	5.7	$p=0.67$
Length of meeting in minutes	27.5	15.8	$p=0.00$

\*After each meeting, the lobbyist recorded the answer to the following question: “On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being not comfortable at all and 7 being extremely comfortable, how comfortable was the meeting?”

\*\*After each meeting, the lobbyist recorded the answer to the following question: “On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being not formal at all and 7 being extremely formal, how formal was the meeting?”

\*\*\*After each meeting the lobbyist recorded the answer to the following question, “On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being a very negative tone and 7 being a very positive tone, how would you describe the tone of the meeting?”