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Interest Group Policy Goals and Electoral Involvement:

Lessons from Legislative Primary Challenges

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**Interest Group Policy Goals and Electoral Involvement:
Lessons from Legislative Primary Challenges**

by

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Report

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Dedication

This masters report is dedicated to the memory of Anna Lynn Howe (M.Ed. '52), a great aunt who passed before my birth and preceded me in taking a masters degree from this institution.

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University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Elections are one way in which interest groups seek to advance their policy goals. Policy studies and election studies have approached this issue differently, leaving unanswered questions about the relationship between interest group policy goals and electoral involvement. This report helps to fill the gaps by applying conventional wisdom to the unstudied question of interest group support for primary challengers. Its findings amend the conventional wisdom in a few key ways. While legislative access does have a negative effect on challenger support, a group-specific measure of access rather than a type-based inference shows the effect to extend beyond groups traditionally thought of as access-seekers. Further, interest in legislative access does not preclude targeted support for challengers by these groups. This suggests that groups may be more sensitive to political circumstances and willing to achieve policy goals through elections than previously thought.

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Report

Interest groups are important, unofficial actors in the policymaking process. Their pursuit of policy goals takes many forms, including formal lobbying (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Baumgartner et al. 2009), grassroots or “outside” lobbying (Kollman 1998), venue shopping (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), and problem definition (Baumgartner, DeBoef, and Boydston 2008). Interest groups also pursue policy goals through involvement in elections (e.g., Herrnson 1998). However, the literature on interest groups and elections suffers from bifurcation, with policy studies giving less attention to election dynamics and election studies giving less attention to policy goals. As a result, our understanding of the relationship between group policy goals and electoral involvement is too vague. The unstudied question of interest group support for primary challengers demonstrates this weakness.

Conventional wisdom holds that many interest groups seek access to legislators and work to gain access by supporting the campaigns of incumbents, especially groups allied with trade organizations and corporations (e.g., Lowery and Brasher 2004). Accordingly, there is little to no reason for these groups to support any challenger, let alone in a primary. Recent work has questioned the universality of this view (Brunell 2005), and elections pose further complications. In a recent Texas Republican primary for the state legislature, about 30 percent of the almost \$800,000 contributed to challengers by interest groups came from corporate or trade groups (see Table 1). This belies the

notion that interest groups of any stripe categorically shy away from challenger campaigns. The current literature seems unable to reconcile this problem, which suggests that more remains to be known about the relationship between interest group policy goals and electoral involvement.

Another weakness in the literature is the near universal exclusion of primary and state election studies from the theory conversation. For both academic and democratic reasons, these are consequential omissions. Many state legislatures, like the U.S. Congress, have a high number of “safe” seats (Weber, Tucker, and Brace 1991). Thus, the majority of a legislature’s membership may be, in effect, determined by party primaries and not general elections. However, studies of interest group involvement in elections seldom consider primary elections (notable exceptions are Welch 1976; Breaux and Gierzynski 1991; 1998). Because states present significant variation in a number of factors relevant to interest groups, elections, and policy, state-level and single state studies can help to fill this gap by providing opportune circumstances for theory development (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002). This report advances such an enterprise by developing a better explanation for interest group support for legislative primary challengers and, in so doing, provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between a group’s policy goals and electoral involvement.

It makes four significant contributions. First, it addresses a critical theory gap by translating theories of interest group policy goals and electoral involvement in general elections to primary elections and exploits the favorable conditions of Texas legislative elections, campaign finance regulations, and lobbying disclosure laws to test them in a

low regulation environment with few constraints and high transparency. Second, by using a group-specific measure of legislative access rather than an assumption based on group type, it shows that legislative access has a deterrent effect on challenger support not only among corporate and trade groups but also nonconnected groups. This qualifies the conventional wisdom, which considers these typically issue-based or ideological groups to be among the most likely to support challengers, and suggests that groups may pursue policy goals through a more diverse set of strategies than commonly supposed. Third, it shows that even access-seeking groups may employ electoral strategies to advance their policy goals, which indicates that these groups may be more sensitive to political circumstances and more willing to use elections to achieve their policy goals than previously thought. Finally, it shows that groups commonly thought of as partisans may still choose sides in the disfavored party's primary and are more often hostile toward incumbents.

Research Objective

Numerous studies have examined interest group contributions at the federal level (e.g., Jacobson 1980; Gopoian 1984; Eismeier and Pollock 1986), and a few have done so at the state level (Jones and Borris 1985; Cassie and Thompson 1992; 1998; Thompson, Cassie, and Jewell 1994; Ramsden 2002). Gray and Lowery (2002) have noted a disconnection between state and federal interest group studies and a tendency of state-level research to offer more descriptive contributions than theoretical ones. Even still, state-level and single state studies “provide an opportune stage on which both to develop

and test new theories” (Gray and Lowery 2002, 405). This report is not concerned with state-level phenomena per se. Its main objective is to develop our understanding of how interest group policy goals relate to a group’s electoral involvement. It accomplishes this by addressing the question of interest group support for legislative primary challengers during the 2008 Texas Republican primary election.

The Texas Republican primary provides a nearly ideal context for studying interest group contributions to primary candidates. It is the majority party in the state house and senate, and every statewide elected official is a Republican. Thus, Republican primaries are determinative in selecting the state’s elected leaders. Additionally, no caps exist on interest group contributions in Texas and financial disclosure laws require full transparency, meaning there are few constraints on interest group contributions and reliable data on the flow of money. This stands in stark contrast to federal elections, where contribution limits force a vast amount of interest related money to alternative and less transparent means to influence elections, including independent and uncoordinated spending. For this reason, a state with low regulation and a high level of transparency offers a superior case for this study, which seeks to explore and develop theories on the underlying dynamics of interest group policy goals and how they affect electoral involvement. Moreover, given that recent Supreme Court rulings have removed certain barriers to corporate contributions, and that future rulings along the same line cannot be ruled out, Texas also presents a possible window into the future of interest group

electoral involvement at the federal level.¹

State-level and single state studies are not without limitations, most notably generalizability. States, for example, vary in political culture, party competitiveness, legislative professionalism, and election law. However, this study is primarily concerned with theory development and not state variation, and the unique conditions and measures available in Texas commend it as an appropriate case for the question at hand (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002). The report proceeds by reviewing the conventional wisdom on interest groups policy goals and electoral involvement. It then relates this to legislative primary elections and hazards three hypotheses to test an amended view that, while the conventional wisdom is instructive, intervening factors like political and electoral circumstances may lead a group to view primary elections as a means to affect legislative outcomes and advance their policy goals.

Assessing the Conventional Wisdom

In 1991, Breaux and Gierzynski wrote: “If the general elections to state legislatures are still largely a mystery to political scientists, the primary elections are a virtual black hole” (1991, 429). Little has changed in the two decades since. Consequently, most of our knowledge of interest group involvement in elections comes

¹See *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) and *Arizona Free Enterprise Club v. Bennett* (2011), in which the U.S. Supreme Court struck down various federal and state campaign finance regulations.

from studies of general elections to the U.S. Congress (for example, Jacobson 1980; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Eismeier and Pollock 1986). State-level studies of the same have focused almost exclusively on extending those theories to general elections for state legislatures. Generally, the state election studies have confirmed the findings from the federal level, although with some variation depending on contextual factors such as campaign finance regulations, legislative professionalism, and one-party or competitive government. Only a handful of studies exist on legislative primary elections, with only tangential treatment of interest groups.

Most studies of interest group involvement in elections examine the contribution patterns of PACs. While PACs are not the only way that interest groups influence elections, their contribution patterns have proven a reliable and readily available way to measure interest group involvement in elections.² PACs, in fact, may be thought of as “the election arm of an interest group” (Herrnson 1998, 38). Studies have also paid attention to the policy goals of interest groups. While groups participate in election politics through PACs, they remain “policy maximizers” that “exist to transmit policy preferences of their constituents to our elected officials” (Brunell 2005, 283).

Unfortunately, the relationship between policy goals and electoral involvement has often been inferred or theorized in general terms in the literature. This commonly involves PAC types as classified by the Federal Election Commission: corporate, trade, labor, and

²Endorsements and grassroots mobilization are other notable ways in which interest groups can influence elections (for example, McDermott 2006).

nonconnected. Studies have found PAC type to have a significant effect on contribution patterns, which seems to support the notion that policy goals generally correspond with group type (e.g., Eismeier and Pollock 1986).

A few recurrent findings emerge from these studies to comprise the bulk of conventional wisdom on interest groups in elections. (1) PACs contribute disproportionately to incumbents (Jones and Borris 1985; Eismeier and Pollock 1986; Thompson, Cassie, and Jewell 1994; Berry and Wilcox 2009). (2) This is especially true for trade PACs and many corporate PACs, which have an interest in maintaining access to legislators. Access is key for these groups' policy goals, since it enables them to affect legislation that pertains to their organization's interests (for example, Lowery and Brasher 2004). Contributing to incumbents is a means by which these groups gain legislative access. (3) Partisan preferences can affect PAC support for candidates. Labor PACs, for example, demonstrate a partisan preference for Democratic candidates. Many access-seeking PACs do not demonstrate a great deal of partisan preferences, but some do exhibit preferences through strategically placed contributions (Brunell 2005). (4) Nonconnected groups are more interested in advancing an issue-based or ideological agenda and less interested in achieving legislative access. Thus, they demonstrate greater openness to support challengers as well as incumbents (e.g., Eismeier and Pollock 1986; Lowery and Brasher 2004).

Theory and Hypotheses

While much of the conventional wisdom on interest groups would seem to hold in primary as well as general elections, an amended theory of how interest group policy goals relate to electoral involvement is still necessary to bridge some gaps. The conventional wisdom could be boiled down to a matter of interest group strategies (Ramsden 2002; Lowery and Brasher 2004; Brunell 2005). The first two findings noted above suggest that many interest groups pursue an access strategy. By contributing mostly to incumbents, the groups gain access to legislators, which helps advance their group's policy goals. In contrast, the last two findings suggest that some groups are less concerned with access and look instead to altering the partisan or ideological makeup of the legislature to advance their policy goals. Instead of access, these groups pursue an electoral strategy by contributing to candidates who challenge disliked incumbents, either on partisan or ideological grounds.

According to the conventional wisdom, there is no theoretical explanation for an interest group that seeks access to legislators to support a primary challenger. The advantage of incumbency has been widely noted in political science (for example, Erikson 1971; Mayhew 1974; Cox and Katz 1996; Carson et al. 2007), thus deterring these groups from supporting challengers. Challenger support would seem inimical to policy goals that demand legislative access. For groups whose policy goals do not demand access, there are plausible grounds to support challengers. Primaries do not pose a theoretical problem for issue-based or ideological groups. These groups can support or challenge incumbents on ideological grounds in general and primary elections alike. The

situation turns more complicated for partisan allied groups, like labor groups. On its face, groups with partisan preferences might seem to be disinterested in primaries, opting instead to expend resources on general elections in order to maximize the number of legislators from the preferred party. However, partisan allied groups could also view primaries as an opportunity to oust disliked incumbents, in the favored or disfavored party.

A more problematic aspect of the conventional wisdom concerns the linkage of policy goals to group type and the seemingly determinative relationship between policy goals and electoral involvement. A type-based view is not altogether without merit. Sound research has found different types of groups to pursue generally different strategies (Eismeier and Pollock 1986). However, tendencies at the aggregate-level are insufficient to develop expectations for individual-level behavior. This is one possible reason for the discrepancy between the conventional wisdom and the fact that corporate and trade groups do sometimes contribute to challengers. A simple way to resolve this problem is the use of a group-level measure of interest in legislative access.

Another reason for discrepancies between conventional wisdom and empirical reality is that group policy goals do not lead to mutually exclusive strategies of access or elections. Brunell (2005) dispels the notion of purely access-oriented groups:

The desire for access to elected officials is premised on the notion that these groups have specific policy preferences. If an interest group takes the time and effort required to start a PAC, raise money, and distribute

those dollars to office-seekers, the group must have some defined policy preferences. This is not to say that groups are not interested in access, they are. Nonetheless, I argue that an interest group's primary concern revolves around policy outputs, which are better effected by a certain set of representatives (i.e., one party or the other) rather than having the ability to have a meeting with a random set of elected officials (683).

The same could be said for groups thought to pursue electoral strategies. While certain groups may predominantly pursue an electoral strategy, i.e., trying to maximize the number of legislators who share their policy positions, this does not mean that they are unconcerned with legislative access. Moreover, electoral and political circumstances may have an effect on the strategy a group employs. Eismeier and Pollock (1986), for example, find that political circumstances can have an effect on group behavior.

This report operates under the view that interest groups are not unaware of political circumstances or immune to other intervening factors that might affect their strategies. They are, first and foremost, policy maximizers that seek specific policy outputs. While certain groups tend to pursue access or electoral strategies, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thus, while the conventional wisdom is instructive in showing that the relationship between policy goals and electoral involvement exhibits certain tendencies, many groups may still view primary elections as a means to affect legislative outcomes. We would expect some groups are more willing to support primary challengers than others since, along with political circumstances, policy goals vary across

groups, as does the breadth of access that groups desire and the political risk they are willing to take on during elections.

Three hypotheses test this theory. (1) Access-seeking hypothesis: Legislative access will have a negative effect on interest group support for primary challengers. While a group's interest in seeking legislative access does not preclude a group from supporting a primary challenger, conventional wisdom suggests that it would still be expected to deter challenger support. (2) Selective targeting hypothesis: Groups that support primary challengers will direct large contributions to them. For interest groups, challenger support is a risky proposition given incumbency advantages and high rates of re-election. This is especially the case for access-seeking groups. Therefore, groups would be expected to support challengers in targeted and significant ways. (3) Hostile group hypothesis: Since labor groups are known to be highly supportive of Democrats, labor group involvement in a Republican primary will generally be hostile toward Republican incumbents. These groups would be expected to view primaries as an opportunity to target vulnerable or especially disfavored incumbents for defeat, or at least to weaken them before the general election.

Data and Methods

Data for this study were compiled from candidate contribution disclosure reports and state-required lobbyist disclosure reports.³ The data include PAC contributions to

³These reports can be downloaded from <http://www.ethics.state.tx.us>.

candidates in the 17 primary challenges that occurred during the 2008 Republican primary elections for the Texas legislature. Texas disclosure laws require candidates and PACs to report any contribution of \$50 or more and lobbyists are required to report their clients and compensation. Along with other relevant variables, these data were compiled such that the unit of analysis is a PAC's total contribution per candidate within the eight-month period preceding the primary election. PACs donate to campaigns in various ways. Some make one large contribution, while others spread their contribution out in smaller amounts over the course of weeks or months. While these differences are not unimportant, this study is chiefly concerned with a group's total investment in a campaign during the primary election.

An interest group's decision to contribute to a campaign reflects both candidate and group attributes. The study considers seven explanatory variables, selected based on previous research and present research interests. Three candidate attributes are considered: (1) whether the candidate is an incumbent or challenger, (2) incumbent leadership post during the previous legislative session, and (3) the number of terms the incumbent has served. Leadership post is defined as chairing or co-chairing a committee or powerful sub-committee and is intended to indicate an incumbent's power as a legislator. Previous research has suggested that a position of leadership or a legislator's legislative influence may be a factor in PAC contribution decisions (Thompson, Cassie, and Jewell 1994). The incumbent terms variable is included as an alternative measure of incumbent power, based on the legislator's seniority in the house rather than formal position of power.

Four group attributes are considered.

(1) Group lobbying expenditures. This represents the total amount of money an interest group paid to lobbyists during the previous legislative session. Rather than inferring a group's interest in seeking legislative access from its FEC type, lobbying expenditures provide a group-level measure of legislative access. The measure is taken from lobbyist disclosure reports, which report lobbying contracts and compensation amounts. Compensation is reported as a range, so the actual measure is the median. (A few groups spent an extremely large amount of money on lobbying, making a continuous measure problematic, so lobbying expenditures were treated on an ordinal scale for the purpose of data analysis.)

(2) PAC type. While Texas does not type PACs like the FEC, for comparative purposes, each PAC in this study was typed according to the FEC typology.

(3) Contribution size. This represents the total amount of money received by a candidate from a PAC during the eight months preceding the primary election. The contribution size is measured relative to a PAC's mean contribution in order to indicate if a candidate received more, less, or about the same as the group's average contribution. This is important to ascertain if and how groups target disproportionate contributions to certain candidates.

(4) Total PAC contributions. This represents the total amount of money the contributing PAC invested in these primary challenge races. Because some interest groups are more involved in elections than others, this measure indicates the group's overall electoral involvement. Like for group lobbying expenditures, contribution

amounts are treated on an ordinal rather than continuous scale to prevent extreme data points from biasing the results.

In these data, interest groups contributed about \$2.7 million to candidates, with almost \$800,000 going to primary challengers. Nonconnected PACs contributed the most to primary challengers, representing 43 percent of these groups' total contributions. Labor PACs, however, sent the largest proportion of contributions to challengers, 54 percent, but were also the lowest contributing group overall. Corporate and trade groups gave the lowest proportion of contributions to challengers at just 16 and 17 percent respectively but made sizeable contributions overall (see Table 1).

This study aims to answer the question of why an interest group would support a primary challenger. The data were fitted to a logit model with the dependent variable of challenger support, i.e., whether a group contributed to an incumbent or challengers. The size of the contribution is considered as an explanatory rather than dependent variable, since it serves as an indicator of a group's strategic purposes in electoral involvement. Regression analysis helps to explain the relationship between group policy goals and electoral involvement by estimating the degree to which a group's interest in seeking legislative access and affecting elections impacts challenger support. To test the hypotheses, the model is estimated across PAC type and also for access and non-access seeking groups. For corporate PACs, challenger support and leadership post were perfectly separated in the data. While this is not unsurprising given the conventional wisdom, it does cause a problem for regression analysis, so leadership post was dropped from the model for this type. Thankfully, seniority still serves as a measure of the

incumbent's legislative influence. No other subgroup encountered problems in the data or analysis.

Hypothesis 1: Legislative Access

The conventional wisdom holds that access-seeking groups have little or no reason to support challengers, since their policy goals are best advanced through legislative access and that is best carried by contributing to incumbents. This should be especially true for corporate and trade groups. The data generally support this hypothesis. Corporate and trade PACs demonstrate strong similarities, giving 84 and 83 percent of their contributions respectively to incumbents. The regression analysis also supports the hypothesis (Table 2). When the model is estimated across PAC type, lobbying expenditures (the measure of a group's interest in legislative access) has a significant negative effect on the odds of challenger support. For corporate groups, the odds ratio of 0.607 represents the strongest deterrent effect on challenger support of all attributes, and the same is true for trade groups (odds ratio of 0.571).

Table 3 further shows the effect of lobbying expenditures on challenger support. In these data, corporate groups that contributed to an incumbent spent a combined total of \$109,450,550 on lobbying during the legislative session immediately prior to the 2008 primary election. Corporate groups that contributed to a challenger spent just \$4,342,500, which accounts for less than four percent of total corporate lobbying expenditures among the groups in these data. This illustrates the impact of lobbying expenditures on challenger support, as borne out in the regression analysis. Trade groups demonstrate a

nearly identical disparity. Trade groups that supported incumbents spent more than 98 percent of the combined lobbying dollars of the groups represented in these data.

The only PAC type for which lobbying expenditures do not have a negative effect on challenger support are labor groups. Interestingly, the regression analysis shows that lobbying has a significant and negative effect for nonconnected groups, with an odds ratio of 0.432. These groups are not traditionally thought of as access-seekers. Rather, the conventional wisdom holds that their issue-based and ideological policy goals are more often advanced through electoral strategies. To be sure, the amount of lobbying expenditures accrued by these groups pales in comparison to corporate and trade groups. The nonconnected PACs that contributed to candidates in these primary challenge races spent just \$10,592,500 on lobbying during the previous legislative session—about a tenth as much as corporate or trade groups. However, more than 98 percent of these lobbying expenses were by nonconnected groups that contributed to incumbents (Table 3).

Overall, 43 percent of nonconnected PAC contributions went to challengers, which is significantly higher than corporate or trade groups. However, while this type of group appears more willing to support primary challengers in the aggregate, a group-level measure of legislative access lends greater clarity to the relationship between policy goals and electoral involvement. Nonconnected PACs that do not lobby are more willing to support primary challengers, but those that do lobby are no more willing to support a primary challenger than a corporate or trade PAC. This underscores the importance of an individual-level rather than aggregate measure of legislative access when assessing individual group behavior. It also challenges the notion that nonconnected groups

categorically forego legislative access as a means to pursue issue-based and ideological policy goals and suggests that they employ a more diverse set of strategies to advance these goals than commonly supposed.

Hypothesis 2: Selective Targeting

Interest groups that support challengers take on political risk in doing so. Incumbents typically have financial advantages over their challengers and high rates of re-election. By opposing an incumbent for re-election, an interest group risks not only a loss of legislative access but also the possibility of fostering legislative hostility if the legislator is not defeated. The selective targeting hypothesis states that groups that do support challengers will direct large contributions to them. Since challenger support is politically risky, groups that take on this risk will do so deliberately and with the clear intent of defeating the incumbent. They will not stick their toe in the water, so to speak, but jump in with gusto. This should especially be the case for access-seeking groups, who seem to have more at stake.

This hypothesis assumes that access-seeking groups do contribute to challengers. Tables 1 and 3 show that this does occur, albeit less often than not. Table 4 shows the results of the regression model when estimated for groups that seek access (defined as groups that spent at least \$50,000 on lobbying during the legislative session prior to the 2008 primary election) and those that do not. As hypothesized, contribution size has a significant and positive effect on challenger support for access-seeking groups. Since this variable measures the size of a group's contribution relative to its mean contribution, the

results indicate that disproportionately large contributions increase the odds of challenger support. If these groups contributed a fixed amount to incumbents and challengers alike, or a smaller amount to challengers, this variable would have a negative or no effect. The odds ratio of 1.418 implies the presence of two kinds of contributions by these groups: access contributions, in which incumbents receive an average or smaller-than-average amount, and electorally motivated contributions in which challengers are selectively targeted to receive a larger-than-average amount. Notably, when the model is estimated across PAC type, contribution size is significant for trade PACs but not for corporate PACs, even though both are known to seek access. This again emphasizes the importance of a group-level measure of access.

The finding is not replicated among groups that do not seek access. When the model is estimated for these groups, contribution size does not have a significant effect on challenger support. This means that atypically large contributions do not increase the odds of challenger support. While there is evidence for selective targeting by access-seeking groups, there is no evidence that it occurs for non-access groups. This implies a few things about the relationship between policy goals and electoral involvement for access-seeking and non-access groups. While the access-seeking finding verifies that groups that seek access are less likely to support primary challengers than those that do not, this finding shows that access and electoral strategies are not mutually exclusive. The variation in contribution size and significant result in the regression analysis suggest that access-seeking groups can and do pursue policy goals through primary election. This occurs infrequently, but when it does, these groups play to win. In contrast, groups that

do not seek access are less reticent to support challengers. Their support for challengers shows less predictable variation, likely because their pursuit of policy goals primarily through an electoral strategy means that they always play to win, with whomever they support.

Hypothesis 3: Hostile Groups

The level of involvement among labor groups in these Republican primary races is markedly less than other types of groups. This is understandable given their commonly understood preference for Democrats. However, labor PACs still contributed \$173,091 to campaigns in these races. Of this, about 54 percent went to challengers, which represents the largest proportion of all four PAC types and makes labor the only type to contribute more to challengers than incumbents. This lends some support to the hypothesis that labor groups demonstrate hostility toward Republican incumbents in primary challenge races.

In Table 2, the regression results do not indicate that these groups are especially hostile toward longtime incumbents. This is interesting, because it might easily be thought that labor groups would dislike their disfavored party's most senior and influential members the most. Shying away from those who challenge longtime incumbents could mean that these groups heed the dictum "better the devil you know than the devil you don't." More likely, it is because their intent is to defeat a candidate in the primary or weaken a candidate before a general election challenge by a strong Democratic opponent. While longtime incumbents have demonstrated their staying power

over the course of many elections, less senior members have less established chances of re-election, making them a more attractive target for group resources. This is supported by the significant and positive effect of contribution size on labor group challenger support, with a sizeable odds ratio of 3.873. This signifies the presence of a targeting strategy akin to what was found among access-seeking groups.

Labor groups are the only type for which lobbying expenses do not have a negative effect on challenger support, which comports with the conventional wisdom that these groups advance policies through partisan allegiance rather than legislative access. Viewed in sum, the data and regression results that labor groups do tend to be hostile toward Republican incumbents, but especially toward less seasoned ones.

Conclusions

This examination of the previously unstudied question of interest group support for primary challengers proves helpful in some key ways. It informs our understanding of interest group involvement in these important and overlooked elections and also provides a new testing ground for current theories. These findings suggest that the conventional wisdom is instructive but not wholly sufficient as an explanation for interest group support for primary challengers or the relationship between group policy goals and electoral involvement more generally.

The conventional wisdom paints a too discrete picture of how interest group policy goals relate to electoral involvement. In reality, the relationship between a group's policy goals and electoral involvement appears less deterministic than is commonly

supposed. These findings show that, while many groups do demonstrate an interest in seeking legislative access as a means to pursue their policy goals, relying on group type as an indicator of seeking access does not fully capture the breadth of access's effect on electoral involvement. Using a group's lobbying expenditures as a group-level measure of access clarifies the picture, revealing that a group's interest in legislative access decreases the odds of challenger support not only for the usual suspects but also for nonconnected groups, which have not traditionally been thought of as access-seekers.

Moreover, these findings indicate that groups do not necessarily pursue their policy goals exclusively through access or election strategies. Even groups that demonstrate a strong interest in legislative access may view a primary election as an opportunity to advance their policy goals. While these groups predominantly support incumbents, they may also target large contributions to certain challengers. This suggests that factors like electoral and political circumstances do not go unnoticed by interest groups and can affect their decision use elections as a means to advance policy goals, no matter the group's type or access orientation. Further, if the circumstances are right, even groups that are known to have a partisan preference may become involved in the disfavored party's primary. This underscores the opportunistic nature of interest groups as policy maximizers. While they tend to favor certain strategies to pursue their policy goals, when opportunities arise, many groups may view primary elections as a means to affect legislative outcomes.

While this research answers some important questions about interest groups and primary elections and brings greater clarity to the relationship between their policy goals

and electoral involvement, it also offers new avenues for future research. As a single state study, it exploits the favorable conditions and available data from one state to develop theories and expand our scholarly knowledge of interest groups and their role in American political life. Extending these findings to the federal level and across states will further develop their implications for the relationship between group policy goals and electoral involvement in a variety of different settings and conditions. The findings on selective targeting and hostile groups also suggests that interest groups make strategic decisions on electoral involvement based on a number of dynamic factors, including electoral and political circumstances. Future research could bring greater clarity to this process by isolating and explaining the factors that affect these decisions. Considering these and related questions will continue to enhance our understanding of interest groups and how they influence politics and policymaking at the state and federal level.

Appendix

TABLE 1
Support for Primary Challengers by PAC Type

Contribution	Corporate	Trade	Labor	Nonconnected
Incumbents	\$599,731	\$570,214	\$79,212	\$623,681
Proportion	0.842	0.826	0.458	0.572
Challengers	\$112,152	\$120,455	\$93,879	\$465,857
Proportion	0.158	0.174	0.542	0.428
Total contributions	\$711, 883	\$690,669	\$173,091	\$1,089,539

TABLE 2
Attribute Effects on Challenger Support by Group Type

Variable	Coefficient (se)	Odds Ratio
<i>Overall (N=1054)</i>		
(Intercept)	-1.133 (0.410) ***	
Leadership Post	-1.197 (0.304) ***	0.302
Incumbent Terms	-0.185 (0.045) ***	0.830
Contribution Size	0.287 (0.125) **	1.333
Total PAC contributions	0.427 (0.116) ***	1.532
Lobbying expenditures	-0.421 (0.096) ***	0.657
Null deviance: 571.44 on 1054 df; residual deviance: 479.97 on 1049 df; AIC: 491.97		
<i>Corporate PAC Contributions (N=434)</i>		
(Intercept)	-1.886 (0.858) **	
Incumbent Terms	-0.283 (0.101) ***	0.754
Contribution Size	0.158 (0.295)	1.171
Total PAC contributions	0.708 (0.251) ***	2.030
Lobbying expenditures	-0.499 (0.197) **	0.607
Null deviance: 156.13 on 434 df; residual deviance: 136.18 on 430 df; AIC: 146.18		
<i>Trade PAC Contributions (N=437)</i>		
(Intercept)	-0.072 (0.873)	
Leadership Post	-2.466 (1.056) **	0.085
Incumbent Terms	-0.279 (0.111) **	0.757
Contribution Size	0.412 (0.208) **	1.510
Total PAC contributions	0.049 (0.374)	1.050
Lobbying expenditures	-0.561 (0.299) *	0.571
Null deviance: 143.80 on 437 df; residual deviance: 109.22 on 432 df; AIC: 121.22		
<i>Labor PAC Contributions (N=70)</i>		
(Intercept)	-1.495 (1.261)	
Leadership Post	0.951 (0.696)	2.588
Incumbent Terms	-0.408 (0.127) ***	0.665
Contribution Size	1.354 (0.738) *	3.873
Total PAC contributions	0.245 (0.407)	1.278
Lobbying expenditures	0.290 (0.261)	1.337
Null deviance: 95.23 on 70 df; residual deviance: 70.01 on 65 df; AIC: 82.01		
<i>Nonconnected PAC Contributions (N=110)</i>		
(Intercept)	-1.833 (1.093) *	
Leadership Post	-0.929 (0.661)	0.395
Incumbent Terms	0.062 (0.099)	1.064
Contribution Size	0.403 (0.369) *	1.496
Total PAC contributions	0.420 (0.244) *	1.522
Lobbying expenditures	-0.840 (0.371) **	0.432
Null deviance: 95.05 on 110 df; residual deviance: 80.26 on 105 df; AIC: 92.26		

*, **, and *** indicate that the coefficient is statistically significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels.

TABLE 3
Comparison of PAC Lobbying Expenses and Candidate Support

Contributed to a(n)	Lobbying Expenses by PAC Type				Total
	Corporate	Trade	Labor	Nonconnected	
Incumbent Proportion	\$109,450,550 0.962	\$119,380,000 0.982	\$5,775,000 0.530	\$10,477,500 0.989	\$246,083,050 0.954
Challenger Proportion	\$4,342,500 0.038	\$2,185,000 0.018	\$5,130,000 0.470	\$115,000 0.011	\$11,772,500 0.046
Total	\$113,793,000	\$121,565,000	\$10,905,000	\$10,592,500	\$257,855,550

TABLE 4
Attribute Effects on Challenger Support by Legislative Access

Variable	Coefficient (se)	Odds Ratio
<i>Access-Seekers</i>		
(Intercept)	-2.336 (0.488) ***	
Leadership Post	-1.261 (0.422) ***	0.283
Incumbent Terms	-0.219 (0.065) ***	0.803
Contribution Size	0.349 (0.142) **	1.418
Total PAC contributions	0.280 (0.164) *	1.323
Null deviance: 323.61 on 748 df; residual deviance: 278.56 on 744 df; AIC: 288.56		
<i>Non Access-Seekers</i>		
(Intercept)	-1.840 (0.573) ***	
Leadership Post	-1.097 (0.442) **	0.334
Incumbent Terms	-0.152 (0.064) **	0.859
Contribution Size	0.094 (0.304)	1.099
Total PAC contributions	0.517 (0.159) ***	1.679
Null deviance: 233.49 on 305 df; residual deviance: 200.18 on 301 df; AIC: 210.18		

*, **, and *** indicate that the coefficient is statistically significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels.

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