

Which Groups Win Meetings with the President?

KARRA MCCRAY | BROWN UNIVERSITY

As Head of State and Chief Administrator, the President oversees the operations and performance of the federal government. With this role, they also can limit the power of special interests, frequently speaking out against them and vowing to save their administrations from their influence. However, further examination of the White House reveals that the words and actions of the president do not always align. Presidents frequently engage with organized interests—but which interests tend to win meetings with the White House?

David Miller's [recent APSR article](#) provides insight into presidential engagement and organized interests. More specifically, he studies which interest presidents engage, the extent to which presidents influence engagement, and what motivates the engagement. As defined by Miller, presidential engagement is the mutual and reciprocal communication and coordination between the president and interest leaders.

By examining in-person meetings at the White House, survey responses from lobbyists, and interviews with interests' representatives and former White House officials, Miller finds that presidents enjoy significant discretion over engaging the interests of their choice. Although interest groups may have some luck reaching out to the White House first, the White House does much of the outreach itself and interest groups tend to be more responsive to the White House.

To measure the president's engagement motivation, Miller calculated the lobbying expenditures and the total campaign finance contribution for candidates running for federal office and identified the interests' partisan preferences. He found that while presidents engage with interests with lower financial resources, they are somewhat more likely to engage with interests that have more extensive electoral and policy resources. Presidents engage with interest



Karra McCray is a third-year student in the PhD program at Brown University, with research subfields of American politics and political theory. Her research examines ideological differences among members of race-based caucuses.



Presidents of the United States can decide to meet lobbyists in the White House (Getty/[Bet Noire](#)).

groups of all partisan persuasions, but they engage more moderately with groups that share their political preferences.

Presidents are most motivated to engage with organized interests that offer them electoral and legislative benefits. Organized interests can pressure stakeholders who are crucial to their success so presidents can influence resources to be favorable to them.

Miller obtained the White House visitor logs released by the Clinton and Obama administrations and used lobbying data to cross-reference visitors that visited in their capacity as a representative for an organized interest. This information also determined the quality of the visit by determining whether interests were in contact with the president or a senior advisor. It is evident that the White House prioritizes interests that are better resourced and share ideological standing, but this does not affect engagement quality.

From this article, we learn that presidents do engage with interests and mostly on their own accord. However, interests' resources inform engagement. Engaging with organized interests has vast benefits for the president as they are more likely to use the outreach of organized interests to excite and mobilize the public, which can bias political outcomes in their favor. ■

MILLER, DAVID RYAN. 2022. "The President Will See Whom Now? Presidential Engagement with Organized Interests." *American Political Science Review*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422001125>