

Courting Colleagues: Occupational Affinity and Individual Contributions in American Legislative Elections

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Abstract

Why do certain professions dominate elected office in the United States? I demonstrate that occupational donor networks provide unequal access to early campaign funds, systematically advantaging candidates from high-income professions like law, medicine, and business. I construct an original dataset that classifies 2.7 million donors and nearly 12,000 candidates into shared occupational categories across congressional and state legislative elections (2003-2022). I show that candidates enjoy a substantial fundraising advantage from donors who share their occupation, raising an additional 7 percentage points of their individual contributions from co-occupation donors relative to competitors in the same contest. This advantage is driven by mobilizing more donors, is concentrated in the first 90 days, and extends across state and party lines. Only candidates from high-income professions, however, convert this occupational affinity into net fundraising advantages. Evidence on mechanisms points to network mobilization and professional identity, not policy investment. Together, these dynamics channel early capital toward a narrow set of occupations, reinforcing occupational imbalances in political representation.

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Introduction

Political elites in the United States are drawn disproportionately from a narrow set of high-status professions. White-collar professionals are vastly overrepresented in legislatures, while working-class occupations hold only a small fraction of seats (Carnes, 2018). Attorneys, for example, once comprised roughly 80 percent of Congress, a share that has since fallen below 40 percent but still dwarfs their presence in the broader population (Robinson, 2017). Scholars have offered several explanations for this imbalance, emphasizing self-selection, the transferability of professional skills, or voter preferences (Diermeier, Keane, & Merlo, 2005; Hain & Piereson, 1975; Miller, 1995). However, empirical evidence for these accounts remains limited. Why do some professions dominate elected office while others remain almost entirely absent?

A more recent line of work centers on campaign finance. Fundraising plays an outsized role in determining who enters, competes in, and ultimately wins elections (Thomsen, 2025). Contributions are especially consequential in primary elections, where partisan cues are absent and candidate quality is difficult to assess. Candidates who raise substantial early funds are more likely to deter challengers and build momentum, as early money signals viability and begets more money (Biersack, Herrnson, & Wilcox, 1993; Epstein & Zemsky, 1995; Krasno, Green, & Cowden, 1994; Magleby, Goodliffe, & Olsen, 2018). Yet while we know early money matters, we know far less about its sources and structure: who provides it, why they give, and which candidates benefit most.

This paper explores one potential organizing axis of campaign finance: occupation. If members of a profession mobilize behind candidates from their own ranks, professional networks can supply the early money and resources that establish viability (Bawn et al., 2023). This dynamic could help explain the profound occupational imbalance in American legislatures, which, in turn, shapes the policies that governments enact (Carnes, 2013). Direct evidence is sparse: Bonica (2020) documents the pattern among attorneys, and to a lesser extent physicians and corporate executives, but it remains unclear whether occupation is a general organizing principle of fundraising or a feature of a small set of elite professions. This paper tests that broader claim directly, examining occupational fundraising patterns across fourteen professions and industries in U.S. House and state legislative primaries.

To do so, I compile a novel dataset linking biographical information on legislative candidates to individual campaign contributions between 2003 and 2022, classifying than 2.7 million unique donors and thousands of candidates into 14 occupations and industries. My main identification strategy compares candidates within the same primary contest using race-occupation fixed effects, holding constant race-level confounders such as district affluence, donor pool composition, and baseline partisanship. The estimates therefore reflect the fundraising advantage a candidate enjoys from co-occupation donors, relative to competitors in the same race.

The results establish occupational affinity as a robust feature of primary elections. Candidates raise

an additional 7 percentage points of their individual contributions from co-occupation donors relative to their competitors, an advantage comparable in magnitude to documented donor preferences along racial and gender lines. This advantage stems mainly from more co-occupation donors and, to a lesser extent, from larger contributions. It remains strong in the first ninety days of fundraising, when resources are most critical for viability, and it extends across both state and party lines.

Yet not all professions benefit equally. Only elite occupations, such as attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives, convert affinity into a net fundraising advantage. For most others, including teachers, nurses, and law enforcement officers, co-occupation donors do mobilize, but they are too few or too modestly resourced to outweigh contributions lost from other donor groups. To the extent that fundraising shapes primary election outcomes, this asymmetry may help explain why certain professions remain so overrepresented in American legislatures and others so absent.

Evidence on mechanisms points to a blend of professional networks and expressive identity rather than policy investment. Among attorneys, co-occupation giving is notably stronger within law-school alumni networks, suggesting that shared professional connections help channel mobilization. At the same time, occupational affinity remains strong even in unwinnable races, where the eventual nominee has little prospect of holding office and donors can expect no policy return. Adapting the difference-in-differences design of Fourinaies and Hall (2018), I further show that individual occupation donors are largely unresponsive to whether a candidate gains a profession-relevant committee assignment, even as PACs respond strongly, casting doubt on narrowly instrumental accounts.

This study makes several contributions. Most directly, it establishes occupation as a general organizing principle of campaign finance, extending beyond the well-documented attorney case to a broad range of professions and industries (Bonica, 2017, 2020). In doing so, it connects the literature on early money and primary viability (Magleby et al., 2018; Thomsen, 2025) to the persistent puzzle of occupational imbalance in American legislatures (Carnes, 2013, 2018). The findings also speak to work on identity-based donor coalitions (Grumbach & Sahn, 2020; Thomsen & Swers, 2017), highlighting professional identity as another dimension along which political resources are mobilized. Together, these results demonstrate that occupational affinity redistributes campaign resources in ways that advantage certain professions. Because a legislator’s occupational background shapes the issues she prioritizes, the bills she introduces, and her legislative success (Carnes, 2012; Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Makse, 2022; Miler, 2017), that advantage reaches beyond who governs to whose interests become law.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. I first situate the project within existing research on individual donor motivations and occupational representation, then develop a theoretical framework for how occupation structures donor behavior. The following sections introduce the data and occupation classification method, before outlining the central empirical strategy. I then present the main results, which document patterns and mechanisms of occupational affinity in primary elections. I conclude by

discussing the implications of occupational donor networks for candidate selection, political inequality, and the composition of American political elites.

Occupation as an Organizing Force in Campaign Finance

Occupation in Campaign Finance

Scholars generally agree that individual contributions reflect a mix of strategic and expressive motivations (Ensley, 2009; McCarty & Poole, 1998). Strategic contributions are intended to influence electoral outcomes or secure access and policy benefits (Hall & Wayman, 1990; Snyder, 1990), while expressive contributions reflect the personal or symbolic value of supporting a candidate or cause (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, & Snyder, 2003). Expressive giving is often rooted in ideological proximity (Barber, 2016; Bonica, 2014), yet shared policy preferences are not the only basis for expressive attachment. A growing body of work shows that shared identity also structures donor behavior: contributors disproportionately support candidates who share their race, ethnicity, or gender (Grumbach & Sahn, 2020; Grumbach, Sahn, & Staszak, 2020; Sorensen & Chen, 2022; Thomsen & Swers, 2017). Occupation is a natural extension of this logic, yet it has drawn far less attention than identities like race and gender.

The most developed line of research on occupation focuses on attorneys. Bonica (2017, 2020) show that attorney-candidates raise large sums of early money from fellow lawyers, helping them clear early fundraising hurdles and signal viability. This occupational advantage may help explain why attorneys are so heavily overrepresented in elected office: rather than reflecting voter preferences alone, their electoral success appears rooted in occupation-based fundraising dynamics (Broockman, Carnes, Crowder-Meyer, & Skovron, 2014; Fong & Grimmer, 2016; Hainmueller, Hopkins, & Yamamoto, 2014).

Beyond the attorney case, however, evidence is sparse. In related work, Bouton, Cagé, Dewitte, and Pons (2024) document that large individual donors are disproportionately male, white, high-income, and concentrated in managerial and highly educated occupations, but do not test whether donors and candidates tend to match on occupation. Stuckatz (2022) demonstrates that the *workplace* can organize individual giving, as employees contribute disproportionately to candidates their employer's PAC supports, but whether occupation independently structures fundraising remains an open question. The relative lack of attention to profession is notable given the stark occupational imbalance in elected office (Carnes, 2018). If part of that imbalance reflects unequal access to early money rather than self-selection or voter preferences alone (Bonica, 2017), then whether donors systematically favor candidates from their own profession is directly relevant. Why this advantage might take shape, however, is less obvious. The following subsection develops three such channels.

Three Channels

Why might occupation organize donor behavior in the first place? I consider three complementary channels: network mobilization, in which professional ties lower the cost of fundraising; expressive identification with one’s profession; and policy investment in candidates who share one’s occupational interests. These channels are not mutually exclusive, and the empirics that follow cannot perfectly disentangle them. Nonetheless, each mechanism implies somewhat distinct empirical patterns, and the analysis that follows explores which appear most prominent.

Network Mobilization. Professional networks lower the structural cost of fundraising. Candidates typically begin by soliciting close professional contacts, such as colleagues and classmates, who are most likely to respond to an early ask (Feigenbaum & Shelton, 2013; Francia, Herrnson, Green, & Powell, 2003; Magleby et al., 2018). Formal organizations such as bar associations, medical societies, and industry groups reduce transaction costs, facilitate coordination, and raise a candidate’s visibility within a pool of potentially sympathetic donors (Bonica, 2017). This informational advantage is most valuable early, particularly in primaries, when candidates lack name recognition and media coverage is sparse (Thomsen, 2025). As endorsements, polling, and coverage accumulate, the edge provided by professional networks diminishes relative to these widely available cues. Crucially, occupations vary in the density and institutionalization of these networks (Carnes, 2018). Professions with established organizations can more easily coordinate contributions, so high-income, well-networked professions are more likely to translate occupational affinity into tangible fundraising advantages, not necessarily because their members care more about politics, but because their networks enable rapid mobilization at the critical early stage.

Expressive Identification. Professions also foster distinct cultures and values, reinforced by shared training, norms, and regulatory experience. These can translate into in-group solidarity, an expressive reason for donors to support one of their own. Attorneys, physicians, and members of other highly professionalized fields may view co-occupation candidates as representing their professional identity and values, much as race or gender structures donor behavior (Grumbach & Sahn, 2020; Grumbach et al., 2020; Thomsen & Swers, 2017). This affinity reflects a desire to see one’s group represented in office, independent of any specific policy return, and homophily strengthens these bonds, making appeals from co-professional candidates feel more personally meaningful (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

Policy Investment. Finally, donors may support a candidate from their profession not only to see it represented, but because that representation carries real policy consequences. Professions face common regulatory and legislative concerns: physicians care about health policy, attorneys about legal reform, and real estate developers about land use and taxation (Bonica, Rosenthal, & Rothman, 2019; Matter & Stutzer, 2015). Donors may believe that a co-candidate will better represent these interests in office,

whether through specific policy stances or a general grasp of the profession’s priorities. Such concerns are traditionally channeled through formal organizations like the American Bar Association or American Medical Association, but occupational donors can collectively mimic interest-group behavior by supporting candidates from their field. Empirical evidence supports this: corporate executives donate more, and more strategically, when promoted, in keeping with their professional interests (Burris, 2005; Fremeth, Richter, & Schaufele, 2013; Gordon, Hafer, & Landa, 2007; Richter & Werner, 2017). More broadly, individual donors favor legislators whose committee assignments match their occupational concerns (Barber, Canes-Wrone, & Thrower, 2017), and their contributions often follow the donations of employers and affiliated PACs (Stuckatz, 2022). This form of giving need not be narrowly transactional (Fourinaies & Hall, 2018; Powell & Grimmer, 2016); it may instead represent a group-based political investment, an effort to elevate the profession’s voice within the legislature (Snyder, 1990).

These channels often operate together rather than in isolation. During the 2014 Republican primary for Georgia’s 1st congressional district, for instance, observers noted that State Senator Earl Leroy “Buddy” Carter appeared to be a frontrunner, in no small part due to his professional connections as a pharmacist (Bawn et al., 2023). One observer remarked:

“You’ve got Obamacare, all the . . . Medicare-Medicaid issues about payment for prescription drugs. You’ve got all the layers of regulatory paperwork that apply to all businesses, and so you’ve got a bunch of rich people out there who happen to be pharmacists who want one of theirs up there [in Congress].” (Bawn et al., 2023, 100)

The remark emphasizes both policy stakes (drug-payment rules and regulatory paperwork) and expressive identity (a desire to put “one of theirs” in Congress). The third channel surfaces in the mobilization itself: Bawn et al. (2023) report that pharmacy owners, pharmacy-industry PACs, and employees of pharmacy-related businesses gave roughly \$435,000 to Carter’s campaign, about 45 percent of all the money he raised. Raising that share from a single occupational sector depends on a coordinated professional network capable of reaching and activating co-occupation donors.

Early Money and Candidate Viability

Whatever its motive, co-occupation giving may be especially impactful because of *when* it arrives: since professional networks are among the first a candidate calls on, this money tends to come early (Thomsen, 2025). Early fundraising is among the strongest predictors of primary survival: candidates who post strong early numbers attract endorsements, deter challengers, and find it easier to raise more, while those who fall short are disproportionately likely to withdraw before election day (Box-Steffensmeier, 1996; Goodliffe, 2001; Norrander, 2000). An occupation that mobilizes behind one of its own can act as an anchoring constituency, supplying the early resources a candidate needs to stay viable in a low-information primary (Bawn et al., 2023, 2012). Early money, in other words, does not just reflect a candidate’s strength: it helps create it.

This timing places occupation near the front of a sequential filter. Long before voters weigh in, the candidates who can assemble early money are the ones who appear viable, allowing them to raise more, consolidate support, and stay in the race. By structuring access to early money, occupation may shape who imagines herself as viable and chooses to run, who survives the winnowing of the primary, and ultimately who reaches office. Occupation grants access to a professional network; the network supplies early money; early money establishes viability; and viability conditions later donations and electoral outcomes. To the extent that professions differ in their capacity to supply early money, they differ in their capacity to move candidates through this filter, which is one reason the occupational composition of legislatures may reflect the structure of professional donor networks as much as the preferences of voters.

Setting and Scope

A final consideration is how partisanship structures giving in primary versus general elections. Individual contributions are heavily influenced by party and ideology (Bonica, 2014; Ensley, 2009; McCarty & Poole, 1998). In general elections, partisan cues give donors a clear basis for evaluating candidates, leaving little room for professional background to operate independently. Primaries strip these cues away. When party labels are uninformative, shared occupation can serve as an alternative heuristic for competence, values, or policy alignment, and professional networks can play a larger role in directing the early contributions that shape viability (Thomsen, 2025). Primaries are therefore the natural setting in which to look for occupational affinity, and where the stakes for candidate selection are highest.

Not all professions are equally positioned to draw on these channels. They vary in income, in the density and institutionalization of their networks, and in their history of political engagement. These differences are likely to shape the strength of occupational affinity, and especially whether it yields a *net* fundraising advantage. Even where affinity is strong, only professions with sufficient donor scale and aggregate financial capacity can convert it into an overall fundraising edge. I take up this heterogeneity directly when examining which professions translate affinity into total fundraising gains.

The remainder of the paper documents the patterns and mechanisms of occupational affinity in two parts. The first establishes occupational affinity as a robust empirical pattern, using within-race comparisons to characterize when the advantage emerges, how it operates, and which professions convert it into net fundraising gains. The second turns to mechanisms, examining settings where the network, expressive, and policy-investment channels generate distinct empirical predictions.

Data

This study draws on original data linking candidate biographies, individual campaign contributions, and election returns across U.S. House and state legislative elections from 2003 to 2022. The core dataset

Table 1: List of Occupation and Industry Categories

Occupations	Industries
Accountants	Agricultural Production
Attorneys	Construction and Skilled Trades
Corporate Executives	Fossil Fuel
Law Enforcement Officers	Insurance
Nurses	Investments
Physicians	
Professors	
Real Estate Agents/Brokers	
Teachers (Primary/Secondary)	

classifies candidates and donors into a common set of fourteen occupational categories, which allows direct measurement of occupational alignment between contributors and the candidates they support. I summarize the main components below and provide a more complete discussion of the data and classification procedures in Supplemental Appendix [SA-1](#).

I draw on several sets of election returns to identify the candidates competing in each primary. For congressional races I use returns from Ansolabehere, Hansen, Hirano, and Snyder Jr (2010), extended through 2022 by Myers (2025). For state legislatures, I rely on a newly compiled dataset from Handan-Nader, Myers, and Hall (2025). Candidate occupational backgrounds come primarily from Project Vote Smart, supplemented by Ballotpedia, Makse (2019), Porter, Case, and Treul (2025), and the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory as merged with DIME by Bonica and Sen (2017).

Individual contribution records come from the Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections (DIME), which compiles campaign contributions reported to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and state agencies (Bonica, 2024). FEC rules require that contributions above \$200 be itemized, and itemized records must include each donor’s self-reported occupation and employer. These occupation and employer fields are the basis for matching donors to occupational categories.

Occupation Classification

Both candidates and donors are classified into a common set of fourteen categories: nine occupations defined by reported job title and five industries defined primarily by employer (such as fossil fuel and insurance). The industry categories extend coverage to contributors whose job titles do not map to a focal occupation but whose employer places them in a politically salient sector. A donor listing “Office Manager” at “Chevron,” for instance, is captured under fossil fuel rather than a specific occupation. Table 1 lists the full set of categories.

Because candidate and donor records differ substantially in structure and scale, I classify each through a distinct pipeline. Both are described in full in Supplemental Appendix [SA-1](#). Project Vote Smart is the primary source for candidates, given its broad coverage of congressional and state legislative races. A large

language model (Anthropic’s Claude Haiku) reads each candidate’s structured career history (occupation titles and employer names) and returns binary flags for the fourteen categories. I supplement these classifications with the additional sources described above to expand candidate coverage.¹ Validated against hand-coding, the combined procedure achieves 93.6% precision (correctly classifying candidate–category assignments) and 94.8% recall (recovering candidate–category memberships identified by hand) across the fourteen categories.

For donors, a hybrid procedure combines deep-learning record linkage (Arora & Dell, 2023), large language model verification of borderline matches, and regular-expression matching. Occupation strings are matched to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Standard Occupational Classification system and employer strings to the Center for Research in Security Prices (CRSP) database of publicly listed firms. On a stratified sample hand-coded against the fourteen focal categories, the procedure achieves 90% precision and 97% recall. Of the donors active in the sample period, roughly 9 million (84%) are classified into at least one occupation and 2.7 million into one of the fourteen focal categories.

Both pipelines assign affiliations from a subject’s entire record, so that a candidate who practiced law before entering business is flagged as both an attorney and a corporate executive, and a donor who reports different occupations across cycles is credited with each. These “ever affiliated” measures are meant to capture the long-term professional identity and network ties most likely to shape giving.

Analysis Sample

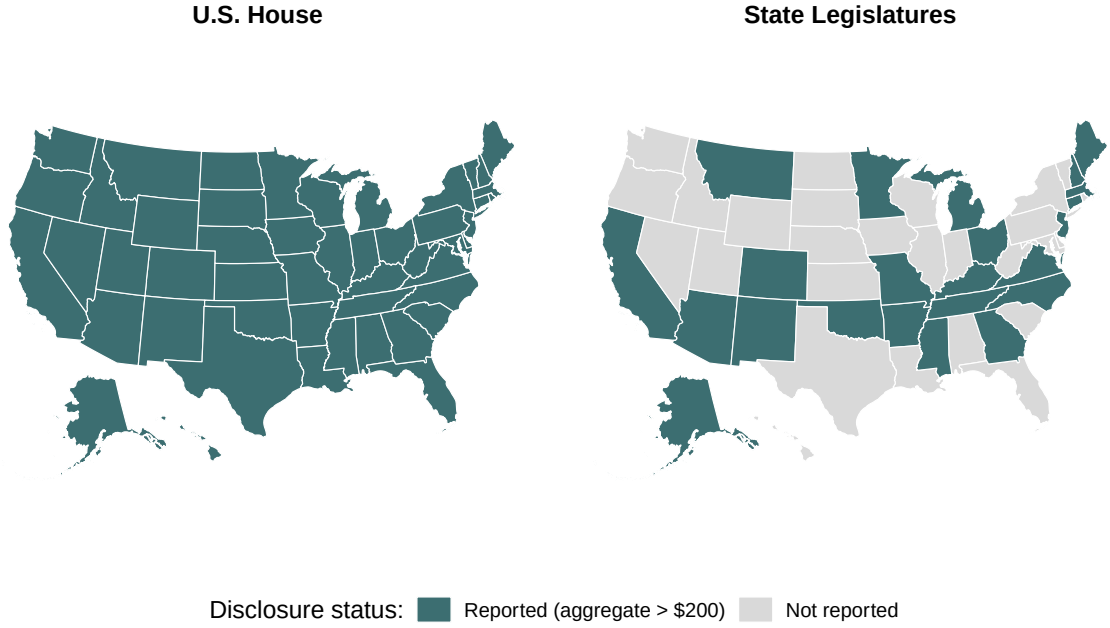
The disclosure rules that generate these occupation and employer fields also restrict the sample in two ways. First, data on donor occupation only became available starting in 2003 so the analysis begins with the 2004 cycle. Second, while federal disclosure is uniform, applying to U.S. House races in every state, state-level requirements for state legislative races vary substantially. Some states, such as Oklahoma, require occupation and employer for all contributions, while others impose per-contribution or per-cycle thresholds that differ widely. To maintain consistency with the federal standard, I restrict the state legislative sample to states whose disclosure threshold is at or below the FEC’s \$200 itemization standard. States with thresholds above \$200 are excluded.² Figure 1 maps this variation: federal disclosure covers every state (left panel), whereas only twenty-three states meet the threshold for their legislative races (right panel). Non-shaded states are dropped from the state legislative sample.

Of the 79,330 candidate-cycles in the primary election data, 43,168 fall in jurisdictions with FEC-consistent disclosure. I examine occupational coverage in this sample. 31,817 (73.7%) observations are matched to the candidate-occupation data, with higher coverage among primary and general election win-

¹Supplemental Appendix SA-1 gives the full source hierarchy and override logic.

²Federal reporting is required for contributions to a candidate that sum to over \$200, consistent with itemization rules. States at or below this standard include those with no threshold (full disclosure), those requiring occupation reporting at lower per-contribution amounts (e.g., \$50, \$100, or \$150), and those where any individual contributing more than \$200 over an entire election cycle must report, a more inclusive standard than the FEC’s per-candidate threshold.

Figure 1: Donor Occupation Disclosure Requirements for Individuals Contributing More Than \$200 to a Candidate: U.S. House vs. State Legislatures



Note: For the U.S. House, the FEC collects donor occupation for contributions to a candidate that sum to over \$200. For state legislatures, the states with occupation disclosure requirements consistent with the FEC (or more inclusive), and included in the analysis, are: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Virginia.

ners, U.S. House candidates, and incumbents (Supplemental Table [SA-1](#)). Each observation is uniquely defined by a candidate (i), cycle (t), and occupation (j): for example, fundraising from pharmacist donors to Buddy Carter in the 2014 Republican primary for Georgia’s first congressional district. Some analyses employ an alternative data structure, “widening” the data to the candidate-cycle level to recover occupation-specific estimates of affinity.

To keep candidates comparable, I limit the estimation sample to contested two-party primaries. For state legislatures, I further restrict to single-member districts and to states whose disclosure rules match the FEC standard (Figure 1), and exclude special elections and nontraditional formats such as top-two and blanket primaries. U.S. House races are not subject to the disclosure restriction, since the FEC enforces reporting uniformly across states. After these restrictions and the exclusion of candidate-cycles with missing occupation data, the estimation sample comprises 11,752 candidate-cycles.³

Empirical Strategy: Within-Race Comparisons

Do candidates receive a fundraising advantage from donors with a shared occupational background? To investigate this question, I study candidate fundraising patterns in primary elections for the U.S. House and state legislatures. My main empirical strategy exploits within-race variation in candidate occupations

³Supplemental Table [SA-2](#) reports the sample at each stage of construction.

to isolate whether donors are more likely to support candidates who share their profession.

Specification

The core identifying variation comes from comparisons among candidates competing in the same race who differ in whether they share an occupation with a given group of donors. By focusing on within-race comparisons, I hold fixed the electoral environment, donor pool, and other race-specific factors, and ask whether candidates raise systematically more from donors who share their occupation.

I formalize this comparison by estimating the following fixed effects specification:

$$y_{ijt} = \beta \text{CandOcc}_{ij} + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \alpha_{r \times j} + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \quad (1)$$

where y_{ijt} is a fundraising outcome for candidate i in cycle t from occupation j , CandOcc_{ij} is an indicator equal to one if candidate i is affiliated with occupation j , $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ is an optional vector of candidate-level controls, and $\alpha_{r \times j}$ represents electoral race-occupation fixed effects. An electoral race is uniquely defined by an office-district-party-cycle pairing.

For example, one race-occupation fixed effect in my sample corresponds to accountant-donors in the Republican primary election for Alaska’s at-large congressional district in 2006. Conditional on this fixed effect, the specification asks whether accountant candidates receive greater fundraising support from accountant donors, compared to non-accountant candidates competing in the same election. The coefficient of interest, β , pools across all 14 occupations and industries to capture the average additional fundraising that candidates receive from donors in their own occupation, relative to other candidates in the race.

The generic outcome y_{ijt} stands in for several fundraising measures. The two primary outcomes are $\text{Share}_{ijt}^{\text{cand}} = \frac{\text{Amount}_{ijt}}{\text{Amount}_{it}}$, the share of candidate i ’s cycle t contributions that came from individuals in occupation j , and $\text{Log}(1 + \text{Amount}_{ijt})$, the log of total contributions candidate i receives in cycle t from occupation- j donors. Shares are directly comparable across offices whose fundraising scales differ enormously, from expensive U.S. House races to smaller state-legislative contests, and have a natural interpretation as the fraction of a candidate’s contributions attributable to a given occupation. The log-dollar outcome provides a complementary perspective by capturing the level of occupational fundraising rather than its share. Because the outcome is logged, the coefficients are most naturally interpreted as proportional differences.⁴ Subsequent sections introduce additional outcomes.

The electoral race-occupation fixed effects play a central role in this specification. By construction, they absorb all unobserved heterogeneity that varies at the level of the election and occupation. This

⁴Because Amount_{ijt} contains many zeros, the $\text{Log}(1 + \cdot)$ transformation makes this proportional interpretation sensitive to the units in which the outcome is measured (Chen & Roth, 2024; Cohn, Liu, & Wardlaw, 2022). I therefore report parallel Poisson, intensive-margin, and extensive-margin estimates in Supplemental Table SA-3, which are substantively similar to the main results.

includes between-race differences in district affluence, baseline size of the donor pool, contest salience, and party environments in primary elections. Because the fixed effects are indexed by occupation, they also absorb occupation-specific baselines that vary across races. For example, attorneys may donate more in some districts than others, or teachers may be more politically active at the state-level rather than the federal-level. Finally, the fixed effects net out systematic differences in the availability of occupation-specific contributions across settings, including variation driven by state or the local concentration of industries.

As a result, β is identified from a highly local comparison: holding fixed everything about the contest environment and the baseline propensity of donors in occupation j to give in that election, do candidates who share that occupation receive more support from those donors?

Identification Assumption

Identification relies on the assumption that, within a given race, a candidate’s occupational affiliation is uncorrelated with other unobserved determinants of fundraising from occupation- j donors, conditional on the fixed effects and controls. This assumption would be violated if, for example, candidates from a given occupation who enter a particular race systematically differ from their opponents in ways that independently affect their ability to mobilize co-occupation donors, such as personal wealth, prior political experience, or access to pre-existing networks, beyond what is absorbed by the race–occupation fixed effects.

Importantly, candidate entry itself is endogenous. Individuals are more likely to run for office when they anticipate access to viable fundraising networks. Candidates from particular occupations may selectively enter races where they expect an accessible and prominent co-occupation donor base. On the other hand, potential candidates who do not expect robust support may self-select out of running altogether. This selection process complicates causal inference: the observed occupational fundraising advantage may partly reflect who chooses to run rather than the independent effect of occupation.

The results from Equation 1 should therefore be interpreted as the effect of occupational alignment on fundraising, *conditional* on a candidate from a given occupation choosing to enter a race. This conditional estimand reflects how occupational donor networks operate in practice, where strategic entry and fundraising capacity are inherently intertwined. Nonetheless, the patterns I uncover demonstrate how occupational donor networks contribute to candidate viability.

Robustness

To assess the sensitivity of the results to these remaining concerns, I estimate a series of alternative specifications, reported in Supplemental Table SA-4. First, I supplement the baseline race–occupation fixed effects with candidate fixed effects, further absorbing time-invariant candidate characteristics such

as experience and baseline fundraising capacity. This specification identifies the coefficient from within-candidate variation across donor occupations within the same race. A positive coefficient reflects a within-candidate increase in fundraising from co-occupation donors relative to donors from other occupations. While it alters the estimand, it helps address concerns that unobserved candidate quality drives the baseline results.

The candidate fixed-effects specification underscores a broader feature of the design: identification in the baseline model comes entirely from within-race comparisons. As a result, only races featuring candidates with different occupational backgrounds contribute identifying variation. Single-candidate races and races in which all candidates share the same occupation do not contribute to estimation. While this restriction reduces the effective sample size, it ensures that identification comes entirely from comparisons among direct competitors facing the same electoral environment. The estimates should therefore be interpreted as capturing the role of occupational matching in competitive primary elections, where occupational fundraising advantages are likely to be most politically consequential.

To assess whether this restriction drives the results, I also replace the combined race–occupation fixed effects with separate district–party–occupation and cycle fixed effects in Supplemental Table [SA-4](#). This alternative specification leverages a broader set of races, including contests that do not contribute identifying variation in the baseline model, but does so at the cost of stronger assumptions regarding the comparability of candidates across election cycles. The stability of the estimates across these specifications provides additional confidence that the results are not an artifact of the particular fixed-effects structure employed in the main analysis.

Occupational Affinity Is a Consistent Feature of Primary Elections

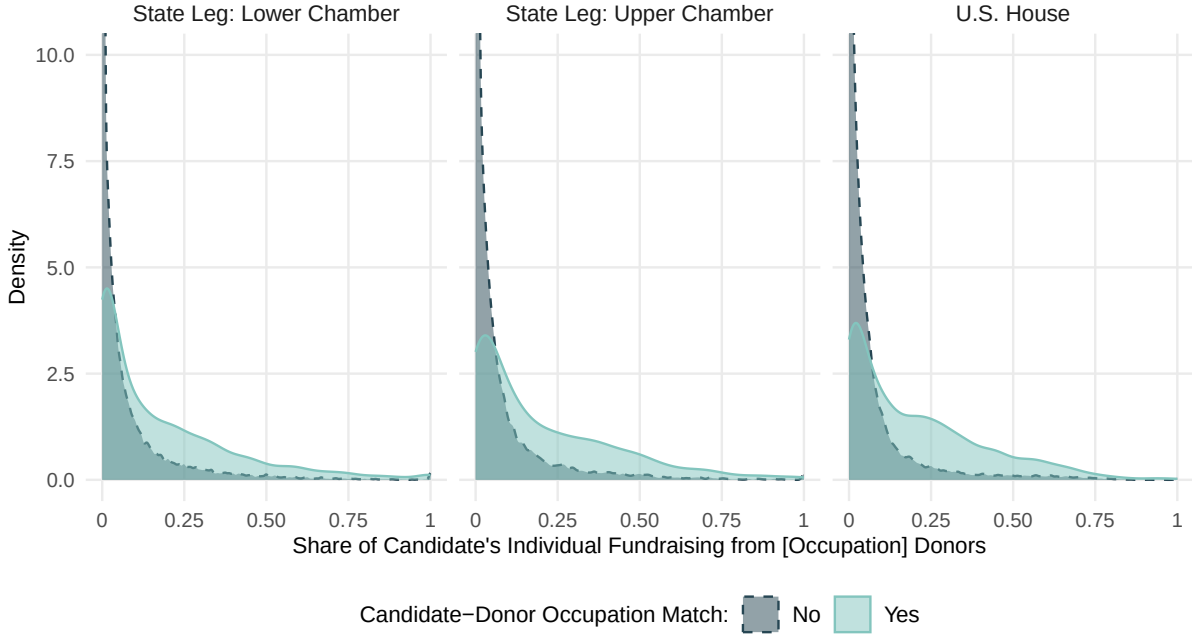
Baseline Occupational Affinity

I begin by establishing the baseline existence of occupational affinity in primary elections. Specifically, I examine whether candidates receive a fundraising advantage from donors who share their professional background, relative to otherwise comparable candidates competing in the same election.

To do so, I first compare how much candidates raise from donors in a given occupation when they themselves belong to that occupation versus when they do not. Pooling across candidates, cycles, and occupations provides a simple baseline visualization of occupational affinity: whether, on average, shared professional identity translates into greater financial support from co-occupation donors. I create this comparison with the candidate-cycle-occupation data structure outlined for Equation 1. Subsequent sections estimate this result more formally, before relaxing the pooled approach to examine how these

patterns vary across specific professions.

Figure 2: Candidates Raise a Greater Share of Contributions from Their Own Occupation



Note: Candidate-Donor Occupation Match indicates whether a candidate shares a background in occupation j with a set of donors. The outcome is the amount of money a candidate raised from occupation j , divided by the total amount they received from individual donors.

Figure 2 plots the distribution of the share of a candidate's primary election fundraising from individuals that comes from donors in occupation j . Distributions are shown separately for candidates who share that occupation and those who do not, with panels split by office type (U.S. House, upper chamber of a state legislature, and lower chamber of a state legislature).

The figure highlights a clear descriptive difference: candidates who share an occupation with a set of donors receive a substantially larger share of their fundraising from that group. In Figure SA-1 in the Supplemental Appendix, I produce a similar plot, but filter out all observations where a candidate raised zero dollars from an occupation. The pattern is highly similar, demonstrating that the results are also not a product of data sparsity. The marked stability of the pattern across office types provides a strong justification for the pooled specification that follows.

With the underlying descriptive pattern established, I now turn to the pooled specification from Equation 1 to more rigorously estimate the occupational fundraising advantage across all occupations. Table 2 reports estimates using two outcomes: a candidate's share of total individual contributions that come from occupation- j donors (columns 1–3) and the logged amount of money raised from occupation- j donors (columns 4–6). Because the within-candidate share outcome is defined only for candidate-cycle observations with nonzero total individual fundraising (a nonzero denominator), observations that do not meet this criterion are excluded. This restriction modestly reduces the sample size and accounts for the small difference in the number of observations across models.

Table 2: Fundraising Advantage from Same-Occupation Donors

	Within-Candidate Share			Log(1 + OCC Funds)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Candidate-Donor	0.13	0.07	0.07	2.48	1.24	1.04
Occupation Match	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	155 303	155 303	155 303	155 342	155 342	155 342
Candidate-Cycles	11 750	11 750	11 750	11 752	11 752	11 752
Controls			✓			✓
Race-OCC FE		✓	✓		✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate's total individual fundraising that comes from occupation j donors. Log(1+OCC Funds) is the natural log of the amount of money a candidate raises from occupation j donors.

Columns 1 and 4 present a simple benchmark that omits both fixed effects and controls. In this raw comparison, candidates raise substantially more from donors in their own profession, compared to other candidates. Candidate-donor occupation match is associated with a 13 percentage-point higher within-candidate share (column 1) and 2.48 log points more in occupation- j contributions (column 4).

Columns 2 and 5 introduce race-occupation fixed effects, comparing fundraising from a given occupation among candidates *within* the same contest. After accounting for differences across office, geography, party, and occupation, the estimated advantage attenuates but remains sizable: candidates raise 7 percentage points more of their funds from co-occupation donors (column 2) and 1.24 log points more in logged dollars (column 5), corresponding to approximately 246% more occupation- j money relative to non-co-occupation candidates in the same race.

Columns 3 and 6 add incumbency controls, yielding my preferred specification. The estimates are nearly unchanged: 7 percentage points for within-candidate share (column 3) and 1.04 log points for logged dollars (column 6), indicating that incumbency status does not account for the within-race occupational fundraising advantage. Taken together, these results demonstrate that while raw differences are large, a substantial occupational fundraising advantage persists even under demanding within-contest comparisons that hold constant the electoral environment and donor occupation.

While Table 2 pools U.S. House and state legislative candidates, the results are not driven by one office alone. Table SA-5 in the Supplemental Appendix presents estimates disaggregated by office. Occupational alignment confers a highly consistent fundraising advantage across both settings: the within-candidate share coefficient is 7 percentage points for both House and state legislative candidates, while the corresponding occupation- j log-dollar estimates are 1.06 and 0.94, respectively. To aid interpretation, the table also reports the mean outcome, $\text{Mean}(y_{it})$, which varies substantially across offices. Differences across chambers thus arise primarily from baseline fundraising levels rather than from variation in the

strength of occupational affinity.

Because the fundraising amount outcome is log-transformed, the reported means correspond to the average of $\log(1 + \text{Amount})$ rather than the log of the average raw amount. This distinction matters in a skewed distribution: the mean logged outcome is lower than the log of the raw mean. For reference, the raw average amount of primary fundraising from a given occupation is approximately \$37,650 for U.S. House candidates and \$2,020 for state legislative candidates, compared to average total individual primary fundraising of \$427,447 and \$29,113, respectively.

Occupational Fundraising in Context

How large are these occupational fundraising advantages in substantive terms? Are they large enough for any individual occupation to be meaningful in an electoral context? One way to answer this is by benchmarking against other well-documented forms of identity-based affinity.

To do so, I turn towards a candidate-cycle specification, which allows me to compute separate estimates for individual groups. I fit the following specification:

$$y_{it} = \beta \text{CandOcc}_i + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \delta_r + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (2)$$

where y_{it} is a fundraising outcome for candidate i in cycle t from the focal occupation, CandOcc_i is an indicator equal to one if candidate i is affiliated with the focal occupation, $\mathbf{X}_{it}$ is an optional vector of candidate-level controls, and δ_r represents race (office-district-party-cycle) fixed effects.

Affinity Beyond Occupation Replacing the candidate occupation indicator in Equation 2 with an indicator for female candidates, I estimate gender-based fundraising affinity on the same sample of contested primaries. Female candidates raise an additional 9 percentage points ($\text{SE} = 0.00$) of their total individual fundraising from female donors relative to male candidates competing in the same race, only slightly larger than the 7-percentage-point occupation-based affinity estimate in Table 2. On the log scale, however, the pattern reverses: the gender estimate is 0.61 log points (0.05), compared to 1.04 log points for occupation (Supplemental Table SA-6 reports the full results for gender). These gender affinity estimates closely mirror those reported by Thomsen and Swers (2017), indicating that my results replicate an established pattern. Occupational ties therefore generate a fundraising response on the same scale as one of the most salient identities in American politics.

A similar comparison can be drawn with race-based donor affinity. Grumbach and Sahn (2020) find that, in U.S. House general elections, the nomination of an Asian American or Latino candidate increases the district’s share of contributions from co-ethnic donors by roughly 10 percentage points, while Black nominees increase the share of Black contributions by about 3 percentage points. By comparison, the estimates in Table SA-5 indicate that occupational alignment in the U.S. House produces a 7

percentage point increase in the share of primary election funds from co-occupation donors, a pattern that is somewhat smaller than the largest co-ethnic affinities but larger than the Black donor response. Taken together, these comparisons indicate that the magnitude of occupational affinity is substantively comparable to other identity-based affinities that scholars have documented in campaign finance.

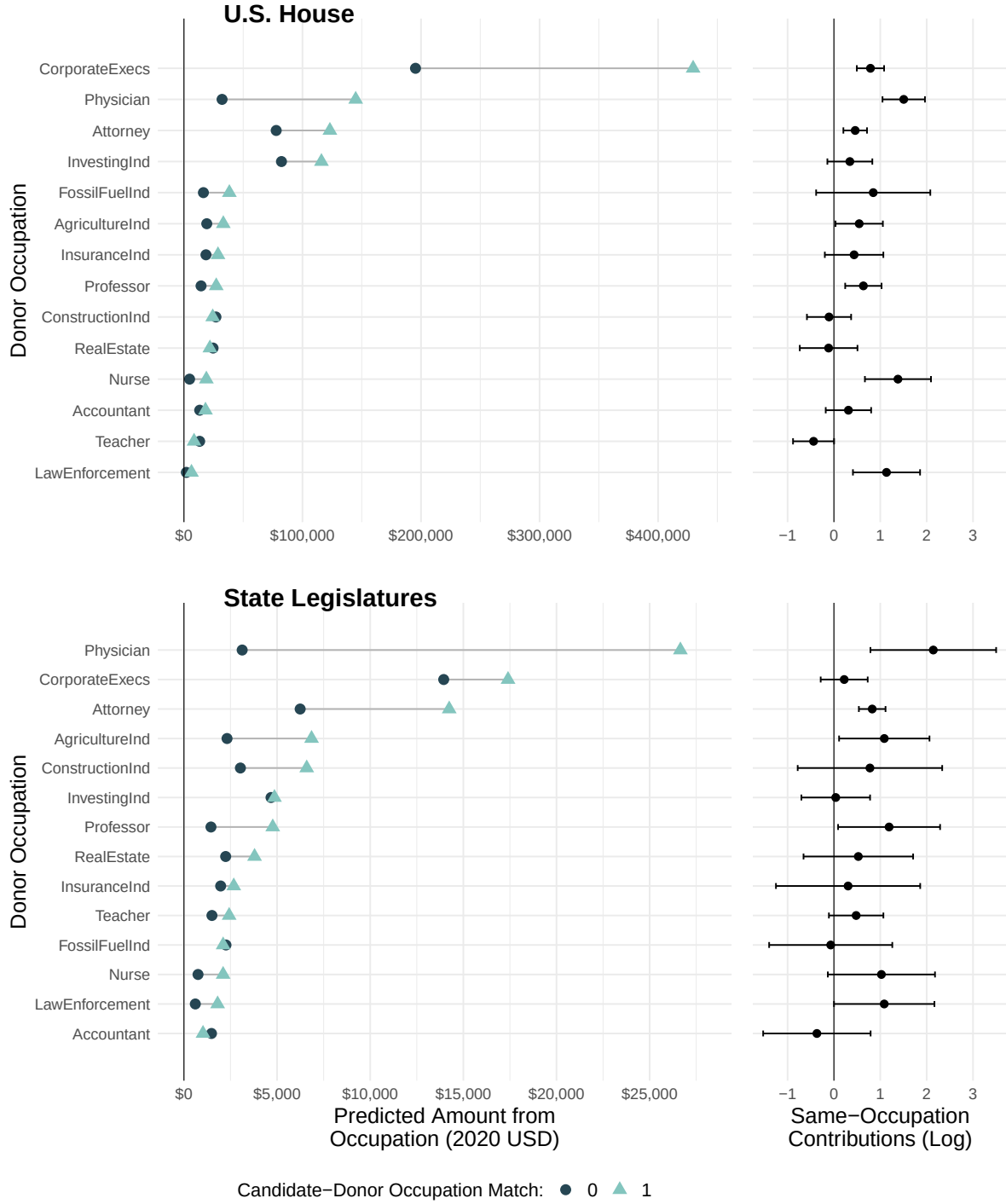
The Magnitude of Occupational Affinity To provide a clearer sense of the substantive magnitude of occupational affinity, I return to Equation 2 and estimate it separately for each of the fourteen occupations and industries in both U.S. House and state legislative contests. I fit each model using Poisson regression with raw dollar contributions as the outcome. Estimating in levels keeps fundraising on its natural scale and sidesteps the log-transformation and back-transformation that the highly skewed, zero-inflated distribution of contributions would otherwise require, steps that can complicate interpretation and potentially bias predictions (Chen & Roth, 2024; Cohn et al., 2022; Manning, 1998; Silva & Tenreyro, 2006).

For each candidate-cycle observation I then generate two predicted fundraising totals from the fitted model: one that assigns the candidate to the focal occupation and one that does not. Averaging the difference between these predictions across candidates yields the average change in fundraising associated with occupational membership. Because the fixed effects enter the prediction step directly, these estimates capture within-race contrasts rather than unconditional differences in mean fundraising. The result is a descriptive benchmark for the average dollar advantage that occupational membership confers, estimated separately for each of the fourteen groups.

Figure 3 summarizes these estimates in two stacked panels, with results for the U.S. House on top and state legislatures below. The left sub-panel reports the predicted contributions in 2020 dollars. Teal (light blue) triangles mark the predicted total for candidates who share a donor occupation and dark blue dots the total for candidates outside it, which makes the horizontal gap between them the absolute dollar advantage of occupational membership. The right sub-panel plots the corresponding Poisson coefficient on candidate-donor occupation match, with 95% confidence intervals and a vertical reference line at zero. Because the model is estimated in levels, this coefficient carries a multiplicative interpretation: $\exp(\beta) - 1$ is the proportional change in expected contributions for a co-occupation candidate, and a point falling to the right of zero indicates a same-occupation premium. The two sub-panels are thus the same contrast on different scales. The left reports the matched-versus-unmatched difference in dollars, the right their log ratio. Presenting these estimates together separates two ways in which an occupation’s affinity can be “large”: a group may loom large in total dollars yet show only a modest proportional premium, or give little in absolute terms while still posting a sizable, precisely estimated co-occupation effect.

Across the two sub-panels, one pattern stands out: how much an occupation gives overall and how strongly it favors its own are nearly unrelated. The familiar heavyweights of campaign finance occupy

Figure 3: Average Predicted Fundraising by Candidate and Donor Occupation



Note: Average predicted values from Equation 2. Each row corresponds to a donor occupation. In the left sub-panel, the x -axis reports contributions in 2020 USD: teal triangles mark candidates who share the occupation, dark blue dots mark non-aligned candidates, and the distance between them is the dollar advantage of occupational membership. The right sub-panel plots the corresponding Poisson coefficient on candidate-donor occupation match, with 95% confidence intervals and a reference line at zero. Since $\exp(\beta) - 1$ is the proportional change in expected contributions, points to the right of zero indicate a same-occupation advantage. These differences should be interpreted descriptively, holding covariates and fixed effects at their observed values. The full results are presented in Supplemental Table SA-7.

the corner where both run high. Corporate executives, attorneys, and physicians are among the largest contributors to legislative candidates in either chamber (Bonica, 2020; Bonica et al., 2019; Stuckatz, 2022), and each directs disproportionate support toward its own. Physicians do so most dramatically, with a co-occupation match raising predicted giving roughly fourfold in the House and eightfold in state legislatures. Attorneys’ premium is more modest but the most consistent across chambers, while corporate executives reward fellow professionals strongly in the House yet show no detectable affinity in the states, where their standing rests on volume alone.

Other large donors give at scale without such loyalty. Investors rank among the largest contributors in U.S. House races, yet their co-occupation advantage is modest and statistically indistinguishable from zero (Ban & You, 2019; Carpenter et al., 2022). Although they provide substantial campaign funding, they exhibit little evidence of occupational affinity in their contribution patterns. A set of smaller donors (accountants, real estate agents, the insurance industry, construction, and fossil fuel) rounds out the low-affinity field, with point estimates too small or too imprecise to establish a reliable co-occupation advantage in either chamber.

The reverse case is perhaps the more telling. Several occupations that barely register in absolute dollars post some of the largest proportional affinity in the sample. In the U.S. House, a co-occupation match more than triples predicted giving for both nurses and law enforcement officers, and professors and the agricultural industry post significant premiums in both chambers. The sums involved are small, but the proportional pull toward fellow professionals ranks among the strongest anywhere in the data, an affinity that a dollar-denominated ranking would erase.

Finally, a few occupations sort their loyalty by office. Teachers are the clearest case: their affinity is negative in U.S. House contests but turns positive in state legislatures, though the state estimate is imprecise. Although much of education policy is administered locally, its broader framework is set in statehouses, which makes them a more salient target for teacher giving than Congress.

Having established the baseline pattern across both outcomes and illustrated the absolute scale of occupational advantages, the remaining analyses focus primarily on the within-candidate share measure. This focus reflects the comparability and interpretability advantages discussed above. Parallel specifications using log-dollar outcomes are reported in Supplemental Tables [SA-10](#) and [SA-8](#). The results are substantively similar throughout.

Contextual Variation

Does occupational affinity vary across electoral contexts? In this section, I explore this question across three dimensions: open-seat primaries, safe districts, and crowded primaries. Column 1 of Table [3](#) reproduces the baseline estimate from Equation [1](#). Columns 2–4 then re-estimate the specification on subsets of the data: open-seat races (column 2), districts that are safe for the candidate’s party, defined

Table 3: Fundraising Advantages from Same-Occupation Donors, Across Contexts

	Within-Candidate Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate-Donor	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.07
Occupation Match	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Sample	Pooled	Open Seat	Safe	Crowded
Observations	155 303	57 340	61 121	68 098
Candidate-Cycles	11 750	4441	4583	5152
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate’s total individual fundraising that comes from occupation j donors. A parallel table with log-dollar outcomes is reported in Supplemental Table [SA-8](#).

as those where the co-partisan presidential nominee received more than 60% of the two-party vote share (column 3), and crowded primaries with three or more candidates (column 4).

Occupational affinity proves stable across electoral contexts, varying only modestly from one setting to the next. Against a baseline advantage of 7 percentage points, the estimate is slightly larger in open-seat primaries (8 points, column 2), somewhat smaller in safe districts (5 points, column 3), and essentially unchanged in crowded primaries (7 points, column 4). The open-seat coefficient is only slightly larger than the baseline, but its setting is consequential. Open seats are the principal entry point to a legislature: with no incumbent in the race, they are where a body’s occupational composition is most directly set, and where early money might have the greatest impact on who emerges as viable (Thomsen, 2025). Affinity is, if anything, strongest precisely here.

The open-seat advantage matters because it compounds. A candidate who converts co-occupation support into an open-seat victory enters future elections as an incumbent, after which the well-documented financial and electoral advantages of incumbency make continued fundraising and reelection far easier (Fournaies & Hall, 2014; Jacobson, 2015). Occupational affinity therefore need not recur at every stage to shape a legislature’s long-run composition: an edge at entry can persist through careers, linking the fundraising patterns documented here to the occupational imbalance that motivates the paper (Carnes, 2018). Notably, affinity is no stronger in safe districts, where the primary effectively decides the seat, than in the average race, a pattern that does not fit an account in which donors concentrate occupational support where officeholding is most assured. I return to this theme in the mechanism analysis below.

Characterizing the Advantage

With the baseline pattern of occupational affinity established, I now characterize the advantage along several dimensions: *when* it emerges in the campaign cycle, *how* it operates at the level of individual donors, and *who* the occupation donors are. Together, these results provide a fuller picture of what occupational affinity looks like in practice, before turning to the question of what drives it.

Early Money The results presented thus far establish a consistent occupational fundraising advantage in primary elections. Prior work, however, suggests that *early* contributions may be especially consequential for downstream candidate performance (Bonica, 2017; Thomsen, 2025). If occupational affinity is concentrated in the earliest stages of fundraising, when resources are most critical for establishing viability, it would underscore the practical importance of co-occupation support for candidates seeking to compete.

Following the definition of early fundraising proposed by Case and Porter (2025), I employ a candidate-centered measure: the first 90 days after a candidate receives her *first* contribution from an individual donor. Candidate self-loans are excluded, ensuring the measure captures the initial fundraising window when outside individuals begin supporting the campaign. I again estimate the pooled model from Equation 1, but now define the outcome as the share of early individual-donor dollars that originate from donors in the candidate’s own occupation.

The resulting estimate, reported in column 1 of Table 4, indicates that occupational affinity is indeed pronounced in early fundraising. When a candidate shares an occupation with a set of donors, contributions from those donors comprise an additional 7 percentage points of the early money the candidate receives. The strength of occupational support in early fundraising suggests that it is not merely a bandwagon effect that develops after candidates have already demonstrated electoral viability. It is present from the outset, before endorsements, polling, or coverage establish viability, suggesting occupational networks help shape the field rather than track it.

More Donors, Slightly Larger Checks Having documented the persistence of occupational affinity in *early* fundraising, I now turn to the composition of this advantage. Increased fundraising could arise through a larger number of donors, larger contributions from the same donors, or some combination of the two. I consider each of these possibilities in turn.

Column 2 of Table 4 presents coefficient estimates from the specification in Equation 1, where the outcome is the share of a candidate’s total individual donors drawn from a given occupation. This measure ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates that a candidate attracts no donors from the occupation and 1 indicates complete reliance on that occupation for support. For example, if a nurse-candidate receives contributions from 100 unique individuals during a primary and 20 of those donors are nurses,

Table 4: Dimensions of the Occupational Fundraising Advantage

	When	How		Who	
	Early \$ (1)	Donors (2)	Log(Avg. Gift) (3)	Out-State \$ (4)	Out-Party \$ (5)
Candidate-Donor	0.07	0.06	0.12	0.05	0.10
Occupation Match	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.03)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	153 108	155 342	101 855	124 924	87 640
Candidate-Cycles	11 580	11 752	11 308	9419	6634
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Columns (1), (2), (4), (5) are within-candidate shares: occupation- j \$ (or donors) divided by the candidate's total in the corresponding pool. Column (3) $\text{Log}(\text{Avg. Gift})$ is the natural log of the average contribution from occupation- j donors to a candidate. Sample sizes in columns (3)–(5) are smaller because these outcomes require a nonzero denominator or at least one occupation-specific contribution. A parallel table with log-dollar outcomes is reported in Supplemental Table SA-10.

the outcome would be 0.20. The coefficient in column 2 of Table 4 indicates a 6 percentage point increase in the share of a candidate's donors that come from a shared occupation, relative to competitors in the same race who do not share that occupation. Co-occupation donors make up a notably larger share of aligned candidates' contributor base.

I next ask whether these donors also contribute *larger* amounts to their fellow professionals. To assess this, I again estimate Equation 1, now defining the outcome as the average contribution amount per occupation-specific donor. This outcome is measured as the total amount contributed by donors in a given occupation, divided by the number of distinct donors from that occupation. Although this variable is constructed as an average for each candidate-cycle-occupation observation, it remains right-skewed, so I take its natural log prior to estimation.

Because the outcome is measured in log dollars, the coefficient in column 3 of Table 4 implies that candidates receive, on average, contributions from co-occupation donors that are approximately 0.12 log points (about 13%) larger than those received by competitors who do not share the occupation. This result is substantively modest. In raw dollars, the average contribution amount from occupation donors in the sample is \$804 (\$1,208 for U.S. House candidates and \$543 for state legislative candidates).

Taken together, the results from columns 2 and 3 of Table 4 suggest that the occupational fundraising advantage arises primarily through a broader donor base. Candidates who share an occupation with a set of donors attract meaningfully more donors from that profession, and while they also receive modestly larger individual contributions, the gift-size channel appears secondary.

This distinction matters beyond accounting. A broad base of co-occupation donors signals breadth of support and, because individual donors face per-election contribution limits, supplies a larger pool

of distinct contributors for a campaign to draw on for additional donations as the race continues. Such breadth is more consistent with mobilization through broad professional networks than with the intensified giving of a few committed patrons.

Crossing State and Party Lines The prior section demonstrates that much of the occupational fundraising advantage stems from attracting a broader base of co-occupation donors rather than larger contributions. I now consider whether occupational affinity extends across two important boundaries: state and party lines.

The rise of a national donorate is an important development in modern campaign finance. The median House incumbent raises an increasingly large share of individual contributions from out-of-district donors (Gimpel, Lee, & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2008), and members appear responsive to the preferences of this national donor base in ways that shape representation (Canes-Wrone & Miller, 2022). One open question is whether occupational ties help candidates access these distant donors. Professional networks are frequently national in scope: attorneys and physicians, for example, belong to associations, attend conferences, and share institutional ties that cut across state boundaries. If co-occupation donors are especially likely to cross state lines, it would indicate that the reach of occupational affinity extends well beyond a candidate’s immediate geographic base.

To explore this, I employ the specification from Equation 1. The outcome variable is the share of a candidate’s total out-of-state individual contributions that come from occupation-specific donors. Restricting the denominator to out-of-state money isolates occupation’s role in geographic reach: of the support a candidate draws from beyond her home state, how much flows through shared profession? The results, presented in column 4 of Table 4, indicate that candidates receive an additional 5 percentage points of their out-of-state money from donors who share their occupation, relative to non-occupation competitors. Occupational affinity, then, is not confined to a candidate’s home state: it reaches into national professional communities, allowing a candidate’s professional network to partly substitute for a strong local donor base. In doing so, it ties officeholders to a professional constituency whose preferences need not track those of the district they represent (Canes-Wrone & Miller, 2022).

I next ask whether occupational affinity can extend across party lines. This is a particularly demanding test. Decades of research underscore the durability of partisanship and ideology in structuring political behavior, including contribution patterns (Ansolabehere et al., 2003; Barber, 2016; Barber et al., 2017). This is especially true during the polarized period covered by the sample, 2003–2022. If professional identity can nonetheless elicit cross-party contributions, it would suggest that occupation operates on a dimension at least partially orthogonal to ideological alignment.

I again rely on Equation 1, with the outcome defined as the share of a candidate’s out-party individual contributions that come from occupation-specific donors. Among the contributions that do cross

party lines, this measures how far professional identity organizes giving. Are occupation donors especially likely to set aside party loyalty and support one of their own? To identify donor partisanship, I examine each donor’s full contribution history and retain only those who have donated to four or more unique candidates. Among these, I classify as strong partisans those who directed 75% or more of their contributions to candidates of a single party. A donation is then coded as out-party when it flows from a strong partisan of one party to a candidate of the other.⁵ The results, presented in column 5 of Table 4, reveal a notable pattern of cross-party giving among co-occupation donors. The estimated coefficient of 0.10 indicates that candidates receive a 10 percentage point larger share of their out-party money from donors who share their occupation, relative to competitors who do not.

To put this in perspective, House candidates raise an average of \$10,553 in total out-party money (2020 USD). A 10 percentage point shift in the share from co-occupation donors corresponds to roughly \$1,055 in additional cross-party support.⁶ While modest in absolute terms, this is notable during a period (2003–2022) in which cross-party donations are otherwise rare, and suggests that professional identity operates on a dimension at least partially independent of partisan attachment. Moreover, this result represents an average across candidates and occupations. For some races and professional groups, cross-party occupational giving is considerably larger.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that occupational affinity remains robust in the earliest stages of fundraising, operates primarily through broad donor mobilization rather than through larger contributions, and is not restricted to a fixed set of local, co-partisan donors. The next section explores how occupational affinity relates to candidates’ total fundraising performance.

Occupational Affinity and Total Fundraising

The preceding results demonstrate that candidates receive disproportionate support from donors who share their professional background. However, this occupational affinity reflects only a partial fundraising advantage: contributions from donors within the same occupation. It is less clear whether such affinity translates into a *net* fundraising gain. If candidates from a given occupation attract fewer contributions from donors outside their field, the additional support from co-occupation donors may be offset by losses elsewhere. In this sense, occupational affinity could reflect substitution rather than an overall advantage.

Whether the fundraising patterns documented above contribute to the occupational imbalance of American legislatures (Carnes, 2018) depends on two questions the pooled specification cannot answer on its own: which professions translate occupational affinity into net fundraising advantages, and how large a role does the co-occupation channel play in generating those advantages?

To address these questions, I group the fourteen occupation and industry categories into two sets: *elite*

⁵Supplemental Table SA-9 presents results from a more stringent classification, in which strong partisans are donors who directed 80% or more (rather than 75%) of their contributions to candidates of one party, as well as from a log-dollar specification of out-party giving in place of the within-candidate share. The results are highly similar.

⁶Supplemental Table SA-10 reports the corresponding result in log dollars, which is similar.

occupations (attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives) and the remaining eleven categories. These three elite categories correspond to the occupations and industries whose members are, on average, among the highest-income donors in the sample, and whose professional donor networks are among the most extensively documented in the campaign finance literature (Bonica, 2020; Gordon et al., 2007; Richter & Werner, 2017).⁷ I then estimate a variant of Equation 1 in which the candidate-donor occupation match indicator is interacted with occupation group $g \in G = \{\text{elite}, \text{other}\}$:

$$y_{ijt} = \sum_{g \in G} \beta_g (\text{CandOcc}_{ij} \times \mathbf{1}\{\text{OccGroup}_j = g\}) + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \alpha_{r \times j} + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \quad (3)$$

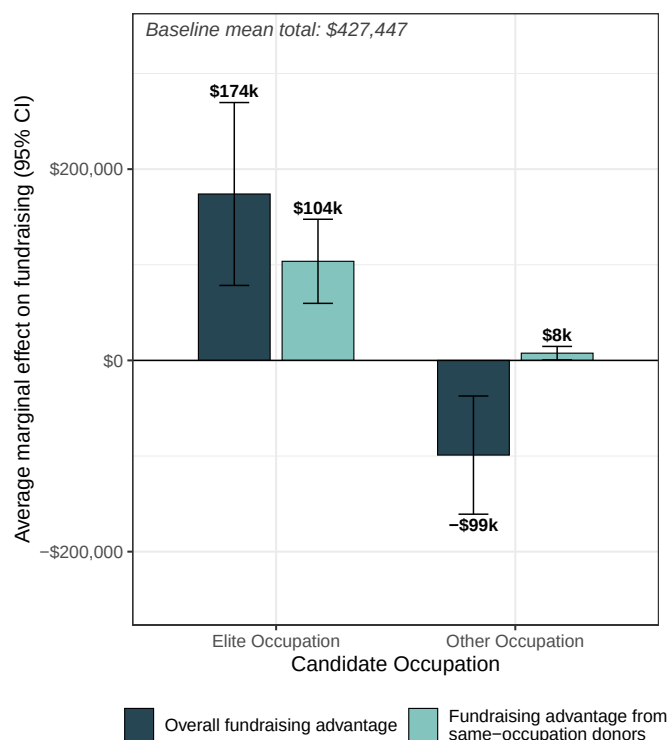
The coefficients β_g measure the occupational fundraising advantage separately for each occupation group. All other terms are defined as in Equation 1. The model is estimated as a Poisson regression with contributions in 2020 USD as the outcome, which keeps fundraising on its natural scale and avoids the bias that log-transformation and back-transformation can introduce with highly skewed outcomes and a substantial mass at zero. I fit this specification separately by chamber and for two dependent variables: total individual contributions and same-occupation contributions. For each, I compute average marginal effects (AMEs) by toggling the match indicator from zero to one within each occupation group and averaging the resulting change in predicted dollars across observations. Because fixed effects are incorporated into the prediction step, the resulting estimates reflect within-race contrasts rather than unconditional differences in mean fundraising. This decomposition recovers the dollar-level fundraising advantage that occupation-matched candidates enjoy, separating the portion attributable to the co-occupation channel from the total advantage inclusive of any spillover to (or displacement from) other donor groups.

Figure 4 presents the results for candidates in U.S. House primaries. Candidates from elite occupations enjoy large total fundraising advantages: approximately \$174,000 more in individual contributions per race, against a baseline mean of roughly \$427,000. A substantial share of this advantage runs through the co-occupation channel. Same-occupation contributions account for approximately \$104,000 of the \$174,000 total, nearly 60%. The remainder reflects higher contributions from donors *outside* the candidate’s occupation, consistent with a dynamic in which strong early co-occupation support signals viability to the broader donor pool.

The pattern for other occupations differs dramatically. Despite positive co-occupation fundraising (approximately \$8,000), candidates from these professions face a net fundraising *disadvantage* relative to otherwise comparable candidates in the same race, raising roughly \$99,000 less in total individual contributions. The co-occupation channel operates for these professions, but the scale of same-occupation giving is more than offset by lower contributions from donors in other occupations.

⁷The decision to pool these three categories does not drive the results. Appendix Figure SA-2 re-estimates the decomposition separately for each elite occupation; the co-occupation advantage remains positive and significant for all three, confirming the pattern is common to the group rather than driven by any single profession.

Figure 4: Fundraising Advantage of Elite Occupations Comprised Largely of Co-Occupation Donations in U.S. House Primaries



Note: Average marginal effects from Poisson regressions of individual contributions (2020 USD) on candidate-donor occupation match interacted with occupation group (elite vs. other), with incumbency controls and race-occupation fixed effects. Two outcomes per group: total individual contributions and same-occupation contributions. Elite occupations: attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives. Other occupations: remaining eleven occupations. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries.

State legislative contests show a broadly similar pattern, albeit noisier and at a smaller scale (Supplemental Table SA-3). Elite-occupation candidates raise approximately \$4,000 more in total individual contributions against a baseline mean of roughly \$29,000. The co-occupation channel again accounts for a large share of candidates' potential fundraising advantage: the same-occupation advantage for these candidates is approximately \$6,000, and is statistically significant. The co-occupation advantage exceeds the total advantage, implying that the increase in same-occupation donations is partially offset by a decrease in contributions from other donors. The chief difference from the House results is precision: the total fundraising advantage is imprecisely measured, and for other occupations the total and co-occupation estimates are small and statistically insignificant.

The decomposition clarifies why occupational affinity, although present across virtually all professions, translates into a net fundraising advantage for only a few. The binding constraint is not whether a profession's donors activate on behalf of co-occupation candidates (they generally do), but whether the profession's donor pool is large enough and wealthy enough to convert that activation into a net fundraising advantage. Elite professions satisfy this condition; others do not. To the extent that early money determines who can viably compete in a primary (Thomsen, 2025), these dollar-level asymmetries

help explain why certain professions remain overrepresented in elected office and others remain largely absent.

Even where occupational affinity does not produce a net fundraising gain, it may still shape the relationship between candidates and their professional communities. A teacher-candidate who raises a substantial share of contributions from fellow teachers, even if her total fundraising falls short of an attorney-candidate's, may feel heightened accountability to the concerns of that professional base (Carnes, 2013, 2018). In this sense, occupational affinity can influence representation even when it does not shape electoral outcomes.

What Drives Occupational Affinity?

The preceding section establishes that occupational affinity is a robust feature of primary elections, concentrated in early fundraising, driven by donor mobilization rather than larger contributions, and capable of crossing state and party lines. But what *drives* it? The theoretical framework developed above identifies three complementary channels. *Policy investment* accounts predict that donors support co-occupation candidates to secure favorable policy outcomes, implying that affinity should be strongest where the expected return is highest: in winnable districts and for candidates who gain access to profession-relevant committees. *Network mobilization* accounts predict that interpersonal and institutional ties channel contributions to co-occupation candidates, implying that affinity should be amplified within denser professional networks. *Expressive identity* accounts predict that donors give to candidates “like them” for reasons of professional solidarity, implying that affinity should persist even where strategic returns are negligible.

These channels are not mutually exclusive, and the empirical tests that follow will not perfectly disentangle them. The goal is to narrow the range of potential mechanisms by identifying which accounts are most and least consistent with the data. To probe the instrumental channel, I first examine whether occupational affinity attenuates when the expected policy return is low (in districts where the candidate's party is unlikely to win the general election). I then adapt the difference-in-differences design from Fourniaies and Hall (2018) to test whether co-occupation donors respond when a candidate gains access to a profession-relevant committee. To probe the network channel, I explore whether co-occupation giving is amplified within shared law school alumni networks, where professional ties are densest.

Limited Evidence of Policy Investment

If occupational affinity reflects policy investment, in which donors give in order to advance the policy interests of their profession, two patterns should be visible in the data. First, affinity should attenuate when the candidate is unlikely to hold office, since the expected policy return approaches zero. Second,

occupational donors should increase their support for any legislator who gains a seat on a profession-relevant committee, regardless of that legislator’s own occupation, since committee membership enhances a legislator’s capacity to deliver targeted benefits. I test each prediction in turn.

Unwinnable Districts To test the first prediction, I split the sample by district safety and re-estimate the pooled specification from Equation 1 on each subsample. I classify a district as *unwinnable* for the primary’s party if the opposing party’s presidential candidate won by at least 20 percentage points in the most recent presidential election. In such districts, the primary winner faces a near-certain general election loss, making it implausible that donors expect meaningful policy returns from their contribution.

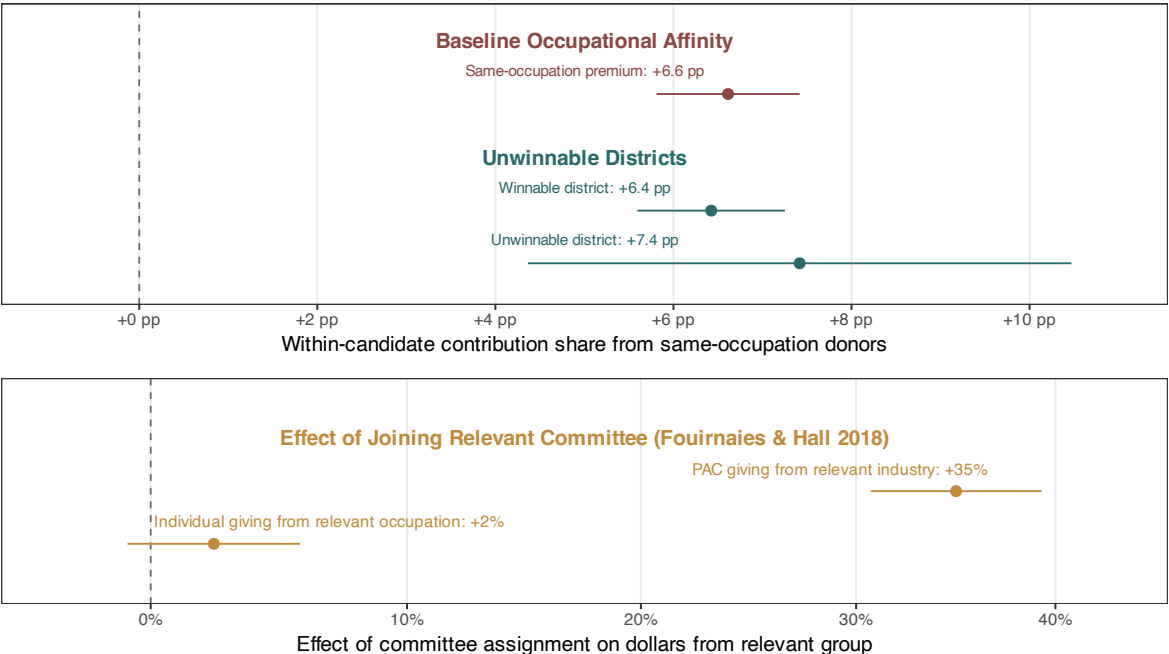
The upper panel of Figure 5 presents the results. As a benchmark, I plot the baseline occupational affinity estimate (across all districts) of 6.7 percentage points at the top of the panel. Below this baseline, I plot separate estimates for winnable (6.4 percentage points) and unwinnable districts (7.4 percentage points). Although the unwinnable district estimate is imprecisely estimated, occupational affinity is, if anything, *larger* in races where the eventual nominee has no realistic prospect of holding office. This pattern is inconsistent with a purely instrumental account in which donors direct contributions toward candidates who can deliver policy benefits. Instead, it suggests that co-occupation donors support candidates from their profession regardless of whether that support is likely to translate into legislative influence.

Committee Access To evaluate the second prediction, I adapt the difference-in-differences design from Fourniaies and Hall (2018), who show that interest group PACs increase contributions to legislators who gain seats on committees with jurisdiction over the group’s policy domain. I examine whether individual occupation donors exhibit a similar response, increasing support for any legislator who joins a profession-relevant committee irrespective of that legislator’s own occupation. I implement this test among state legislators, where I can draw on the committee assignment data compiled by Fourniaies and Hall (2018).

The lower panel of Figure 5 presents both estimates. I first replicate the PAC result across the 8 sector-committee pairings that correspond to occupations in my sample.⁸ Consistent with Fourniaies and Hall (2018), PAC giving increases by approximately 35 percent following a relevant committee assignment ($N = 354,792$). I then estimate the analogous specification for individual donors from each occupation across 8 occupation-committee pairings ($N = 397,312$). The result is effectively null: giving from occupation donors increases by approximately 2 percent, an estimate that is both small and statistically indistinct from zero. The contrast is striking: PACs, which are widely understood to behave strategically, respond strongly to committee assignments, while individual occupation donors do not. This divergence suggests that the mechanisms governing individual occupation giving differ fundamentally from the access-seeking logic that drives PAC contributions.

⁸Fourniaies and Hall (2018) report results for 10 sector-committee pairing. I restrict to the 8 that map onto my individual donor analysis.

Figure 5: Policy Investment: Occupation Donors Unresponsive to Office and Access



Note: The upper panel plots coefficients on same-occupation match from Equation 1, estimated separately on each subsample. *Unwinnable district*: the opposing party’s presidential candidate won by ≥ 20 percentage points. All specifications include race-occupation fixed effects and incumbency controls. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. The lower panel plots the estimated effect of gaining a relevant committee assignment on log contributions, rescaled as $\exp(\hat{\beta}) - 1$ for interpretation as a percentage change. The PAC sample replicates Fourinaies and Hall (2018) across 8 sector-committee pairings ($N = 354,792$). The individual sample covers 10 occupation-committee pairings (397,312). Both specifications include candidate-industry/occupation and candidate-year fixed effects, with robust standard errors clustered by candidate. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Taken together, these two tests provide little support for narrowly instrumental accounts of occupational affinity. If co-occupation giving were primarily motivated by expected policy returns, it should attenuate in districts where the candidate is unlikely to win and increase when a legislator gains access to a relevant committee. Neither pattern appears in the data. Whatever drives individual co-occupation giving, it does not closely track the conditions under which strategic contributions would be most valuable.

Network Mobilization: Evidence from Law School Alumni

Having found little evidence for policy investment, I next ask whether professional *networks* play a more direct role in channeling co-occupation contributions. If shared professional ties help activate occupational affinity, then giving should be concentrated along specific network links, not diffused evenly across all co-occupation donors. To test this, I examine whether attorney candidates raise disproportionately from donors who attended the same law school.

The attorney case offers a uniquely informative setting. Law schools create well-documented networks of alumni who share formative professional experiences and maintain ties through alumni associations, bar organizations, and referral networks. If these connections channel political contributions, same-school alumni should give at rates far exceeding what chance alone would predict. Limiting the analysis to attorneys and their attorney donors also holds the occupation constant, isolating the role of *within*-occupation network ties above and beyond the baseline occupational affinity documented in the preceding section.

I estimate a within-candidate panel specification at the candidate-cycle $\times$ donor-school level. The panel includes all 246 law schools attended by at least one candidate in the sample, zero-filled for school-candidate dyads in which no donor from that school contributed. Each specification includes candidate-cycle fixed effects, so the coefficient on school match is identified from within-candidate variation: holding fixed everything about a candidate’s fundraising environment, do donors from the candidate’s own law school give more than donors from other schools? I estimate the model with two outcomes: the share of a candidate’s total attorney fundraising from donors at a given school, and the log dollar amount from those donors.

A natural concern is that same-school giving reflects geographic proximity rather than institutional ties. A candidate and donor who attended the same state law school may simply live near each other, and proximity could drive the elevated giving rather than shared professional connections. To address this, the most demanding specification replaces school fixed effects with state $\times$ school fixed effects, absorbing state-specific school giving patterns and ensuring that the estimate is not driven solely by geographic overlap between candidates and their fellow alumni.

Table 5 presents the results. In the baseline specification, a same-school match (Candidate–Donor School Match) is associated with a 22 percentage point increase in the share of contributions from donors

Table 5: Fundraising Advantage from Same-Law-School Donors

	Within-Candidate Share			Log(1 + Amount)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cand-Donor	0.22	0.15	0.06	3.78	4.58	2.62
School Match	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.10)
School Match $\times$		0.09	0.05		-1.02	-1.51
State Leg		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.13)	(0.11)
Observations	1 246 728	1 246 728	1 246 728	1 246 722	1 246 722	1 246 722
Candidate-Cycles	5018	5018	5018	5018	5018	5018
Cand-Cycle FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School FE	✓	✓		✓	✓	
State-School FE			✓			✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Per (candidate-cycle $\times$ donor-school) panel restricted to primary-stage attorney candidates and the 246 schools attended by at least one candidate. Candidate-Donor School Match is binary (0/1). Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate's attorney fundraising from donor-school j . Columns (2) and (5) interact with seat class (House as reference); columns (3) and (6) replace school FE with state $\times$ school FE.

affiliated with a given law school (column 1) and a 3.78 log-point increase in dollars raised from those donors (column 4). These estimates suggest that, at least among attorneys, same-school alumni account for a substantial share of co-occupation contributions.

Columns 2 and 5 interact school match with an indicator for state legislative candidates (U.S. House as the reference). The same-school premium is larger for state legislative candidates in share terms (0.24 vs. 0.15) but smaller in log dollars (3.56 vs. 4.58). Despite this variation across offices, the premium is large and precisely estimated in both settings, confirming that alumni networks structure attorney fundraising across levels of office.

The most demanding specification (columns 3 and 6) replaces school fixed effects with state $\times$ school fixed effects, which absorb state-specific school contribution patterns. The same-school premium attenuates but remains substantial: 5.9 percentage points in share terms and 2.62 log points in dollars for House candidates, and 10.5 percentage points in share terms and 1.11 log points for state legislative candidates. The persistence of a sizable premium under these demanding controls, particularly for House candidates, is consistent with alumni networks that operate nationally, channeling contributions through professional ties rather than geographic proximity alone.

Of the mechanisms examined here, the network channel finds the strongest empirical support. Attorney candidates raise substantially more from donors who attended the same law school, suggesting that professional networks channel contributions to co-occupation candidates above and beyond shared occupational identity alone. The attenuation under state $\times$ school fixed effects indicates that geography accounts for part of the alumni premium, but a substantial component remains after absorbing state-specific school giving patterns.

Discussion

The results presented in this paper establish occupational affinity as a consistent and substantively important feature of American legislative elections. Across a wide range of professions, offices, and electoral contexts, candidates raise disproportionately from donors who share their professional background. In primary elections, within-race comparisons show that candidates raise roughly 7 percentage points more of their individual contributions from co-occupation donors than their competitors, an advantage comparable in magnitude to documented affinities along racial and gender lines.

The professions that benefit most from occupational affinity are not those whose members give most readily to their own. Co-occupation donors mobilize across nearly every field; what differs is the pool they can draw on. Only a narrow set of elite professions, including attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives, draw on a sufficiently strong donor pool to convert that mobilization into a net advantage. Elsewhere, the same enthusiasm runs into a thinner, less affluent base. The binding constraint is thus a profession’s fundraising capacity, not the willingness of its members to support their own. Yet even where affinity yields no net advantage, it may still bind candidates to their professional communities, heightening their accountability to a base they depend on (Bawn et al., 2023, 2012).

The mechanism tests point away from narrowly instrumental explanations and toward professional networks and expressive identity. Co-occupation affinity does not weaken in districts a candidate’s party cannot win, and individual donors, unlike PACs, do not respond when a legislator gains a profession-relevant committee seat, both difficult to reconcile with a policy-investment account. The strongest positive evidence is for networks: among attorneys, giving concentrates within law-school alumni ties even after absorbing geographic overlap.

These findings carry broader implications for representation. The professional makeup of a legislature is not incidental. It is shaped, in part, by which candidates can assemble the resources to compete. Because occupational networks supply that money early, they operate as a filter on the candidate pool, helping to determine who appears viable before voters weigh in. That filter is most consequential at the point of entry. Occupational affinity is, if anything, strongest in open-seat primaries, the contests that most directly determine a legislature’s composition. A candidate who converts co-occupation support into an open-seat victory enters future elections with the financial and electoral advantages of incumbency, so an edge concentrated at entry can persist across a career (Fouirnaies & Hall, 2014). In this way, the uneven distribution of professional fundraising capacity helps reproduce the occupational imbalance of American legislatures.

The stakes of that imbalance reach well beyond the composition of the chamber. A legislator’s occupational background shapes what she does in office, from the issues she prioritizes to her success in advancing them (Carnes, 2012; Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Makse, 2022; Miler, 2017). The professions best positioned to fund their candidates therefore help set the policy agenda once those candidates win,

in domains as consequential as health insurance, the minimum wage, and taxation (Carnes, 2013).

Several limitations merit discussion. First, because of the \$200 federal itemization threshold and comparable thresholds at the state level, the analysis primarily observes donors who give above these amounts. Small-dollar fundraising has grown rapidly through platforms such as ActBlue, and occupational affinity may operate differently among unitemized small donors (Yorgason, 2025). Second, the data capture only monetary contributions, and professional networks may also supply volunteers, expertise, endorsements, and introductions that matter for viability but go unobserved in campaign finance records. Third, the primary-election estimates remain conditional on candidate entry. Candidates from well-networked professions may selectively enter races where they expect a strong co-occupation donor base, while potential candidates who do not anticipate such support may select out of running altogether. The observed fundraising advantage therefore partly reflects who chooses to run, not only the independent effect of occupational alignment on candidate performance. The estimates therefore speak to how occupational alignment shapes the performance of candidates who run, not to whether it draws them into running in the first place. That is a narrower quantity than a fully unconditional effect, but a consequential one, since it is the advantage that helps decide who emerges viable among those already competing.

More broadly, these findings reframe a familiar question about representation. If early money matters for who can compete, and if access to it is distributed unevenly across professions, then the composition of American legislatures reflects not only the preferences of voters but also the structure of candidates' professional environments. Understanding how professional networks form, mobilize, and channel campaign capital is therefore part of any complete account of who governs, and whose interests are most effectively represented.

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Supplemental Appendix

SA-1 Data and Occupational Classification

This appendix expands on the data sources and classification procedures summarized in the main text. It provides additional detail on the candidate occupation sources, the construction of the donor classification pipeline, and the disclosure rules that define the sample.

SA-1.1 Data Sources

The primary source for candidate occupations is Project Vote Smart (PVS), which offers the most comprehensive coverage of congressional and state legislative candidates. I supplement PVS with four additional datasets that vary in coverage: Ballotpedia candidate profiles; Makse (2019), covering state legislators from 1993 to 2012; Porter et al. (2025), covering congressional candidates from 2018 to 2022; and the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory as merged with DIME by Bonica and Sen (2017). These differences in coverage motivate the hierarchical integration described below.

On the donor side, I rely on individual contribution records sourced from DIME (Bonica, 2024), which compiles contributions reported to the FEC and state agencies. These data include more than 34 million unique individuals between 1980 and 2024. The donor-reported occupation and employer fields accompanying itemized records form the basis for matching donors to occupational categories.

SA-1.2 Occupational Schema

Candidates and donors are classified into a common set of fourteen categories (Table 1), described in the main text. I additionally constructed classifications for three further occupations (dentists, pharmacists, and software developers) and one further industry (the pharmaceutical industry), but fewer than 100 candidates were assigned to any of these categories, producing highly unstable estimates; I therefore exclude them from the analysis. Because candidate and donor records differ substantially in structure and scale, I classify each through a distinct pipeline, described below.

SA-1.2.1 Candidate Occupation Pipeline

The baseline classification comes from Project Vote Smart. A large language model (Anthropic’s Claude Haiku) reads each candidate’s structured PVS career history and returns binary flags for the fourteen categories. This source initializes all flags and covers the plurality of candidates. I then layer the supplementary sources on top of this baseline using two types of merge rules, both designed to minimize false positives.

The first rule is *positive override*: a flag set to one by a high-precision source forces the combined flag to one, but a zero from that source never suppresses a baseline positive. Ballotpedia (whose keyword and LLM-extracted profession fields are conservative, as they often record only a candidate’s most recent occupation) and the Martindale-Hubbell law directory (attorney) both enter as positive overrides. The second rule is *NA-fill*: a source supplies a value only where the baseline and higher-priority sources are missing, never overriding an existing classification. Porter et al. (2025)’s CampaignView (House candidates) and Makse (2019) enter this way; Makse is further restricted to the four categories (attorney, corporate executive, insurance, and agriculture) that overlap cleanly with one of the 14 categories included in my study (e.g., Makse’s “Educator” overlaps with my “Teacher” and “Professor” categories). The resulting precedence is: PVS-Haiku baseline, then positive overrides from Ballotpedia and Martindale-Hubbell, then NA-fills from CampaignView and Makse.

To validate the combined candidate occupation classification procedure, I hand-coded two random samples of candidates against the fourteen categories: 200 that the procedure assigned to at least one category, and 150 it assigned to none. Of the 250 candidate-category labels the procedure assigned from candidates’ biographical text, hand-coding confirmed 234 (precision = 93.6%). And of the 247 candidate-category labels identified by hand, the procedure recovered 234 (recall = 94.8%).

SA-1.2.2 Donor Occupation Pipeline

Donor occupation assignments rely on a hybrid procedure combining automated record linkage, LLM verification, and regular-expression matching. The primary method uses a deep-learning record-linkage model

implemented through LinkTransformer (Arora & Dell, 2023), applying the pre-trained `all-MiniLM-L6-v2` sentence-transformer model. Unique occupation strings are matched to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, and employer strings are matched to the Center for Research in Security Prices (CRSP) database of publicly listed firms (1962–2024). For each string the model returns a best-matching entry and a cosine similarity score; I retain matches above 0.75 for occupations and 0.90 for employers.

For occupation matches in the intermediate similarity range (0.75–0.85), I verify classifications with an LLM (Anthropic's Claude Haiku), which reads each raw occupation string and assigns category flags directly, overriding the embedding classification where the two disagree. I further supplement the automated methods with regular-expression matching applied to all occupation strings, capturing common or unambiguous labels that may fall below the embedding threshold. A donor is flagged for an occupation if either the combined embedding/LLM pipeline or the regex identifies a match. On a hand-coded, stratified validation sample, the combined pipeline produces mean match rates of 88% for occupations and 91% for employers. Of the 11 million individual donors active in the sample period, roughly 9 million (84%) are classified into at least one occupational category and 2.7 million (25%) into one of the fourteen focal categories.

I hand-coded two random samples of donors against the fourteen categories: 200 assigned to ≥ 1 category and 150 assigned to a non-listed occupation. Of the 219 donor–category assignments the procedure made, 197 were confirmed (precision = 90.0%; 91.9% weighting by contribution dollars). Recall was 97.2%, and the marginal-band Haiku-verification step was correct on 30 of 33 labels it backed (90.9%).

Occupation Classification Coverage

Table SA-1: Occupational Data Coverage Across Candidate Attributes, FEC-Consistent Disclosure Jurisdictions

Grouping	Count with Occupation	Total Count	Percent with Occupation
<i>All Candidate-Cycles</i>	31,817	43,168	73.7%
<i>Primary Winner</i>			
Lost	4,378	9,341	46.9%
Won	27,254	33,593	81.1%
<i>General Winner</i>			
Lost	9,198	18,128	50.7%
Won	20,015	21,930	91.3%
<i>Chamber</i>			
State: Lower	17,766	26,190	67.8%
State: Upper	5,668	7,729	73.3%
Federal: House	8,388	9,254	90.6%
<i>Incumbent Status</i>			
Open Seat	7,215	12,276	58.8%
Challenger	7,920	12,094	65.5%
Incumbent	16,296	17,819	91.5%

Note: The final column reports the share of candidate-cycles with non-missing occupation data (count with occupation divided by total count) within each group. Percentages are calculated within groups, not across them, and so need not sum to 100. Each attribute (primary winner, general winner, chamber, incumbency status) is a separate cross-tabulation of the same candidate-cycles, so group totals within an attribute draw on the full sample except for candidate-cycles with missing values on that attribute.

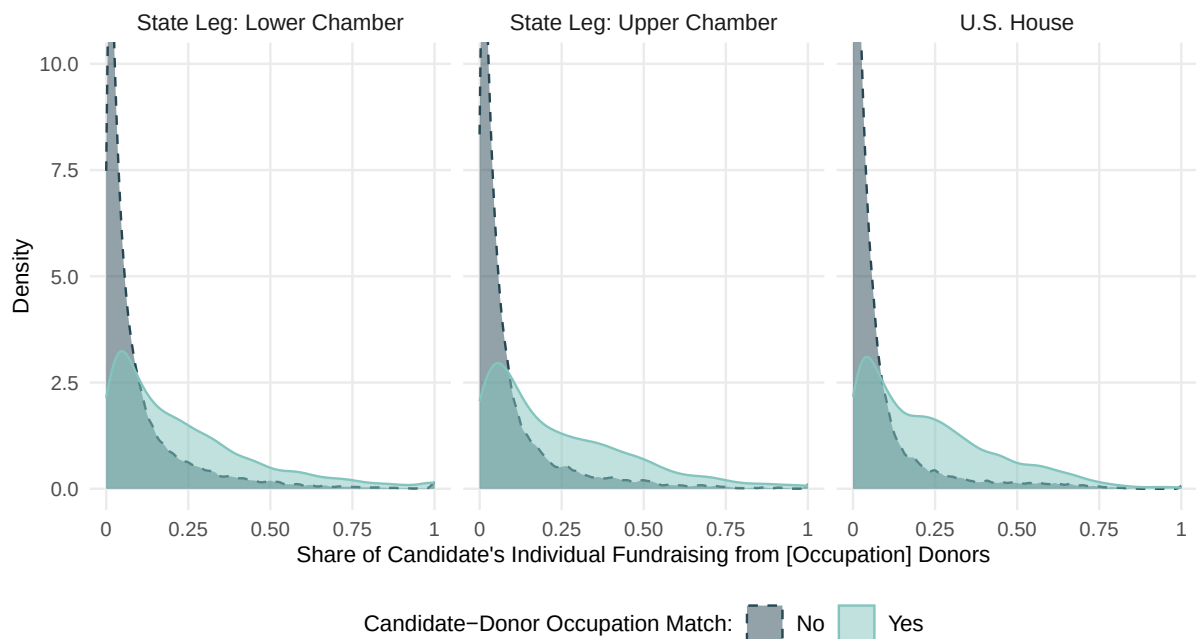
Table SA-2: Sample Construction: From Primary Election Data to Estimation Sample

Step	Candidate-Cycles
All candidate-cycles in primary election data	79,330
FEC-consistent disclosure jurisdictions	43,168
Sample restrictions	17,938
Non-missing occupation data (estimation sample)	11,752

Note: Candidate-cycle counts at each stage of sample construction. “Sample restrictions” refer to restricting the sample to regularly scheduled, contested, two-party primaries. State legislative races are further limited to single-member districts and exclude nontraditional primary formats (e.g., top-two and blanket primaries). The estimation sample (final row) comprises the candidate-cycles entering the within-race specifications in Equation 1, and equals the number of clusters reported in the regression tables.

Baseline Occupational Affinity (Filtered to amount_occ > \$0)

Figure SA-1: Candidates Raise a Greater Share of Contributions from Their Own Occupation (Filtered to amount_occ > \$0)



Note: Candidate-Donor Occupation Match indicates whether a candidate shares a background in occupation j with a set of donors. The outcome is the amount of money a candidate raised from occupation j , divided by the total amount they received from individual donors.

Occupational Affinity in Primary Elections: Robustness to Alternative Outcome Treatment

In this section I assess whether the log-dollar results survive alternative treatments of the outcome, considering the substantial number of candidate-occupation pairs that receive \$0 in contributions. Because zeros are common, the $\log(1 + \text{Amount}_{ijt})$ coefficients depend on the units of the outcome and lack a clean proportional interpretation (Chen & Roth, 2024; Cohn et al., 2022). The zeros also blend two distinct margins (whether occupation j gives to a candidate at all and how much it gives conditional on giving) that a single transformed outcome cannot separate. I therefore re-estimate the preferred specification under outcomes that avoid the transformation and decompose these two margins.

Table SA-3 re-estimates the preferred specification from Table 2 under four outcomes that vary only the dependent variable and estimator. Column (1) reproduces the main-text benchmark, $\log(1 + \text{OCC Funds})$. Column (2) replaces the transformation with Poisson pseudo-maximum likelihood (PPML), which models the expected level of occupation- j funds directly rather than a transformation of it (Silva & Tenreiro, 2006). PPML handles zeros without an added constant, is invariant to the outcome's units, and yields coefficients that read as proportional differences in expected dollars. Because it drops fixed-effect groups whose outcome is zero for every candidate, its estimation sample is smaller. Columns (3) and (4) separate the margins: (3) is a linear probability model for receiving any occupation- j money, and (4) is the log amount among candidates who receive a positive amount.

Table SA-3: Same-Occupation Fundraising Advantage: Robustness to Outcome Treatment

	Log(1+OCC Funds) (1)	OCC Funds (2)	Pr(OCC Funds>0) (3)	Log(OCC Funds) (4)
Candidate-Donor	1.04	0.64	0.07	0.59
Occupation Match	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.01)	(0.06)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Funds > 0
Observations	155 342	118 387	155 342	101 838
Candidate-Cycles	11 752	11 540	11 752	11 307
Estimator	OLS	PPML	OLS	OLS

All columns hold the preferred specification fixed: race-occupation fixed effects, an incumbency control, and the binary Candidate-Donor Occupation Match indicator. Robust standard errors are clustered by candidate-cycle. Only the dependent variable and estimator vary. (1) OLS on $\log(1 + \text{OCC Funds})$; (2) PPML on OCC Funds in levels (smaller sample: PPML drops fixed-effect groups with no positive contributions); (3) linear probability model on $\mathbf{1}\{\text{OCC Funds} > 0\}$; (4) OLS on $\log(\text{OCC Funds})$ among candidates with positive OCC Funds. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. OCC Funds is the amount a candidate raises from occupation- j donors.

Occupational Affinity in Primary Elections: Robustness to Alternative Fixed Effects

In this section, I present results on occupational affinity in primary elections using the pooled specification outlined in Equation 1. In these models, however, I incorporate alternative fixed-effects structures to demonstrate the robustness of the findings. Column 1 adds a candidate fixed effect to the baseline race–occupation fixed effect, while column 2 replaces the combined race fixed effect with separate district–party–occupation and cycle fixed effects, thereby leveraging more of the available variation in the data. Importantly, the specification in column 1 cannot be estimated using the within-candidate occupation fundraising share outcome, since that outcome is already defined by comparisons within candidate. Including a candidate fixed effect in that setting would generate highly correlated observations across candidate–cycle–occupation rows. To address this constraint, I instead use the logged amount raised from occupation j as the outcome variable.

Table SA-4: Occupational Affinity in Primary Elections: Robustness to Alternative Fixed Effects

	Within-Candidate Share		Log(1 + OCC Funds)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Candidate-Donor	0.07	0.06	1.04	0.95	0.85
Occupation Match	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.07)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	155 303	155 303	155 342	155 342	155 342
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Race-OCC FE	✓		✓		✓
Candidate FE					✓
District-Party-OCC FE		✓		✓	
Cycle FE		✓		✓	

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency (except Col 2, where it is absorbed by candidate FE). Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate’s total individual fundraising from occupation j donors. Log(1 + OCC Funds) is the natural log of the amount of money a candidate raises from occupation j donors. Cols (1) and (3) reproduce the preferred specification from Table 2. Cols (2) and (4) replace race-occupation FE with separate district-party-occupation and cycle FE. Col (5) adds candidate fixed effects.

Pooled Occupational Affinity, by Office

Table SA-5: Fundraising Advantages from Same-Occupation Donors, by Office

	Within-Candidate Share		Log(1 + OCC Funds)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate-Donor	0.07	0.07	1.06	0.94
Occupation Match	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.09)	(0.16)
Sample	U.S. House	State Leg.	U.S. House	State Leg.
Observations	67 421	87 882	67 421	87 921
Mean(y_{it})	0.07	0.06	6.63	4.16
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate's total individual fundraising that comes from occupation j donors. Log(1+OCC Funds) is the natural log of the amount of money a candidate raises from occupation j donors.

Gender-Based Affinity

Table SA-6: Female Candidates' Fundraising Advantage from Female Donors

	Within-Candidate Share	Log(1 + Female Funds)
	(1)	(2)
Female Candidate	0.09 (0.00)	0.61 (0.05)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	29 746	29 753
Controls	✓	✓
Race FE	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Female Candidate is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Within-Candidate Share is the share of a candidate's total individual fundraising that comes from female donors. Log(1 + Female Funds) is the natural log of the amount of money a candidate raises from female donors.

Occupational Affinity in Primary Elections, By Occupation and Chamber

Table SA-7: Occupational Fundraising Advantages: U.S. House vs. State Legislative Races

<i>Dependent variable: Amount from occupation (2020 USD)</i>		
<i>Independent variable: Candidate-donor occupation match (binary)</i>		
	U.S. House	State Legislatures
Accountant	0.313 (0.250)	-0.368 (0.591)
Attorney	0.459*** (0.130)	0.825*** (0.147)
Physician	1.505*** (0.234)	2.143** (0.692)
Nurse	1.381*** (0.364)	1.024 (0.590)
Professor	0.635** (0.200)	1.190* (0.561)
LawEnforcement	1.134** (0.369)	1.085* (0.553)
Teacher	-0.439 (0.226)	0.479 (0.300)
RealEstate	-0.115 (0.317)	0.526 (0.603)
CorporateExecs	0.788*** (0.150)	0.221 (0.259)
FossilFuelInd	0.847 (0.628)	-0.069 (0.678)
InsuranceInd	0.435 (0.322)	0.305 (0.794)
AgricultureInd	0.545* (0.260)	1.086* (0.497)
ConstructionInd	-0.106 (0.243)	0.777 (0.795)
InvestingInd	0.343 (0.247)	0.039 (0.378)
Observations	3,366–4,863	2,260–5,903
Race FE	✓	✓

Coefficients are drawn from 28 separate Poisson regressions (14 occupations $\times$ 2 levels of office). Specification outlined in Equation 2. Sample sizes vary across specifications because Poisson estimation omits fixed-effect groups in which contributions are zero for all candidates. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle in parentheses. Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Contextual Variation: Alternate Outcomes

Table SA-8: Fundraising Advantage from Same-Occupation Donors, Across Contexts (Log Outcomes)

	Log(1 + OCC Funds)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate-Donor	1.04	1.08	0.85	1.11
Occupation Match	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.09)
Sample	Pooled	Open Seat	Safe	Crowded
Observations	155 342	57 354	61 121	68 098
Candidate-Cycles	11 752	4442	4583	5152
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Log(1 + OCC Funds) is the natural log of the amount of money a candidate raises from occupation j donors.

Characterizing the Advantage: Out-Party Contributions

Table SA-9: Out-Party Occupational Affinity: Robustness to Alternate Outcomes and Partisanship Thresholds

	Within-Candidate Share		Log(1 + Out-Party \$)	
	75% (1)	80% (2)	75% (3)	80% (4)
Candidate-Donor	0.10	0.10	0.89	0.78
Occupation Match	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	87 640	76 426	155 342	155 342
Candidate-Cycles	6634	5782	11 752	11 752
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. Donors are classified as strong partisans if they gave to at least four distinct major-party candidates and directed at least 75% (cols. 1, 3) or 80% (cols. 2, 4) of their contributions to one party. Within-Candidate Share is occupation- j out-party \$ divided by the candidate's total out-party \$; Log(1 + Out-Party \$) is the natural log of occupation- j out-party dollars. Column (1) is the main specification (Table 4, column 5). Share columns have smaller samples because they require a nonzero out-party denominator.

Characterizing the Advantage: Alternate Outcomes

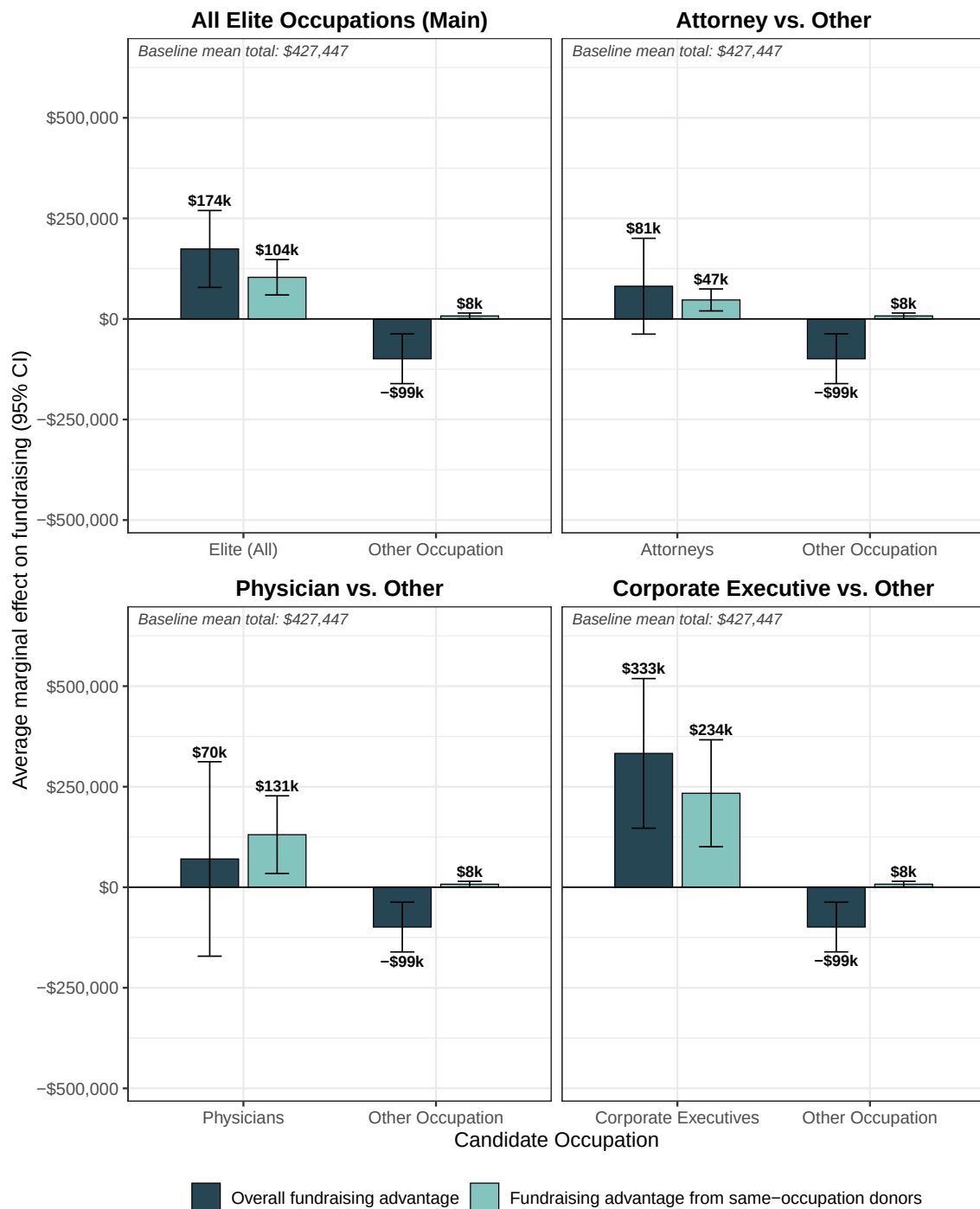
Table SA-10: Dimensions of the Occupational Fundraising Advantage (Log Outcomes)

	Early \$ (1)	# Donors (2)	Avg. Gift (3)	Out-State \$ (4)	Out-Party \$ (5)
Candidate-Donor	1.13	0.49	0.12	0.86	0.78
Occupation Match	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Sample	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled	Pooled
Observations	153 295	155 342	101 855	155 342	155 342
Candidate-Cycles	11 590	11 752	11 308	11 752	11 752
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race-OCC FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidate-Donor Occupation Match is binary (0/1). Controls include incumbency. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries. All outcomes are logged: each is estimated by OLS using the $\log(1 + x)$ transformation. *Early \$*: dollars from occupation- j donors in the first 90 days. *# Donors*: count of occupation- j donors. *Avg. Gift*: average contribution from occupation- j donors. *Out-Party \$* and *Out-State \$*: dollars from out-party and out-of-state occupation- j donors.

Occupational Affinity and Net Fundraising: By Specific Occupation

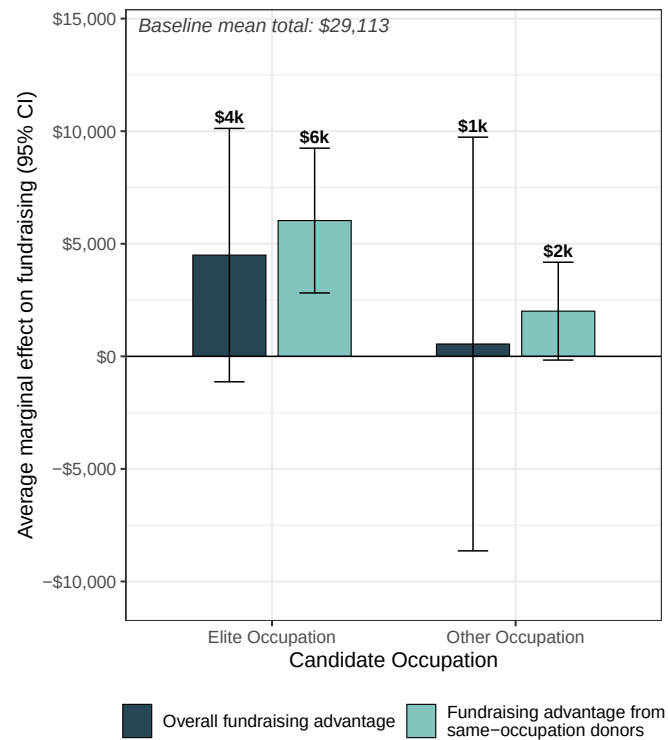
Figure SA-2: Fundraising Advantage of Elite Occupations in U.S. House Primaries (By Individual Occupation)



Note: Average marginal effects from Poisson regressions of individual contributions (2020 USD) on candidate-donor occupation match interacted with occupation group (elite vs. other), with incumbency controls and race-occupation fixed effects. Two outcomes per group: total individual contributions and same-occupation contributions. Elite occupations: attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives. Other occupations: remaining eleven occupations. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries.

Occupational Affinity and Net Fundraising: State Legislatures

Figure SA-3: Fundraising Advantage of Elite Occupations in State Legislative Primaries



Note: Average marginal effects from Poisson regressions of individual contributions (2020 USD) on candidate-donor occupation match interacted with occupation group (elite vs. other), with incumbency controls and race-occupation fixed effects. Two outcomes per group: total individual contributions and same-occupation contributions. Elite occupations: attorneys, physicians, and corporate executives. Other occupations: remaining eleven occupations. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors clustered by candidate-cycle. Candidates restricted to Democrats and Republicans in contested primaries.