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Research Article

## Funding in the Shadow of Conflict: AIPAC's Financial Influence on US Congress Post-2023 Israel-Hamas War

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**Abstract:** The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has been a key player in mobilizing support for Israel's foreign policy within the US Congress, especially during regional conflicts. While studies have examined the influence of the pro-Israeli lobbies' donations on US policymakers, the strategic allocation of these funds remains less explored. This study addresses that gap by analyzing factors that influenced variations in AIPAC donations to US Congress members following the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. The findings reveal two main determinants: Congress members' sponsorship of pro-Israel bills and the electoral competition in their constituencies. Those actively supporting pro-Israel legislation receive more financial contributions, indicating a link between legislative support and financial incentives. Additionally, members facing strong electoral competition attract more donations, suggesting AIPAC's targeted investment in politically secure candidates. This research highlights how the Israeli lobby strategically uses financial contributions to shape US foreign policy, particularly in the context of Israel's military engagements.

**Keywords:** AIPAC, Congressional Donations, Israeli Lobby,

## Introduction

The influence of pro-Israeli lobbying on US foreign policy has been a subject of intense debate, yet it has garnered limited academic exploration. While public commentaries often underscore the significance of this lobbying influence, especially in shaping US policy toward the Middle East region, academic inquiries into the extent and mechanisms of pro-Israeli influence on US foreign policymaking have been sporadic (Waxman, 2010). The most prominent scholarly discourse was ignited by Mearsheimer and Walt's (2006) seminal work, which provocatively argued that the United States support for Israel is not rooted in strategic interests or moral imperatives but rather in the formidable influence of the pro-Israeli lobby within US domestic politics. Mearsheimer and Walt's publications swiftly prompted criticism from a variety of perspectives, kindling the debate on the impact and reverberations of pro-Israeli lobbies in US policymaking. The academic debate became more prominent as the Israel-Hamas war erupted on October 7, 2023, and culminated in immense humanitarian tragedies. Since the US opted to provide

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enormous financial and political support for Israel's military campaigns and foreign policy initiatives in the region, the academic discussions concerning the impact of the pro-Israeli lobbies on US policy in the Middle East region have become increasingly relevant and necessary (Bilmes et al., 2024; Guardian, January 10, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to this significant debate by providing an empirical analysis of the extent to which, and under which conditions, lobbying groups may leverage financial contributions to influence US foreign policymaking through the Congress. This research explores the factors that explain variations in donations facilitated by one of the most important pro-Israeli lobbies in the US, The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), to the Congress members. While some descriptive accounts suggest that these donations primarily target pro-Israel candidates, little is known about why certain members receive more financial support than others (Guardian, January 10, 2024). By focusing on Congress members' legislative actions and their electoral contexts, this study provides insights into the mechanisms through which AIPAC's lobbying efforts may be pertinent to legislative behavior and steering desired foreign policy outcomes. This study hypothesizes that two factors—congressional sponsorship of pro-Israel legislation and electoral competitiveness—play a significant role in explaining these variations. By focusing on these two dimensions, this research seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the strategic use of financial contributions in US foreign policy formulation, specifically regarding pro-Israeli lobbying efforts.

The findings of this study show that AIPAC-facilitated financial contributions allocated to endorsed congress members correlate with their explicit commitment to the legislative processes that reinforce the pro-Israel foreign policy objectives. These results supports studies that illuminate the link between pro-Israeli lobbying efforts and US foreign policymaking by indicating the plausible pathways through which financial contributions may translate into desired foreign policy outputs in the context of the October 7 War (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009a, 2009b). Concerning this role of pro-Israeli lobbying funding in supporting legislative processes that reinforce Israel's contentious military engagements in the Middle East, the study calls for increased transparency and accountability in political donations, given their potential to back contentious military policies.

### **Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy**

Even though the influence of the pro-Israeli lobbies in the US foreign policymaking has been abundantly alluded to in commentaries and anecdotes, the subject interestingly attracted limited academic scrutiny (Waxman, 2010). In international

relations scholarship, the most vigorous debate was kindled by Mearsheimer and Walt's (2006) study on the impact of the pro-Israeli lobbies on US foreign policy. The authors vehemently contended that US support for Israel neither stems from the American strategic calculations based on mutual interests nor moral imperatives felt obliged by the US policymakers (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). Rather, the Israeli Lobby managed to steer US foreign policy in line with the security interests of Israel by successfully navigating through US domestic politics (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009b). Mearsheimer and Walt explain various ways in which pro-Israeli lobbies influence US domestic politics. They may lobby for the candidates running for Congress or senate elections, mobilize Jewish-American votes for the supported candidates, and shape public opinion through paid media campaigns. Accordingly, the latter was prominently harnessed to boost American citizens' support behind Israeli policies in the Middle East region, preponderantly portraying Israel as the most valuable and important ally of the US in the region and a high-end protector of the US's security interests. Additionally, the media campaigns are also aimed at exonerating Israeli military actions against Palestinians, depicting the latter as the ultimate source of instability and perennial conflict in the region (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009b). The lobby's influence over the media is also leveraged to disparage those who adopt a critical approach toward Israeli interests (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006).

The Congress, according to Mearsheimer and Walt, is the most important playground of the pro-Israeli lobbies in US politics. The authors argue that pro-Israeli lobbies have an immense influence in US Congress, where a substantial number of congress members and official staff work in legislative processes favoring Israel's foreign policy interests. The Israeli Lobby, in turn, does not neglect rewarding cooperative Congress members and candidates during their election campaigns and in their terms in office. Pro-Israeli legislators and candidates are entitled to generous donations from the Israeli lobby, whereas those candidates and congress members who criticize the Israeli policies are encountered with vociferous Israeli lobby support for their political challengers (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). In addition to races between the Democratic and Republican parties in electoral districts, pro-Israeli lobbies also support their favored candidates in intra-party primaries. In this context, the Israeli lobby gives bipartisan support for the pro-Israeli candidates. The lobby particularly campaigns to ensure pro-Israeli candidates run for the electoral district in both Democratic and Republican parties and capitalize on their political and financial prowess to sway voters to support their favored candidate in primaries (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006).

The debate initiated by Mearsheimer and Walt ushered in a nascent research agenda that examined the role of pro-Israeli lobbies in US foreign policymaking.

These studies focused on understanding the role of pro-Israeli lobbies in influencing a variety of US foreign policymaking issues, including undermining peacemaking efforts in the Middle East brokered by the US (Abdollahi, 2016; Ahmadi, 2015; Khalidi, 2013), swaying US policymakers to take a biased stance toward regional conflicts (Bölme, 2018; Çiçekçi, 2021; Gultom & Miftah, 2024; Oguntuase et al., 2024), prompting military interventions against the hostile states (Mast, 2014; Petras, 2011), affecting high-level foreign policy appointments (Talaykurt, 2007) and facilitating military technology transfers from US to Israel (Huczko, 2019; Rodman, 2007). On the other hand, Mearsheimer and Walt also prompted criticism from a variety of perspectives, arguing the power of the pro-Israeli lobby to sideline the Congress members could be exaggerated and that the lobby actually has less influence on Congress than it is usually depicted (Wang, 2021). One current in these criticisms posits that pro-Israeli lobbies' influence on US foreign policy is confounded with the increasing strategic importance of Israel to the US foreign policy objectives in the region (Aridan, 2019; Fishman, 2008; Fleshler, 2009; Kiely, 2017; Plitnick & Toensing, 2007; Spitzer, 2013). In other words, it is argued that the US would still pursue similar policies in the absence of lobby pressures on the US legislative and executive organs. Protecting Israel's interests is inextricably intertwined with the US interests in the region, which would render the lobbying pressures an unnecessary and costly endeavor (Plitnick & Toensing, 2007). Another current criticism of Mearsheimer and Walt's study questions the robustness of the link between pro-Israeli lobbies' endorsed policy stance and Israel's foreign policy agenda. To illustrate, Waxman argues that it would be misleading to conceive every centrist pro-Israeli lobby in the US as a political organization that unquestionably supports the policies of Israel. He contends that "it will not necessarily lend its full support" in every political issue discussed in terms of Israel's foreign policy interest, albeit they rarely publicly disparage Israel's policies (Waxman, 2018, p. 93). Last but not least, some scholars criticize Mearsheimer and Walt's employed methodology, arguing that the relationship between Israel lobbies' contribution to the candidates and the level of support derived from the endorsed candidates is not empirically substantiated and claiming causal linkages are unestablished (Lieberman, 2009, p. 238).

Although Mearsheimer and Walt responded to some of these criticisms in their later works (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009a, 2009b), the impact of pro-Israeli lobbies on US foreign policy is still contentious and necessitates empirical studies to unravel to what extent and by which mechanisms pro-Israeli lobbies may influence the US foreign policymaking. This study responds to this gap and examines the factors influencing the pro-Israeli AIPAC lobby's facilitated donations to the endorsed US congress members in the context of one of the violent and egregious

military conflicts that erupted between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023. Implications of this study aim to provide a piece of empirical for evaluating certain arguments coined in the debate embarked on with Mearsheimer and Walt's study and to understand the role of pro-Israeli lobbies in contentious and unmitigated US support for Israeli's political and military engagements in the context of Israel-Hamas war (Bilmes et al., 2024). The following section presents a framework for explaining the link between variations in AIPAC donations allocated to endorsed congress members and political support mobilized for Israeli foreign policy objectives.

### **AIPAC and US Congress**

Pro-Israeli lobbies are not the only organizations engaged in lobbying efforts in US Congress to attain desired political outputs. The lobbying practice is also substantially embraced by business actors operating within the US. An extensive literature on corporate political action shows that business entities may resort to political donations and lobbying efforts within the US Congress in order to hedge themselves against prevailing political and economic risks or extract exclusive economic privileges reinforcing their business practices (Hillman et al., 2009; Lawton et al., 2013; Zhang, 2021). Lobbying through affiliated political action committees (PACs) has been one of the important political interactions of the notable business actors in the US to incentivize US Congress members to urge policies endorsing the economic interests of the business agents (Hassan et al., 2019). In addition to business groups, other ethnic lobbies in the US besides pro-Israeli lobby, such as Armenia and India, have successfully lobbied in the US Congress to incentivize congress members to land support on a particular foreign policy action (Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Blackwell, 2010). What makes the AIPAC lobby an important subject of this study is these lobbies' immense influence over the policymaking processes undertaken in Congress and their link with Israeli politics, which undergirds Israel's contentious military actions in the Middle East. Ostensibly, AIPAC is not the only pro-Israeli lobby in the United States, but it is the most influential and powerful one (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006).

The impact of the pro-Israeli lobbying can be traced back to long before the establishment of AIPAC in 1953. Historical studies show that pro-Israeli lobbying was effective in convincing US President Wilson to endorse Balfour Declaration and later galvanizing support in the US Congress and Senate on Israel's statehood during Truman's tenure (Waxman, 2018). AIPAC, on the other hand, had limited financial resources and had restricted access to US foreign policymaking before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The war substantially turned the tide in favor of AIPAC, granting an unprecedented opportunity for the lobby to institutionalize itself in US

domestic politics. The war massively increased the support of the American Jews to the lobby along with the amount of total donations received and the number of administrative staff. While the AIPAC cemented its financial base and public approval, its ability to sway US policymaking in favor of its desired policies proportionally increased. Even though American Jewish support for the lobby occasionally diminished, particularly during politically stable eras in the Middle East, tumultuous years of military conflict and upheavals such as the First and Second Intifada coincided with increasing support for the lobby in the United States (Waxman, 2018). Likewise, some reports indicate that the recent Israel-Hamas war clearly showcases the increasing weight of AIPAC in swaying US Congress opinion towards advocating Israel's foreign policy objectives and egregious military campaigns (Guardian, January 10, 2024).

The main purpose of this study is to understand the factors influencing the variation in donations allocated to endorse congress members who enjoyed some extent of financial benefits from the lobby. Some descriptive accounts examined the donation patterns of AIPAC-facilitated donations among congress members supporting pro-Israel versus pro-Palestine arguments. To illustrate, The Guardian's report shows that congress members supporting pro-Israeli policies after the eruption of the Israel-Hamas war received more donations than those members supporting Palestine (Guardian, January 10, 2024). The report shows that pro-Israeli donations preponderantly targeted Congress members supporting Israel's war efforts initiated after October 2023, and the vast majority of congress members benefited from the incoming donations for their campaigns. However, the report also denotes that receiving benefits from AIPAC did not automatically translate into support for pro-Israeli policies. Even though some congress members enjoyed a certain amount of funding allocated by pro-Israeli lobbies, they did not outright endorse pro-Israeli policies. Rather, some of these congress members criticized pro-Israeli lobbies harshly, calling them "cancers" in US politics (Guardian, January 10, 2024). In this context, how can we account for the political factors accounting for the variation in financial contributions allocated to the congress members, and to what extent can these financial contributions be linked to the legislative processes in Congress?

This study primarily focuses on the impact of pro-Israeli AIPAC's lobbying on the foreign policymaking formulated in the US Congress rather than presenting a generalizable framework applicable to the present interest lobbies in the US. The main aim of the research is to make a meaningful contribution to the literature by examining the link between financial contributions allocated to Congress members and the legislation process within Congress that supports the foreign policy objectives of Israel. Nonetheless, prevailing theories examining rational actions of

the PACs may provide insights into the underlying strategic interaction between congress members and lobbies and may enable drawing testable hypotheses to examine the political implication of lobbying in Congress (Thomsen, 2023).

One factor that explains the variation in the amount of political donations allocated for individual congress members can be the level of alignment of specific policy goals attached to the lobbying efforts and congress members' concrete actions shedding support on these specific policy objectives of the pro-Israeli lobbies. This strategic alignment with policy objectives underscores the importance of policy advocacy in shaping donation behaviors (Khanam, 2022). The support of the congress members on a particular lobby's policy position can be observed in various means. One of these strategies would be examining the voting behavior of these congress members on bills concerning particular policies. Nonetheless, voting on the Congress floor may signal weak alignment since it does not require the allocation of Congress members' resources anchored to the particular policy issues advocated by interest lobbies. Furthermore, some studies found no relationship between political donations and congressional voting patterns (Glantz et al., 1976; Jacobson, 1978). Alternatively, focusing on how congress members involved in the legislation process in promulgation of the endorsed bills would indicate a better alignment of congress members to the policy preferences attached to the drafted bills (Hall & Wayman, 1990). This study operationalizes the commitment of congress members to the legislation process pertinent to the pro-Israeli policies by focusing on the number of sponsored and cosponsored bills instead of taking congress members' voting patterns into account. Congress members' sponsorship of the proposed bills would require devoting more political resources to a particular policy. Hence, it can be a better indicator of the congressional support for lobbies' policy stances. Thereby, this study posits the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: The number of sponsored and cosponsored bills endorsing the policy objectives of the AIPAC is positively correlated with the amount of financial contributions received from the facilitation of the AIPAC lobby by the individual congress members.*

As the second factor, electoral competitiveness may influence the patterns in lobby donations (Hunt & Kettler, 2023). The competition across electoral districts may vary greatly as certain candidates may encounter formidable opponents while others may have a strong and explicit upper hand against their political challengers. This variation in electoral competition may have an influence on financial contributions allocated by lobbies, revealing the strategic bargaining entrenched in the interactions among the lobby and congress members. From the viewpoint of

lobbies, gaining access to Congress members is a costly and challenging process for the lobbies (Dryer, 2007). As the lobbies achieved access to the congress members and built up cordial relationships with them, established contact became a valuable asset in the network of influence in the US Congress (Hall & Wayman, 1990). Re-election of the congress members providing lobbies access to the congress would be of great interest to the lobbies, saving them from costs and ambiguities of having access to the Congress through a freshly elected congress member. Hence, lobbies may be more eager to financially support congress members facing severe electoral competition in their course of re-election. On the other hand, from the perspectives of the congress members, they would be in a more advantageous position to press lobbies to allocate more financial resources for their campaigning efforts (Hall & Wayman, 1990). Hence, the following hypothesis can be stated in the context of this study:

*Hypothesis 2: Electoral competence faced by endorsed congress members is positively correlated with the number of financial contributions received from the facilitation of the AIPAC lobby.*

## **Data and Methodology**

This article aims to examine the underlying factors explaining the variation in financial donations allocated by the facilitation of AIPAC to US Congress members. The main dependent variable is continuous in nature, measuring the amount of donations in US dollars received by individual congress members from AIPAC-affiliated political action committees. The donations data are received from Track AIPAC, a Non-governmental organization (NGO) that monitors AIPAC's financial contributions to Congress and senate members by compiling data from Open Secrets, another NGO monitoring the financial influence of interest lobbies in US politics, and Federal Election Commission, a governmental body (Track AIPAC, 2024). The data contain financial contributions received by US Congress members from the initiation of the 118th United States Congress in January 2023 to June 2024, which is the latest date for this study's data compilation.

It should be noted that since AIPAC is not a PAC it cannot directly raise funds to allocate donations to US politicians (Waxman, 2018). Nonetheless, AIPAC is linked to many pro-Israeli PACs, which are entitled to make financial contributions to political figures in US politics, and AIPAC's overwhelming network fosters contributions to these pro-Israeli PACs and maintains coordination among these committees to ensure endorsed political figures receive intended financial funds (Plitnick & Toensing, 2007). In this sense, even though AIPAC cannot publicly lend support to the favored candidates, it has an overt signaling mechanism that guides its members about which candidates should be endorsed financially (Fleshler,



2009). Furthermore, since AIPAC constitutes a broad platform for supporting pro-Israeli policies and embodies a wide membership network, it can mobilize support for political figures advocating AIPAC's policies and steer its members' financial support to these endorsed individuals' political course. AIPAC also vehemently campaigns to mobilize financial support for individuals who are not active members of AIPAC but are sympathetic to politicians endorsing pro-Israeli policies (Fleshler, 2009; Plitnick & Toensing, 2007, p. 44).

This study employs two independent variables. First, one of the contentions of this research is that the amount of donations received by the US Congress members from AIPAC is correlated with the political support behind the pro-Israeli policies formulated in the US Congress. This political support is operationalized by the number of bills endorsing pro-Israeli policies sponsored and cosponsored by each individual congress member who is financially contributed by AIPAC and AIPAC-affiliated PACs. Data were compiled from the US Congress's web archive by examining the proposed bills in the 118th US Congress up to the latest date for data collection and extracting out pro-Israeli bills along with the congress members who sponsored each bill in question (US Congress, 2024a). Second, the study hypothesizes that the competitiveness of the electoral district in which the current congress members run may correlate with the financial funds received through the facilitation of the pro-Israeli AIPAC. This research uses a dummy variable to indicate whether the electoral district of the endorsed congress member is a competitive race by capitalizing on the race ratings published by The Cook Political Report (The Cook Political Report, 2024).

This research uses a variety of control variables to be included in the regression analyses. The democratic or republican party affiliation of the congress members is coded as a categorical variable. Previous research shows that partisan polarization was an influential factor in interest groups' lobbying efforts (Garlick, 2022; Guardian, January 10, 2024). AIPAC can endorse both Democratic and Republican candidates in each state, but the total financial contributions of a party in each state vary significantly. Additionally, committee membership within Congress may affect the financial contributions allocated by the interest groups (Hall & Wayman, 1990). Previous studies reported that AIPAC significantly supports the role of Congress members in Congress's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on Armed Services (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009a). Even though this research aims to explain the variation of donations among the congress members already endorsed by AIPAC rather than explaining which factors account for the likelihood of attracting donations facilitated by AIPAC, this research uses a dummy variable to control for the endorsed congress members' participation in these important committees (US Congress, 2024b). Finally, the features of the state in

which individual congress members are elected are compiled and included as control variables. The data on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and population of each state is retrieved from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2024). The study also includes a dummy variable to account for whether the state of the congress member is considered a swing state in the most recent presidential election held in 2020 (Ballotpedia, 2024).

At this point, one may argue why the research did not include the American-Jewish population by state as a control variable. It can be explained twofold. First, the distribution of the American-Jewish population by state is highly correlated with the general population by state. Hence, the inclusion of both of the population variables creates a multicollinearity problem for the analysis. Second, it is indicated nearly one-third of the American-Jewish population lends either weak or no support for policies advocated by AIPAC (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). Furthermore, Jewish donations cannot be conflated with pro-Israeli lobby donations. Even though pro-Israeli lobby donations may have a significant influence on the campaigns of candidates, their amounts are considerably smaller in comparison to individual donations allocated by American Jewish citizens who may sometimes support candidates on issues that are not relevant to Israeli policies (Fleshler, 2009). Therefore, this study included the general population by state as a control variable instead of including a variable measuring the American-Jewish population by state. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of all the employed variables.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics of the employed variables*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Amount of Donations	141132.60	81375.5	166787.13	1000	990064
Bill Sponsorship	8.83	7.0	7.40	0	49
Electoral Competence	0.18	0.0	0.38	0	1
Party Affiliation	0.46	0.0	0.50	0	1
GDP of elected state	83397.08	78880.0	21202.19	49911	259938
Population	14706149.40	10258359	12057750.86	576851	39538223
Swing State (Yes = 1)	0.41	0.0	0.49	0	1
Foreign Affairs Com. (Yes = 1)	0.08	0.0	0.27	0	1
Armed Services Com. (Yes = 1)	0.10	0.0	0.30	0	1

## Results

The study estimated an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model to analyze the relationship between the variation of individual donations received by US Congress members with the facilitation of the AIPAC lobby. The dataset is cross-sectional in nature since each observation corresponds to a single Congress member, with members are grouped by their respective states ( $n = 382$ ). Given that Congress members from the same state may be subject to similar lobbying influences and electoral pressures, standard errors are clustered at the state level to account for potential within-state correlation in the error terms. The OLS regression results are presented in Table 2. The Model 1 shows the estimation that includes only control variables. Model 2 includes the study's first independent variable, measuring Congress members' support for pro-Israeli policies by using the number of sponsored bills that endorse Israel's foreign policy objectives. Results indicate that the number of sponsored bills is positively correlated with the amount of funds received through the facilitation of the AIPAC lobby (Hypothesis 1), and this effect is statistically significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ). Estimation suggests that a one-unit increase in sponsored bills corresponds to approximately \$5,000 more funds raised from donations for each Congress member. Model 3 integrates the study's second independent variable, measuring the relationship between electoral competence and donations facilitated by AIPAC to congress members. Results suggest that electoral competence is positively correlated with the received donations (Hypothesis 2), and the effect is statistically significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Interpretation of the coefficient suggests that Congress members from electoral districts with high levels of electoral competition received approximately \$46,000 more donations compared to Congress members from low-level competition districts. Results also suggest that party affiliation significantly accounts for variation in donations received through AIPAC facilitation as Democratic candidates received more funds than Republicans on average. On the other hand, membership in the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services has limited explanatory power in explaining the variation of received funds by Congress members since the reported effects are not statistically significant, though membership in these committees may increase the likelihood of attracting funds facilitated by AIPAC.

**Table 2**

*OLS Regression Results*

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*Dependent Variable: Amount of received AIPAC donations (in USD)*

(Model 1)

(Model 2)

(Model 3)

Bill Sponsorship	5066.456*** (1552.309)	4820.164*** (1489.740)	
Electoral Competence		45937.219** (22508.061)	
Party Affiliation	71608.921*** (18238.927)	87695.180*** (18538.743)	82478.657*** (17580.742)
GDP of elected state	-0.259 (0.266)	-0.372 (0.246)	-0.403* (0.236)
Population (log)	19827.888*** (7347.277)	16738.963** (7130.528)	18414.768*** (6409.891)
Swing State	13452.498 (18517.688)	4228.473 (16573.687)	313.394 (15897.960)
Foreign Affairs Com.	14186.666 (34698.094)	-7531.209 (36562.632)	-7402.518 (37617.150)
Armed Services Com.	28604.603 (32786.913)	18211.355 (30529.458)	21145.605 (30258.204)
Observations	382	382	382
R <sup>2</sup>	0.066	0.111	0.122
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.051	0.094	0.103
Residual Std. Error	162497.499 (df=375)	158742.566 (df=374)	157993.744 (df=373)
F Statistic	9.055*** (df=6; 375)	11.180*** (df=7; 374)	14.863*** (df=8; 373)

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01 (Clustered standard errors in parenthesis)

## Discussion

The findings of this study lend support to both hypotheses presented in this study and shed some light on the political implications of the AIPAC-facilitated financial contributions in the domestic settings of the United States, suggesting the strategic use of lobby donations. This strategic utilization of the donations can be understood from the perspective of both donors and recipients, which is the AIPAC lobby and US congress members, respectively. Firstly, the study shows that electoral

competence significantly correlates with the amount of AIPAC-facilitated funds received by endorsed US Congress members. The implications of this finding can be grasped twofold. On the one hand, it suggests the ability of in-office congress members to leverage prevailing electoral conditions to capture greater shares from the lobbying efforts, in compliance with the findings denoted by the previous research (Khanam, 2022; Thomsen, 2023). The Congress members facing stronger challengers in their electoral districts may have more bargaining power in their interactions with interest lobbies if the lobbies perceive coopting those challengers into their pursued policy framework would be costly and thorny. On the other hand, results may pinpoint the perseverance of the AIPAC's lobbying efforts to support already endorsed congress members vying with stronger candidates in their course of re-election (Hall & Wayman, 1990).

Second, this research reveals that the amount of financial contributions allocated to US congress members is strongly correlated with the number of bills supporting the foreign policy objectives of Israel, which are sponsored by the endorsed US congress members. This finding lends support to studies that argue that pro-Israeli donations have great influence in shaping US foreign policymaking, particularly considering Israel's controversial policies on the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009b; Young, 2024). This strategic use of donations aimed at attaining desired pro-Israeli foreign policy output is more meaningful considering the data collection timeframe of this study, including the eruption of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023 and its concomitant sufferings. Most of these sponsored bills supporting Israel's foreign policy stance also endorsed Israel's contentious political and military engagements conducted in the context of the Israel-Hamas war. A corollary of this empirical proposition is that the lobbying efforts of pro-Israeli lobbies may result in the formulation of a US foreign policy on the Middle East, which does not truly reflect the national interests of the US. Indeed, this argument has been posited by various scholars, suggesting that the lobbying efforts of these interest groups may culminate in the deterioration of the United States' independent foreign policymaking. Worse, it may end up anchoring US foreign policymaking to the narrow interests of particular groups and conflicting broad interests of other foreign nations (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009a, 2009b).

## **Conclusion**

Heated debates revolved around the impact of the pro-Israeli AIPAC lobbying on US foreign policymaking, albeit there was a scarcity of academic research on this subject. This research aims to contribute one more piece to the literature aimed at studying the political implications of AIPAC-facilitated financial contributions. The

research examines the factors correlating with the amount of financial contributions received by the US Congress members from AIPAC-affiliated political action committees. The findings of this study shed light on the strategic role of the Israel lobby in influencing U.S. Congress members through political donations, particularly following the outbreak of the October 7 war. By analyzing new data on lobbying efforts and donations, we identify two key factors contributing to variations in donations: the sponsorship of pro-Israel legislation and the electoral competence of Congress members. The study finds that received financial contribution significantly correlates with the number of sponsored bills advocating pro-Israeli foreign policy. Hence, the finding suggests that financial contributions from the pro-Israeli AIPAC lobby are closely tied to members' active support for Israel's policy agenda in Congress, reflecting a direct relationship between legislative backing and financial incentives as posited in previous research (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009a, 2009b). Particularly, allocated financial contributions may have been one of the effective means of mustering support within the Congress for Israeli foreign policymaking and its military engagements that transpired in the aftermath of the Israeli-Hamas conflict. Moreover, the lobby's donations are strategically targeted toward members facing competitive electoral environments, underscoring its tactical investment in politically insecure candidates who are facing strong political challengers but desire to remain influential in Congress (Hall & Wayman, 1990).

The study indicates one of the pathways in which pro-Israeli interest groups may wield influence by capitalizing on the established domestic institutions within the US and molding desired policy outcomes in line with Israel's foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. Since the US policymaking projects immense influence on the political landscape prevailing in the Middle East region, consolidating support in Congress grants extensive influence for Israel in order to legitimize and draw foreign support for its military and political engagements (Bilmes et al., 2024; Guardian, January 10, 2024). Nonetheless, the implications of this research go beyond the particular case of Israel and the AIPAC lobby, offering broader insights into the mechanisms by which foreign policy formulations can be shaped by domestic political processes with the involvement of a foreign nation. These findings call attention to the need for heightened transparency and accountability in political donations, especially when such contributions may support contentious and controversial foreign policies and military actions that take an immense humanitarian toll. Understanding the motivations behind these donations provides a clearer picture of how external actors influence legislative outcomes and highlights the importance of addressing the potential for undue financial influence in democratic institutions.

## **Article Information Form**

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