



# **Grassroots Impact Survey: Federal Legislators**

**December 2013**

A partnership between Hamilton Place Strategies and YouGov to provide insight into the impact and importance of grassroots, constituent contacts as part of legislative, regulatory and public affairs.

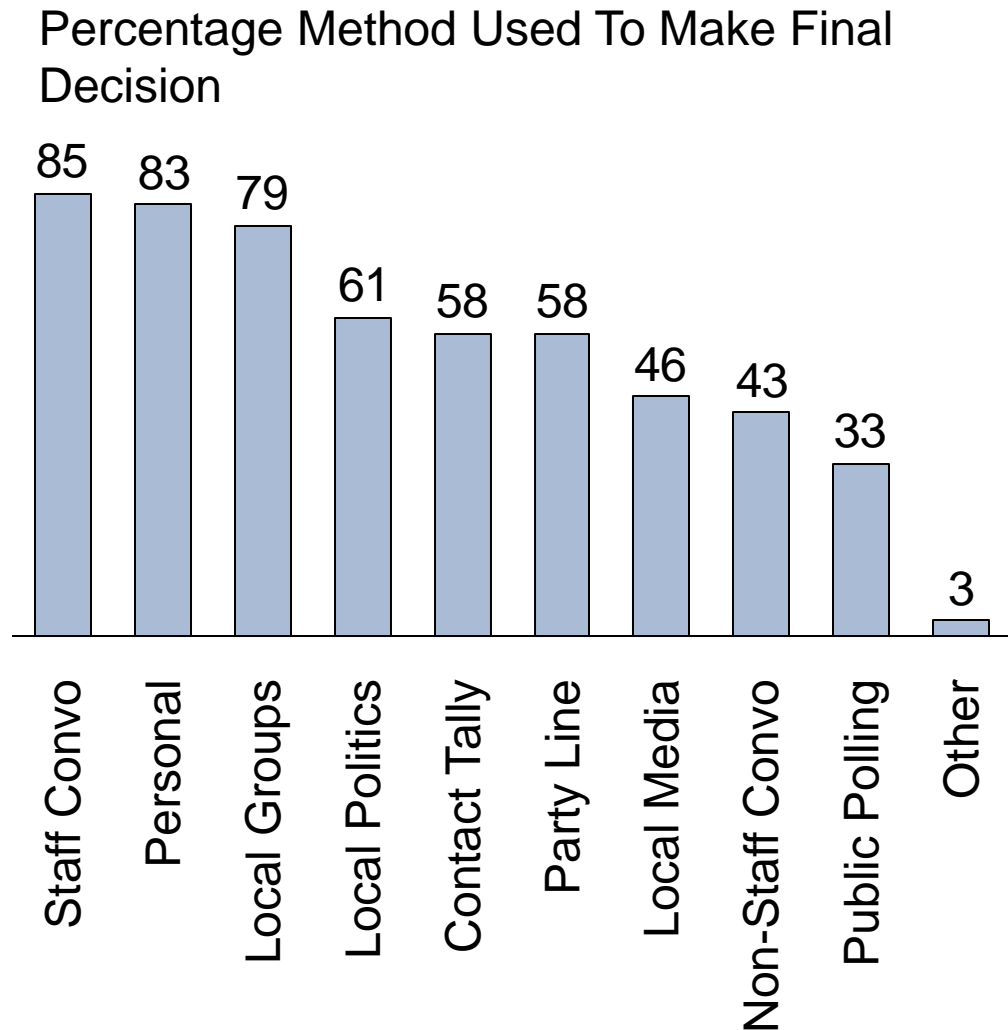
## Executive Summary

*The HPS/YouGov Grassroots Impact Survey surveyed Congressional staffers and then compared their answers with answers to similar questions posed to Political Insiders recruited by longtime Washington political reporter James A. Barnes. Each group was asked about the relative impact of various communications efforts on Member decision-making:*

- **A Member's decision-making is personal, so efforts to influence that decision-making must be personal.** In-person contacts are better than phone calls, and both are more influential than contacts through social media. Congressional staffers say Members give great weight to conversations with staff in the D.C. office and reports from district staff.
- **Grassroots advocacy matters.** Contacts that are generated from inside a Member's constituency weigh more heavily than others. Tallies of contacts are considered and may influence the final decision, staffers say, but other factors matter, too.
- **Political Insiders may underestimate the internal dynamics of Congress.** According to Congressional staffers, what leadership wants and the conclusions of Congressional committees influence a Member's decision-making to a degree those outside Congress—even Political Insiders who are not currently staffers— may not understand.
- **A white paper on impacts within a constituency or Congressional district outweigh information from an ideological or partisan source.** Consumer groups, non-partisan experts, and partisan organizations lack the clout of reports from constituents and business leaders, local news reports, and what a Member's home district staff say.
- **Both the principle and profession of lobbying are strongly supported in Congress.** Broad majorities of staffers view the role of lobbyists as important and agree that all organizations should have the right to lobby Congress

## Individual Members' Decisions Can Often Be Influenced, So Precise Targeting Is Important

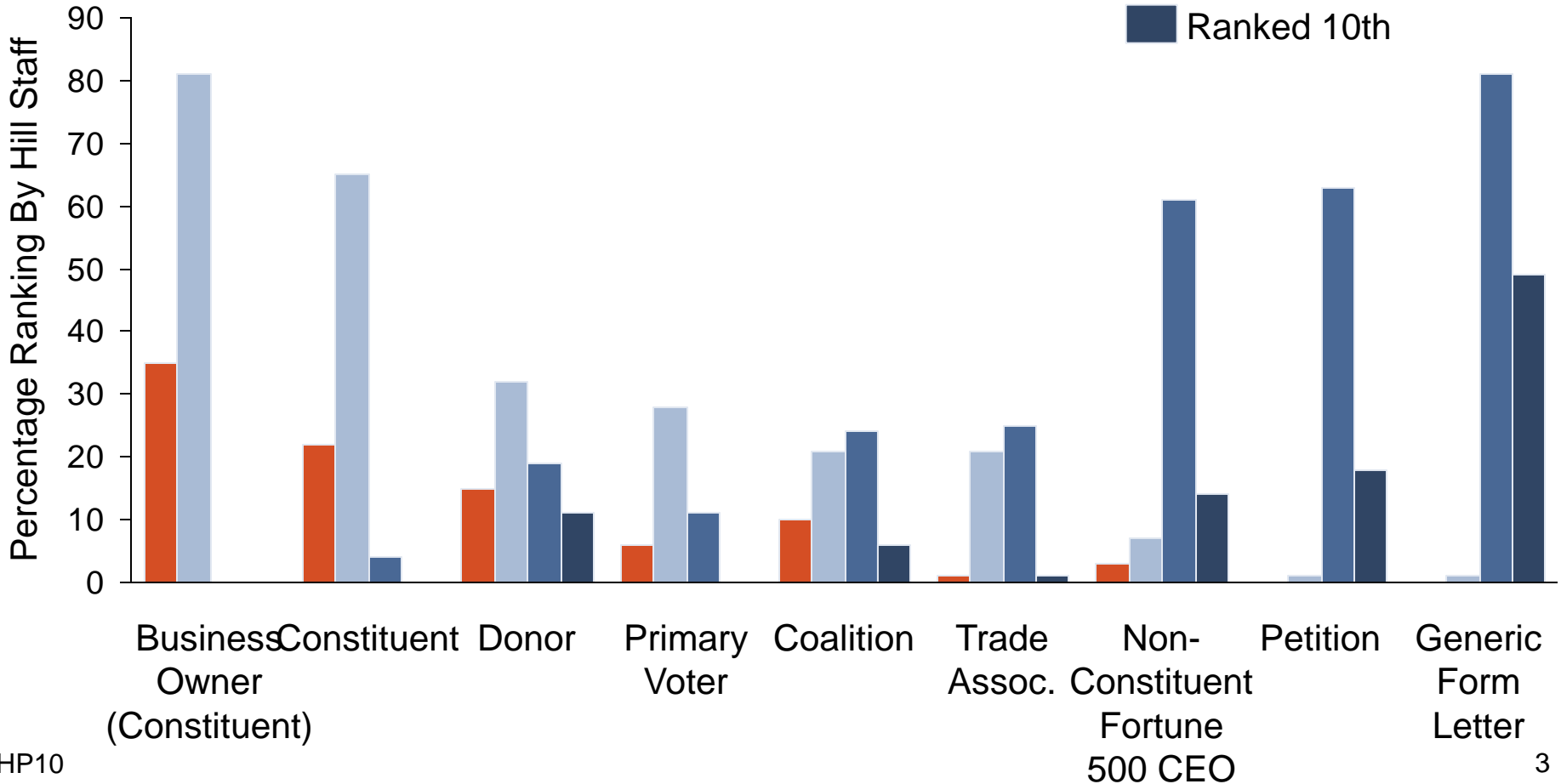
- Many final decisions come down to conversations with staff or are personal decisions.
- Conversations with staff factor into 85% of final decisions made by members, staff say.
- Member decisions can be influenced, but communication must be targeted to specific members to be effective.



# Constituent Letters Ranked Highest, While Generic Form Letters And Petitions Were Lowest Priority

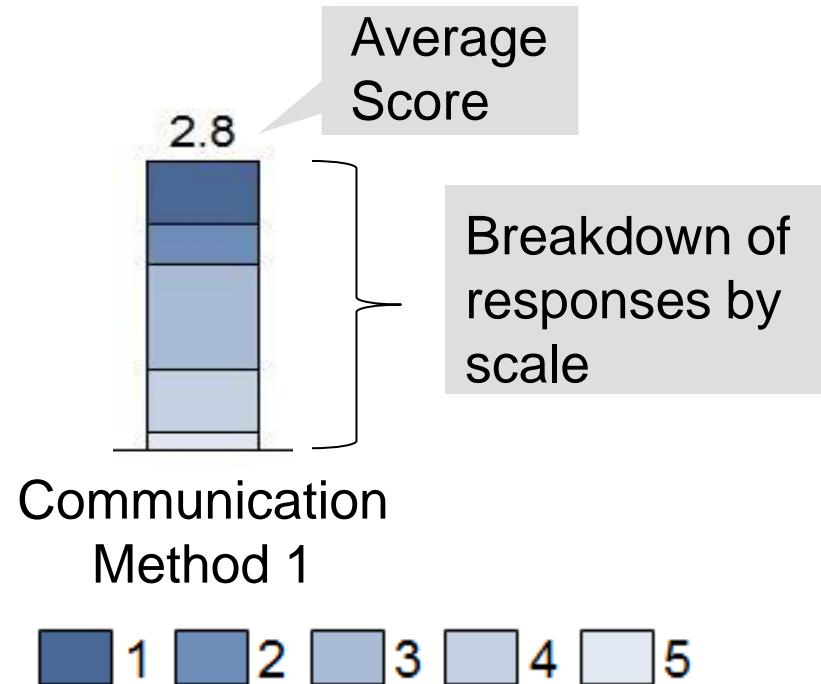
Letters from constituents— especially business owners— were ranked highest priority, as well as politically involved constituents, while anything non-targeted or out-of-district ranked lowest

- Ranked 1st
- Ranked 1st, 2nd or 3rd
- Ranked 8th, 9th or 10th
- Ranked 10th



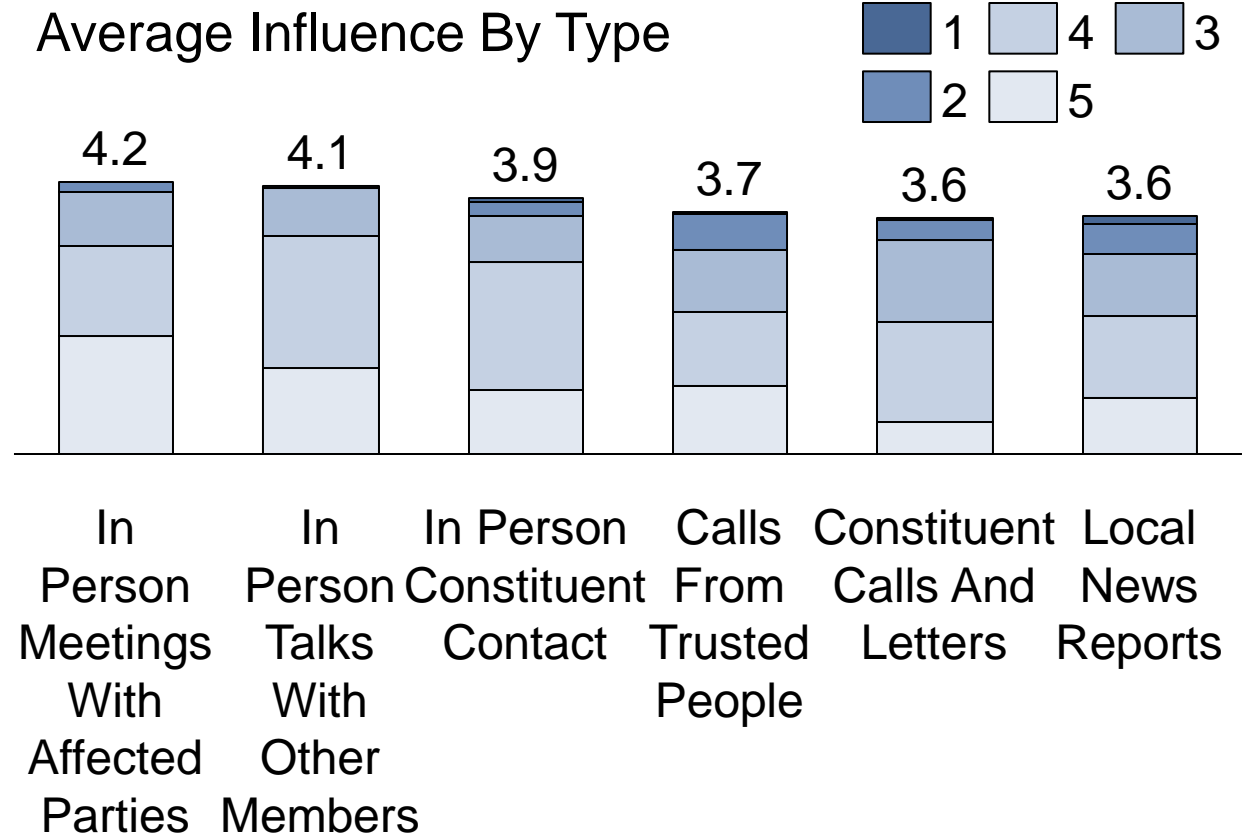
## The Survey Responses Are Presented In Stacked Bar Charts, Which Are Interpreted As Follows

- Responses were measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing little or no influence/importance and 5 representing the most
- Larger areas indicate stronger responses for each score
- The average score for each category is calculated as a weighted average of the responses by level



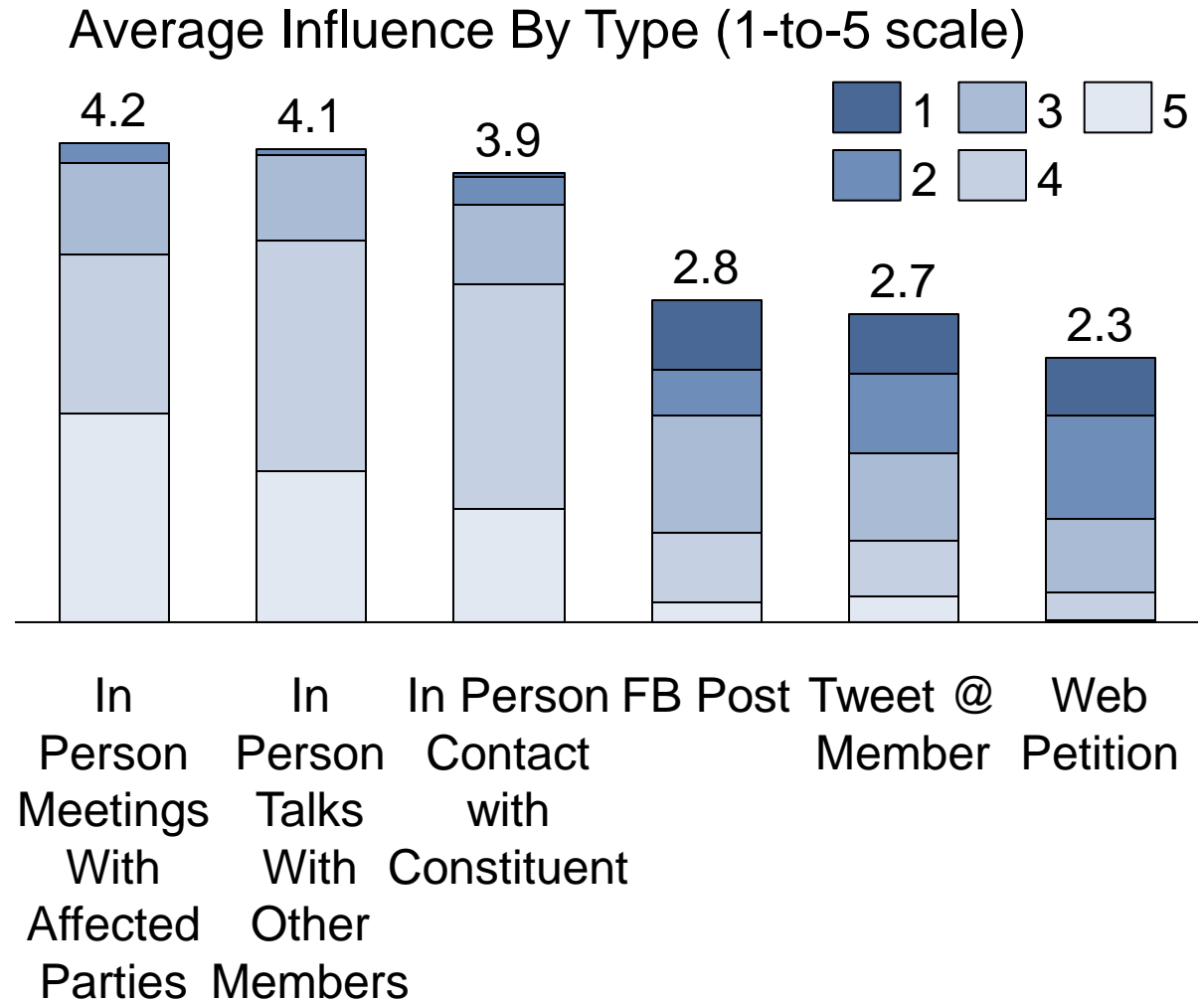
# In Person Communication Is The Most Effective Means Of Informing Or Influencing A Decision

- To influence a Member's decision, seek in-person communication: In-person meetings with affected parties and with constituents, one-on-one discussions with other Members, phone calls.



# Social Media Does Not Come Close to Matching Effectiveness of In-Person Communications

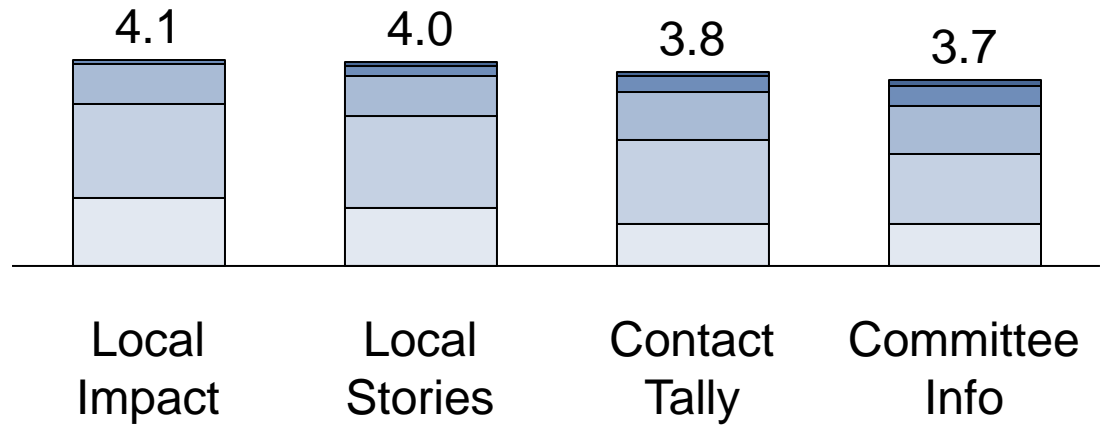
- Members may not yet be as attuned to Facebook, Twitter or various web petition applications.
- Congressional staffers rate social media contacts ineffective compared to in-person contact, telephone calls with trusted sources, or local news reports.



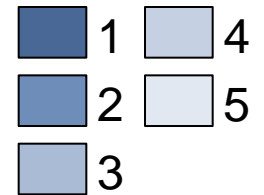
# Quantitative Reports on Local Impacts, Hearing Stories from those Affected Locally, Matter Most

- Staffers indicated that local quantitative impact and local stories are the most influential types of research.
- Staffers rank information from committees or from leadership more highly than do Political Insiders not on staff.
- Tally of contacts from constituents ranked higher by Political Insiders than by staffers.

Average By Type (Congressional Staff rankings)



Helpfulness of Committee/Leadership Information



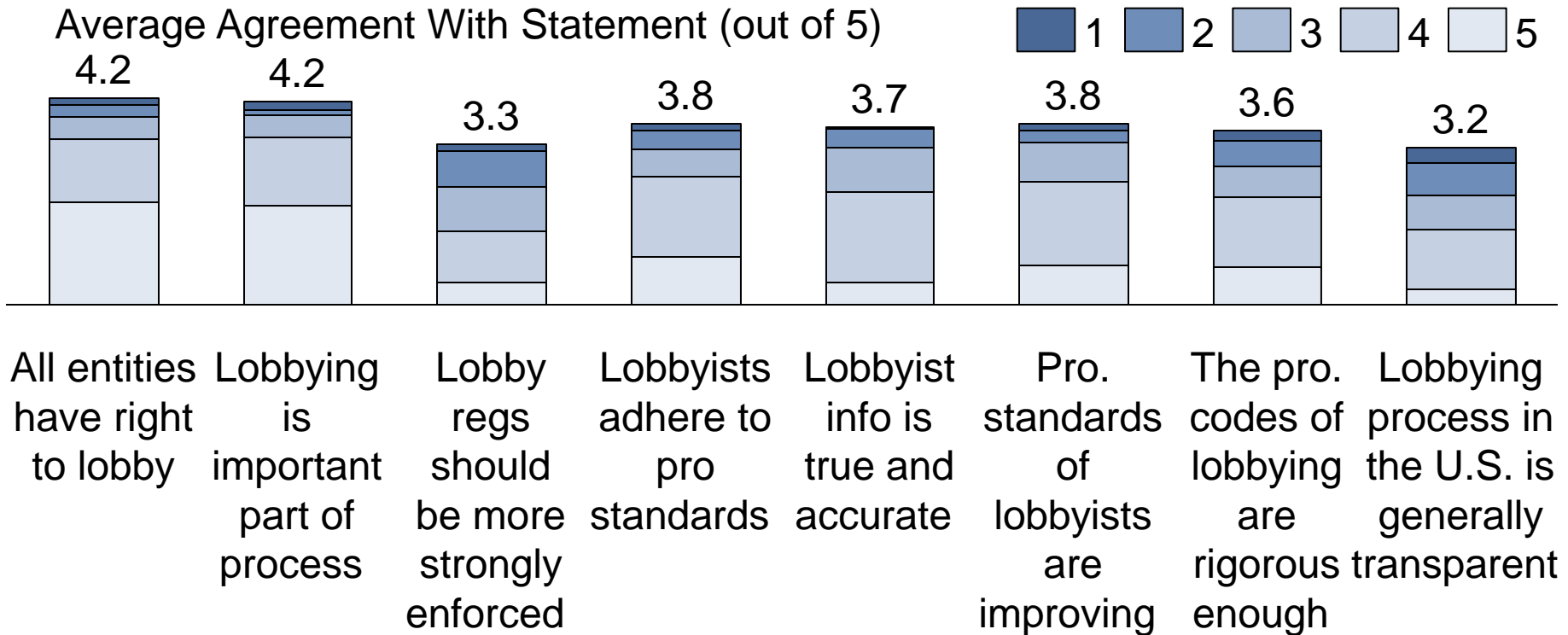
# Congressional Publication Sources

Which type of publication do Congressional offices pay the most attention to?

	CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS					<i>Mean</i>
	No Attention At All		3	Close Attention		
	1	2		4	5	
National newspapers (i.e. Wall Street Journal, USA Today)	-	3%	10%	46%	41%	4.3
State and local newspapers	1%	4%	14%	27%	53%	4.3
DC-centric outlets (Politico, the Hill)	-	3%	21%	37%	39%	4.1
National television (CNN, MSNBC, Fox)	-	1%	23%	39%	37%	4.1
Local TV	7%	10%	11%	36%	36%	3.8
Main regional daily (i.e. LA Times, Dallas Morning News)	4%	17%	29%	24%	26%	3.5
Local radio	7%	17%	16%	34%	26%	3.5
Financial television (CNBC, Bloomberg TV, Fox Business)	3%	17%	27%	39%	14%	3.4
Local blogs	13%	13%	34%	26%	14%	3.2
National blogs	7%	19%	41%	23%	10%	3.1
Partisan-affiliated outlets (Daily Caller, Talking Points Memo)	11%	27%	27%	24%	10%	2.9

# Congressional Staffers Generally View Lobbyists As Reliable And Important

- When asked about the role of lobbyists, a large proportion of staffers viewed them as important.
- Additionally, staffers, in large part, feel that all organizations should have the right to lobby members of Congress.



# Methodology

- The survey interviewed current Congressional staff, and compared their answers to the answers of Political Insiders—the experienced veterans of campaigns and policy fights, recruited for this survey, by longtime Washington political reporter James A. Barnes.
- The survey asked individuals to rate various forms of communication or information in terms of influence on decision making and value.
  - Some questions focused on the relative value of particular methods, while others asked about the influence that certain methods have on member or staff decisions.
- Each method was assigned a score between 1 and 5, with higher scores corresponding to relative impact.

## About The Grassroots Impact Survey (GIS)

Grassroots Impact Survey: This is a survey in which Congressional staffers are asked to rate on a 1-to-5 scale the importance or effectiveness of various forms of contact with a Congressional office (with 5 the most important or influential). Results are compared with results on some of those same questions when posed to a group of veteran Political Insiders, from a panel recruited by veteran Washington political reporter James A. Barnes.

About Hamilton Place Strategies: HPS provides communications, policy, and advocacy solutions at the intersection of business, government, and media.

About YouGov: The world's leading online research organization, YouGov conducts public opinion polls each week for the *Economist*/YouGov poll, as well as surveys of special panels of experts, such as this survey of Congressional staffers, surveys of Political Insiders, and surveys of other expert panels on policy issues.