Politics of the People? Out-of-State Involvement in American Direct Democracy Campaigns

by

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Abstract

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Title: Politics of the People? Out-of-State Involvement in American Direct Democracy Campaigns

Direct democracy was designed as a mechanism for local self-governance, yet contemporary ballot measure campaigns routinely attract substantial funding from donors who cannot vote on the measures they finance. Between 2006 and 2022, individual donors contributed over $340 million across state lines to direct democracy campaigns across the twenty-six states with citizen initiative processes. Drawing on an original dataset of over one million campaign contribution records, a survey of 910 out-of-state donors, and in-depth interviews with 40 ballot measure campaign leaders across 19 states, this dissertation develops the concept of localized nationalization to explain how state-level institutions designed for territorially bounded communities now function as venues for national political conflict. Three forces drive this transformation: the inherent permeability of American federalism, the nationalization of American political life, and the consumption-oriented character of individual political giving. Empirical findings reveal that out-of-state contributions concentrate on value-laden policy domains, that donors prioritize expressive over instrumental motivations and frame participation as engagement with national movements rather than intervention in discrete state decisions, and that campaign leaders navigate dual legitimacy demands by developing strategic compartmentalization between external funding sources and local messaging. Together, these findings reveal direct democracy functioning simultaneously as a mechanism for state-level policy determination and as a venue for national political contestation — a hybrid institutional form reflecting not corruption or capture, but adaptation to a political environment where formal territorial boundaries increasingly diverge from functional political communities.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge the support I received during the data collection portion of this project. Several public servants across the country devoted their time and resources to helping me collect, parse, and clean the thousands of campaign finance records that form the empirical foundation of this endeavor.

Dedication

For Spencer. If I am even half as intelligent and capable as you see me, I could run the world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On November 4, 2008, California voters approved Proposition 8, a ballot initiative that amended the state constitution to define marriage as exclusively between one man and one woman. The measure passed with 52% of the vote, overturning a California Supreme Court decision that had legalized same-sex marriage just months earlier. The campaign attracted unprecedented national attention, transforming what might have appeared to be a state-level policy question into a flashpoint for debates about marriage, civil rights, and the proper boundaries of democratic participation.

Yet the most striking feature of Proposition 8 may not be the intensity of the debate or even the policy outcome itself, but rather who funded the campaign. Of the $105 million raised by both sides, a substantial margin came from donors residing outside California. The Yes on 8 campaign received $46.5 million from nearly 18,000 out-of-state contributors, with substantial support flowing from Utah, where members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints mounted an organized fundraising effort (Youn 2013). Opponents of the measure likewise received millions from donors across the country who viewed California's marriage law as having implications far beyond the state's borders. When campaign finance disclosures revealed these funding sources, criticism emerged from multiple directions. Some argued that distant interests were hijacking California's democratic processes. Others countered that marriage equality represented a fundamental civil rights question that transcended state boundaries and justified national engagement.

The Proposition 8 campaign crystallized fundamental tensions about direct democracy in the twenty-first century. When campaigns theoretically about local self-governance receive more funding from outside than inside state borders, questions emerge about whose preferences are being expressed and whose interests are being served. This pattern was neither the first nor the last instance of substantial out-of-state involvement in state ballot measures, but it brought unprecedented attention to a phenomenon that has reshaped direct democracy while remaining largely invisible in existing scholarship.

The Puzzle: From Local Affairs to National Battlegrounds

At the turn of the twentieth century, Populist and Progressive activists pushed for direct democracy as a bulwark against corporate influence in state legislatures (Smith and Lubinski 2002; Piott 2003). James W. Sullivan, author of *Direct Legislation*, urged activists to recognize that "before any project of social reconstruction can be followed out to the end, there stands a question antecedent to every other. It is the abolition of the lawmaking monopoly." Direct legislation would destroy this "parent of monopolies," and with it would fall "the chief evils of governmental mechanism—class rule, ring rule, extravagance, jobbery, nepotism, the spoils system, every jot of the professional trading politician's influence" (Piott 2003, 35; Sullivan 1893, 100). Citizens would reclaim lawmaking power for themselves. The initiative, referendum, and recall would restore governance to affected communities. Campaigns would be local affairs for local decisions.

The votes remain local. Increasingly, the money does not.

Between 2006 and 2022, individual donors contributed over $340 million across state lines to direct democracy campaigns.[1] This dissertation provides the first systematic examination of this phenomenon, documenting patterns across hundreds of campaigns, explaining what motivates cross-state participation, and revealing how external funding transforms direct democracy in practice. The transformation raises immediate questions about repre-

[1] $340 million is calculated from the original campaign finance dataset discussed in Chapter 3. The 2006-2022 period reflects when sufficient states maintained accessible electronic campaign finance records.

sentation and influence. If substantial campaign resources flow from outside state borders, can these campaigns still be understood as expressions of local preferences? Do out-of-state donors distort policy outcomes, tilting results away from what state residents would have chosen absent external influence? Or does cross-state participation represent legitimate engagement by those affected by or interested in policy outcomes that increasingly transcend state boundaries?

Understanding why individuals contribute to campaigns in states where they don't reside requires moving beyond narrow conceptions of material self-interest. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (2000) demonstrate that political activists seek diverse gratifications from participation—not just material benefits, but also social rewards, civic satisfaction, and policy outcomes. For out-of-state donors, the puzzle is determining which of these gratifications can operate across state boundaries. While existing research on campaign finance (Lowenstein 1981; Owens & Wade 1986; Garrett & Gerber 2001; Stratmann 2004, 2006; De Figueiredo, Chin, and Kousser 2011), direct democracy (Banducci 1998; Roberts 2016; Tyler and Gerken 2022), and political nationalization (Stokes 1965, 1967; Lunch 1987; Paddock 2005; Klinghard 2010; Hopkins and Schickler 2016; Hopkins 2018, 2022; Medvic et al. 2022) provides important insights, these literatures have developed largely in isolation and have not been systematically integrated to explain cross-state participation in ballot measure campaigns.

Previous research consisted primarily of case studies of individual high-profile measures or journalistic investigations of particularly controversial campaigns (Shin 2009; Garry, Nelsen, and Spurlin 2010). While valuable for understanding specific contests, these analyses cannot reveal whether observed patterns represent exceptional circumstances or systematic features of contemporary direct democracy. We have lacked basic empirical knowledge about how common out-of-state funding is across different types of measures, how geographic patterns vary across policy domains, whether external funding has increased over time, and what mechanisms drive cross-state participation.

Contributions and Approach

This research makes several important contributions. Most fundamentally, it provides systematic empirical evidence through an original campaign finance dataset assembled over several years in partnership with Secretary of State offices, campaign finance agencies, and transparency organizations across the country. The resulting database contains detailed information on over one million individual contributions to ballot measure campaigns from 2006 through 2022, including donor names, addresses, contribution amounts, and position taken on each measure. State campaign finance reporting systems vary dramatically in accessibility, format, and completeness, and no centralized repository exists comparable to what the Federal Election Commission maintains for federal campaigns. This dataset enables analysis that has been impossible given previous data limitations and will support future research on campaign finance, political participation, and state-level policymaking.

Theoretically, I develop the concept of *localized nationalization* to explain how state-level institutions designed for local decision-making now operate as venues for national political conflict. This is not simply "nationalization" applied to state politics; rather, it describes a distinctive paradox where institutions remain formally local and territorially bounded while simultaneously functioning as sites where national political movements contest policy outcomes, with citizens participating across state lines in decisions where they cannot vote. The theory synthesizes insights about American federalism's inherent permeability with evidence of political life's increasing nationalization.

American federalism has always been more permeable than institutional boundaries suggest. State policy decisions create spillover effects beyond their borders. Policy innovations in one state affect political feasibility elsewhere through diffusion dynamics. The distribution of direct democracy mechanisms across states means citizens in twenty-four states without initiative processes face limited avenues for direct political expression, creating incentives to engage in states where such mechanisms exist. Political nationalization

provides the motivation: citizens increasingly interpret politics at all levels through nationalized frameworks, organizing their political identities around national partisan labels and issue positions rather than local concerns. When federalism's permeability intersects with political nationalization, direct democracy campaigns become sites where national political conflicts play out through state-level institutions.

I argue that interstate giving will concentrate where three conditions align: value-laden content that implicates fundamental questions of rights, identity, or morality; symbolic national significance where state contests come to represent broader ideological conflicts; and organizational infrastructure that can mobilize geographically dispersed supporters.

The dissertation employs three complementary research strategies. First, I use the campaign finance dataset to map the landscape of out-of-state giving, documenting patterns across time, space, policy domains, and campaign characteristics. Second, I field an original survey of out-of-state donors who made multiple contributions to ballot measure campaigns between 2016 and 2022, investigating motivations, goals, and decision-making processes that cannot be inferred from contribution records alone. Third, I conducted in-depth interviews with leaders of forty ballot measure campaigns that received substantial external funding, revealing how campaign organizations respond to out-of-state support, manage tensions between local authenticity and accessing national resources, and navigate questions of democratic legitimacy. This multi-method design enables triangulation across different data sources and analytical approaches, providing a multifaceted understanding of how out-of-state funding transforms direct democracy in practice.

Research Questions

This dissertation is organized around one overarching question and four specific research questions that illuminate different dimensions of out-of-state donor involvement in direct democracy:

These questions build on each other sequentially. Understanding who participates

Type	Question
Overarching	How has out-of-state funding transformed direct democracy in the United States?
RQ1	Who are out-of-state donors to ballot measure campaigns, and what characterizes their giving patterns across time, geography, and policy domains?
RQ2	Why do individuals donate to direct democracy campaigns in states where they do not live?
RQ3	How do campaign organizations respond to and manage substantial out-of-state funding?
RQ4	What does cross-state giving reveal about democratic legitimacy, representation, and federalism in contemporary American politics?

in cross-state giving establishes the empirical foundation. Explaining why they participate reveals motivations and goals that drive the phenomenon. Examining how campaigns respond shows what happens when theory meets practice. Evaluating normative implications addresses fundamental questions about democratic legitimacy and appropriate boundaries of political participation.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework of localized nationalization in detail, examining American federalism's inherent permeability and analyzing how citizens increasingly interpret state-level politics through national frameworks. The chapter synthesizes these insights to explain when and why out-of-state giving concentrates in particular campaigns, generating expectations about donor behavior, contribution patterns, and campaign dynamics that subsequent chapters examine systematically.

Chapter 3 describes the construction of the campaign contribution dataset tracking contributions across all 26 states with citizen-initiated mechanisms from 2006 through 2022. The chapter details the methodological challenges of collecting and standardizing data from fragmented state reporting systems, presents the dataset's scope, and provides descriptive analysis revealing key patterns in direct democracy campaign finance.

Chapter 4 uses the dataset to document patterns of out-of-state giving across time, geography, and policy domains. The analysis examines how external funding has evolved, which types of measures attract cross-state support, how contribution patterns vary across states, and whether empirical patterns align with the localized nationalization framework.

Chapter 5 presents findings from the survey of out-of-state donors, investigating what motivates cross-state participation, how donors understand their involvement and view its legitimacy, and how motivations vary across policy domains. The chapter distinguishes among instrumental, expressive, and identity-based rationales for cross-state giving.

Chapter 6 analyzes interviews with ballot measure campaign leaders, examining how campaigns think about external funding, manage relationships with out-of-state donors and national advocacy organizations, and navigate tensions between local authenticity and accessing national networks. The analysis reveals variation in organizational approaches and identifies factors shaping different strategic responses.

Chapter 7 synthesizes insights across the empirical chapters to address the dissertation's overarching questions, evaluating normative questions about legitimacy and appropriate boundaries of political participation. The chapter discusses implications for understanding campaign finance, political participation, and democratic practice, and identifies directions for future investigation.

Significance

The patterns documented here reveal not corruption or capture but rather adaptation to a political environment where state boundaries remain legally significant yet practically permeable, where local and national politics increasingly intertwine, and where questions about community, representation, and legitimate participation grow more complex. Direct democracy, at its inception, aimed to empower local citizens to shape policy through grassroots participation. Today's reality involves professionalized campaigns, sophisticated advocacy networks, and substantial funding from beyond state borders. Understanding this

transformation requires grappling with how democratic institutions function when the practical conditions of political life diverge significantly from institutional design assumptions.

The research speaks to fundamental questions about democratic representation and federalism. When can out-of-state participation in local politics be considered legitimate? How should we balance territorial principles of community self-determination against interconnection and spillover effects? What obligations do citizens have toward policy outcomes in other jurisdictions? These questions become increasingly pressing as political life grows more nationalized while formal institutions remain organized around territorial boundaries.

Chapter 2: Out-of-State Giving and the Paradox of Localized Nationalization

Why would someone in Massachusetts send money to an Oregon marijuana initiative? Why would a Texas resident contribute to a Washington state campaign on carbon taxes? Why would donors from across the country invest in a South Dakota abortion measure? These questions point to a fundamental puzzle in how we understand American democracy. Direct democracy was designed around a simple principle: let the people who live under a law decide whether to adopt it. Yet contemporary practice reveals something more complex. Donors contribute billions of dollars to ballot measure campaigns in states where they cannot vote, supporting or opposing policies that will not govern their own lives. This behavior appears paradoxical from traditional democratic theory but systematic in empirical reality.

Existing theories of political participation struggle to explain this phenomenon. Models of rational self-interest predict that individuals participate when they expect personal benefits from their participation (Downs 1957). But out-of-state donors cannot vote on the measures they fund and will not directly experience the policies that result. Geographic proximity theories suggest people engage most intensely with nearby political contests (Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006), yet contribution patterns show weak relationships with geographic distance. Partisan mobilization theories emphasize party control over government institutions (Hertel-Fernandez 2019), but ballot measures decide specific policies rather than which party governs. Each framework captures something important about political behavior,

yet none adequately accounts for why individuals systematically invest resources in policy contests occurring in distant states where they lack a say.

The Dual Paradox of Localized Nationalization

Understanding this phenomenon requires examining both sides of the dynamic that interstate funding creates. Out-of-state giving produces a dual paradox that operates simultaneously for donors and for campaign organizations, with each side reinforcing the other in ways that entrench nationalized patterns. Donors participate in institutions designed for territorially bounded communities while understanding their involvement primarily through national movement frameworks. They contribute to state-level campaigns while deriving meaning from participation in broader ideological conflicts that transcend state boundaries. Campaign leaders, conversely, must access resources from geographically dispersed donor networks responding to national framing while maintaining legitimacy with local voters who may view external support with suspicion. They accept funding that enables competitive campaigns while managing political vulnerabilities that opponents can exploit by highlighting outside influence.

This chapter develops a theoretical framework to explain interstate political participation in direct democracy. The core argument is that American federalism creates a paradox I call localized nationalization: state-level institutions designed for local decision-making now operate as venues for national political conflict. While existing theories of political nationalization explain how voters increasingly interpret local elections through national frames (Hopkins 2018), localized nationalization extends this logic to a distinct phenomenon: donors participating financially across state lines in policy contests where they cannot vote. The institutional form remains local (only state residents vote), while political practice becomes national (participation, resources, and framing transcend state boundaries).

The term "localized nationalization" is deliberately paradoxical because the phenomenon itself is paradoxical. Standard theories of nationalization describe unidirectional

processes where national forces penetrate and reshape local politics, where voters think nationally while voting locally, parties coordinate nationally while competing locally. But localized nationalization describes something different: formally local, territorially bounded institutions that routinely function as venues for national political contestation, with participation and resources flowing from outside the relevant political community. The institution remains stubbornly local (only California residents vote on California propositions and only California law changes), yet the politics becomes genuinely national, with donors from across the country participating, campaigns framing issues as national battles, and meaning deriving from national movement narratives. Neither "nationalization" alone, which implies institutions themselves became national, nor "cross-state participation", which describes behavior without capturing the institutional paradox, adequately characterizes this dynamic where territorial and national principles exist in permanent tension.

This occurs through the interaction of three forces. First, American federalism has always been more permeable than institutional boundaries suggest, with state policy decisions carrying consequences that extend beyond state borders (Shipan and Volden 2008). Second, the nationalization of American political life over recent decades has intensified these connections, creating organizational infrastructure and political identities that transcend territorial boundaries (Hopkins 2018). Third, the consumption-oriented character of most individual political giving means that donors derive utility from participating in ideologically meaningful campaigns regardless of their marginal instrumental impact on outcomes (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003). When these forces interact with direct democracy institutions, they transform how ballot measures operate politically.

These are not separate challenges but mutually constitutive dynamics. When campaigns frame appeals in national movement terms to mobilize distant donors, they reinforce donors' understanding of participation as engagement with national causes rather than intervention in local decisions. When donors respond to such appeals with contributions driven by ideological expression, they provide resources that enable campaigns to professionalize

and scale up operations in ways that further require national fundraising. When opponents attack external funding as illegitimate outside interference, they can paradoxically validate donors' sense that they participate in consequential national battles facing local resistance, which can intensify commitment and mobilization. The cycle becomes self-reinforcing: national framing enables resource mobilization, which enables professional campaigns, which attracts opposition framing funding as illegitimate, which reinforces national identity among supporters, which enables further resource mobilization.

I argue that interstate giving will concentrate where three conditions align: value-laden content that implicates fundamental questions of rights, identity, or morality; symbolic national significance where state contests come to represent broader ideological conflicts; and organizational infrastructure that can mobilize geographically dispersed supporters. This chapter develops this theoretical framework in detail, while subsequent empirical chapters examine how these mechanisms operate in practice and explore its implications.

This framework synthesizes insights from literatures on federalism and intergovernmental relations (Shipan and Volden 2008), policy diffusion and innovation (Walker 1969; Boushey 2010), political nationalization (Hopkins 2018), campaign finance (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Barber 2016), and donor behavior (Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006; Baker 2020). While these literatures have developed rich understandings of their respective phenomena, they have not been systematically integrated to explain cross-state participation in direct democracy. Understanding this phenomenon requires first examining what direct democracy represents in American politics and how it has evolved from its Progressive Era origins.

Direct Democracy: Design and Practice

Direct democracy mechanisms, primarily the initiative, referendum, and recall, emerged during the Progressive Era as correctives to what reformers viewed as corrupt and unresponsive representative government (Piott 2003). Between 1898 and 1918, 24 states

adopted some form of citizen-initiated lawmaking, concentrated primarily in the West and Midwest (Schmidt 1991). Reformers envisioned these tools as returning power to "the people," enabling citizens to bypass legislatures captured by railroads, utilities, and party machines to enact policies reflecting genuine popular will (Cronin 1989).

The democratic promise of these institutions rested fundamentally on assumptions about local participation and control. Citizens within a state would identify problems, draft solutions, gather signatures from their neighbors, and vote on proposals that would govern their own communities. This vision presumed relatively bounded political communities where those making decisions were largely those who would live under resulting policies. Geographic proximity and shared community membership provided both practical mechanisms for mobilization and normative justification for collective decision-making. Direct democracy would be participatory, grassroots, and authentically local in ways that representative institutions, increasingly influenced by organized interests and party bosses, were not (Bowler, Donovan and Tolbert 1998).

The historical record of direct democracy accomplishments proves mixed. Initiatives have produced significant policy innovations, from women's suffrage in several states before the Nineteenth Amendment to environmental protections, campaign finance reforms, and expansions of civil rights (Matsusaka 2005). Yet critics note that direct democracy has also been used to restrict rights, particularly of minority groups, from alien land laws targeting Asian immigrants in the early twentieth century to more recent measures limiting LGBTQ rights and immigrant access to public services (Hajnal, Gerber, and Louch 2002). The process neither guarantees progressive outcomes nor prevents majoritarian overreach. What direct democracy clearly accomplishes is providing an alternative policymaking venue when legislatures prove unresponsive to public preferences or when organized interests block legislative action.

Today's direct democracy landscape differs substantially from Progressive Era visions. Modern ballot measure campaigns regularly cost millions of dollars, require professional

management, and involve sophisticated media strategies indistinguishable from candidate elections. Qualification itself has become professionalized, with campaigns hiring firms that pay per signature rather than relying on volunteer gatherers (McCuan 2005; Stone 2012; Rayner 2014). The average cost of a competitive statewide campaign ranges from $5-10 million, with high-profile contests in large states regularly exceeding $50 million in total spending. These financial realities mean that successful ballot measure campaigns require substantial resources that few purely local, grassroots efforts can generate.

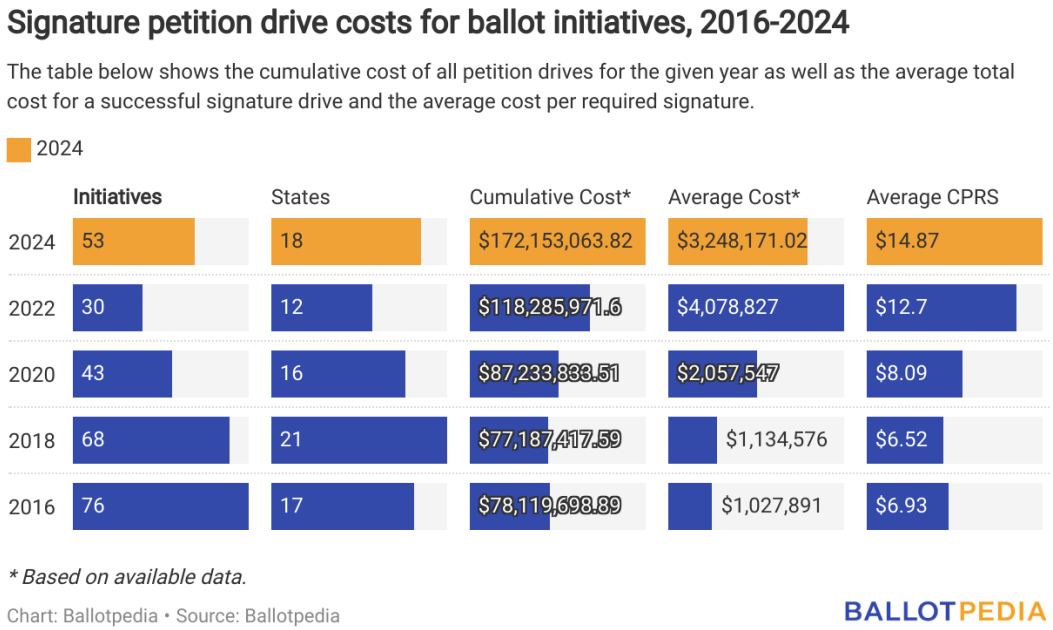


Figure 2.1: Cost per required signature for ballot measure qualification

The professionalization extends beyond fundraising to encompass every aspect of campaign operations. Skinner (2007) documents how political consultants have transformed campaign operations, creating standardized strategic frameworks and technical expertise that travel across state contexts. Organizations like The Fairness Project exemplify these dynamics, operating a Ballot Measure Leadership Corps to "cultivate and sustain elite campaign talent" across election cycles (The Fairness Project 2025). This model transforms campaign leadership from locally-sourced volunteers into a professionalized cadre moving between states with standardized strategic frameworks. Since 2016, such organizations have

backed successful initiatives to raise minimum wages and expand Medicaid across multiple states.

The costs of modern campaigns reflect the fundamental economics of political communication in contemporary media environments. Television advertising, digital targeting, polling, data analytics, and field operations all require substantial investment (Bowler and Donovan 1994; Stratmann 2010). This creates a structural imperative for accessing resources beyond what local fundraising alone can typically generate, particularly when well-funded opposition campaigns can outspend grassroots efforts. The distinction between signature gathering and actual campaigning proves important: while qualification can sometimes succeed through volunteer efforts, winning campaigns requires reaching less engaged voters through mass media, which necessitates professional campaign infrastructure. This creates fundamental dilemma for campaign leaders: they must access resources necessary for competitive campaigns while maintaining legitimacy with local voters who may interpret external support as threatening.

Understanding how campaigns navigate these tensions requires grasping the broader context of American federalism within which direct democracy operates, a federalism more permeable than formal institutional boundaries suggest.

Three Forces Driving Localized Nationalization

Permeable Federalism: Spillovers and Institutional Geography

American federalism traditionally rests on territorial assumptions about political community. States serve as distinct jurisdictions with bounded populations making collective decisions about governance within their borders. Justice Brandeis's "laboratories of democracy" metaphor envisions states as experimental spaces where different policy approaches can be tested, evaluated, and potentially adopted elsewhere. The metaphor assumes relatively clean boundaries: experiments occur within defined spaces, results can be observed,

and other jurisdictions can learn from successes or failures.

Yet this tidy metaphor obscures crucial features of how federalism actually operates. State boundaries create legal jurisdictions but do not contain policy effects, political identities, or mobilization networks. As scholars increasingly recognize, the traditional conception of states as autonomous political communities capable of independent policy experimentation confronts a more complex reality where state boundaries have become functionally porous even as they remain legally significant (Gardner 2014; Bulman-Pozen 2014). This permeability operates through three interconnected dynamics: direct policy spillovers that create cross-border effects, anticipatory spillovers through policy diffusion processes, and uneven institutional access that redirects political participation across state lines.

State-level policy decisions routinely create effects beyond their borders. When Colorado legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, neighboring states experienced increased drug trafficking and enforcement challenges, prompting Nebraska and Oklahoma to file suit against Colorado in federal court (Kilmer et al. 2013). When California establishes vehicle emission standards under its Clean Air Act waiver, automobile manufacturers face practical pressure to meet those standards nationally rather than maintaining separate production lines for different state markets (Carlson 2009). These direct spillovers create obvious stakes for out-of-state actors who find their lives affected by policies adopted in jurisdictions where they cannot vote.

More subtle but equally significant are anticipatory spillovers through policy diffusion. Policy innovations in one state create precedents that affect political feasibility elsewhere. The first state to legalize marijuana, recognize same-sex marriage, or implement ranked-choice voting changes what subsequent states understand as politically possible (Boushey 2010; Shipan and Volden 2008). Success or failure in one jurisdiction provides evidence that advocates and opponents use strategically in other states' political debates. Walker's (1969) classic work demonstrates that states adopt policies in relatively predictable patterns, with early adopters influencing later consideration elsewhere. Contemporary scholarship re-

veals these diffusion processes operate through multiple mechanisms: learning from other states' experiences, economic competition between states, professional networks among policymakers, and coordinated advocacy by interest groups (Volden, Ting, and Carpenter 2008; Boushey 2010). For contemporary advocates and opponents, each state campaign represents a battle in a longer war of policy diffusion, where victories and defeats shape not just immediate policy outcomes but the trajectory of policy development across multiple jurisdictions.

This helps explain why contribution patterns show limited relationship to geographic proximity. Supporting marijuana legalization in Oregon when you live in Pennsylvania makes sense not because Oregon's policy will directly affect Pennsylvania cannabis markets, but because Oregon's success or failure will influence Pennsylvania's future policy debates (Mooney 2001). Each state campaign becomes a move in a national policy game where precedent and momentum matter strategically. However, empirical analysis reveals that while approximately one-third of donors believe their contributions set precedents that will influence policy in their home states, this expectation ranks well below expressive motivations. The spillover beliefs may provide plausible instrumental rationale that allows donors to reconcile consumption-oriented participation with strategic reasoning, but may not drive the decision to contribute in the first place.

The distribution of direct democracy mechanisms across states creates another form of permeability rooted in institutional geography rather than policy spillovers. Twenty-six states allow some form of citizen-initiated ballot measures, while twenty-four states provide no such mechanisms or restrict them to legislative referrals only (Matsusaka 2005). Massachusetts residents can place measures on the ballot through citizen petitions, a right exercised regularly since 1918. Neighboring New York residents cannot, despite repeated attempts to establish such mechanisms that have failed due to entrenched political interests (Zimmerman 1999). California, Oregon, and Washington offer robust direct democracy institutions with relatively accessible signature requirements and well-established procedures. Texas, with a population exceeding forty million, restricts direct democracy to legislatively-

referred constitutional amendments, offering no provisions for citizen-initiated statutes despite grassroots efforts dating back decades (Schmidt 1989).

This uneven institutional landscape creates what might be called democracy arbitrage: political energy that cannot find expression through direct democracy in one state flows toward opportunities in states where such mechanisms exist. New York and Texas rank first and third respectively in aggregate out-of-state contributions despite having no similar processes of their own. This concentration may initially suggest surrogate representation dynamics, where citizens redirect political participation across state lines when home-state channels prove blocked (Baker 2020; Keena 2024). The pattern resembles what scholars observe in campaign finance more broadly, where donors in noncompetitive districts or states redirect contributions toward competitive races elsewhere (Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006). Yet donors from states lacking direct democracy mechanisms report no stronger motivations related to future policy influence than donors from states with such mechanisms. The geographic concentration may better reflect factors like population size, wealth distribution, and ideological mobilization operating through national advocacy networks, rather than primarily conscious strategies of seeking representation through other states' institutions. Residents of non-direct democracy states channel political energy toward available participatory venues, but this reflects expressive participation seeking meaningful engagement opportunities rather than instrumental rationality about policy outcomes in specific jurisdictions.

These three features—direct spillovers, policy diffusion dynamics, and uneven institutional access—combine to make state boundaries practically porous even as they remain legally significant. Policies diffuse across borders creating anticipatory stakes for advocates and opponents nationwide. Institutional access varies by state, redirecting participation toward jurisdictions offering direct democracy mechanisms. The result is a federal system where state-level policy battles regularly attract attention and potential participation from beyond state borders. Yet the permeability of federalism creates opportunities for interstate participation without explaining why individuals actually seize those opportunities

or how geographically dispersed actors coordinate engagement in distant state campaigns. Understanding these motivational and organizational dimensions requires examining the nationalization of American political life and the transformation of civic infrastructure that connects nationally-oriented citizens to state-level political contests.

Political Nationalization and the Transformation of Direct Democracy

The permeability of federalism creates opportunities for interstate participation, but it does not explain why individuals actually seize those opportunities or how geographically dispersed actors coordinate engagement across state lines. Understanding these patterns requires examining the nationalization of American political life. "Nationalization" describes distinct but interconnected processes: changes in how political organizations and movements operate (organizational nationalization), and transformations in how citizens think about and engage with politics (behavioral nationalization). Both prove essential for understanding interstate participation in direct democracy, operating through different mechanisms that reinforce each other. This project contributes to understanding both dimensions of nationalization, though with different emphases. The organizational dimension provides crucial context for the environment in which direct democracy operates, while the behavioral dimension represents this project's primary empirical focus through examining how donors and campaign leaders understand and experience interstate participation.

Contemporary direct democracy operates within an increasingly nationalized organizational environment shaped by transformations in how political movements, actors, and parties structure their operations. Scholars document profound changes in how political organizations operate at national scale. Skocpol (2003) traces the shift in American civic life from locally-rooted, chapter-based membership organizations toward professionally managed advocacy organizations operating primarily at the national level. Where earlier civic organizations mobilized members through local chapters with face-to-face interaction, contemporary advocacy organizations mobilize supporters through national communications

infrastructure, such as email lists, social media, and digital fundraising platforms, that can rapidly direct attention and resources toward specific campaigns regardless of geographic location.

What scholars increasingly characterize as "movement parties" reflects fundamental shifts in how parties organize and mobilize (Tarrow 2021). Milkis and Tichenor (2019) trace how innovations in both the presidency and social movements have reshaped their relational dynamics from the Progressive Era forward, with modern presidents becoming more prominent targets of insurgents while the White House gained incentives to control or partner with potent social movements. Their analysis emphasizes how "the worlds of movements and the executive increasingly overlapped as the size and scope of presidential power and particular movements grew," creating institutional conditions where movement-party alliances operate at national scale (Milkis and Tichenor 2019, 6-7). Schlozman and Rosenfeld (2025) characterize contemporary American parties as "hollow parties." Tracing developments from the New Deal forward, they identify the rise of programmatic partisanship, the nationalization of parties, and the presidentialization of politics as interconnected transformations that reshaped American party structures (Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2025, 113). Contemporary parties and movements function less as membership organizations rooted in local communities and more through professional staffing and coordination with allied advocacy organizations, creating organizationally top-heavy structures poorly rooted in local communities but capable of mobilizing resources nationally.

These organizational transformations occurred alongside, and were mutually reinforced by, increasing political polarization. Hopkins, Schickler, and Azizi (2022) demonstrate that state party platforms diverged dramatically starting in the mid-1990s, precisely when congressional speech became polarized. Examining 1,783 state party platforms from 1918 to 2017, they show that Republican and Democratic state parties adopted increasingly divergent positions matching their national counterparts' positions. Simultaneously, cross-state differences within each party decreased and regional issues became less promi-

nent, revealing tight connections between polarization, nationalization, and state political agendas. Caughey, Dunham, and Warshaw (2018) document the ideological nationalization of partisan subconstituencies, showing growing ideological homogeneity within congressional parties and the decline of geographic cleavages within parties. Zingher and Richman (2019) demonstrate that when national-level polarization is high, state legislative election outcomes depend more on voters' orientations toward national parties than on positions taken by state legislative parties themselves. This polarized environment creates sharp ideological stakes that make issue-based mobilization meaningful. When parties diverge clearly on issues like abortion or marijuana policy, those issues carry clearer political meaning, facilitating both individual understanding of what participation represents and organizational ability to frame campaigns within coherent movement narratives.

These changes, and the polarized environment they helped create, appear to extend to direct democracy contexts as well. Contemporary ballot measure campaigns operate within similar organizational infrastructure: advocacy groups coordinate across state boundaries to identify promising ballot measure opportunities and mobilize supporters nationally. The same trends scholars observe in candidate elections, like the weakening of traditional party structures, rise of professionally managed advocacy groups, development of digital fundraising infrastructure, may characterize direct democracy campaigns as well. Online fundraising platforms like ActBlue have revolutionized small-dollar fundraising, allowing campaigns to reach national audiences efficiently (Karpf 2012). Contemporary advocacy organizations operate through national communications infrastructure that can rapidly direct attention and resources toward state-level campaigns in ways that would have been impossible in earlier eras when civic organizations operated primarily through local chapters and face-to-face mobilization. This project contributes to understanding organizational nationalization by revealing how this infrastructure operates in direct democracy contexts, particularly through examining its effects on participation patterns and campaign strategies explored in subsequent empirical chapters.

While this organizational and polarized environment provides essential context, this project's primary contribution lies in examining behavioral nationalization, or how donors and campaign leaders actually think about, understand, and experience interstate participation in direct democracy. Hopkins (2018) provides the essential framework for understanding how citizens come to think nationally about state-level policy campaigns. Building on earlier work that documented the nationalization of American electoral patterns—including studies of both where parties draw their support geographically and how uniformly electoral change occurs across different regions (Stokes 1965, 1967; Claggett, Flanigan, and Zingale 1984; Vertz, Frendreis, and Gibson 1987; Morgenstern, Swindle, and Castagnola 2009)—Hopkins demonstrates that American politics has become increasingly nationalized over recent decades, with state and local political behavior growing more responsive to national forces and less shaped by local conditions. This nationalization operates through two interconnected dimensions: the alignment of national and subnational political divisions, visible in the increasing correlation between presidential and gubernatorial vote choice; and the national orientation of political engagement, evident in citizens paying more attention to national politics than state or local affairs (2018, 12). These patterns emerge from several reinforcing transformations beginning in the mid-twentieth century. The New Deal centralized significant power at the federal level, creating stronger incentives for parties to coordinate national strategies (Chhibber and Kollman 2004). The transformation of the media environment accelerated these trends, as the decline of local news sources and the rise of national partisan media meant that voters increasingly encountered politics through national rather than local frames.

Hopkins's framework emphasizes how citizens interpret politics at all levels through nationalized frameworks, organizing their political identities around national partisan labels and issue positions rather than local concerns. Media coverage of politics increasingly focuses on national rather than local news. Congressional elections that once turned on local factors now hinge heavily on national political tides and presidential approval. Even

ostensibly nonpartisan municipal elections show growing influence of national partisan identities (Moskowitz 2021). Rogers (2016) demonstrates that state legislative elections likewise depend far more on outcomes beyond legislators' control, such as the national economy, presidential approval, than on state-level policy outcomes or legislative performance. Rodden (2019) shows how thoroughly nationalized partisan identities have become: urban-rural divides now operate as proxies for national partisan conflict rather than reflecting distinctive local interests or community identities.

Behavioral nationalization has fundamental implications for how donors understand ballot measure contests as well. Issues that are technically state-specific come to represent broader ideological conflicts. Oregon's 2020 drug decriminalization measure became a battle in national debates about drug policy, criminal justice, and harm reduction approaches. California's Proposition 8 on same-sex marriage served as a proxy for national debates about LGBTQ rights, religious liberty, and equality. The symbolic politics surrounding initiative campaigns often matter as much as their direct policy outcomes, with national advocacy organizations, media outlets, and political networks treating state ballot measures as indicators of broader political momentum. When donors contribute to these campaigns, they interpret their participation through nationalized political identities and issue frameworks rather than purely local concerns. They view contributions as influencing national political priorities and trends far more frequently than as directly shaping policies in specific states, a pattern that persists even among donors who report giving primarily to help campaigns win.

Hopkins's insights require extension from voting behavior to campaign finance behavior. Like voters, donors interpret state-level campaigns through national frames and identities. But unlike voters, donors face no geographic constraints on participation—they can contribute anywhere, transforming state campaigns into venues for national political expression (Verba et al. 2000). While the existing nationalization literature tracks how national forces shape local political behavior, out-of-state giving reveals how national forces moti-

vate cross-jurisdictional political behavior. The underlying logic remains similar—national frames trump local concerns—but the behavioral manifestation differs substantially. Voters must engage with politics in their own jurisdictions; donors can redirect participation toward states where nationally salient conflicts play out through direct democracy mechanisms. This project's survey of out-of-state donors and interviews with campaign leaders provide direct evidence of how these behavioral patterns operate in practice, examining whether donors actually frame their participation nationally and how campaign leaders understand and navigate these dynamics.

The interaction between organizational nationalization, political polarization, and behavioral nationalization produces some of the patterns of interstate giving observed in direct democracy campaigns. Organizational infrastructure provides the mobilization capacity: nationally coordinated advocacy networks identify campaigns worth supporting, frame them within movement narratives resonating with geographically dispersed supporters, and provide the practical mechanisms such a fundraising platforms, email communications, and strategic guidance that enable participation across state lines. Political polarization creates the sharp ideological contrasts that make participation meaningful: when parties diverge clearly on issues, donors can more easily identify campaigns aligned with their values and understand what their participation represents. Behavioral nationalization creates the motivational foundation: donors understand state campaigns as battles in national movements, derive meaning from participating in broader ideological conflicts, and organize their political identities around national rather than local concerns. No single process alone suffices to explain substantial interstate giving. Behavioral nationalization without organizational capacity would leave nationally-oriented donors with motivation but no mechanism to act on distant campaigns. Organizational capacity without behavioral nationalization would leave advocacy networks unable to mobilize donors who still think primarily in local terms. And neither organizational nor behavioral nationalization would generate the intense mobilization patterns observed without the sharp ideological contrasts that polarization provides.

The localized nationalization paradox emerges precisely from these interactions: formally local institutions designed for territorially bounded communities now operate as venues for national political engagement because how citizens think about politics, how organizations mobilize participation, and how parties position themselves have all transformed in nationally-oriented directions. Direct democracy campaigns sit at this intersection, creating opportunities for donors who think nationally about politics to participate in state-level policy contests through organizations that can coordinate mobilization across state boundaries within a polarized environment that makes such participation meaningful. Contributing to a campaign becomes a way of participating in national political narratives, not just influencing specific state policies. This reflects genuine reorientation of how donors understand their engagement rather than merely strategic framing by campaigns.

Consumption-Oriented Giving and Expressive Participation

National framing alone cannot fully explain the persistence of small-dollar giving or why donors continue contributing despite acknowledging minimal marginal impact on outcomes. These patterns require understanding the consumption-oriented character of contemporary political participation. Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder (2003) term this the consumption model of political giving, where donors derive utility from the act of participation itself rather than expecting instrumental returns. Traditional models of campaign contributions presume donors seek returns commensurate with investment, whether those returns come as policy influence, official access, or material benefits (Downs 1957). Yet these models struggle to explain much individual giving, particularly small-dollar contributions unlikely to affect outcomes through marginal impact.

Recent scholarship has reinforced this consumption framework through multiple analytical approaches (Saunders and Abramowitz 2004; LaRaja and Wiltse 2012; Johnson 2013). Francia et al. (2003, 43) find in their survey of 1996 congressional donors that "purposive goals are a major factor in the decision to contribute," while "business-related reasons were

acknowledged much less often." Yet the consumption account faces some empirical challenges. Heerwig (2016) finds that repeat donors, or those who contribute in multiple election cycles, show contribution patterns more consistent with access-oriented behavior, while infrequent donors exhibit more ideological patterns. The character of aggregate donations from repeat donors is "more access-oriented even while controlling for other salient candidate characteristics," with funds from infrequent donors appearing "more ideologically motivated" (Heerwig 2016, 182). Similarly, Gordon, Hafer, and Landa (2007) demonstrate that corporate executives whose compensation is sensitive to firm performance contribute more politically, suggesting investment motivations among at least some donor populations. These findings indicate heterogeneity in donor motivations, with consumption and investment orientations potentially coexisting within the broader contributor pool.

The consumption framework applies particularly well to out-of-state direct democracy giving because donors cannot vote on measures they fund, attenuating standard instrumental calculations about marginal impact while preserving opportunities for ideological expression. Donors cannot expect continuing relationships with officials, future policy quid pro quo, or the access dynamics that might justify contributions to candidate campaigns. What remains is the expressive dimension: contributing allows individuals to signal membership in political communities organized around shared values rather than shared geography, to affirm their identities through supporting causes aligned with their beliefs, and to derive psychological satisfaction from participating in movements they view as meaningful regardless of their individual causal efficacy.

Substantial majorities of donors acknowledge their contributions likely have minimal or no impact on outcomes, yet similar majorities report donating primarily to express values. This is not cognitive dissonance but rather sophisticated understanding that individual efficacy differs from collective symbolic participation. Like purchasing concert tickets or donating to charity, political contributions provide expressive and psychological benefits independent of causal impact on specific outcomes. The act of giving becomes meaning-

ful through what it represents about the donor's values and political identity rather than through its marginal influence on whether particular measures pass or fail.

The consumption model does not eliminate instrumental reasoning but transforms what instrumental thinking means in nationalized political environments. Rather than calculating whether individual contributions affect discrete state outcomes, donors understand campaigns as longer battles where precedent and momentum may matter strategically. A modest contribution to a Colorado environmental initiative derives expressive utility from supporting aligned causes while maintaining plausible instrumental rationale that Colorado's success influences broader national trajectories. The donor doesn't need to believe her specific contribution determines Colorado's outcome to rationally participate if she views successful campaigns as creating momentum for policy change across multiple states over time.

This dual orientation of expressive participation providing immediate utility while instrumental reasoning operates at national rather than state-specific levels helps explain the policy concentration patterns observed empirically. Social issues and substance regulation attract disproportionate out-of-state funding not primarily because donors calculate spillover probabilities but because these domains represent battles in cultural and political conflicts that make values expression feel meaningful regardless of immediate policy outcomes. Marriage equality attracted massive cross-state funding because the issue represented fundamental questions about equality, dignity, and rights that transcended state boundaries. The state venue provided the institutional mechanism for political engagement, but the meaning donors derived came from participating in what they understood as a national movement for civil rights.

The consumption model also illuminates why donors maintain remarkable consistency in their giving patterns despite contributing across multiple states and campaigns. Repeat donors show very high subject matter consistency and position consistency, with substantial minorities concentrating their giving primarily on ideologically-charged issues. This systematic, ideologically-aligned giving reflects deliberate choices about which causes

merit ongoing support rather than opportunistic response to individual campaigns. Donors are sophisticated political actors making choices consistent with stable value commitments.

When Interstate Giving Concentrates

The theoretical framework emerges from connecting federalism's permeability with political nationalization and consumption-oriented participation. American federalism creates conditions where state policy decisions carry implications beyond state borders through spillover effects, policy diffusion dynamics, and uneven institutional access. Political nationalization means Americans increasingly interpret even state-level politics through national frameworks, with advocacy organizations, media coverage, and political identities operating across state boundaries. The consumption model means that most individual donors derive utility from participating in ideologically meaningful campaigns regardless of their marginal instrumental impact on specific outcomes.

Direct democracy campaigns sit at this intersection, creating venues where national political conflicts play out through state-level institutions while donors engage through expressive participation framed by national movement narratives. I argue that substantial cross-state participation emerges when three conditions converge.

First, value-laden content. Issues implicating fundamental questions of rights, identity, morality, or cultural values mobilize participation beyond those directly affected by immediate policy outcomes. These domains become meaningful sites for political expression because they represent battles in broader conflicts transcending state boundaries. Measures framed as battles over moral principles, human dignity, or core commitments attract contributions from donors who view them as nationally significant regardless of their state of residence. Marriage equality campaigns attracted massive out-of-state funding because the issue represented fundamental questions about equality and human rights that transcended state boundaries, not because donors calculated policy diffusion probabilities.

Second, symbolic national significance. Certain state contests come to represent

broader ideological conflicts in ways making them meaningful for political expression regardless of donors' state of residence. This operates through both organizational infrastructure—national advocacy networks framing state campaigns within movement narratives—and media coverage emphasizing national rather than local stakes. Missouri's 2024 abortion measure serves as a referendum on reproductive rights writ large. A 2018 measure granting voting rights to felons in Florida represents a fight for suffrage everywhere. The state venue matters institutionally, but the political meaning extends nationally. This national framing persists even among outcome-oriented donors who report giving primarily to help campaigns win.

Third, organizational infrastructure. Sophisticated advocacy organizations, or even sometimes individuals, that identify campaigns, frame them within broader narratives, and mobilize geographically dispersed supporters dramatically increase out-of-state participation. This infrastructure provides mechanisms translating concern into contribution, with platforms like ActBlue enabling rapid small-dollar fundraising and email networks mobilizing donors nationally. Organizations provide the interpretive frameworks helping donors understand how state campaigns connect to national priorities, the communications infrastructure reaching geographically dispersed supporters, and the practical mechanisms making contributions easy regardless of geographic distance.

When these conditions converge, as with marriage equality campaigns in the 2000s and 2010s combining rights-based moral claims, symbolic national significance, and sophisticated organizational infrastructure, substantial interstate participation emerges. When they diverge, as with water rights or utility regulation lacking moral valence or national framing despite similar legal structures, campaigns remain primarily locally funded. The theory thus explains both the overall scale of interstate giving and its highly uneven distribution across policy domains and states.

Empirical Expectations and Alternative Explanations

If localized nationalization operates as theorized, we should observe five patterns that distinguish it from alternative explanations:

1. Geographic proximity should matter less than policy domain and ideological alignment. If interstate giving reflected primarily material spillovers or geographic concerns, contribution patterns should correlate strongly with distance to funded states. I expect weak geographic effects but strong policy domain effects, particularly for value-laden issues with national symbolic significance.

2. Donors should demonstrate high consistency in issue focus and position across campaigns. If giving reflected opportunistic response to individual campaigns or partisan mobilization in competitive races, donors would show scattered giving patterns. I expect systematic, ideologically-aligned giving reflecting deliberate choices about which causes merit support.

3. Donors should acknowledge minimal individual impact while maintaining that participation serves important expressive functions. If giving reflected primarily instrumental calculations about affecting outcomes, donors should emphasize outcome importance and race closeness. I expect donors will acknowledge minimal impact while prioritizing values expression as primary motivation.

4. Donors should frame impact through national rather than state-specific lenses. If giving reflected primarily state-level policy concerns, donors would emphasize directly shaping policies in specific states. I expect donors will view contributions as influencing broader political priorities and national movements rather than determining individual state outcomes.

5. Personal connection to states should rank low among motivations. If geographic ties drove participation, prior residence or property ownership would predict contributions.

I expect personal connection will matter far less than ideological alignment with causes.

These expectations distinguish localized nationalization from three alternative explanations. Material spillover models would suggest contribution patterns correlate with geographic proximity to funded states, with donors emphasizing future policy influence in their home states as primary motivation, and systematic differences emerging between donors from states with and without direct democracy mechanisms. Partisan mobilization models would suggest contributions flow toward close contests regardless of policy domain, with donors emphasizing outcome importance over values expression, and partisan identity predicting giving patterns more strongly than policy domain. Models emphasizing geographic ties would suggest prior residence and property ownership strongly predict contributions, with donors emphasizing local concerns even when giving to distant states.

The consumption-oriented, nationalizing framework suggests different patterns: small-dollar giving concentrated on value-laden issues with national symbolic significance, donors prioritizing values expression while acknowledging minimal individual impact, and national rather than state-specific framing of participation's meaning. The empirical chapters that follow examine which patterns better characterize out-of-state giving.

How Interstate Giving Transforms Direct Democracy

The theoretical framework offers expectations about behavior, but it also illuminates how interstate giving fundamentally alters direct democracy's operation. When the three conditions converge—value-laden content, symbolic national significance, and sophisticated organizational infrastructure—they create transformation at three interconnected levels: individual participation, organizational strategy, and democratic legitimacy. These levels reinforce one another in ways that entrench nationalized patterns.

At the individual level, donors engage through what might be called nationalized local participation. They contribute to state-level campaigns while understanding their participation as part of broader national movements. Donors rarely articulate purely local

concerns even when contributing to campaigns in neighboring states. Instead, they frame their participation through national issue commitments, movement identification, and ideological expression. The meaning they derive from participation extends beyond instrumental calculations about specific state policies. The contribution becomes simultaneously a local act (supporting a specific state campaign) and a national one (participating in movements for marriage equality, drug policy reform, or reproductive rights). This national framing operates alongside realistic assessments of individual efficacy. Donors acknowledge their contributions have minimal marginal impact on whether specific measures pass or fail, yet they maintain that participation serves important functions: expressing values, advancing long-term political goals, and setting precedents influencing broader policy trajectories.

At the organizational level, campaigns develop bifurcated legitimacy strategies. They must simultaneously appeal to two distinct audiences with different legitimacy criteria. Out-of-state donors respond to national framing, movement narratives, and ideological appeals that position state campaigns within broader political conflicts. Local voters often prioritize local voices, community concerns, and state-specific considerations. Campaign leaders navigate this challenge through strategic communication that emphasizes different elements to different audiences. They may stress grassroots local support in advertising while using national movement language in fundraising appeals. They cultivate local spokespeople to provide authentic voices while coordinating strategy with national organizations. They accept the resources that national funding provides while managing the political vulnerabilities it creates.

Campaign leaders with extensive experience managing multiple ballot measure campaigns across jurisdictions demonstrate strategic compartmentalization, maintaining deliberate boundaries between funding sources and messaging decisions while cultivating relationships with national advocacy networks. These experienced leaders view external funding through operational rather than normative lenses, treating resource mobilization as a technical challenge requiring strategic management. First-time campaign leaders, conversely, often

enter with expectations about grassroots organizing that the resource requirements of contemporary campaigns quickly challenge. The temporal evolution matters: leaders describe evolving perspectives as campaigns progress, indicating that legitimacy frameworks develop through experience rather than preceding it. Many begin with idealistic commitments to purely local grassroots organizing but develop more pragmatic justifications for external funding as they confront the competitive dynamics and resource requirements of modern campaigns.

Resource environments create differential constraints on autonomy. Campaign leaders in resource-scarce contexts express more dependence on external support and describe greater influence from national funders on strategic decisions. Leaders operating in better-resourced environments or with established professional networks navigate external funding differently, maintaining greater operational autonomy even when accepting substantial external resources. Support campaigns advocating for policy change access different legitimacy narratives than opposition campaigns defending existing arrangements. Support campaigns on civil rights issues can frame external funding as enabling democratic participation and giving voters meaningful choices. Opposition campaigns must navigate more complex terrain when justifying why outside resources should help maintain existing policy arrangements, though those aligned with major business interests often develop confidence that professional campaign support serves broader public interests.

Geographic symbolism operates independently of material dependencies in ways that campaigns must navigate strategically. Campaign funding sources create perceptions about political identity and values that often matter more than the actual operational reality of donor influence. Voters and opponents react to funding from certain states or cities based on what they perceive those places to represent politically, regardless of whether donors actually influence campaign decisions. Funding from states like California or New York became shorthand for political orientations that transcend specific policy content, triggering questions about whose interests campaigns genuinely serve regardless of shared policy preferences

between donors and voters. However, geographic sensitivity varies across political contexts, depending on existing patterns of political identity and regional resentment.

At the democratic legitimacy level, interstate giving creates what might be called contested localism. The presence of substantial out-of-state funding becomes itself a site of political contestation, with different actors advancing competing interpretations of what it means for democracy. Opponents frame external funding as outside interference, cultural imposition, or elite manipulation, drawing on territorial conceptions of political community where legitimate participation requires geographic connection to policy outcomes. Supporters frame the same funding as democratic inclusion, movement participation, or resource equalization that enables genuine policy debate. These competing frames reflect genuine normative disagreements rather than purely strategic positioning. Both sides make claims that resonate with different democratic values: local self-determination versus political expression, territorial community versus issue-based solidarity, insularity versus interconnection.

Rather than defensively responding to criticism about funding sources, many campaigns reframe external support within narratives of democratic participation. Instead of apologizing for outside support, campaigns emphasize why issues matter to people everywhere, making stories about shared values rather than geographic origins of resources. Every time opponents bring up funding sources, campaigns pivot to discussing policy stakes and what measures would accomplish. These reframing strategies suggest campaigns have moved beyond defensive postures toward assertive legitimacy claims that position external funding as evidence of broad support rather than outside manipulation.

These three levels—individual participation, organizational strategy, and democratic legitimacy—reinforce one another in ways that entrench nationalized patterns. Donors who understand their participation nationally are mobilized effectively by organizations employing national framing, which in turn provokes local opposition that frames funding as illegitimate outside interference, which then reinforces donors' sense that they're participating in

consequential national battles against local resistance. The pattern becomes self-reinforcing, transforming direct democracy from the bounded local institution imagined by Progressive Era reformers into a venue where national political conflicts regularly play out through state-level institutional mechanisms.

Conclusion

The theory developed in this chapter explains out-of-state giving in direct democracy as emerging from the intersection of permeable federalism, nationalized politics, and consumption-oriented participation. State boundaries remain legally significant but cannot contain policy effects, institutional access, or political mobilization. Americans increasingly engage politics through national identities and issue frameworks rather than purely local attachments. Most individual donors derive utility from participating in ideologically meaningful campaigns regardless of their marginal instrumental impact on specific outcomes. When these forces converge in direct democracy campaigns, they transform state ballot measures into venues for national political engagement while retaining their formally local character.

The empirical chapters that follow apply this framework to understand patterns of out-of-state giving while illuminating practical implications. Chapter 3 describes construction of a novel dataset encompassing contributions to direct democracy campaigns across all 26 states with citizen-initiated mechanisms from 2006 through 2022 and presents some descriptive analysis of its overall scope. Chapter 4 documents patterns of out-of-state contributions, including their scale, temporal trends, concentration across policy domains, and geographic origins. This chapter also examines whether these patterns align with the framework's expectations regarding donor consistency and contribution characteristics. Chapter 5 surveys out-of-state donors to examine whether they articulate expressive rather than instrumental motivations, frame impact through national rather than state-specific lenses, and understand participation as engagement with movements rather than intervention in discrete state decisions. Chapter 6 interviews campaign leaders to analyze how organizations navigate

bifurcated legitimacy demands created by external funding and how professional experience and resource environments shape these strategies.

Beyond examining these patterns, these investigations address broader questions about democratic representation in increasingly nationalized political systems. The analysis reveals not merely that interstate giving occurs at substantial scale but that it fundamentally transforms how direct democracy operates. Understanding these transformations is essential for evaluating state-level democracy in an era where formal institutional boundaries increasingly diverge from functional political communities, where citizens engage politics through national frameworks while governing authority remains territorially distributed, and where the meaning of local self-governance becomes contested rather than self-evident.

Chapter 3: Building a Dataset and a Glimpse at the Data

Testing the theory of localized nationalization developed in Chapter 2 requires systematic data on campaign contributions across all states with direct democracy mechanisms. This chapter describes the construction of a novel dataset that represents one of this project's largest contributions. To my knowledge, while some campaign finance data spanning multiple states exists, no dataset of this breadth and detail has been used for social science research. This dataset provides the empirical foundation not only for the aggregate analyses in this chapter and Chapter 4, but also for the survey sampling frame in Chapter 5 and case selection for campaign leader interviews in Chapter 6. I devote a substantial portion of this chapter to its construction given its originality and central role across all subsequent empirical chapters.

The chapter proceeds in two parts. First, I describe the data collection process, including the challenges of working with fragmented state reporting systems, the methods used to obtain and standardize records, and the supplementary data sources incorporated to enable richer analysis. Then, I provide descriptive analysis of aggregate patterns across the full dataset, establishing baseline features of direct democracy campaign finance before subsequent chapters investigate specific research questions. These aggregate analyses examine contribution size distributions, individual versus non-individual donor patterns, variation across policy domains, geographic concentration of contributions, patterns across election cycles, and repeat donor behavior. Together, these descriptive findings characterize the overall

landscape of direct democracy financing and reveal the empirical puzzles that motivate the dissertation's core investigations into out-of-state participation.

Campaign Finance Data in American Federalism

State-level campaign finance data exists in fragmented systems across jurisdictions, each with distinct disclosure requirements, reporting formats, and access protocols. Unlike federal data centralized through the Federal Election Commission, state political finance data resides in what scholars describe as a "balkanized" system (Malbin and Gais 1998). Each state determines its own disclosure thresholds, reporting timelines, and information requirements. Campaign committees file reports with agencies such as Secretary of State offices, ethics commissions, or campaign finance boards that maintain systems like Nevada's AURORA system, Arkansas' ReFrame Disclosure database, and Washington's Public Disclosure Commission archive, each with different interfaces and capabilities.

For direct democracy campaigns specifically, these challenges intersect with institutional variation in how states structure initiative processes, qualify measures for the ballot, and regulate campaigns. The Supreme Court decisions in *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti* (1978) and *Citizens Against Rent Control v. City of Berkeley* (1981) established that contribution limits cannot be applied to ballot measure campaigns, creating an unregulated environment where individuals and organizations can contribute unlimited amounts.

Twenty-six states offer citizen-initiated processes: constitutional initiatives, statutory initiatives, and/or veto referendums. These mechanisms allow voters to propose constitutional amendments, enact new laws, or challenge existing legislation directly. The states with these processes represent diverse regions and political cultures, from large populous states like California and Florida to smaller states like Montana and South Dakota. California leads the nation in both ballot measure frequency and campaign fundraising, with individual measures sometimes attracting over $100 million in contributions.

Campaign finance disclosure requirements vary significantly but follow similar princi-

ples. Committees that support or oppose ballot measures must register with state agencies and file periodic reports disclosing contributions and expenditures. However, disclosure thresholds—the amount above which donor information must be reported—differ widely. Table 3.1 presents these thresholds across all 26 states.

Table 3.1: State Disclosure Thresholds for Direct Democracy Contributions

State	Threshold ($)	State	Threshold ($)
Alaska	50	Missouri	100
Arizona	25	Montana	35
Arkansas	100	Nebraska	250
California	0	Nevada	1000
Colorado	20	New Mexico	0
Florida	0	North Dakota	100
Idaho	50	Ohio	0
Illinois	150	Oklahoma	50
Maine	50	Oregon	100
Maryland	0	South Dakota	100
Massachusetts	50	Utah	50
Michigan	0	Washington	25
Mississippi	200	Wyoming	25

Thresholds range from $0 in California, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, and Ohio (requiring disclosure of all contributions) to $1,000 in Nevada (capturing only major contributors). This variation affects cross-state comparability, as donor pools captured in each state reflect reporting requirements as well as underlying giving behavior.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

The primary source of campaign finance data for this project consists of disclosure reports filed by ballot measure committees with state agencies. In most states, these agencies are Secretary of State offices, though some states assign this responsibility to ethics commissions, campaign finance boards, or other entities. Ballot measure committees—organizations formed to support or oppose specific initiatives or referendums—must register with the appropriate agency and file periodic reports disclosing their contributions and expenditures.

Three main approaches were used to obtain these data. For states where online data

access was limited or where historical data had been removed from websites, I submitted formal public records requests under state open records laws. These requests were largely open-ended, as I was hoping to receive as much of the raw data related to direct democracy campaigns as possible to ensure scope of the final dataset. Response times varied from two weeks to six months, and the formats provided ranged from Excel spreadsheets to CSV files to scanned PDF documents that required manual data entry. Second, many states now maintain online databases that allow public access to campaign finance data. Some systems, like California's CAL-ACCESS and Oregon's ORESTAR, provide bulk download options for researchers. Others require searching for individual campaigns and exporting results one at a time. For states without bulk download capabilities, I developed web scraping scripts in R to extract contribution data from online archives. Finally, two national organizations, Follow the Money (operated by the National Institute on Money in Politics) and OpenSecrets (operated by the Center for Responsive Politics), maintain databases of campaign finance information aggregated from state sources. These organizations generously provided access to their data on ballot measure contributions for several states. However, their coverage varied by state and time period and did not include full street addresses, necessitating supplementation with data from other sources to achieve complete temporal and geographic coverage.

The heterogeneity of state systems presented numerous challenges. Database structures varied widely. Some states organized data by committee, others by transaction, and still others by election cycle. Field names differed (what California calls "contributor name" might be "entity name" in Oregon and "donor" in Washington). Date formats ranged from MM/DD/YYYY to YYYY-MM-DD to text descriptions like "Third Quarter 2012." Address information might be stored in separate fields for street, city, state, and ZIP code or combined in a single address field. Contribution types included in-kind donations, monetary contributions, and various forms of non-monetary support, each requiring different handling in the data processing pipeline.

The file formats presented their own complications. Some states provided relatively manageable exports with contributions organized by campaign or reporting period. Others delivered single massive files containing every contribution ever made to any committee in the state's history, requiring extensive filtering to isolate only ballot measure-related transactions. California's CAL-ACCESS system, for instance, provides bulk downloads that contain millions of records spanning decades of state political activity across all types of committees. Extracting just the relevant ballot measure contributions required matching committee identification numbers to ballot measure campaigns, then filtering by date ranges and transaction types. Similar challenges emerged in other high-volume states like Washington and Colorado, where the raw data files contained contributions to candidate campaigns, political parties, and various other entities alongside ballot measure committees.

An additional complication arose in cases where a single ballot measure committee was registered to support or oppose multiple measures simultaneously. This occurred occasionally when organizations ran coordinated campaigns on related issues or when committees amended their registration to add new measures during an election cycle. In these instances, contribution records listed only the committee name without specifying which measure(s) a given donation supported. Resolving these ambiguities required manual parsing of committee registration documents, campaign finance reports, and individual dates of contribution reporting. For example, a committee might initially register to oppose Measure A, then later amend to also oppose Measure B, creating a period where contributions could have supported either or both efforts. I developed matching procedures to assign contributions based on registration dates, amendment filings, and temporal proximity to election dates, though some ambiguous cases remain in the final dataset.

Finally, while some states' campaign finance databases contain records dating to the early 2000s or earlier, systematic disclosure before 2006 is inconsistent and incomplete. Many states did not require itemized contributor information for ballot measure campaigns until the 2000s, while others purged older records during database migrations. The analysis

therefore begins in 2006, when enhanced disclosure requirements and standardized digital reporting made the collection of comparable contribution data across all 26 direct democracy states feasible. This time frame certainly has its limitations, as it cannot capture long-term historical evolution of direct democracy financing.

Data Standardization and Cleaning

Raw data required extensive standardization to create a consistent, analyzable dataset. I completed most of this standardization using R.

The first task mapped fields from each state's system to a common schema: contributor name, contribution amount, contribution date, contributor address (street, city, state, ZIP code), contributor type (individual vs. organization), ballot measure identifier, committee name, and support/oppose position. This process was iterative, as initial attempts revealed inconsistencies requiring returns to source data and refined extraction procedures.

Contributor location represents a crucial variable for identifying contribution patterns across geographic space. Address information arrived in various formats, including separate fields, combined strings, or only partial information. I developed parsing algorithms to extract city, state, and ZIP code information. Address validation procedures from the survey portion of this project aided in refining accuracy.

A particularly challenging aspect involved identifying unique donors across contributions and states. The same individual might appear as "John Smith," "John Q. Smith," "J. Smith," and "Smith, John." Organizations might be listed as "ACLU," "American Civil Liberties Union," or "ACLU Foundation." Without careful entity resolution, repeat donor analyses would be fundamentally flawed. I implemented multi-stage entity disambiguation using R's stringdist package for fuzzy matching. First, I standardized name formats by converting text to lowercase, removing punctuation, and applying consistent ordering. For example, "ACLU," "American Civil Liberties Union," and "ACLU Foundation" were standardized to a single identifier based on name similarity and address matching. Second, I used fuzzy match-

ing algorithms identifying likely duplicates based on name similarity and address proximity. Third, for high-dollar frequent donors, I conducted manual review to verify matches and correct errors. Contribution amounts required careful attention. Most states report amounts in dollars and cents, but some drop cents. I standardized all amounts to numeric dollar values, flagged anomalies (e.g., contributions over $1 million, while rare, do occur), and created separate indicators for in-kind versus monetary contributions and negative/corrected amounts. Ensuring quality required multiple validation approaches throughout collection and cleaning. Many states publish summary statistics showing total contributions. I compared aggregated totals against these figures to identify gaps or errors. When discrepancies emerged—for instance, if California totals for high-profile measures differed from official reports by more than a few percentage points—I re-checked source files and submitted additional requests.

I also examined whether the same entities appeared consistently across states. For instance, if a major union contributed in five states, I verified entity names and addresses were consistent (or variations attributable to local chapters). This caught numerous naming variations missed by automated fuzzy matching and revealed reporting patterns, such as instances where state chapters sometimes listed national organizations as donors while other times listing themselves.

Finally, I plotted contribution patterns over time for each state to identify anomalies, such as unexpected spikes or drops indicating missing data or errors. A state showing zero contributions when ballot measures appeared clearly had a data gap. Dramatic year-to-year fluctuations inconsistent with measure counts merited investigation. These visualizations revealed missed reporting periods requiring separate collection, or reporting inconsistencies where remedying errors proved impossible. Despite best efforts, errors in collection and coding may remain.

Supplementary Data Sources

Beyond core campaign finance data, I incorporated supplementary sources while conducting the analysis for this project.

Income Data

To provide economic context for donor behavior, I collected income data from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates at the ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) level. The ACS provides detailed demographic and economic information, with five-year estimates offering greater statistical reliability for smaller geographic units.

I obtained median household income data for each ZCTA from 2011 through 2022. For earlier years (2006-2010), ACS data at the ZCTA level were not consistently available. To maintain longitudinal consistency, I imputed these years by replicating 2011 values backward. While this assumes income stability during a period including the 2008 financial crisis, it provides a reasonable proxy for relative economic standing of geographic areas.

The income data enable examining whether contributors from wealthier or poorer areas behave differently. However, important limitations exist. First, ZIP code-level income represents area medians and may not accurately reflect individual donor circumstances. ZIP codes can be geographically large and economically heterogeneous, particularly in urban areas. Second, median household income does not capture wealth, which may be more relevant to political giving capacity than annual income. Third, temporal imputation for 2006-2010 introduces measurement error difficult to quantify. Despite limitations, ZIP code income provides the best available proxy for donor economic context absent individual-level financial data.

Policy Categorizations

Direct democracy measures address wide-ranging policy topics. To enable analysis of how contributions vary across issue domains, I developed a policy classification scheme grouping measures into substantively meaningful categories.

The categorization began with detailed issue codes from Follow the Money, which tracks measures using a taxonomy of over 350 specific policy areas. While fine-grained, this proved too detailed for many purposes—dividing data into so many categories that patterns became difficult to discern. I collapsed narrow categories into 20 broader policy domains maintaining important substantive distinctions while creating groupings large enough for analysis.

The 20 categories include: Government Operations, Tax and Revenue, Education, Criminal Justice, Health, Environment & Natural Resources, Elections & Campaigns, Business & Labor, Social Issues, and Substance Use & Regulation. This schema groups related subjects while separating issues that existing scholarship suggests may attract different donor types or financing patterns. The complete list appears in Appendix 3A.

To ensure reliability, two trained graduate research assistants independently coded a 20% sample of measures after reviewing the classification scheme and completing practice coding on 25 measures. Inter-coder reliability, measured using Krippendorff's Alpha, reached 0.91, indicating strong agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consultation with original Follow the Money classifications. For measures fitting multiple categories—for example, a measure both raising taxes and funding education—the team assigned each to the category representing its primary focus.

The Dataset: Scope and Structure

The resulting database contains detailed information on contributions to 667 unique ballot measures across 26 states from 2006 through 2022, including over one million individual

contribution records encompassing approximately $10 billion in total contributions.

The dataset includes these core variables for each contribution: contributor information (name, address including street, city, state, and ZIP code, and entity type indicating individual vs. organization); contribution details (amount, date, and type distinguishing monetary from in-kind donations); campaign information (ballot measure identifier, state, election year, measure title, and policy category); committee information (committee name and support/oppose position); and supplementary variables (contributor ZIP code median income and geographic identifiers including whether the donor's state has direct democracy processes, population, and whether the contribution was to a bordering state).

The dataset is structured at the contribution level, with each row representing a single donation from a contributor to a campaign. This granular structure enables flexible aggregation. Researchers can aggregate by donor to study giving patterns across campaigns, by campaign to examine funding sources for specific measures, by state and year to track temporal trends, or by policy category to compare financing across issue domains. The contribution-level structure preserves maximum analytical flexibility.

Table 3.2: Dataset Summary Statistics

Metric	Value
Number of Direct Democracy Measures	667
Number of States	26
Years Covered	2006-2022
Total Contributions (Billions USD)	$10.18
Number of Contribution Records	1,474,279
Unique Donors	653,807
Median Donation Amount (USD)	$50.00
Mean Donation Amount (USD)	$6907.64

Table 3.2 presents key summary statistics. Contribution amounts exhibit a highly skewed distribution, with a median donation of $50 contrasted against a mean of approx-

imately $6,900. This substantial disparity reflects a small number of exceptionally large donors alongside a majority of smaller contributors, which is a pattern consistent with existing research on political financing (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This concentration means that while direct democracy appears democratically accessible with broad participation, campaign capacity depends critically on attracting major donors.

Analysis of Aggregate Patterns

This section presents descriptive analyses establishing baseline patterns in direct democracy campaign finance. These analyses characterize the overall landscape across all states, years, and policy domains from 2006 through 2022, examining contribution size distributions, donor type patterns, policy domain variation, geographic concentration, temporal trends, and repeat donor behavior. Each provides foundation for understanding scope and structure before subsequent chapters investigate specific research questions about out-of-state giving, donor motivations, and campaign dynamics.

Contribution Size Distribution

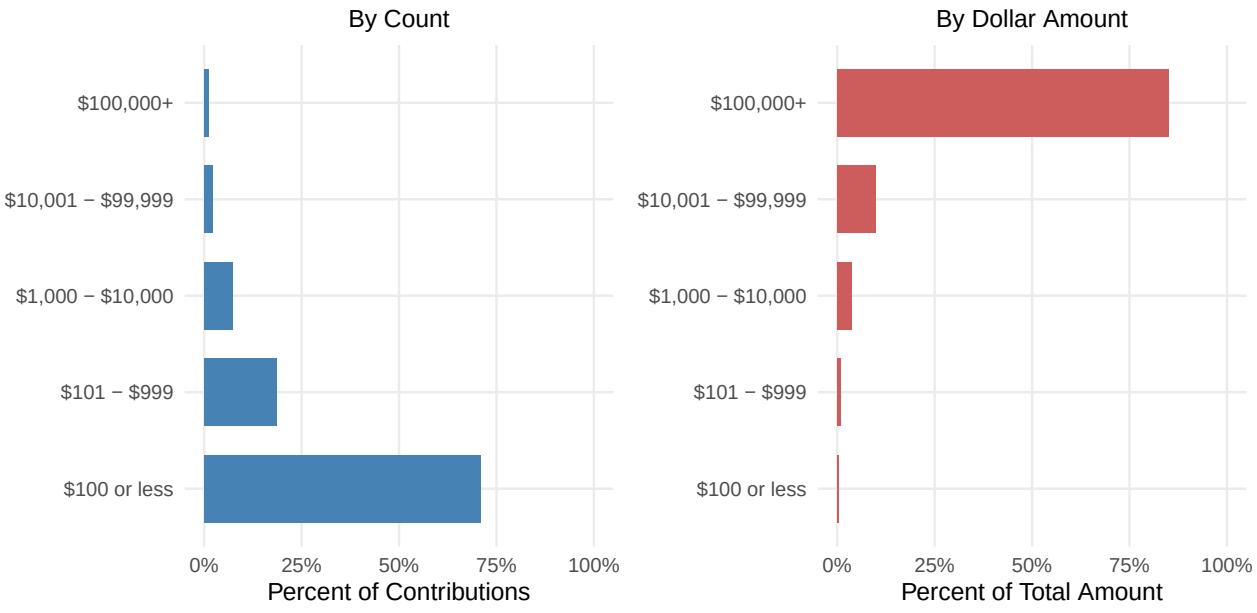


Figure 3.1: Distribution of Contributions by Size.

Figure 3.1 displays the distribution of contributions by size category. The left panel shows small donations of $100 or less represent approximately 69% of all contributions by count, with donations between $101 and $999 accounting for another 20%. Contributions exceeding $10,000 make up roughly 3% of total count. The right panel reveals a markedly different pattern when examining dollar amounts: donations of $100 or less account for less than 1% of total dollars, while contributions exceeding $10,000 comprise over 94% of all funding. The two middle categories each contribute approximately 2-3% to total dollar amounts despite their differing prevalence by count.

Individual vs. Non-Individual Donors

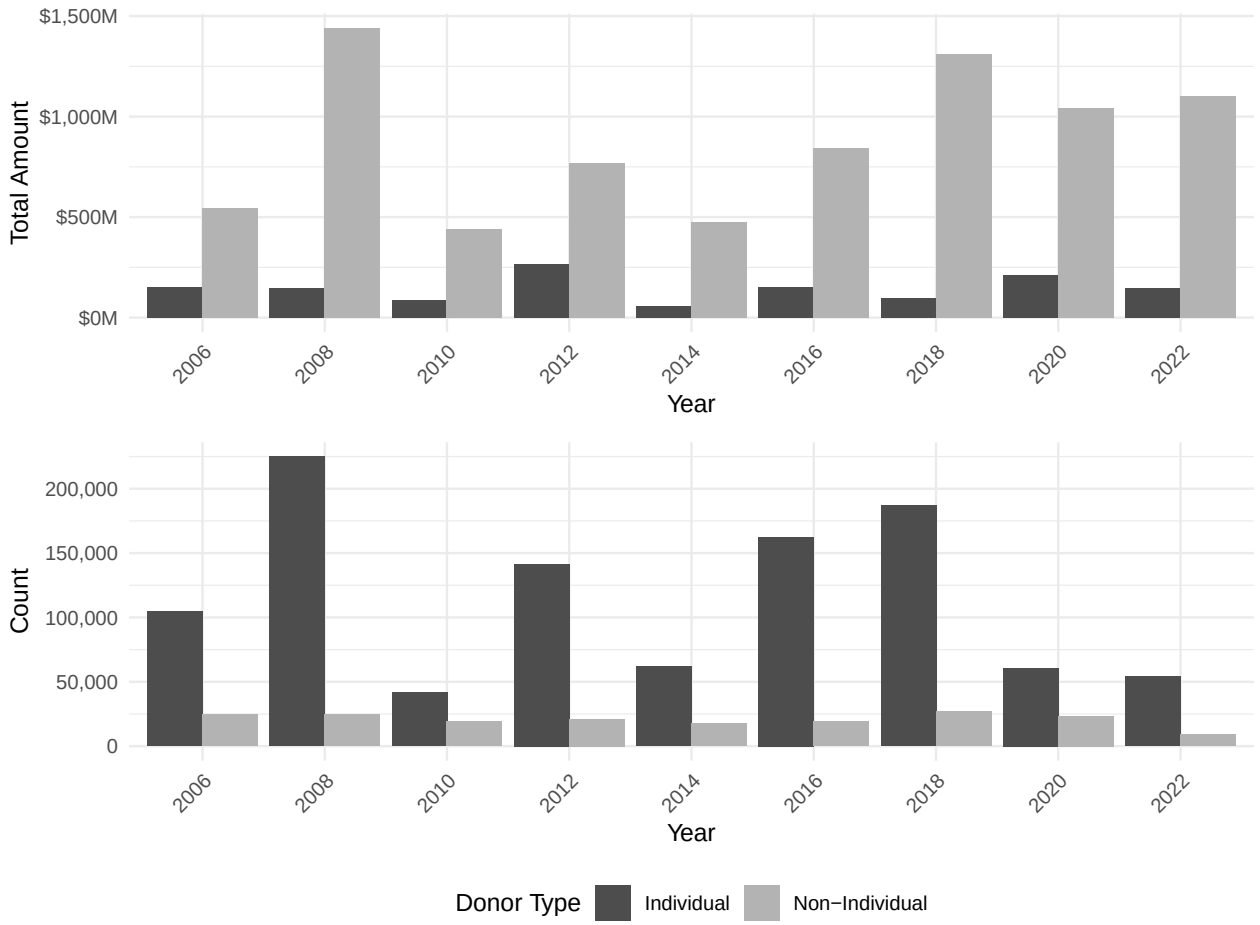


Figure 3.2: Individual and non-individual donor patterns over time.

Figure 3.2 compares contribution patterns between individuals and non-individual donors across even-numbered years. The top panel shows non-individual donors such as corporations, unions, advocacy groups, and political action committees, contribute substantially more in every election cycle, with particularly high levels in 2008, 2012, 2016, 2018, and 2020. The bottom panel shows individuals make far more contributions by count, typically outnumbering non-individual donors by ratios ranging from approximately 3:1 to 8:1 depending on election cycle. Both panels show increased activity in presidential election years compared to midterm years.

Policy Domain Analysis

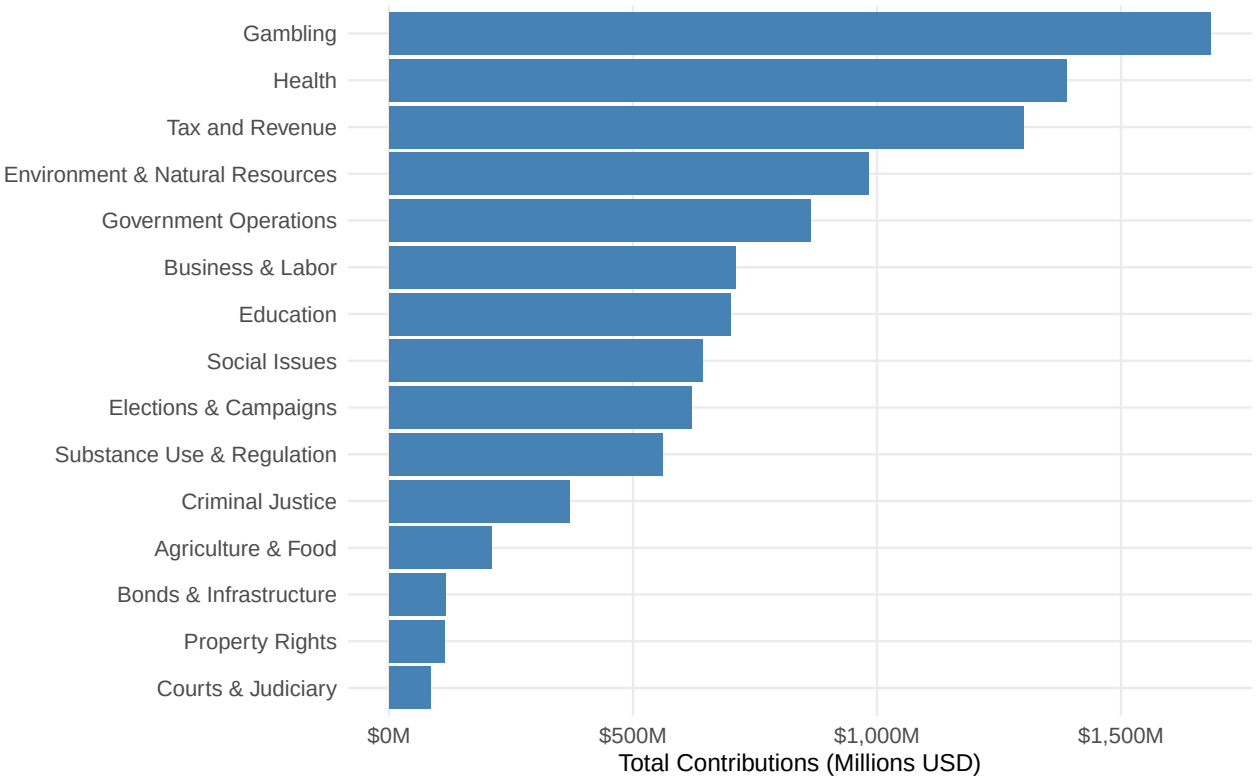


Figure 3.3: Total Contributions by Policy Domain (Top 15)

Figure 3.3 displays total contributions across the top 15 policy domains. Gambling-related measures attract the highest total at approximately $1.5 billion, followed by health care at roughly $1.25 billion and tax and revenue issues at just over $1 billion. Environment

and natural resources, government operations, and business and labor each draw between $500 million and $750 million. The remaining categories receive progressively lower totals, with courts and judiciary receiving the least among the top 15 at under $100 million.

This aggregate view establishes which issue areas attracted the most campaign finance activity overall across the 2006-2022 period. However, these totals combine contributions from diverse sources, including individuals giving small amounts, organizational donors making large contributions, in-state residents, and out-of-state participants. Each of these donors potentially operates through different motivational structures and mobilization channels. Gambling's dominance in total spending may be driven by concentrated organizational interests with direct economic stakes: tribal nations protecting gaming rights, casino operators pursuing expansion, and competing industries opposing new competition. Appendix Figure 3B.1 shows that when the analysis restricts to in-state individual donors only, gambling falls near the bottom of the top 15 while tax and revenue issues and social questions rise to prominence. Other policy domains may show different patterns when disaggregated by donor type and geography. Subsequent chapters examine whether individual out-of-state donors, the population central to understanding localized nationalization, resemble in-state individuals in their policy priorities or demonstrate distinct giving patterns reflecting different mechanisms of political mobilization across state boundaries.

Geographic Patterns

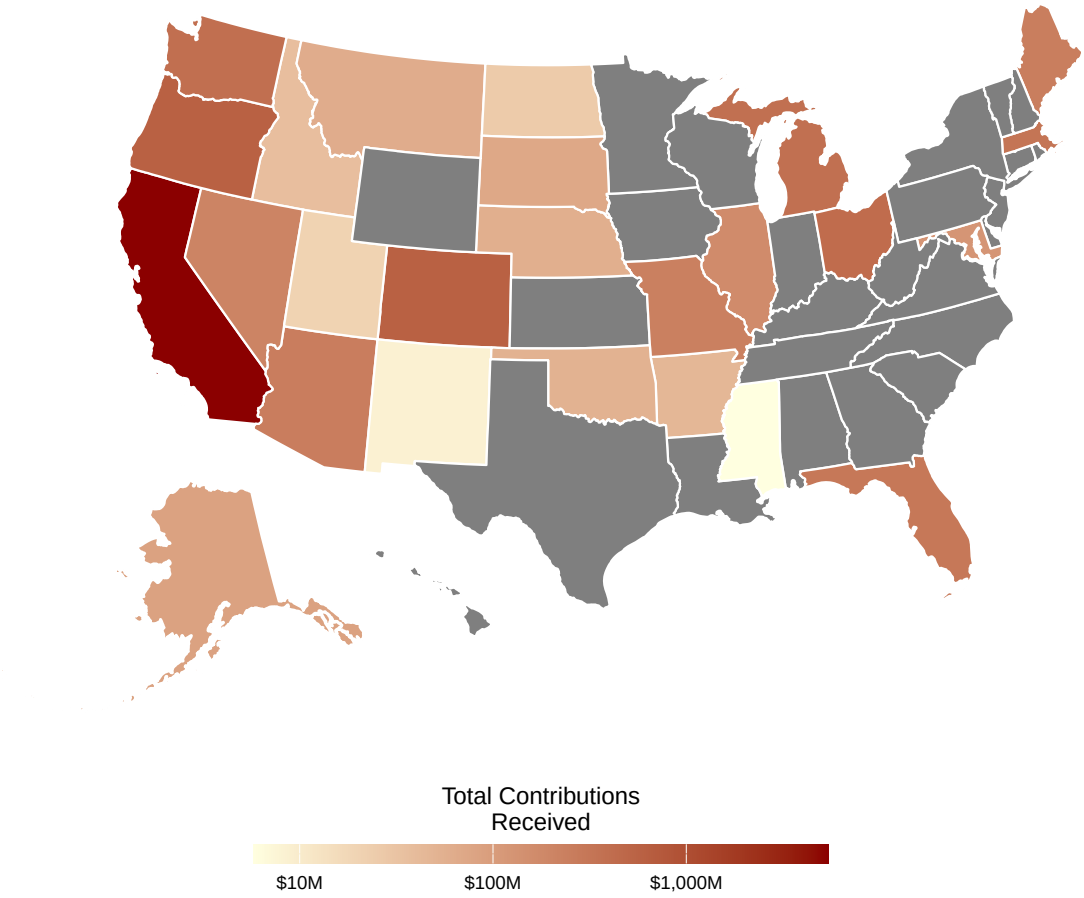


Figure 3.4: Total Direct Democracy Contributions by State (2006-2022)

Figure 3.4 maps total contributions received by direct democracy campaigns in each state from 2006 through 2022. California alone accounts for over 40% of all contributions, with totals exceeding $4 billion. We already know this subliminally— California is the epicenter of direct democracy in the United States and is the center of much scholarly research. What the map reveals, however, are the less prominent states and the considerable variation in direct democracy activity beyond California or other ballot measure hot spots. Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Arizona, Massachusetts, and Ohio show the next tier of activity with totals ranging from approximately $300 million to $600 million. Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, and Montana form a middle tier with totals between $100 million and $300 million.

Several states with direct democracy mechanisms, including Wyoming, South Dakota, and Arkansas, show much smaller campaign finance activity during this period. The map uses a logarithmic scale to make variation visible across the wide range of values.

Cyclical Patterns in Direct Democracy Financing, 2006-2022

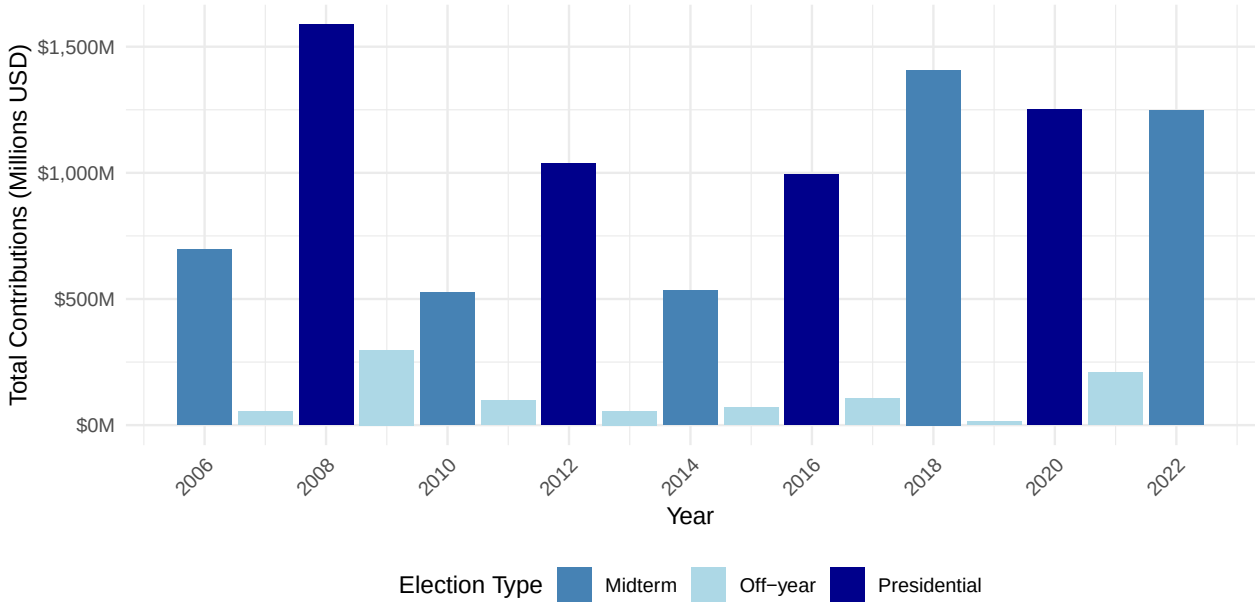


Figure 3.5: Direct Democracy Campaign Finance Across Election Cycles

Figure 3.5 displays total contributions by year across the 2006-2022 period. This timeframe represents the contemporary era of direct democracy campaign finance, beginning when enhanced disclosure requirements and digital reporting systems made systematic cross-state data collection feasible. The period captures direct democracy financing during an era of heightened partisan polarization and expanded digital fundraising infrastructure. While this 17-year window cannot reveal long-term historical transformations in how direct democracy operates, it documents the structure of contemporary campaign finance during a politically meaningful period.

The data reveal clear cyclical patterns tied to election timing rather than secular trends. Presidential election years show the highest totals, each exceeding $1 billion, with voter turnout and media attention creating more favorable conditions for ballot measure

campaigns. The 2008 peak at approximately $1.6 billion reflects California's Proposition 8 (same-sex marriage) campaign, which alone attracted over $80 million. The 2018 spike at roughly $1.4 billion includes multiple high-spending healthcare expansion and marijuana legalization campaigns coinciding with elevated midterm engagement. Midterm election years show more moderate totals, typically ranging from $500 million to $700 million. Odd-numbered years show minimal activity, with most recording less than $100 million, as only Colorado, Maine, Mississippi, Ohio, and Washington schedule ballot measures outside even-year general elections.

These patterns establish the institutional rhythms structuring campaign finance flows. Direct democracy campaigns concentrate resources when voters are already mobilized for candidate elections, when media coverage amplifies ballot measure contests, and when donors are already engaged politically. This cycling suggests that direct democracy financing operates within—rather than independent from—the broader electoral calendar, with implications for how campaigns time qualification efforts, fundraising appeals, and strategic communications. Understanding these contemporary patterns provides essential context for interpreting the cross-state giving behaviors examined in subsequent chapters.

Repeat Donors

Table 3.3: Repeat Donor Patterns

Metric	Value
Total Unique Donors	653,807
Repeat Donors (2+ contributions)	250,479
Percent Repeat Donors	38.3%
Average Contributions per Repeat Donor	4.3
Average States per Repeat Donor	1.21
Median Total Given by Repeat Donors	$225

Table 3.3 presents statistics on repeat donors, contributors who made multiple dona-

tions during the 2006-2022 period. Approximately 38% of unique donors made more than one contribution. These repeat donors made an average of 4.3 contributions each. Critically, they contributed to campaigns in an average of 1.21 states, indicating that a substantial portion of repeat donors engage across state lines, establishing interstate participation as a common rather than exceptional pattern. The median total amount given by repeat donors was $225. These figures establish baseline patterns in repeat giving behavior that subsequent chapters investigate more thoroughly, particularly regarding differences between in-state and out-of-state repeat donors and variation across policy domains.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the construction of a dataset containing over one million contribution records to direct democracy campaigns across 26 U.S. states from 2006 through 2022. The data collection involved obtaining records from diverse state reporting systems, followed by extensive standardization to create a consistent database from disparate formats. The resulting dataset captures approximately $10 billion in contributions, with detailed information on contributor locations, amounts, timing, and policy issues at stake.

The aggregate patterns establish the basic structure of direct democracy campaign finance: small donations dominate by count while large contributions dominate by dollars, non-individual donors provide most funding despite individuals making most contributions, and certain policy domains attract disproportionate attention. Yet these aggregate statistics mask the central empirical puzzle this dissertation investigates. A critical feature of this dataset is the inclusion of contributor location information, which enables identification of the billions of dollars flowing across state lines to influence ballot measures where donors cannot vote.

The following chapters exploit this geographic detail to examine out-of-state participation in what are ostensibly local democratic processes. Chapter 4 maps the landscape of cross-state giving, documenting its scale, growth, and concentration on particular issues.

Chapter 5 combines contribution records with original survey data to understand why individuals choose to contribute to campaigns in states where they have no electoral voice. Chapter 6 explores how campaign leaders respond to and think about out-of-state funding through interviews with organizers across 19 states. Together, these analyses address fundamental questions about representation, influence, and democratic legitimacy when state policy battles attract national attention and resources.

Chapter 4: Who Gives? Individual Out-of-State Contributions to Direct Democracy Campaigns

Having established the construction and scope of the campaign finance dataset in the previous chapter, I now turn to analyzing a particularly puzzling subset of contributors: individual donors who give to direct democracy campaigns in states where they do not reside.

Understanding who contributes to direct democracy campaigns from outside state borders, and why they do so, is important for several reasons. First, while direct democracy is designed to reflect local preferences, the growing influence of out-of-state money suggests these processes have become venues for broader policy battles. Second, the relationship between donor and recipient differs markedly from traditional campaign contributions. Out-of-state donors cannot hold representatives accountable through future elections or rely on ongoing relationships for policy influence, yet they contribute substantial sums through small-dollar donations focused on particular types of issues. Third, examining these donors' behavior provides an opportunity to better understand the motivations of an understudied yet increasingly important set of political actors in American democracy, whose giving patterns may reveal new insights about political participation across state lines. This chapter therefore addresses two central questions: 1) what characterizes these out-of-state direct democracy contributions? and 2) what could explain why individual donors contribute to direct democracy campaigns in states where they do not live and cannot vote on the policy outcome?

Despite growing recognition that state policy choices can have cross-border implications, research examining the patterns and dynamics of out-of-state contributions in direct democracy campaigns remains limited. While recent research investigates the donor behavior of both in-state and out-of-state contributors in candidate elections (Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006; Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008; Keena 2024), there is a notable absence of similar studies focusing on the nature and extent of out-of-state donations in the context of direct democracy. This gap is particularly significant given how direct democracy fundamentally differs from candidate elections, which dominate the existing literature on donor motivations. These patterns cannot be explained through existing theories focused on access, influence, or material benefits. Understanding what motivates these donors and how their involvement shapes state policy outcomes is crucial for evaluating the health of state-level democracy in an era of increasing nationalization.

While non-individual donors, such as unions or corporations, make up a substantial majority of out-of-state contributions, their motivations are theoretically material in nature due to the potential direct impact of these campaigns' outcomes on their operations or specific goals (Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Barber 2016; Barber, Canes-Wrone, and Thrower 2017). They are therefore more likely to share motivations with in-state donors, who see the policy's outcome as affecting them directly. In contrast, individual out-of-state donors' motivations for contributing to these campaigns are less clear and thus are the focus of this chapter.

The analysis presented here reveals three notable findings. First, out-of-state contributions to direct democracy campaigns have increased steadily over time, with notable spikes in recent election cycles. Second, a majority of these contributions are relatively small, amounting to $100 or less, and are primarily directed towards measures concerning social and moral issues. Third, based on zip code-level income data, the majority of these individual contributions come from areas with lower to middle-income levels, with a significant portion originating from states that lack direct democracy mechanisms of their own.

Drawing on these findings and previous scholarship, I develop a theory that individual out-of-state donors to direct democracy campaigns are primarily driven through a combination of ideological and consumption-oriented motivations. The ideological motivation is supported through the disproportionate focus on high-profile social or moral issues, while the consumption-oriented aspect is evident in the small donation amounts and the apparent lack of expectation for direct policy or material benefits. These donors likely derive utility from the act of participating in the political process and expressing their beliefs, even if the outcomes of the ballot measures do not directly affect their lives or communities. In this regard, their contributions can be viewed as a form of political consumption or expressive participation, where the act of donating itself provides intrinsic value to the donor, irrespective of the tangible impact of their contribution on the campaign outcome.

These findings are particularly salient given recent efforts through states to address contentious policy issues through direct democracy that have been gridlocked at the federal level. Voters in recent years have successfully placed issues such as abortion, recreational drug use, and environmental protections on the ballot, reshaping the policy landscape across the US.[2] The analysis also highlights concerns about out-of-state funding potentially compromising the integrity and independence of state-level democratic processes, especially as direct democracy becomes an increasingly important alternative to traditional representative politics for resolving divisive issues (Bowler, Donovan and Tolbert 1998; Bowler and Donovan 2000).

Out-of-State Donors

In recent years, scholars have become increasingly interested in donors who choose to give beyond their own state or district. This scholarship predominantly investigates candidate elections, examining the characteristics of these donors, who and what they contribute

[2]For example, see: Kentucky Constitutional Amendment 2, No Right to Abortion in Constitution Amendment (2022); Pennsylvania No State Constitutional Right to Abortion Amendment (2023); Arizona's Proposition 127 Arizona Renewable Energy Standards (2018); and California's Proposition 64: The Adult Use of Marijuana Act (2016).

to, why they contribute, and the impact of these contributions (Gimpel et al. 2006; Gimpel et al. 2008; Keena 2024). As a result, we've learned that these donors may be more ideological or politically sophisticated than those who contribute in-state, or made in the attempt to gain access or "surrogate representation" (Baker 2020; Keena 2024). These contributions reflect a growing nationalization of campaign finance, in which the political strategies and messaging across states have become increasingly blurred as a result of factors such as polarization and the strategy of political parties (Jacobs and Imboywa 2024; Hopkins 2018; Hertel-Fernandez 2019). Similar to the ways that this nationalization challenges the democratic promises of offices like the US House or Senate, it may also be prevalent in other areas of US politics, such as direct democracy. Studies that have approached these questions primarily consist of case studies and legal analyses, which, although valuable, do not provide a systematic understanding of the role and characteristics of out-of-state contributions across a wide range of direct democracy campaigns and states (Shin 2009; Garry, Nelsen, and Spurlin 2010).

Why investigate out-of-state donor behavior in direct democracy campaigns specifically? Direct democracy campaigns differ from candidate elections in several key ways, revealing a significant gap in our understanding of out-of-state contributors. First, direct democracy campaigns focus on specific policy issues rather than broader candidate platforms or party affiliations. In most cases, this is mandated through law, with state constitutions requiring initiatives be single-subject in order to qualify for the ballot (Clark 1998). This rule was implemented primarily to limit confusion for those voting on the measure. Further, the effects of direct democracy policies primarily limit themselves to the state where the election occurs, unlike federal candidates whose actions may impact out-of-state donors via nationwide policies. Finally, donors cannot anticipate ongoing relationships or future policy quid pro quo in the same ways that those involved in candidate elections may, as their involvement typically ends at the ballot box (Austen-Smith 1995).

Analytical Approach

The analysis in this chapter draws on the dataset described in Chapter 3, which encompasses contribution records from 667 unique ballot measures across 26 states from 2006-2022. As detailed in the previous chapter, this dataset was compiled through partnerships with Secretary of State offices, campaign finance agencies, and transparency organizations, resulting in detailed records of over one million individual contributions. The database includes donor names, addresses, contribution amounts, ballot measure identifiers, policy areas, donor type classifications, and position on measures.

For this chapter's analysis of individual out-of-state donors, I supplement the core contribution data with ZIP code-level income estimates from the American Community Survey to provide context about the economic landscape from which these contributions emerge. As noted in Chapter 3, this approach carries limitations, as ZIP code median income serves only as a proxy for individual donor wealth and cannot capture individual-level socioeconomic characteristics. Additionally, each contribution is categorized using the 20-category policy classification schema developed in collaboration with FollowTheMoney, which achieved strong inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff's Alpha of 0.91) when validated through independent coding.

The key analytical distinction in this chapter is between in-state and out-of-state contributions. I classify contributions as out-of-state when the contributor's address state differs from the ballot measure state. This classification relies on the state field in contributor addresses, which I standardized during data cleaning. Contributors listing addresses in multiple states are classified based on their stated address for each contribution.

Out-of-State Donors at a Glance

Table 4.1: Summary Statistics of Direct Democracy Contributions

Metric	Value

Number of Direct Democracy Measures	667
Number of States	26
Total Contributions (Billions USD)	$10.18
Out-of-State Contributions (Billions USD)	$3.42
Out-of-State Individual Contributions (Millions USD)	$341.58
Median Donation Amount (USD)	$50.00
Mean Donation Amount (USD)	$6907.64
Median Out-of-State Donation (USD)	$35.00
Mean Out-of-State Donation (USD)	$8905.21
Median Out-of-State Individual Donation (USD)	$25.00
Mean Out-of-State Individual Donation (USD)	$1056.85

Table 4.1 presents summary statistics for the dataset, focusing on out-of-state contributions. The 667 ballot measures in the dataset attracted approximately $10 billion in total contributions, with out-of-state sources accounting for $3.4 billion (roughly one-third of total funding). Individual out-of-state donors contributed $342 million, representing approximately 10% of total out-of-state funding, while organizational donors (corporations, unions, PACs) contributed the remaining 90%. The contribution amounts exhibit a highly skewed distribution across all donor types. The median donation of $50 contrasts sharply with a mean of approximately $6,900, and this asymmetry is even more pronounced for out-of-state contributions (median of $35, mean of approximately $8,900). Among individual out-of-state donors specifically, the median contribution of $25 and mean of approximately $1,100 reveal an even more concentrated pattern of small-dollar giving. The considerable disparity between median and mean values across all categories reflects the presence of a small number of exceptionally large donors alongside a majority of smaller contributors, consistent with typical patterns observed in political financing literature.

Trends and Donor Characteristics

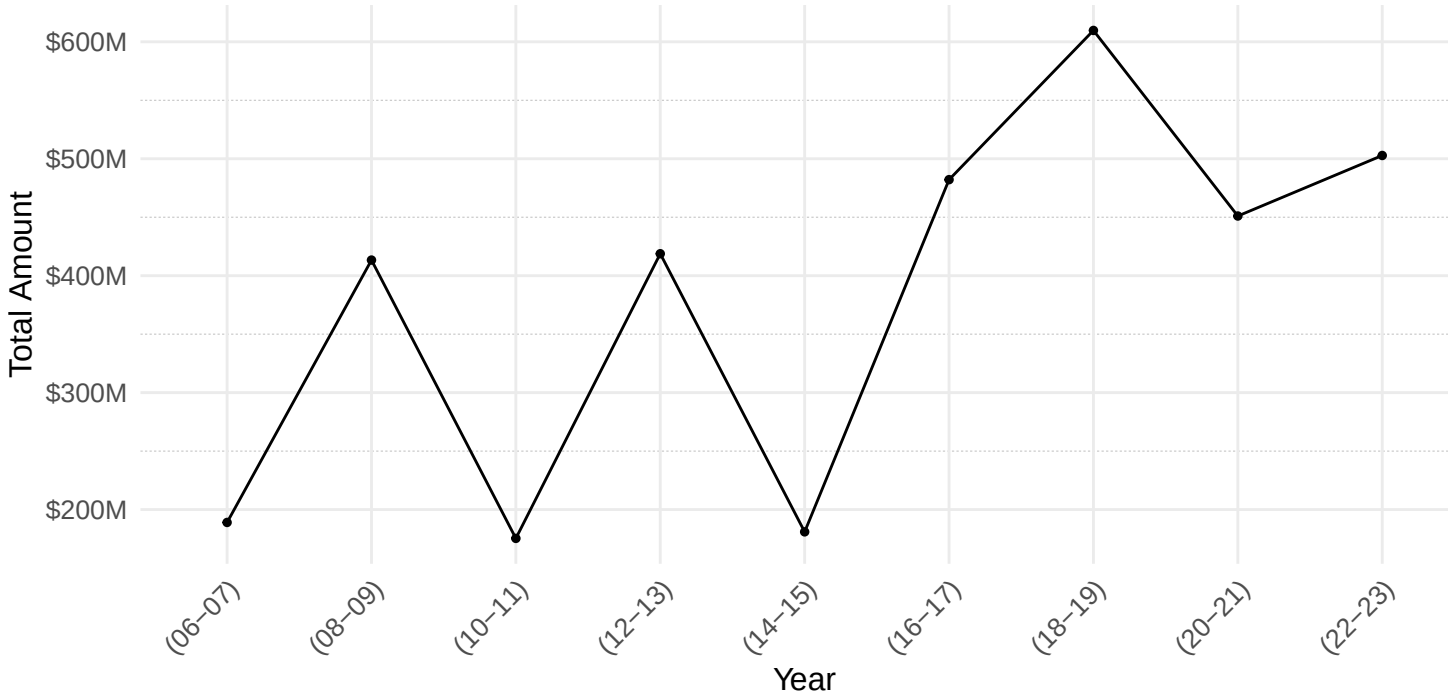


Figure 4.1: Overall Trends of Out-of-State Contributions

This chapter's analysis of out-of-state contributions to direct democracy campaigns from 2006 to 2022 reveal several key trends and characteristics. Figure 4.1 illustrates the overall growth in out-of-state contributions, with total amounts more than doubling from approximately $200 million in 2006-2007 to almost $500 million in 2022-2023. This substantial increase suggests a growing involvement of out-of-state actors in state-level policy debates through direct democracy mechanisms.

There is a notable increase in contributions during presidential election years. As highlighted by works such as Sarah Anzia's, *Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*, this can mostly be attributed to factors related to election timing. First, presidential elections generate heightened political engagement nationwide, creating an environment where donors are more attentive to all forms of political participation. Second, these cycles feature higher voter turnout, making them strategically valuable for advancing

policy objectives through direct democracy. Third, national advocacy organizations often mobilize their donor networks more aggressively during these periods (Anzia 2013). Finally, and from a more procedural perspective, many states have regulations requiring ballot measures to appear during general elections. Washington, for instance, requires constitutional amendments at general elections, while states like Florida and Michigan permit special elections only through supermajority votes (Boldt 2023). In sum, even in states with flexibility, the high-profile nature and increased turnout of presidential elections make them attractive for placing important measures before voters.

The substantial increase in out-of-state contributions to direct democracy campaigns from 2006 to 2022 could also be an indication of alignment with broader trends of nationalization in American politics (Hopkins 2018). This raises an empirical question worth pursuing in future research: to what extent do the same individuals who contribute to out-of-state direct democracy campaigns also donate to congressional candidates in other states? The nationalization literature suggests that polarized-movement-party activism might trigger similar motivations across both venue types. If substantial overlap exists between out-of-state direct democracy donors and out-of-state congressional donors, this would strengthen the interpretation that a common set of nationalizing forces drives cross-state political participation. Conversely, if direct democracy attracts a distinct donor base, this would suggest something unique about policy-specific giving that cannot be reduced to general partisan nationalization. The dataset compiled for this project could be linked with Federal Election Commission records to explore these patterns, though such analysis lies beyond this chapter's scope.

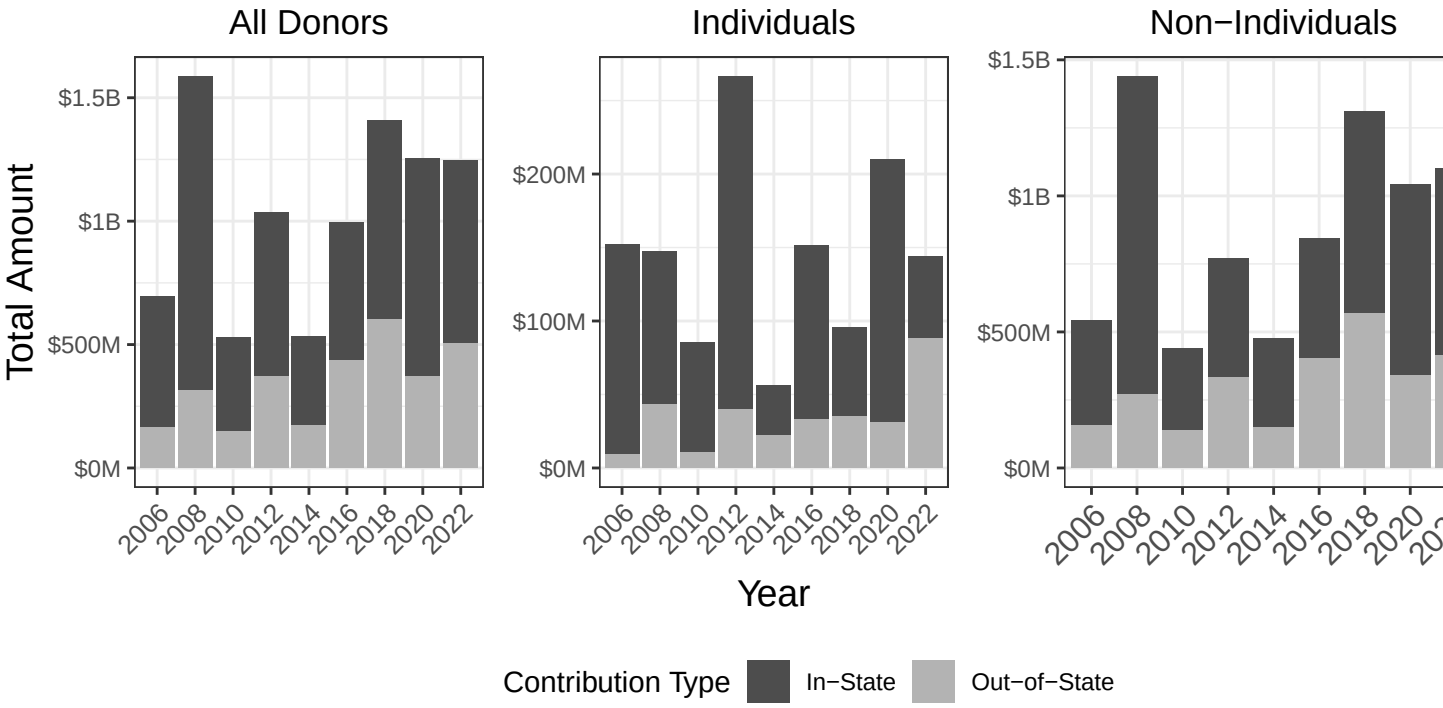


Figure 4.2: Contributions by Donor Type

To better understand this trend, I then compare in-state and out-of-state giving across three categories: all donors, individuals, and non-individuals. In-state contributions consistently exceed out-of-state amounts across all categories. However, both individual and non-individual out-of-state donors make up substantial proportions of total contributions. The gap between in-state and out-of-state giving narrows significantly for non-individual donors over time, with out-of-state non-individual contributions approaching parity with their in-state counterparts by 2022. Individual out-of-state contributions, while lower than in-state individual giving, maintain a consistent and significant presence throughout the period.

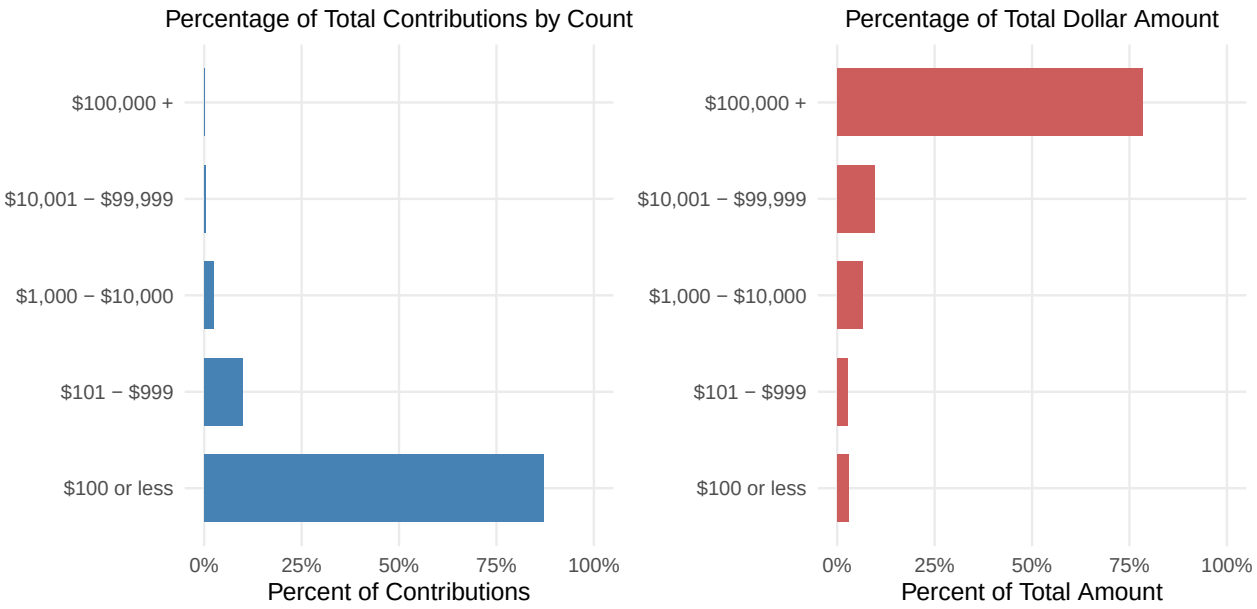


Figure 4.3: Distribution of Out-of-State Individual Contributions by Size

I then examine contribution activity, focusing on individual out-of-state donors. Figure 4.3 illustrates the distribution of contribution sizes from out-of-state donors, revealing a landscape dominated by small donations. Over 86% of contributions are $100 or less, while about 10% fall between $101 and $999. Larger donations are relatively rare, with contributions ranging from $1,000 to $10,000 and those exceeding $10,000 each representing less than 4% of total contributions.

This distribution highlights the prevalence of small contributions among out-of-state donors, contributing to a growing body of scholarship examining small donor behavior in campaign finance. While federal campaigns only require itemized disclosure for contributions over $200, many state and local jurisdictions, including those governing ballot measure campaigns, have lower reporting thresholds. This allows us to observe a more comprehensive picture of small donor activity. Scholars have paid increased attention to small donors in recent years (Ansolabehere et al. 2003; Barber 2016; Bouton et al. 2024; Keena 2019; Culberson, McDonald, and Robbins 2019), examining the characteristics and motives of these donors utilizing contribution platforms like ActBlue. State-level campaign finance data, including that from ballot measures, offers a unique window into small donor behavior that is

often obscured in federal campaign finance analyses.

When we consider the percentage of total amount contributed rather than just the number of contributions, the contribution activity of out-of-state individual donors looks quite different. While individual out-of-state donations of $100 or less make up over 86% of contributions, they account for only 3% of the total out-of-state amount donated. Conversely, contributions exceeding $10,000, while comprising less than 1% of the total number of donations, represent about 86% of the total amount. The prevalence of small-dollar contributions suggests a broad base of participation, potentially indicative of grassroots mobilization or widespread ideological resonance with specific ballot measures. However, the outsized financial influence of a minute fraction of high-dollar contributors raises questions about the nature of democratic representation and the potential for plutocratic tendencies in a system theoretically designed to reflect the will of the people.

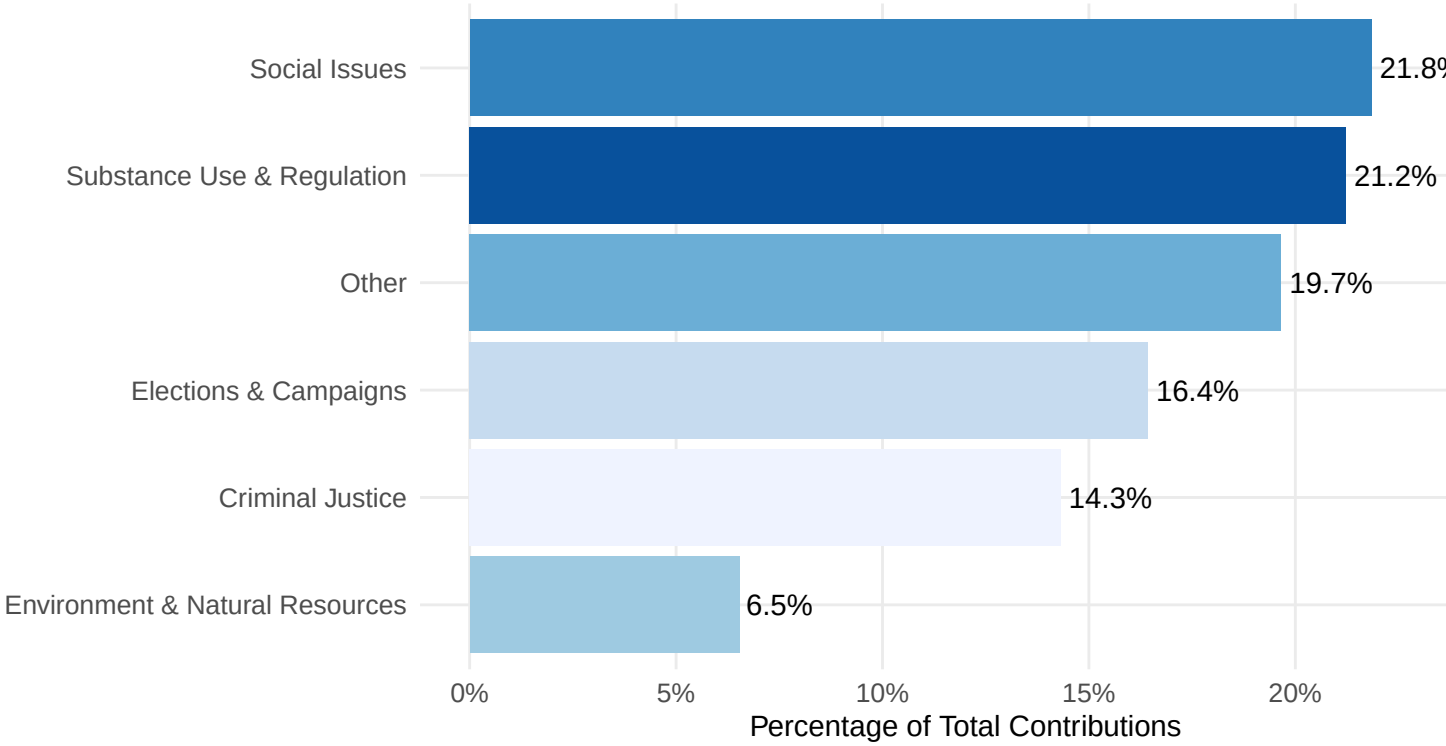


Figure 4.4: Individual Out-of-State Contributions by Policy Type

What are these donors contributing to? Unlike scholarship examining out-of-state

donor contributions to candidates for state or federal office, contributions to state-level direct democracy campaigns are policy and outcome-specific. The 20-category policy classification schema developed in Chapter 3 allows us to identify which types of measures attract out-of-state individual donor attention.

Figure 4.4 illustrates the distribution of individual out-of-state contributions across policy types. Social issues—encompassing measures related to abortion, marriage, LGBT+ rights, affirmative action, assisted suicide, religious freedom, and other morally-charged topics attract the most attention from these donors, accounting for about 21% of all contributions. Notably, social issues represent only 7% of total measures on the ballot. Similarly, substance use and regulation policies, primarily marijuana legalization and decriminalization measures, make up just 7% of ballot measures but attract 21% of total out-of-state individual contributions, making them the second most funded category. This significant funding imbalance suggests these two categories are particularly motivating for donors willing to contribute across state lines, despite their relatively infrequent appearance on ballots.

The "Other" category comprises policy areas that each amass less than 5% of total out-of-state individual contributions, including Business & Labor, Gambling, Bonds & Infrastructure, Property Rights, Agriculture & Food, Housing, Economic Development, and Veterans & Military affairs. Within this grouping, gambling measures lead at 4.2% of contributions, followed by tax and revenue issues at 3.1%, business and labor at 2.3%, bonds and infrastructure at 1.9%, property rights at 1.1%, housing at 0.6%, economic development at 0.5%, and veterans and military affairs at 0.3%.

This pattern of giving across policy domains potentially reflects a unique cohort of "Strategic Investors" (Rhodes et al. 2018). They merit this label not just because they "donate to candidates outside their state" but because the nature of direct democracy allows them to funnel their contributions to particular issues instead of a range of interest groups, PACs, and candidates (Jacobs and Imboywa 2024, 241; Rhodes et al. 2016). Further, this pattern differs markedly from both the aggregate contribution patterns and in-state individ-

ual donor behavior documented in Chapter 3. Chapter 3's analysis of total contributions across all donor types showed gambling-related measures attracting the highest funding, followed by health care and tax and revenue issues. However, as Chapter 3's Appendix Figure 4B.1 demonstrated, when restricting analysis to in-state individual donors only, the distribution shifts substantially: gambling falls near the bottom of the top funded categories while tax and revenue issues and social questions rise to prominence. Out-of-state individual donors present yet another distinct pattern, with social issues and substance use measures dominating their contribution activity while tax and revenue measures attract relatively limited attention despite their prominence among in-state individual donors.

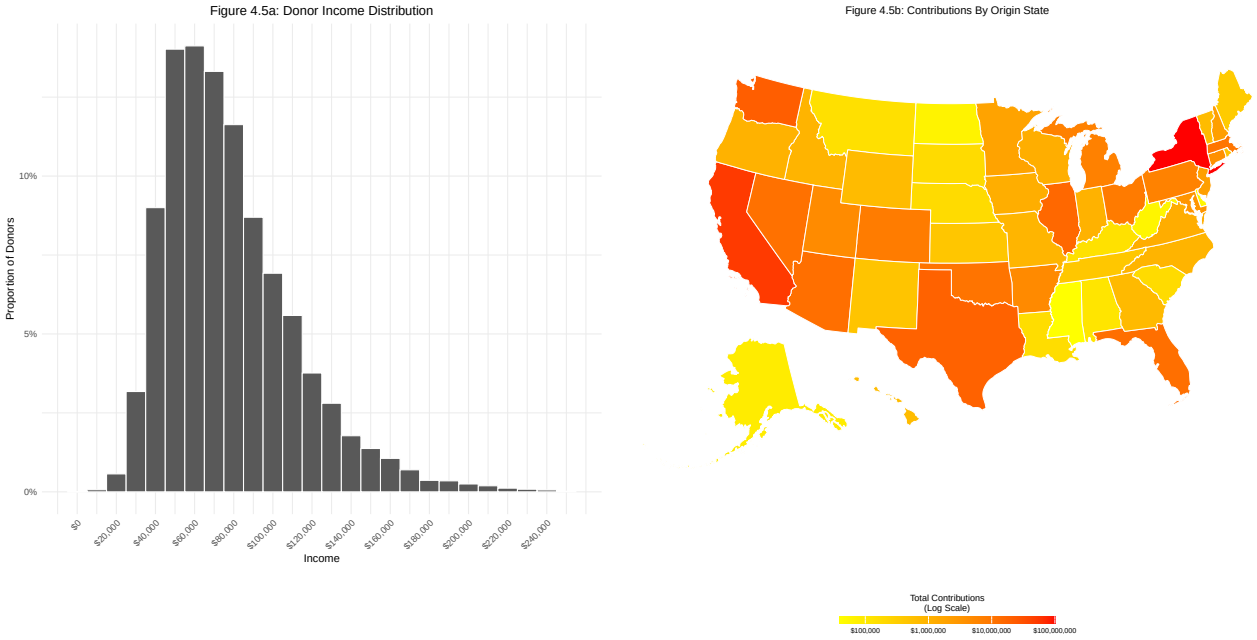


Figure 4.5: Contribution Characteristics: Origin and Income

Finally, this chapter examines two additional characteristics of out-of-state direct democracy contributions. Figure 4.5 offers a comprehensive visual representation of the geographic and income distribution of out-of-state individual contributions to direct democracy campaigns from 2006 to 2022. Panel (a) depicts the income distribution of out-of-state individual contributions, based on data from the American Community Survey (ACS) zipcode-level income estimates matched to donor zip codes provided in campaign finance records.

The resulting distribution reveals a right-skewed pattern, with most contributions coming from zip codes with low-to-average median incomes. This approach, while it does not provide exact individual-level income data for each contributor, offers a proxy for understanding the broader economic landscape from which out-of-state direct democracy contributions emerge.

This income distribution may challenge conventional assumptions about the socioeconomic profile of political donors. While previous research has often emphasized the outsized influence of wealthy elites in campaign finance (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), this data highlights a different subset of contributors. The right-skewed distribution indicates that a substantial portion of out-of-state donors to direct democracy campaigns come from areas with modest to moderate income levels. This finding is particularly noteworthy, given the long-established positive relationship between income and political giving (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and hints at the possibility of a more economically diverse donor base in direct democracy initiatives, potentially challenging our understanding of who shapes policy outcomes through financial contributions.

Panel (b) illustrates the total contributions by origin state, where out-of-state contributions originate from. A few states on this map stand out with comparatively high concentrations of out-of-state contributions, such as New York and Texas. Interestingly, these states lack similar direct democracy processes of their own. New York, despite attempts to establish statewide initiative and referendum processes, has consistently failed to implement such mechanisms due to entrenched political interests and legislative resistance. Despite these restrictions, individuals in the state have contributed over $106 million to other state campaigns between 2006-2022. This is more than any other state's aggregate out-of-state amount. Similarly, Texas restricts direct democracy to legislatively referred amendments at the state level, offering no provisions for citizen-initiated statutes or constitutional amendments. Contributions from individuals to other state direct democracy races, however, total over $28 million. This is the third-highest concentration of out-of-state contributions. The absence of robust direct democracy mechanisms in these populous states may explain their

residents' propensity to engage in out-of-state ballot measure campaigns. This pattern indicates that residents in states without direct democracy mechanisms may seek alternative avenues for political expression through out-of-state contributions.

Theory of Why Donors Contribute

This section develops a potential theory to explain the puzzle of why individual donors contribute to direct democracy campaigns in states where they do not reside, despite the absence of direct policy impact on their lives or communities. Drawing on the scholarship examining political participation and campaign finance and the findings from previous sections, I argue that donors are motivated by a complex interplay of ideological and consumption-based motivations (Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Ideological Motivations

Over 40% of all individual out-of-state donations are funneled to high-profile social and moral issue campaigns. Specifically, out-of-state donors contribute most to issues relating to issues regarding abortion, LGBT+ rights, affirmative action, and substance use and regulation. The direct democracy measure amassing the most out-of-state individual contributions was Proposition 8 in California in 2008, which aimed to define marriage as between one man and one woman, reversing a state court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage. The measure received $46.5 million from almost 18,000 donors outside of the state. Similarly, the ballot measure amassing the third-highest concentration of out-of-state individual contributions was Michigan's Proposal 3 in 2022, which instituted a constitutional amendment declaring that "[every] individual has a fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which entails the right to make and effectuate decisions about all matters relating to pregnancy, including, but not limited to, prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, contraception, sterilization, abortion care, miscarriage management, and infertility care" (Reproductive Health Act, 2008).

Proposal 3 attracted $14 million from over 16,000 donors registered outside of Michigan. This behavior aligns with the notion that individuals engage in political activities as an expression of their values and beliefs (Baker 2020; Panagopoulos and Bergan 2006; Bonica et al. 2016; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). By contributing to campaigns that resonate with their ideological positions, even across state lines, donors can affirm their identities and signal solidarity with like-minded causes. This form of expressive participation may be particularly appealing to individuals residing in states without direct democracy mechanisms, as it provides an alternative avenue for ideological self-expression.

To assess whether ideological consistency characterizes donor behavior, I analyze the consistency of donor behavior across multiple campaigns and states. The methodology focuses on three key metrics: subject matter consistency (whether donors give to similar issue types), position consistency (whether donors maintain consistent support or opposition towards a measure), and the correlation between consistency and contribution amounts (Table 4.2). For statistical validation, I employ t-tests to determine if consistency rates exceed random chance (0.5) and correlation analysis to examine relationships between the donor characteristics (Table 4.3).

Table 4.2: Multi-State Donor Characteristics

Metric	**Value**
Total Multi-State Donors	54,631
Average States per Donor	1.8
Subject Consistency Score	92.4%
Position Consistency Score	95.8%
% Primarily Ideological Donors	40.9%

The results presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 reveal patterns consistent with ideologically-motivated giving among out-of-state donors to direct democracy campaigns. Table 4.2 shows donors contribute across an average of 1.8 states while maintaining remarkably high subject

and position consistency in their giving patterns. The finding that about 40% of donors concentrate their giving on ideologically-charged issues further supports this interpretation, though this could also reflect the heightened media coverage of these issues or relative prevalence of such measures on state ballots- though policy type analysis in Figure 4.4 suggests this might not be the case. Statistical testing demonstrated in Table 4.3 strongly rejects the null hypothesis that these patterns emerge from random giving ($p < .0001$), suggesting donors make deliberate choices about which campaigns to support.

Table 4.3: Statistical Test Results

Test	**Statistic**	**p.value**
Subject Consistency	t = 611.16	< 0.001
Position Consistency	t = 863.29	< 0.001
Amount-Consistency Correlation	r = -0.016	< 0.001

While the consistency scores suggest donors tend to support similar positions across different ballot measures, this pattern could emerge from either a genuine ideological commitment or other factors that produce systematic rather than random giving. Together, these results indicate that out-of-state donors engage in purposeful rather than indiscriminate giving, with patterns that align with ideologically-motivated behavior, even if we cannot definitively rule out all alternative explanations for the observed consistency in donor behavior.

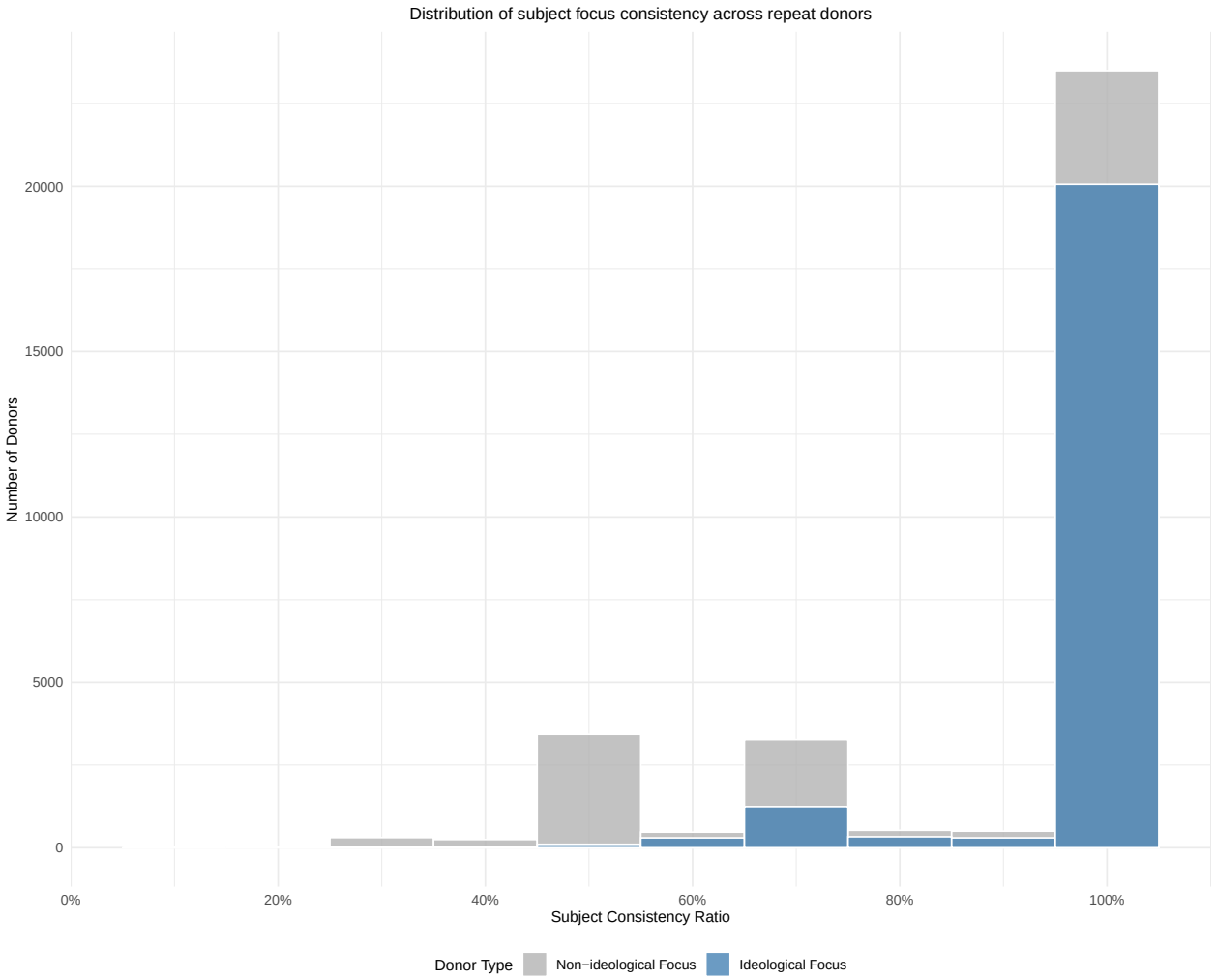


Figure 4.6: Subject Matter Consistency Among Multi-State Donors

Figure 4.6 reinforces these findings by showing a strong right skew in subject consistency ratios - most donors cluster at high consistency levels (0.8-1.0), with relatively few exhibiting varied giving patterns. The slight negative correlation between amount and consistency (r = -0.016) suggests that even as donors give larger amounts, they maintain their ideological focus. These patterns align with theoretical expectations that out-of-state donors are sophisticated political actors who carefully select campaigns matching their ideological preferences, rather than giving based on geographic proximity or other factors.

The results also provide evidence into donor sophistication - rather than treating all policy reforms similarly, donors appear to discriminate based on specific issue positions and

maintain those positions across jurisdictions. This level of consistency would be unlikely if donors were motivated primarily by non-ideological factors. The fact that donors exhibit such strong patterns despite the single-subject nature of initiatives suggests they are actively seeking opportunities to engage in ideological expression through direct democracy campaigns.

Evidence from these tests contributes to the existing literature debating the sophistication and ideological nature of donors. In the context of direct democracy, individual donors may exhibit distinct patterns of sophistication in their contribution behavior compared to donors in candidate elections. While Hill and Huber (2017) suggest that individual donors may not distinguish among same-party candidates based on ideology, other scholars such as Barber, Canes-Wrone, and Thrower (2017) and Baker (2016), who focus on out-of-state donors, find that donors are indeed ideologically motivated. However, these existing findings may not fully capture the motivations of direct democracy donors. Direct democracy campaigns are inherently policy-specific, focusing on a particular issue or proposal rather than a candidate's broader platform or party affiliation. This policy-specific nature of direct democracy may encourage donors to engage in more sophisticated decision-making, carefully considering the ideological alignment and potential outcomes of the measures they choose to support financially, without the need to distinguish between the various ideological leanings of one candidate over another. Consequently, the motivations and contribution patterns of individual donors in direct democracy campaigns may diverge from those observed in candidate elections, showcasing a higher level of political sophistication and ideological discernment. The current study's findings suggest that out-of-state donors, whether contributing to candidates or ballot measures, are ideologically sophisticated actors who base their giving decisions on specific policy positions and ideological alignment.

Consumption-Oriented Motivations

Simultaneously, the prevalence of small donations among individual out-of-state donors points to a consumption-based motivation. The consumption model of political giving, as articulated by Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, and Snyder (2003), posits that donors derive utility from the act of participation itself, rather than expecting a tangible policy return on their investment. This finding appears to hold up for out-of-state donors in representative politics as well. Keena (2024) finds that out-of-state donors to Senate campaigns behave like "consumers" when giving to senators who are not actively seeking reelection. During off-cycle periods, senators strategically appeal to out-of-state donors by sponsoring legislation, and these donors respond by rewarding senators for their position-taking.

The descriptive patterns observed in the context of direct democracy campaigns align with both Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, and Snyder's (2003) consumption model and Keena's (2024) findings on out-of-state donors in Senate campaigns. The vast majority, over 86%, of individual out-of-state donors to direct democracy campaigns contribute $100 or less, amounts unlikely to yield substantial policy influence consistent with alternative explanations, such as the investment model of giving. By making these small donations to out-of-state campaigns, individuals can experience the intrinsic rewards of engaging in the political process, such as a sense of agency, fulfillment, and connection to a larger cause.

To examine whether the consumption model characterizes political giving among out-of-state individual donors in direct democracy campaigns, I focus on the behavior of small donors who contributed $100 or less. The consumption theory assumes that donors derive intrinsic value from the act of participation itself, rather than expecting direct policy influence or material benefits. If this theory holds, I expect small donors to make multiple contributions across different campaigns and states, even if the total amount given remains relatively low. I calculate summary statistics on the number of donations, states, and total amounts per donor, and conduct statistical tests to assess if the observed patterns are consistent with this hypothesis. Specifically, I use a one-sided t-test to determine if the average

number of donations per donor is significantly greater than one. This test aims to evaluate whether small donors exhibit behavior consistent with the consumption theory, providing evidence for the intrinsic motivations behind their political giving.

Results from the analysis of small donor behavior provide some preliminary support for the consumption theory of political giving among out-of-state individual donors in direct democracy campaigns. Table 4.4 presents summary statistics for small donors who contributed $100 or less, revealing a total of 129,200 small donors who made an average of 2.18 donations each, supporting campaigns across an average of 1.27 states per donor. The median total amount contributed per small donor was $50.

Table 4.4: Summary Statistics for Small Donors

Metric	Value
Total Small Donors	129,234
Average Donations per Donor	2.18
Average States per Donor	1.27
Median Total Amount	$50

Based on the results presented in Table 4.5, the statistical test examining whether donors make significantly more than one contribution on average yielded a highly significant result. The data shows that small donors made an average of 2.18 donations each, which is substantially and statistically significantly greater than the theoretical value of 1. The effect size (Cohen's d = 0.34) indicates a small to medium practical significance. However, the operationalization of consumption-oriented giving employed here, examining whether donors make significantly more than one contribution on average, provides only partial evidence for the consumption model and warrants careful interpretation. Finding that small donors average 2.18 contributions demonstrates repeated participation, which aligns with consumption theory's expectation that donors derive utility from ongoing engagement rather than

seeking to maximize impact through single large contributions. However, this pattern could emerge from alternative mechanisms unrelated to consumption motivations. Donors might give repeatedly because campaigns contact them multiple times, because they respond to urgent solicitations across different campaigns, or because they gradually increase their giving as they become more engaged with political issues—none of which necessarily indicates they derive consumption utility from the act itself. The statistical significance obtained here ($p < .0001$) reflects the large sample size rather than necessarily indicating a strong consumption effect. The modest effect size suggests consumption motivations explain some but not all of the variance in giving patterns. This analysis should thus be understood as providing suggestive evidence consistent with consumption theory rather than definitive proof— it demonstrates that small donors behave in ways we would expect if consumption motivations operate, while acknowledging that behavioral patterns alone cannot rule out alternative explanations for repeated small-dollar giving.

Table 4.5: Statistical Test of Consumption Theory

	t value	df	p value	Mean	Effect size
t	122.58	129233	<0.001	2.18	0.34

This analysis provides preliminary evidence consistent with the consumption model of political giving among out-of-state direct democracy donors, though it is methodologically limited in a few important ways. The operationalization employed here relies primarily on donation frequency patterns rather than capturing the full conceptual richness of consumption-oriented motivations. Ideally, future research should triangulate multiple measurement approaches, including donor surveys, natural experiments, and controls for confounding factors such as fundraising appeals or social media influence. Despite these limitations, this analysis makes a valuable contribution by demonstrating a statistically significant pattern of repeated small-dollar giving across state lines—behavior that aligns more

closely with expressive participation than with instrumental investment. The modest but meaningful effect size suggests that consumption motivations, while not the sole driver, play a substantive role in explaining the otherwise puzzling phenomenon of small out-of-state direct democracy contributions that offer no material return.

It is important to acknowledge the inferential limitations inherent in behavioral analysis of contribution patterns. While the evidence presented—small dollar amounts, high consistency across campaigns, concentration on social issues—is consistent with ideological and consumption-oriented motivations, contribution data alone cannot definitively establish donors' subjective motivations or self-understanding. The same behavioral patterns could theoretically emerge from alternative mechanisms: donors might give repeatedly because they receive persistent solicitations rather than deriving consumption utility; they might concentrate on social issues because these campaigns conduct more effective outreach rather than because such issues hold special ideological significance; their small contributions might reflect financial constraints rather than lack of instrumental expectations. The theory developed here represents the most parsimonious explanation for the observed patterns given what we know from existing literature on donor behavior, but it remains fundamentally an inference from revealed preferences rather than direct evidence about donor decision-making. Chapter 5's survey evidence addresses this limitation by asking donors directly about their motivations, providing a critical check on the interpretations offered here while also revealing whether donors' self-understanding aligns with the patterns their behavior suggests.

Overall, the theory developed in this section posits that individual out-of-state donors to direct democracy campaigns are motivated by a combination of ideological expression and political consumption. Contributing to campaigns that align with their values, even in small amounts and across state lines, allows these donors to affirm their identities, signal their beliefs, and derive expressive benefits from participation.

Conclusion

Individual out-of-state donors have contributed billions of dollars to ballot measure campaigns in the last two decades, with most giving small amounts concentrated on social and moral issues. These donors demonstrate remarkable consistency in their giving patterns, maintaining focus on particular policy areas and positions across multiple states and campaigns. Drawing on these empirical patterns, this chapter proposed a dual motivation theory: donors appear driven both by ideological commitments and by consumption-oriented desires for political expression.

Yet behavioral patterns inferred from contribution records have inherent limitations. While the evidence presented here is consistent with ideological and consumption motivations, we cannot know from aggregate data alone how donors themselves understand their participation. Do they view their contributions as part of broader national movements? Do they expect any influence over policy outcomes? How do they decide which out-of-state campaigns merit their support?

The next chapter turns to original survey evidence that asks donors directly about their motivations and expectations. This approach moves beyond inference to examine how out-of-state donors describe their own decision-making, what they hope to accomplish through their contributions, and how they understand the relationship between their giving and democratic representation. These findings will help clarify whether the patterns observed here reflect conscious strategic choices or emerge from other dynamics shaping contemporary political participation across state lines.

Chapter 5: Why Give? A Survey of Out-of-State Donors

Why do individuals contribute money to political campaigns in states where they cannot vote? Chapter 4 examined this puzzle through contribution records spanning 2006-2022, revealing behavioral patterns consistent with ideological commitment and consumption-oriented giving. Donors demonstrated remarkable consistency in their support patterns, concentrating heavily on social and moral issues despite their scarcity on ballots, and overwhelmingly gave small amounts unlikely to decisively influence outcomes. These patterns suggested sophisticated actors pursuing expressive rather than instrumental goals. Yet understanding why sophisticated political actors make small contributions unlikely to affect outcomes requires moving beyond behavioral inference to examine how donors themselves describe their decision-making.

I approach this through an original survey of 910 out-of-state direct democracy donors. The analysis examines two fundamental questions about cross-state participation. First, what motivates donors to contribute across state lines? Do they seek to affect specific state outcomes, or do they participate primarily to express values and support causes they believe in? Second, how do donors conceptualize the impact of their contributions? Do they view themselves as directly shaping policies in particular states, or as influencing broader national political priorities and movements?

The survey distinguishes instrumental motivations—focused on affecting outcomes in competitive races or setting precedents for policy diffusion—from expressive motivations ori-

ented toward values expression independent of electoral results. It measures whether donors frame impact through state-specific lenses, viewing contributions as interventions in discrete policy decisions, or through national lenses, understanding participation as engagement with political movements that work through state institutions. These self-reported assessments reveal whether the behavioral patterns documented in Chapter 4 reflect conscious orientations toward national political engagement or simply instrumental calculations about cross-state influence.

The results partially support theories developed from behavioral analysis while complicating others in productive ways. Expressive motivations dominate as expected: supporting causes and ideological agreement far outpace instrumental considerations like affecting outcomes or race closeness. Personal connection to states ranks as the least important motivation, supporting that donors orient toward issues rather than geography. The consumption model receives strong support as donors acknowledge minimal individual impact while rating expressive motivations as highly important and overwhelmingly indicate they donate to express values rather than achieve specific outcomes.

However, the surrogate representation hypothesis finds limited support. While Chapter 4 documented substantial contributions from states lacking direct democracy mechanisms, survey respondents did not report particularly strong motivations related to future policy influence in their home states, and this motivation did not vary systematically between donors from states with and without direct democracy. This suggests that the geographic concentration of giving from non-direct democracy states reflects other dynamics, perhaps simply population size and wealth concentration,rather than a conscious strategy of seeking representation through other states' institutions.

Finally, impact perceptions align closely with expectations from the nationalization framework. Donors predominantly view contributions as influencing national political priorities and expressing personal values rather than directly shaping specific state policies. This national framing persists even among donors who believe they had some individual impact,

suggesting a fundamental reorientation away from state-specific policy outcomes toward broader political engagement. Spillover beliefs are widespread, though these beliefs appear to provide supplementary instrumental rationale rather than serving as primary motivations.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. First, I review existing literature on campaign contribution motivations, emphasizing how direct democracy differs from candidate elections in ways that complicate both instrumental and expressive giving theories. Second, I describe the survey design, sampling strategy, and respondent characteristics, noting important response biases that strengthen inference about sustained cross-state participation. Third, I present two research questions with associated hypotheses and analyze survey responses addressing motivations and impact perceptions. Fourth, I discuss how these findings illuminate tensions between localized institutions and nationalized political engagement, with implications for understanding federalism and democratic legitimacy in contemporary American politics.

What Motivates Cross-State Political Giving?

Scholarship on campaign contributions generally distinguishes between instrumental and expressive motivations. The instrumental view treats donations as investments seeking returns- policy influence, access to officials, or material benefits (Denzau and Munger 1986; Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003). Donors calculate whether expected benefits justify contribution costs, giving strategically to competitive races where resources might prove decisive. This framework dominates analyses of corporate and interest group contributions, which often explicitly seek policy returns or regulatory benefits. Yet instrumental models struggle to explain much individual giving, particularly small-dollar contributions unlikely to affect outcomes. Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder (2003) propose instead that most individual donors are "consumption-oriented," deriving utility from the act of participation itself rather than expecting instrumental returns. Like purchasing concert tickets or donating to charity, political contributions provide expressive and psychological benefits

independent of causal impact on outcomes. Subsequent research supports consumption-oriented giving among small donors (Barber 2016; Bouton et al. 2024).

Geographic patterns in campaign contributions reveal additional complexities. Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski (2006) show that proximity matters for out-of-district giving, with donors more likely to support nearby candidates. Yet they also find ideology and partisan competition override geography for many donors, particularly those giving to presidential and high-profile Senate races. Research on out-of-state giving emphasizes "surrogate representation" as a key motivation- donors contribute to out-of-state candidates whose positions better match their preferences than their geographic representatives (Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008; Baker 2020). This makes sense for federal candidates, whose actions affect all Americans regardless of district. Policy diffusion scholarship suggests surrogate representation might extend to state ballot measures. Shipan and Volden (2008) demonstrate that state policy innovations regularly spread across borders, creating anticipatory stakes for non-residents. Successful marijuana legalization in Colorado influenced debates nationwide, just as Massachusetts marriage equality shaped subsequent state contests. If donors anticipate spillover effects, they develop rational instrumental motivations for cross-state contributions even absent direct governance stakes.

Variable Category	Candidate Elections	Direct Democracy
Overlapping Variables		
Demographic characteristics	✓	✓
Geographic proximity	✓	✓
Political ideology and affiliation	✓	✓
Political engagement level	✓	✓
General donor motivations	✓	✓
Variables Unique to Candidate Elections		
Candidate-specific factors	✓	
Party control considerations	✓	
Variables Unique to Direct Democracy		
Direct democracy familiarity		✓
Specific policy area interests		✓
State vs. national policy views		✓
Identification strategies		✓

Table 5.1: Comparative Overview of Out-of-State Donor Survey Topics

Table 5.1 illustrates the comparative scope of survey research on out-of-state donors across candidate elections and direct democracy campaigns. While the two contexts share important variables including demographics, ideology, and general motivational factors, they diverge in theoretically meaningful ways. Candidate election surveys naturally emphasize candidate-specific qualities and party control considerations that have no parallel in single-issue ballot measure campaigns. Direct democracy surveys, conversely, must address how donors discover and evaluate specific policy proposals without party labels or candidate platforms, how they conceptualize the relationship between state-level policy outcomes and national political priorities, and whether they view direct democracy institutions as fundamentally different from representative politics. This survey's contribution lies in systemati-

cally measuring these direct democracy-specific dimensions while maintaining comparability with existing donor research through standard demographic and motivational items. The instrument thus allows us to test whether theories developed for candidate donors apply to direct democracy contexts while also identifying novel motivational patterns unique to policy-specific cross-state participation.

The Survey

The primary focus of this chapter is a survey, fielded in Spring 2025, of individuals who made at least two contributions to direct democracy campaigns outside their state of residence between 2016-2022. I select this timeframe for several reasons. First, it captures donors with recent memory of their contributions, enhancing the reliability of self-reported motivations and behaviors. Second, this period encompasses significant political events and trends, including increasing polarization and nationalization. Third, this timeframe provides a sufficient pool of repeat donors to study while maintaining relevance to current political dynamics. The University of Oregon Institutional Review Board approved this survey protocol.

The survey sample is a subset of the larger dataset. Individual donors over a certain contribution threshold in some US states with direct democracy are required to include their full street address when filing their contribution. After narrowing down the contribution dataset to states where mailing addresses are required, I then honed in on donors who had contributed at least twice to citizen-initiated campaigns in states other than the address listed in the records. This is for two reasons. The first is financial and practical. The universe of out-of-state donors from these states, within this time frame, who have contributed at least once is approximately 49,000, while the corpus of those contributing to at least two totals around 16,000. The second is theoretical. I am interested in donors who, theoretically, have an interest in these processes beyond a one-time donation motivated by a viral social media post or a highly visible campaign. Mailing addresses were then verified through a

CASS-certified validation software, Smarty, which checks for the validity of addresses. The final sample included 12,637 cross-state donors.

Table 5.2: Sampling Frame Characteristics

Characteristic	Value
Total Donors Contacted	12,637
Target States	9
Unique Ballot Measures	63
Avg Measures per Donor	1.05
Avg States per Donor	1.03
Avg Total Contribution	$2722.26

Table 5.2 presents characteristics of the full sampling frame. The 12,637 donors collectively supported measures across 9 states. On average, donors supported 1.05 ballot measures across 1.03 states, with mean total contributions per donor of $2722.26.

Donors in this sample received a mailed postcard with a unique QR code containing this project's survey. After scanning the QR code, participants were prompted with their contribution activity for each campaign they had contributed to since 2016. This information includes the measures they supported or opposed, the state where the campaign took place, how much they contributed, and a brief description of each measure itself. I included this feature to increase the reliability of responses, especially for those who had contributed to multiple campaigns across a variety of states. The unique QR codes also allowed me to connect donor's responses to their campaign contribution history for subsequent analysis. A sample of the postcard, along with a sample of this information-prompting procedure, is located in Appendix 5A of this chapter.

The survey includes several key components designed to understand donor decision-making processes. Respondents are asked about their demographic characteristics, political

engagement patterns, and connections to states where they have donated. To measure motivations directly, the survey employs Likert scale questions assessing the importance of various factors including ideological agreement with measures, potential to affect outcomes, presence of unacceptable opponents, expectations about future policy influence in other states, personal connections to states, and supporting causes regardless of location. These items distinguish between instrumental motivations focused on affecting specific state outcomes and expressive motivations oriented toward broader values expression and national political engagement. The survey also examines how donors conceptualize impact, asking whether they view contributions as directly shaping state policies or as influencing national political priorities, and whether they donate primarily to achieve outcomes or to express values. These questions illuminate whether donors understand their participation as intervention in discrete state decisions or as engagement with national political movements organized around state-level campaigns. The survey instrument is located in Appendix 5A.

Sample Characteristics

Table 5.3: Survey Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Value
Sample Size	910
College Degree or Higher	74.1%
Democrat	56.5%
Republican	27.4%
Independent	14.3%
Household Income Under $100k	46.9%
Follow Politics Very Closely	44.3%
Avg Measures Supported	1.8
Avg Total Contributed	$1803.42

Table 5.3 presents survey respondent characteristics. Respondents are highly educated (74% hold a college degree or higher) and politically engaged (44% follow politics very closely). The sample skews Democratic (56%) but includes meaningful Republican (27%) and Independent (14%) representation. Notably, 47% report household incomes under $100,000, suggesting economic diversity beyond typical assumptions about political donors as uniformly wealthy. The concentration of college-educated respondents is consistent with Schlozman, Verba, and Brady's (2012) finding that the well educated are consistently overrepresented in the "heavenly chorus" of political voice. Yet the relatively modest income distribution may complicate their observation that "those who are not affluent and well educated are less likely to take part politically" (2012, 5).

This educational skew may reflect not only who donates but also who responds to academic surveys. The postcard design identified me as a PhD student at the University of Oregon, which likely elicited more favorable responses from college-educated donors who

view academic research positively. Had I instead identified as a representative of Turning Point USA, the Heritage Foundation, or a faith-based research organization, the demographic composition of respondents might have differed.

Table 5.4: Comparison of Sampling Frame to Survey Respondents

Characteristic	Full Frame (N=12,637)	Respondents (N=910)
Avg Measures Supported	1.05	1.76
Avg States Contributed To	1.03	1.45
Avg Total Contributed	$2722.26	$1803.42

Table 5.4 compares the sampling frame to survey respondents on observable characteristics from contribution records. Respondents supported 68% more measures on average (1.76 vs. 1.05) and contributed across 41% more states (1.45 vs. 1.03), indicating systematic response bias toward donors with sustained cross-state engagement. However, respondents contributed somewhat less per capita ($1,803 vs. $2,722), suggesting the survey captured breadth of participation rather than the highest-dollar donors exclusively.

Response Bias and Generalizability

The 7.2% response rate itself compares favorably to other similar surveys, but acceptable response rates do not preclude systematic bias in who responds.[3] For motivational patterns (RQ1), the dominance of expressive over instrumental considerations may reflect how sustained participants rationalize continued engagement rather than how all out-of-state donors understand initial contributions. Donors who contribute repeatedly across state lines may have developed more coherent ideological frameworks justifying participation than those making occasional contributions.

For impact perceptions (RQ2), the widespread national framing and acknowledgment

[3]Brockman and Malhotra (2020) and Broockman, Kalla, and Sekhon (2017) provide response rate comparisons for similar projects.

of minimal individual impact may similarly reflect sustained donors who have reconciled continued participation with realistic efficacy assessments. First-time or occasional cross-state donors might hold different beliefs about their impact or frame contributions differently. The consumption model receives strong support among respondents, but the sample composition means we are examining whether sustained cross-state participation operates through consumption-oriented logic rather than whether all out-of-state giving does.

The surrogate representation null finding (H3) may be particularly affected. If surrogate representation motivates initial contributions but repeat donors develop different frameworks through continued engagement, the null result could reflect how sustained participants understand their giving rather than disconfirming surrogate representation as an initial motivation. Similarly, the heterogeneity analyses showing minimal variation across donor characteristics may partly reflect sample homogeneity—sustained cross-state donors may be more similar to each other than the broader population of all out-of-state contributors. The findings establish that among sustained cross-state donors, expressive motivations dominate, national framing is pervasive, and consumption-oriented participation characterizes continued engagement despite acknowledged minimal impact.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What motivates individuals to contribute to ballot measure campaigns in states where they cannot vote?

Existing research distinguishes between instrumental motivations (seeking to influence outcomes) and expressive motivations (expressing values or political identity). For out-of-state direct democracy donors, this distinction is particularly important. These individuals cannot vote on the measures they fund, which potentially attenuates standard instrumental calculations about marginal impact while preserving opportunities for ideological expression.

Chapter 4's analysis of contribution patterns revealed two key behavioral signatures consistent with specific motivational theories. First, out-of-state donors demonstrate re-

markable consistency in their giving: 92.4% maintain subject matter consistency and 95.8% maintain position consistency across multiple campaigns, with 40.9% concentrating their giving primarily on ideologically-charged issues (social issues, substance regulation, LGBT+ rights, abortion). This pattern of systematic, ideologically-aligned giving across state boundaries suggests donors are sophisticated political actors making deliberate choices rather than responding opportunistically to individual campaigns. Second, over 86% of individual out-of-state contributions are $100 or less, amounts unlikely to yield substantial marginal influence on campaign outcomes. This prevalence of small-dollar giving, combined with donors averaging 2.18 contributions each, suggests participation may serve expressive functions beyond instrumental impact.

Chapter 4 also documented substantial contributions from states lacking direct democracy mechanisms entirely. New York contributed over $106 million and Texas over $28 million to out-of-state campaigns despite neither state offering citizen-initiated ballot measures. This geographic pattern suggests a potential "surrogate representation" motivation, where residents without direct democracy access in their home states seek alternative channels for policy influence by contributing to campaigns elsewhere. If this mechanism operates, donors from non-direct democracy states should be more motivated by expectations about future policy influence in their home states, viewing successful ballot measures as setting precedents that could eventually affect their own jurisdictions through policy diffusion.

These patterns generate observable implications. If donors are motivated primarily by ideological commitment to causes transcending state boundaries, expressive motivations like ideological agreement and supporting aligned causes should dominate over instrumental factors like affecting specific outcomes or race competitiveness. Personal connection to states should rank low, as donors orient toward issues rather than geography. If donors also view participation as political consumption- deriving utility from the act of contributing itself- they should acknowledge limited individual impact while maintaining that values expression

was highly important.

H1: Expressive motivations (ideological agreement, supporting causes) will be rated more important than instrumental motivations (affecting outcomes, race closeness)

H2: Personal connection to states will rank among the least important motivations.

H3: Donors from states without direct democracy mechanisms will rate future policy influence in their home states as more important than donors from states with direct democracy, consistent with surrogate representation seeking.

RQ2: How do out-of-state donors perceive the impact of their contributions?

Whether donors view contributions as directly shaping policies in specific states or as influencing broader national political priorities reveals how they understand their participation. Chapter 4 documented that out-of-state giving concentrates heavily on high-salience national issues, social issues attract 21% of contributions despite comprising only 7% of ballot measures. This disproportionate focus suggests donors may conceptualize their participation through national political frameworks rather than state-specific policy outcomes.

The consumption theory of political giving posits that donors derive utility from participation itself, viewing contributions as expressive acts rather than investments expecting tangible returns. If this framework applies to out-of-state direct democracy donors, they should frame impact in terms of values expression and engagement with national movements rather than calculating marginal influence on specific state outcomes. This would align with the small-dollar giving patterns observed in Chapter 4, where the typical donation amount suggests expressive participation rather than strategic investment. Additionally, if surrogate representation motivations operate, donors should express beliefs about policy spillover and diffusion, viewing successful state campaigns as creating momentum for similar policies in their home states.

H4: Donors will more frequently frame impact in terms of national political priorities and values expression than in terms of directly shaping specific state policies.

H5: The majority of donors will report being motivated primarily to express values rather

than to achieve specific outcomes, consistent with the consumption model of political giving. H6: Donors will express widespread beliefs about policy spillover across state boundaries, viewing ballot measure outcomes as having implications beyond individual states.

Analytical Approach

The analysis of donor motivations (RQ1) draws on seven five-point Likert scale items ranging from "very unimportant" to "very important." I convert these responses to numeric values (1-5) and calculate mean importance ratings for each motivational factor. This allows direct comparison across instrumental motivations (affecting outcomes, race closeness), expressive motivations (ideological agreement, supporting causes), and geographic considerations (personal connection to states, future policy influence). Appendix D provides a complete mapping of each analytical variable to its corresponding survey question.

The examination of impact perceptions (RQ2) combines single-response and multiple-selection items. Single-response questions capture donors' self-assessment of individual impact, expectations about policy spillover, and whether they view giving primarily as values expression or outcome achievement. The multiple-selection format for the impact view question allows donors to indicate all applicable ways they conceptualize their contributions' effects, revealing whether donors hold singular or multifaceted understandings of impact. Together, these measures distinguish between state-specific policy influence and broader forms of political engagement.

The analysis is primarily descriptive. While behavioral patterns documented in Chapter 4 suggest certain motivations, self-reported data provides direct evidence about how a subset of the larger donor pool understand their own participation. These measures reveal whether donors consciously orient toward national movements or state-specific outcomes, and whether they acknowledge the limited individual impact that contribution amounts imply. The descriptive findings establish baseline patterns of donor self-understanding that complement behavioral inference.

Results

What Motivates Out-of-State Contributions?

Figure 5.1 presents the mean importance ratings for seven different motivations that might drive out-of-state contributions to ballot measure campaigns. Respondents rated each motivation on a five-point scale ranging from "very unimportant" (1) to "very important" (5). The figure displays these mean ratings in ascending order, with error bars representing standard errors around each estimate. The visual hierarchy clearly distinguishes expressive motivations (supporting causes and ideological agreement) at the top from instrumental considerations (affecting outcomes and race closeness) near the bottom. Personal connection to states ranks lowest, while future policy influence and presence of unacceptable opponents occupy middle positions. The spacing between different motivation clusters reveals how donors mentally organize their reasons for giving across state boundaries.

Among sustained cross-state donors, the motivational hierarchy reveals a clear pattern distinguishing expressive from instrumental considerations. Supporting causes respondents believe in receives the highest rating (M=4.87, SD=0.33), with 87% of donors rating this factor as very important. Ideological agreement with the measure follows closely (M=4.82, SD=0.41), with 83% selecting very important. These two expressive motivations cluster together at the top of the hierarchy, separated from all other factors with means above 4.8.

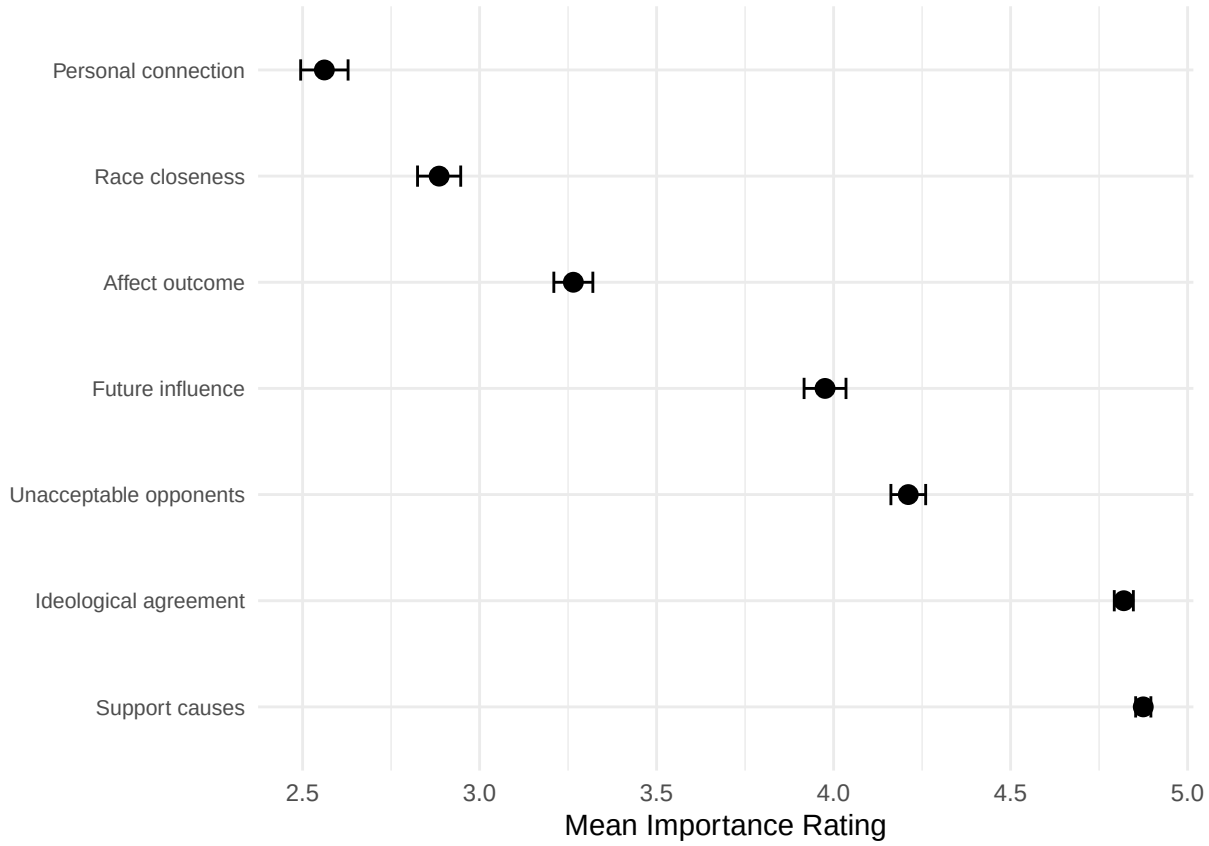


Figure 5.1: Mean Importance of Motivations for Out-of-State Contributions

The presence of unacceptable opponents occupies a middle position in the motivational hierarchy (M=4.21, SD=0.76), with 38% rating it very important. This factor combines elements of both instrumental calculation (countering opposition resources) and expressive orientation (opposing groups whose values conflict with donors' own). Its intermediate rating suggests donors view opposition as relevant but secondary to positive alignment with causes and policies.

Expectations about future policy influence in other states, including donors' home states, receive moderate importance ratings (M=3.98, SD=0.91). While this mean falls well below expressive motivations, it exceeds purely instrumental considerations about affecting specific state outcomes. The pattern suggests donors do consider spillover possibilities, though such expectations operate as supplementary rather than primary motivations.

Instrumental motivations centered on affecting immediate outcomes receive substan-

tially lower ratings than expressive factors. Potential to affect the outcome of the ballot measure has a mean of 3.26 (SD=0.85), with only 5% rating it very important. Race closeness—whether the measure appears likely to pass or fail—ranks even lower (M=2.89, SD=0.94), with just 1% considering it very important. These low ratings for instrumental factors persist despite donors contributing to competitive campaigns where outcomes remain uncertain. The disconnect between donors' participation in consequential contests and their professed lack of concern with affecting those contests' outcomes provides initial evidence for consumption-oriented giving.

Personal connection to the state where measures appear ranks lowest among all motivations (M=2.56, SD=1.03), with only 3% rating it very important. This finding contradicts the possibility that out-of-state giving reflects primarily geographic ties such as previous residence, property ownership, or family connections. Instead, donors orient toward issues and causes that transcend state boundaries. The minimal importance of geographic connection supports the interpretation that donors understand their participation as engagement with national political movements rather than intervention in specific states' affairs. The spacing between motivation categories proves as revealing as their absolute values. A gap of approximately 0.6 points separates top expressive motivations from opposition concerns, another gap of roughly 0.25 points separates opposition from future influence expectations, and a larger gap of 0.7 points separates future influence from immediate outcome considerations. These intervals suggest donors mentally organize motivations into distinct categories rather than viewing all factors as roughly equivalent considerations.

To assess whether the observed differences in motivation ratings are statistically significant, I conduct two types of t-tests. First, one-sample t-tests compare each motivation's mean rating against the scale midpoint of 3.0 (representing "Neither important nor unimportant") to determine whether donors rate each factor as significantly more or less important than neutral. Second, paired-samples t-tests compare expressive motivations (supporting causes and ideological agreement) against instrumental motivations (affecting outcomes)

within the same donors, testing whether the hierarchy of motivations observed in Figure 5.1 represents statistically meaningful differences rather than random variation. Effect sizes are calculated using Cohen's d to assess the practical magnitude of these differences.

Testing Motivations

Table 5.5: Statistical Tests of Motivation Importance Ratings

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	p	p (formatted)	
Support Causes vs. Neutral	1.875	170.747	0	< .001	***
Ideological Agreement vs. Neutral	1.820	132.325	0	< .001	***
Affect Outcome vs. Neutral	0.265	9.425	0	< .001	***
Race Closeness vs. Neutral	-0.114	-3.675	0	< .001	***
Support Causes vs. Affect Outcome	1.610	53.447	0	< .001	***
Ideological Agreement vs. Affect Outcome	1.555	50.548	0	< .001	***

Statistical tests (Table 5.5) support that these differences are not due to chance. One-sample t-tests show expressive motivations significantly exceed the neutral midpoint: supporting causes (t=170.75, p<.001) and ideological agreement (t=132.33, p<.001). Instrumental motivations fall near or below neutral: affecting outcomes (t=9.43, p<.001, mean=3.26) and race closeness (t=-3.68, p<.001, mean=2.89). Paired-samples tests demonstrate expressive motivations exceed instrumental motivations by approximately 1.6 points within the same donors (support causes vs. affect outcome: t=53.45, p<.001; ideological agreement vs. affect outcome: t=50.55, p<.001), with large effect sizes. These results support the patterns in Figure 5.1, establishing that the motivational hierarchy reflects systematic rather than random variation.

How Do Donors Perceive Impact?

Direct questions about whether donors contribute primarily to help campaigns win specific outcomes or to express values reveal strong orientation toward values expression.

Among sustained cross-state donors, when forced to choose between these alternatives, 54% indicated they donate primarily to express values regardless of likelihood of success, compared to just 11% who donate primarily to help campaigns win. An additional 35% selected both equally, refusing the binary choice. Even accounting for this middle category, values-oriented donors outnumber outcome-oriented donors at a ratio exceeding 5:1.

This values orientation persists despite donors holding realistic assessments of their individual impact. When asked to evaluate how much their donations affected ballot measure outcomes, 77% of respondents indicated their contributions had minimal or no impact. Just 23% believed their giving had any meaningful effect, and only 5% thought they somewhat or significantly affected outcomes. The combination of acknowledged minimal impact with continued participation strongly supports the consumption model of political giving—donors derive utility from the act of contributing itself rather than from instrumental achievement of policy outcomes.

Figure 5.2 compares how values-oriented donors versus outcome-oriented donors conceptualize the impact of their contributions. The grouped bar chart displays the percentage of each donor type who selected five different impact views from a multiple-selection question. Light gray bars represent outcome-oriented donors (those who reported donating primarily to help campaigns win), while dark gray bars represent values-oriented donors (those who donate primarily to express values). Impact views are ordered from most to least frequently selected overall, ranging from influencing national priorities to directly shaping state policies. The figure allows readers to assess whether the two donor types differ substantially in how they understand their contributions' effects, while also revealing the dominant national framing that characterizes both groups' impact perceptions.

The most frequently endorsed perspective is that contributions influence national political priorities and trends (79%), framing impact in terms of broader political movements rather than discrete state decisions. 75% view their contributions as expressing personal values and beliefs, reinforcing the values orientation observed in direct questions. Nearly

half (46%) understand their giving as advancing long-term political goals beyond any single state, suggesting a temporal expansion that complements the geographic expansion from state to national framing.

Comparing values-oriented donors to outcome-oriented donors reveals both groups prioritize national framing over state-specific outcomes, though with different emphases. Values-oriented donors show slightly higher endorsement of national priorities influence (79% versus 72% for outcome-oriented donors) and values expression (79% versus 54%). Outcome-oriented donors demonstrate stronger orientation toward long-term goals (52% versus 46%) and home state precedents (36% versus 33%), consistent with their stated instrumental focus. Yet even among outcome-oriented donors, national priorities influence outpaces directly shaping state policies (72% versus 22%), indicating that instrumental thinking itself operates at national rather than state-specific levels.

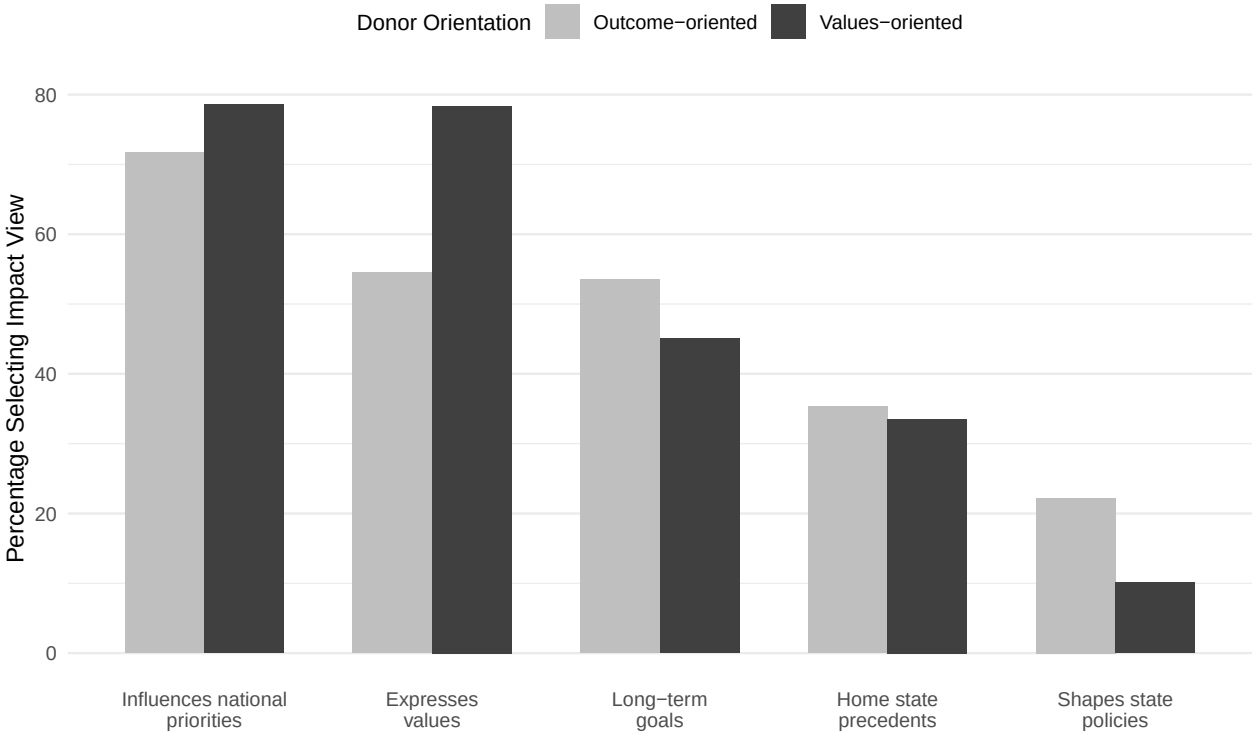


Figure 5.2: How Donors View Impact by Giving Orientation

The most striking pattern across both donor types is the remarkably low percentage viewing contributions primarily as directly shaping policies in specific states. Only 11% of

donors overall select this option, with outcome-oriented donors (22%) rating it only modestly higher than values-oriented donors (10%). This convergence suggests fundamental reorientation away from state-specific policy outcomes regardless of whether donors emphasize values expression or outcome achievement as their primary motivation.

Approximately one-third of donors (32%) believe their contributions set precedents that will influence policy in their home states, providing evidence of spillover expectations. A similar proportion (31%) view giving as countering the influence of groups they oppose, representing a reactive rather than proactive orientation. The multiple-selection format reveals that most donors hold multifaceted rather than singular understandings of impact. The percentages sum to well over 100%, indicating donors typically endorsed several impact views simultaneously. This multiplicity suggests donors construct complex narratives about their participation that combine national influence, values expression, long-term goals, and spillover effects rather than reducing impact to any single dimension.

Heterogeneity in Motivations

To test whether these motivational patterns hold across different types of donors, I examine variation by self-reported orientation, contribution size, and geographic spread of giving. Table 5.6 examines whether motivational patterns vary across donor characteristics that might theoretically produce different giving orientations. The first comparison contrasts self-identified values-oriented donors with outcome-oriented donors. Even among the subset explicitly stating they donate primarily for outcomes, supporting causes (M=4.86) rates substantially higher than affecting outcomes (M=3.32). This finding suggests that even supposedly instrumental donors actually prioritize expressive motivations, or alternatively that donors distinguish between helping causes succeed generally versus believing their individual contributions affect results. Values-oriented donors rate affecting outcomes at M=3.27, statistically indistinguishable from outcome-oriented donors, indicating this instrumental consideration receives similar weight across donor types. Multivariate regression models

examining whether demographic characteristics, political engagement, and contribution behavior predict motivations (Appendix 5B) support minimal heterogeneity, with observable donor characteristics explaining less than 2% of variation in motivational ratings.

Table 5.6: Mean Motivation Ratings by Donor Characteristics

Group	N	Support Causes	Affect Outcome	Future Influence
By orientation				
Values-oriented donors	495	4.88	3.27	NA
Outcome-oriented donors	99	4.86	3.32	NA
By contribution amount				
Small donors (<$500)	636	4.87	3.27	NA
Large donors (>$2,000)	126	4.88	3.24	NA
By geographic spread				
Single-state donors	529	NA	NA	3.98
Multi-state donors	381	NA	NA	3.98

Contribution amounts might theoretically correlate with motivations if larger donors view themselves as more capable of affecting outcomes. However, comparing small donors (under $500) with large donors (over $2,000) reveals virtually no variation in outcome importance. Small donors rate affecting outcomes at M=3.27, while large donors rate it at M=3.24, a trivial difference despite the more than fourfold difference in contribution amounts. Both groups rate supporting causes very similarly at approximately M=4.87-4.88. This absence of variation suggests contribution size reflects capacity and commitment to causes rather than differing beliefs about marginal impact.

Finally, comparing single-state donors with multi-state donors tests whether broader geographic engagement correlates with different motivational profiles. Multi-state donors show virtually identical future influence motivation (M=3.98) compared to single-state

donors (M=3.97). This contradicts the possibility that multi-state giving reflects stronger beliefs about creating cross-state momentum or policy diffusion. Instead, it suggests that whether donors support campaigns in one state or many, they hold similar expectations about spillover effects and future influence.

The consistent absence of heterogeneity across all three comparisons—orientation, contribution size, and geographic spread—provides some evidence for the consumption model of political giving. If donors were primarily instrumentally motivated, we would expect systematic variation: larger donors should rate outcome importance higher (believing they can affect results), multi-state donors should emphasize future influence more strongly (calculating spillover effects), and self-identified outcome-oriented donors should demonstrate meaningfully different priorities than values-oriented donors. Instead, expressive motivations dominate across all donor types, suggesting that consumption-oriented participation characterizes sustained cross-state engagement broadly rather than reflecting particular subgroups.

However, sample composition requires caution about generalizability to all out-of-state giving. Table 5.4 shows respondents actually contributed somewhat less on average than the full sample, suggesting that the wealthiest, highest-capacity donors are underrepresented. The "large donor" category in Table 5.6 (N=126) captures donors at the lower end of high-dollar giving rather than the six- and seven-figure contributors documented in Chapter 4 who account for the vast majority of total dollars. If instrumental motivations and efficacy beliefs scale with contribution capacity, the survey may simply lack sufficient representation of donors giving at levels where such differences would manifest. The findings establish that among sustained small- and medium-dollar cross-state donors, the consumption model receives strong support: these donors participate primarily for expressive utility rather than instrumental impact. Whether major donors operate with different motivational profiles remains an open question this survey cannot address.

Discussion

The survey findings reveal how sustained cross-state donors understand their participation in ballot measure campaigns, providing direct evidence that complements the behavioral patterns documented in Chapter 4. Three patterns prove particularly significant for the theory of localized nationalization developed in Chapter 2. First, donors navigate the dual paradox identified in that chapter: they participate in institutions formally bounded by state territoriality while orienting primarily toward national political movements. Second, they reconcile acknowledged minimal individual impact with continued participation through frameworks that treat state venues as sites for national political expression. Third, these patterns characterize repeat donors broadly rather than reflecting particular subgroups, though sample composition requires caution about generalizing to all out-of-state giving.

Localized Nationalization from the Donor Perspective

Chapter 2 identified a fundamental tension in contemporary direct democracy: state institutions designed for territorially bounded self-governance increasingly function as venues where Americans engage with national political conflicts. The survey provides evidence that donors themselves experience and navigate this tension, though their resolution differs from what traditional democratic theory might predict.

The overwhelming national framing donors apply to their participation demonstrates permeable federalism in practice. Nearly four in five respondents (79%) view their contributions as influencing national political priorities, while only 11% see them as directly shaping specific state policies. This is not mere rhetoric or post-hoc rationalization. Donors who report giving primarily to help campaigns win still emphasize national priorities over state-specific outcomes (72%), suggesting the reorientation operates across motivational types. State ballot measures function simultaneously as local policy decisions and as battles in national movements, with donors conceptualizing their participation primarily through the

latter frame.

This pattern connects to Chapter 2's discussion of how institutional permeability creates opportunities for cross-state political engagement. When advocacy organizations develop sophisticated multi-state strategies, when media coverage emphasizes national frames, and when digital infrastructure enables rapid resource mobilization across boundaries, the conditions exist for donors to treat geographically dispersed campaigns as unified political efforts. Marijuana legalization campaigns in multiple states become understood as a single drug policy reform movement rather than discrete state decisions. Marriage equality initiatives similarly transcend their immediate jurisdictional effects to represent broader questions about rights and dignity that make state venues feel appropriate for national political expression.

The failure of the surrogate representation hypothesis further illuminates how this transformation operates. Chapter 4 documented substantial contributions from states lacking direct democracy mechanisms— New York contributed over $106 million despite having no citizen initiative process. Yet donors from these states rate future policy influence no higher than donors from states with robust direct democracy. This null finding suggests donors orient primarily toward issues and movements rather than calculating strategic paths to home-state policy influence through other states' institutions. When participation is nationally rather than state-specifically oriented, the distinction between states with and without direct democracy becomes less salient than whether campaigns address issues donors care about. The minimal importance donors assign to personal connections to states (M=2.56) reinforces this pattern of issue-based rather than geographically-based orientation.

The Donor Side of the Dual Paradox

Chapter 2 identified a dual paradox in contemporary direct democracy: donors must reconcile national engagement with local institutional structures, while campaign leaders must maintain local legitimacy while accessing external resources. The survey illuminates

the first half of this dynamic, revealing how donors resolve what appears paradoxical through consumption-oriented frameworks that redefine political efficacy.

The tension between realistic impact assessments and continued participation represents the survey's most theoretically productive finding. That 77% acknowledge minimal individual impact yet 54% donate primarily to express values rather than achieve specific outcomes provides strong support for consumption models of political giving. These donors are neither naive about influence nor engaged in self-deception. Rather, they participate in collective symbolic politics, using financial contributions to signal membership in national political communities organized around shared values rather than shared geography.

This consumption framework operates alongside transformed instrumental reasoning that matches nationalized political realities. Approximately one-third (32%) believe their contributions set precedents influencing home-state policy, and 79% view giving as affecting national political priorities. Instrumental calculations have not disappeared but transformed to operate at national scales. Rather than calculating whether individual contributions affect discrete state outcomes, donors understand state campaigns as battles in longer policy diffusion processes where precedent and momentum matter strategically.

The widespread spillover beliefs donors express illuminate this reconciliation mechanism. A donor can simultaneously acknowledge her contribution probably doesn't determine whether an initiative passes while maintaining that success will influence other states' future debates through demonstration effects. The consumption utility comes from supporting aligned causes; the instrumental rationale comes from understanding individual campaigns as contributing to broader movements working across jurisdictions over extended time horizons. This dual orientation, expressive participation providing immediate utility while instrumental reasoning operates at national scales, resolves the apparent paradox of sophisticated actors making contributions they acknowledge have minimal marginal impact.

From Behavioral Patterns to Donor Self-Understanding

The survey findings clarify and complicate patterns observed in Chapter 4. The concentration on social issues and substance regulation documented there takes on new meaning when viewed through donors' national lens. Donors gravitate toward these issues not primarily because they calculate unique instrumental importance for cross-state giving but because they represent battles in cultural and political conflicts transcending state boundaries. Marriage equality attracted massive out-of-state funding not because donors anticipated direct policy diffusion but because the issue represented fundamental questions about rights making state venues feel like appropriate sites for national political expression.

The small-dollar giving pattern Chapter 4 documented, where 86% of contributions were under $100, makes sense when participation serves expressive functions independent of marginal impact. Donors need not believe their $50 contribution will swing an outcome to derive utility from participating in policy reform efforts. The act of giving becomes meaningful through what it represents about values and political identity rather than through instrumental influence on whether measures pass or fail.

However, the uniformity observed across donor types likely reflects sample composition rather than genuine homogeneity. Respondents gave to more measures (1.76 vs. 1.05) and more states (1.45 vs. 1.03) than the full frame, indicating sustained engagement. The survey captures how committed repeat donors understand continued participation rather than initial motivations or occasional contributions. The six- and seven-figure contributors documented in Chapter 4 are likely underrepresented, leaving open possibilities that major donors operate with different motivational profiles.

Implications for Democratic Legitimacy

The findings clarify empirical realities that normative debates about interstate giving must address. Sustained cross-state donors are sophisticated political actors making deliberate choices, understanding participation primarily through national frameworks, ac-

knowledging minimal individual impact while deriving utility from values expression. This reality complicates both celebratory and condemnatory accounts of external funding.

Traditional corruption narratives lose analytical purchase when donors explicitly acknowledge minimal impact yet continue giving primarily for values expression. The challenge runs deeper than preventing quid pro quo influence: state institutions designed for territorially bounded self-governance operate as venues where Americans engage with national political conflicts, creating legitimacy tensions that regulatory frameworks focused on preventing corruption cannot address. This reflects the institutional misalignment Chapter 2 identified, where formal geographic boundaries diverge from functional political communities, ideological movements transcend state lines while formal authority remains geographically bounded, and resources operate at national scale while decision— making authority remains formally local.

The normative implications remain contested. One perspective holds that cross-state participation fundamentally corrupts direct democracy's local character, substituting outside interests for authentic community self-governance. An alternative frames cross-state participation as legitimate political expression, arguing that artificial geographic restrictions violate democratic principles when issues carry broader implications. The survey cannot adjudicate between these positions but exposes some arguments as inadequately describing practice. Claims about shadowy manipulation mischaracterize donors who openly express ideological commitments. Claims that geographic restrictions protect local autonomy must confront that participants themselves view campaigns through national lenses.

More productive questions concern how federalism should operate when formal boundaries diverge from functional political communities, what principles should govern participation when ideological movements transcend state lines while formal authority remains geographically bounded, and whether current arrangements adequately serve democratic values when resources operate at national scale while decision-making remains formally local. The survey reveals that even participants who acknowledge state-level

institutional realities understand their participation primarily as engagement with national political movements, suggesting challenges rooted in misalignment between how Americans engage politically and how federalism organizes decision-making authority.

Conclusion

The survey reveals that sustained repeat donors are sophisticated political actors who have adapted participation to match nationalized political realities while formal institutions preserve territorial boundaries. Sustained repeat donors acknowledge minimal individual impact while deriving utility from values expression. They view state campaigns through national lenses while understanding state-level institutional structures. They maintain instrumental orientations focused on precedent-setting and national momentum rather than calculating marginal influence on discrete outcomes. These patterns reflect neither naivete nor cynicism but sophisticated adaptation to political environments where state institutions increasingly serve as venues for national engagement.

This evidence supports Chapter 2's theory of localized nationalization while documenting one side of the dual paradox identified there. Donors navigate the tension between national engagement and local institutional structures through consumption-oriented frameworks that redefine political efficacy at national scales. Yet donors' nationally-oriented values expression creates the resource environment within which campaign leaders must operate. Those leaders face the other side of the paradox: maintaining local legitimacy while accessing external resources, translating national engagement into state-level campaigns while managing potential backlash from voters suspicious of external influence.

Chapter 6 turns to interviews with campaign professionals to examine how organizations manage these practical challenges. The organizational strategies campaigns develop for navigating the intersection of national funding and local legitimacy demands remain largely invisible in analyses focused on donor behavior. Understanding both sides of the dual paradox—how donors conceptualize nationally-oriented participation and how campaigns

adapt organizationally to resource dependencies—completes the dissertation's account of how localized nationalization operates through both individual behavior and institutional adaptation.

Chapter 6: Campaign Leaders on Ballot Measure Funding

"Do people actually believe that shit? That we just take money and bend to the whim of whoever writes the check? I've been doing this a while, that's not how it works"

— California Campaign Leader

"Not only was the financial support critical to the campaign, they provided a lot of really great insight into how to run an effective campaign and we were happy to take whatever help we could get."

— Nebraska Campaign Leader

In June 2025, I conducted back-to-back interviews with leaders of support campaigns for ballot measures in two different states, both receiving similar percentages of out-of-state funding. When I asked each leader how they would respond to critics who argue that out-of-state money dilutes local preferences and corrupts campaigns, their reactions illuminated fundamentally different understandings of what direct democracy campaigns represent in contemporary politics. The California campaign leader, a seasoned veteran of multiple ballot measure campaigns, rejected the premise entirely. For this professional, there was no dilemma to navigate between local legitimacy and external resources—the very framing reflected what they saw as naive misunderstanding of modern campaign realities. Out-of-state money was simply one operational element among many in competitive electoral contests requiring

substantial resources. The Nebraska campaign director, managing their first ballot measure campaign, offered a markedly different response. They openly acknowledged the tension, defending their local presence while expressing genuine appreciation for both the financial support and institutional knowledge their out-of-state donors provided. How do campaign leaders from different states, with different experience running these operations, pursuing different issues, and from different sides of the measure, understand and navigate the growing concentrations of out-of-state money documented in previous chapters?

The preceding chapters established empirical patterns that make this question both puzzling and consequential. Chapter 4 documented that out-of-state individual donors contributed approximately $340 million dollars to direct democracy campaigns, predominantly in small amounts concentrated on social issues. These contribution patterns revealed remarkable consistency: 86% of out-of-state donors give $100 or less, yet they maintain striking focus in their policy engagement across multiple states. Chapter 5 examined donor motivations directly through survey research, finding that donors view their contributions primarily as ideological expression and participation in broader democratic engagement rather than strategic interventions in specific state contests. These donors prioritize supporting causes that align with their values over affecting particular state-level policy outcomes, suggesting a consumption-oriented model of political giving that parallels national movement participation.

These findings create a puzzle for campaign organizations. If donors contribute primarily through small amounts driven by expressive motivations rather than expectations of direct policy influence, yet campaigns still receive substantial external resources concentrated on particular policy areas, how do campaign leaders operating within this environment understand their relationships with out-of-state supporters? Do they perceive donor influence on their strategic decisions? How do they justify accepting resources that may trigger local legitimacy challenges? The contribution patterns documented in Chapter 4 and motivational dynamics revealed in Chapter 5 provide the context, but understanding how campaigns ac-

tually function within this nationalized funding environment requires examining leaders' own perspectives and strategic reasoning.

This chapter shifts from donors to campaign organizations, examining how leaders of ballot measure campaigns with substantial external funding experience and manage relationships with out-of-state supporters. Through in-depth interviews with 40 campaign directors and managers across 19 states, the analysis reveals how structural factors including professional experience and resource environments interact with normative frameworks about democratic legitimacy to shape campaign strategies and justify external funding relationships. The findings demonstrate that campaign leaders interviewed for this study do not simply accept or reject external funding based on principled positions, but rather develop adaptive organizational processes through which they navigate competing pressures for local authenticity and strategic effectiveness. Whether these patterns hold across the broader universe of ballot measure campaigns, including lower-profile measures with minimal external funding or campaigns in states with different political cultures, remains an important question that these 40 interviews cannot definitively answer. However, the consistency of patterns observed across leaders with different backgrounds, operating in different contexts, and pursuing different policy goals suggests meaningful dynamics worthy of theoretical attention.

Organizational Responses to External Funding

Understanding how campaign leaders manage external funding relationships requires examining the professionalized strategic environment within which contemporary ballot measure campaigns operate. Skinner (2007) documents how political consultants have transformed campaign operations, creating standardized strategic frameworks and technical expertise that travel across state contexts. Campaign directors increasingly develop portable skills in media strategy, voter targeting, and coalition building that transcend particular local contests, fundamentally altering who leads campaigns and how they understand their work.

Masket (2009) reveals how informal party organizations function as coordinating structures that deploy resources and expertise across multiple jurisdictions, creating powerful networks for coordinating campaign activity across states.

Organizations like The Fairness Project and the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center illustrate this shift. BISC's training initiatives aim to "prepare people to run winning, transformational campaigns that leave leadership and infrastructure behind long after Election Day." Rather than relying on locally-sourced volunteers, ballot measure campaigns can now draw from a mobile class of trained professionals who apply similar methods across different state contexts. Between 2016 and 2022, The Fairness Project supported 34 ballot measure campaigns across multiple states, winning 32 of them according to their public reporting. This organizational infrastructure exists not just for moving money across state lines, but for deploying expertise, messaging frameworks, and campaign models that have proven successful elsewhere.

On the conservative side, organizations like Americans for Prosperity, the State Policy Network, and ALEC coordinate across states to oppose measures they view as expanding government or restricting business interests. These organizational networks create what scholars describe as "policy feedback loops" where successful strategies in one jurisdiction quickly disseminate to similar contests elsewhere (Hertel-Fernandez 2020; Hacker and Pierson 2019). Well-resourced business-aligned opposition campaigns can tap into established networks of corporate donors and professional consultants, while community-based opposition efforts must build support through different mechanisms.

This professionalized environment creates distinctive tensions for campaign leaders who must navigate multiple, sometimes conflicting, institutional identities. Heaney and Rojas (2015) demonstrate how political actors holding multiple institutional identities experience systematic tensions when those identities come into conflict. Their analysis of antiwar activists who were simultaneously Democratic partisans reveals that more institutionalized identities typically proved more durable than movement identities when the two pulled in

different directions. Campaign leaders face similar dynamics: they operate simultaneously as locally-grounded electoral efforts and as nodes within national policy networks. They must manage relationships with local volunteers and voters who value grassroots authenticity, national donors seeking policy change across states, and professional consultants providing specialized expertise. These competing relationships create distinctive legitimacy challenges, particularly when local and national identities point toward different strategic priorities.

Resource constraints compound these tensions in ways that structural factors alone cannot explain. Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012) demonstrate that political participation depends not just on individual motivation but on organizational infrastructure enabling effective mobilization. Their emphasis on the "upper-class accent" of American civic life proves directly relevant here. Campaigns with limited local fundraising capacity or weak advocacy networks face systematic disadvantages in accessing sophisticated polling, data analytics, and media strategies required for contemporary electoral competition. These resource disparities create genuine strategic dilemmas for campaign leaders committed to local democratic participation but confronting well-funded opposition. Campaign leaders operating without access to established organizational infrastructure described feeling disadvantaged regardless of their ability to attract individual donors, because they lacked the institutional capacity to convert donations into effective campaign operations.

The geographic dimensions of campaign legitimacy add another layer of complexity to these organizational challenges. Cramer (2016) reveals how place-based consciousness generates political identities organized partly around perceived domination by distant elites. Her ethnographic work in rural Wisconsin shows that geographic resentment operates independently of economic self-interest, creating deep suspicion toward external political influence. Ternullo (2024) extends this analysis by examining how local political identity involves complex attachments to community, shared experience, and collective self-governance beyond simple residence. Political legitimacy in place-based communities depends partly on perceived authenticity, or whether political actors genuinely belong to and understand local

contexts. When campaigns deploy resources and expertise originating outside these place-based communities, they risk undermining the local connections that provide democratic legitimacy. Yet purely local campaigns may lack resources necessary to compete effectively in contemporary political environments, creating genuine strategic dilemmas. Campaign leaders operating in contexts where such geographic identities run strong must carefully manage relationships with out-of-state funders to avoid activating place-based resentments. Several leaders interviewed for this study described precisely these dynamics, where funding geography became more politically salient than funding amounts in shaping local media coverage and opponent attacks. This tension between local authenticity and competitive viability emerged repeatedly in interviews, particularly among first-time campaign leaders who entered direct democracy with expectations about grassroots organizing that proved difficult to sustain amid resource demands of modern campaigns.

How campaign leaders justify accepting external resources while maintaining claims to local representation requires attention to organizational legitimacy theory. Deephouse et al. (2017) point to the importance of coherent justification frameworks that allow political actors to manage tensions between institutional ideals and operational realities. In the context of externally-funded direct democracy campaigns, leaders construct legitimacy narratives that reconcile local democratic participation with nationalized resource mobilization. However, rather than developing stable legitimacy frameworks, campaign leaders in these interviews demonstrated systematic ambivalence reflecting ongoing negotiation between competing democratic values.

Rosanvallon (2011) distinguishes between different forms of democratic legitimacy, such procedural, substantive, and reflexive, that political actors might strategically deploy when justifying their roles. Campaign leaders defending external funding might emphasize procedural legitimacy (carrying out the campaign the "right" way), substantive legitimacy (advancing democratic values like equality or rights), or reflexive legitimacy (remaining accountable to local constituencies despite external resources). Campaign leaders accepting

guidance from out-of-state funders while claiming to represent local interests navigate complex territory between these representational modes. Several leaders interviewed for this study articulated precisely this logic, describing external funding as enabling them to give voters meaningful choices they would otherwise lack due to resource constraints.

The analysis that follows examines how campaign leaders with different backgrounds operating in different contexts navigate these tensions, how they justify strategic choices to multiple constituencies, and what their experiences reveal about the evolving relationship between local democratic processes and broader patterns of political influence.

The Interviews

This study draws on in-depth interviews with 40 campaign leaders across 19 states whose direct democracy campaigns received substantial out-of-state funding. These interviews provide insight into how campaign organizations navigate the practical challenges and strategic considerations that arise when managing significant external financial support in ostensibly local democratic processes.

While the quantitative analysis in previous chapters established patterns of out-of-state contributions and donor motivations through surveys, understanding how campaign leaders navigate these funding relationships required a different methodological approach. In-depth interviews offered what Berg and Ternullo (2025) identify as a key strength of qualitative methods. As they argue, qualitative approaches "allow researchers to tailor research design in the service of understanding puzzles, adapting as new puzzles emerge during the course of fieldwork, and uncovering new facets of political behavior by carefully engaging with voters' meaning-making" and that "... qualitative research has the unique potential to illuminate and explore differences that might be lost in the statistical average" (Berg and Ternullo 2025, 2). Campaign leaders face genuine tensions between maintaining local legitimacy and accessing external resources, between operational imperatives and normative commitments about democratic participation. These tensions do not reduce to simple accep-

tance or rejection of external funding based on fixed principles, but rather involve adaptive processes of justification and strategic reasoning that vary with professional experience, resource constraints, and political context. Interviews allowed campaign leaders to articulate these complex navigation strategies in their own terms, revealing patterns of strategic compartmentalization, legitimacy management, and adaptive organizational practices that would remain invisible in aggregate funding data or survey responses. The open-ended interview format proved essential for discovering how leaders construct coherent narratives that reconcile competing pressures, how their frameworks evolve through campaign experience, and how professional socialization shapes their understanding of proper democratic participation in direct democracy campaigns.

Sample Selection Strategy

The sampling framework employs a stratified purposive approach designed to capture campaigns where out-of-state influence was most pronounced while ensuring representation across key analytical dimensions. Since the corpus includes over 600 unique ballot measures, with certain states representing a much larger fraction of this total than others, I decided to take a sample of these measures to pull interview subjects from. Campaigns were eligible for inclusion if they met three primary criteria: receiving at least 40% of total funding from out-of-state sources, occurring during the 2016-2022 period to support memory recall and ensure data consistency, and having at least five unique out-of-state donors to avoid what I call the "Bloomberg effect" where a single wealthy donor dominates the funding landscape.

The 40% threshold was established to identify campaigns with a clear presence of out-of-state donations and to further narrow the pool of cases for analysis. This cutoff helps distinguish between campaigns that rely meaningfully on external funding versus those receiving only minimal out-of-state contributions. The minimum donor requirement ensures that selected campaigns represent genuine patterns of external support rather than isolated large donations from individual contributors.

The Sample

From the pool of eligible campaigns, I implemented a three-dimensional stratification scheme using policy subject area, campaign position (support/opposition), and electoral outcome. Policy subject area diversification prevents overrepresentation of highly funded campaigns in populous states on highly salient issues (such as marijuana, same-sex marriage, abortion, etc.).

The campaign position dimension distinguishes between campaigns supporting and opposing ballot measures, recognizing that the strategic considerations and funding dynamics often differ systematically between proponents seeking policy change and opponents defending the status quo. Opposition campaigns frequently face different challenges in message framing and coalition building, while support campaigns must navigate the complexities of advocating for policy innovation. The electoral outcome stratification ensures representation of both successful and failed campaigns, which is crucial for understanding how out-of-state funding influences campaign effectiveness and for capturing the full range of strategic adaptations that emerge when external resources either facilitate or fail to produce electoral success.

Within each stratum defined by the three-dimensional framework, I randomly selected campaigns using proportional allocation to achieve a target sample of 100 campaigns. I allocated each stratum a proportional share of the total sample, ensuring even small strata had at least one representative campaign. I then conducted random sampling within each stratum using a fixed seed for reproducibility. When the initial allocation exceeded the target sample size, I conducted a final random selection to reach exactly 100 campaigns while maintaining representativeness across all stratification dimensions.

Table 6.1: Sample Descriptive Statistics

Characteristic	Value
Total Campaigns	100
Mean Out-of-State Funding %	73.4%
Median Out-of-State Funding %	76.6%
Range Out-of-State Funding %	40.2% - 100%
Support Campaigns	67
Opposition Campaigns	33
Most Common State	CO
Most Common Policy Subject	Substance Use & Regulation
States Represented	20
Policy Subjects Represented	14

The 100 campaigns analyzed represent a substantial subset of ballot measure contests where out-of-state funding played a dominant role, with external contributions comprising nearly three-quarters of total funding on average. The sample encompasses campaigns from multiple states and policy areas, with support campaigns and successful campaigns each representing roughly two-thirds of the total. Colorado and substance use regulation issues appear most frequently, though the sample maintains diversity across geographic and thematic dimensions to ensure broad applicability of findings.

I recruited campaign leaders from these campaigns using contact information from Secretary of State archives. In most states, campaign finance disclosure laws require campaigns to make leadership contact information publicly available. In cases where the contact information was either out of date or inaccurate, I utilized LinkedIn to locate and message campaign leaders. Leaders from states like California and Colorado were more eager and willing to participate in interviews, thus I spent extra time recruiting campaign leaders from states not typically known for their ballot measure activity to ensure variation. The University of Oregon Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this recruitment

protocol to ensure compliance with human subjects research standards.

The geographic concentration of interviews in states like Colorado and California reflects the underlying distribution of ballot measure activity rather than sampling bias alone. States vary dramatically in their use of direct democracy mechanisms, with some conducting dozens of campaigns per cycle while others see ballot measures only sporadically. This structural reality creates an unavoidable tension between achieving geographic diversity and capturing sufficient cases of externally-funded campaigns. Campaign leaders operating in high-activity direct democracy states likely possess different professional networks, institutional knowledge, and normative expectations about campaign conduct than their counterparts in states where ballot measures represent exceptional political events. These institutional differences may systematically influence how leaders interpret and respond to external funding relationships, potentially confounding individual-level factors with state-level political cultures. The findings presented here should be understood as most directly applicable to campaigns in states with regular ballot measure activity, where professionalized campaign infrastructure has developed over time. Whether similar patterns hold in states with sporadic direct democracy usage remains an empirical question requiring additional research.

Participants and Procedure

While 51 campaign leaders initially agreed to participate, I ultimately conducted 40 interviews over a five-month period from April to August 2025. Some participants were unable to follow through due to personal commitments, while others became unavailable because of scheduling conflicts and other logistical factors.

The interview sample represents 40 campaigns across 19 states, with out-of-state funding averaging 73.3% of total contributions. Support campaigns comprise 26 of the sample, with 14 opposition campaigns.

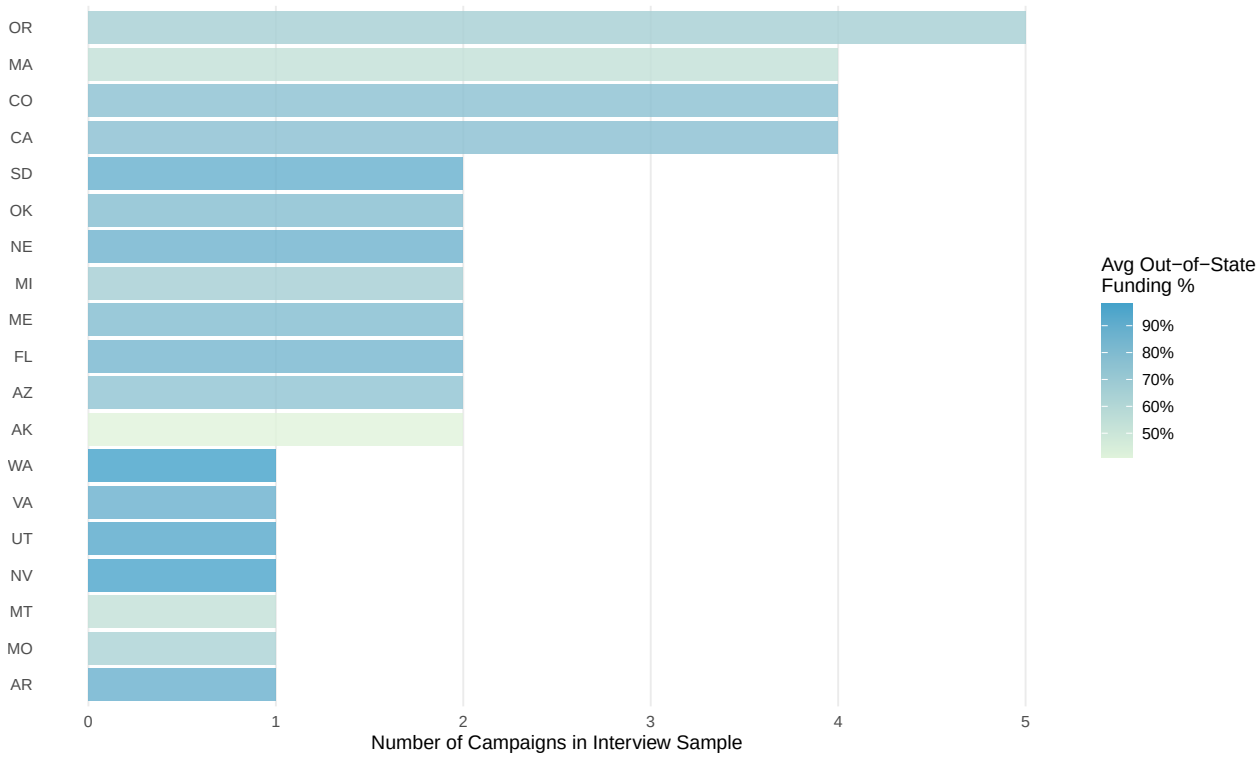


Figure 6.1: Geographic Distribution of Interview Sample

In five cases, interviewees referred me to other campaign staff members who had deeper expertise in my areas of inquiry—specifically campaign finance and donor relations. In one of these instances, the referral was a member of a well-established organization specializing in consulting for direct democracy campaigns. Two of the campaigns in the sample had the same campaign manager, which provided interesting insight into the dynamics of experienced campaign leaders. I conducted all interviews remotely using video platforms and phone calls, with sessions averaging 66 minutes. All participants provided informed consent for recording and transcription. To protect their privacy, I have anonymized their responses, names, and any identifying information. Throughout this chapter, I refer to these individuals and their campaigns using pseudonyms and general descriptive terms.

The interview approach used a funnel structure, starting with broad questions about campaign organization and gradually narrowing to focus on specific aspects of out-of-state donor relationships and their operational implications. Since campaign finance records were

publicly available and had been analyzed prior to interviews, questions were designed to let leaders naturally discuss their experiences without feeling interrogated about specific donor relationships. Initial questions established rapport through open-ended inquiries about campaign origins: "Tell me about how this campaign came together" and "What were the biggest challenges you faced early on?" These often naturally led participants to discuss resource constraints without prompting. Operational dynamics were explored indirectly through questions like "How did you build your campaign team?" and "What surprised you most about running this kind of campaign?" When participants mentioned consultants or strategic guidance, follow-ups explored these relationships: "How did you connect with them?" and "What was that working relationship like?" Legitimacy questions used hypothetical framings: "Some people argue that modern campaigns have moved away from grassroots organizing—what's your take on that?" This approach allowed participants to engage with normative questions without feeling personally attacked, often generating the reflective and sometimes defensive responses evident in the findings.

Analytical Approach

For analysis, I employed a two-stage approach combining manual and computational methods. The manual coding process began immediately after conducting the first five interviews, allowing for iterative refinement of the analytical framework as data collection continued. I transcribed all interviews using Atlas.ti transcription service, then verified transcripts against audio recordings to ensure accuracy.

The initial coding phase followed an inductive approach informed by grounded theory principles (Charmaz 2006). I read each transcript multiple times, first for general comprehension and then with increasing focus on specific research questions about external funding relationships, organizational autonomy, and legitimacy construction. During the first complete reading of each transcript, I wrote analytic memos documenting initial impressions, emergent themes, and questions for further exploration.

The first round of coding employed open coding techniques, wherein I assigned descriptive labels to meaningful segments of text without imposing predetermined categories. These initial codes remained close to participants' own language and conceptual frameworks. For example, when a campaign leader discussed accepting guidance from external consultants, I coded segments with descriptive labels like "deference to expertise" or "consultant recommendations" rather than immediately categorizing these as instances of "autonomy constraint." This approach preserved the nuance in how different leaders characterized similar relationships and allowed patterns to emerge organically from the data.

After completing open coding for all 40 transcripts, I conducted a second round of focused coding to identify recurring themes and consolidate codes into broader analytical categories (Saldaña 2009). This process involved comparing coded segments across interviews to identify both commonalities and variations in how campaign leaders discussed external funding. Several major thematic categories emerged: professional experience and campaign expertise, resource mobilization strategies, strategic compartmentalization, legitimacy frameworks and justifications, geographic symbolism and place-based identity, and temporal evolution of perspectives. I paid particular attention to cases that appeared to contradict emerging patterns, using these as opportunities to refine theoretical interpretations. For example, several opposition campaign leaders expressed strong confidence in external support rather than the ambivalence more common among other participants. Rather than treating these as anomalous cases, I explored what distinguished these campaigns—ultimately revealing that opposition leaders defending business interests developed fundamentally different legitimacy frameworks than those representing community-based resistance.

Throughout the coding process, I maintained detailed documentation of analytical decisions and tracked the frequency with which different themes appeared across interviews, noting whether patterns varied systematically with campaign characteristics like policy area, electoral outcome, or state context. I also noted instances where leaders became defensive, used qualifying language, or shifted emotional register when discussing particular topics.

These meta-linguistic patterns often revealed tensions between stated positions and underlying discomfort, particularly around questions of campaign autonomy and democratic legitimacy.

To supplement the qualitative coding, I conducted computational sentiment analysis examining emotional register across interview segments. This analysis tested whether the patterns of ambivalence and confidence observed through close reading manifested systematically in leaders' language choices. Using the Bing sentiment lexicon in R, I calculated net sentiment scores and variance measures for segments discussing external funding, campaign strategy, democratic values, and local legitimacy. The analysis confirmed key qualitative findings: experienced leaders maintained more consistent emotional registers (lower sentiment variance) compared to novice leaders, and opposition campaigns showed notably higher variance when discussing local legitimacy compared to support campaigns. These computational patterns validate interpretations from qualitative coding while demonstrating that sentiment analysis alone cannot capture the strategic reasoning and contextual nuance that close reading reveals. Full methodological details and figures appear in Appendix 6A.

Qualitative Findings

Structural Dynamics: Professional Experience and Resource Dependence

Campaign leaders in this study operated within resource environments that fundamentally shaped their approach to external funding. Resource dependence theory suggests that organizations facing uncertain resource environments develop strategic responses based on their institutional capacity and experience managing external dependencies (Pfeffer and Salancik 2006). The forty campaign leaders interviewed demonstrated how these dynamics play out in contemporary direct democracy, revealing systematic differences in how professional experience, organizational networks, and resource constraints influence strategic decision-making.

Among the leaders interviewed, those with experience managing multiple ballot measure campaigns across jurisdictions approached external funding relationships through operational rather than normative lenses. These experienced leaders viewed resource mobilization as a technical challenge requiring strategic management rather than a philosophical dilemma about democratic legitimacy. As one seasoned campaign director who has managed initiatives across multiple western states explained: "People who get upset about outside money don't understand how expensive it is to get people to pay attention to what's on the ballot. A thirty-second TV spot costs the same whether you're explaining a measure about abortion or selling hamburgers. The difference is McDonald's has a marketing budget and we're trying to crowdfund a constitutional amendment."

This operational framing reflects organizational learning that accumulates across campaign cycles. Professional leaders in this sample demonstrated what might be termed "strategic compartmentalization", maintaining deliberate boundaries between funding relationships and campaign messaging decisions. A support campaign leader from the Midwest noted, "we have a network of funders who we can reach out to if we need support, people we know align with our cause. They don't want to be involved with the process, they just want to see us succeed." This compartmentalization appeared consistently among experienced leaders across different states, policy areas, and campaign positions, suggesting it represents an adaptive response to the dual challenges of resource mobilization and local legitimacy maintenance that characterize contemporary ballot measure campaigns.

Prior literature on nationalization and the localized nationalization theory I develop in this project highlights a national networks of organizations who help to make the issue salient for donors or bring the issue into national light. Contemporary direct democracy operates within an organizational environment where professionally managed advocacy organizations can rapidly direct attention and resources toward state-level campaigns regardless of geographic location (Skocpol 2003). I asked campaign leaders about how they approached raising money and how their partnerships with social movement organizations and other

networks came to be. The experienced leaders interviewed understood how to navigate this infrastructure effectively. For those with experience running these types of campaigns and engaging with established national networks, cultivating these relationships was often part of the initial planning process. One leader on a high-profile social issue campaign explained their strategic approach: "Oh we reached out to them right away. We'd worked with a bunch of these guys before and they know how to make the measure visual to voters and those who want to help support our cause." Another added: "I don't know about all of that social media stuff, but they do." These leaders recognized that national organizations possessed both the technical expertise for modern campaigning and the mobilization capacity to reach geographically dispersed donor networks.

The timing and nature of organizational engagement varied systematically across campaigns, demonstrating a division in access to the same organizational infrastructure experienced campaigns appeared to harness with ease. Yet not all campaigns accessed this organizational infrastructure with the same awareness or enthusiasm. Leaders I spoke to who were managing their first ballot measure campaign exhibited different patterns, displaying what organizational theorists recognize as "liability of newness" (Stinchcombe 1965). These leaders expressed surprise at the disconnect between their initial expectations about the direct democracy process and the resource requirements they encountered. A first-time campaign manager in the Pacific Northwest described this realization: "I started this because I am passionate about [ISSUE] and was pretty blown away by how much it took to get in the game. Then you start asking around to people who've led these races before and realize you need polling data and television ads and suddenly you're taking meetings with consultants from D.C. and New York."

The leaders facing this learning curve were not political novices—many held positions as lawyers, public servants, or even elected officials in their everyday careers. Their early perception of direct democracy mirrored how much of the public views it: people making policy change in their own communities through grassroots organizing. The gap between these

expectations and campaign realities appeared consistently across first-time leaders in this sample. While Progressive Era reformers envisioned direct democracy as enabling grassroots citizen lawmaking, the contemporary reality involves median campaign budgets exceeding $2 million for contested measures, with professional consultants, polling operations, and media buys comprising the bulk of expenditures.

For some campaigns, engagement with national organizations emerged only after initial struggles to gain traction. These leaders described a period of uncertainty before connecting with established networks on their issue. One first-time leader explained that "it took us a bit of time to get the recognition and attention we wanted, and it was after a chapter of [ORGANIZATION] partnered with us that we started to feel like we were getting momentum." The presence of these networks proved essential for many campaign leaders interviewed. Leaders described partnerships with national organizations working on drug decriminalization and voting rights, while others mentioned collaboration with chapters of the Sierra Club or IBEW. Whether campaigns cultivated these relationships during initial planning or connected with national networks later in the process, what leaders consistently emphasized was the importance of having access to this organizational infrastructure at all.

The differential access to organizational infrastructure connects to broader patterns of issue salience and donor mobilization. The localized nationalization framework developed in Chapter 2 argues that interstate giving concentrates where value-laden content, symbolic national significance, and organizational infrastructure converge. The campaign leaders interviewed illustrated how this third condition operates in practice. Some issues like environmental protection, reproductive rights, and gun control appear to create the buzz that attract these well-developed advocacy networks that can identify promising ballot measure opportunities and mobilize supporters nationally. Leaders working on these issues described relatively straightforward paths to accessing resources, even when managing their first campaign. One leader on an environmental measure noted: "we didn't necessarily 'work' with them, but they found out about our measure and blasted it all over their social media,

which I think made a ton of donations pour in."

In contrast, leaders working on lower-salience issues described feeling systematically disadvantaged. The organizational infrastructure simply did not exist for their policy domains in the same way it did for nationally salient issues. One leader working on a state governance reform measure explained: "I remember trying to find a way to make ranked-choice voting sound interesting for a social media post we were doing, and I was like 'god, I wish we were dealing with like weed or something right now—this would be so easy." Another leader on an election reform measure shared this sentiment, noting: "no, we didn't work with any national or state organizations or anything, we weren't that type of measure." For these campaigns, the absence of established organizational networks characterized their fundraising reality. They worked with individual large donors who contributed substantial amounts, but their campaign lacked the mobilization infrastructure that could generate broad-based small-dollar giving- a pattern that may have reflected the nature of their issue type rather than a strategic necessity.

This variation in organizational access reveals how certain issues activate the nationalized infrastructure that makes substantial interstate giving possible while others remain largely local affairs despite similar legal structures and democratic significance. It's not that ranked-choice voting matters less than policy regarding affirmative action, but voters and donors alike find it harder to connect emotionally with electoral mechanics than with issues touching on rights, morality, or economic survival. Certain issues activate emotional and values-based responses more readily than others, creating systematic funding advantages that have little to do with policy merit or local support.

The resource environments leaders in this sample navigated appeared to influence how they understood their strategic flexibility and relationship to external funders. Campaign leaders operating in what they perceived as resource-constrained environments described feeling limited in their strategic options and more dependent on external support. A campaign director working on a progressive initiative in a conservative state described how this per-

ceived dependence influenced their relationship with donors: "When [the donor] approached us with a check for [AMOUNT], they had all these opinions about our messaging, our targeting, our strategy. And when they're providing a significant portion of your budget, and have clearly done this before, their opinions carry a lot of weight."

The differences between experienced and novice campaign leaders documented here suggest that organizational experience influences how leaders navigate external dependencies. The experienced leaders interviewed demonstrated capabilities for managing resource relationships while preserving operational autonomy, maintaining strategic compartmentalization and cultivating relationships with national funders and advocacy organizations that provided resources without overwhelming local control. Novice leaders were still developing both the knowledge of how to navigate these relationships and the professional networks that would facilitate accessing resources while maintaining autonomy.

Normative Dynamics: Democratic Legitimacy and Representation

Much of what critics of direct democracy lament is that these processes have become "captured" by national or special interests, oftentimes through money, which fundamentally distorts the localized ideal of what ballot measure campaigns are "supposed to be". In these interviews, I wanted to tease out how campaign leaders themselves conceptualized out-of-state money and involvement. Campaign leaders' responses to external funding reflect distinct conceptions of democratic legitimacy that operate alongside the structural resource constraints described above. These normative frameworks shape how leaders interpret their roles and justify strategic choices, revealing how they understand democratic participation and political representation in contemporary ballot measure campaigns. Yet rather than applying stable philosophical positions, the leaders interviewed demonstrated systematic ambivalence that reflects ongoing negotiation between competing democratic values.

Organizational legitimacy theory suggests that actors develop coherent justification frameworks to manage tensions between institutional ideals and operational realities (Deep-

house et al. 2017). In the context of externally-funded direct democracy campaigns, leaders must reconcile local democratic participation with nationalized resource mobilization. The leaders interviewed consistently expressed discomfort with aspects of modern campaigning while simultaneously defending their strategic choices. A campaign leader working on voter reform reflected: "how you do something matters just as much as what you're trying to accomplish. But then you're sitting there looking at polling numbers and you realize that if you don't hire the right guys, you're going to lose, and then you start to consider some changes."

This ambivalence reveals genuine internal tensions rather than mere rhetorical positioning. The leader acknowledges that process matters normatively while also recognizing that losing means the policy change won't happen. This creates pressure to compromise on process values to achieve substantive goals, suggesting that theoretical commitments adapt under practical pressures rather than providing stable guidance for strategic decision-making among the leaders in this sample.

The temporal dimension of legitimacy construction proved particularly revealing. Leaders described evolving perspectives as campaigns progressed, indicating that democratic frameworks develop through experience rather than preceding it. A healthcare campaign leader explained: "I'll admit I had a pretty rosy picture of this process when I first started, but you quickly realize that's not how any of this works anymore. There is a lot at stake involved in these types of campaigns." The shift from initial idealism to pragmatic realism captures how exposure to campaign realities reshapes normative frameworks. When outcomes feel consequential, leaders become more willing to adopt professional campaign practices that may conflict with grassroots democratic ideals.

Another leader captured this ongoing negotiation: "We did have some conversations in the middle there that we might've lost the plot of the whole thing, especially when the opposition started posting all of these things about how much money we were raising, but I also wasn't willing to lose over it." This reveals the internal deliberations leaders conduct

as they navigate contemporary campaign realities, balancing concerns about whether their approach has diverged from original intentions against the imperative to win. The legitimacy frameworks that emerge appear contingent on campaign experiences rather than reflecting pre-existing philosophical commitments about democratic participation.

These temporal patterns connect to the broader transformation of direct democracy described in Chapter 2. When novice leaders describe evolving from grassroots idealism toward pragmatic acceptance of professional campaign infrastructure, they're undergoing personal transformations that mirror direct democracy's shift from Progressive Era localism toward contemporary nationalized engagement. These individual trajectories accumulate into systemic change, as each campaign cycle produces more leaders socialized to view external funding as normal campaign practice rather than a one-off case. The normative frameworks don't simply adapt, they may fundamentally reconstruct what counts as legitimate democratic practice in contemporary direct democracy.

Opposition campaign leaders in this sample demonstrated similar patterns of ambivalence, often expressing appreciation for professional campaign support while questioning whether such approaches undermined the authentic local representation they claimed to defend. One explained: "This really was about preserving our state's values, but there was just no way to compete without it." The juxtaposition of "our state's values" with acceptance of external resources reveals the tension: the campaign's legitimacy rests on defending local autonomy, yet achieving that goal requires accepting the very outside support that opponents could frame as illegitimate interference.

However, opposition leaders working on campaigns aligned with major business interests exhibited notably different legitimacy frameworks. These leaders expressed confidence that professional campaign support served broader public interests, even when local opinion polling suggested mixed community sentiment. A leader working against environmental regulations explained: "Sometimes you have to help people see past the immediate appeal of these measures to understand what they'd actually mean for jobs and the economy. Our

supporters understand the real stakes here."

This contrast reveals a more paternalistic approach to democratic representation, where leaders position themselves as protecting communities from policy choices that might seem appealing but would ultimately prove harmful. Such leaders appeared comfortable with extensive professional campaign management, viewing expert guidance as necessary for educating voters about complex policy consequences. The variation between ambivalent and confident opposition leaders suggests that democratic legitimacy frameworks depend on the underlying interests being represented rather than simply campaign position. Opposition campaigns defending established business interests developed different justification strategies than those representing community-based resistance to policy change.

The leaders interviewed developed systematic approaches to managing tensions between external resources and local credibility. These legitimacy management strategies involved reframing external support within narratives of democratic participation rather than defending against corruption charges. One leader described their communications strategy: "Instead of apologizing for outside support, because at this point it's inevitable, we talked about why this issue matters to people everywhere. We made it about shared values." This reframing transforms potential vulnerability into evidence of broad resonance. Rather than defending funding sources, the campaign shifted conversation to why the issue attracts support across geographic boundaries, emphasizing ideological alignment over territorial identity.

Another leader explained their approach to media coverage: "Every time they brought up funding sources, we pivoted to talking about the policy stakes. We made the story about what the measure would accomplish and what it could mean for change about [issue] at large." The pivot strategy moves discussion from process questions about funding to substantive questions about policy outcomes. By framing the measure's significance as extending beyond state boundaries—"change about [issue] at large"—the leader implicitly justifies why out-of-state actors would care enough to contribute, while simultaneously avoiding defensive

postures about funding sources.

In one interesting case, when asked about the involvement of a certain national organization in the planning and strategy of their campaign, a leader remarked: "Oh we worked with the chapter here in our state. They might have had help from their national headquarters or whatever to help with fundraising, but we had help from their volunteers to gather signatures and send mailers." This framing is revealing in how it constructs legitimacy through organizational layering. In emphasizing collaboration with the local chapter and highlighting volunteer activities, the leader presents the relationship as rooted in state-based organizing. The national organization's role in fundraising becomes backgrounded, treated as incidental rather than central to the campaign's operation. This rhetorical move allows the leader to access the resources that national organizational infrastructure provides while maintaining the appearance of locally-driven grassroots mobilization.

These reframing strategies appeared across both experienced and novice leaders, support and opposition campaigns, successful and unsuccessful contests in this sample. The prevalence suggests they may represent emerging best practices within professionalized campaign environments. Rather than simply defending external funding against corruption charges, many leaders actively reframe it as evidence of broad support and national significance. This rhetorical shift from defensive to assertive suggests organizational learning as campaigns develop communication strategies adapted to nationalized politics. Leaders emphasize shared values and policy stakes that transcend state boundaries, learning which messages resonate with distant donors while managing local legitimacy challenges.

The geographic dimension of legitimacy challenges operated through symbolic rather than material mechanisms in these interviews. Campaign funding sources create perceptions about political identity and values that often matter more than the actual operational reality of donor influence. Voters and opponents react to funding from certain states or cities based on what they perceive those places to represent politically, regardless of whether donors actually influence campaign decisions. One leader working on marijuana legalization

explained: "We had this article come out talking about support from donors from different states like California and then.. suddenly we weren't talking about criminal justice reform or medical access we were talking about whether West Coast potheads were trying to corrupt our kids. Even though most of our funding actually came from all over the place, they couldn't drop this California shit. It didn't matter where the money really came from—California became shorthand for everything they didn't like."

This account illustrates how geographic symbolism may function in polarized political environments. The symbolic power of California operates independently of actual funding patterns—"most of our funding actually came from all over the place"—yet opponents fixated on California specifically because it represented broader cultural and political orientations they opposed. Contemporary political polarization operates through spatial as well as ideological dimensions, with certain locations functioning as shorthand for political identities that extend beyond specific policy content (Ternullo 2024). The leader's frustration reveals how geographic framing can derail substantive policy discussion, transforming debates about criminal justice reform into cultural conflicts about whose values should govern the state.

Yet some campaign leaders actively worked to reframe geographic origins of funding in ways that neutralized potential backlash. One leader described countering attacks about out-of-state money: "Actually, I had a lot of conversations with voters and some of them actually liked seeing the national support. They saw it as validation that [issue] was an important issue, and it could happen to them someday." This framing inverts the typical opposition narrative. Rather than external funding representing outside interference, it signals national importance and broader relevance. The phrase "it could happen to them someday" subtly invokes policy diffusion dynamics ("what happens in this state matters for others") while positioning voters as part of a larger movement rather than isolated local actors.

This framing parallels with how donors themselves understand their participation. As Chapter 5 documents, donors rarely frame contributions as intervention in distant state affairs but rather as engagement with causes larger than any single state. By emphasizing

national significance and shared values, campaigns can leverage the same nationalization dynamics that mobilize interstate giving to deflect criticism about funding sources. The strategy transforms what opponents frame as illegitimate outside interference into evidence that the issue transcends state boundaries in ways that make broad participation appropriate.

The variation in how geographic symbolism operates across different political contexts appeared in these interviews. In some states, particularly those with cosmopolitan identities or histories of policy innovation, national support signaled sophistication and broad relevance. Leaders in these contexts faced fewer legitimacy challenges from external funding, as local political culture was more receptive to being part of national policy conversations. In states where place-based identity centered on resistance to external influence, identical funding patterns triggered backlash. The leaders working in these contexts had to navigate more carefully, emphasizing local voices and community support even while accessing resources from national networks.

These findings indicate that campaign leaders navigate competing legitimacy claims through ongoing adaptive processes rather than applying stable normative frameworks. The leaders interviewed operated within complex symbolic terrain where funding sources became markers of cultural and political authenticity, requiring simultaneous navigation of resource acquisition challenges and legitimacy management tasks. Understanding these dynamics requires recognizing that normative frameworks about democratic participation develop through practical experience rather than preceding it. The relationship between external funding and democratic legitimacy involves ongoing negotiation rather than fixed institutional arrangements, at least among the leaders in this sample.

The implications extend beyond individual campaign effectiveness to broader questions about democratic representation in nationalized political environments. The sophistication with which the campaign leaders I spoke to navigate these tensions suggests that such navigation has become a systematic feature of direct democracy rather than an exceptional circumstance. Leaders learn which messages resonate with voters and donors, how to com-

partmentalize funding sources from messaging decisions, when to reframe external support as evidence of broad resonance rather than outside interference, and how to manage geographic symbolism in politically polarized contexts. These adaptive organizational practices represent responses to institutions operating dually as local and national venues.

Discussion and Conclusion

Campaign leaders interviewed for this study navigate a fundamental tension: they mobilize resources from geographically dispersed donors while maintaining credibility with local voters who may view external support as threatening authentic self-governance. This navigation proves neither simple nor uniform. Professional experience, resource environments, policy contexts, and campaign positions shape how leaders approach these challenges, producing variation in both strategic practices and normative frameworks.

The variation documented here illuminates organizational mechanisms through which direct democracy has adapted to nationalized politics. When experienced leaders develop strategic compartmentalization in which they attempt to maintain boundaries between funding sources and messaging decisions, they're creating institutional buffers that allow campaigns to access national resources while trying to preserve operational autonomy. When novice leaders describe evolving from grassroots idealism toward pragmatic acceptance of professional campaign infrastructure, they're undergoing personal transformations that mirror direct democracy's broader shift from Progressive Era localism toward contemporary nationalized engagement. These individual trajectories accumulate into systemic change, as each campaign cycle produces more leaders socialized to view external funding as normal campaign practice rather than exceptional deviation.

The role of organizational infrastructure proves critical for understanding how localized nationalization operates in practice. The theory developed throughout this project argues that interstate giving concentrates where value-laden content, symbolic national significance, and organizational infrastructure converge. The campaign leaders interviewed

illustrated how this third condition functions. Some issues have well-developed advocacy networks that can identify promising ballot measure opportunities and mobilize supporters nationally, while others lack such infrastructure despite similar democratic significance. This creates systematic inequalities in which voices gain access to direct democracy, with patterns stemming not primarily from policy merit or local support but from whether issues activate the organizational capacity that enables substantial interstate participation.

The legitimacy management strategies leaders employ prove particularly revealing. Rather than simply defending external funding against corruption charges, many leaders interviewed actively reframe it as evidence of broad support and national significance. This rhetorical shift from defensive to assertive suggests organizational learning as campaigns develop communication strategies adapted to nationalized politics. Leaders emphasize shared values and policy stakes that transcend state boundaries, learning which messages resonate with distant donors while donor expectations gradually shape how campaigns present themselves publicly.

Geographic symbolism operates as a particularly potent dimension of these legitimacy challenges. Funding from California or New York activated place-based resentments for some that mattered independently of whether donors actually influence campaign decisions. Contemporary political polarization operates through spatial as well as ideological dimensions, with certain locations functioning as shorthand for cultural and political orientations that extend beyond specific policy content. Yet this symbolic geography varies across contexts. In states where cosmopolitan identity or policy innovation are valued, national support can signal sophistication and broad relevance; in states where place-based identity centers on resistance to external influence, identical funding patterns may trigger backlash.

The variation between support and opposition campaigns adds additional complexity. Support campaigns advocating for rights expansion accessed legitimacy narratives about democratic empowerment that resonate across audiences. Opposition campaigns defending business interests developed more paternalistic frameworks positioning professional manage-

ment as protecting communities from harmful policies. Yet opposition campaigns representing community-based resistance to policy change demonstrate patterns more similar to support campaigns, experiencing similar ambivalence about external resources. These differences suggest that legitimacy frameworks depend on underlying interests being represented rather than simply campaign position.

The interviews provide evidence for how campaign leaders function as active mediators rather than passive conduits, developing practices that simultaneously enable accessing national resources and maintaining local legitimacy. Their strategic compartmentalization, evolving normative frameworks, bifurcated messaging strategies, and geographic sensitivity represent organizational responses to institutions operating dually as local and national venues. These responses prove neither uniform nor stable, varying with experience and context while evolving through campaign cycles.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

In January 2026, the New York Times published a profile of Brian Heywood, a hedge fund founder who had spent $11 million since 2022 putting conservative policy proposals before Washington state lawmakers and voters (Griffin 2026). The article captures many of the tensions this dissertation has documented. Heywood described himself as simply trying "to fix stupid stuff that's happening" in an increasingly progressive state. His opponents called him "an oligarch" engaging in political opportunism. Progressive organizers worried about being forced to refocus on culture-war issues during midterm elections. Political scientists observed that "there's no such thing as pure grassroots anymore" and that "anybody who wants to get something passed needs a wealthy patron." The story presents one view of how direct democracy now operates: a California transplant using his fortune to influence Washington politics, framing his participation as legitimate engagement with state policy while critics questioned whether out-of-state wealth should shape local decisions.

However, this vignette tells only *part* of the story. While this research confirms the prevalence of external participation, the analysis reveals a far more nuanced picture that resists simple narratives of oligarchic capture or democratic corruption. The patterns documented here suggest that out-of-state funding operates through multiple motivations, serves diverse functions, and produces varied effects depending on policy domain, state context, and campaign strategy. This conclusion synthesizes those findings, considers their broader implications, acknowledges limitations inherent to the research design, and charts

directions for future inquiry.

Revisiting Core Findings

The empirical landscape documented throughout this research tells a story about how American politics operates when formal institutional boundaries remain fixed while political communities and issue networks increasingly transcend them. The campaign finance dataset at the heart of this project covers nearly two decades and over one million individual contributions, revealing patterns that challenge conventional understandings of direct democracy as primarily local governance mechanisms.

Between 2006 and 2022, donors residing outside state borders contributed over $3 billion to ballot measure campaigns across all twenty-six states with citizen initiative processes. Rather than representing an aberration confined to high-profile contests, external funding has emerged as a systematic feature of contemporary direct democracy. Temporal analysis demonstrates growth both in absolute terms and as a proportion of total campaign receipts.

Geographic patterns proved especially revealing. External funding concentrates in measures addressing same-sex marriage, abortion access, environmental regulation, tax policy, and labor rights. These policy domains share characteristics identified as central to localized nationalization: they involve moral or ideological commitments that transcend state boundaries, connect to national partisan divides, produce policy outcomes with potential spillover effects, and engage organized advocacy networks operating across multiple states simultaneously. Rights-based measures, especially those involving LGBTQ+ equality and reproductive access, generated the highest proportions of external funding relative to total campaign resources. Environmental initiatives drew cross-state funding particularly when connected to climate change debates, while economic measures attracted substantial external support when framed through broader ideological lenses.

The survey of out-of-state donors illuminates motivations that existing theories of political contribution had not adequately captured. These donors described participation

driven less through instrumental calculations about policy influence and more through expressive desires to register support for principles they viewed as transcending geographic boundaries. Many framed their contributions not as interventions in distant political contests but as engagement with national questions temporarily instantiated in particular state campaigns. Survey results suggested that ideological proximity matters more than geographic distance in shaping contribution decisions, particularly for measures involving rights, values, or moral positions. A progressive donor in Massachusetts felt closer affinity to abortion rights campaigns in Montana than to tax policy debates in neighboring New Hampshire. Conservative donors in Texas prioritized marriage measures in California over local school board elections. These patterns indicate that political geography increasingly operates through ideological networks rather than territorial proximity.

Interviews with campaign leaders reveal sophisticated navigation of tensions between local authenticity and access to national resources. Campaign professionals described careful management of relationships with out-of-state donors and national advocacy organizations, seeking to secure external support without appearing captured by distant interests. The interviews exposed variation in strategic approaches. Some campaigns embraced national framing openly, while others worked deliberately to maintain local presentation even while receiving substantial external resources. This variation reflected different contextual factors, including state political cultures, policy domain characteristics, and organizational capacities. Leaders in states with strong populist traditions emphasized grassroots mobilization narratives even when receiving majority funding from distant sources. Those operating in states with more nationalized political cultures acknowledged external support more readily, framing it as legitimate engagement with issues of broader significance.

These findings demonstrate that direct democracy functions not as purely localized governance but as something more complex and contested. State boundaries define voting eligibility but may not define relevant political communities. The institutional architecture remains territorial while political engagement increasingly operates through networks

organized around issues rather than geography. This creates a dual reality where direct democracy serves simultaneously as mechanism for state-level policy determination and as venue for national political contestation. Neither function completely dominates the other, producing instead a hybrid form where local and national dynamics coexist in tension.

Theoretical Contributions and Limitations

The concept of localized nationalization developed in this research offers explanatory purchase on dynamics extending beyond direct democracy. The framework identifies conditions under which state-level political processes may become sites for national political expression while retaining formally local character. Three factors emerged as critical: policy domains connecting to broader political identities, decisions producing or threatening cross-state spillovers, and presence of organized networks capable of mobilizing resources across state boundaries. These conditions interact rather than operate independently. Environmental measures become nationalized not simply because they address climate change but because climate change connects to partisan identity, produces clear spillover effects, and engages well-organized advocacy networks. Marriage equality measures attracted external funding because they simultaneously invoked rights discourse, threatened or promised policy diffusion across states, and mobilized networks on both sides organized nationally.

This theoretical approach makes several contributions to existing scholarship. It extends research on political nationalization beyond voting behavior to campaign finance participation, revealing how national frames motivate not just how people vote locally but where they contribute across jurisdictional boundaries. The findings complement work on electoral nationalization in congressional and state legislative contests (Hopkins 2018; Rogers 2016; Moskowitz 2021) showing similar dynamics operate in direct democracy contexts while revealing participation patterns unconstrained by geographic residence requirements that limit voting behavior.

The research also speaks to campaign finance scholarship's questions about small-

dollar giving and expressive participation. The consumption model of political contributions (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003) finds support in patterns where donors acknowledge minimal individual impact while prioritizing values expression. The findings extend this framework showing how expressive utility derives from participating in nationally-framed policy movements regardless of geographic location, with implications for understanding donor behavior beyond traditional representative politics.

The framework also illuminates how permeable federalism operates in practice. While scholars theorize federalism's practical permeability (Gardner 2014; Bulman-Pozen 2014), this research documents concrete mechanisms through which state boundaries become functionally porous for political participation. The findings reveal that policy diffusion operates not just through governmental learning or economic competition (Shipan and Volden 2008; Boushey 2010) but through organized political participation treating state campaigns as battles in broader policy wars.

Finally, this research suggests that transformations in political organization identified in party politics may extend to direct democracy campaigns. National organizational infrastructure enables resource mobilization that would have been impossible under earlier civic models emphasizing local chapters (Skocpol 2003; Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2025). This organizational capacity interacts with behavioral nationalization to produce the participation patterns observed, suggesting that understanding contemporary political engagement requires attending to both individual political psychology and organizational infrastructure.

However, the theoretical framework also carries inherent limitations. First, the research design centers donor behavior and campaign dynamics, treating direct democracy primarily through the lens of political participation and resource mobilization. This focus illuminates important patterns but says little about whether cross-state participation influences electoral outcomes or policy implementation beyond campaign finance patterns themselves. We can document where money flows but not definitively trace its effects on voter behavior or policy results.

The localized nationalization concept treats external participation as a general phenomenon, though meaningful distinctions likely exist among different types of cross-state engagement. A Montana resident contributing to an Idaho environmental initiative may differ from a Manhattan donor supporting California housing policy in ways that future research could explore. Geographic proximity, cultural similarity, and economic integration between states could refine the framework's explanatory power. Regional patterns, cultural affinities, and economic interdependencies offer promising directions for extending the theory.

Questions about generalizability arise because the framework centers American federalism specifically. Federal systems vary considerably in how they allocate authority, structure representation, and enable citizen participation. Even within American federalism, the framework developed here focuses on direct democracy specifically rather than all state-level political processes. Whether similar patterns characterize gubernatorial elections, legislative campaigns, or administrative proceedings requires separate investigation.

The temporal scope of the analysis, while substantial, may be insufficient for fully understanding secular trends. The research covers 2006-2022, capturing important variation but beginning well after the internet had already transformed political communication and organization. We cannot determine whether patterns documented here represent permanent features of twenty-first century politics or transitional dynamics during a particular period of technological and partisan transformation. Longer time series would strengthen confidence in claims about enduring characteristics versus historically contingent circumstances.

Finally, the theoretical framework makes normative neutrality a methodological commitment, describing patterns without definitively adjudicating whether they represent desirable or problematic developments for democratic governance. This analytic stance enables clear empirical investigation but leaves unresolved fundamental questions about legitimate boundaries of political participation. The research documents that out-of-state donors view their contributions as legitimate expressions of political engagement, while some campaign leaders and state residents view the same behavior as inappropriate interference. The theo-

retical framework explains why both perspectives emerge but does not resolve which deserves priority when they conflict.

Methodological Considerations

The research design combined large-scale quantitative analysis with survey and interview methods, each contributing distinct insights while also introducing particular constraints.

The campaign finance database enabled systematic documentation of contribution patterns impossible through case studies alone. Yet data quality varied considerably across states, reporting requirements changed over time, and some potentially relevant information remained unavailable despite extensive data collection efforts. Some states provided detailed contribution records with standardized formats and rigorous validation. Others offered inconsistent reporting, missing data fields, and variable enforcement of disclosure requirements. These discrepancies mean patterns documented here may understate true variation across states if reporting quality correlates with political characteristics.

The survey of out-of-state donors achieved a response rate typical for political science research but still relatively modest in absolute terms. Response bias may systematically skew findings if donors with particular motivations or characteristics proved more likely to complete the survey. The reliance on retrospective self-reporting introduces potential memory effects, social desirability bias, and post-hoc rationalization of contribution decisions. Donors may remember their motivations as more principled and their decision processes as more deliberative than they actually were at the time. Experimental or observational designs capturing contribution decisions in real time would address some limitations, though such approaches introduce their own complications and constraints.

The interviews with campaign leaders provided rich qualitative material but necessarily covered only a fraction of relevant campaigns. The selection criteria prioritized variation across states, policy domains, and outcome types rather than attempting representative

sampling. This approach illuminated important dynamics but means findings may not generalize to the full population of ballot measure campaigns. Additionally, campaign leaders have institutional positions and professional identities that may shape their accounts in ways differing from other campaign participants like grassroots volunteers, paid consultants, or opposing coalition members.

Perhaps most significantly, the research treats contribution behavior as the primary empirical focus without directly measuring campaign effects on voter behavior or policy outcomes. We cannot determine from this evidence whether external funding actually influences how citizens vote on ballot measures, whether measures attracting substantial out-of-state support pass at different rates, or whether implemented policies differ when campaigns received more external resources. The decision to focus on contribution patterns rather than electoral effects reflected both practical constraints and theoretical priorities, but it means important questions about consequence remain open.

Directions for Future Research

The findings generated here suggest numerous productive avenues for extending this research agenda. Five directions seem particularly promising for advancing understanding of direct democracy, campaign finance, and political participation in federal systems.

Interviews as Extended Investigation

The interview component captured campaign leader perspectives through relatively brief conversations focused on specific campaigns. These discussions revealed complex strategic reasoning, organizational tensions, and normative ambivalence that merit deeper investigation.

A book-length project or expanded study could pursue several complementary directions. Longitudinal interviews following campaigns from formation through electoral outcome and potential policy implementation would illuminate how external funding relation-

ships develop over time and how campaign dynamics shift as contests progress. Following a campaign from petition signature gathering through post-election implementation would reveal how external funding relationships evolve and how dependence on distant resources shapes strategic choices at different campaign stages.

Expanding the range of interviewees beyond campaign leaders would provide additional perspectives. Grassroots organizers, paid consultants, major donors, volunteer coordinators, opposition leaders, and local journalists all occupy positions enabling distinct insights into how external funding shapes campaign dynamics. Their accounts might corroborate, complicate, or contradict patterns documented in campaign leader interviews.

Comparative case studies examining matched campaigns with varying levels of external funding within the same policy domain and time period could isolate effects of out-of-state resources more effectively. Such research would require intensive engagement with multiple campaigns simultaneously, but it would enable stronger causal inference about how external funding specifically influences campaign strategy, coalition formation, and local legitimacy concerns.

Interviews with out-of-state donors themselves, beyond the survey methodology employed here, would capture their decision-making processes and self-understandings more richly. Extended conversations would illuminate motivations and meanings in ways survey responses cannot fully capture.

Comparing Survey Results Across Studies

This research produced original survey data on out-of-state donor motivations, but placing these findings in conversation with other survey-based studies of political contributors would strengthen understanding of how ballot measure donors compare to other types of political participants. Several specific comparisons warrant systematic investigation.

Do out-of-state ballot measure donors exhibit similar patterns of ideological polarization as donors to congressional candidates? The current findings suggest ideological position-

ing matters substantially for cross-state contribution decisions, but direct comparison using comparable measurement instruments would test whether ballot measure donors represent a distinctly ideological subset of the broader donor pool.

Research on donor motivations in candidate elections distinguished among policy-oriented, access-seeking, and social participation motives for political giving. Do ballot measure donors distribute across these motivation types differently than candidate donors? The binary policy outcomes and absence of ongoing access opportunities in direct democracy might produce distinct motivation profiles. Access-seeking motivations should theoretically be absent or minimal for ballot measure donors, but social participation motives might be stronger if direct democracy enables clearer expression of political identity.

Additionally, comparing demographic characteristics, participation histories, and self-reported political identities between out-of-state ballot measure donors and other types of political contributors would reveal whether this represents a distinctive form of participation or an extension of more general donor behavior. Do the same individuals contribute both to candidates in their home districts and to ballot measures in distant states, or do these represent separate donor pools? The answers would inform understanding of how direct democracy fits within broader landscapes of political participation and campaign finance.

Comparing Ballot Measure and Candidate Contributions

While this dissertation focused exclusively on direct democracy campaigns, systematic comparison with candidate election finance would illuminate important dynamics. Several specific questions deserve investigation.

Do the same donors contribute to both ballot measures and candidate campaigns, or does each domain attract distinct pools of contributors? Matching donor records across institutional contexts would reveal whether ballot measure participation represents specialized behavior or part of more general patterns of political engagement.

How do geographic patterns of contribution differ between candidate and ballot mea-

sure campaigns? Out-of-state giving in congressional elections follows particular patterns related to partisan competitiveness, ideological extremity, and national party strategy. Do ballot measure contributions exhibit similar geographic patterns, or does direct democracy's policy-specific character produce different spatial distributions of external support?

Comparative analysis of contribution amounts, timing, and donor characteristics would test whether institutional differences between candidate and direct democracy campaigns produce distinct donor behaviors. Candidate campaigns typically involve longer time horizons, more complex strategic environments, and ongoing relationships between elected officials and supporters. Ballot measures offer single-shot policy decisions with no subsequent access opportunities.

Examining the same policy domains across both institutional contexts would be particularly revealing. Consider environmental policy: do environmental advocates contribute more readily to candidates promising climate action or to ballot measures implementing specific environmental regulations? Do contribution patterns vary across institutional venues, and what explains that variation?

Additional Trajectories

Beyond these primary directions, several other extensions merit mention. Investigation of internal organizational dynamics within national advocacy networks would illuminate how resources flow across state campaigns and what coordination mechanisms enable cross-state mobilization. Analysis of how voters in states receiving substantial external funding for ballot measures subsequently view direct democracy institutions would indicate whether external participation affects institutional legitimacy. Research examining how state legislators and governors respond to ballot measures that passed with substantial external support would clarify whether implementation politics differ as a function of campaign funding sources. Studies of policy diffusion investigating whether ballot measure outcomes in one state influence campaign formation or contribution patterns in other states consider-

ing similar measures would advance understanding of how direct democracy operates as an interconnected system rather than isolated state-by-state contests.

Normative Implications

This dissertation has maintained largely descriptive and analytic focus, documenting patterns rather than definitively pronouncing judgment on whether external participation enhances or undermines democratic governance. Yet the empirical findings raise normative questions that warrant explicit consideration even if they resist conclusive resolution.

Three perspectives emerged repeatedly throughout the research, each carrying democratic legitimacy yet reaching different conclusions about appropriate boundaries for participation. One view, articulated by many campaign leaders working to maintain local authenticity, holds that direct democracy's democratic character depends on local control over campaigns and outcomes. From this perspective, substantial external funding undermines the legitimacy of results even when the electoral process itself remains confined to state residents. Direct democracy was designed to empower citizens to shape policy in their own communities; external resources distort this through amplifying voices from beyond relevant political boundaries.

A second perspective, expressed by many out-of-state donors and national advocacy leaders, argues that contemporary policy questions transcend state boundaries in ways that justify and perhaps require cross-state engagement. From this view, state ballot measures that determine whether same-sex couples can marry, whether abortion remains accessible, whether environmental regulations address climate change, or whether workers can organize collectively involve fundamental questions that legitimately concern citizens beyond state borders. Geographic accident of residence should not foreclose participation on issues with national significance or moral weight.

A third position, reflected in scholarship on federalism and democratic theory, acknowledges tensions between these perspectives while emphasizing institutional design con-

siderations. This view notes that federal systems necessarily create some spillover effects and interdependencies, that mobile populations mean state policies affect future residents and former residents, and that experimentation within federal systems produces information benefiting broader political communities. From this perspective, the question is not whether any cross-state participation is legitimate but rather what levels and forms of external engagement threaten local autonomy versus productively engaging with policy interdependencies.

The empirical findings documented in this research do not resolve these normative debates, but they do indicate that appeals to "local control" require qualification in contemporary context. State ballot measure campaigns already involve professionalized consultants, sophisticated media operations, and substantial organized resources regardless of funding sources. The choice facing local advocates is rarely between authentic grassroots campaigns and external professionalization but rather between external resources flowing through national issue networks versus external resources flowing through professional campaign consultancies accessible to well-resourced local groups.

Similarly, claims that fundamental rights or moral principles justify external participation confront the question of which issues rise to that level and who decides. If abortion and marriage equality justify cross-state engagement, what about tax policy, education spending, or criminal justice reform? Drawing principled boundaries around appropriate external participation proves difficult because political actors reasonably disagree about which policies involve rights versus preferences, which decisions affect primarily local versus national communities, and which issues merit moral versus pragmatic framing.

The research suggests that direct democracy increasingly functions as venue for both local governance and national political expression, creating irreducible tensions that institutional tinkering cannot fully resolve. Tightening contribution restrictions might reduce external funding but would also constrain participation from those genuinely affected or interested in policy outcomes beyond state borders. Loosening restrictions would enable fuller expression of national political engagement but might undermine local democratic character.

The challenge is not finding technical solutions that eliminate tensions but rather developing political practices that enable both local autonomy and broader engagement while maintaining transparency about trade-offs and power dynamics.

Final Reflections

American direct democracy has traveled far from Progressive Era visions of local citizens gathering petitions and deliberating about policy choices in their own communities. Yet what we observe reflects not capture or corruption but adaptation to political conditions where state boundaries remain legally significant yet practically permeable, where policy decisions have increasingly networked consequences, where communication technology enables real-time participation across distance, and where national political identities shape how citizens interpret local questions. The substantial out-of-state contributions documented here represent millions of individual decisions from citizens engaging with political questions they viewed as significant enough to warrant financial support. These donors saw ballot measures in other states as legitimate objects of political participation, whether because they affected fundamental rights, produced spillover consequences, connected to broader political commitments, or simply interested them. Their contributions enabled campaigns that might not otherwise have formed, messages that might not otherwise have reached voters, and outcomes that might not otherwise have occurred.

Yet these contributions came from individuals who could not vote on the measures they funded, who rarely had direct stakes in policy outcomes, and whose participation sometimes generated resentment from state residents viewing external engagement as inappropriate interference. This dissertation has sought to document these patterns systematically, explain them theoretically, and illuminate tensions inherent to direct democracy in conditions of political nationalization. The findings reveal direct democracy operating simultaneously as local institution and national political venue, producing hybrid governance form that serves multiple functions imperfectly rather than any single function ideally. Whether this

transformation strengthens or weakens democracy depends on whose democracy we center in analysis. Perspectives emphasizing geographic community, territorial boundaries, and local control view external participation as decline from democratic ideals. Those emphasizing issue communities, affected interests, and expressive participation see external engagement as appropriate adaptation to interconnected political realities. Still others focus on institutional design, competitive dynamics, and power relationships, treating external funding as one factor among many shaping whether direct democracy enables popular sovereignty or reinforces existing political advantages.

The research documented here cannot settle these questions definitively, but it insists that normative evaluation engage seriously with empirical realities rather than romanticized accounts of how direct democracy once operated or aspirational visions of how it might function ideally. Direct democracy today involves cross-state funding, national advocacy networks, professional campaign management, and sophisticated strategic coordination. These are features not bugs in the system, systematic patterns not aberrations, adaptations not corruptions. Understanding contemporary direct democracy requires grappling with these realities and the tensions they produce rather than wishing them away or pretending they remain exceptional circumstances confined to controversial campaigns. American federalism has always involved permeability alongside autonomy, interconnection alongside independence. Direct democracy in the twenty-first century makes these tensions visible in campaign finance disclosures, forces them into public debate through media coverage of external funding, and requires both democratic theorists and political practitioners to develop frameworks adequate to political life that transcends territorial boundaries while remaining organized through territorial institutions.

This dissertation represents one contribution to that ongoing project, documenting how external participation manifests empirically, explaining why it concentrates in particular domains, and illuminating tensions it produces. The task of developing normative frameworks adequate to contemporary circumstances, institutional reforms that address genuine

concerns without foreclosing legitimate participation, and political practices that balance competing democratic values remains unfinished. These questions will only grow more urgent as political life continues evolving in ways that strain institutional arrangements designed for earlier eras. Understanding that evolution clearly, documenting it systematically, and grappling with it seriously represent essential foundations for whatever responses ultimately emerge.

Appendix

Appendix 3A: Policy Classification Schema

Table 3A.1: Complete List of Policy Categories Used in Dataset Classification

Policy Categories	Policy Categories	Policy Categories
Abortion-Ban	Education-K12	Health Care-General,Health Insurance-General
Abortion-Definition of Person	Education-K12 Funding	Health Care-General,Health Insurance-Health Care Choice
Abortion-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-General,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax,Tax & Revenue-General	Health Care-General,Health Insurance-Individual Mandates
Abortion-General,Abortion-Definition of Person	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Government Bonds-General	Health Care-General,Health Insurance-Universal Coverage
Abortion-Parental Notification	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Infrastructure-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Health Care-General,State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-General,Tobacco-General
Abortion-Waiting Period	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Business	Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Business,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax
Abortion-Waiting Period,Abortion-Parental Notification	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-General	Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-General
Affirmative Action-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax	Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-General,Transportation-General
Agriculture-Animal Welfare	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-General
Agriculture-Animal Welfare,State Government-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-Taxation	Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-Taxation
Agriculture-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tobacco-Taxation	Health Care-General,Tobacco-General
Agriculture-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Government Bonds-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-K12	Health Care-General,Tobacco- Taxation
Agriculture-General,Government Bonds-General,Health Care-General	Education-K12 Funding,Education-K12,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Health Care-General,Tort Laws-General
Agriculture-Genetically Modified Food	Education-K12 Funding,Gambling-Expansion	Health Insurance-Employer Mandates
Agriculture-Genetically Modified Food,Agriculture-General	Education-K12 Funding,Gambling-Expansion,Tax & Revenue-General	Health Insurance-General
Alcohol-General	Education-K12 Funding,Gambling-General	Health Insurance-General,Health Insurance-Employer Mandates
Alcohol-General,Business Regulation-General	Education-K12 Funding,Government Bonds-General	Health Insurance-General,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-Taxation
Alcohol-General,Local Government-General	Education-K12 Funding,Government Bonds-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Health Insurance-Health Care Choice
Alcohol-Restriction	Education-K12 Funding,Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Health Insurance-Individual Mandates
Alcohol-Restriction,Alcohol-General	Education-K12 Funding,Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Health Insurance-Individual Mandates,Health Insurance-Health Care Choice
Alcohol-Taxation	Education-K12 Funding,Health Care-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Health Insurance-Universal Coverage
Alcohol-Taxation,Tax & Revenue-General	Education-K12 Funding,Infrastructure-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Housing-General
Alcohol-Taxation,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Education-K12 Funding,Marijuana-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Housing-General,Local Government-General
Assisted Suicide-General	Education-K12 Funding,Marijuana-Legalization,Tax & Revenue-General	Housing-General,Property Rights-General
Business Regulation-General	Education-K12 Funding,State Government-Budget	Housing-General,Seniors-General
Business Regulation-General,Energy-General	Education-K12 Funding,State Government-Spending Caps,Tax & Revenue-General	Housing-General,State Government-Budget
Business Regulation-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Education-K12 Funding,Tax & Revenue-General	Housing-General,Veterans-General
Business Regulation-General,Health Care-General	Education-K12 Funding,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Human Services-General
Business Regulation-General,Immigration-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Education-K12 Funding,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax	Human Services-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax
Business Regulation-General,Labor-General	Education-K12 Funding,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Hunting & Wildlife-General
Business Regulation-General,Property Rights-General	Education-K12,Health Care-General	Hunting & Wildlife-General,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax
Business Regulation-General,Tax & Revenue-Business	Education-K12,Immigration-English Language	Immigration-Employment Law
Business Regulation-Insurance	Education-Teacher Quality	Immigration-English Language
Business Regulation-Insurance,Health Insurance-General	Education-Teacher Quality,Education-K12	Immigration-General
Business Regulation-Payday Lending	Education-Teacher Quality,Education-K12,Elections-General	Immigration-General,State Government-General,Transportation-General
Business Regulation-Securities	Education-Teacher Quality,Labor-General	Immigration-General,Tort Laws-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure	Education-Vouchers/Charters	Infrastructure-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Campaign Finance-General	Education-Vouchers/Charters,Education-K12,Elections-General	Infrastructure-General,State Government-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Campaign Finance-General,State Government-Ethics	Elections-General	Infrastructure-General,Tax & Revenue-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Campaign Finance-Public Funding	Elections-General,Gambling-General	Infrastructure-General,Transportation-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Elections-Voting	Elections-General,Legislature-General	Labor-General
Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Legislature-General,Term Limits-General	Elections-General,Legislature-General,Local Government-General,State Government-General	Labor-General,Legislature-General,State Government-Ethics
Campaign Finance-General	Elections-General,Legislature-General,Term Limits-General	Labor-General,State Government-General
Campaign Finance-General,Elections-Initiatives & Referenda	Elections-General,Re-districting-Legislative	Labor-Right to Work
Campaign Finance-General,Employment-Labor Unions,Labor-General	Elections-General,State Government-Ethics	Legislature-Compensation
Campaign Finance-General,Labor-General	Elections-Initiatives & Referenda	Legislature-General
Campaign Finance-General,Legislature-Compensation,State Government-Ethics,Term Limits-General	Elections-Initiatives & Referenda,Gambling-Expansion	Legislature-General,Re-districting-Congressional
Campaign Finance-General,Legislature-General,Re-districting-Legislative	Elections-Initiatives & Referenda,Marijuana-Legalization,Tax & Revenue-Business	Legislature-General,Re-districting-Legislative
Campaign Finance-General,Re-districting-Legislative	Elections-Initiatives & Referenda,Tax & Revenue-General	Legislature-General,State Government-Budget
Campaign Finance-General,State Government-Ethics	Elections-Initiatives & Referenda,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	Legislature-General,State Government-Ethics
Campaign Finance-Public Funding	Elections-Voting	Legislature-General,State Government-General
Campaign Finance-Public Funding,Campaign Finance-Disclosure,Campaign Finance-General,State Government-Ethics	Elections-Voting,Elections-General	Legislature-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax
Campaign Finance-Public Funding,Campaign Finance-General	Elections-Voting,Immigration-General	Legislature-General,Term Limits-General
Constitutional Convention-General	Elections-Voting,Labor-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Adoption
Courts-Elections	Elections-Voting,Tax & Revenue-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-General
Courts-Elections,Courts-General	Employment-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-General,Religion-General,Seniors-General
Courts-Elections,Elections-General	Employment-General,Health Care-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Marriage
Courts-General	Employment-General,Health Insurance-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Marriage,Religion-General
Courts-General,Courts-Elections	Employment-Labor Unions	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Partnership
Courts-General,Criminal Justice-Victims Rights	Employment-Labor Unions,Labor-General	LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Partnership,LGBTQIA Rights & Issues-Marriage
Courts-General,Elections-Initiatives & Referenda,State Government-General	Energy-General	Local Government-General
Courts-General,State Government-General	Energy-General,Environment	Local Government-General,State Government-General
Courts-Term Limits	Energy-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Local Government-General,Tax & Revenue-General
Courts-Term Limits,Term Limits-General	Energy-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Housing-General	Local Government-General,Transportation-General
Criminal Justice-Death Penalty	Energy-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General,State Government-Budget	Marijuana-General
Criminal Justice-Drug Offenses	Energy-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Marijuana-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax
Criminal Justice-Drug Offenses,Criminal Justice-Sentencing	Energy-General,State Government-General	Marijuana-Legalization
Criminal Justice-Drug Offenses,Health Care-General	Energy-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Marijuana-Medical
Criminal Justice-General	Energy-Renewable	Marijuana-Medical,Marijuana-Legalization
Criminal Justice-General,Criminal Justice-Sentencing	Energy-Renewable,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Military-General
Criminal Justice-General,Gambling-General	Energy-Renewable,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Government Bonds-General	Minimum Wage-General
Criminal Justice-General,Immigration-General	Energy-Renewable,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Property Rights-Eminent Domain
Criminal Justice-General,Marijuana-General	Energy-Renewable,Government Bonds-General	Property Rights-Eminent Domain,Property Rights-Regulatory Takings
Criminal Justice-General,Property Rights-General	Energy-Renewable,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax	Property Rights-General
Criminal Justice-General,Property Rights-General,Transportation-General	Energy-Taxation	Property Rights-Regulatory Takings
Criminal Justice-General,Seniors-General	Energy-Taxation,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Property Rights-Regulatory Takings,Property Rights-Eminent Domain
Criminal Justice-Inmate Labor	Energy-Taxation,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Local Government-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Re-districting-Congressional
Criminal Justice-Sentencing	Energy-Taxation,Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Re-districting-Congressional,Re-districting-Legislative
Criminal Justice-Sentencing,Criminal Justice-Drug Offenses	Energy-Taxation,Tax & Revenue-General	Re-districting-General
Criminal Justice-Sexual Offenses	Energy-Taxation,Tax & Revenue-General,Transportation-General	Re-districting-Legislative
Criminal Justice-Sexual Offenses,Criminal Justice-Sentencing	Energy-Taxation,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Re-districting-Legislative,Re-districting-Congressional
Criminal Justice-Sexual Offenses,Tax & Revenue-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General	Religion-General
Criminal Justice-Victims Rights	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Energy-General,State Government-Budget	Seniors-General
Economic Development-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Energy-Renewable,Government Bonds-General	Seniors-General,State Government-General
Economic Development-General,Environment & Natural Resources-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Government Bonds-General	State Government-Budget
Economic Development-General,Government Bonds-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Government Bonds-General,Hunting & Wildlife-General	State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-General
Economic Development-General,Government Bonds-General,Health Care-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Government Bonds-General,Infrastructure-General	State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-General,Transportation-General
Economic Development-General,Government Bonds-General,Labor-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Hunting & Wildlife-General	State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax
Economic Development-General,Government Bonds-General,Local Government-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Military-General	State Government-Budget,Transportation-General
Economic Development-General,Health Care-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Property Rights-General	State Government-Ethics
Economic Development-General,Infrastructure-General,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax	Environment & Natural Resources-General,State Government-Budget	State Government-General
Economic Development-General,Local Government-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,State Government-General	State Government-General,State Government-Budget
Economic Development-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,State Government-General,Tax & Revenue-General	State Government-General,Tax & Revenue-General
Education-General	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-General	State Government-General,Transportation-General
Education-General,Elections-Voting	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax	State Government-General,Veterans-General
Education-General,Energy-General,Government Bonds-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Environment & Natural Resources-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	State Government-Public Fund Investments
Education-General,Government Bonds-General	Family Law-General	State Government-Spending Caps
Education-General,Government Bonds-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax	Family Law-General,Gun Issues-General	Stem Cell Research-General
Education-General,Health Care-General,State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco	Gambling-Expansion	Tax & Revenue-Business
Education-General,Labor-General	Gambling-Expansion,State Government-General	Tax & Revenue-General
Education-General,Tobacco-Taxation	Gambling-Expansion,Tax & Revenue-General	Tax & Revenue-General,Transportation-General
Education-Higher Education	Gambling-General	Tax & Revenue-Income Tax
Education-Higher Education Funding	Gambling-General,Gambling-Expansion	Tax & Revenue-Income Tax,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-General	Gambling-General,State Government-General	Tax & Revenue-Property Tax
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12	Gambling-General,Tax & Revenue-Business	Tax & Revenue-Property Tax,Tax & Revenue-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12 Funding	Gambling-Restriction	Tax & Revenue-Property Tax,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax,Tax & Revenue-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12 Funding,Education-General,Government Bonds-General	Government Bonds-General	Tax & Revenue-Property Tax,Veterans-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12 Funding,Seniors-General,State Government-General	Government Bonds-General,Health Care-General	Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12 Funding,State Government-Budget	Government Bonds-General,Housing-General	Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax,Tax & Revenue-Income Tax
Education-Higher Education Funding,Education-K12 Funding,State Government-Budget,Transportation-General	Government Bonds-General,Infrastructure-General	Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax,Transportation-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Gambling-Expansion	Government Bonds-General,Infrastructure-General,Transportation-General	Tax & Revenue-Tobacco
Education-Higher Education Funding,Government Bonds-General	Government Bonds-General,Local Government-General	Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-Taxation
Education-Higher Education Funding,Government Bonds-General,Tax & Revenue-General	Government Bonds-General,State Government-Budget	Term Limits-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,State Government-Budget	Government Bonds-General,State Government-General	Tobacco-General
Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-General	Government Bonds-General,Tax & Revenue-Sales Tax,Transportation-General	Tobacco-Smoking Ban
Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Property Tax	Government Bonds-General,Transportation-General	Tobacco-Taxation
Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco,Tobacco-Taxation	Gun Issues-General	Tort Laws-General
Education-Higher Education,Education-Higher Education Funding,Tax & Revenue-General	Health Care-General	Transportation-General
Education-Higher Education,Immigration-General	Health Care-General,Education-General,State Government-Budget,Tax & Revenue-Tobacco	Veterans-General

Appendix 3B: In-state Individual Donor Policy Preferences

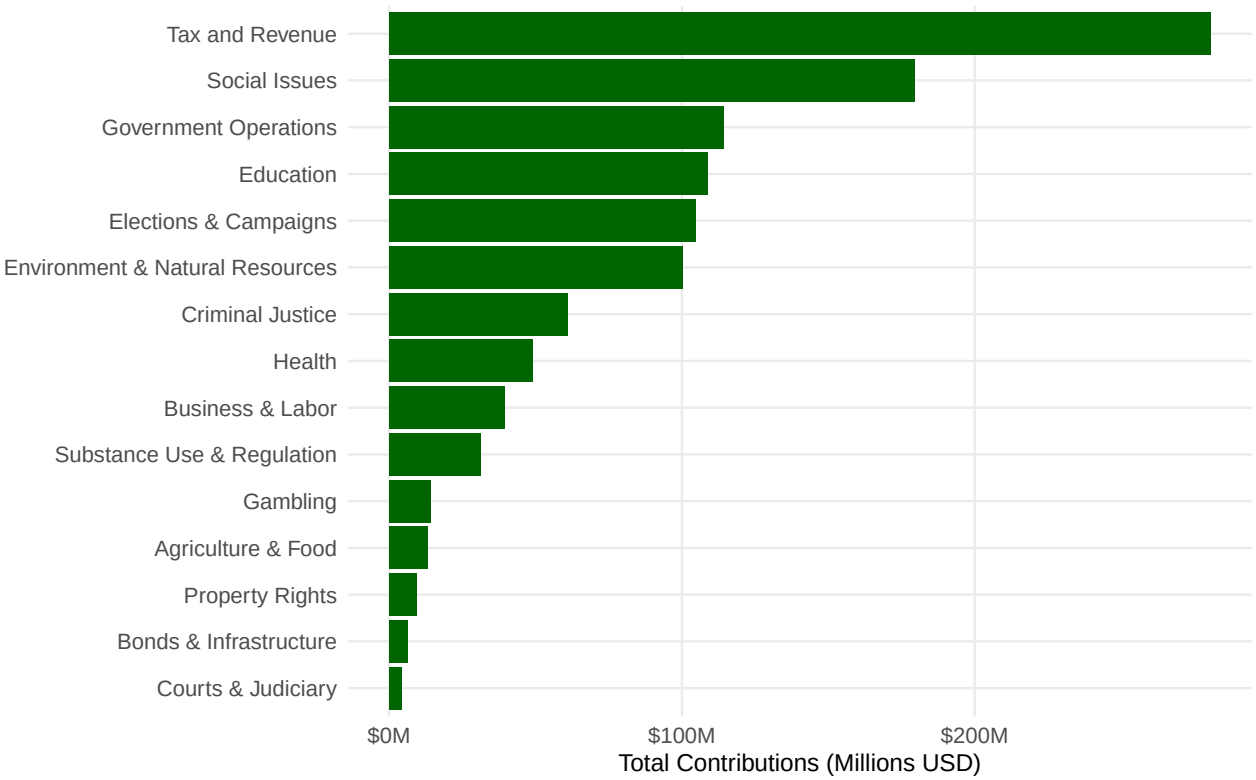


Figure 3B.1: Total Contributions by Policy Domain - Individual Donors Only (Top 15)

Figure 3B.1 presents total contributions by policy domain when restricting the analysis to in-state individual donors only, excluding both out-of-state contributors and all organizational entities (corporations, unions, political action committees, etc.). Comparing this figure to Figure 3.3 in the main text reveals how dramatically donor composition shapes policy domain rankings. Tax and revenue emerges as the top category for in-state individual donors, followed by social issues, while gambling falls near the bottom despite topping the aggregate list. The contrast illustrates that aggregate campaign finance totals can obscure important variation in who mobilizes around which issues. Subsequent chapters investigate whether out-of-state individual donors resemble their in-state counterparts in prioritizing issues like tax policy and social questions, or whether interstate participation follows different patterns reflecting distinct motivations and mobilization mechanisms.

Appendix 3C: State and Temporal Coverage

Table 3C.1: Number of Ballot Measures by State and Year

	Year																	
State	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
AK	3	1	4	0	3	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	20
AR	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	3	24
AZ	16	0	7	0	11	0	8	0	2	0	4	0	4	0	2	0	9	63
CA	15	0	19	6	13	0	13	0	8	0	17	0	14	0	13	1	9	128
CO	12	0	13	0	6	0	3	2	4	1	8	0	13	2	10	3	10	87
FL	3	0	3	0	4	0	6	0	2	0	3	0	7	0	4	0	0	32
ID	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	13
IL	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	10
MA	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	3	0	2	0	4	29
MD	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	12
ME	1	2	2	5	8	3	5	3	7	2	5	3	2	0	2	2	0	52
MI	5	0	2	0	1	0	6	0	3	1	0	0	3	0	1	0	3	25
MO	4	0	3	0	4	0	3	0	8	0	4	0	8	0	2	0	2	38
MS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
MT	2	0	2	0	3	0	3	0	1	0	4	0	3	0	3	0	1	22
ND	2	0	4	0	2	0	6	0	7	0	4	0	3	0	1	0	2	31
NE	7	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	3	21
NM	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	10
NV	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	4	0	2	0	3	24
OH	4	0	3	2	0	2	1	0	1	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	21
OK	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	6	0	3	0	0	18
OR	10	2	14	0	11	0	9	0	7	0	7	0	6	0	4	0	4	74
SD	11	0	4	0	3	0	4	0	3	0	10	0	4	0	2	0	4	45
UT	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	7
WA	3	4	3	2	7	3	5	2	3	2	6	0	4	2	2	0	0	48

Table 3C.2: Total Contributions Received by State and Year (Millions USD)

	Year																	
State	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
AK	3.1	0.2	13.2	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.6	0.0	1.2	0.0	13.8	0.0	27.8	0.0	5.0	85.6
AR	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	4.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	19.9	0.0	6.8	0.0	8.3	46.4
AZ	35.0	0.0	40.7	0.0	8.6	0.0	6.8	0.0	0.7	0.0	27.8	0.0	81.1	0.0	34.3	0.0	20.9	255.8
CA	408.3	0.0	1041.8	205.2	259.4	0.0	522.5	0.0	209.2	0.0	536.1	0.0	467.3	0.0	773.1	95.1	890.7	5408.9
CO	27.5	0.0	118.7	0.0	28.1	0.0	6.2	11.5	58.1	0.0	89.6	0.0	105.7	9.7	66.6	6.5	70.7	598.7
FL	8.6	0.0	12.9	0.0	40.4	0.0	13.6	0.0	20.3	0.0	39.2	0.0	138.1	0.0	32.1	0.0	0.0	305.2
ID	4.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	14.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	37.2
IL	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	20.6	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	123.6	0.0	19.8	170.2
MA	15.8	0.0	11.5	0.0	14.7	0.0	14.9	0.0	33.8	0.0	66.9	0.0	42.9	0.0	61.7	0.0	70.9	333.0
MD	0.0	0.0	8.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	110.4	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	5.8	0.0	0.5	126.3
ME	2.6	2.2	7.4	18.0	16.2	11.8	16.7	0.8	8.1	2.8	33.0	19.5	5.0	0.0	1.8	107.4	0.0	253.1
MI	16.4	0.0	18.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	210.1	0.0	16.9	9.6	0.0	0.0	32.6	0.0	0.9	0.0	79.9	385.0
MO	52.4	0.0	18.3	0.0	10.3	0.0	10.1	0.0	7.9	0.0	16.0	0.0	92.4	0.0	22.1	0.0	8.8	238.2
MS	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.8
MT	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	5.0	0.0	36.7	0.0	17.3	0.0	1.1	63.4
ND	0.1	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	3.2	0.0	11.2	0.0	7.3	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	25.9
NE	6.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	4.6	0.0	3.0	0.0	36.0	0.0	5.7	58.1
NM	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.0	1.1	0.0	6.2	8.5
NV	10.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1	0.0	32.5	0.0	127.8	0.0	1.3	0.0	28.0	209.3
OH	50.1	0.0	86.5	66.3	0.0	55.0	16.4	0.0	0.7	45.3	0.0	87.3	19.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	427.7
OK	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.2	0.0	14.3	0.0	6.2	0.0	0.0	54.3
OR	30.0	21.0	185.8	0.0	39.6	0.0	36.5	0.0	89.9	0.0	68.4	0.0	88.3	0.0	25.7	0.0	13.1	598.2
SD	13.6	0.0	7.3	0.0	1.0	0.0	4.4	0.0	3.0	0.0	12.6	0.0	9.4	0.0	5.0	0.0	15.4	71.6
UT	0.0	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.6
WA	11.0	21.0	9.3	7.8	97.3	30.0	43.1	43.6	18.4	6.0	20.2	0.0	80.5	5.7	2.8	0.0	0.0	396.7

Tables 3C.1 and 3C.2 reveal substantial variation in direct democracy activity across states and over time. California dominates in both measure count and total contributions, with Oregon, Colorado, and Washington also showing consistently high activity. Some states appear only occasionally, reflecting less frequent use of direct democracy mechanisms. Temporal patterns show spikes in even-numbered years, corresponding to general election cycles when most states schedule ballot measures.

Appendix 5A: Survey Instrument and Materials

5A.1 Survey Postcard

The following postcards were mailed to 12,637 out-of-state direct democracy donors. Each postcard included a unique QR code linking to the Qualtrics survey platform, where respondents were shown their specific contribution history.



Figure 5A.1: Survey Postcard - Front

My name is Madison Schroder and I am a Political Science PhD candidate at the University of Oregon.

I am interested in what motivates people to donate to ballot measure campaigns in states where they do not live. Based on public campaign finance records– at some point in the past 5 years, that was you!

Please fill out the *very short* survey using the QR code to the right or by typing the link into your browser.

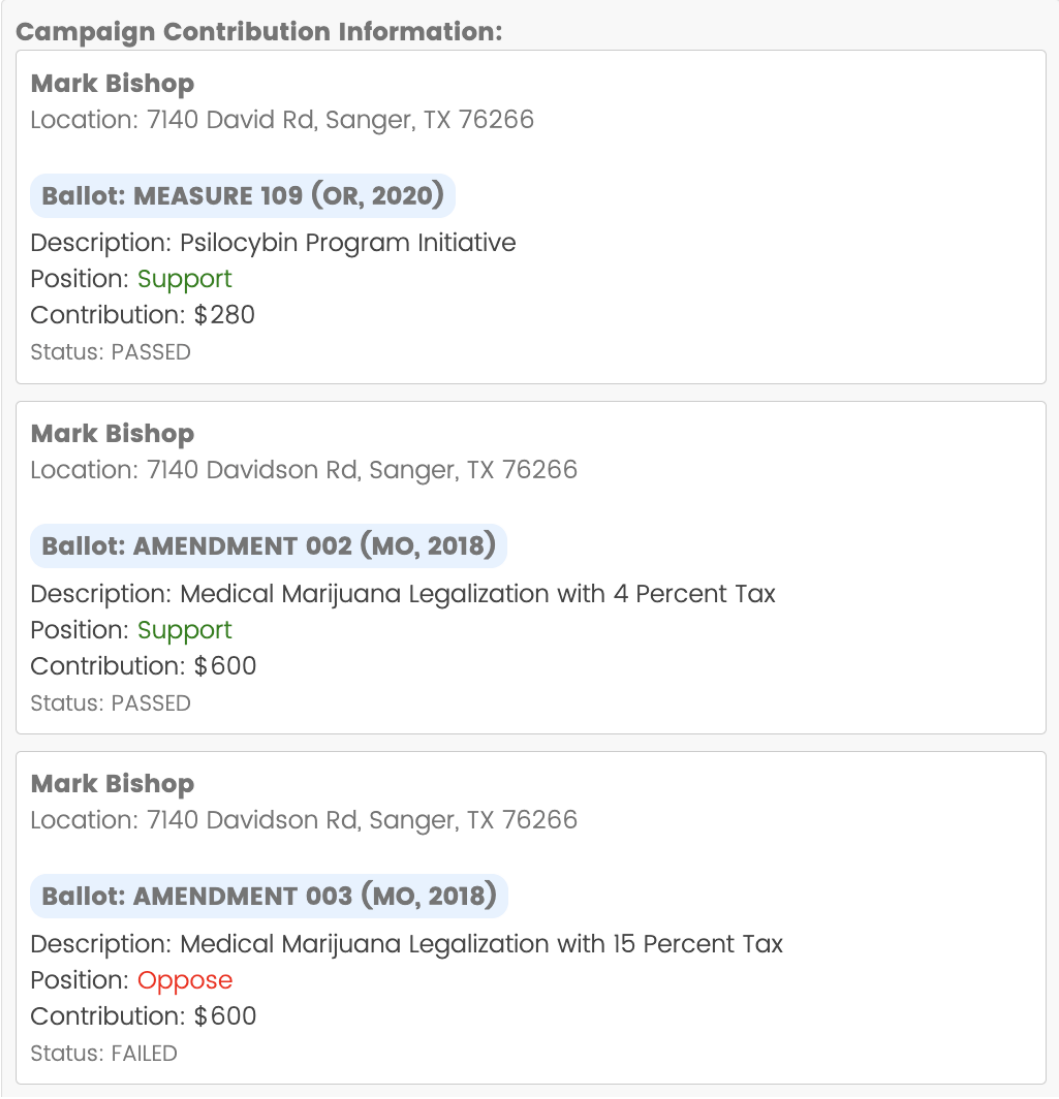
[Blank for address]

For questions, please contact Madison Schroder, mschrod2@uoregon.edu

Figure 5A.2: Survey Postcard - Back

5A.2 Survey Contribution Information

This screenshot presents an example of an actual donor in the dataset and what they see when they scan the QR code on the postcard. This information includes their name, state, measures contributed, a brief description of this measure, amount contributed , support or opposition, and status of the measure for *each* measure they contributed to.



5A.3 Survey Instrument

Introduction Thank you for your interest in my research on out-of-state donations to direct democracy campaigns (such as ballot measures and referenda). My name is Madison

Schroder and I am a Political Science PhD student at the University of Oregon. I am studying how individuals engage with ballot initiatives and referendums across state lines.
I am asking you to be in this research study because based on publicly available campaign finance records, you have contributed to at least two out-of-state direct democracy campaigns between 2016 and 2022.
If you agree to be in this study, you will complete the survey below. This survey should take about 15 minutes to complete and includes multiple-choice questions that gather some general demographic information and questions about your motivations, perceived influences, and views on your decision to contribute out-of-state.
Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will remain completely anonymous. I am not gathering any identifying information. All data will be stored securely and reported only in aggregate form.
There are no identified risks associated with participating in this survey that are greater than the risks you would encounter in everyday life. While there are no direct benefits to you as a participant, your contribution will help advance our understanding of the interconnected political environment in the US.
If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at mschrod2@uoregon.edu or 503-407-9838. For inquiries about your rights as a research participant, you can reach the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board at 541-346-2510.
By proceeding with the survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Demographics 1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school
- High school graduate or GED
- Some college
- College graduate
- Post-graduate degree

2. Which age range describes you:

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54

- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

3. Which category best describes your total household income last year before taxes?

- Under $25,000
- $25,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 to $249,999
- $250,000 or more

4. In politics, as of today, would you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other

5. What racial group best describes you? (Select one)

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian or Asian American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- Prefer not to answer

6. Are you Hispanic or Latino?

- Yes, Hispanic or Latino
- No, not Hispanic or Latino
- Prefer not to answer

7. What gender best describes you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Other/Prefer not to say

Political Engagement 8. Which of the following statements best describes how you follow politics and policy issues?

- I follow local and national politics very closely on a daily basis
- I make an effort to stay generally informed about major policy issues and elections
- I only pay attention to politics during major elections or when major issues arise
- I find most political news frustrating or draining so I mostly tune it out
- I don't have time to follow politics or policy debates regularly

9. During the last year, did you: (Select all that apply)

- Attend a political meeting
- Work on a political campaign
- Donate to a political candidate
- Sign a petition
- Contact an elected official
- Follow politics on social media
- Share political content online
- None of the above

10. Have you ever lived in, or owned property, in the state(s) where you made out-of-state donations? (Select all that apply)

- Yes, I previously lived there
- Yes, I own or have owned property there
- Yes, I have family or friends living there
- None of the above

Information Sources and Research 11. Where did you hear about the ballot measure(s) you contributed to? (Select all that apply)

- Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram)
- Advocacy groups or organizations

- Personal networks or giving circles
- Independent research (actively searched for information)
- Traditional media (TV, newspapers, online news sites)
- Online fundraising platforms (e.g., ActBlue, WinRed)
- Direct campaign outreach (e.g., email, mail, phone call)
- Political blogs or podcasts
- Public figures or celebrities I follow
- Other (please specify)

12. Before donating money to an out-of-state ballot initiative campaign, I: (Select all that apply)

- Read social media commentary and headlines about the initiative
- Check which organizations are endorsing or opposing the initiative
- Follow news coverage about the initiative
- Study pro/con arguments from both sides
- Review campaign materials from the campaign itself
- Read detailed neutral analyses or voter guides
- Review the actual policy language or legislative text
- None of the above

13. When deciding to donate out of state, endorsements from the following groups would strongly compel me to contribute: (Select all that apply)

- Advocacy organizations focused on specific issues
- Issue-specific experts (economists, scientists, researchers)
- Labor unions
- Religious organizations
- Environmental groups
- Business leaders or entrepreneurs
- Social media influencers
- Donor networks or giving circles
- National politicians (e.g., the president, congressional leaders)
- None of the above

Policy Spillover and Expectations 14. When you donate to ballot measures in other states, how often do you expect the policy outcome to eventually influence your own state?

- Always or almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Unsure

15. Which statement better describes your out-of-state donations?

- I donate primarily to help the campaign win and achieve a specific outcome
- I donate primarily to express my values, regardless of likelihood of success
- Both equally

16. Realistically, how much do you think your individual donation(s) affected the outcome of the ballot measure(s)?

- Significantly affected the outcome
- Somewhat affected the outcome
- Had minimal impact on outcome
- Had no impact on outcome
- Unsure

Motivations for Donating For each of the following factors, please indicate how important it is in your decision to donate to out-of-state direct democracy campaigns:

17. Ideological agreement with the ballot measure

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

18. Potential to affect the outcome of the ballot measure

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

19. Presence of unacceptable opponents (individuals or groups supporting the opposite side)

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

20. Closeness of the race (likelihood of the measure passing or failing)

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

21. Belief that supporting the measure will influence future policy decisions in other states, including my own

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

22. Personal connection to the state where the ballot measure is taking place

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

23. Supporting causes I believe in, regardless of where they are

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

Perceived Impact **24. How do you view the impact of your out-of-state donations? (Select all that apply)**

- Influences national political priorities and trends
- Counters the influence of groups I oppose
- Advances long-term political goals beyond any single state
- Expresses my personal values and beliefs
- Directly shapes policies in the specific states where I contribute
- Supports local communities in other states
- Sets precedents that will influence policy in my home state
- None of the above

Views on Direct Democracy **25. Direct democracy (ballot initiatives and referendums) is increasingly part of national political conversations rather than just state or local issues.**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

26. When I donate money to out-of-state ballot initiative campaigns, I generally view the policy outcomes as having implications that will extend beyond that state's borders.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Future Behavior **27. How likely are you to donate money to out-of-state direct democracy campaigns in the future?**

- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely

- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

28. How often do you contribute to elections in your own state?

- Very often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

29. Have you ever contributed to a candidate election outside of your own state or district?

- Yes, multiple times
- Yes, once or twice
- No, never
- Not sure

Open Response 30. Is there anything else you would like to share about your motivations for contributing to out-of-state ballot measure campaigns, or your views on direct democracy more broadly?
[Open text box]

Thank You
Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will contribute to important research on political participation and direct democracy in the United States. If you have any questions about this research, please contact Madison Schroder at mschrod2@uoregon.edu.

Appendix 5B: Multivariate Analysis of Donor Motivations

The descriptive analyses in the main text reveal strong patterns in donor motivations and impact perceptions. To assess whether these patterns hold when simultaneously accounting for multiple donor characteristics, I estimate a series of regression models. These analyses test whether the observed motivational hierarchies persist after controlling for demographics, political engagement, and contribution behavior.

I estimate three models examining different aspects of donor motivations:

Model 1: OLS regression predicting importance rating for "supporting causes I believe in" (1-5 scale)

Model 2: OLS regression predicting importance rating for "potential to affect the outcome" (1-5 scale)

Model 3: Logistic regression predicting whether donor reports giving primarily to express values vs. primarily to achieve outcomes or both equally

Independent variables include:

-Demographics: Education (college degree or higher), household income (categorical), age group

-Political characteristics: Party identification (Democrat, Republican, Independent/Other baseline), political engagement (follows politics very closely)

-Contribution behavior: Total amount contributed (log-transformed), number of states supported, number of measures supported

-Connection to states: Whether donor previously lived in, owned property in, or has family/friends in states where they contributed

Table 5B.1: Multivariate Models of Donor Motivations

	Support Causes		Affect Outcome		Values-Oriented	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Intercept	4.987***	(0.065)	3.583***	(0.165)	0.506	(0.398)
College Degree or Higher	-0.057*	(0.025)	-0.144*	(0.064)	0.042	(0.153)
Income $100k+	-0.002	(0.022)	-0.032	(0.056)	0.105	(0.135)
Age	-0.001	(0.001)	-0.002	(0.002)	-0.002	(0.005)
Democrat	0.003	(0.031)	-0.081	(0.079)	-0.015	(0.190)
Republican	0.016	(0.035)	-0.122	(0.088)	-0.058	(0.211)
Follows Politics Very Closely	-0.025	(0.022)	-0.047	(0.057)	-0.121	(0.136)
Log(Total Contributed)	0.003	(0.006)	0.008	(0.015)	-0.091*	(0.036)
Number of States	0.013	(0.026)	0.111	(0.068)	-0.344*	(0.163)
Number of Measures	-0.024	(0.027)	-0.117	(0.069)	0.382*	(0.172)
Connection to State	-0.059	(0.042)	0.043	(0.107)	0.548*	(0.269)
N	910		910		910	
RÂ²/Pseudo-RÂ²	0.011		0.013		0.012	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models 1-2 are OLS regressions. Model 3 is logistic regression. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Multivariate models assess whether the motivational patterns observed descriptively persist when simultaneously accounting for demographics, political engagement, and contribution behavior. The results confirm that observable characteristics explain virtually none of the variation in motivations ($R\hat{A}^2$<0.02 across models). The dominance of expressive motivations over instrumental considerations holds across education levels, income categories, party affiliations, and contribution amounts, supporting the interpretation that consumption-oriented giving characterizes out-of-state direct democracy donors broadly rather than reflecting particular donor subgroups.

Appendix 5C: Additional Robustness Checks and Sensitivity Analyses

This appendix presents additional analyses addressing response bias, sample representativeness, and robustness of main findings to alternative specifications and sample restrictions. These approaches are adapted from similar studies surveying donors, including Brockman and Malhotra (2020) and Barber (2016).

5C.1: Response Rate Analysis by Donor Characteristics

Table 5C.1: Response Rates by Contribution Amount

Amount Category	Sample Size	Respondents	Response Rate
Under $100	9645	435	4.5%
$100-$500	1719	193	11.2%
$500-$2,000	778	150	19.3%
Over $2,000	495	132	26.7%
Total	**12637**	**910**	**7.2%**

5C.2: Weighted Analysis of Main Findings

Table 5C.2: Comparison of Weighted and Unweighted Motivation Ratings

Motivation	Unweighted Mean	Weighted Mean	Difference
Support causes	4.875	4.874	0.000
Ideological agreement	4.820	4.822	0.002
Affect outcome	3.265	3.266	0.001
Future influence	3.976	3.970	-0.006

Personal connection	2.562	2.561	0.000

Note: Weights adjust for underrepresentation of small-dollar donors in survey responses.

Table 5C.2 shows that main findings are robust to reweighting. Weights were constructed to adjust for the response bias documented in Table 5C.1, where higher-dollar donors responded at substantially higher rates (4.5% for under $100 vs. 27.0% for over $2,000). Small donors were upweighted and large donors downweighted to match the sampling frame's contribution distribution. Differences between weighted and unweighted estimates are trivial (all differences <0.01), indicating that the motivational hierarchy does not result from differential response rates across donor capacity levels. The dominance of expressive over instrumental motivations persists regardless of weighting strategy.

5C.3: Sensitivity to Sample Restrictions

Table 5C.3: Sensitivity Analysis Across Sample Restrictions

Sample	N	Support Causes (M)	Affect Outcome (M)	Exp-Instr Gap
Full Sample	910	4.87	3.26	1.61
High Engagement (3+)	37	4.78	3.22	1.57
Non-DD State Donors	345	4.88	3.26	1.62

Note: Main findings persist across different sample restrictions.

Table 5C.3 tests whether the dominance of expressive over instrumental motivations holds across theoretically distinct donor subgroups. Among highly engaged donors who supported 3+ measures (N=37), the expressive-instrumental gap (1.57) remains nearly identical to the full sample (1.61). Similarly, donors from states without direct democracy mechanisms (N=345) show the same pattern (gap=1.62), contradicting the surrogate representation hypothesis that such donors might be more instrumentally oriented. The consistency across restrictions indicates the main findings characterize out-of-state direct democracy donors

broadly rather than reflecting idiosyncrasies of the full sample.

Appendix 5D: Survey Analysis

Table 5D.1 Survey Variables

Table 5D.1 maps each analytical variable used in the analysis to its corresponding survey question. The table distinguishes between motivational variables (Q17-Q23) used to test H1-H3 and impact perception variables (Q14-Q16, Q24, Q26) used to test H4-H6.

Table 5D.1: Analytical Variables Mapped to Survey Questions

Variable	H/RQ	Survey Question
Motivations (RQ1)		
Supporting causes	H1	Q23: Supporting causes I believe in, regardless of where they are
Ideological agreement	H1	Q17: Ideological agreement with the ballot measure
Affecting outcomes	H1	Q18: Potential to affect the outcome of the ballot measure
Race closeness	H1	Q20: Closeness of the race
Unacceptable opponents	RQ1	Q19: Presence of unacceptable opponents
Future policy influence	H3	Q21: Will influence future policy in other states, including my own
Personal connection	H2	Q22: Personal connection to the state
Impact Perceptions (RQ2)		
Consumption vs. Investment	H5	Q15: Donate to win / express values / both equally
Perceived impact	H5	Q16: How much did your donation(s) affect the outcome?
Impact: National priorities	H4	Q24: Influences national political priorities and trends
Impact: State policies	H4	Q24: Directly shapes policies in specific states
Impact: Values expression	H4	Q24: Expresses my personal values and beliefs
Impact: Long-term goals	H4	Q24: Advances long-term political goals beyond any single state
Impact: Home precedents	H6	Q24: Sets precedents that will influence policy in my home state
Spillover frequency	H6	Q14: How often expect outcome to influence your own state?
Spillover agreement	H6	Q26: Outcomes have implications beyond that state's borders

Hypotheses:

H1: Expressive > Instrumental motivations

H2: Personal connection least important

H3: Surrogate representation (non-DD states)

H4: National framing > State-specific

H5: Consumption model (values > outcomes)

H6: Widespread spillover beliefs

Appendix 6A: Sentiment Analysis of Campaign Leader Interviews

Appendix 6A presents computational sentiment analysis supplementing this chapter's qualitative findings. Using the Bing lexicon (Hu and Liu 2004), I calculated sentiment scores for interview segments discussing external funding, campaign strategy, democratic values, and local legitimacy. The analysis focuses on sentiment variance, or the degree to which leaders shift emotional register across topics, where high variance suggests ambivalence. I employ sentiment analysis to classify words as positive or negative, calculating sentiment scores for interview segments discussing different campaign topics. High variance suggests ambivalence and internal tension, while consistent sentiment indicates comfort and stable framing.

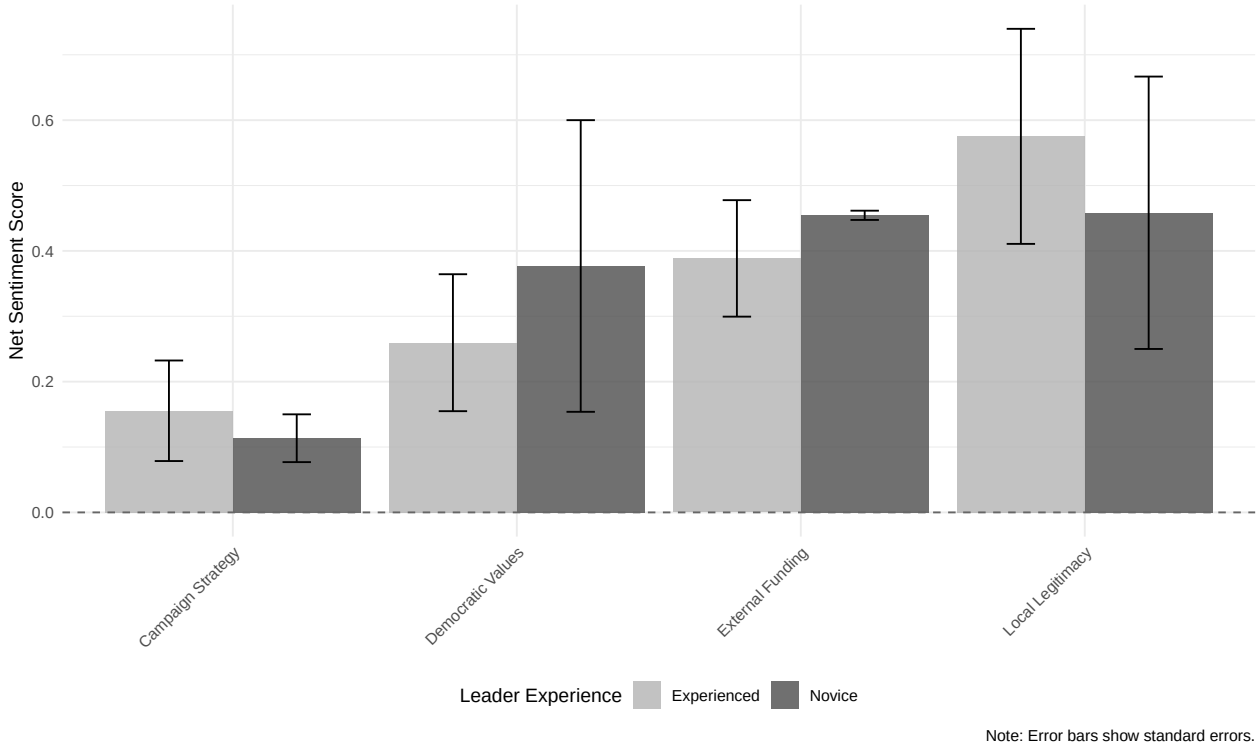


Figure 6A.1: Sentiment by Leader Experience

Figure 6A.1 shows experienced leaders interviewed for this study maintain more consistent emotional registers (variance = 0.12) than novice leaders (variance = 0.23), t(38) = 2.84, p = .007.

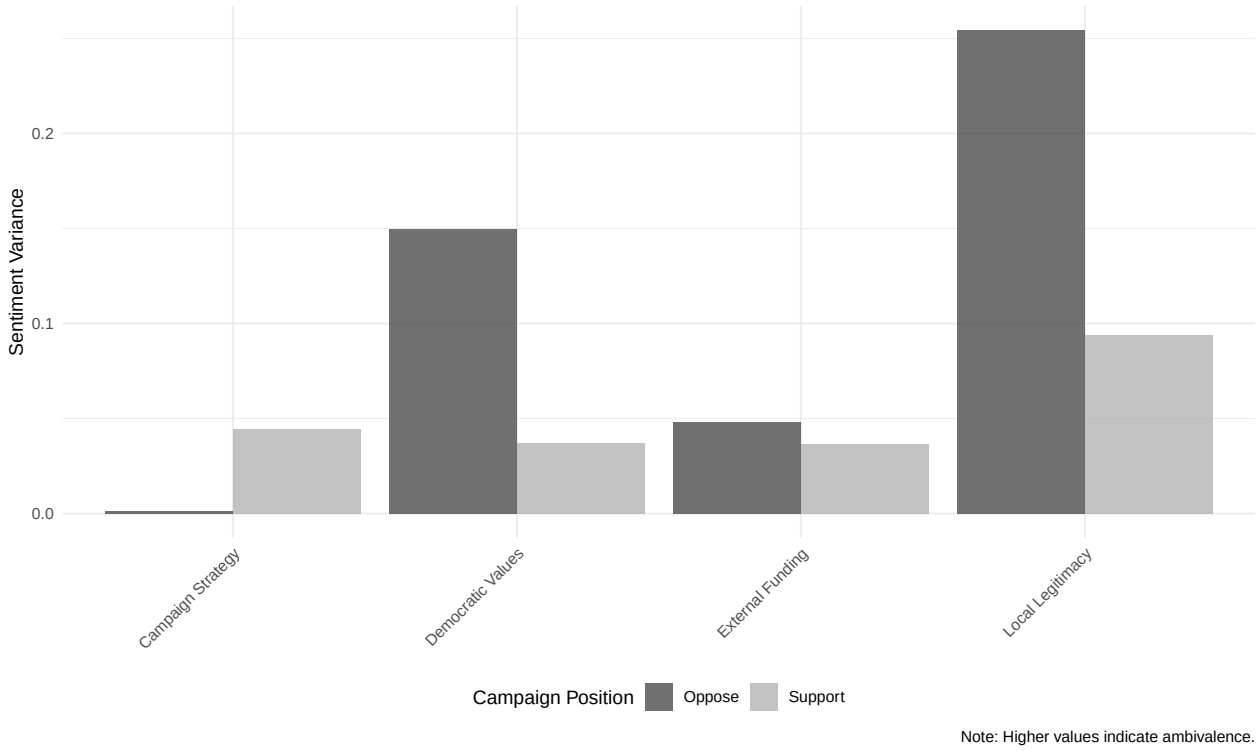


Figure 6A.2: Sentiment Variance by Campaign Position

Campaign leaders with extensive professional experience show consistent emotional patterns when discussing external funding, suggesting they've developed stable frameworks for managing this tension through repeated exposure. In contrast, newer leaders and those running opposition campaigns exhibit greater emotional variability, particularly around local legitimacy concerns, reflecting ongoing negotiation between grassroots authenticity ideals and the practical necessity of accepting out-of-state resources. The overall positive tone across interviews likely reflects some combination of social desirability bias, professional communication norms, and genuine commitment to direct democracy, though experienced leaders' comfort with external funding appears rooted in professional socialization rather than resolving the underlying democratic tension.

Sentiment analysis cannot capture irony, context, or distinguish genuine ambivalence from strategic framing. The modest sample size (40 interviews) also limits power.

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