

Newspapers and Individual Campaign Donations: The Informational Channel

Parmigiani (2026)

Discussant Comments

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What the Paper Does

Question. Does local newspaper coverage of House races drive individual campaign donations — an *informational channel* of contributions?

Two complementary designs:

- **IV:** instrument self-reported newspaper reading with Snyder–Strömberg (2010) *congruence*; CES, 2006–2020
- **District panel:** DIME individual contributions on congruence; 1982–2020

Main findings

- Reading raises in-district giving by 12.5pp
- Higher congruence \Rightarrow more in-district, less out-of-district donations

Robust to

- Incumbents *and* challengers; primaries & general
- Small & large donors; new & old donors

Local press fosters participation in politics

Framing of Contributions

There is a similar paper in the *AER*, Gentzkow et al. (2011), showing that newspapers have a positive effect on political participation, using voter turnout.

- This paper substitutes donations for voter turnout to estimate participation, so in many ways, the broad story is similar.

One idea:

- Donations can tell us about the intensity of political participation, and the in-district vs. out-of-district differences. I think there's room to theorize more about the research question—in particular, why local information should push giving *towards* the home district.

Supporting the Participation Interpretation

- A participation mechanism predicts *more people* donating and turning out, not just more money donated.
- It is worth reporting results using the **number of unique donors** (the paper says these hold but are “not reported”), and voter turnout alongside aggregate donation amount as additional dependent variables, to support the participation claim.
- The IV compliers (Table A7: lower-income, less-educated) are the people campaign-finance literature says get crowded out of the donor pool (Overton, 2004). So you could also frame this as a distributional result: congruence isn't only raising giving — it's making the donor pool more representative.

Mechanisms & Framing

- What in the news coverage drives the effect — mere *presence* vs. *volume* of stories, name recognition, or solicitation?
 - Perhaps some sort of content-analysis link would sharpen the mechanism (Hayes & Lawless 2018).
- The CES donation question switches from in/out-of-*district* to in/out-of-*state* in 2012 (fn. 1) — since everything hinges on the district margin, how is this handled after 2012?
- Congruence is built on print circulation, but the OLS correlation is bigger for online (and print-only is negative, Table A11). I wasn't quite sure how to square this with your main results?

Conclusion

- A really nice question and a novel lens: donations as a window onto the informational effects of local news
- Biggest opportunities:
 1. Sharpen the conceptual distinction from the turnout / accountability literature
 2. Bolster the participation claim using both unique donor count and turnout
 3. Perhaps frame as a representational issue
- A really promising paper. Looking forward to the next version!