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Are campaign contributions perceived as a civic duty?

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine the extent to which Americans view contributing money to political campaigns as a civic duty. Using data from an original survey ($N = 1,269$), we find that roughly 15% of the public thinks that for anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns. Interestingly, we find that there is very little relationship between the sense of duty to vote and the sense of duty to contribute to campaigns. We also develop statistical models to explain individuals' views about the duty to contribute money to campaigns and compare the results to the determinants of the sense of duty to vote. We find that men, younger people, and those who follow the news closely are more likely than their counterparts to see contributing as a civic duty.

KEYWORDS

Civic duty; campaign contributions; civic obligation; donation

Introduction and expectations

Although research has shown that relatively large numbers of people vote in elections, in part due to social voting norms and perceptions that voting is a civic duty (Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; A. Gerber et al., 2008; Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Panagopoulos, 2011, 2013, 2014), far fewer people contribute financially (Magleby et al., 2018). To date, numerous studies have examined the motivations for giving in elections (see, e.g., Barber, 2016; Francia et al., 2004; Hill & Huber, 2017; Lipsitz & Panagopoulos, 2011; Magleby et al., 2018; Panagopoulos & Bergan, 2006), which typically fall into three different categories – purposive, material, and solidary motives. In their well-known work on political engagement, Schlozman et al. (1995) argue that there are a number of more nuanced motivations for political participation, including donating money. According to these scholars, people may be motivated by selective material benefits (i.e., furthering one's career), selective social gratifications (i.e., enjoyment of being with people), selective civic gratifications (i.e., feel it is a duty), and/or a collective outcome (i.e., chance to influence policy). In this article, we are interested in the civic motivations for donating money during campaigns. More specifically, we want to understand the extent to which people see donating money as a civic obligation. In our view, a civic obligation or duty refers to the belief that engaging in some act (voting, volunteering, donating, etc.) is something a “good” citizen ought to do (Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011). Thus, consistent with previous work in political science, we see civic duty as a political attitude (Blais, 2000; Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; Klemmensen et al., 2012; Loewen & Dawes, 2012; Weinschenk, 2014; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2018).¹ In their study, Schlozman et al. (1995) focus exclusively on political activists – those who are

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¹In the field of personality psychology, some researchers have noted that dutifulness is a component of the Big Five trait Conscientiousness. However, recent research suggests that Conscientiousness and civic duty are distinct items. For additional details on this point see footnote 17 in Weinschenk and Dawes (2018). In addition, as Blais and Labbe'-St-Vincent (2011) note, “Political attitudes differ from personality traits in two respects. First, they refer to an organized set of views whereas personality refers to a disposition to react in certain ways. Second, they pertain to politics whereas personality applies to all realms of life” (p. 414).

heavily engaged in politics – but they uncover a number of interesting things about the importance of civic motives in fostering political action. For example, they note that “The proportion of activists who mentioned some civic purpose ... is remarkably high” (Schlozman et al., 1995, p. 19). In fact, among those who contributed money to a political candidate, 80% mentioned civic gratifications as an important motivation. Similarly, among those who contributed money to a party organization, 86% mentioned civic gratifications as an important motivation.² Of course, one limitation of the Schlozman et al. (1995) study is that most people are not political activists. It is unclear, then, whether idea that giving could be seen as a civic obligation applies to a broader population.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, we are interested in understanding the extent to which ordinary Americans see contributing to campaigns as a civic duty.³ According to Dalton (2008), there are a number of different dimensions of civic duty, including norms related to “citizen duty” (usually associated with social order) and norms related to “engaged citizenship” (usually associated with political and civic activity and feelings of solidarity with others in society). When it comes to the engaged citizenship dimension, we have some understanding of the extent to which certain civic and political acts are seen as obligations (see, e.g., Dalton, 2008; Klemmensen et al., 2012), but we do not know much about feelings of duty to contribute money to campaigns. Indeed, when measuring the participation dimension of civic duty, Dalton (2008) focuses on the following acts: voting in elections, being active in voluntary organizations, and being active in politics. Similarly, Klemmensen et al. (2012) focus on the obligation to engage in two acts – to always vote in public elections and to be active in social and political associations. Given the wide array of political and civic acts available in a democracy, it seems valuable to develop a better understanding of which types of activities are seen as duties and which are not. Overall, our expectation, given social norms surrounding voting in the United States (A. Gerber et al., 2008; Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Panagopoulos, 2013, 2010), is that fewer people will see contributing as a duty than voting, though we do not have a specific prediction about the number of Americans who will report that donating money to campaigns is a duty. This expectation is based on the fact that when people are asked about obligations to engage in different political acts and about the obligation to vote, they usually say that voting is the most important act. Indeed, Dalton (2008) found that of the three political acts measured in his study, Americans attached less importance to being active in voluntary organizations and being active in politics than voting, though they did still see both of these acts as duties.

Second, we are interested in understanding the variables that underpin the belief that contributing is a civic duty (or not). Before we describe the variables of interest, it is worth noting that one implication of Dalton’s (2008) above-mentioned work is that norms related to elections should be related. Thus, one might expect individuals who feel that donating to campaigns is a duty to be driven by the same factors as those who feel it is a duty to vote. In order to understand the individual-level variables that might be relevant to the sense of duty to donate, we turn to the literature on the predictors of the sense of duty to vote. In his seminal book on duty and voting, Blais (2000) hypothesized that political interest, sex, education, age, income, and religiosity would be related to the sense of duty to vote. His analysis showed that women, politically interested, older, religious, and wealthy people are more likely than their counterparts to view voting as

²Given that few studies have focused specifically on the sense of civic duty to donate to campaigns, we are not aware of research that has linked this attitude to the propensity to donate to campaigns. Importantly, though, we were able to identify a data source, the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), that allows us to examine one possible effect of the sense of duty to donate. In the 2016 CCES, campaign donors were asked a question about the duty to make donations if one is financially able to do so. Of course, because the question was asked of donors, we cannot use it to predict whether a respondent donated or not. However, the CCES did include a measure of how much money donors contributed to candidates and committees. Our expectation is that among donors those who have a stronger sense that donating is a duty will make larger donations than their counterparts. The results of a regression model using the sense of duty to donate to predict the amount of money donated is presented in the Online Appendix. Even the presence of a host of controls, the sense of duty has a positive and statistically significant effect on the amount of money donated. Those who believe that donating is a civic duty donate more money than those who do not. Thus, this provide some evidence that the sense of duty to donate is related to donation behavior.

³We note that contributing to a political campaign is not something universal. Indeed, electoral systems across the world limit private contributions depending on the existence (or absence) of public funding. Thus, the fact that political parties from many countries in the world are also (or only) publicly funded likely affects the perception of private donations as a civic duty. Although this article focuses on the United States, we encourage future studies in other contexts.

a civic duty. Given that these variables predict the sense of duty to vote, it seems worthwhile to include them as predictors of the sense of duty to contribute. This also allows us to see whether the predictors behave in similar ways across different dimensions of civic duty. We note that our survey does not include an extensive battery of demographic questions, but we have measures of age, education, sex, race, and the extent to which respondents follow the news, which we use to capture interest in politics. Descriptive statistics for all variables are included in the Online Appendix. Previous work provides a number of expectations about how these demographic variables may be related to the sense of duty. For instance, age is typically positively related to measures of civic duty (Blais, 2000; Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; Weinschenk, 2014). As C. Panagopoulos and Abrajano (2014) note, civic norms are likely to be more deeply engrained in individuals who have had more exposure to and experience with the political system. Thus, our expectation is that age will be positively related to the sense of duty to contribute. We code age as a series of dummy variables (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65+). We also expect that education will be positively related to the sense of obligation to donate money to campaigns. As Sniderman (1975) argues, “the further one progresses through the educational process, the deeper and firmer his grasp of the norms of the ideal culture” (pp. 134–35). Indeed, in most studies on the antecedents of civic obligations, education is positively related to civic duty (Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; Carreras, 2018; Dinesen et al., 2014; Jackson, 1995; Weinschenk, 2014). The positive relationship between education and civic obligations holds for voting but also a wide range of other activities, such as not cheating on taxes, joining associations, and trying to understand the opinions of others (Dinesen et al., 2014). We also note that education is typically highly correlated with income. Thus, given that educated people tend to earn higher incomes, they may also be more likely than their counterparts to believe that people should donate to political campaigns if they are financially able to do so. We measure education as a series of dummy variables (less than high school, high school degree, some college, Bachelor's or Associate's degree, and post-graduate degree). We note that although we do not have a measure of income available in our survey, we are able to control for respondent racial/ethnic background, which is important since there are racial/ethnic differences in income and educational attainment the United States (Magleby et al., 2018).⁴ In terms of interest in politics, our expectation is that people who follow politics closely will be more inclined than those who do not to see contributing as an obligation (Blais, 2000; Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; Galais & Blais, 2019). The basic idea is that people who are highly interested in politics are likely see the stakes of elections as being high (Blais, 2000). Consequently, they should be more likely to view contributing to political campaigns as an important activity that can help their preferred candidate or party. In terms of the relationship between sex and civic duty, we note that previous research has uncovered mixed relationships, especially when it comes to the relationship between sex and the sense of duty to vote; some studies find that women are more likely to see voting as a duty than men while others have found null results (see Galais & Blais, 2019 for an overview). Interestingly, research on campaign donations indicates that men are much more likely to make political donations than women (Magleby et al., 2018). Thus, it could be the case that men are more likely to make political donations because they have a stronger sense that donating to campaigns is an obligation.

In addition to the demographic variables described above, we are interested in the link between two political traits – political partisanship and ideology – and the sense of duty to donate money to campaigns. We focus on ideology and partisanship because Graham et al. (2009) found that conservatives tend to favor in-group loyalty, authority, and purity, and, as a consequence, like to adhere to the social norms of their in-group, strive for a high degree of self-control, and uphold a strong sense of duty. Thus, our expectation is that conservatives (and Republicans) may be more likely to feel a sense of civic duty than their counterparts. We measure ideology using a 5-point item that ranges from 1 (very liberal) to 5 (very conservative). We measure partisanship using a 3-point item where 1 = Weak Democrat, Democratic Leaner, and Strong Democrat, 2 = Independent, and 3 = Weak Republican, Republican Leaner, and Strong Republican. These are standard ways of measuring these concepts.

⁴See this report for details on disparities: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/1-demographic-trends-and-economic-well-being/>

In this article, we make use of data from an original survey to examine the extent to which the public sees contributing money to political campaigns as a civic obligation. We begin by examining aggregate-level attitudes about the obligation to contribute financially to campaigns. We also examine the relationship between the sense of duty to vote and the sense of duty to donate. Next, we develop a multivariate model to explain individual views about whether contributing to campaigns is a civic duty. We also estimate a model that uses the sense of duty to vote as the dependent variable, which enables us to understand whether our two measures of civic duty are driven by similar factors. To preview our results, we find that roughly 15% of the public thinks that for anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns. Interestingly, there is very little relationship between the sense of duty to vote and the sense of duty to contribute to campaigns. We also find that many of the factors that we find are related to the sense of duty to vote (e.g., education, age, sex) are inversely related to views about the obligation to contribute to campaigns. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our results.

Does the public view contributing money to campaigns as a civic duty?

As a starting point for understanding whether the public views contributing money to campaigns as a civic duty, we present aggregate data from an original survey ($N = 1,269$) that we developed and fielded via Qualtrics. The survey was fielded between 1 March 2019 and 15 March 2019. Although data from Qualtrics are not equivalent to random samples since Qualtrics makes use of online samples matched to Census data, scholars have shown that among online samples Qualtrics samples are “the most demographically and politically representative” (Boas et al., 2020, p. 232). Overall, the demographics of our sample are fairly similar to the demographics of the U.S. population (from the Census). For example, in our sample, 63% of respondents are White (non-Hispanic), 5% are Asian, 12% are African American/Black, and 16% are Hispanic/Latino. According to the U.S. Census, 60.4% of the population is White (not Hispanic or Latino), 5.9% is Asian, 13.4% is African American/Black, and 18% is Hispanic/Latino. When it comes to educational attainment, 46.6% of people (age 25 or higher) in our sample have an Associate’s degree or higher. According to the Census, 46% of people in the United States (age 25 or higher) have an Associate’s degree or higher. When it comes to sex, we find that women make up 56% of respondents in our sample. Census data indicate that women make up 51% of the population in the United States. Finally, we find that the median age group (we grouped different age ranges together in our question) is 35–44 years old. In the United States, the median age is 38.2 years old.⁵ Overall, we believe that our sample is useful for examining the sense of duty to contribute.

We included two questions about civic duty, one about the sense of duty to contribute to campaigns, and, for comparison, one about the sense of duty to vote. More specifically, we asked respondents to “Please indicate below your level of agreement with each of the following statements: (1) *For anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns* and (2) *It is a civic duty to vote in elections.*” The response categories were strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree.⁶

⁵Census data used in this section can be found at the following links: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218> <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/06/median-age-does-not-tell-the-whole-story.html>

⁶Blais and Achen (2019) have pointed out that agree/disagree statements can suffer from acquiescence bias. We acknowledge this as a limitation but believe that we can still learn from the questions used in this study. It is worth noting that we used the contributions measure described here because we replicated the item from previous studies. For example, the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study included the same measure that we use here. We also acknowledge that the questions we use are not exactly equivalent. For example, contributing is conditioned on financial ability (while voting is not). Importantly, we note that barriers to giving have dropped considerably in the era of online giving. And many donors now give in small amounts (Magleby et al., 2018; Panagopoulos & Bergan, 2006).

Table 1. Distribution of views on voting and campaign contributions as a civic duty.

Category	Contributing	Voting
	Percent	Percent
Strongly Disagree	43.97	7.81
Somewhat Disagree	14.50	5.68
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26.08	20.50
Somewhat Agree	10.01	21.29
Strongly Agree	5.44	44.72
N	1,268	1,269

Table 2. Crosstab of views on voting and campaign contributions as a civic duty.

Vote Duty	Contributing Duty			Row %
	Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Strongly/Somewhat Agree	
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	80.7%	13.5%	5.9%	100%
Neither	30.4%	60.8%	8.9%	100%
Strongly/Somewhat Agree	62.7%	17.9%	19.4%	100%

Table 1 provides a look at the distribution of responses to our two civic duty questions. Approximately 15% of people say that they somewhat or strongly agree that for anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns. In contrast, about 66% of people somewhat or strongly agree that it is a civic duty to vote in elections. Previous research also finds that the majority of people believe that voting is a civic obligation (Blais, 2000; Blais & Labbe'-St-Vincent, 2011; Weinschenk, 2014). On the other end of the scale, we find that roughly 58% of people somewhat or strongly disagree that it is a civic duty to contribute money to campaigns. For the voting measure, the number of people answering somewhat or strongly disagree is just 13%.

Overall, the data shown in Table 1 indicate that the distributions are quite different. While the vast majority of people see voting as a civic duty, a much smaller slice of the population believes that it is a civic duty to contribute money to political campaigns. Given the very different distributions, it is not all that surprisingly to find that the two measures are not strongly correlated. Table 2 contains a cross-tabulation of the two items (categories condensed down to three for the sake of tidiness), which reveals some interesting patterns. Among those who view voting as a civic duty, for example, 62.7% *do not* believe that contributing is a duty. In addition, only about 19% of people who think that voting is a civic duty think that contributing is a duty. Overall, a Chi-squared test indicates that the relationship between the two civic duty measures is significant at the $p < .05$ level, although it is worth noting that relationship is quite weak (Cramer's $V = 0.3$).

What explains individual attitudes?

Although it is worthwhile to look at the sense of duty to contribute at the aggregate level, we are also interested in examining the individual-level determinants of the sense of duty to contribute. As we noted above, we are interested in whether age, education, race, sex, interest in the news, ideology, and partisanship influence the sense of duty to donate. In Table 3, we present the results of two ordered logistic regression models. In the first model, we use the sense of duty to vote as the dependent variable (coded from 1 to 5 where higher values correspond to more agreement that voting is a duty). In the second model, we use the campaign contribution measure as the dependent variable (coded from 1 to 5 where higher values correspond to more agreement that donating is a duty). The models include the same independent variables, so that we can see how the predictors behave across the different measures of civic duty.⁷

⁷We note that as a robustness check, we also estimated the models using multinomial logit (with strongly and somewhat agree=3, neither=2, strongly and somewhat disagree=1). Comfortingly, the results were very similar to the ordered logit model results.

Table 3. Predictors of the sense of duty to vote and contribute, ordered logit models.

	(1) Vote Duty b/se	(2) Contribute Duty b/se
Partisanship (Republican)	-0.110 (0.080)	0.046 (0.079)
Ideology (Conservative)	-0.010 (0.063)	0.067 (0.062)
25-34 years old	0.134 (0.173)	0.158 (0.172)
35-44 years old	0.099 (0.185)	-0.056 (0.183)
45-54 years old	0.389* (0.189)	-0.460* (0.189)
55-64 years old	0.633** (0.210)	-0.655** (0.210)
65+ years old	1.369*** (0.234)	-0.578** (0.213)
High School	0.755* (0.310)	-0.204 (0.318)
Some College	1.210*** (0.306)	-0.633* (0.313)
Bachelor's or Associate's	1.459*** (0.309)	-0.973** (0.316)
Post-graduate degree	1.645*** (0.347)	-0.614 (0.346)
Male	-0.279* (0.122)	0.386** (0.120)
Asian	-0.550* (0.236)	0.797*** (0.221)
Hispanic	-0.377* (0.154)	0.209 (0.151)
Black	-0.167 (0.176)	0.559** (0.173)
Other race	-0.547 (0.318)	-0.490 (0.339)
Follow News	0.709*** (0.085)	0.337*** (0.083)
Cut point 1	-0.189 (0.390)	0.163 (0.390)
Cut point 2	0.454 (0.386)	0.786* (0.390)
Cut point 3	1.792*** (0.391)	2.225*** (0.396)
Cut point 4	2.817*** (0.396)	3.424*** (0.410)
<i>N</i>	1266	1267
Pseudo R-squared	0.06	0.03

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Omitted age category is 18-24 years old.

Omitted education category is less than high school degree.

Overall, the results shown in Table 3 illustrate that a number of the independent variables exert statistically significant effects on the sense of civic duty. Turning first to the duty to vote measure, we see that sex, age (omitted category is 18-24), education (omitted category is less than high school), race, and the extent to which respondents follow the news are significantly related to viewing voting as a duty. Women, older respondents, those with higher levels of education, and those who follow the news very closely are more likely than their counterparts to report that voting is a civic duty. Asian and Hispanic Americans are less likely to report that voting is a civic duty relative to White respondents. By and large, our results are consistent with the results reported in previous studies on

the underpinnings of the sense of duty to vote. For example, Blais and Labbe'-St-Vincent (2011) and Blais (2000) also find that age is positively related to seeing voting as a duty. In addition, Blais and Labbe'-St-Vincent (2011) find that education is positively related to the sense of duty to vote. Finally, Blais (2000) finds that women are more likely to see voting as a civic obligation than men, though, as we noted above, not all studies find significant effects for this variable. It is important to point out that most previous studies on civic duty to vote have not included measures of partisanship or ideology in their models, but we note that we do not find differences across partisan or ideological groups in perceptions of voting as a civic duty.

When we turn to the contributions model, we find that many of the same variables that are related to perceiving voting as a civic duty are related to the contributions measure. However, in most cases, the coefficients take on the opposite sign in the contributions model than they did in the vote model. Indeed, we find that men are more likely than women to say that contributing to campaigns is a civic duty. The probability of men strongly agreeing that contributing is a civic duty is .06 compared to .04 for women.⁸ In addition, older respondents are less likely than their younger counterparts to say that contributing is a civic duty. The probability of those in the youngest age group (18–24 years old) strongly agreeing that it is a civic duty to contribute is .06 compared to .03 for those in the oldest age group (65+ years old).⁹ Those with high levels of education are also less likely than their counterparts to say that contributing is a civic duty. The probability of those in the lowest education category (less than high school) strongly agreeing that it is a duty to contribute is .09, while the probability of those with a college degree strongly agreeing is .03.¹⁰ The only variable that has the same sign across models is the measure of the extent to which a person follows the news. In both models, those who follow the news very closely are more likely than those who do not to say that voting and contributing are civic duties. Among those who follow the news very closely, the probability of strongly agreeing that contributing is a civic duty is .06, and among those who do not follow the news closely at all, the probability of strongly agreeing that contributing is a civic duty is .03.¹¹ It is worth pointing out that ideology and partisanship do not have statistically significant effects in the contributions model, which is similar to the vote model.¹² Overall, we note that although the differences in predicted probabilities described above not particularly large, they are worthwhile to consider. Indeed, examining the effects provides a sense of which variables are the most (and least) important predictors of the sense of duty to donate.

At the outset, we noted that it seemed reasonable to expect duties related to elections (i.e., voting and donating) to be related given previous work on norms related to electoral participation. Overall, the results in Table 3 indicate that many of the same variables that impact the sense of duty to vote also influence the sense of duty to donate but do so in opposite ways. For example, older people are more likely than younger individuals to see voting as a duty but less likely to see donating as a duty. And highly educated people are more likely to see voting as a duty than their counterparts but are less inclined to see donating as a duty. These patterns are interesting when considered alongside recent research on the attributes of people who actually donate money during elections. Such research generally shows that older people are more likely to donate than younger people and that

⁸To calculate the predicted probabilities, we set the following variables at their mean values: age=3 (35–44 age group), ideology=3 (moderate), partisanship=2 (independent), education=3 (some college), and news interest=2 (somewhat closely). For the four race dummies, we set each measure to 0 (which means that our probabilities are based on a white respondent).

⁹The other variables in the model are set at the values described above. However, we set male to 0 (female) since it is a control variable in this specification rather than the variable of interest. Age is not set to a particular value since it is the focus here.

¹⁰Control variables set at the values mentioned above.

¹¹Again, control variables set at the values mentioned above.

¹²We also investigated whether partisan and ideological strength were related to the sense of duty. The results are included in the Online Appendix. Generally speaking, those with strong ideological and partisan commitments are more likely than their counterparts to see voting and contributing as duties, which makes theoretical sense. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this idea.

educated people are more likely to donate than those with lower levels of educational attainment (Magleby et al., 2018).¹³ One possibility is that while such groups see donating as an important political act and have a desire to *personally* engage in it, they do not necessarily see donating as something that *everyone* is obligated to do. When it comes to the relationship between sex and civic duty, we also uncovered an interesting pattern. Women are more likely to see voting as a duty than men, but men are more likely than women to see donating as a duty. Generally speaking, studies on actual donation behavior have found that women are more likely to give money to charity than men and that men are more likely to donate to politics (Magleby et al., 2018). One possible explanation has to do with social change. A study by the Women’s Campaign Forum Foundation has pointed out that “Women drive charitable giving but don’t associate political contributions with the social change of charitable contributions.” If men see political donations as a mechanism to foster political change, they may, therefore, see political donations as something that others ought to do in order to impact the political system.

Conclusion

In this article, we used data from an original survey to examine public perceptions about campaign contributions. It is important to understand the underpinnings of donation behavior and attitudes toward campaign donations given that campaigns in the U.S. are largely privately funded and need money to inform and educate voters; campaign donations matter not just for campaign managers and candidates but also for democracy.¹⁴ Here, we examined one component of how people think about campaign donations (whether they are a part of one’s civic obligation). Overall, we found that about 15% of respondents in our study believe that for anyone who can afford it, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns. In contrast, about two-thirds of people see voting as a civic obligation. Perceptions about whether voting and contributing are considered civic duties appear to be quite different. In addition, in our individual-level models, we found that most of the factors that predict the sense of duty to vote (e.g., age, education, sex) were inversely related to views about the obligation to contribute to campaign. This is an interesting finding in light of Dalton’s (2008) work, which suggests that norms related to electoral activities may be related.

Overall, the findings presented above may be particularly interesting to fundraisers and campaigns. While many studies have shown that, on average, appeals to sense of civic duty and social norms increase voter turnout (A. Gerber et al., 2008; Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Panagopoulos, 2013, 2014), it is worth noting that individual-level factors can shape with how people respond to such appeals (Panagopoulos & Abrajano, 2014; A. S. Gerber et al., 2013; Weinschenk et al., 2018). Indeed, A. S. Gerber et al. (2013) found that introverts became more likely to vote after being exposed to social pressure to vote, while extraverts became less inclined to vote after experiencing social pressure to vote. We are only aware of one study that has attempted to increase the odds that people donate money to campaigns, which found that, on average, appeals to civic duty do not have much of an effect on the odds of donating money to political campaigns (Schwam-Baird et al., 2016). One possibility is that the effects of such appeals vary depending on attitudes about contributions as civic duty. While our data indicate that some people do see contributing as a duty and therefore might be receptive to appeals centered on the duty to contribute (i.e., they might become even more likely to donate than they otherwise would), many people do not see contributing as a duty and may become even less inclined to donate than they ordinarily would when presented with the idea that contributing is a duty. We cannot examine this idea here, but we encourage future studies on this

¹³See also: <https://www.demos.org/research/whose-voice-whose-choice-distorting-influence-political-donor-class-our-big-money> and <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/17/5-facts-about-u-s-political-donations/>

¹⁴Studies have shown that there is a positive link between campaign spending and accurate levels of knowledge about candidate positions and ideology (see, e.g., Coleman & Manna, 2000). Thus, campaign donations (and the spending that follows) can have benefits for society (and not just those individuals who choose to give money).

question. In the end, much remains to be learned about the sense of civic duty to contribute to campaigns and to engage in other political acts.

Highlights

- Roughly 15% of the American public thinks that for anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to political campaigns.
- There is very little relationship between the sense of duty to vote and the sense of duty to contribute to campaigns.
- Men, younger people, and those who follow the news closely are more likely than their counterparts to see contributing as a civic duty.

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