Using Experimental Design to Test the Effect of Campaign Donation Knowledge on Interpersonal Political Trust in the United States

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Abstract

While the link between knowledge of a candidate and evaluations of said, candidate is well established, little research has examined how knowledge of "outside donations" effect the way that candidates are evaluated. The combined effects of campaign finance and political knowledge on interpersonal political trust are studied in a survey experiment (n=153) measuring how the introduction of knowledge of the source of a candidate's campaign funding changes perception of trust and evaluations of the candidate. Previous literature on political trust has focused on trust in institutions or the belief that one can affect change in politics, but this research examines how voters trust politicians as actors rather than as institutions. This experiment finds knowledge of outside funding has a significant impact on candidate evaluations and the likelihood of a respondent to vote for a candidate. Respondents in the treatment group demonstrated lower levels of trust in the candidate as well as lower probabilities of voting for the candidate in a statistically significant manner, but also demonstrated evidence that theoretical negative feelings toward outside donations are partially mitigated by introducing a human aspect - and assigning a large percentage of donations from outside sources to a previously neutral or positively evaluated candidate.

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Chapter I. Introduction and Research Question

1.1 Introduction

"It's an issue that Democrats and Republicans seem to come together on, the over influence of money in politics and in power." – Andrew Gillum

Money is an omni-present feature in American elections. There are no fundraising limits for elections in the United States, thus many elections are decided by the amount of money candidates can raise to spend against other candidates. As candidates battle to raise the most money, the lure of money from outside sources¹ becomes tempting. Candidates fundraising is constrained by jurisdictional (federal, state, or district) campaign donation limits, and their ability to appeal to voters in such a way that makes them likely to donate funds.² Thus, candidates are attracted to donations that come from other sources, as in the case of American elections, all money is "good money." Outside money³ has long been a feature of elections, but the role of outside money has become more noticeable if present since court cases in 2010⁴ and 2014⁵ changed limitations on political action committee (PAC) spending allowances.

¹ Outside sources refers to the location from which the donation originates. If the donation comes from an interested party that is not located in the voting district. It should further be noted that money can only be raised from the United States and neither foreign citizens or businesses may donate to candidates.

² In particular, because less than 10% of Americans donate to campaigns at any level (Open Secrets 2017) https://www.opensecrets.org/resources/dollarocracy/04.php

³ Outside money refers to donations that come from entities outside of the district for which a representative is responsible. Donations may come from other individuals such as a person in a neighboring district, businesses that have stake in a race because of transactions that occurs in other districts, PAC that are not based in the district (such as a national 501(c)4 group that donates to particular state-level races), Super PACS, or other special interest groups.

⁴ Citizens United V FEC; Citizens United v Federal Election Commission (FEC) is a 2010 Supreme court decision that ruled corporate spending is free speech. Citizens United's decision led to the creation of SuperPACS, whose spending is only limited by the amount of money they raise (Dunbar 2012; Garrett 2016).

⁵ McCutchen v FEC; McCutcheon v Federal Election Commission (FEC) decided aggregate campaign donation limits (that limited the amount of money that can be donated over a specific time) are unconstitutional (Garrett 2016).

With strategy in Montana being called the "50-state strategy (Martin, 2017)", national attention and money funnels into non-national races and changes the scope of campaigns as candidates now need to appeal to broader out-of-district audiences. Outside groups spent over \$15 million dollars in West Virginia- an increase of 300% from 2012 totals (Tyson 2016). The Brennan Center found that in 2016, outside groups outspent both parties and candidates in 10 key senate races (2017). The level of outside spending and attention has transformed congressional races into national races, decreasing the effect of an average donor. The proliferation of outside money in races via independent expenditures on behalf of candidates by political action groups (PACS) gives warrant to Stiglitz claim that "increasingly, and especially in the United States, it seems that the political system is more akin to 'one dollar one vote' than to 'one person one vote (Stiglitz 2013).""

Figure 1: Spending in 10 Key Senate Races in 2016



source: Brennan Center

This phenomenon is not limited to large scale races as outside money's influence is seen in state and local races. Reckhow et all found that local school board races were becoming nationalized as wealthy national donors and interest groups began to fund races (2016). While this is not new - outside money in the Los Angeles school board race gained national attention (Blume 1999)- Reckhow et all assert that large national donors play an increasing role on local elections. State and local races have been called "Super-PAC playgrounds (Huffington 2014)" with races in cities as small as Elizabeth New Jersey (population 128,705) receiving significant attention from national Super PACS registered in states that shouldn't theoretically have interest in local races (USA Today 2015). The growing nationalization of state and local elections underscores the growing influence of special interest based PACS and SuperPACS as well as wealthy donors.

Polls in 2012 revealed that the majority of the American public was concerned over the influence of "big donors" on politics (Levy et all 2014), but outside donations have proliferated. What do these fears mean for the average voter when confronted with a candidate that has received a large sum of outside money?

1.2 Research Question

This thesis seeks to understand how political trust and outside donations interact through the use of an experiment (see Chapter IV). I ask the question, what is the effect of outside donations in elections in the United States? I further limit this question to the following two sub-questions: Does outside funding make voters less likely to trust a candidate? Does knowledge of outside funding change the decision to vote for a candidate?

In asking these questions, I look to examine how interpersonal trust between voters and candidates changes in light of new information. By examining outside donations, , I examine if interpersonal political trust is damaged and how this damage manifests in general evaluations of candidates, the appeal of a candidate, and likelihood to vote for a candidate. Trust is a salient

issue but interpersonal trust (trust in individual actors rather than institutions) has not been studied in the current political context in which outside money in politics has expanded. Thus, this thesis will seek to do so to understand the implications of outside money on the American electorate and how levels of interpersonal political trust change.

1.3 Overview and Structure

Bowler and Donovan write that most Americans do not know much about money in politics, but believe it is an important issue (2015). This is complicated by the complex nature of financial reporting forms (FEC disclosure forms are both tedious and fail to capture independent expenditure on behalf of a candidate.⁶) as well as reluctance of most candidates to discuss publicly where their funding comes from. ⁷ As such, I examine how interpersonal political trust is affected by introducing the knowledge that a candidate accepts outside money.

This thesis focuses on trust at the individual rather than institutional level. I argue that while trust in institutions is important it is well researched while trust between voters and candidates or elected officials is under-studied. Trust between voters and candidates has been minimally studied and in looking to this rather than institutional trust, this thesis is able to address a gap in literature. Trust between candidates and voters is an important intermediary step before trust between voters and institutions. While Delhey and Newton (2003) argue that trust in institutions and trust in candidates as actors are correlated, trust in candidates as actors ie interpersonal trust is more significant for looking at politics at a micro level. This thesis specifically examines

⁶ Candidates are not required to report independent expenditure. Unless there is collusion between a PAC/SuperPACS and a candidate, outside groups can spend as much money as the deem necessary in a given race (FEC 2015).

⁷Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders (I) proposed candidates be required to wear the names or logos of their major contributors on suits to show where funding came from, but this proposal was not popular with any candidates from either party.

what it takes to change someone's decision to support a candidate, identifying the point where trust drops enough to make a voter decide not to vote for a specific candidate.

In this thesis, I find that respondents view candidates that accept outside donations during campaigns poorly; evaluations of candidates became less positive after introduction of candidates funding sources was introduced. At the same time, results reveal conflicting attitudes between opposing candidates accepting outside donations in theory and candidates accepting outside donations in reality, with respondents being more forgiving in reality than their expressed theoretical opinions would suggest. I do however find that those whom reject the idea of candidates accepting outside donations in theory evaluate the candidate in this experiment more negatively, meaning that while respondents were forgiving toward the candidate when he accepted outside donations, those whom were against outside donations remained consistent in their opinions.

Chapter II of this thesis offers an overview of existing literature on campaign finance and political trust before laying out theoretical expectations that guide this work. Chapter III describes the methodology of the experiment including why an experiment was used for this topic, discussion of a pilot study on the treatment condition, and an overview of the variables studied. Chapter IV contains the results and analysis on the experiment and Chapter V provides conclusions and a description of further research.

Chapter II. Literature and Theory

This thesis focuses on the interaction between campaign finance and political trust, more narrowly on how donations from special interest groups effect candidates and public perception of elected officials. I first survey literature on campaign finance focusing particularly on the current status of campaign finance with emphasis on the necessity of money in elections and then on the role of outside groups including PACS and SuperPACS. Second, I examine political trust by looking at what general trust, different definitions of political trust, and the significance of political trust. Finally, I overview theoretical expectations of the interaction between these two concepts.

2.1 Campaign Finance

The first section of literature will focus on the state of campaign finance and the role of money in elections.

2.1.1 The role of money in elections

Money in elections is that money is important in elections in order for candidates to outspend their opponents by promoting themselves and point out flaws in their opponents.⁸ Experiments conducted by Alan Gerber and Donald Green found that gaining an additional vote costs incumbents \$200.00 (2003). Their experiments revealed it was more expensive for incumbents to buy an additional vote (thus showing diminishing marginal returns on every dollar spent) than for challengers; Vavreck explains this saying that while challengers gain more for every

⁸ In very rare circumstances, candidates will self-finance their election efforts. Even in these situations, as was the case for current President, Donald Trump, candidates accept donations.

dollar spent, they do not spend enough to be competitive⁹ (2014). Samuels finds that challengers are most helped by increased spending in competitive races (2001), but fundraising for challengers is often significantly lower than for incumbents, Jacobson arrived at similar results to Samuels: increasing marginal returns for challengers but decreasing marginal returns on spending for incumbents (1978).

The sum of combined spending on congressional and presidential races tripled between 1998-2012 (Levy et all 2014). Numerous scholars found that there is a positive association between campaign expenditure and gaining votes (Gierzyncki 1996). This is logical- it would make sense that there are positive marginal returns on spending money because spending can be used to gain recognition, challenge an opponent's reputation, and-fersuade the electorate that a candidate is the best choice for said community.

Money is frequently used as a tool of intimidation in races. Jacobson called having a large war chest¹⁰ an important aspect if opponent deterrence with Sorauf finding early receipts (not necessarily sending) discouraged opponents from entering races (Jacobson and Sorauf in Hersh and McDougal 1994). War chests may not always be fully spent but are used to signal that a candidate can or will outspend opponents if necessary. This dissuades challengers who fear risking their financial and political capital on a potential loss (Hersh and McDougall 1994). Squire had similar findings when examining Senate races. He found that those who fear they will face numerous challengers in their next election raise as much money as possible in the

⁹ Competitive meaning offering a challenge to incumbents who have a natural incumbency bias. For more on this see Ansolabehere and Snyder 2001, Guis 2009, or Mann and Wolfinger 1980.

¹⁰ The term war chest refers to the pool of donations a candidate of politician raises that can later be used for election-related activity and campaigning.

first 2/3 of their 6 year terms with the idea that this war chest will dissuade challengers from running (Squire 1991).

While money is important, money is not everything as Shrum notes "there is no linear relationship between amount of money and degree of success (Shrum *in* Dubner 2012). Milyo extends this logic noting winners usually spend more than their opponents, but that winners also contain traits that make them more likely to win. Milyo argues there is a reverse causality between money and winning because candidates that are successful are often able to raise money and gain votes based on personality. He says "campaign spending is potentially as much a symptom of electoral success as its cause (Milyo in Dubner 2012). His argument is that while a candidate cannot win without a certain amount money, the personality of the candidate may be more important and that money boils down to how likeable, appealing, charismatic, or trustworthy the voting base finds a candidate to be.

Dubner finds that candidates with vast personal wealth to spend on elections to not necessarily do better in elections based on an analysis of natural experiments. For elections until 2012, Dubner found campaign spending not to be as important as many argued (2012). Never the less, the necessity of surpassing an ever-changing monetary threshold cannot be understated. Campaigns are not free and studies have shown that having a large enough "war chest¹¹" is an important feature of a successful campaign (Hersh and McDougal 1994).

2.1.2 How much money was raised in 2016?

¹¹ For more on this see Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000.

The 2016 elections saw one of the largest spending totals in the history of elections in the United States, with \$2.65 billion dollars spent on the Clinton v Trump race alone. The total sum of all races in the 2016 elections reached \$6.8 billion dollars- the highest total ever. (Open Secrets; Open Secrets; Berr 2016).

Exorbitant spending is not limited to the Presidential Election. The Pennsylvania Senate Race was the most expensive in history, at \$113 million spent; 87.1% of that sum was raised by outside groups (Pramuk 2016). New Hampshire and Nevada also saw spending figures nearing \$100 million, with large percentages (77.2 and 65.8 respectively) coming from outside groups (Pramuk 2016). What does this mean? Spending and fundraising was at its peak in 2016 as was the influence of outside groups on elections, as they contributed disproportionally high percentages of money in races for which they were interested. Bryner attributes the rising costs of elections directly to Citizens United v. FEC saying outside groups can raise more money than anyone would have thought and this makes overall costs rise more quickly than expected (Bryner in Berr, 2016).

Financial breakdowns of the 2016 presidential election highlight the role of outside groups. More than 50 individual donors gave more than \$1 million dollars or more (Allison et al 2016) and this election cycle featured the highest spending totals by outside groups by over \$300 million dollars (Open Secrets). Non-party outside spending has increased in the past few election cycles, with a dramatic increase between 2014 and 2016. In 2014, the highest levels of outside non-party spending were 47% of total spending; in 2016, candidates in the most expensive races only spent between ¹/₄ and 1/₃ of the total expenditure; the majority came from outside non-party organizations (Vandewalker 2017). Funding sources had been shifting

slowly, but the dramatic increase between 2014 and 2016 demonstrates the dominance of special interest groups in US elections.

In the 2016 election cycle, Donald Trump raised \$239 million dollars from donors contributing \$200 or less, while Hillary Clinton raised \$137 million dollars and Bernie Sanders raised \$100 million dollars from donors of the same nature. (Campaign Finance Institute 2017). Obama, raising 32% of his total funds in 2012 from these small money donations, and Trump's high level of grassroots support- 26% of his total funds coming from donations of \$200 or less- were a sign that he had a dedicated base, whereas Hillary Clinton and Mitt Romney raised significantly less from small money- with Clinton raising 16% of total funds and Romney only raising 5% of total funds from small money donations (Washington Post 2017).

2.1.3 The Rise of Mega Donors

New money flows into politics as special interest groups and wealthy donors exploit loopholes in campaign finance law or conditions created by Citizens United v FEC and McCutchen v FEC. The rising influence of these groups and wealthy donors is largely attributed to Charles and David Koch, who were the major funders of Citizens United and largely worked behind the scenes to influence elections (Jane Mayer 2016); The focus on the Koch brothers is not to say the mega donors are not present on the left, but Koch funded special interest groups and educational organizations with limited political activity (501© 4 organizations) are both more common and more directly attributed to one wealthy donor. Groups funded by the Koch brothers on the right can influence politics in tangible physically obvious ways such as the American Legislative Exchange Council, a group funded and heavily influenced by Charles and David Koch, writing the actual legislation that state legislatures then introduce for consideration (Hertel-Fernandez, 2014). These groups are also less obvious, such as when Freedom Works creates "beautiful chaos" (Reeves 2012) or spends time creating manuals on how to best recruit and train tea-party activists (Handlin 2014).

Koch funded groups have been able to flex their financial power to work on elections in almost every state and target different populations such as Hispanics, Veterans, Millennials, and academics in addition to usual conservative groups (Schumpeter 2014; IFG 2014). The Koch's pledged to spend \$889 million dollars in the 2016 election cycle, up from \$400 million in 2012 (Confessore 2015); their actual spending figure is not available. Interestingly, Koch spending focused more so on federal, state, and local races than on the 2016 presidential race after the Koch's began to "reevaluate their approach to politics (Alberta and Johnson, 2016; Salam 2016).

The popular media narrative that the Koch brothers are buying influence in US politics seems to have merit, as their projected spending total of \$889 million in 2016 is larger than the amount spent by either the Republican National Committee or Democratic National Committee (Confessore 2015), but is that necessarily a bad thing? There are of course normative problems with buying votes and small groups trying to use money to systematically change political systems in a way which benefits only the wealthy, but does the average voter care about the effect of the Koch brothers on elections?

2.1.4 The Influence of National Groups, Pacs, and Super PACs¹²

National special interest groups such as the National Rifle Association and Greenpeace play noticeable roles in American Politics, as they can raise large amounts of money that they can

¹² For clear picture of the differences between Pacs and Super Pacs, see Garrett 2013.

then spend however they wish whether that be in independent expenditure or direct donations to candidates. Thomas Brunell explained the significance of PACs donationing to political campaigns, saying that many PACs will donate to candidates simply to gain access, noting that sending money to an incumbent is advantageous because "buying" access requires a relatively low buy in, as incumbents have liquid resources (Brunell, 2005). The question that emerges from Brunell's work is, how do these donations effect electoral outcomes?

PACs face legal and regulatory restrictions on the amount they can spend and from whom they can raise money, but are still able to exert substantial influence in elections. Thompson and Cassie found that PACS are able to advance their own interests within the political arena by contributing to candidates, particularly focusing on incumbents because in part of the incumbency advantage (1992). PACS also spend in order to maximize access and influence by focusing on races where they will gain the highest level of influence per dollar spent (Thompson and Cassie 1992). The Congressional Research Service found that PACS and their newer iteration Super PACs are still a large factor in American elections, with Garrett saying they "occupy a major place in federal elections (Garrett, 2013)." Garrett does however note that the impact Super PACs may not be fully understood as they are not subject to any issues rules that would regulate their behavior. He highlights administrative orders (AOs) issued in reference to Super PAC behavior when Stephen Colbert founded one on his comedy TV program, but the lack of federal rules means that Super PAC behavior may not be as clear as it seems.

The decision for a PAC to contribute money to a candidate is based on many factors. On one hand, PACS give money to support candidates that they believe will win- but PACS also help fund challengers when they disagree with incumbents. Poole et all modeled the decisions that PACS have no make and the considerations behind donating to candidates laying out factors

that PACS as rational decision makers must make (1987). Poole et all finds that PACS look at candidates that further the PACS legislative agenda, are more likely to donate in monetarily close races (with the expectation that money can make or break an election), that PACS favor races where they will gain influence by donation to senior legislatures and those who are in line for chairman-ships, and that PACS look at where their money would have the biggest impact as they donate large sums to smaller numbers of candidates (Poole et all 1987). Bond et all found that being associated with a PAC did not make a person more likely to gain access to a member of congress than did being a constituent in a 2000 experiment (Bond et all, 2000), but the role of PACS and now SuperPACS has increased since 2000 with Supreme Court cases changing restrictions on donations.

Super PACS are still a relatively new legal structure. Their existence was catalyzed by the Citizens United Decision. Hasson found that Super PACS are more likely to focus their attention on negative adds towards opposition candidates, while PACS spend more on positive adds to support their favored choice (2016). The real question becomes, do these groups matter? Most voters lack knowledge of what a PAC or Super PAC is and how they differ- yet alone how they spend. Alexander (2005), found they are quite powerful and having a PAC on your side if a good thing, but what happens when voters find out that the majority of your funding comes from one of these groups or from donations from a few wealthy individuals- in particular when a candidate says they represent the "voice of the people"?

A common narrative is that PACS represent the voice of the view and are a tool of manipulation of the political process by the wealthy elite (Mayer 2016). Boncia argues that the role of special interests, referring to industry groups, lobbying firms, and PACS, is sometimes misrepresented in the media (2011). He writes in the Boston Review that:

A common misconception is that polarization goes hand and hand with lobbying and special interests... political contributions are often portrayed as a means by which special interests hash out quid pro quo deals. In truth, they more closely resemble a form of expensive targeted advertising (Boncia 2011).

Boncia sees the role of special interest groups as less critical than the role of small donors¹³ whom he says often time do not align with the preferences with average voters (2011). He finds special interest groups are not as problematic. He argues campaign finance reform to further regulate these groups is a distraction from and that while money from organized special interest groups "flows freely to the ideological center", fund-raising from small donors is about partisan taunting and ideological appeals (Boncia 2011). Bonacia's views on special interests stand out from what most researchers write, but highlights differing views on PACS. Many argue that special interest groups and in particular PACS have too much power in American Politics as they currently stand, but others do believe that PACS are not problematic and other factors are what skew evaluations of the state of American elections; The tension surrounding special interest groups is examined in the experiment in Chapter IV.

2.1.5 How is money raised?

Campaign staffs generally consist of someone whose sole job is to solicit donations. Candidates also appear strategically at events in which they deem will help them raise money. Candidates solicit donations from individuals, corresponding level political parties, civic organizations, businesses, and other groups and use a variety of techniques such as direct asks, mail campaigns, and targeted messaging.

¹³Boncia does not define small donors but discusses people whom donated to Reps. Michelle Bachman Alan Grayson. It is understood that small donors refer to the groups of people that donate to candidates to make their voices heard but have specific reasons to donate that may not align with policy preferences of those who do not donate.

Should a candidate focus all their attention on garnering grassroots donations, or should they court outside interest groups (PACS)? Alexander found that PAC donations are positively (0.11) correlated with electoral success in open-seat races, while those candidates that candidates whom self-finance elections face a negative correlation (-0.11) with electoral success (Alexander 2005, 355). Alexander also found that candidates that raised money from out of state donors were less likely to win elections than those that raised money close to home (Alexander, 356), Alexander questions the relationship between PACs and success hypothesizing that PACs donate based on the likelihood of success of the candidate. Alexander found that the idea situation would be for a candidate to receive PAC donations but for the donations to come from in state/district- but his findings are only statistically significant for open-seat races. A major question that emerges is what effect would this have for weak incumbents in the face of new programs launched by both the Republican and Democratic National Committees, designed to defeat "weak" incumbents? What does this mean for candidates today in a climate where money comes from all over, not just a home district or state?

Dowling and Miller (2014) however find that candidates without outside money are rated more highly than those with it. Evaluations using CCES (Cooperative Congressional Election Study) data and YouGov found significant results, while an Mturk study found no significant findings when evaluating perceptions of candidates with outside funding. The difference in findings between CCES/YouGov and Mturk raised questions about how significant funding sources are. A nationally representative study found significant results, which may strengthen the conclusion, but by collecting primary data Dowling and Miller can control the questions asked to the sample found in MTurk.

Studies produced by Alexander and Dowling and Miller seem to have conflicting results. Both concluded that donations matter in elections, but differ in their findings on the importance of the origin of funding. Alexander's findings follow the common logic that any money is good money and that only in rare cases will voters care if the money came from a PAC. Dowling and Miller however found significant results that locations matter when using a nationally representative study (CCES/YouGov). The contrast between Dowling and Miller's internal findings and between Dowling and Miller and Alexander's findings highlights the need for more research that explores whether voters care about where money is raised. This thesis aims to do so while also introducing the idea of interpersonal political trust to see if the origin of donations is important.

2.2. Political Trust

In this section I define political trust and survey existing literature focusing on different definitions of political trust, the importance of political trust, and the implications of low or declining levels of political trust.

2.2.1 What is Political Trust?

Trust is broadly defined as believing in the reliability or ability of someone or something (Webster Dictionary). Trust itself is important to many social sciences, with most attention to trust coming from psychology and behavioral economics. Trust is important to daily life and the bonds of societies as the relationship that allows for every day interactions to occur. Rotter writes:

'The entire fabric of our day-to-day living, of our social world, rests on trust – buying gasoline, paying taxes, going to the dentist, flying to a convention – almost all our decisions involve trusting someone else' (Rotter 1970 *in* Krueger and Evans 2009).

Without trust, Rotter argues, daily transactions would not occur; society is based on the premise that we are able to trust other people to uphold their end of the hypothetical bargain. Messick and Kramer say, "trust as the result of a specific decision often based on the presumed honesty and perceived morality (not the interests) of the trustee (Messick and Kramer *in* Cook 2001).

If trust is seen as the underlying relationships that allow for social bonds, then what is political trust? While it seems that political trust would be a clear concept, there is no singular definition of political trust. Heatherington defines political trust as "a basic evaluative orientation toward the government founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations (1998, p 781)." Hetherington's definition can be understood as political trust looks at whether or not the government or members of the political system meet expectations. Levi and Stoker argue that trust is relational; trust may be given in degrees and may extend to parts of the whole but not the whole itself (2000, p 475-6).¹⁴

Gamson (1968) approaches political trust differently, moving from expectations to measuring satisfaction with outcomes. Gamson defines political trust as "the probability... that the political system (or some part of it) will produce preferred outcomes (1968, p 54). This can be interpreted as people trust politicians to act in their voter's best interests whether they govern as a delegate or a trustee. Offe clarifies this to be that "trust is the belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to my/our well-being and refrain from inflicting damage upon me/us (1999, page 47). Each of these definitions highlight the fact that trust is evaluative;

¹⁴ Such could partially explain why people seem to trust some levels of government more so than others.

it requires consideration of how deserving of trust a party or actor is in light of normative expectations of what a politician should represent and how they should behave.

2.2.1.1 Levels of Trust

Trust in politics would mean that a voter believes that the politician will produce optimal outcomes and not create harms for the people they represent, be it all politicians of a nation or just those who are represented by an elected official. Anderson (2009) notes that political trust is comprised of two different types or trust that should be treated separately. Anderson divides political trust into trust in government or institutions and trust in one's ability to affect change in the political system, highlighting that part of political trust is dependent on inter-personal relations while part is faith in structures of government (2009). Trust in specific candidates, as this thesis studies, is somewhat outside of this focusing on interpersonal relationships rather than either institutions or one's belief in their own ability to affect change; This project is concerned with trust in specific candidates which Anderson clarifies as requiring giving other people the benefit of the doubt (Putnam 2000 and Uslaner 2002 *in* Anderson 2009).

Anderson also stresses that trust in others and trust in political institutions are not the same. Trust in others, in this case meaning the candidate as a person rather than an institution in themselves assumes a sense of cooperation with Anderson arguing that cooperation leads to trust (2009). If a voter believes they are working with a candidate to better their community, they will place some faith and trust in that candidate by voting for them. What however happens if the candidate whom is otherwise deemed as non-problematic engages in behavior which the voter disagrees with? Political Trust is practically divided by level of government; trust is measured at the local, state, and national level separately. Polls conducted through 2014 by Gallup revealed differences in the levels of trust respondents exhibited toward local government versus state governments and state governments versus national government (Gallup 2014). 72% of respondents in a September 2014 poll trusted their local government while 62% trusted their state government (Gallup 2014)¹⁵. In 2015, a Pew study found that only 3% of respondents trusted the national government in the United states "just about always" while 16% of respondents selected "most of the time (Pew 2015). If trust is based on community relationships, then it follows that local governments would be the most trusted level as local governments would be the most visible and person iteration of governments in most people's lives. When voters are able to put faces to names and are able to see that local governments and officials are trying to affect positive change in their communities, they are able to express higher levels of trust. Trust is personal and the stronger the bond between the two bodies (in this case being members of a community and political candidates or officials); political trust should be higher than current levels suggest.

Demonstrations of incompetence and failure to convince the public that politicians are in fact truth worthy affects both institutional trust (leading people to believe that Congress, parties, or the executive branch are should not be trusted) as well as interpersonal political trust (trust in individual actors decreases even if institutional trust remains unaffected). ¹⁶ While accepting large sums of outside donations is contriversial, the question that arises for the experiment in

¹⁵ Historic data as well as public opinion pools all show that trust is highest at the local level. Similar results were reported by YouGov 2013 and Wolack 2010.

¹⁶ Further research might examine potential spillover effects of decreasing trust in institutions on interpersonal political trust. Research has shown that trust in levels of government differs and are not dependent on each other (trust in national government falling does not mean that trust in state or local level institutions decreases). Whether or not data shows correlation between low levels of trust in institutions is yet to be seen. Studies have shown even when people report falling trust in institutions, they rate their own representatives highly (Pew 2015; Luntz 2017; Oosting 2013).

Chapter IV is whether accepting high levels of outside donations will harm evaluations of the candidate (that suggests levels of trust).

2.2.1.2 Focusing on Interpersonal Rather than Institutional Trust

In this thesis, I am specifically interested in interpersonal trust rather than institutional trust. Interpersonal trust, referring to how actors trust each other among the same level, is related to institutional trust, but has more direct implications for voting behavior and personal political activity. I argue that the way in which people trust each other is an important signal for both how strong community relations are (as a measure of social capital) and for the health of the political system. It is not surprising that in a country where general political trust is low (Gallup 2016; Pew 2016), voter turnout is lower than other similar countries (Martinez 2010).

Interpersonal trust is important to study in a voting behavior context because the way in which voters see candidates has implications on decisions to vote for specific candidates or to abstain from voting as a conscious decision. When interpersonal trust between voters and a candidate is low, voters may abstain from voting for that candidate(thus why some supporters of Bernie Sanders decided they would not vote for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election) or may vote for alternative or non-major party candidates (such may be why republicans began to look toward Evan McMillian as an alternative republican candidate for president after Donald Trump won the Republican party nomination or why other republicans voted for libertarian candidate Gary Johnson). I look to interpersonal trust rather than institutional political trust to begin to understand the mechanisms behind these decisions.

2.2.2 Why is political trust important?

Political trust is inherently important as a measure of gauging the state of government. Easton argues that "the legitimacy of democratic political systems depends in large part on the extent to which the electorate trusts the government to do what's right at least most of the time (Easton 1965 *in* Erber and Lau, 1990). Gallup data shows that 81% of respondents trusted government only some of the time or never, while only 19% trusted government 'just about always or most of the time (Gallup, 2016). Distrust in government is at its highest since 1994, but does this mean anything? Distrust in government seems to be cyclical as trust was low between 1973-4, reached a peak in 1984 and fell sharply again by 1994 (Erber and Lau ,1990; Gallup, 2016). Levi and Stokes note if trust in government institutions is a cycle and people tend to conflate trust in government figure should not be concerning when looked at as a part of larger trends. What, however, does this mean for candidates who face low levels or decreases in levels of trust amid an election?

Heatherington is interested in the role of political trust in presidents, saying that in times of low trust, incumbents should lose elections- but does this apply outside of presidential races? Parker (1989) goes as far to make the claim that trustworthiness can be a larger predictor than party identification in races in general, not just presidential elections. Parker bases this analysis on an index created combining a battery open ended survey questions on trust into a single variable and says that this variable was more predictive than party identification when looking at incumbency performance and voter choice (1989). If this finding holds true today, then trust as a heuristic deserves more attention. The use of trust as a heuristic however is only truly useful in high political knowledge settings when challengers are as well-known as incumbents.

Electoral history reveals that in cases when a candidate does something that would make them appear untrust worthy (such as the many scandals of Anthony Weiner and other similar officials ¹⁷), they lose support and later lose elections. How far does one need to go to become untrustworthy? Does it require a large-scale scandal or can taking outside money provoke the same response? It seems unlikely that accepting a large sum of money from special interest groups to fund a campaign would evoke the same response as being involved in a scandal of the nature as was Anthony Weiner, but as the response of voters when someone has large sums of outside money should be the same to a lesser magnitude (citation).

Political trust is important for both political actors (meaning institutions and individual politicians and candidates) and voters. Rudolph and Evans discuss the importance of political trust to institutions saying political trust "fosters civilian compliance with governmental demands (2005, page 660)." Political trust is recroprical in this sense; when voters trust political actors they comply with "government demands." Heatherington and Husser further explain the importance of political trust saying:

... they can both benefits from increasing levels of political trust. Trust can underwrite both their favored initiatives because, in the public mind, what the federal government is and, in turn, what it does can change over time depending on circumstances (2011, page 312).

Political trust, Heatherington and Husser argue, is what allows politicians to enact policies without fear that they will lose their seat in the next election. In this sense, trust in individual

¹⁷ Anthony Weiner was a representative to the United States House of Representatives from New York's 9th district from 1999-2011. Weiner was forced to resign in 2011 after it was uncovered that Weiner was involved in a "sexting" scandal, with more incidents of Weiner being unfaithful to his wife, Huma Abedein (an aid to Hillary Clinton) following. Weiner pled guilty in 2017 of transferring "obscene materials" to an underage female (Washington Post, 2017).

politicians is a sense of security. If a politician is trusted by the people they represent, then they have the ability to move forward with policies they, meaning the politician, favor.

Conceptually, trust is interesting because it is in direct conflict with corruption and corruption is a recurring theme in evaluations of government. A 2002 Brennan Center poll found 70% of respondents responding positively that SuperPACS leads to corruption and the ANES in the same year showed 60% of respondents agree that "about half" or more of" the people running government" were corrupt (Bowler and Donovan 2015). In terms of public opinion, Bowler and Donovan write "A more expansive definition of corruption would recognize that citizens may come to perceive their representatives' decisions as "the result of the whispered voices of those who have bought access through their campaign contributions" and include "practices that some consider legalized bribery (2015)"". In this sense, trust and corruption are on opposite ends of the evaluative scale. Trust becomes an important variable because using the words corrupt or corruption would (in this experiment) bias respondents when they see the phrase outside money or special interest. By asking about questions that get at trust rather than how corrupt does a respondent feel a politician is, there is less of a priming effect but the same phenomena are evaluated.

2.2.2.1 Voting as an Act of Trust

Political trust is also important because of its implications on voting behavior. The act of voting for a candidate indirectly implies that a voter trusts a candidate to act in their best interest as their representative to a governing body. Heatherington argues that trust in politicians is a critical heuristic used when voters decide who to vote for in a dearth of information, saying people rely on evaluations of candidates but that this becomes more difficult in times of divided government (which is common as voters tend to retrospectively punish parties during mid-term

elections) (Heatherington 1999). In the scenario Heatherington describes, voters either consciously or subconsciously decide whether or not to vote for a candidate based on their evaluation of whether or not they can trust the candidate. This then becomes a primary heuristic when the opportunity cost of seeking out further information is higher than what a voter will accept.

2.2.3 The Implications of Low or Declining Political Trust

The implications of low levels of political trust have been studied primarily at the institutional level. Marien and Hooghe found that low levels of political trust were correlated with high levels of law breaking and non-compliance, concluding that low aggregate levels of political trust lead to weaker societal bonds (2010). If citizens of a country do not trust government institutions, they are less likely to follow rules set by those institutions. Delhey and Newton reported a similar conclusion but began to introduce interpersonal political trust saying that low levels of political trust were correlated with low social capital and stability (2003). If a community is able to trust each other and the institutions of government in that community, then they are bonded and the community is more stable.

Heatherington further addresses the political relevance of political trust finding that scholars underestimate the consequences of distrust in politicians (again focusing on the presidential level) and says that low trust situations make it harder for leaders to succeed (1998). Bowler and Karp argue that to raise general trust, politicians should not seek scapegoats, but stop the actions that make the public see them as untrustworthy (2004). If this is the case and outside donations do in fact make a politician appear untrustworthy, should they then turn away donations?

2.3. Theoretical Expectations of the Interaction Between Knowledge of Outside Donations and Interpersonal Trust between Voters and Candidates

Low levels of information among the general public as well as declining levels of generalized political trust may lead to large reactions when voters believe that their trust has been violated. As polling data demonstrates that the large majority of voters believe that big donors are problematic for the state of democracy and are against outside donations, the experiment I use (see Chapter III for the methodology and Chapter IV for results) to examine how knowledge of outside donations effects interpersonal trust towards candidates becomes more poignant. In this section, I will lay out a theoretical framework in which these factors may be evaluated focusing on voting as an act of trust and the role political knowledge in trust evaluations.

This project is grounded in expectations 4 key theoretical assumptions: voting intention is a sign of trust in a candidate, accepting large sums of outside donations will be evaluated as a betrayal of trust by voters, trust and perceived violations of trust manifest in a decreased likelihood to vote for a candidate, and high levels of information¹⁸ leads to better informed voters.

The first assumption under which this thesis operates is that voting signifies trust in a candidate. The act of voting in itself can be construed as believing that a person's vote can affect change. Gronund and Setala found that at the individual level, trust in government increases a person's likelihood to vote (2007). They argue that trust in institutions and trust in institutional actors (ie

¹⁸ Perfect information would lead to "perfect" voting but in so far as information asymmetry exists and manifests as a knowledge problem (Hayek, 1948; Somin 2013 (Cato Unbound)), there will never be perfect information and thus never be perfect voting as opportunity costs in gaining full information about policies, backgrounds, voting history, and donors exceed the marginal benefit of gaining the information. This is one reason that voters employ heuristics in deciding for whom to cast their vote.

candidates and officials as people in themselves rather than pure representations of their respective institutions) are highly correlated (Gronund and Setala 2007; Heatherington 1998). They also find an independent effect (at the aggregate level in a multi-national study) on turnout related to the level of trust in politicians. In situations where voting is non-compulsory, as is the case in the United States, both the act of voting in itself and the act of voting for one individual over another can thus be seen as a sign that trust in the actors is present.

When a person votes for a candidate, they are expressing a certain inherent level of trust in that candidate. Voting for a candidate signals that a voter believes this candidate will do what is best for them more so than any other available option and that they trust them to protect their best interests. Bates (2016) looks to leadership theory and explains voting as a sign of trust saying:

There's always a vast group of voters whose visceral belief in a candidate, rather than knowledge of the issues, motivates them to go to the polls, Likewise, employees coming in to work every day are deciding whether to keep working for you, and how 'engaged' they're going to be, based on how much, or how little, they trust you (Bates *in* Fisher 2016)."

Bates equates voters with employees and argues that decisions are centered around how much a person trusts a leader, or in this case a candidate. She uses this theory to explain why many voters seemed to favor Sanders over Clinton as the democratic nominee for President in 2016. Personal traits rather than actual policy issues motivate some voters and trust is motivating factor. It is important to note that political trust in the way it is studied in this thesis may focus primarily on the trust relationship between voters and candidates, but institutional trust may affect how voters trust candidates. Heatherington argues republican primary voters showed a preference for Donald Trump over other candidates because they did not trust "Washington (Heatherington 2015)." Regardless of levels of institutional trust, voter's decisions to vote for one candidate over another is a sign that they trust their chosen candidate. Voting is a sign of trust because they chose whom they trust most to represent them in government (Cox 2015).

If trust is a critical factor in the decision to vote for a candidate, than how do outside donations effect levels of trust? Attitudes toward outside donations are generally negative, with polls in 2012 revealing that most the American public was concerned over the influence of "big donors" on politics (Levi 2014) and similar narratives being espoused in popular media during the 2016 election cycle. In this project, I assume first that voters will have an opinion about outside donations and second that the opinion will be negative.¹⁹ If these two propositions are true, then I argue that voters would view the acceptance of many outside donations as a betrayal of trust. I argue that voters choose representatives that they believe will best represent their own interests (Jones 2012; Stafford 2016), and a candidate's dedication to voters comes into question when they accept donations from outside sources who they are not by definition bound to represent. If a candidate creates an obligation to protect the interest of an outside source of donations, as I argue the exchange between special interest groups, PACS, or mega donors and a candidate creates, and voters have information about this, then they should logically question the how dedicated the candidate would be to the voters in the circumstance that the interest of the outside source and the voters in the district are not aligned.

If outside donations are perceived as violations of trust, I assert that voters would be less likely to vote for said candidate because voting is a sign of trust. This assumption poses one glaring issue: what if both candidates accept outside donations. In this circumstance, voters will use

¹⁹ This assumption is tested in the experiment in chapter IV.

other heuristics such as incumbent approval, endorsements, or party identification (Lefevre 2010; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lupia 1994). Trust is, Heatherington argues, a heuristic in the absence of party identification (a strong heuristic) (1999). While this is a very real possibility for actual elections, I am interested in evaluations of single candidates rather than measuring support for one candidate instead of their opponent(s). In non-partisan elections, situations in which voters do not have party identification information (as is the case with the experiment in Chapter IV), trust should be a strong heuristic. When a candidate is viewed as less trustworthy, voters should react negatively toward them. When trust is violated, voters should be less likely to vote for a candidate and this decrease in likelihood would directly reflect the decrease in trust between the voters and the candidate.

Finally, I base this thesis in the idea that knowledge of funding is an important aspect of political knowledge that voters need to inform the "best "possible vote. Gaining knowledge of financial resources and donor sources requires more effort than many voters are willing to expend, Gallup data showed that voters are concerned with big donors influence in politics. If a voter has feelings toward outside donations but is not particularly interested in politics, they may not actively seek out this information given their opportunity costs if it is buried in financial disclosure records or forms with the race's respective election committee, even if they are concerned with the influence of wealthy donors. I argue that introducing this information to voters will lead to better informed votes. If information about the sources of campaign donation is clearly presented to voters, I posit that voters will take note and evaluations of candidates would change. It should not have an effect on those who do not have opinions on outside donations, but should shift the evaluation of a candidate to be more negative after this information is introduced if a voter has opinions toward outside donations.
The role of political trust in determine whether a person will support another person is thus unclear. Do voters care if a candidate takes outside money? Does outside donation decrease interpersonal political trust? Chapter IV will measure this using an experiment.

Chapter III: Methodology

In this chapter I detail the design of the experiment in Chapter IV and the methodology of analysis.

3.1 Why an experiment?

This survey experiment examines the effect of donation on evaluations of candidates, focusing on the interpersonal trust between respondents and candidates. While the design of the survey is outlined below, it is important to first discuss why an experiment was the appropriate method for this research and detail the possible limitations of the method as well as how limitations were addressed.

Druckman et all explain the use of experiments in political science saying "Evolution was driven by the maturation of research literatures that demand acute tests of causal claims, and by innovations in the implementation of experiments that expand their reach. Political science experiments can transform—have transformed—thinking on a topic when carried out in relevant contexts—and to be relevant, the situation need not be isomorphic with a naturally occurring (i.e., "real world") referent (Druckman et all, 2006)." The role of survey experiments is less clear than a natural, field, or laboratory based experiment. Morton and Williams explain what makes a survey experiment different from a straight survey saying "When a researcher does purposely attempt to use a survey to manipulate elements of the DGP that theoretically affect respondent's opinions, we call this an experiment (2009, p 37)." In this project, I manipulate one condition to see if one factor can change the overall evaluation of a candidate, the reported level of trust in that candidate, and the willingness to vote for that candidate.

The logic behind using a survey experiment is simple. Quirk at el argue that they are simple to implement and they dodge some of the difficulties of making inferences from conventional survey data (2007). The simplicity lays within randomly assigning respondents alternative versions of questionnaire items (Quirk 2007). In some cases, as is the case with this experiment, respondents are unaware if they are in the control of treatment group and by random assignment, the representativeness of the sample is less of a problem that other assignment techniques because there is a random chance that a participant is assigned to each group. This project benefits from the use of an experiment because of the hypothesized cognitive dissonance, being that people will be opposed to something in theory but their behavior will demonstrate the opposite or no effect in practice.

Experiments are the best tool for this investigation because existing survey data does not cover interpersonal trust, but the method does have limits. It may be difficult for respondents to evaluate a hypothetical candidate.²⁰ Respondents are offered a hypothetical candidate in order to not potentially harm the reputation of any existing candidates and are not told where the race is, allowing respondents to picture the race taking place in their own district, but this may seem unrealistic and lead to more hypothetical than realistic views. The goal of this research is to measure actual attitudes, which may be a limitation of this research and would need further work. An experiment is also used for this thesis because as Gronlund and Setala note, support for actors tends to be conflated in traditional survey research (2007). They argue that the way questions about trust are asked tends to skew results and thus I measure trust in multiple

²⁰ This is particularly a challenge for testing the hypothesis that candidates will reject outside donations in theory and reality.

questions and offer a treatment condition in an attempt to get a more realistic picture of the level of interpersonal political trust.

One problem with the use of an experiment may be low external validity. Chapter IV will discuss the sample that participated in this experiment, but because the sample is not representative, generalizations are limited (Campbell 1968 *in* McDermott). This is resolved by limiting the scope of generalizations to populations that the sample of this experiment are generalizable to. Samples gleaned from Mturk are superior to student samples as they reach more diverse populations and do not consist of over studied student groups (Buhermester 2011, Bartneck 2015). Research has also found that samples taken from Mturk respondents paid more attention to instructions than did student samples (Hauser 2016). External validity also may be threatened by using what Campbell calls "professional subjects", but because the sample is not told they are involved in an experiment (but are informed they are just taking a survey) (Campbell 1968 in McDermott), this may not be as large of a threat to external validity as it would be if this was a sample of political science of psychology students who knew they were involved in an experiment.

3.2 Experimental Design

Questions exploring the impact of outside donation on trust in candidates were asked as the section in a larger survey that included sections on voting consistency, evaluation of government programs in personal versus institutional settings, and evaluation of public policy processes. The larger survey took between 20-30 minutes to complete (the section containing this experiment was timed at 4-5 minutes).

The experiment was hosted on Qualtrics which was able to randomly assign respondents to the control of treatment groups. Randomization occurred at the beginning of the survey and after each additional sub section so that there was an equal chance of a person being a member of the subsequent sections control or treatment groups. This is important because this experiment was run in conjunction with 3 others. This experiment was the third of four sections respondents saw as a part of the greater survey, so the treatment contained 50% of the treatment groups of the earlier 2 sections and 50% of the control groups. This randomization technique allows for true randomization in each experiment rather than flagging a respondent as control or treatment at the beginning and having them follow that path in each of the 4 experiments embedded into the larger survey.

The survey was offered as a Human Intelligence Task on Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk) to most effectively recruit an American sample. Mturk is more representative than either student or convenience samples (Berkinsky 2011). MTurk is also the most cost effective platform for the larger survey; we were able to recruit our sample for substantially less than it would have cost to use a platform such as YouGov or other platforms. Mturk samples do tend to consist of younger respondents whom are liberal leaning and have higher levels of education than average, but that only limits the generalizability of conclusions to the entire populations; claims can still be made about the sample population that arises. External validity may be slightly problematic for Mturk samples (Berkinsky 2011) as respondents self-select based on the title of the survey, projected amount of time to complete the survey, and level of compensation offered.

3.2.1 Questions and Information

This experiment was designed to offer a neutral candidate and measure the impact of the influence of the introduction of knowledge on a candidate's financial contributions. At the beginning of this study, respondents were asked about their political ideology in two ways: first by asking them to identify as democrat, republican, or other and second by asking them whom they voted for in the 2016 election. On this page, respondents were also asked about the theoretical presence of outside money in elections with the question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The best candidates are candidates that raise money at home rather than taking money from special interests.* This question is asked before a candidate is ever introduced and intentionally on a different page than when the respondents are asked whether or not the candidate in this experiment should accept donations in order to avoid biasing their answers. Part of the analysis in Chapter IV will focus on differences between theoretically disliking outside money and realistic attitudes toward candidates that accept outside money, so this question was necessary but placement needed to be particular in order to avoid confirmation bias.

Additionally, I ask about theoretical outside money before introducing respondents to the candidate in order to avoid the question order effect (Lavarakas 2008). Asking after the introduction to the candidate may prime subsequent questions, but it can be argued that the question order as respondents saw it primed them to subconsciously believe that that candidate received outside money- even though funding is purposefully not addressed. The question order was not changed for two reasons. First, priming is slightly avoided by placing the introduction to the candidate and subsequent evaluation after a page break and the actual question under a large block of text that introduces the candidate. This should have given respondents time to "forget" the earlier question about outside money, but analysis of this is not possible without

running the experiment again. Second, this question order was important for the treatment condition because the topic needs to be asked before respondents know that the candidate receives outside funding in order to test the hypothesis that people may be opposed to outside money in theory but in practice will not punish candidates that accept outside funding.

Respondents were asked about their opinion on outside money in races before being introduced to the hypothetical candidate. Then they were asked if they found him appealing or would vote for him to avoid placing the assumption that he received money into the minds of respondents. Respondents that were randomly allocated to the treatment group were also asked if the candidate should accept money from outside groups. They were told that the candidate received 70% of his funding (\$100,000) from outside special interest, but were not given any other details about the source of the funding than that the candidate hosted many small grassroots events. This small battery of questions allows analysis on attitudes to outside money in evaluation of candidates and tests whether people agree with the idea of restricted campaign funding in theory *and* reality.

Responses are measured on a 6-point scale rather than a 5 or 7-point scale to evoke a nonneutral response (where 1 is most favorable and 6 is least favorable). The above-mentioned pilot found that most people answered the neutral option, so this study asks the same questions while removing the true neutral and forcing an answer. "Somewhat positive" and "Somewhat negative" are offered in every instance that calls for evaluation, and respondents chose one of these options rather than skipping the question or dropping out of the survey.

3.2.2 The Candidate: Position and Issue Selection in the Creation of the Vignette

Patrick Smith is running for re-election to state legislature. He is a small business owner and an active community volunteer. Smith has focused his campaign on problems facing the community, in particular a shortage of qualified teachers in public schools. Smith has a positive reputation in the state legislature as someone who knows how to get things done. He vowed to "work hard on behalf of the middle class" if he was re-elected. If re-elected, this would be his 3rd term in office.

Respondents were offered a neutral profile of an incumbent running for his third term in the state legislature that is trusted by other members of the legislature, dedicated to schools, owns a small business, and is a "voice of the people in the state legislature." While the introduction of the small business owner term can be interpreted as slightly republican, there was no significant difference in the initial evaluations of the candidate in a pilot test (n=52) between people whom identified as democrat, republican, or independent. Additionally, the design of the script captures slightly populist notes that underscore the success of candidates such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (Ball 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Cassidy 2016. Respondents are offered the profile of a male that seems to be white to avoid racial or gender bias (Sigleman 1995, Smith et al 2007).

The conscious choice to use the name of a white-sounding male that had mildly conservative yet still centrist views was made in order to not isolate respondents. I made a conscious decision to only offer one version of the candidate, so views needed to be fairly moderate and non-contriversial. Gallup data shows that historically, satisfaction with schools is a non-partisan issue.



Figure 2: Americans Satisfaction with US education

Polls conducted in the US in 2016 reveal that democrats are more satisfied with the state of the US education system, but Gallup found that many are still concerned with the state of schools in the United States (Gallup 2017, Pew 2016). This issue is thus sufficient for the introduction to the candidate because the quality of schools is generally non-polarizing. Political issues in education such as Common Core are not mentioned and the text only mentions more money for quality teachers. Figure 2 shows a large difference in opinion along partisan lines in satisfaction with US education (particularly in 2016), but this can be attributed to issues such as Common Core.

Respondents are also told that the candidate is a voice of the people. This serves two purposes. First is shows community connection, which is an important aspect of trust; if someone is dedicated to serving their community and acting on behalf of the people, they should be more trusted. Second, this subconsciously brings in populist themes that dominate US politics. The

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Source: Gallup 2017

success of Trump and Sanders was largely attributed to their "voice of the people rather than the political elites" messages (Baggini 2017; Islam and Crego 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2016). While Sanders success as a liberal populist was admirable, overt mentions of populism would have biased the candidate as more conservative than liberal. In order to suggest that the candidate may lean populist, the term "voice of the people" is used. Sanders and Trump were both called "voices of the people" through the election (Cassidy 2016); the exact language of the text was used to communicate the same message in the wording of the introduction to the candidate.

Furthermore, the vignette highlighted that the candidate was connected to his community as a small business owner. This aspect of the profile is appealing more so to republicans than democrats (Marks 2016; NFIB 2016), but the democratic party platform for 2016-2020 includes a section on small business saying, *"The Democratic Party will make it easier to start and grow a small business in America...by supporting small business and entrepreneurship, we can grow jobs faster in America.* (Democrats.Org 2016)." This issue is one that, when introduced as a link to the community rather than as the only characteristic of the candidate, should not skew evaluations to heavily. Gallup polls in 2010 also found that while most Americans identify as independent the majority of independent voter's lean republican- so any effect this feature of the vignette would have is theoretically in line with the American electorate.

3.2.3 Pilot Study on Treatment Condition

A pilot study with a sample of n=53 was run on March 14, 2017 to determine first if the candidate would be appealing to both democrats and liberals and second if the treatment would be able to evoke non-neutral responses. To this extent, only the treatment condition was explored, as the vignette is the same in both the control and treatment. Participants were

recruited on social media by putting out a call in the Mary Baldwin College alumnae/i Facebook page and the DC Libertarian Circle Facebook page. This sample was not representative nor random, but because there was no treatment versus control condition and the purpose was to determine if the battery of questions was able to evoke non-neutral responses, the sample was sufficient. Putting out a call for responses in a libertarian group did evoke stronger than expected answers as well as skew the answers to theoretical questions about theoretical outside money in campaigns, but this was an acknowledged issue before results were examined. This sample was reached more republicans and supporters of Donald Trump than the Mturk sample was able to reach, but that falls within the accepted limitations of Mturk samples being generally slightly more liberal, in particular compared to the Facebook groups in which the survey was posted.

In this pilot, all respondents were given what would become the treatment group survey. There was no control group because there are minimal differences between treatment and control and the purpose of this pilot was to determine whether the vignette and treatment condition would be able to evoke non-neutral responses. Testing only the treatment survey allowed me to have a larger sample group and check for neutrality in the vignette that all respondents in the paid experiment would see as well as testing the treatment condition

The results of the pilot survey on only the treatment condition revealed neutrality. 58.5% of respondents evaluated the candidate as neutral after the initial measure; 54.7% evaluated the candidate as neutral after the treatment was introduced. 64.2% of respondents replied they were unsure if they would vote for the candidate and when asked "*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Patrick Jones has my best interest at heart,*" 60.4% of respondents selected the neutral response. Neutral answers in themselves are acceptable but the fear that

respondents were choosing neutral responses to avoid thinking about the issue and the desire to see the direction of the relationship between the evaluation of the candidate and the introduction of the treatment condition led to the conclusion that allowing for a purely neutral answer option may not be the best strategy in this survey.

Changes were made after looking at pilot results. First, the name of the candidate was adjusted as google searches revealed the initial name corresponded to an up-and-coming professional football player in the United States. Second, the campaign was changed from a federal race to a state race because of the nature of the question with the understanding that people are more attached to people closer to their communities (Anderson 2009) and offering a state race would have a higher underlying level of trust in the candidates than would a federal race. Finally, positive or negative answers were forced by switching to an even numbered scale. Switching from 1-6 rather than 1-7 and labeling 3 and 4 as "somewhat positive" and "somewhat negative" allows for a sense of neutrality but also shows direction. The pilot results were unable to show direction of neutrality, but the scale in the final experiment allow me to measure changes from somewhat positive to somewhat negative or vice versa if a respondent still feels fairly neutral.

3.2.4 Variable Selection: Trust, Appeal, and Voting

The aspect of the survey that both control and treatment groups received deal with 3 key issues: trust, whether the candidate is appealing, and whether the respondent would be willing to vote for the candidate. The rational and significance behind these variables is explained below.

3.2.4.1: Trust

Trust is the aspect this experiment is most interested in because trust in political officials rather than government institutions lacks research that combines trust with information about finance.

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Fenno notes that trust is what binds representatives and their electorates (1979), but little has been done in this area. If trust has been demonstrated as necessary for the functioning of democracy (Levi and Stokes 2004), a critical heuristic (Heatherington 1998), and what binds politicians and the electorate, then the interaction of trust with outside donations deserves more attention in current research.

Trust is used as a variable because the nature of trust allows for the measurement of perception of candidates in theory and performance. Trust, serving by proxy as antonymic for corruption, is sufficient to measure the relationships between the elected and the electorate. Trust is also measured because of its differences with appeal and willingness to support. Whether you trust a candidate is somewhat related to how appealing they are or whether you will support them²¹, but voters may not trust a candidate but still voter for them. Trust is measured when respondents are asked how appealing the candidate is but trust is implied in evaluations of the candidate. Trust is not directly mentioned but can be measured through the evaluative questions in the survey. Glaser et all found that a direct question of trust is not the best approach to reveal respondent's preferences (2000, p 814-16). The included questions about how appealing the candidate is to the respondent, and the likelihood to vote, when combined with the change in general evaluation of the candidate are sufficient measures for trust. While a question that directly asks respondents about trust may have been straightforward, the fear was that this question would bias respondents or not be answered honestly. At this introductory stage to this research, the questions included are adequate measures of trust in the candidate. Further research might introduce a question that directly measures trust, but the questions in this survey are for now a sufficient gauge of trust in the hypothetical candidate.

²¹ Correlation between these three factors will be examined in the next chapter.

Respondents in the treatment condition are asked to evaluate the candidate twice- first after the initial vignette and second after the introduction of the information about the candidate's donor source (this information appears on a new page, so while respondents are asked the same question twice, they do not see the same question on the same page).

The question is asked twice in order to measure the direct effect of the introduction of the new information on the evaluation. In this research, I seek to examine if information about outside donations will change evaluations of the candidate. While it is less than optimal to ask two nearly identical questions, this is the best way to measure this phenomenon. There is some risk of confirmation bias, but this risk is inherent to the survey no matter how the questions are asked. By asking for two separate evaluations in the treatment group, respondents may be unintentionally led to make their evaluation more extreme (in the idea that a changed evaluation must be the desired response so as a respondent, I should change my response). It is then difficult to separate the primed result from the natural result (being that the information changed the evaluation rather than the expectation of a changed answer led people to change their evaluation in light of new information. The control group is only asked to evaluate the candidate after the vignette (at the same time that the treatment group offers their first evaluation).

3.2.4.2: Appeal

I also examine how appealing the candidate is deemed by respondents as a way to both measure trust and differentiate between thinking a candidate may be favorable and wanting to vote for a candidate. I ask about appeal in order to gauge support without the implications of voting (which is addressed in a later question). Asking whether or not a candidate is appealing looks is a way of looking at if they would support them in the circumstance in which they deem voting for a candidate as not rational and choose to vote for a candidate that has a higher probability of winning. ²² This is not a perfect measure of secondary support, but adds to the narrative the survey is able to construct about voter's opinion of how outside donations changes the way they think about candidates.

3.2.4.3: Voting

Finally, I ask respondents whether or not they would vote for this candidate but do not offer an opponent. This is for two reasons: first there is a lack of party identification for the candidate, removing a key heuristic for respondents (Heatherington, 1999) and second because this would create more subgroups and require a large sample size in order to have sufficient numbers for analysis.²³ Including a question that directly asks respondents whether they would vote for the candidate.

Respondents in the pilot commented that having an opponent would make their decision to vote for or against the candidate more straightforward as those that commented said they did not know if they would vote for the candidate because they did not understand their other options, but offering an opponent would introduce a new factor to be evaluated. The evaluation of the opponent would also need to be determined and understood to understand if the treatment

²² Such as when conservative leaning- libertarians vote for republican candidates or when members of the green party vote for democrats.

 $^{^{23}}$ Experiments can be and have been run on small samples (n=19), but in order to have generalizable results, the largest feasible sample was used and counts in each sub group were kept as high as possible, thus eliminating some preliminarily planned sub divisions such as offering an incumbent versus a non-incumbent and offering one conservative profile and one liberal profile.

condition had any effect on the decision to vote for or against the candidate or if they simply found the opponent to be more in line with their own preferences.

The control group (that does not know that 70% of the candidate's finances come from national special interest groups) is asked the same questions as the treatment group, except for the second evaluation question that the treatment group is asked after they are informed about the funding source. Because the treatment group is asked to evaluate the candidate twice and the control group is only asked to evaluate the candidate once, confirmation bias may be inconsistent (only occurring in the treatment). This is countered by the introduction of new information before asking the second evaluation question and no other questions are asked twice (so there is no other risk of confirmation bias).

3.3 Hypothesis²⁴

3.3 Hypothesis

In this thesis, I examine how evaluations, trust, and likelihood to support a candidate change when a person knows that a candidate receives outside money. I also measure whether being anti-outside money when asked in a theoretical vacuum means that they will in practice be against a candidate that receives outside money. Below I present both the null hypothesis and the expected effect.

²⁴ I intended on investigating practical implications of this research and explores how nonvoters or those who voted for the candidate opposite of their party identification evaluate the candidate, but failed to reach a high enough number of respondents that either did not vote in 2016 or voted for the party that does not correspond with their party identification.

The first set of hypothesis deal with evaluations of the candidate and differences between the

control and treatment groups.

 $H_{1a null}$: Candidates will not be evaluated differently is they accept outside donations H_{1a} : Candidates will be evaluated more negatively if they accept outside donations

 $H_{1b null}$: Trust in a candidate will be the same in the treatment group and control group. H_{1b} : Trust in a candidate will be lower in the treatment group when knowledge of the candidate's funding source is known than in the control group.

 $H_{1c null}$: Members of the treatment group will not be less willing to vote for the candidate than members of the control group.

 H_{1c} : Members of the treatment group will be less willing to vote for the candidate than members of the control group

The second major hypothesis questions whether believing outside donations are unfavorable

will lead to a person believing the candidate should not accept outside donations in reality and

if knowledge of outside donations will change their perception of the candidate.

H_{2a null}: Respondents will not consistently reject outside donations in theory and reality. H2_a: Respondents will consistently reject outside donations in theory and reality.

 H_{2bnull} : Respondents who reject outside donations in theory will not have a negative perception of the candidate

 H_{2b} : Respondents who reject outside donations in theory will have a negative perception of the candidate

Chapter IV: An experiment on the effect of campaign donation knowledge on the evaluation of candidates.

In this chapter I present the results of the experiment and discuss findings, first detailing the sample and examining the characteristics of the data. I report results before moving to discussion. The results and analysis are grouped by hypothesis.

4.1 Characteristics of the Sample

4.1.1 Participants

Participants for the final experiment were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk in April 2017. While not totally representative, recruitment through MTurk is more representative than student or convenience samples (Berkinsky et al 2011). The sample for this survey is not fully representative of the general population of the United States, but generalizations can still be drawn from the data.

Race: 72.5% of the sample identify as Caucasian. The remainder of the sample identifies as black, Asian, Hispanic, or chose to skip the question. Because the number of observations is under 30 for Black (17), Asian (11), Hispanic (6), and other (6), they will be combined in analysis.

Age: The sample for this project is weighted toward young respondents. The youngest respondent was 19 years old while the oldest respondent was 65 years old, with a mean age of 34.7 and a median of 34.66. The highest frequency of respondents is aged between 24-34 (135/153 respondents); generalizations can be made about this age cohort without any manipulation.

Gender: 64.2% of the sample identifies as male, while 35.8% identify as female. The heavy bias toward men is not representative of general demographics of the United States but understood as a limitation of the MTurk sample pool.

The sample for this survey includes more men, young people, and Caucasians than a representative sample would.

4.2. Results

4.2.1 Summary of Data

In order to check the underlying assumptions of methods I use to test my hypothesis, I first check for normality of data. Table 1 shows the skew and kurtosis for the analyzed variables.

Skew	Kurtosis
0.99*	1.18
0.58*	1.07
0.87*	0.09
0.74*	2.11
0.06	-0.38
0.33	0.13
	Skew 0.99* 0.58* 0.87* 0.74* 0.06 0.33

Table 1: Skew and Kurtosis

*= moderate skew

The skewness and kurtosis values of the pertinent data are presented in table 1. The responses for the control evaluation, control vote, control outside money, and treatment evaluation questions are moderately skewed, while the responses for treatment evaluation 2 and treatment vote fall within the symmetrical range (-0.5-0.5). After examining the skewness of the data, I examine kurtosis levels. Perfectly normal data has kurtosis of 3. The fact that every variable has kurtosis under 3 means it has less responses in the tails than would normally distributed data. The responses in treatment evaluation 1 come closest to normal distribution levels of kurtosis, but have moderate skewness.

While the distribution of data in every variable is not normal, I am able to use parametric tests. I use parametric testing because even though some of the data is nor fully normal, normal tests used are "robust to the assumption of normality (Minitab)." Furthermore, the sample size is large enough that by employing the logic of the Central Limit theorem, sample means will be close to the population mean and that the sampling distribution of the mean should be normally distributed. Because the central limit theorem is applicable to sample sizes over n=50 and the sample size in this experiment is in its smallest category n=70, I am use parametric tests. I do however use a non-parametric Wilcoxon paired signed rank test (as a non-parametric substitute for a Welch's t-test to determine if results are dependent on parametric versus non-parametric testing and found similar results. For the sake of simplicity in reporting however, I only report the results of parametric tests in the following sections.

4.2.2 Hypothesis Testing: Evaluations and Voting

I first test the hypothesis surrounding trust in the candidate and likelihood to vote. H_{1a} : *Candidates will be evaluated more negatively if they accept outside donations* is tested by running a two-tailed paired sample T-test on the differences in the way the candidate was evaluated after initial introduction and directly after funding information was introduced in the treatment group.

Table 2:Welch's T-Test on differences in evaluation of candidate before and after donation information in treatment group

T-Value	Degree Freedom	of P-Value	Mean of before	Eval Mean of Eval after
-7.2	141	< 0.01	2.32	3.55

Table 2 shows that the mean values of the evaluation are significantly higher (meaning more negative) after respondents in the treatment group evaluated the introduction of the treatment condition than when they offered their initial evaluation. The mean value after the introduction of the treatment condition is then compared to the mean of evaluation of the candidate after

initial introduction in the control group with another two-tailed paired sample t-test. These means are statically different at the 0.05 level. ²⁵

Table 3 Welch's T-Test on differences in evaluation of candidate in the control group versus after donation information in the treatment group

T Value	Degree of Freedom	P Value	Mean of Eval in Control	Mean Eval	of	2 nd in
				Treatm	ent	
-6.9	141	< 0.01	2.37	3.55		

Table 3 above allows for the examination of H_{1b} : Trust in a candidate will be lower in the treatment group when knowledge of the candidate's funding source is known than in the control group.

Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that the treatment conditions influence evaluation. While the means of the first evaluation are for all purposes that same, the mean after the treatment condition is introduced differs from the initial mean in a statistically significant manner, meaning the treatment condition effected evaluations in the treatment group.

In order to test H_{1c} : Members of the treatment group will be less willing to support the candidate than members of the control group, a two-tailed paired sample T test was conducted. This

 $^{^{25}}$ I also tested the correlation between attitudes toward raising money in the control versus treatment groups after initial evaluations to see if there were any significant differences that would need to be accounted for between the two groups and while the correlation coefficients were different, they did not reach significant at thee P< 0.05 level and are thus not included.

measured whether the introduction of information about the candidate's funding source changed evaluations of the candidate. The results of the paired sample t-test on the treatment group's evaluation before and after the introduction of knowledge of the funding source of the candidate's finances is reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Welch's T-Test on differences between likelihood to vote in treatment and control

T-Value	Degree of freedom	P Value	Mean of Cvote	Mean of TVote
-4.55	134	< 0.01	2.77	3.49

This T-test depends on the likelihood to vote for the candidate question that is asked after the introduction of the candidate's funding source in the control group. The T-test in Table 4 reveals that the mean value of the willingness to vote in the control group is significantly higher (well below the 0.05 level) than the mean value of the willingness to vote in the treatment group.

4.2.3 Attitudes toward outside donations in theory versus reality

Here I test Hypothesis 2a and 2b discussing perceptions of outside donations in theory and practice. I first test H_{2a} : Respondents will reject outside donations in theory and reality by using a 2 tailed T-Test. In testing this hypothesis, I look at how respondents feel toward outside donations (theory) and compare that to how they feel about the candidate accepting outside donations(reality). The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Welch's T-Test on outside donations in theory versus in reality in the treatment group

T-Value	Degree of Freedom	P Value	Mean	of	Mean of Reality
			Theory		
10.84	106.1	< 0.01	2.09		0.664

Analysis is only available using the treatment group for this hypothesis because there is no gauge of behavior towards outside donations in reality in the control group, whereas the treatment group is asked: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Smith (the candidate) should not accept money from special interests.* In this questions 1 means strongly agree and 6 means strongly disagree, meaning the mean value of "reality responses" is still agree, but the p value in Table 5 means that the difference between the mean value of the theory question (2.09) is significantly different than the mean value of the reality question (0.664).

To analyze H2_b: *Respondents who reject outside donations in theory will have a negative perception of the candidate,* I correlate feelings toward donations in theory and the second evaluation of the candidate (after the knowledge that the candidate is funded by special interests has been introduced).

Table 6: Correlation between feelings toward candidate accepting outside donations in theory and second evaluations in the treatment group

	-value
Treatment -0.23 ().04

The R of -0.23 means that there is a negative correlation between candidates that accept outside donations in theory and second evaluations of the candidate among treatment group respondents.

4.3 Discussion of Results

This experiment finds that there are significant differences between attitudes when the public knows a candidate receives money from special interests or outside groups. The candidate in this experiment was evaluated significantly less highly in the treatment group that in the control

group. Table 2 shows that the candidate is evaluated more positively by respondents in the control group than in the treatment group. Because identical information was introduced to the control and treatment groups except knowledge of the candidate's funding sources, this attitudinal change can be attributed to the introduction of the new knowledge in the treatment group. The means are fairly neutral given the 6-point scale (with 1 being highest, 6 being lowest), but those in the treatment group are shown to significantly less likely to vote for the candidate than those in the control group. Furthermore, a t-test on the initial evaluation of the mean value of evaluation in the control group revealed the values (2.37 in control and 2.32 in treatment) are not statistically different. Because the introduction of new information is the only departure point before the second evaluation in the treatment versus the only evaluation in the control, the difference in values shown in Table 1 can be directly attributed to the treatment condition.

The treatment condition was strong enough to evoke changed evaluations of the candidate within the treatment group. Respondents found the candidate, on average, to be slightly positive, but knowledge of funding sources directly changed their evaluations to be more negative. While the candidate was initially evaluated on the positive side of neutral, once respondents received the new information, the mean evaluation dropped from 2.32 to 3.55 - placing evaluations on the more negative side of the scale. The treatment was a single question, but could create an attitudinal shift toward a formerly positive candidate that is significant well below the P<0.01 level. The implications of the power of the treatment to bring the mean evaluation down by more than a full point (on a 1-6 scale) are informative but these questions are about evaluations rather than likelihood to vote. While this is a measure of trust in the

candidate, it does not mean that respondents were less likely to vote for the candidate; evaluations can drop independent of the decision to vote for or against the candidate.

The effect of the treatment on the decision to vote for the candidate is measured in Table 3. It shows the differences in the means of the likelihood to vote for the candidate to be significant well below the accepted p<0.01 level. Respondents were less likely to vote for the candidate (mean value of voting likelihood in the control group was 2.77 while the mean value of the voting likelihood in the treatment group was 3.55) once they knew he had accepted a large percentage of total campaign funds from special interest groups than they were after their initial introduction to the candidate. Because respondents are not offered an opponent, the likelihood to vote for the candidate measure can also be used to measure interpersonal trust between respondents and the hypothetical candidate. The decrease in the mean value between the treatment and control group means that the level of trust respondents had for the candidate drop. This conclusion is possible because voters could say they would not vote for the candidate. They were not presented with a "less of two evils" scenario and were able to select "slightly yes" or "slightly no." If voting is a proxy for trust (Heatherington 1999) then by looking at figures 1, 2, and 3 it can be concluded that the level of trust in the candidate started off between" moderately high" and "slightly high" and decreased to "moderately low".

The data from this experiment shows that the presence of outside donations can influence the evaluation of a candidate in a negative fashion, but does this hold in reality? When someone says, they are against candidates that accept outside donations in theory, will they be against that same candidate once they are informed that they accepted outside donations? Table 4shows that there is a statistically significant difference in believing that outside money should be avoided in theory and once it is personalized to be that the candidate should not accept money

from special interest groups. Once this personal or reality condition is introduced, respondent's responses moved in a more neutral/ accepting manner. The same findings were present when a correlation test was run between agreement or disagreement towards "*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Smith should not accept money from special interests,*" and the decision to vote for the candidate. This was then compared to correlation between accepting outside donations and voting for the candidate in the control group.

Table 7: Correlation between feelings toward candidate accepting outside donations and voting in treatment and control

Group	R	P-value
Treatment	-0.589	< 0.01
Control	0.244	0.03

Table 7 shows a fairly strong negative correlation between acceptance of the candidate taking outside donations and voting: if someone does not approve of outside money, they are less likely to vote for the candidate. also shows a moderate positive relationship in the control group; Accepting outside donations is positively correlated with voting for the candidate. This correlation may be a natural correlation: no information about the candidate's funding was given to the control group and so while some correlation is may be naturally occurring; it is inappropriate to make any causal claims.

The results shown in table 7 mean that there is some consistency in evaluations of outside donations and evaluations of the candidate, those whom rejected outside donations in theory evaluated the candidate more poorly than those who did not.

With these results, I reject each null hypothesis in group 1 and can say with greater than 95% confidence that the positive hypothesis is true. The candidate was evaluated more negatively

once respondent knew he accepted outside donations, trust was lower in the treatment group than in the control group, and members of the treatment group were less willing to vote for the candidate than members of the control group. I fail to reject the null hypothesis that respondents will consistently reject outside donations, as the mean values in Table 4 differ and respondents seemed to be more forgiving towards outside donations when they knew that the candidate has accepted them than they were when they were asked about outside donations in theory. I am finally able to reject the null hypothesis for H2b and find that there is a small but significant correlation between feelings toward candidates accepting outside donations in theory and the evaluations of the candidate that occur once respondents in the treatment group know that the candidate accepts outside donations.

4.4 Limitations

While the findings of this experiment are significant, they are bounded by some clear limitations first in the design of the survey and second in the scope to which generalizations can be made.

4.4.1 Limitations of Survey Design

While sufficient for the exploratory analysis this thesis intended to do, the design of the actual survey given to respondents has limitations. While the questions included are sufficient secondary measure of trust, respondents were never asked if they directly trusted candidates. Guided both by the theoretical framework and literature described in Chapter 2, I use secondary questions to measure trust but asking a question that measures actual trust would make conclusions more explicit. Additionally, while there should not be a priming effect of the other surveys included in this larger survey experiment, that assumption has not and cannot be tested.

The lack of offered opponent and party identification information about the candidate can also be limitations. Not offering an opponent strips the experiment of some degree of real-ness and respondents may not have been adequately able to think of this candidate as real, thus they have not have revealed their true preferences. The same can be said for the lack of party identification for the candidate. This allowed me to remove the chance that respondents were voting based on their own party preferences, but adding in separate profiles for republicans versus democrats and allowing respondents to self-select which profile to read may have yielded more reliable results.

4.1.2 Scope of Generalizations: External Validity

While the conclusions in this experiment are significant, generalizations can only be made to populations which are similar to that of the respondents from the Mturk sample. While more reliable than samples of convince, this sample is not representative of the United States. Regardless of this fact, Berkinsky finds that Mturk samples are generally as reliable as nationally representative samples (2011).

Chapter V: Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined how knowledge of a hypothetical candidate's acceptance of outside donations effects levels of interpersonal trust between candidates and voters. The findings of the survey experiment presented in Chapter IV show that while the treatment condition of introducing knowledge that the candidate received outside information had a negative effect on evaluations of the candidate, and likelihood to vote for the candidate. My findings also showed that respondents were willing to relax their opinions on outside donations when they were asked to evaluate whether or not a particular candidate should accept outside donations. These findings can be interpreted to mean that outside donations effect levels of interpersonal trust, as general evaluations and likelihood to vote decreased after the introduction of the treatment condition and/or between the control and treatment groups. It can also however be said that the effect of knowledge of outside donations was not strong enough, or the act or accepting outside donations was not seen as a large enough violation of trust to evoke consistent negativity from respondents.

My findings suggest that candidates should pay attention to their relationship voters and take care to build relationships with voters when possible if they will accept money from PACS. Candidates should also be transparent about their funding sources and make it clear that they represent their voters rather than special interests. Generalizations for candidates are limited because in reality, both candidates in many elections will accept outside donations. It is only in cases where one accepts a very high percentage (as was presented in this experiment) and the other candidate does not that outside donations may decrease the likelihood of victory for candidates. This research cannot however make claims about this because an opponent is not

offered; I only focus on interpersonal trust and find that outside donations harm levels of trust between candidates and voters.

Studying political trust by focusing on interpersonal relationships rather than focusing on institutions or a person's belief in their own ability to affect change is in its early stages. Interpersonal relationships and the ways in which voters perceive their relationship with political candidates and elected officials is complex due to the scope of many races and political apathy, but has the potential to explain why certain candidates win races even after scandals.

Further research might use the findings of this experiment as a first step in understanding how and why voters trust candidates and how interpersonal trust translates to decisions to vote. The 2016 election cycle demonstrated that voters will refrain from voting for candidates they do not trust and further research should identify other areas that effect evaluations of interpersonal trust to understand how and why voters make decisions regarding whether they will vote for a candidate, chose an alternative that may not have a viable chance at victory, or consciously decide not to vote at all. Further research might also look at political differences in outside donations. A great deal of attention is paid to the influence of Charles and David Koch as well as George Soros (even though they are not the top donors- democratic mega donor Tom Steyer donated the most money in the 2016 election cycle) and research may begin to look at perceptions of outside donations coming from the right versus from the left and how this affects interpersonal trust.

This research shows that as more and more races become "nationalized," candidates will need to adapt to attract large donations or systemic changes will need to occur in which either the aggregate number of donors increases or campaign finance reform changes the way money can flow through politics.

Appendix A: Control Survey

Q55 Who did you vote for in the 2016 election?

- **O** Donald Trump (1)
- Hillary Clinton (2)
- **O** Other (3)
- O Did not vote (4)

Q56 Which party do you identify with?

- O Democrat (1)
- O Republican (2)
- O Independent (3)
- **O** Other (4)

Q58 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The best candidates are candidates that raise money at home rather than taking money from special interests.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- O Agree (2)
- O Somewhat agree (3)
- **O** Somewhat disagree (4)
- **O** Disagree (5)
- O Strongly disagree (6)

Q57 Patrick Smith is running for re-election to state legislature. He is a small business owner and an active community volunteer. Smith has focused his campaign on problems facing the community, in particular a shortage of qualified teachers in public schools. Smith has a positive reputation in the state legislature as someone who knows how to get things done. He vowed to "work hard on behalf of the middle class" if he was re-elected. If re-elected, this would be his 3rd term in office. How do you evaluate Patrick Smith?

- **O** Extremely positive (1)
- Moderately positive (2)
- Slightly positive (3)
- Slightly negative (4)
- Moderately negative (5)
- Extremely negative (6)

Q60 Do you think Smith is an appealing candidate?

- O Yes (1)
- O Somewhat yes (2)
- O Somewhat no (3)
- **O** No (4)

Q59 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Patrick Smith has my best interest at heart.

- O Strongly agree (1)
- O Agree (2)

- Somewhat agree (3)
- O Somewhat disagree (4)
- **O** Disagree (5)
- O Strongly disagree (6)

Q61 Would you vote for Patrick Smith? O Strongly yes (1)

- O Yes (2)
- O Slightly Yes (3)O Slightly No (4)
- O No (5)
- Strongly no (6)

Appendix 2: Survey Questions Treatment

Q62 Who did you vote for in the 2016 election?

- **O** Donald Trump (1)
- Hillary Clinton (2)
- **O** Other (3)
- O Did not vote (4)

Q63 Which party do you identify with?

- O Democrat (1)
- O Republican (2)
- O Independent (3)
- **O** Other (4)

Q64 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The best candidates are candidates that raise money at home rather than taking money from special interests.

- Strongly agree (1)
- O Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- O Somewhat disagree (4)
- O Disagree (5)
- Strongly disagree (6)

Q65 Patrick Smith is running for re-election to state legislature. He is a small business owner and an active community volunteer. Smith has focused his campaign on problems facing the community, in particular a shortage of qualified teachers in public schools. Smith has a positive reputation in the state legislature as someone who knows how to get things done. He vowed to "work hard on behalf of the middle class" if he was re-elected. If re-elected, this would be his 3rd term in office. How do you evaluate Patrick Smith?

- Extremely positive (1)
- **O** Moderately positive (2)
- Slightly positive (3)
- Slightly negative (4)
- Moderately negative (5)
- Extremely negative (6)

Q70 Campaign finance disclosure reveals that while Smith has hosted many small community fundraising events, more than 100,000 dollars (70% of his donations) has come from national special interest groups. How would you evaluate Smith?

- **O** Extremely positive (1)
- O Moderately positive (2)
- Slightly positive (3)
- Slightly negative (4)
- Moderately negative (5)
- **O** Extremely negative (6)

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Q71 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Smith should not accept money from special interests.

- O Strongly agree (1)
- O Agree (2)
- O Somewhat agree (3)
- O Somewhat disagree (4)
- **O** Disagree (5)
- O Strongly disagree (6)

Q72 Do you find Patrick Smith appealing as a candidate?

- \mathbf{O} Yes (1)
- O Slightly yes (2)
- Slightly no (3)
- **O** No (4)

Q73 Would you vote for Patrick Smith?

- O Strongly yes (1)
- **O** Yes (2)
- O Slightly yes (3)
- O Slightly no (4)
- **O** No (5)
- O Strongly no (6)
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