Political Donors as Consumers versus Influencers of Campaign Policy Support: A Timeseries Analysis *

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As the amount of money raised by political campaigns continues to grow, scholars have studied donors to campaigns as a group of unique political actors. Particularly, online donations from small-dollar donors have grown in prominence in contemporary campaigns. Observational and survey data have been used to make ideological inferences about donors to understand more about who donors are, what donors care about, and potential motivations for making a donations. However, there is little consensus on the psychological processes of making a donations. The two predominant explanations of donor motivations–donors are 'access-oriented' or donations are acts of political participatory consumption–posit two different orders of events. Under the access-oriented model, donors first contribute to campaigns in order to influence candidates' support of issues. Under the consumption model, donors participate in the political realm by contributing to candidates who are already supportive of issues that the donor also cares about. This study uses timeseries analysis to observe the relationship between contributions from communities of donors and social media posts of candidates to identify if donations precede or lag public support of certain policy issues by campaigns. The results find that groups of donors largely respond to public support of certain policy issues. This finding supports the consumption model of political donations which treats contributions as acts of political participation.