

# Media Coverage of Campaign Finance

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## **I. Introduction**

Political campaign finance has garnered more attention after *Citizens United v. FEC*. In 2016 Presidential race, candidates from both parties have called for reform in political campaign finance. Meanwhile, the amount of political donation and campaign has increased. Some journalists say the right has gotten more money since 2010. Some journalists say both parties benefit equally. The difference lies in how journalists choose to measure. The research on this topic as well as the media coverage is important because it can provide insights on what exactly is happening in political campaign finance. My thesis focuses on examining different popular, and often contradictory claims, on campaign finance. Some are explicit claims. Some are implicit. I identified the implicit one by applying text analysis on 3800 new articles that cover campaign finance to understand which metrics (*PAC, small donation, 527 groups*) journalists choose to discuss the topic, and whether there is an association between the choice of metrics and the parties mentioned in the discussion (*Republican only, Democrats only, both, neither*). After identifying different claims, then I attempt to evaluate their quantitative evidence. The data to reproduce the analysis and graph are available at <https://github.com/robinlee93/campaign-finance> . Data are collected from OpenSecrets.org,

LexisNexis and Washington Post. I also looked at the Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections compiled by Adam Bonia. However, the DIME data is too granular and not suitable for the scope of this paper.

## **II. Literature Review**

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission has changed the rules on how much and how an organization can spend on political campaign related expenses. It removed the cap on how much corporations and labor unions can spend on campaigns independent from candidates (Dunbar 2016). Traditionally, individuals can only donate \$5,000 annually to a political action committee, and corporations and labor unions are not allowed to donate to PAC. These PACs, can donate directly to political candidates (Sunlight Foundation 2012). The ruling of SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission allowed a new type of PACs, called super PACs to be free from the two restrictions under certain condition. Super PACs can raise unlimited amount of money from individuals, corporations, labor unions, and associations, as well as spend unlimitedly to support or oppose candidates as long as super PACs do not donate directly to candidates and coordinate spending with candidate (“Super PACs | OpenSecrets” 2016).

Michael Kang views Citizens United as a significant case, calling it as “the end of campaign finance law as we knew it” (Kang 2012). However, the interpretations of the impact of this case differ across scholars, researchers, and journalists. There is little consensus on who benefits more after this series of court cases. Campaign finance has been framed in different ways on the media. Some argue that Democrats are raising more money (Beckel

2014). Some the other way. Washington Post writes that “[c]onservative groups attacking President Obama have been quicker to adopt the strategy” (“2012 Presidential Campaign Finance Explorer - The Washington Post” 2016). Dave Levinthal argues that “conservatives have embraced *Citizens United* more widely, but also writes that”“Citizens United’ is helping Hillary Clinton win the White House” (Levinthal 2016). According to Joe Scarborough “You can look at the numbers, and the left and the right are both equal.” (MSNBC Morning Joe clip, “Why the youth vote is still up for grabs,” Nov. 3, 2014)

The different interpretations and framing of the issue by journalists are especially important, because voters form opinion and perception on political issues, candidates and parties through media (McCombs 2014). The issue of campaign finance has become more relevant to the voters in this 2016 election cycle, evidenced by the support around Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Gold and Johnson report that some American voters are mobilized around outside candidates, such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, due to unfavorable view towards the wealthy donors (Gold and Johnson 2015). While campaign finance is not Donald Trump’s main campaign messages, he has stressed on his “self-funding” (CNN 2016). One of Bernie Sander’s top issues is campaign finance reform as seen in his campaign website.

My primary focus of this research is in the framing and reporting of campaign finance in the news. A key reason for the differences in perspectives lies in the choice of measurement as well as the choice of time frames for comparison. Journalists and pundits choose certain definitions of campaign contribution, political action committee (PAC) or outside spending, as well as select time frames for comparison. As such, they arrive at different conclusion. One example of the difficulty to compare is shown in the title of an Atlantic article – “Super

PACs are for Republicans, Campaign Cash is for Democrats” (Graham 2015). News articles often need to condense the story into headline and sub-headline, further reducing the ability to express nuances regarding the topic.

### **A. Timeframe: tradeoff between breaking-news and complete picture**

The need to have new stories on a monthly or even daily basis leads to reporting that is only true for a specific month. An Associated Press article written in December 2011, writes that “Republicans outpace Democrats in party fundraising” (Associated Press 2016). Another AP article written in May 2011 says “Democrats outpace GOP in May party fundraising” (Thomas 2016). A first glance of the article will show that the two articles are contradictory. However, one key reason to this apparent contradiction is the cross-sectional nature of the articles. The first article is measuring fundraising in November 2011, the second in May. News articles like these two illustrate that the complete picture regarding campaign finance is fragmented by time. News readers might make the wrong conclusion regarding which party has raised more money. Therefore, in my analysis on political contribution of labor union, I look at the change over time, rather than the total sum of amount.

### **B. Metrics of campaign fundraising in the news**

Besides the timeframe choice in news articles, what counts towards campaign fundraising is not defined clearly. The previous two articles are both measuring the amount of money raised by the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee. However, donors may also choose to donate to candidates themselves. In addition, Citizens

United and other cases lead to new players, such as political action committees, political non-profits formed as 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6) (“Political Nonprofits (Dark Money) | OpenSecrets” 2016), which are equally important to the parties and candidates in the fundraising space. Yet, there is no consensus on how to count these agents outside of party and candidates. Both Washington Post and New York Times have campaign finance trackers for 2012 and 2016 elections. Washington Post’s 2012 tracker focuses on comparing money raised for Democrats/Barack Obama and Republicans/Mitt Romney from four major sources, national parties, presidential campaigns, super PACs, and undisclosed donors (“2012 Presidential Campaign Finance Explorer - The Washington Post” 2016). Washington Post’s 2016 tracker focuses on two sources for each candidate in the primary, nominee’s own presidential campaign and the combination of allied super PACs and other independent groups. The New York Times 2012 tracker compares candidate campaign, party committee and the primary super PAC associated with each party. It also compares the size of donation to the candidate campaign between two parties.

### **III. Identifying the contrasting explicit claims**

I examine two topics on campaign finance. For each topic, I present different, and often contradictory, claims. Then I would compare the quantitative evidence used in different claims and articles. For each claim, I would attempt to break down the definition of each metric, put context and comparison on the number used. Then, I can evaluate how reasonable the choice of the evidence and how sound the claim is.

## A. Topic 1- Big Money: Koch or Labor Union?

### 1. What's at stakes?

Different journalists and commentators have pointed out Koch Brothers and labor unions as major sources of campaign finance. Because being the major source of campaign contribution tends to have negative image, there are contradictory claims as of which source is bigger and should be under scrutiny more.

### 2. Claims

Claim A: Koch Brothers are major source of big money.

1. During the 2014 election, then Senate majority leader Harry Reid said,

[What the Koch brothers do] is un-American is when shadowy billionaires pour unlimited money into our democracy to rig the system to benefit themselves and the wealthiest 1 percent... The Koch brothers are willing to invest billions to buy that America.

2. In a New York Times article published in January 2015, titled *Koch Brothers' Budget of \$889 Million for 2016 Is on Par With Both Parties' Spending*, Nicholas Confessore writes,

The political network overseen by the conservative billionaires Charles G. and David H. Koch plans to spend close to \$900 million on the 2016 campaign ...

would allow their political organization to operate at the same financial scale as the Democratic and Republican Parties. It would require a significant financial commitment from the Kochs and roughly 300 other donors they have recruited over the years, and covers both the presidential and congressional races. In the last presidential election, the Republican National Committee and the party's two congressional campaign committees spent a total of \$657 million.

Claim B: Big money is not from the Koch brothers, but labor unions.

1. In an article published in March 5, 2014, National Reviews' Veronique De Rugy disagrees with Harry Reid and writes that 14 of the top 25 donors to political campaigns between 1989 and 2014 are labor unions, based on the data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid went on a rant on the Senate floor about the Koch brothers ... saying "whoever has the most money gets the most free speech," implying, I suppose, that Charles and David Koch, as some of the richest men in the world, control the most political speech. However, as the *Washington Examiner's* Mark Tapscott noted a few weeks ago, the biggest donors in America may not be what you'd expect... Fourteen labor unions were among the top 25 political campaign contributors... Public- and private-sector unions contributed 55.6 percent - \$552 million - of the top 25's contributions. Large private companies contributed \$441 million in campaign contributions.

2. In a news article published in *Kansas City*, Koch spokeswoman Melissa Cohlma said Koch's donations are "*drops in the bucket*" compared to labor union spending. In the same article, Koch Industries general counsel Mark Holden acknowledged that Americans for Prosperity, a major conservative political advocacy group associated with the Kochs brothers, spent millions in the 2012 election opposing Barack Obama. But he argued that Kochs brothers would not count as major source of influence, because "there are 2.3 million members in AFP, [s]o it's not just the Kochs".
3. Kimberley A. Strassel, who is a writer of the Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, argues that labor union is the biggest spender in campaigns. She also uses the same data as De Rugy regarding the top donors for 1989-2014.

Nobody scrutinizes the biggest, baddest, "darkest" spenders of all: organized labor ... \$4.4 billion that unions had spent on politics from 2005 to 2011 alone, according to this newspaper. The Center for Responsive Politics' list of top all-time donors from 1989 to 2014 ranks Koch Industries No. 59. Above Koch were 18 unions, which collectively spent \$620,873,623 more than Koch Industries (\$18 million). Even factoring in undisclosed personal donations by the Koch brothers, they are a rounding error in union spending.

### **3. More data points from the news**

1. Koch-backed network raised at least \$407 million during the 2012 campaign
2. While Koch network's projected spending close to \$900 million in the 2015 New



York Times article, a news article published in October 2015 on Politico reported an adjustment Koch network’s projected spending in 2016 election cycle down to \$750 million.

Earlier this year the political network overseen by the billionaire brothers (Charles G. Koch and David H. Koch) announced plans to spend nearly \$900 million on politics. Of that, approximately \$300 million would be spent directly on 2016. Now that number is also slimmer, by about \$50 million. “Probably the total budget over the two years I would guess would be 750 [million], and the amount in politics is 250 [million],” Koch said. Koch made it clear that the majority of the millions they intend to spend weren’t coming directly from the brothers.

#### **4. Other attempt to adjudicate these claims**

In the media, some journalists have tried to reconcile the two views presented above.

1. In an article published in the Huffington Post in March 2014, Blumenthal and Jamieson do not agree with “*drops in the bucket*” claim, because Koch network is at least a quarter of the union spending. Moreover, they do not believe that unions versus Kochs brothers is the appropriate comparison. They argue that union versus all business sectors is a better comparison. They write,

An analysis by The Huffington Post found that labor unions spent more than \$1.7 billion on politics and lobbying in the 2012 election cycle. The Koch network spent at least \$490 million in the period. No single union came close to matching

the Kochs spending. The union spending total is probably slightly overstated in this analysis due to some double-counting of expenses."

While organized labor spends more money than the well-funded network operated by the Kochs, union spending is a tiny fraction of the total amount that business interests spend to influence politics. All business sectors combined to spend at least \$9.5 billion to influence politicians at the federal and state levels in the 2012 election cycle, including campaign contributions and lobbying. Labor unions spent \$600 million. . . Labor's \$600 million still trails a number of business sectors when they are broken out individually. The most powerful business sector is finance, insurance and real estate, which spent \$1.9 billion on federal lobbying, and on federal and state contributions in 2012 elections.

## **5. My attempt to examine each claim**

Claim A : Koch Brothers are major source of big money

Here I am only evaluating Confessore's argument, because Henry Reid's statement has less quantitative evidence. When Nicholas Confessore says Koch's "\$889 million spending goal for 2016" is on par with both parties, a natural follow-up question regarding that comparison is what the benchmark for two parties spending should be. Confessore compares the amount with the sum of the Republican National Committee and the party's two congressional campaign committees in 2012 election cycle. The sum of three Republican committees is 657 million. The sum of three equivalent committees on the Democratic side is at a similar level of 644 million. Even though Confessore leaves the Democratic side out, his claim remains

strong. The sum of three party committees at national level is a reasonable choice, because it only counts the influence of the party. It does not take into consideration of individual presidential, congressional and local level candidate ability to raise funds. Since Confessore's narrative is about Koch-backed network having the similar level of influence as the two parties, his choice of metrics and comparison are appropriate.

However, the limitation in my evaluation is that the reported amount of \$889 million is not scrutinized. Also it is difficult to define what Koch brothers' spending is or even what the reported amount of Koch-backed network's spending includes.

Claim B - labor unions are the biggest donors

1. National Review's De Rugy says 14 of the top 25 donors over 1989-2014 are labor unions, suggesting that unions are the major source of money.

De Rugy's claim's weakness comes from only looking at top 25 donors. This approach is not the best way to evaluate the impact of an interest group, because it does not consider the whole distribution of donations. There might be whole lot of information missed. For example, one interest group might not appear in the top 25 list, but might occupy 60 out of the 26-100 list, resulting in a higher total contribution to politics. The size of contribution from unions could be a very skewed distribution, with the majority of the contribution coming from few unions, whereas other interest groups might have more uniform distribution.

Since labor unions are created to collectivize the action of each individual worker, the size of union would be big. On the other hand, each individual business, such as Koch Industries, might not donate as much as a large union. Yet, businesses from the same industry might

donate much more.

Also, another problem with looking at lump sum over 26 years is that it's not possible to evaluate the change in the importance over time. Unions might be more important at some point, but not now. Therefore, in the next section, I would compare the total contribution from unions per election cycle with total election cost per cycle.

While the arguments introduced here do use the correct reported amount, the differences in the argument comes from the definition of Koch-brothers' spending. If it refers to the political network associated with Koch-brothers, then it does have a huge influence as one party. If it only limited to Koch Industries, then it won't be as significant as a major part.

2. *Drops to the bucket* claim is that labor unions pour way more money into politics than Koch's network.

There are two ways that unions can influence politics with money. One is contribution to elections, and the other is lobbying. Because of data availability, I only look at the campaign contribution in this paper.

### **Labor union contribution**

Based on the data from the Center for Responsive Politics, contributions from labor unions have grown from 50 to 150 million dollars in each two-year election cycle over the last 26 years. However, to evaluate how significant the amount is, I will need to compare it with election costs. I only look at congressional election costs because they also correspond with the two year election cycle reported for labor union contribution. The spending on congressional races for each election cycle ranges from 1.6 to 4 billion USD. Figure 1 suggests

that contribution from labor unions is not very significant to the whole congressional race.

Thus, Strassel's claim that labor unions are biggest donors is not very convincing.

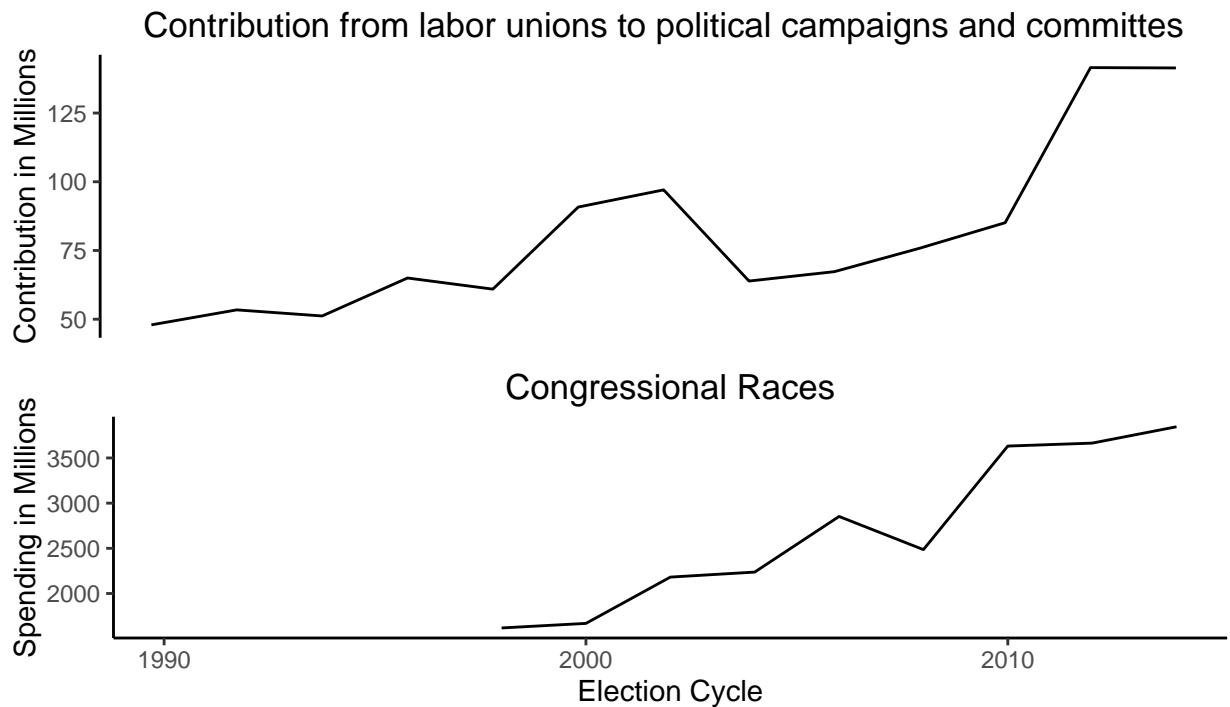


Fig 1: Comparison between labor union contribution and congressional election cost  
The union's contribution is insignificant to spending on congressional races.  
This graph weakens the claim that labor unions are biggest donor.  
Data are from Center for Responsive Politics. Election costs before 1998 cycle are not available.

However a simple comparison between labor union contribution and the election spending isn't sufficient to invalidate the claim that labor unions are the biggest donor. I still need to examine if labor unions contribute more than other interest groups. I then analyze the contribution from different interest groups over the last 26 years based on the data aggregated by Center for Responsive Politics in figure 2.

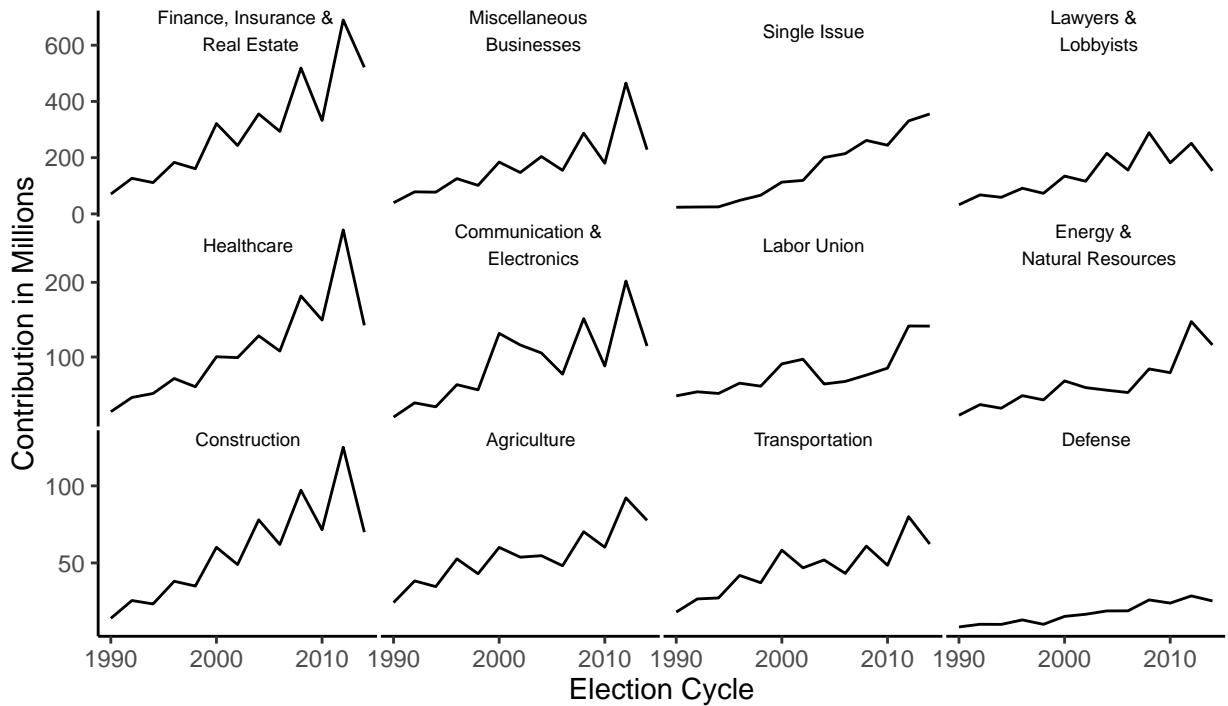


Fig 2: Political contributions from different interests groups between 1989 and 2014. The data are collected every two-year election cycle. Thus, the up represents the cycle with presidential election, while the down represents off-cycle. Panels are sorted by the total contribution from each interest group. The graph shows that labor union contributions do not stand out from the other interest groups

Based on figure 2, we can see that political contribution from labor union is not the biggest type of interest group that contributes to political campaigns. Labor union as a interestr group is ranked the seventh in total amount o fpolitical contribution. This graph further weakens the claim that labor unions are biggest donors.

One reason why labor unions are seen as a major source of campaign finance is that labor unions are traditionally thought as more Democrat-friendly. The party split in each interest group's contributions differs. If contributions from unions lean more towards Democrats than givings from other interest groups, it can be interpreted that unions' spending is more coordinated around Democrats. This might explain why some journalists and observers claim unions as a major player. Thus, I break down the political contributions by party within

each interest group in figure 3.

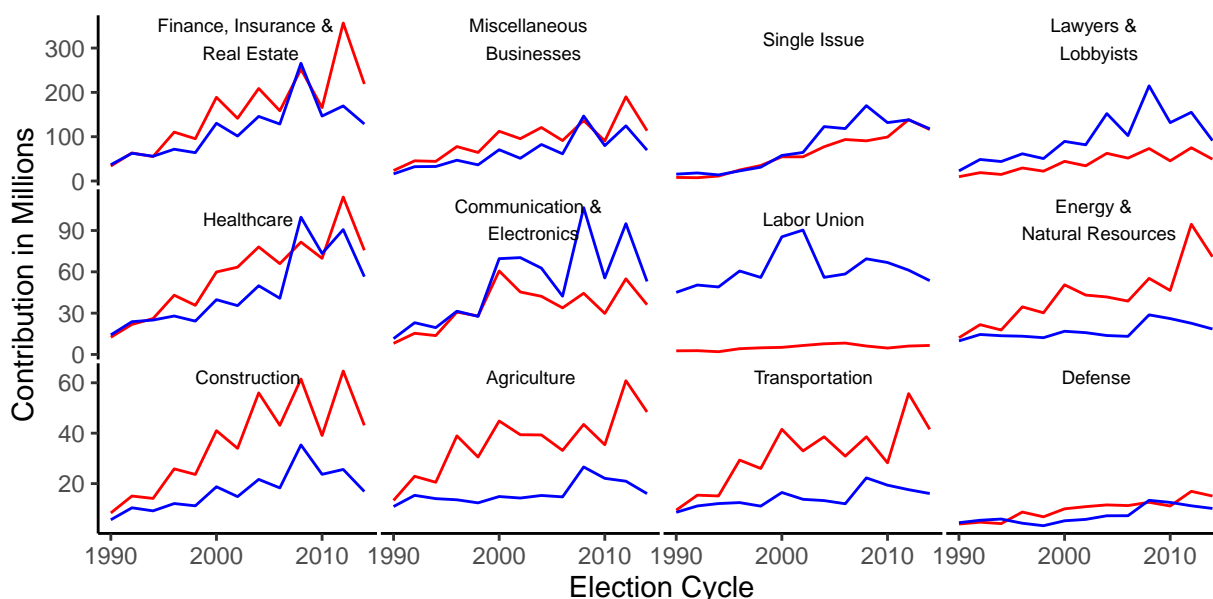


Fig 3: Political contributions from different interests groups to the Republican party and the Democratic party between 1989 and 2014. The data are collected every two-year election cycle. Thus, the up represents the cycle with presidential election, while the down represents off-cycle. Panels are sorted by the total contribution from each interest group. The graph shows that labor union contributions lean towards Democrats more than other interest groups. This supports Strassel's claim that unions do not shy away from being associated with the Democrats. Yet, the amount from labor unions to Democrats still would not make it the biggest donor to single party.

Figure 3 shows that labor unions, energy, construction, agriculture and transportation interest groups have unequal contribution across party line. This supports Strassel's claim that unions do not shy away from being associated with the Democrats. Yet, the amount from labor unions to Democrats still would not make it the biggest donor to single party.

One weakness of the analysis so far is that figures 2 and 3 both show a general increase of campaign contribution from interests groups across time. It is difficult to see whether labor union plays a more important role over time relative to other interest groups or not. Thus in figure 4, I calculate the proportion of each interest group to that year's sum across all 12 interest groups. Figure 4 clearly shows that labor union's importance in election contribution has declined over time. The claim that labor union's a major source of big money is not valid.

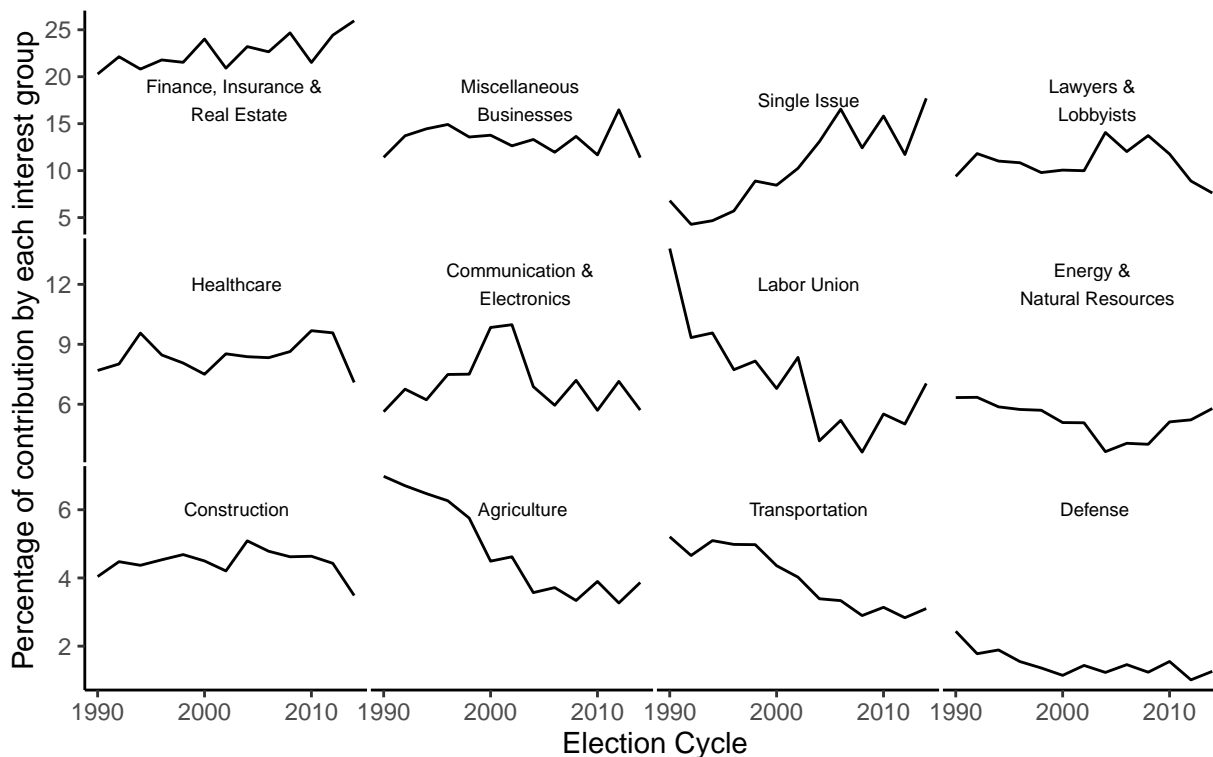


Fig 4: Relative importance of different interests groups between 1989 and 2014 in political contributions. Panels are sorted by the total contribution from each interest group, the same order as figures 2 and 3. The graph shows that labor union contributions have declined relative to other interest groups.

3. When Strassel argues that unions are the “biggest and baddest donors”, she only counts Koch industries as the donor that represents Koch network’s spending. She then compares one entity with multiple unions.

“The Center for Responsive Politics’ list of top all-time donors from 1989 to 2014 ranks Koch Industries No. 59. Above Koch were 18 unions, which collectively spent \$620,873,623 more than Koch Industries (\$18 million).

She neglects to acknowledge other channels for Koch brother’s network such as Freedom Partner Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Prosperity. Even Koch Industries general counsel Mark Holden acknowledges Koch brothers involvement in Americans for Prosperity.



Another issue with Strassel's use of statistics is similar to De Rugy. She uses the top all-time donors list, and compares the top 18 unions' total spending with Koch Industries. This approach is flawed. When one compares an organization spending with the sum of other organizations ahead of it, the latter's is bound to be more than the former. A more appropriate comparison would be to sum up spending from all groups in Koch network and compare that sum with the total union spending. But the difficulty with this comparison is defining the list of groups in the Koch network, because the definition is looser than unions or other industry-based interest group.

While Strassel's use of quantitative evidence is weak, her argument that many unions are directly coordinating with the Democrats is credible.

Most outside conservatives groups, including the Koch-supported Americans for Prosperity, back candidates and positions that challenge the Republican line. And in any event, every conservative 501(c)(4) is so terrified of the hay the media and regulators would make over even a hint of coordination with the GOP, they keep a scrupulous distance . . . Unions, as 501(c)(5) organizations, are technically held to the same standards against coordination with political parties. Yet no Democrat or union official today even troubles to maintain that fiction. Hundreds upon hundreds of the delegates to the 2012 Democratic convention were union members. They were in the same room as party officials, plotting campaign strategies.

4. Mark Holden's claim that Koch brothers are not the only member is valid. This is related to the difficulty of defining what counts as Koch network spending.

Paul Blumenthal and Dave Jamieson also rebutted the *drops to the bucket* claim by comparing the amount of money spent by labor unions in election and lobbying and the reported \$490 million spending from Koch's network during 2011-2012 election cycle. Because labor unions have a longer history of getting involved in the political processes than the Koch network, their method of locking into one cycle between Koch brothers and labor unions is the right approach. However, I do not agree with their subsequent comparison between unions and all-sector business, because the definition of business giving is too broad.

Also, Blumenthal and Jamieson's use of summing lobbying and contribution shows the difficulty of measuring money influence. When counting numbers, sometimes journalists only measure campaign contribution. Sometimes, they measure both campaign contribution and lobbying. While my thesis focuses on campaign contribution, it is not clear how the two can really be separated.

## **6. Mini Conclusion on this topic**

1. While the comparison between Koch network spending and two parties is reasonable, the difficulty in counting Koch's spending makes it hard to evaluate the claim that Koch brothers are major source of money. The claim that Koch's brothers are the biggest donor depends on the assumption that we can measure the contribution from the broadly-defined Koch-backed network well.
2. Based on the analysis above, the claim that labor unions are biggest donors only credible if we look at contribution at single entity level and focus on lump sum contribution. This view does not consider the fact that groups from other categories of interest group

have more, but smaller size entities. It also neglects the change in the importance over time.

## **B. Topic 2 - Reliance on PACs and Campaign Cash**

In this example, I examined a claim that appeared in two articles before the primary started. I re-analyzed the claim based on the data to April 2016. The goal here is to move beyond snapshot and breaking news.

### **1. Claim - Super PACs Are for Republicans, Campaign Cash Is for Democrats**

In July 2015, David Graham wrote an article in *The Atlantic*, titled *Super PACs Are for Republicans, Campaign Cash Is for Democrats*. He writes,

Republicans embraced the post-Citizens United world of super PACs faster than Democrats, but the filings released this week are the most important demonstration of that fact and how it's likely to play out in this election.

In another New York Times article titled *In campaign money race, Democrats vastly outpacing Republicans*, published in October 2015, Matea Gold, Philip Rucker and Anu Narayanswamy write,

The Democratic presidential contenders dramatically outpaced their Republican counterparts in the race for campaign cash last quarter, spotlighting how the parties are taking divergent paths in their pursuit of 2016 funding. The emphasis

by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Bernie Sanders on raising money directly for their campaigns has helped them amass large donor pools . . . While GOP candidates put an intense focus early in the year on raising huge sums for independent groups, many have had less success in attracting smaller donations that are the lifeblood of campaign operations.

## **2. Examine the claim**

When Gold et al. uses the phrase “campaign cash”, they refer to money raised specifically for presidential campaign, not the amount raised via PACs. The “divergent paths Gold et al. reported refer to the reliance of specific donations to candidates’ campaign versus independent support. According to Gold et al, Democratic nominee candidates Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders rely on donations, while GOP candidates focus on PACs and independent groups. The appropriate metrics to evaluate both Graham and Gold et al.’s claims is the ratio of candidate’s own campaign to allied super PACs and other outside support.

What quantitative evidence Gold et al. uses to back up the claim follows.

The risk of the big-money approach was underscored by the modest \$13.4 million raised over the summer by former Florida governor Jeb Bush, who earlier this year was expected to be a financial powerhouse. Just \$877,000 came from donations of \$200 or less.

In all, six Democratic candidates reported raising \$123.2 million for their campaign committees so far this year, while 15 GOP candidates pulled in \$143.5 million

overall.

The totals raised on each side by the candidate-aligned super PACs are unclear, because they do not have to report their fundraising until Jan. 31. But by mid-year, GOP allied groups had raised \$234 million and Democratic groups had pulled in \$17 million.

These numbers translate to the following table, based on the published data as of October 2015.

Party	Ratio of campaign funds to PAC/independent support
Democrats	7.25
Republicans	0.61

Because the story was published in October 2015, it does not capture the changes for the later stages. It is important to look for the fuller picture beyond the first stage of the primary to see if this claim holds throughout the whole election cycle.

According to the data from Washington Post as of April 2016, the same metrics is 4.91 for Democrats, 0.8 for Republicans.

In August 2016, the same ratio changes to 4.56 for Democrats and 0.75 for Republicans.

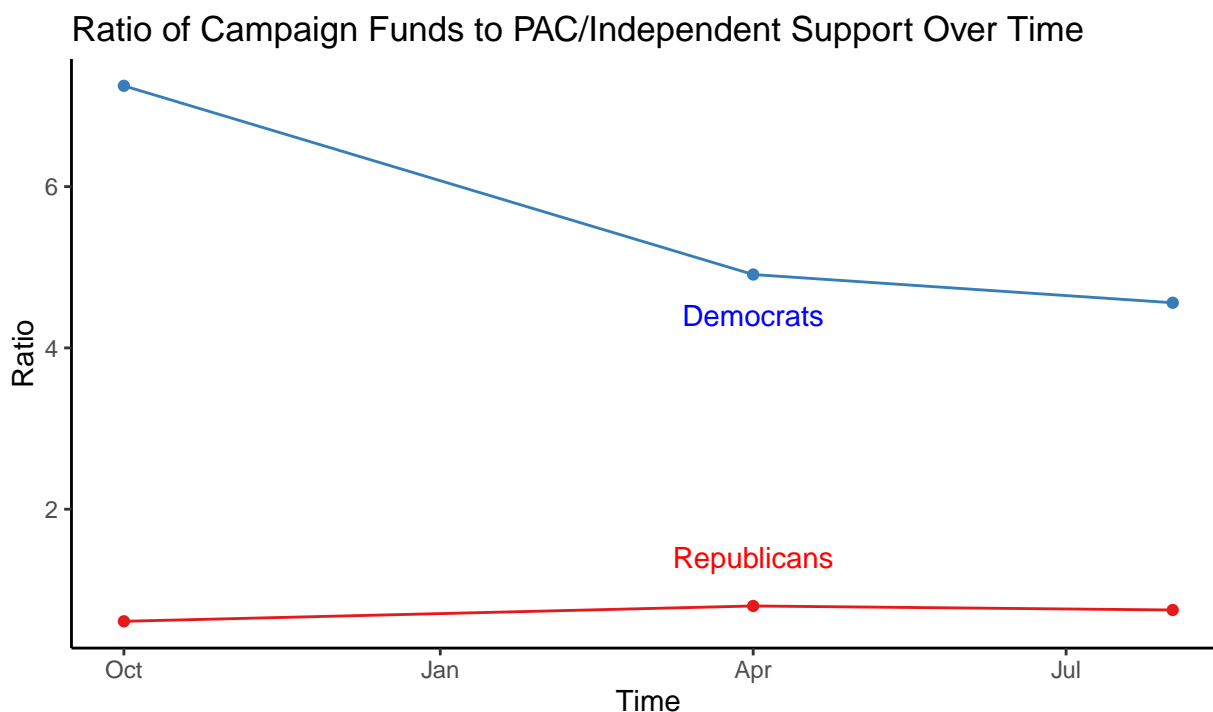


Fig 5: The ratio of campaign funds to PAC/Independent support has declined since the October 2015 article. The data counted here include all primary candidates in both parties. The data are from Washington Post.

The ratio of direct campaign funds to the amount from PAC decrease from 7.25 to 4.5 for Democrats, while the same ratio increased from 0.61 to 0.75.

### 3. Mini conclusion

When counting all primary candidates in both parties, the claim that super PACs are for Republicans, campaign cash is for Democrats holds true beyond the timeframe covered by the two articles. But the gap in the reliance on a specific source of money has decreased. Also because Republican nominee Donald Trump doesn't have the same funding structure like other Republican primary candidates, the claim that campaign cash is for Democrats is not true when comparing between two parties' nominees.

## **IV. Identifying implicit claim**

### **A. Topic 3 - Coverage balance between two parties with text analysis**

When I examine implicit claim with text analysis, I want to understand whether certain metrics appear more often with a party in the articles. I propose the following hypotheses. 1) Both New York Times and Washington Post have similar amount of coverage on campaign finance between two parties. 2) Articles that report only Republican will be more likely to discuss PAC during the recent election cycle, because the sum of money raised by super PACs and PACs associated with the Republican nominee candidates is higher than that of the Democratic nominee candidates. Articles that report on only Democratic party will be more likely to discuss small donation, because the Democratic party has the image of working-class voter base.

### **B. Method**

After initial analysis on news articles on campaign finance, I identified 3 categories and 8 metrics used by journalists to cover the story. These are the candidates for me to do word count

1. total head to head comparison
  - a. total amount raised by each nominee campaign
2. size - small vs large donation
  - a. % of small donation (per candidate, per party)

- b. number of families who donated over \$250,000 (per party)
- 3. source - campaign, party (DNC/RNC), PAC, 527 groups
  - a. amount raised within a candidate's campaign, % of money from candidate's campaign for a election cycle (per candidate, per party)
  - b. amount and proportion raised by DNC/RNC (per party)
  - c. amount of money from PAC (per candidate, or per party)
  - d. number of top 20 PACs (per party)
  - e. spending from 527 (non-PAC) advocacy groups (per party)

I chose to measure three metrics, PAC, small donation and 527, because it is easier to use keyword search on them. Other metrics are harder to capture either because there are very few articles that cover the story that way or simply because it is harder to implement keyword search method. For example, there are only less than 10 articles that discuss families who donated over 250,000. It is harder to define keywords on comparing how much party committee, because it is possible to refer to Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee in many different ways.

Then, I collected the full text of over 3800 news articles, 1003 from the New York Times, 2837 from the Washington Post via Lexis-Nexis database. These articles contain the term campaign finance or campaign contribution between January 2015 and March 2016. Then, I converted these articles to matrix-like datasets, with each article as one row. Columns include title, length (word count), full text and publication date. Using the full text of the articles, I calculated the word counts for each of five phrases (Democrat, Republican, PAC, small don, 527). Using the variables that record how many times words Democrat or Republican are



mentioned, I then construct a variable called *party mentioned* to indicate whether the article discusses both parties, discusses Republican only, discusses Democrat only or didn't mention either party.

Here is an example of the dataset.

Table 2: Example of Dataset

SEARCH_ROW	pac_ment	small_ment	527_ment	party_ment
1	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	both
2	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	neither
3	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	both
4	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	rep_only
5	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	neither
6	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	neither

Limitation with this method is how I measure Republican and Democrat coverage. The proxy

## C. Results

### 1. Coverage balance between Republican and Democrat

First, I examined if these articles have balanced amount of coverage between two parties. The following tables show that Washington Post has quite balanced coverage between the two parties, while the New York Times reports more on Republican-only articles.

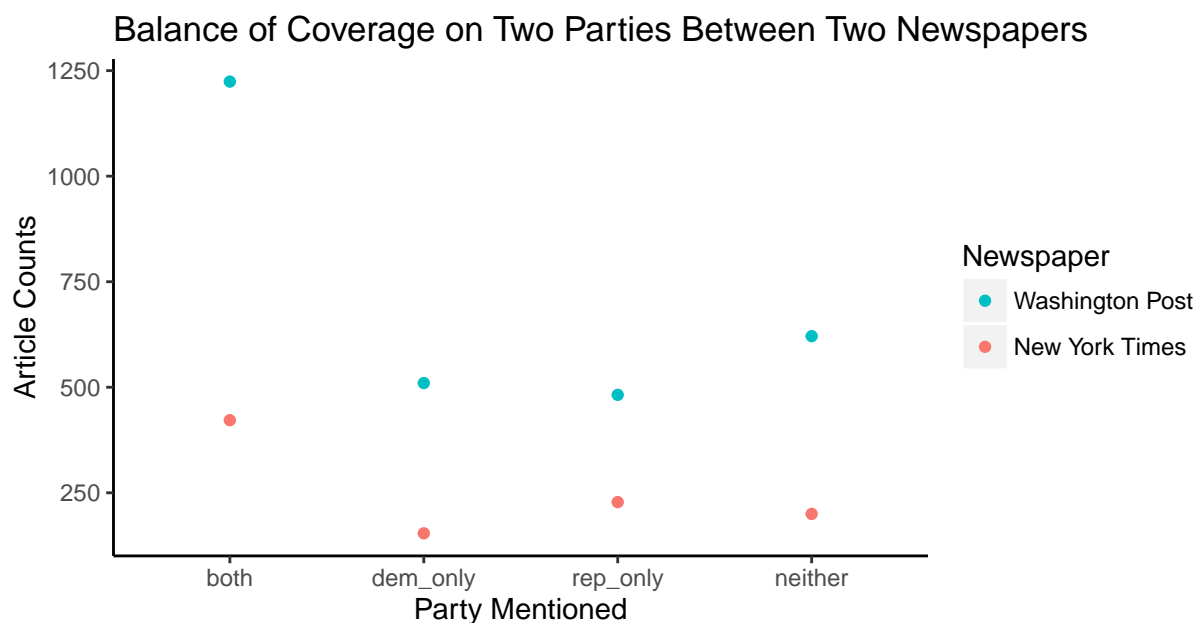


Fig 6: Balance of Coverage on Two Parties Between Two Newspapers.  
The majority of articles in both newspapers cover both parties.  
However, New York Times has more articles that cover Republican  
only, while Washington Post has equal coverage between articles  
that only mention one party.

## 2. Comparing frequencies of different metrics campaign finance articles

Out of the three metrics measured *PAC*, *small donation*, and *527 groups*, PAC appears most often in both publications, appearing in around 30% of articles. Around 5% of articles mention small donation or small donors, whereas only less than 1% of articles discuss 527 groups.

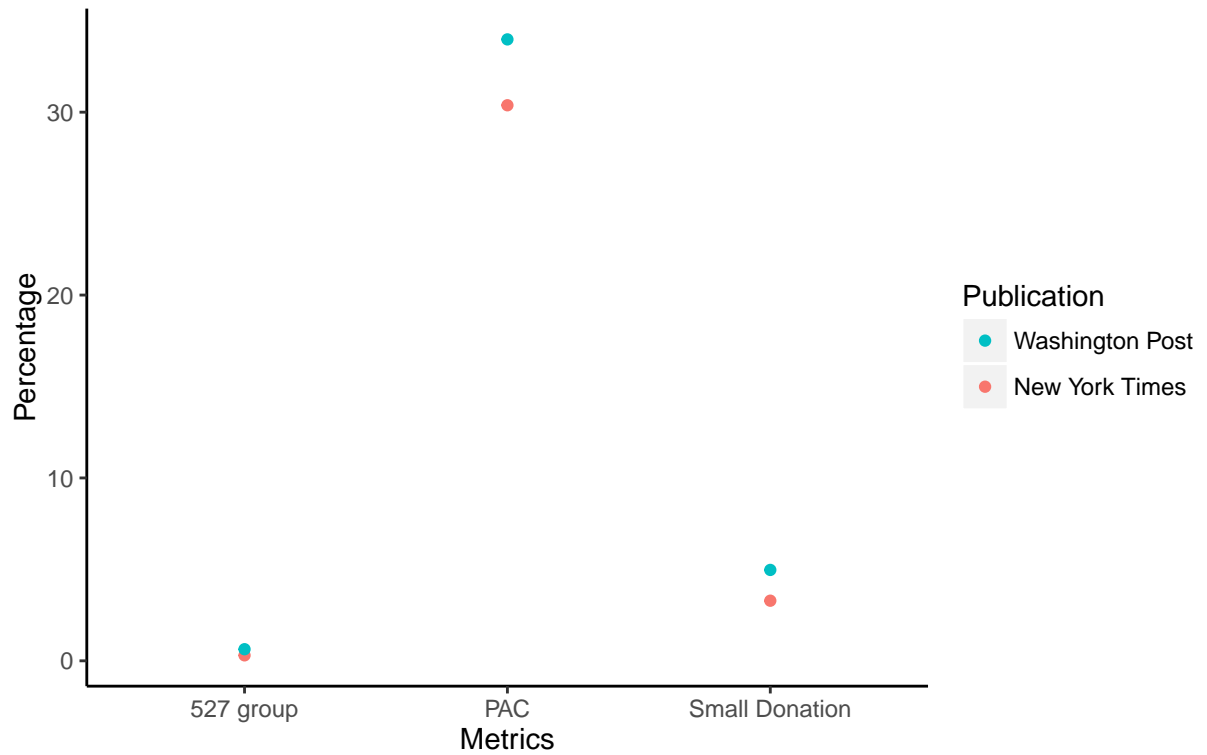
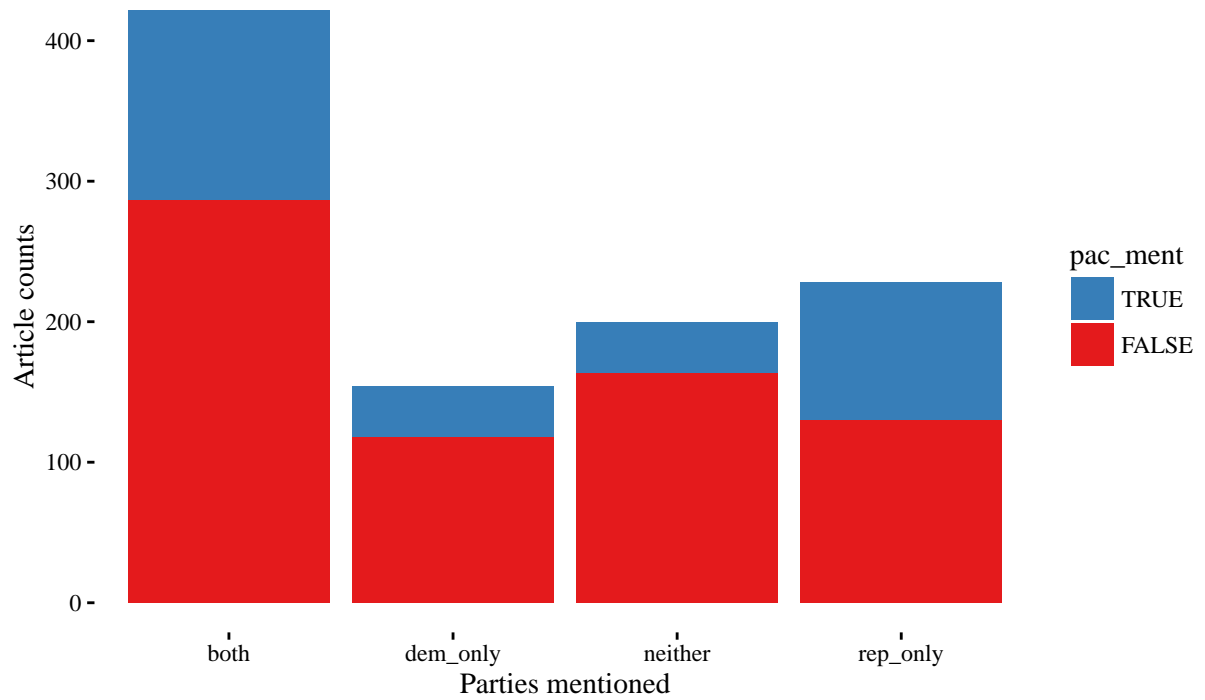


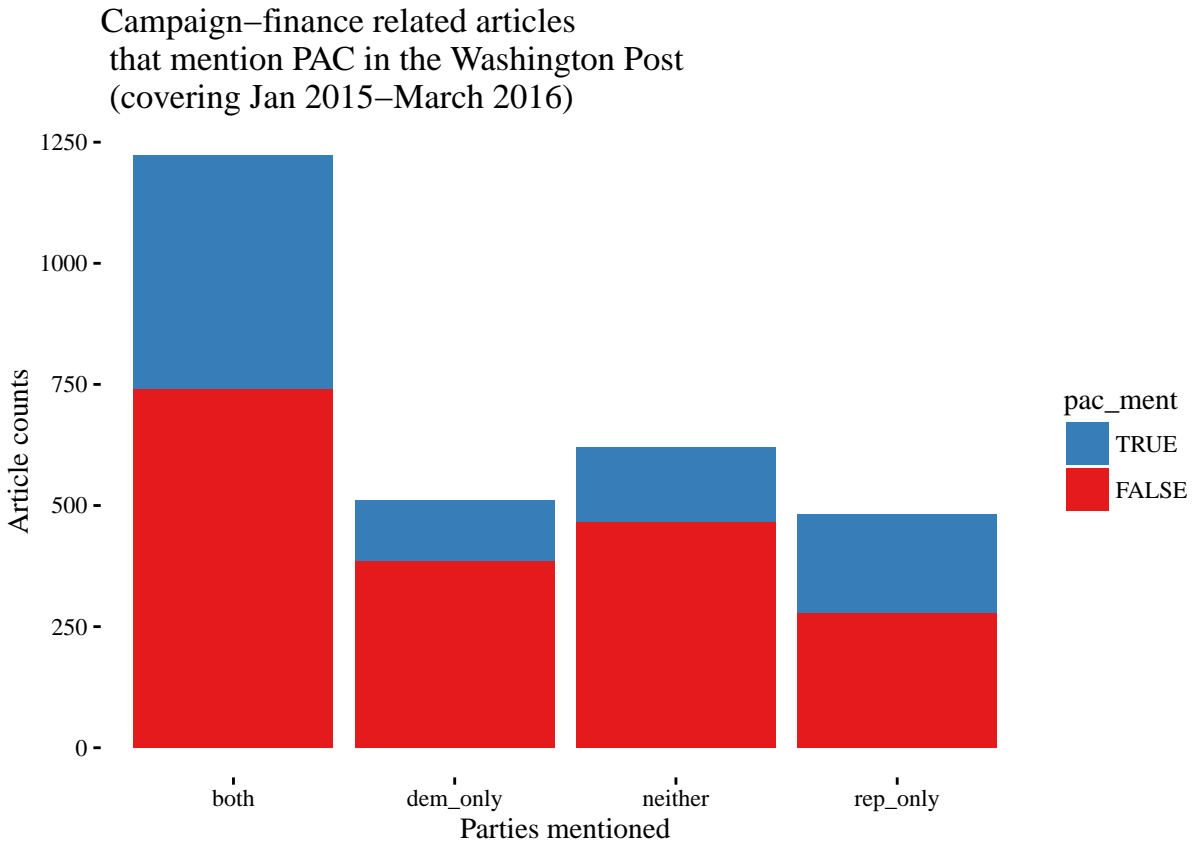
Fig 7: Frequencies of different metrics on campaign finance.  
PAC appears the most frequent compared to other two metrics

### 3. Are these metrics discussed equally across articles that cover different parties?

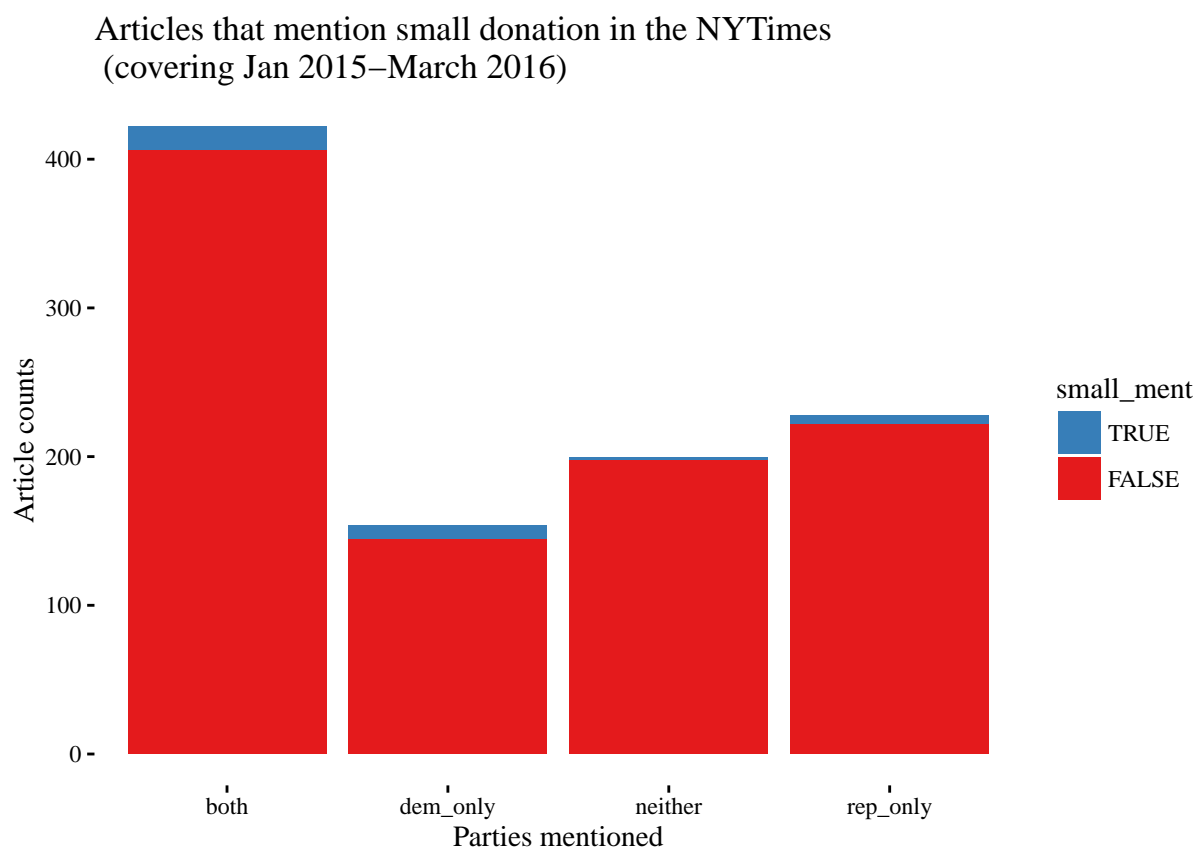
Articles that only mention Republicans have higher proportion of mentioning PAC across both publications. The imbalance in coverage can be considered as an implicit claim that Republicans depend more on PAC than small donation.

Campaign-finance related articles  
that mention PAC in the NYTimes  
(covering Jan 2015–March 2016)





The same analysis is done for small donation, but not 527 groups. In both publications, articles that only mention Democrats have higher proportion of mentioning small donation/donors.



#### 4. Mini Conclusion

My initial hypothesis that both New York Times and Washington Post have similar amount of coverage on campaign finance between two parties is only partially supported by the data. Amount campaign-finance related articles, New York Times has more coverage on Republican, whereas Washington Post covers both parties equally. My other hypothesis regarding the difference in the type of coverage between parties is also partially true in the data. Articles that only mention Republicans have higher proportion of mentioning PAC across both publications. However,

One limitation is how I measure Republican and Democrat coverage. The proxy of coverage is determined by keyword search of terms *Republican* and *Democrat*. The terms

might also capture mentions of other phrases that contain these two terms, but not referring to the two US parties. However, this effect should be low because the articles analyzed have been filtered already, as they all contain term campaign finance.

## **V. Conclusion**

As I compare different claims and examine how the quantitative evidence is used, I find that it is quite difficult to have a clear judgment on which claim is true. However, it is possible to specify the context and assumption each claim is based on.

I identified claims explicitly by looking for contrasting views in the news articles qualitatively. I also identified implicit claims by counting the frequency of terms.

Methodologically, the analysis on labor union contribution shows that it's important to examine time-series trends and that small multiple is a useful graphical tool to analyze data.