

Does Transparency of Political Activity Have a Chilling Effect on Participation?

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Abstract

This study assesses whether disclosure of political activity affects willingness to participate. Using experimental data from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, I observe how individuals respond differently to making campaign contributions or signing petitions when provided with a subtle cue that the information will be made public. The findings indicate that disclosure has a dampening effect on contributions, particularly from small donors, and that people are less willing to sign a petition when they believe the petition will appear on the Internet. Important differences exist for women and cross-pressured citizens. The results imply that disclosure policies regarding political donors and petition signers involve social costs that negatively affect political participation.

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Transparency in politics is universally touted as salutary for democracy. There are few activities where this truism carries more weight than for political fundraising. In the US, donors above a certain amount are required to disclose private information to federal and state election agencies. The fear that campaign donations might influence political decisions is one reason why “sunlight” regarding political money is so widely popular. In theory, knowing who gives and receives campaign money provides a deterrent against corruption and information to voters about political support for politicians. Though the benefits of disclosure for democracy seem clear enough, the costs have not been explored sufficiently (Briffault 2010; Cain 2010). Some of these costs are imposed citizens who must provide personal information when they contribute money. However, there is little empirical work that examines the potentially dampening effect of disclosure costs on political participation. Theories rooted in social-psychology suggest that the prospect of divulging personal information about political activity might cause some to withdraw from politics (Mutz 2006).

To address this gap in research, this study conducts an experiment to observe the behavior of individuals who face the prospect of revealing their names on the Internet when they contemplate engaging in politics. Using Internet survey data from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), it tests for willingness to give money, depending on whether respondents are cued that names will be disclosed once they donate above a threshold. It also looks at whether disclosure discourages people from signing petitions. The expectation is that disclosure triggers a psychological reaction that makes some individuals less likely

to participate. In these situations, disclosure creates a social context in which individuals might become concerned about avoiding disagreement or discomfort in their relations with friends, neighbors and colleagues. There is evidence that voting behavior is marked by such social pressure (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008), but there are no experimental studies that observe the effect of disclosure on other common political activities.

Traditionally, contributing money or signing a petition was not considered an especially public act. Citizens typically wrote checks at fundraising events where attendees included a self-selected group of like-minded citizens. Among this crowd, fear of reprisal or offending others was minimal. Indeed, the homogeneity of the group likely enhanced levels of participation (Mutz 2002). In the past, the donor might have been required to provide private information to the campaign committee or to an election agency, but she could safely assume that her contribution would not be transparent to others, especially for relatively small amounts. Contribution records were stored at the state or federal election agency, where few would take the trouble of searching through stacks of paper files. For this reason, the donor could plausibly assume that the donation was virtually anonymous. The context was somewhat similar for petition signers with respect to ballot initiatives. A petition signer might take for granted that the paperwork went directly to a government agency for counting and verification purposes only.

The reality today is that the Internet makes it possible to publicize information about political activity quite easily. Citizens can no longer assume that their actions are *de facto* private. What makes this situation especially intriguing is

that the legal system in the US and prevailing social norms have prompted two different approaches to political privacy depending on the nature of the activity. The secret ballot makes voting a private act, along with a strong social norm against asking strangers how they voted.¹ On the other hand, making contributions and signing petitions has become more public, both because of changes to law and technology. Many states require information about donors – names, addresses, occupations, even for donations as little as \$1 – and post them on the Internet (McGeveran 2003-2004). Social norms strongly support these sunlight policies and the donor who avoids divulging private information is seen as having something to hide (Briffault 2010).

The central hypothesis in this paper is that the lack of privacy tends to dampen political participation. Moreover, the dampening effects vary across subgroups, affecting individuals who are especially sensitive to being “outed” based on their groups’ historical experience, social status or cross-pressures that make them feel vulnerable. The implications of this research seem clear enough. To the degree that disclosure has a chilling effect on participation, it should give pause to broad claims that sunshine is all for the better. Support for indiscriminate disclosure of political activity might be tempered and recalibrated if it can be shown that chilling effects are not randomly distributed through the population but experienced more powerfully by some groups of citizens.

¹ To be sure, some people lack trust in the secrecy of the ballot box, and many divulge to others who how they voted. See Gerber, A., G. Huber, D. Doherty, and C. Dowling. 2009. "Is There a Secret Ballot? Ballot Secrecy Perceptions and their Implications for Voting Behavior." *SSRN eLibrary*. However, the social norms persists that voting is private, which a significant departure from the 19th century when voting was public.

This research also sheds light on how the Internet is reshaping the social context for political activity. In some ways, the Internet compels individuals to wear their politics on their sleeve, more so than the past. The reach of the Internet makes “quiet” acts like signing a petition or making donations closer to displaying a campaign sign on your front lawn. For highly controversial issues, such as a recent proposition for same-sex marriage in California, the participant may risk personal harassment from the opposition. But even short of harassment, there are reasons to believe some citizens will want to avoid the social discomfort of making their politics public. This concern seems salient in an era of ideological polarization of American political parties, in which citizens may feel considerable cross-pressure amid starkly opposed sides of policy debates.

Social Influence and Political Participation

One does not need to read Jane Austen novels to recognize the degree to which social norms and social pressure affect how individuals behave in public. The effectiveness of anti-smoking and pooper-scooper laws depend on widely shared notions of the public good and the admonitions of some citizens to call out those who violate such laws (Cooter 1997). Individuals tend to conform to prevailing social norms, even when they disagree with them. Some hardy souls will rebel, but do so quietly so as to preserve social harmony and avoid the discomfort of open conflict. In a systematic way, psychologists have shown that individuals vary their behavior to the extent they believe their actions can be observed by others (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). A body of work in political science has drawn on these insights

from social-psychology to explain political behavior in a variety of contexts.

Studies of local communities show how social influence may negatively affect deliberation and participation. Citizens will tend to avoid participating in public discussions when they fear their opinions or actions challenge community norms (Mansbridge 1980) or bring them into conflict with others (Mutz 2002; Rosenberg 1954-55). Research on social networks show that individuals with ambivalent political attitudes or conflict avoidant personalities tend to withdraw from dialogue in which there is political disagreement (Mutz 2006; Ulbig and Funk 1999), and that the effects vary by social context (Djupe 2009; McClurg 2006a).

Only a few studies have looked directly at how secrecy, or its absence, affects behavior. Studies demonstrate positive effects for voting among respondents who believe neighbors might learn whether they voted or not (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008). Other work shows similar effects for rather demanding forms of participation, such as attending a caucus (Grose and Russell 2008), or political protest (Chong 1991). The underlying mechanism motivating behavior is the desire to preserve social status in the community, by appearing to do what the community expects and avoiding shame.

Social influence, of course, can also discourage people from participating. The same studies that observed increased attendance at polls and caucuses noted that participation declined when respondents learned that their votes would be made public (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Grose and Russell 2008). The revelation of a political choice appears to give pause for some, because expressing opinions or dissent may threaten social ties.

In the 19th century, citizens appeared to revel in the expression of their political preferences (McGerr 1986). However, with the advent of the secret ballot, a strong norm has developed that voting should be confidential. The expression of political choice at the ballot box became less a matter of collective displays of loyalty rather than silent acts of individual conscience and reasoning. An important goal of reformers, of course, was to reduce opportunities for vote-buying, intimidation and political pressure by machines and other interests. The new political culture, however, raised the social costs of political activity so that political engagement became less like rooting for a sports team and more like a personal commitment that could put you at odds with friends and neighbors.

For those who surround themselves with like-minded folks, the social costs of politics are not as high (and may even be social benefits). For this reason, such individuals tend to participate more in politics than others (Mutz 2006). The firmly committed may have little concern about advertising their politics. Strong partisans routinely paste political bumper stickers on cars and put signs on their lawns (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). For such people, the benefits of public engagement outweigh any social costs of displeasing neighbors and associates. For other citizens, however, the social costs of disclosing their politics can be quite high. These might include citizens from lower status groups, or individuals who are cross-pressured (Mutz 2002), or those with minority opinions (McClurg 2006a).

How the Internet Affects Social Costs

Most research about the effects of the Internet on politics focuses on its potential to enhance participation (Kittelsohn and Dalton 2006). Previous studies, however, have not elaborated how the social context of the Internet might deter individuals from participating because of privacy concerns. These privacy concerns emerge in policy debates regarding personal information of Internet users that business firms routinely extract from online activity. But these concerns have not been echoed in debates about political participation, except with respect to voting (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, and Dowling 2009).

The Internet potentially dampens participation because it makes some political acts, which are assumed to be private, now public acts. The unwieldy social context of the Internet widens the network of exposure to a politically heterogeneous network in which we might run into our bosses, poker partners or ex-lovers. The open environment makes it difficult to cordon political activity from other forms of social engagement such as work and play. Even if an individual believes he has a fair-minded boss, he may not want her knowing that he contributed to a conservative “Tea Party” candidate, particularly if the boss is known for her political liberalism. In this way, the Internet makes a hash of individual efforts to tailor the presentation-of-self to targeted groups. The individual can no longer control the context in which he or she manages the props, costume and audience appropriate to the situation (Goffman 1959). Lacking this control and the fear of being miscast, the individual withdraws from the stage. For some, exposure to broader and heterogeneous communities on the Internet creates social anxieties, threatens social bonds and may even involve fears of retribution.

The impact disclosure on political contributions and signing petitions

Social influence theory provides key insights into how individuals will behave when the veil of anonymity is lifted for two common political activities: contributing money and signing petitions. In the CCES sample, one in four respondents claimed they made a political contribution in the 2010 elections. Studies show that donors tend to be wealthier, more educated, white and more interested in politics than others (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). These traits tend to make them less vulnerable to social influence (McClurg 2006b; Ulbig and Funk 1999). Signing petitions is a less demanding form of participation than making a contribution, but the same factors explain rates of individual participation.

In the past decade, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and similar agencies at the state level have made significant efforts to improve transparency of contributions.² At the federal level, the law requires someone contributing \$200 or more to provide their name, address, occupation, employer, and amount. Additionally, entrepreneurial watchdog groups have created websites that use government-gathered data to organize the information easily for online users, sometimes in provocative ways. Figure 1 provides an example of one site, operated by the Huffington Post, which merges publicly available data on contributions from FEC with geo-coded data provided by the Census Bureau to generate Google Maps.

² The efforts to improve disclosure in the 50 states have been tracked closely by a consortium of foundations and the UCLA Law School at <http://disclosure.law.ucla.edu/>

These maps locate the address of individuals who give money, along with colored dots showing the party to which they donated (blue dots for Democrats, red for Republicans). One click on the dot reveals the donor's name, amount of contribution and political committee that received it. These data can be retrieved readily by anyone – an employer, landlord, or prospective date – who chooses to “google” a name.

Figure 1 shows Amherst, Massachusetts (the hometown of this author). Unsurprisingly, this college town displays an overwhelming number of blue dots relative to red dots. With a few mouse clicks, anyone can see how their neighbors, friends and colleagues choose to spend their political dollars. The amount of money donated might be interpreted by onlookers as the strength of one's convictions. While donors tend to possess attributes that make them less vulnerable to social influence, some individuals, particularly those who work in professions that rely on trust -- local schoolteachers, clerics, psychotherapists -- may not want to advertise their political convictions so starkly (McGeveran 2003-2004). Potential donors might fear that others will judge them differently or misconstrue the reasons why they gave money. Of course, we do not know whether most donors realize their donations will be publicized, though one survey indicates that support for disclosure drops significant when respondents are asked whether the state should post here how name, address and contribution amount on the Internet (Carpenter 2007). Overall, these insights about how disclosure generates a social cost leads to the following testable hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Disclosure reduces political participation

Those who receive a cue that their participation – either donating money or signing petition -- will be made public will be less likely to participate.

For donors, the amount they contribute will vary depending on the threshold at which donations are made public.

Circumstance and theory suggest that small and large donors should behave differently. Major donors are often courted in person by politicians and their surrogates. Thus, they are granted the benefit of access and privileged social status. Moreover, when attending “big event” fundraisers large donors have the opportunity to experience solidarity with other donors for supporting similar causes. Moreover, large donors may have more intense preferences as indicated by the amount they donate, or they give money because they are in occupations that might routinely give money as part of doing business, or they are less vulnerable to retaliation given that they are wealthy (Briffault 2010). For these reasons, disclosure is less likely to chill large donors.

Hypothesis 2: Small Donors

Small donors are more likely to limit their contributions than large donors when cued that donations will be made public.

Social influence should also have stronger effects on groups that might be especially

sensitive to being “outed” by publicity because of their status in society (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, and Dowling 2009; McClurg 2006a; Ulbig and Funk 1999) or because they face intense cross-pressures (Mutz 2002). Studies indicate that women, for example, are more conflict avoidant (Ulbig and Funk 1999) and are more reluctant to express their opinions (Djupe 2009; Rae Atkeson and Rapoport 2003). The traits on which women score higher, especially agreeableness and extraversion, are those that would predict sensitivity to social pressure (Eagly and Wood 1991; Feingold 1994). Women also tend to believe they have less expertise in political matters, which makes them more susceptible to withdrawing from politics (Huckfeldt 2001). On top of this, the Internet appears to present a more threatening environment to women and they feel a greater need to protect their identities (Herring 2003).

Some of these arguments might be applied equally to minority groups, e.g., nonwhites, with lower status than the majority. Being in the minority makes one especially sensitive to challenging group norms (McClurg 2006a) and raises additional concerns about retaliation, particularly when such concerns are rooted in historical experience.

Hypothesis 3: Social group differences

Women and nonwhites are more likely to limit their participation when cued that political activities will be publically disclosed.

Finally, prior research indicates that those with strong attitudes, such as ideological extremists and strong partisans, are more likely to voice opinions publicly (Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003; Wojcieszak 2011). One argument is that they do not face the kind of ambivalence or cross-pressures that would cause them to withdraw from politics (Mutz 2006). Cross-pressured citizens will tend to be moderates or weak partisans. They are also likely to be citizens who hold different political preferences from their associated in-group, such as union-members who are Republicans, or the devoutly religious who are Democrats. These cross-pressured individuals are most likely to shun participation once the veil of privacy is lifted, exposing them to the pressure from in-group norms.

Hypothesis 4: Cross-pressured citizens

Cross-pressured groups, like moderates and union members, are more likely to limit contributions than others when cued that their political activities will be publically disclosed.

Analyzing the Effect of Disclosure on Participation

This study utilizes a representative survey of 2,500 American adults conducted as part of the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). Appendix 1 includes additional information about the survey. The survey module exploited an experimental design by slightly altering the question wording to different sets of randomly selected respondents. In one set of questions respondents were asked about their willingness to contribute money. Specifically, the question read, “If a candidate is

running in your district who closely represents your political views, how much, if anything, would you consider donating to his campaign?" Respondents were asked to enter an amount between 0 and \$2500. The second and third versions of these questions varied slightly. In one version, the sentence was added, "Please note: names of donors contributing over \$100 are made public on the Internet." The third version changed the threshold for disclosure to \$200. Thus, the second and third versions provide a cue that anonymity is potentially lost once the donor chooses to give above a certain amount. The cue is subtle, yet clear. Furthermore, to make this less of an abstract experience for respondents and generate results that might be generalized to the population of donors, the analysis is restricted to those who said they actually made a political contribution during the 2010 elections (N= 629). With regard to capturing small donors, we counted small donors as those who claimed to give less than \$300 to political committees. This threshold for small donors may seem arbitrary (other studies tend to measure small donors as giving less than \$200, which is the point at which donors must disclose activity for federal elections), though it allows me to assess the effects of treatment at both \$100 and \$200 levels of disclosure.

The second set of questions probed willingness to sign a controversial petition. Half the respondents in sample were the control group and received the following question, "How likely are you to sign a petition to support a cause or candidate you believe in even if that candidate or cause is unpopular with your friends or co-workers?" The respondent was then provided with a "rule widget" that allowed them to drag a marker between "very unlikely" to "very likely" (and a

box for “not sure”). This widget translated into a 0-100 scale (very unlikely to very likely). In the treatment version of this question, the phrase “posted publicly on the Web” is inserted midsentence: It reads: “How likely are you to sign a petition that is posted publicly on the Web to support a cause or candidate you believe in even if that candidate or cause is unpopular with your friends or co-workers?” The revelation about web-posting indicates nothing about who will see the petition – only that is being documented online.

Table 1 provides descriptive data for selected groups respondents in the control group. These figures indicate a range of different outcomes by group. The average “offered” contribution to a desired candidate for the entire sample is \$111. However, those who have the experience of actually contributing to political campaigns typically offered more, most likely because they tend to have higher incomes and a better sense of how much people typically give to campaigns. Among individuals who reported making a donation in 2010, the average hypothetical contribution was \$243, compared to just \$44 dollars for respondents who did not make an actual contribution. Not surprisingly, there are clear differences between people who have made small contributions (less than \$350 in this analysis) who offered an average of \$107 versus those who make larger contributions at \$596. Most interesting for the purposes of this analysis are demographic group differences. Women offered much less than men (\$63 to \$167), and nonwhites gave less than whites (\$83 to \$120). Again these differences are linked, in large part, to income differences across groups. Finally, among potentially cross-pressured groups, there are large differences between moderates and ideologically extreme

respondents. Extremists gave, on average, \$168, versus just \$94 for moderates, which supports previous work demonstrating that ideologues have stronger motivations to participate in politics. Regarding union members, it appears that they are willing to contribute more money to candidates than non-union members, but the differences are not significant.

Turning to petition signers, Table 2 shows the average scores that correspond to respondents' willingness to sign a controversial petition. Substantively, the scores are not easy to interpret since it is not possible to say at what point on the scale a respondent will decline to sign a petition. However, the scale captures variation across groups in their readiness to sign a petition. First, there are no differences between men and women, and rather small difference between whites and nonwhites, with the latter less likely to sign a petition. Second, among potentially cross-pressured groups it appears that extremists are more likely to sign a controversial petition than moderates. There are no differences between union and non-union respondents. These descriptive data for the control group provide a baseline for understanding the effect of the treatment (indicating to respondents that their names will be disclosed). The range of variation for both sets of experiments suggests that group effects will be more important for making contributions than for signing petitions.

Results

To test whether the treatment (disclosure) had an effect on political contributions, I regressed (OLS) explanatory variables on the amount of dollars the respondent was

willing to contribute. The regression intercept provides the mean response for the dependent variable (size of contribution) among the control group, while the coefficients provide the predicted effects for the treatment groups.

The basic model distinguishes between respondents who received different cues for different levels of disclosure, where A is equal to the “Amount” contributed, and D_{100} and D_{200} are dummy variables to identify respondents who were told that the disclosure occurs when the contribution exceeds either \$100 or \$200, respectively. The analysis of political contributions is restricted to respondents who claimed to have made contribution in the 2010 elections. The question asks them how much would they be *willing to give*, hypothetically, to a candidate they liked. Similarly, for signing petitions, the basic regression model assesses the willingness of the respondent to sign the petition (S) on a scale from 0-100, and includes a dummy variable for whether the respondents are cued that the petition will be disclosed (D) on the internet.

Basic model for political contributions: $A = D_{100} + D_{200} + e$

Basic model for signing a petition: $S = D + e$

The more complex models include a dummy variable for the group that is expected to behave differently as a result of the treatment (women, nonwhite, etc.) along with an interactive term(s) to identify whether the group exposed to

treatment experienced a larger (or smaller) effect for the treatment. For example, in testing the effect of publicity on women versus men, the model is:

$$A = D_{100} + D_{200} + \text{Women} + \text{Woman} \times D_{100} + \text{Woman} \times D_{200} + e$$

For ease of presentation, this analysis simply presents graphical displays of the mean responses for control and treatment groups.

Figure 2 supports Hypothesis 1 that disclosure has a dampening effect on making contributions. The average contribution, \$221, drops to just \$112 when respondents are cued that amounts above \$100 are made public. The effect is less dramatic and not significant when respondents are cued that amounts above \$200 are reportable. Thus, we can infer that a low threshold (\$100) for disclosing contributions is likely to have a powerful effect on citizens' willingness to contribute money. The findings also support hypothesis 2, indicating that *small* donors are impacted by disclosure while large donors are not. Figure 3 shows the results for small donors only. Small donors, on average, said they would give \$111 to a candidate. But once if respondents believe their names will be public at a threshold of \$100, the average for small donors declines to \$68.

Disclosure is also likely to impact the more common form of participation of signing petitions. Figure 4 shows that the willingness to sign a petition among all respondents drops 8.5% (70-64=6) when respondents are told that the petition will appear on the Internet.

Turning to the question of whether the treatment affects groups differently, the analysis shows that women do indeed react differently to disclosure. Women who are not told they will have to disclose their contribution offered an average of \$40 compare to \$26 for those who were told the donation would be reported at the \$100 threshold. The treatment appeared to make no difference for men. However, when the analysis is restricted to respondents who actually made a contribution in the 2010 elections, the story shifts somewhat. Figure 5 shows that women donors start from a lower threshold of giving at \$135 compared to men at \$291. The treatment affects *both* women and men, roughly the same. The women's average contribution declines to just \$58, a drop of 57%, while the men's contribution declines to \$146, a drop of 50%. When the analysis is restricted to an elite group of participants -- those who have actually contributed money -- we observe that the effect of disclosure is not that large between women and men. However, the analysis of petition signing indicates that women and men do, in fact, behave differently when they learn their political activities might be observed by others. Figure 6 show that that the average score for women drops 10%, from 70 to 63, when disclosure is present. Men in the control groups begin at the same level but do not appear to be affected when cued that the petition will made public.

Overall, hypothesis 3, which holds that publicity will negatively affect lower status social groups more, holds for women but not for nonwhites. There were no observable differences between nonwhites and whites regarding the treatment effects for making political contributions or signing petitions. This findings support

previous studies that indicate women are highly sensitive to social influence and less likely to publicly declare their opinions.

Finally, I turn to hypothesis 4, which examines the effect of the treatment on potentially cross-pressured groups. Moderates appear more likely to reduce their political contributions than extremists. Without disclosure, moderates are willing to give \$203 compared to just \$92 for those who are told disclosure starts at amounts above \$100 (see Figure 7). There is an effect of similar magnitude for those who are very liberal or very conservative, although the larger standard errors yield results that are not statistically significant. The finding suggests that moderates are more sensitive about hiding their identities than those firmly committed to a particular ideology, though the results are inconclusive. Similarly, the average contribution that union members are willing to give drops significantly from \$107 to \$48. For respondents who do not belong to unions there is no corresponding effect.³

However, when the cross-pressure thesis is applied to signing petitions the effects do not seem as strong, at least for the groups studied in this analysis. Moderates are indeed less likely than extremists to say they will sign a petition that is on the Internet. The average score on willingness drops slightly from 68 to 62, while for extremists the score drops only from 75 to 71 and is not statistically significant (analysis not shown here). Union members, however, appear no more or less likely to sign a petition when they are cued that it will appear on the Internet. One key difference between giving money and signing petitions is the element of

³ It is unclear why the standard errors are exceptionally large for non-union members. These issues will be probed in subsequent analyses.

partisanship. For petitions, partisanship may not be a salient factor. The cross-pressure union members face may be most acute when it involves revealing support for party candidates. Of course, another important difference is that giving money is a stronger statement about how much one supports a cause or candidate, since the amount of the contribution can vary. In short, making political contributions appears to elicit conflict avoidant behaviors more than signing a petition, even a petition that is labeled controversial.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that disclosure has a chilling effect on participation. The experiment regarding political donors and petition signers indicates that some individuals are less likely to participate when they believe their actions are public. The subtle cue that donations above a certain threshold will be disclosed causes individuals to reduce the amount of their contribution. Moreover, the results show that disclosure appears to affect small donors rather than large donors.

The results for subgroups are less conclusive but merit further scrutiny. The study suggests that women appear more sensitive to disclosure than men. When cued that their acts would be public, they were more likely to drop the level of contributions and refrain from signing a petition. This finding supports previous research about women being more conflict avoidant (Ulbig and Funk 1999) and more reluctant to express political opinions (Djupe 2009; Rae Atkeson and Rapoport 2003). Cross-pressured groups are also potentially vulnerable to the

dampening effects of disclosure. Moderates decreased participation in both experiments compared with extreme ideologues, and union members appeared to do so with respect to political contributions. Future research might explore the effect on other potentially cross-pressured groups.

The findings should spur policymakers to reconsider the cost-benefit trade-offs for disclosure policy, particularly for campaign finance. This study shows there are clear trade-offs, particularly for citizens who are sensitive to publicity. The fact that disclosure turns away small donors should be particularly troubling in light of efforts to increase the number of citizens who make small contributions. Small donors cause the least concern for corruption and influence-peddling. In theory, at least, the reliance of politicians on money raised from small donors should diminish the influence of large donors. One recommendation that emerges from this research is that reporting thresholds should not be set as low as \$100, since this level affected participation while the \$200 level did not appear to change behavior significantly. (The current federal level is \$200, but many states have thresholds that are much lower.)

It is also worth considering that disclosure may have differential effects on subgroups. While women now vote at equal rates to men, their participation remains unequal with respect to giving money and other forms of participation. Disclosure policies appear to depress this participation even more. Disclosure policies may also reduce the participation of ideologically moderate individuals, which would give relatively greater voice to highly ideological elements in either major party. The fact that publicity negatively affects cross-pressured groups such

as union members suggests that individuals who disagree with the political allegiances of their in-group will likely find it very hard to support candidates they prefer when their views are made public on the Internet.

To some observers, the social cost of publicity is a fact we must live with in a democracy. In judging the constitutionality of disclosure, the pugnacious Justice Scalia makes an important point in his concurrence in *Doe v. Reed*⁴ that democracy requires citizens to have “civic courage.” The willingness to stand behind a position publicly makes the citizen responsible and accountable to wider community.

On the other hand, as this study suggests, the Internet changes the social context considerably when taking political positions. Citizens may desire more control than the Internet affords them over when and how they choose to exhibit civic courage. This is particularly so when the act has the potential to affect one’s ability to get work or create essential social ties with neighbors. Individuals navigating diverse social landscapes attempt to play different roles for different audiences (Goffman 1959), but the Internet makes it that much harder to separate their politics from the other personal narratives of their life. Without the ability to separate politics for some, political activity may become even more dominated by those for whom politics is a highly salient feature of their personal lives.

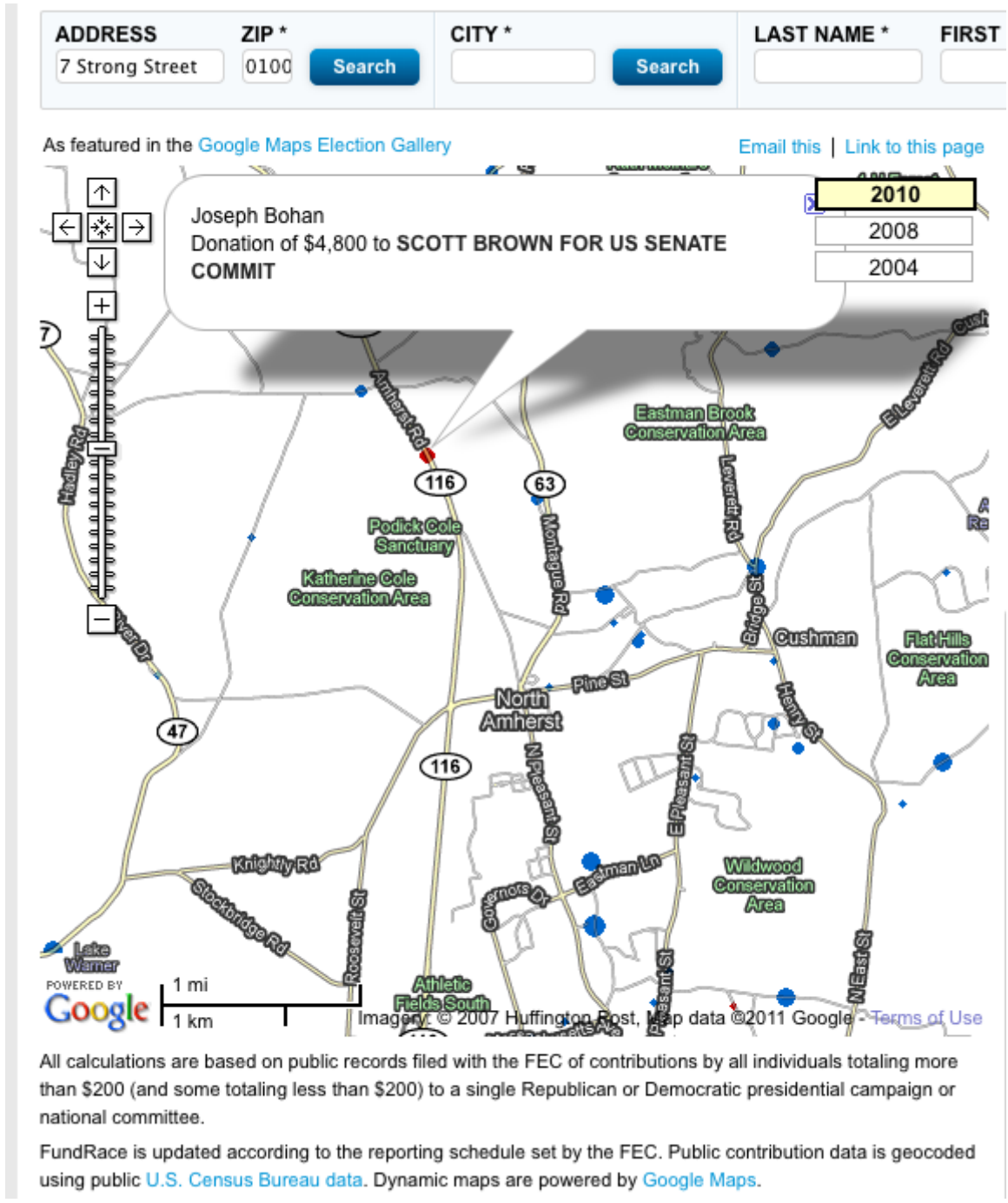
⁴ *John Doe #1 v. Reed*, 586 F.3d 671, 675 n. 4 (9th Cir. 2009). This decision rejected the claim that requiring disclosure of signatures for ballot referenda violates the First Amendment.

Table 1. Average Political Contributions*, Control Group (No Disclosure)

	Contribution Amount	S.E.	N
All Repondents	\$111	\$13	675
Donors	\$243	\$32	229
Non-Donors	\$44	\$8	441
Small Donors	\$107	\$16	160
Large Donors	\$596	\$96	61
<i>Social Group Status</i>			
Women	\$63	\$10	359
Men	\$167	\$23	316
Nonwhite	\$83	\$15	165
White	\$120	\$19	510
<i>Cross-pressured</i>			
Moderates	\$94	\$12	519
Ideologues	\$168	\$37	156
Union Members	\$132	\$25	231
Non-Union	\$101	\$14	444
* Note: these are contributions respondents say they <i>are willing</i> to donate			
*p value <f .10, **p value < .05 for two-sample t-test, one-tailed			

Table 2. Willingness to Sign Unpopular Petition (0-100), Control Group (No Disclosure)			
	Willingness to sign petition	S.E.	N
All Repondents	71	1	1127
<i>Social Group Status</i>			
Women	71	1	601
Men	71	1	526
<i>Nonwhite</i>			
Nonwhite	66	2	250
White	73	1	877
<i>Cross-pressured</i>			
Moderates	70	1	845
Ideologues	74	2	282
<i>Union Members</i>			
Union Members	71	2	354
Non-Union	71	1	773
Note: scale is 0 Very Unlikely to 100 Very Likely			

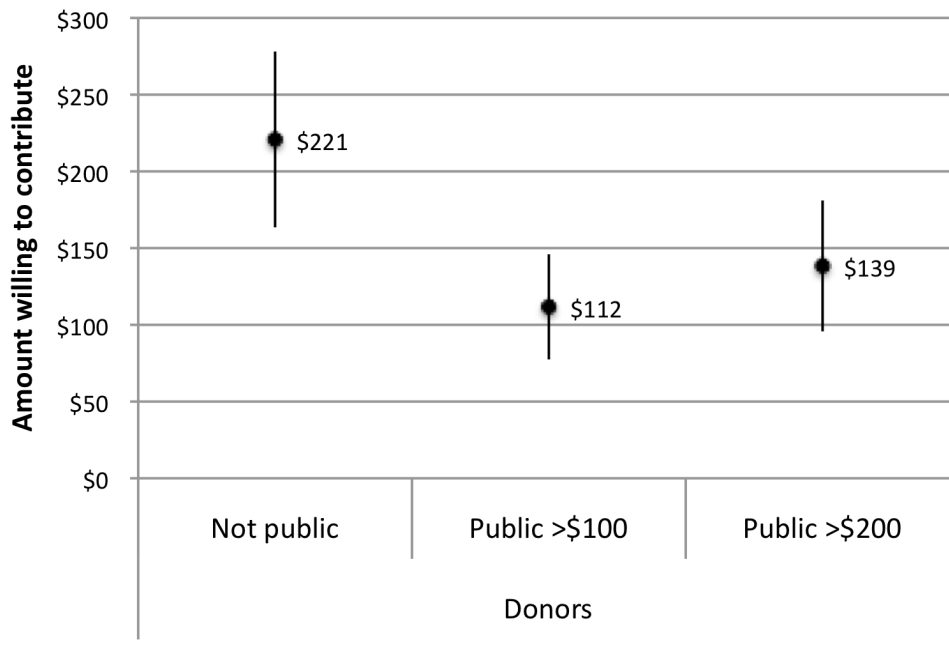
Figure 1. Google Map of Political Donors, 2010 (Amherst, MA)



All calculations are based on public records filed with the FEC of contributions by all individuals totaling more than \$200 (and some totaling less than \$200) to a single Republican or Democratic presidential campaign or national committee.

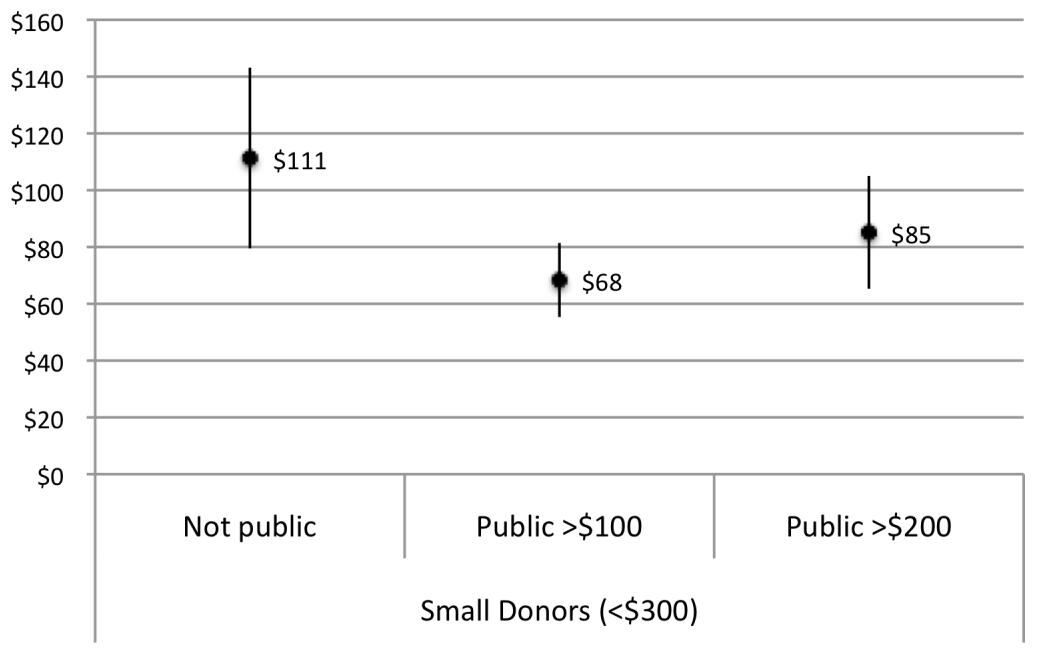
FundRace is updated according to the reporting schedule set by the FEC. Public contribution data is geocoded using public [U.S. Census Bureau data](#). Dynamic maps are powered by [Google Maps](#).

**Figure 2. Effect of Disclosure on Size of Contributions Among Donors
(Predicted Average Contribution)**



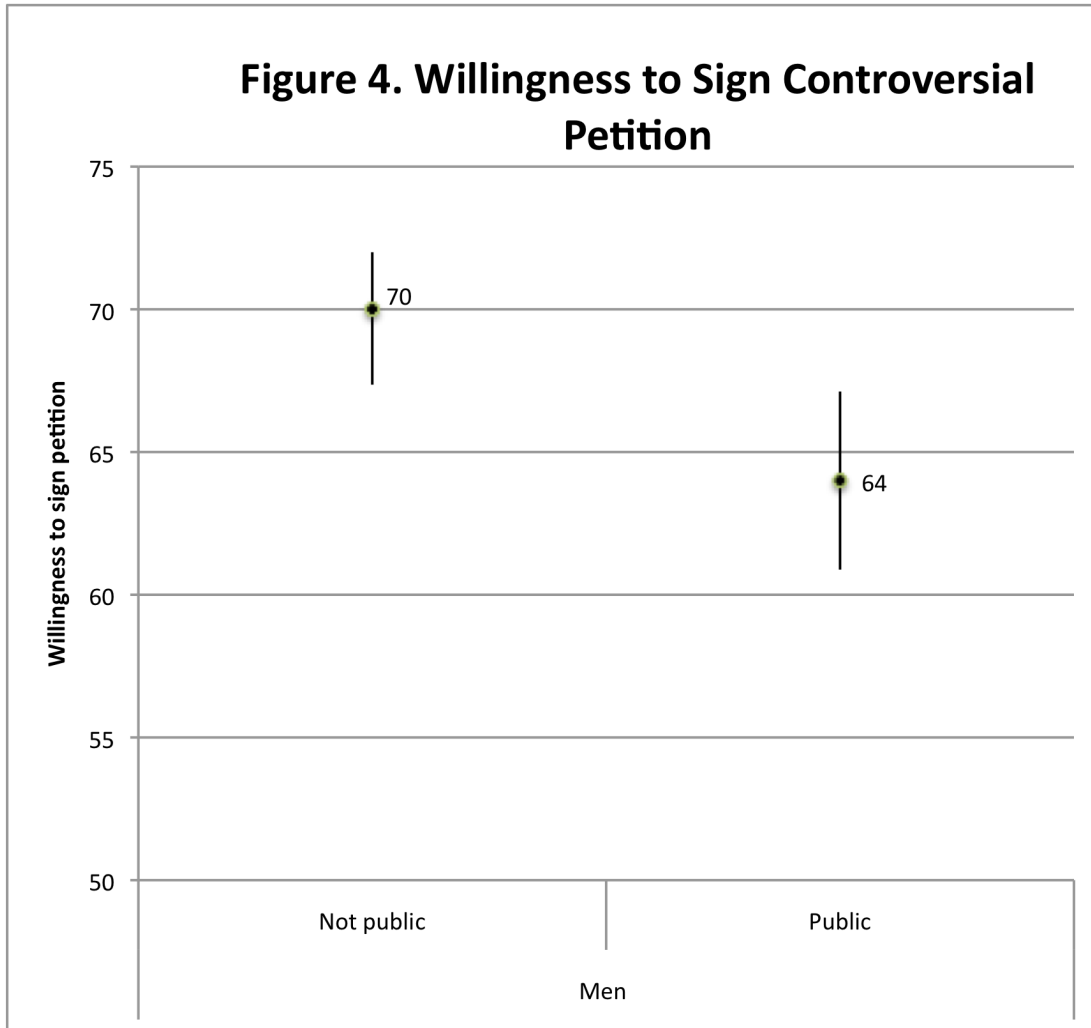
Number of obs = 629

Figure 3. Effect of Disclosure on Size of Contributions Among Small Donors (Predicted Avg Contribution)



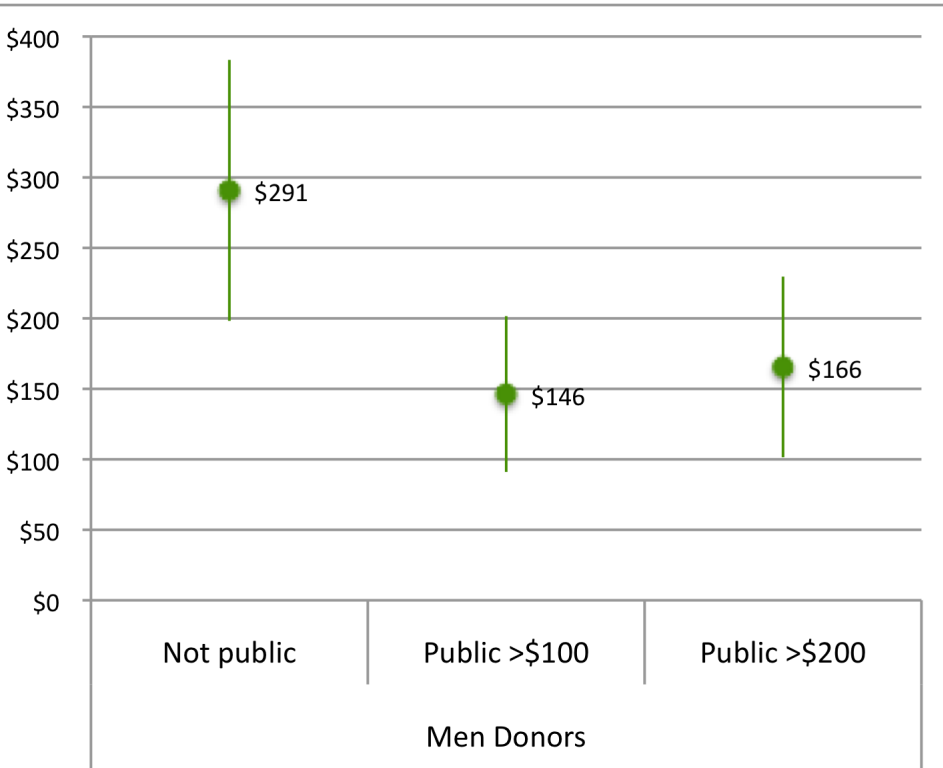
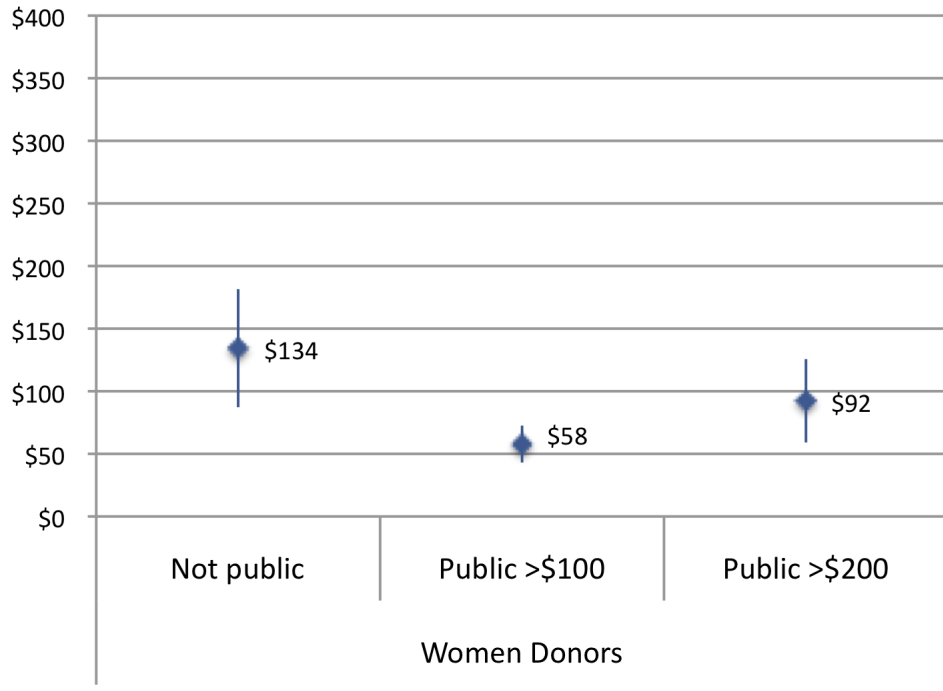
Number of observations = 467

Figure 4. Willingness to Sign Controversial Petition



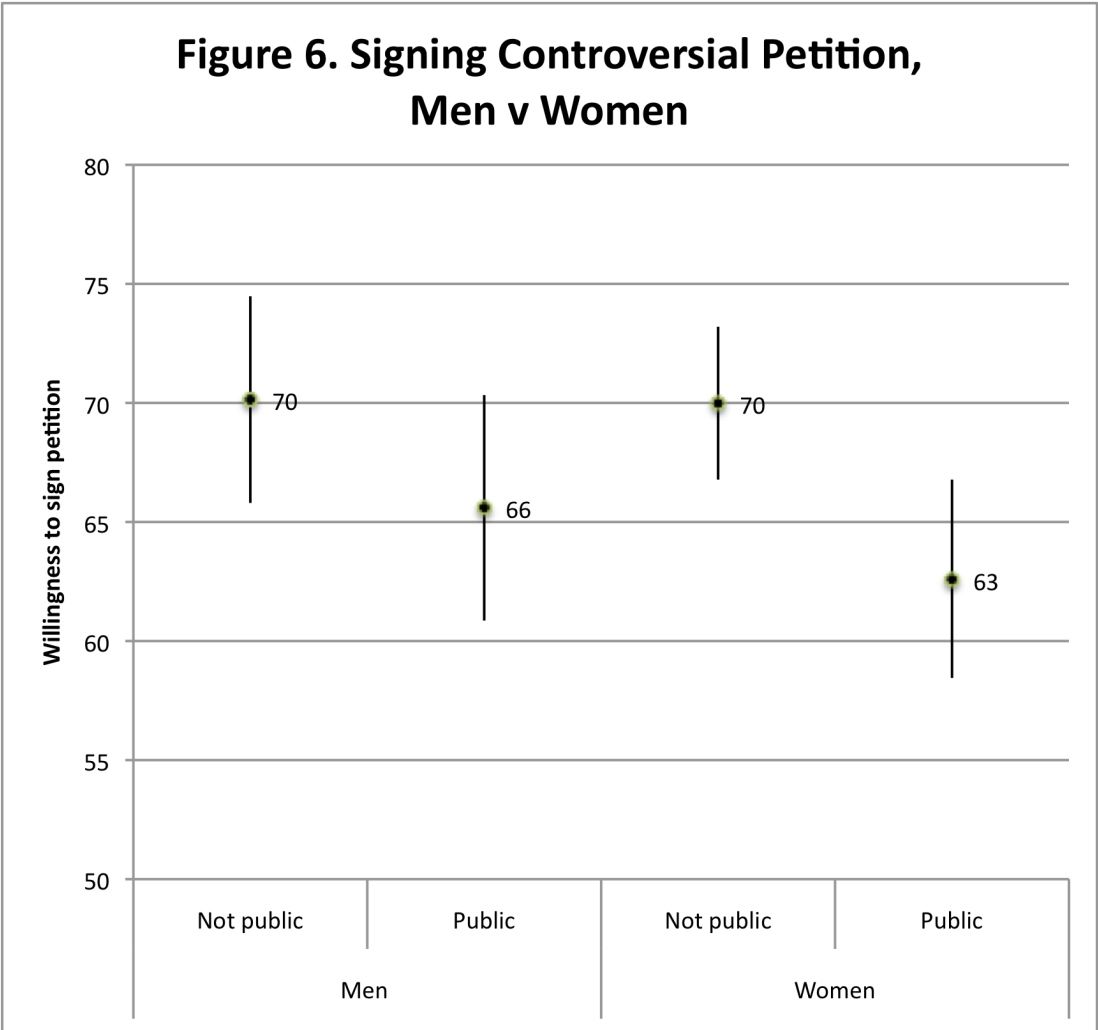
Number of Obs = 2265

Figure 5. Effect of Disclosure on Size of Contributions, Women v Men Donors



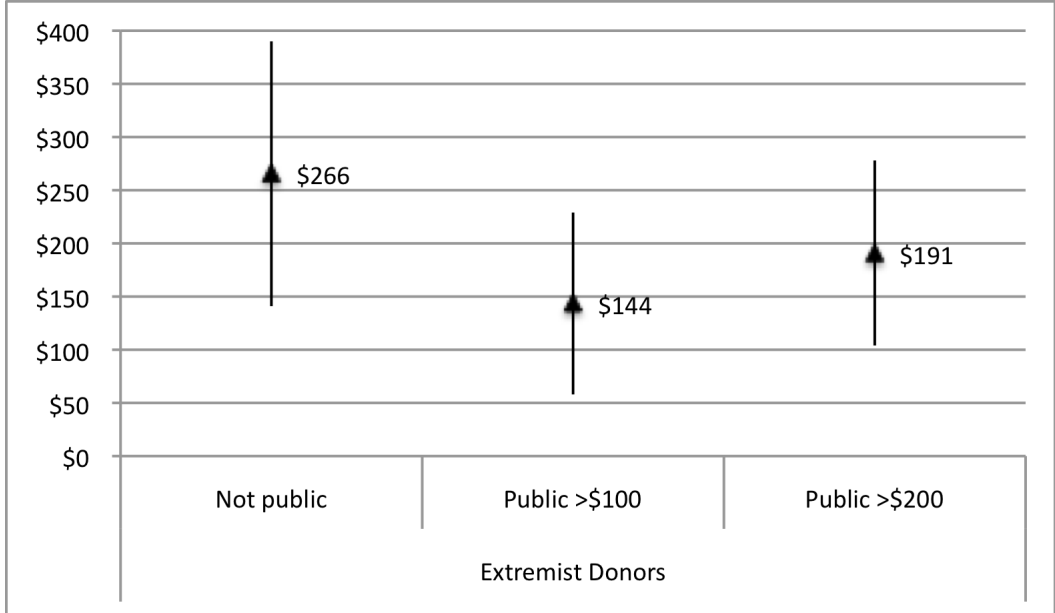
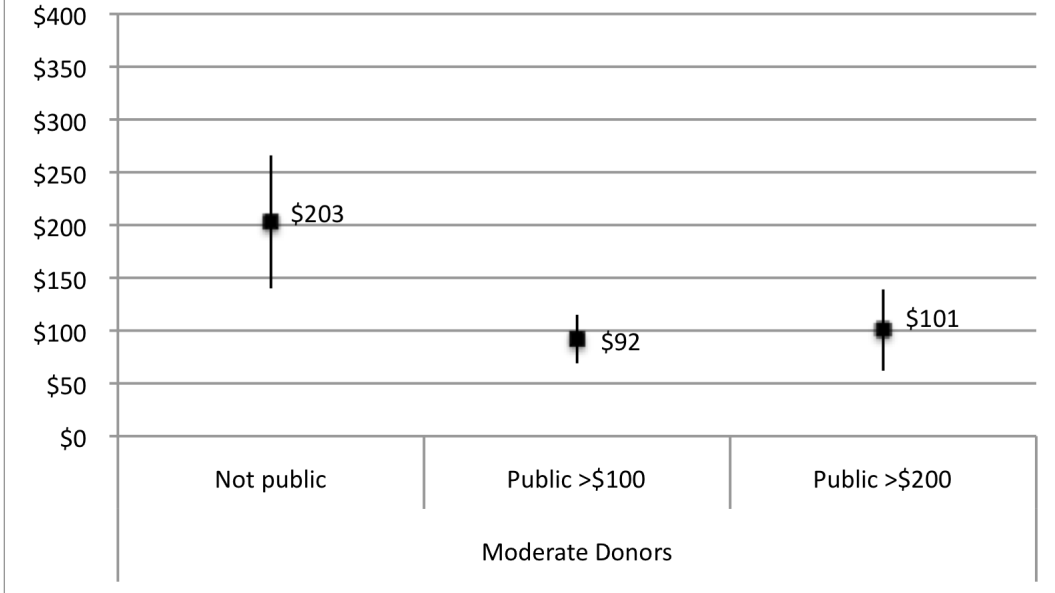
Number of Obs = 629

**Figure 6. Signing Controversial Petition,
Men v Women**



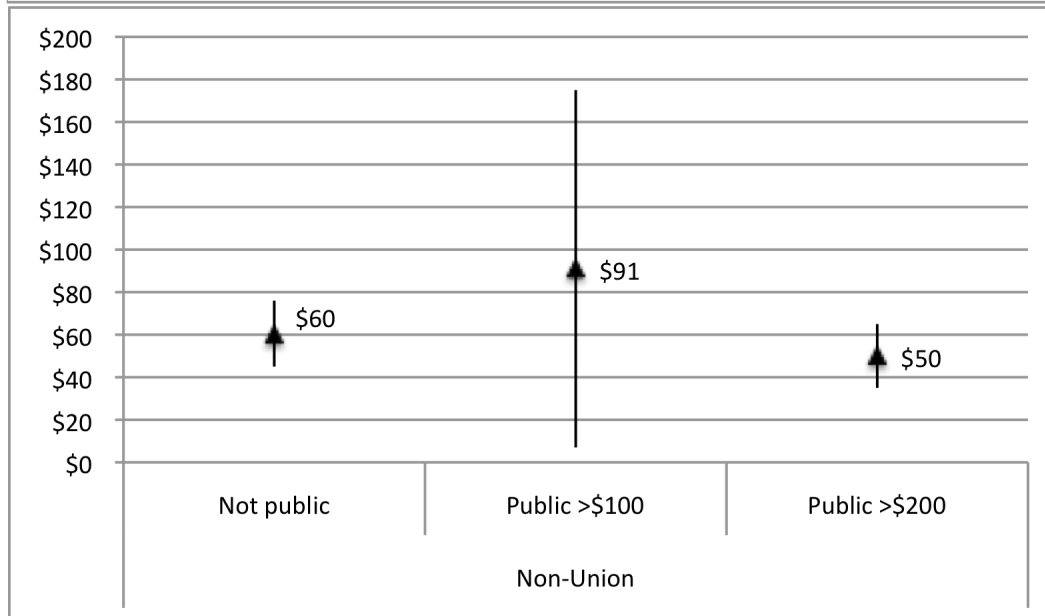
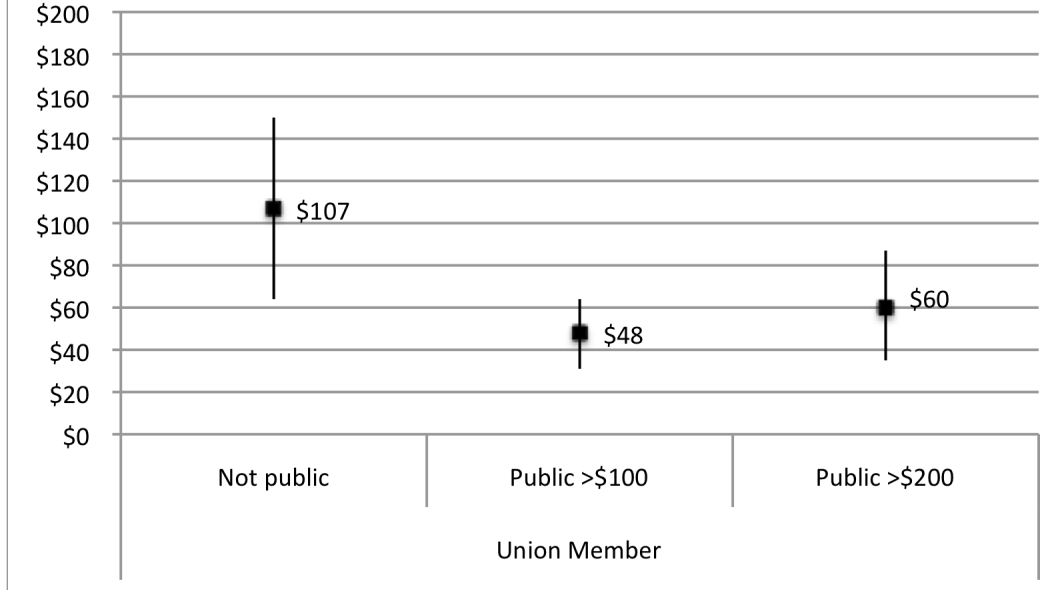
Number of Obs = 2265

Figure 7. Effect of Disclosure on Size of Contributions, Mod vs Ideol Donors



Number of Obs = 629

Figure 8. Effect of Disclosure on Size of Contributions from Union Members



Number of obs=1905

Appendix 1: Information about the Cooperative Congressional Election Study

The CCES is conducted over the Internet by YouGov/Polimetrix using a matched random sample design where a subset of respondents recruited for online surveys were selected by matching them on demographic characteristics to a randomly selected set of American adults. The pre-election survey (used in this analysis) was administered late September to late October. Individuals are recruited onto the YouGov/Polimetrix Internet panel using targeted online advertisements designed to assure a large and representative group of panelists. The online advertisement leads individuals to a gateway survey; at the end of this initial survey, respondents are asked if they would like to join the panel. Propensity score weights were developed to ensure that the sample represented the characteristics of the adult population according to the most recent Current Population Survey. The CCES samples were drawn from the YouGov/Polimetrix panel using a sample matching technique to ensure a nationally representative sample.

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