

Small Money Donating as Democratic Politics

Jennifer Rubenstein

Since 2008, the number of people in the United States making small monetary donations to political causes, both within and beyond electoral politics, has skyrocketed. While critics of “big money” in politics laud these donations because they are small, proponents of small-scale democratic political action eye them suspiciously because they are monetary. Neither group interrogates whether the monetariness of these donations might be a *source* of their democratic potential. Building on Wendy Brown’s conceptual distinction between monetization and economization, I argue that small-money political donations are potentially democratic not only because they are small, but also because they are monetary. More specifically, the mobility, divisibility, commensurability, and fungibility of money help make small-money political donations potentially democratic, by making them potentially accessible, non-intrusive, and collective. Money is the coin of the economic realm, but it can also be a currency of democratic politics.


Since 2008, the number of people making small monetary donations to political causes in the United States has “skyrocketed” (Schlozman et al. 2018, 51; see also Greenwood 2018; Stein 2017). Presidents Obama (in 2012) and Trump (in 2016) received more small donations than any U.S. presidential candidates in history (Campaign Finance Institute 2017). ActBlue has collected more than \$6 billion for Democratic candidates and causes since 2004; in August 2020 alone, more than four million people donated a total of \$485 million via more than 10.5 million donations to Act Blue; these donations averaged a little under \$46 (ActBlue 2020). In the 2010 mid-term elections, Tea Party candidates Christine O’Donnell and Sharron Angle raised 45% and 58% of their campaign funds, respectively, from small donations (Attkisson 2010). The average donation to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s primary campaign in 2018 was \$22

(Muller 2018). Forty-five percent of the money that Donald Trump raised in the 2020 election cycle came from small donors (Montemayor et al. 2020).

This trend is not limited to campaign contributions. After Trump’s election in 2016, “rage giving” of mostly small donations to political action committees (PACs) and civil society organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Planned Parenthood broke all records (Associated Press 2016; Gidda 2017). In 2020, in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, record numbers of small donors contributed to anti-racist organizations and organizations fighting police violence (Goldmacher 2020; Mathey and Quick 2020).¹

There have been two main responses to this explosion of small-money political donating. On one hand, many critics of “big money” in politics are elated. They celebrate these donations because they are small, viewing them as a form of democratically legitimate political participation that is “healthy for its own sake” (Corrado et al 2010), a potential “antidote” to big money in politics (Tausanovitch and Lagasse 2018), or a basis for a possible “small donor democracy” (Cmar 2005). For example, Bernie Sanders, an ardent critic of big money in politics, led chants of “twenty-seven dolluhs”—the average size of donations to his 2016 Democratic primary campaign—at his campaign rallies (Megarian 2016). For these critics of big money in politics smallness is crucial, because small donations don’t enact political inequality or incentivize corruption, and because smallness is an indicator of who is donating: ordinary, non-wealthy people.²

On the other hand, many proponents of small-scale democratic political action are suspicious of small-money political donations. They criticize, or at best ignore, these

Jennifer Rubenstein  is Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, specializing in political theory (jcr7p@virginia.edu). Her interests include non-governmental organizations, humanitarianism, democratic theory, emergencies, and the politics of donating. She has published articles in the *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, and the *British Journal of Political Science*, among others. Her first book, *Between Samaritans and States: The Political Ethics of Humanitarian INGOs* was published by Oxford University Press in 2015. She is currently working on a second book about emergency politics. Before coming to the University of Virginia she was the Cotsen-Link Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Princeton University.

doi:10.1017/S153759272100308X

© The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Political Science Association.

donations *because they are monetary*. Comparing small-money political donating not to big money in politics but rather to *non-monetary* forms of small-scale political action, they view small-money political donating as festering shiftily at the bottom of the participation hierarchy, below voting, public speaking, and protest. In particular, many proponents of small-scale political action view small-money political donating as less involved, educative, authentic, and egalitarian than these non-monetary forms of small-scale political action. For example, Schlozman et al. (2018, 24) describe voting as “the most fundamental democratic act” and “first among equals” among different types of political voice, including donating. They add that “when individuals use time to express political voice, they act on their own behalf and do not hire a Cyrano to compose an e-mail to a public official or a mercenary to march in a protest” (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 25).³ The New England Town meeting is often seen as the “purest ideal of democracy put into practice” (Mansbridge 1976). Livingston (2017) argues that there is an “immense, intangible value” to in-person protests, even when they “fail” in tactical terms, because they teach people how to be political. Correspondingly, while democratic theorists have written extensively and glowingly about non-monetary forms of political action such as voting, deliberation (Cohen 2002), agonistic speech (Mouffe 2005), and (un)civil disobedience (King 2000; Delmas 2018), they have said almost nothing about small-money political donating.

The foregoing two perspectives on small-money political donating can be conceptualized along two axes: a “vertical” perspective that holds medium (i.e., money) constant, focuses on size (big versus small), and celebrates small-money political donations because they are small, and a “horizontal” perspective that holds size (i.e., small) constant, focuses on medium (monetary versus non-monetary), and denigrates or ignores small-money political donations because they are monetary. While logically compatible, these two perspectives are very different. Yet neither addresses a crucial question: how might the monetariness of small-money political donating contribute to its democratic potential? In other words, can small-money political donating be good for democracy, not only because it is small, but also because it is monetary?

The answer, I argue in this article, is yes.⁴ Indeed, the distinctive democratic potential⁵ of small-money political donating derives significantly from money’s distinctive features: money is *mobile*—it can be moved long distances quickly at little to no cost; it is *divisible*—it can easily be divided into units of many different sizes, including very small units; it is *commensurable*—it can be exchanged for a wide range of non-monetary things, and it is *fungible*—once agglomerated, previously discrete amounts of money become impossible to differentiate. Together, these features make small-money political

donating potentially *accessible, non-intrusive, and collective*. In the context of small-money political donating, these three norms are both democratic (in the sense of being conducive to collective self-rule on equal terms) and normatively attractive.

To be clear, my claim is not that small-money political donating is normatively superior to, or more democratic than, non-monetary forms of small-scale political action. Rather, I argue that small-money political donating has democratic potential that has gone overlooked, because this potential derives from its monetariness, rather than its smallness. While monetariness and smallness are connected (in ways that I discuss further later), I focus on monetariness because, again, its democratic potential has been discounted.

I will suggest that the democratic potential of money in the context of small-money political donating comes from its *distinctiveness* as a medium of small-scale political action. Because of this distinctiveness, small-money political donating compensates for the limitations, rather than replicates the strengths, of non-monetary media of political action, such as voting, speech, and marching. In this respect (and others), my account differs from Ackerman and Ayres’ “Patriot Dollars” proposal for campaign finance reform, which emphasizes similarities between donating money and voting (2004, 25). Instead, I follow the lead of some anti-racist activists. These activists implicitly invoke money’s distinctiveness—in particular, its non-intrusiveness—when they argue that small-money political donating is an especially apt way for white people to combat white supremacy because in so doing they materially empower, without displacing or controlling, Black and brown movement leaders (Stewart 2020). I build on, elucidate, and generalize this type of insight, by exploring how specific characteristics of money as a medium help make small money political donating potentially democratic.

In making these arguments I draw on numerous examples, two of which I note here and discuss more extensively later. Rather than being representative cases, these examples are intended to illustrate the democratic potential of small-money political donating. The first example is a crowdfunding campaign that was launched in 2018 to raise campaign funds for an eventual challenger to Maine Senator Susan Collins, if Collins voted to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court. As of November 2020, 130,727 people had collectively donated \$4,126,393 to the fund, which was eventually handed over to Sara Gideon, Collins’ challenger (who lost).⁶ The second example is small-money political donations to the Philadelphia Vigilant (or sometimes “Vigilance”) Committee, one of several inter-racial, cross-class, and sometimes mixed-gender radical abolitionist organizations that operated in several U.S. cities between about 1830 and 1860. While the crowdfunding

campaign is a mainstream initiative situated within conventional liberal democratic electoral politics, donations to the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee exemplify how small-money political donating can be a form of radical, insurgent, democratic political action.

In the next section I situate my argument within the broader literature on money and politics. I then explain what small money political donating is, how it functions, and how the constitutive features of money shape its democratic potential. Next, I discuss the limitations of small money political donating, some broader implications of the argument, and conclude.

Money and/as Politics

How, and under what conditions, do putatively economic (i.e., market or money-based) activities function politically—and even democratically? Scholars have examined this question in the context of consumer boycotts (Bröckerhoff and Qassoum 2019), strikes (Gourevitch 2018), and market exchange (Eich 2019), among others. I examine it in the context of small money political donating.

While some scholarship on this topic equates money and economy, I draw on Wendy Brown's recent efforts to distinguish them. Brown criticizes what she calls "economization," by which she means "a process of remaking the knowledge, form, content, and conduct appropriate to [other] spheres and practices" in ways that lead people to "think and act like contemporary market subjects" (Brown 2015, 31). More specifically, Brown argues that "neoliberal reason ... is converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy's constituent elements into *economic* ones" (Brown 2015, 17; emphasis in original). What gets lost as a result of this process, Brown suggests, are "distinctly human capacities for ethical and political freedom, creativity, unbounded reflection, or invention" (Brown 2015, 43).

Because small-money political donating involves money, it seems at first to exemplify this tendency toward economization. By reducing democratic politics to an instrumental economic transaction, it encourages us to view political participation as—in the words of one commentator—"political retail therapy" that might or might not have a high "return on investment" (Stieb 2018). Crucially, however, Brown distinguishes "economization" from "monetization" (Brown 2015, 31). She draws this distinction in order to argue that there can be economization without monetization: people can, for example, approach their dating life in an economized way, even if no money changes hands (Brown 2015, 31). But this conceptual distinction also leaves space for the opposite possibility: *monetization without economization*. Thus, even though she does not explore it (and indeed seems dubious about it), Brown's conceptual framework opens up the central question of this article: how, if at all, can

what is usually seen as an economic and economizing medium—money—be deployed politically, and even democratically?⁷

In taking up this question, I address Brown's concern about economization, by showing that small-money political donating is not necessarily economizing, but can instead enact the creative, insurgent, democratic politics that Brown sees as economization's opposite. Indeed, once we distinguish conceptually between money on the one hand, and economization and neoliberal rationality on the other, we can search out contexts in which the former is used to combat the latter. But I also go beyond Brown's concerns, by elucidating both limitations of small-money political donating besides economization, and other democratic potentialities of small-money political donating besides avoiding economization.⁸

While much has been written about small-money political donating within the context of electoral politics, scholars have said much less about it outside this domain. But just as big-money donations outside of electoral politics can be political—e.g., "mega-philanthropy" in areas such as education and global public health by people such as Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates (Saunders-Hastings 2017)—small donations to groups and causes at some remove from electoral politics, such as the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, can also be political by, among other things, influencing public policy and public opinion, and helping to mobilize other forms of political action.

By studying small-money donating both within *and* beyond election campaigns, we can get out from under the shadow of campaign finance reform, which—as vitally important of an issue as it is—directs attention narrowly to the problem of big money in electoral politics and how small-money political donating can help solve it. Rather than focus on this vertical axis of big money versus small money, I look horizontally, comparing small-money political donating to non-monetary forms of small-scale political action, such as speech, voting, and protest. In so doing, I examine the democratic potential and limits of small-money political donating in a way that is analogous to how scholars approach these other forms of small-scale political action, including by evaluating it on the basis of its overall democratic potential, not whether it can solve one specific problem (i.e., big money in politics).

Small-Money Political Donating

I turn next to explaining what I mean by "small-money political donating." Rather than specify criteria by which all phenomena can be definitively ruled in or out of this category, I offer a conception that acknowledges fuzzy boundaries and borderline cases. By *donations*, I mean resource transfers for public or other-regarding purposes shared by donors and recipients.⁹ Donations are *political* if they pertain to issues of large-scale or public concern,

within or outside of electoral politics.¹⁰ More specifically, donations are political if they are directed to political entities or causes, send a political message, or influence political outcomes.

The category of political donations therefore includes donations to entities that are primarily or directly involved in electoral politics, including candidates, parties, PACs, and many 501(c)4 advocacy organizations, such as Planned Parenthood and the NRA. It also includes donations to entities that are not directly involved in electoral politics but are political in their activities or framing of the issues, such as some 501(c)5 organizations, e.g., Industrial Workers of the World, and some 501(c)3 organizations, e.g., Breast Cancer Action Network and Black Lives Matter Global Foundation.¹¹ In addition, it includes donations to entities that express political ideas, even if they use the donations they receive for humanitarian or private purposes, e.g., donations to crowdfunding campaigns to pay the expenses of Michael Brown's family after police officer Darren Wilson killed Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Cohen 2014). Finally, I construe as political donations to entities that send an implicit political message, even if they formally describe themselves as apolitical, e.g., *Angeles del Desierto*, which provides food and water to people attempting to cross the border from Mexico to the United States, and megachurches led by preachers who make politically-valenced public statements.¹²

Because big-money political donations are widely seen as objectionably undemocratic because they are big, the question of what makes a monetary political donation *small* is especially fraught. For present purposes, I conceptualize political donations as small if, due to their size, they avoid the normative problems that plague big money political donations, including corruption and disproportionate influence (however these are specified). I start with this conceptual specification of "small," rather than a dollar amount, because the point of this article is to examine the democratic potential of monetary political donations that avoid the criticisms frequently lodged against big money in politics (Pevnick 2016; Dawood 2015). This conceptual specification of "small" also tracks ordinary usage; in the contemporary United States, calling a donation "small"—whether it is \$3 or \$200—typically implies that it avoids the normative pitfalls of big-money donations.

How small must donations be, in dollar terms, to meet this criterion? The answer depends on several factors, including which normative objection(s) to big-money political donations one is seeking to avoid. For example, \$200 usually can't buy preferential access to a candidate (Pildes 2019), so \$200 donations usually aren't vulnerable to what I will call the "intrusiveness" objection. However, \$200 is more than many people can afford, so \$200 donations are often vulnerable to what I

call the "inaccessibility" objection (Pevnick 2016).¹³ However, whether a given donation is actually vulnerable to the inaccessibility objection depends on context: while a \$200 donation would almost certainly be vulnerable to the inaccessibility objection in a local municipal election in Wilcox County, Alabama, where the median household income was around \$27,000 in 2018 (United States Census Bureau n.d.), it might not be vulnerable to this objection in Loudoun County, Virginia, where the median household income in 2019 was almost \$140,000 (Cline 2019). Judgments about which donations are too big to be accessible are further informed by views about a) who *should* have a say in any given decision in the first place (itself an ongoing debate within democratic theory [Bauböck 2018]),¹⁴ and b) what percentage of the population must be able to afford a donation for it to be deemed accessible to that population. For concreteness, I will stipulate that \$20 is usually small enough to avoid most of the problems attributed to big-money political donations in most of the United States most of the time, but nothing in my analysis hinges on this specific number.¹⁵

Turning, finally, to what makes small political donations *monetary*, I focus on four features of modern, capitalist money that shape small-money political donating in the contemporary United States.¹⁶ First, this type of money is highly *divisible*; it can easily be divided up into precisely sized units and very small units (Simmel 2004, 292). For example, many donors to the crowdfunding campaign for Collins' challenger donated a precise amount: \$20.20, a reference to the year Collins was up for re-election. The smallest allowable donation to the campaign was also very small: \$1.00.

Second, money is highly *mobile*, compared to people and most in-kind goods (Overton 2012). Using electronic banking and other technologies, money can be transferred almost anywhere almost instantaneously, at low or no cost (though, importantly, some such transfers are illegal). As a result, eligible donors anywhere in the United States could easily contribute to the campaign for Collins' challenger. While some non-monetary forms of political action, such as commenting on social media, are also highly mobile, many others, such as street protesting and attending in-person meetings, are not.

Finally, money is *commensurable* and *fungible*. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, I here use "commensurability" to refer to the range of things that money can buy in a particular context (Heard 1960; Smith 1997, 90; Espeland and Stevens 1998). Because money is commensurable, it was possible to raise funds for Collins' eventual challenger before that person (Sara Gideon) was identified, and for Gideon, once she received the money, to use it to do many different things. I use "fungibility" to refer to the melding together of donations from different donors that are

deposited into the same “pot,” such as donations to the campaign for Collins’ challenger.

How Small-Money Political Donating Functions: Empowerment and Expression

Small-money political donating functions politically in two main ways. Most obviously, small donors *empower* recipients by transferring purchasing power to them. This empowerment dimension of small-money political donating is closely tied to donation size: the more money a donor donates to a recipient, the more purchasing power is transferred to that recipient, and the more the recipient is empowered.¹⁷ Donating money only amounts to a *meaningful* transfer of purchasing power when it enables recipients to buy what they want or need, which in turn depends on contextual factors.

In addition to empowering recipients, small-money political donations also typically *express* something, such as support for the recipient.¹⁸ Compared to their empowerment dimension, the expressive dimension of donations is less correlated to donation size: a \$10 donation to the World Wildlife Fund—or the KKK—conveys about as much support as a \$75 donation does. These expressions of support are less articulate than an e-mail or phone call, but more targeted than voting, because they can be given repeatedly to a single recipient or numerous recipients at any time and in response to unfolding events.

Several other aspects of small-money political donations can matter for their expressive dimension but not their empowerment dimension. For example, donors’ identities, whether they remain anonymous, the precise timing of their donations, whether and how donations are publicized, and whether donations are accompanied by a written message all tend to affect the expressive, but not the empowerment, dimensions of donations. Conversely, whether and how the recipient is able to spend a donation matters for its empowerment dimension, but not its expressive dimension.

Small-money political donating can also empower the recipient in a second way: not by transferring resources, but rather by conferring democratic legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy comes from, among other things, the uncoerced support of large numbers of ordinary people. Having many small donors (or, though it is not the same thing, receiving many small donations) can have concrete political effects when it is viewed as a marker of democratic legitimacy or popular support. For example, in 2019 the Democratic National Committee used the number of small-money donors contributing to each candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination as a criterion to decide which candidates would get to participate in nationally televised debates (Siders 2019).¹⁹

Size isn’t Everything: Small Money Political Donating as Potentially Democratic Political Action

I turn next to showing how the mobility, divisibility, fungibility, and commensurability of money help make small-money political donating potentially accessible, non-intrusive, and collective, with regard to both its empowerment and expressive dimensions. I also explain why, in the context of small-money donating, these three norms are both democratic and normatively attractive. Proponents of small-money political donating often argue that it is accessible, non-intrusive, and collective because donations are small, whereas big-money political donations are inaccessible, intrusive, and atomistic because donations are big. I agree that small-money political donations are indeed accessible, non-intrusive, and collective. However, this is not only because they are small, but also, and in different ways, because they are monetary.

How Monetariness Makes Small-Money Political Donating Accessible

Accessibility is a democratic norm when it contributes to collective self-rule, on equal terms, by everyone who should have a say. For critics of big money in politics, it is the *smallness* of small-money political donations that makes them accessible: while big donations are accessible only to the wealthy, small(er) donations are (more) accessible to the poor (Kalla and Broockman 2015).²⁰ From this perspective, the notion that the *monetariness* of small-money political donations make them accessible seems absurd. If anything, monetariness *limits* the accessibility of small-money political donating, because people with no money can’t donate.

However, if we compare small-money political donating not to big-money political donating, but rather to non-monetary forms of small-scale political action—that is, if we shift from the vertical to the horizontal perspective—a different part of the picture comes into focus. While smallness makes small-money political donations more accessible than big donations to people who are poor, monetariness makes small-money political donations more accessible than non-monetary forms of small-scale political action to people confronting other forms of exclusion. This is so because of money’s *mobility*, which bridges various kinds of distance, and money’s *divisibility*, which makes very small donations possible.

How money’s mobility makes small-money political donating accessible. Because money is mobile, small-money political donating can bridge physical distance. In-person forms of political activity such as protesting can be entirely inaccessible or too dangerous or costly to access for all sorts of reasons: illness, disability, care-giving or work responsibilities, immigration status, lack of transportation, an

ongoing pandemic, or simply living too far away from where protest is occurring. Under these circumstances, individuals can sometimes express support for a cause or empower those working to promote that cause by donating instead. Planned Parenthood's motto, "I stand with Planned Parenthood," reflects this idea of donating money as a functional alternative to bodily co-presence.²¹

Likewise, because donating money is a relatively inarticulate form of expression, small-money political donating can bridge social distance. It can function as an effective form of expression for people who are reticent to speak in public or who face what Iris Young calls "internal exclusion" because other people "ignore or dismiss or patronize their statements and expressions" due to their speaking style or other attributes (Young 2002, 55; see also Fricker 2019 on testimonial injustice).²² While voting is also accessible to those who are socially excluded in these ways, and absentee voting is accessible to people who are homebound, voting is, as noted earlier, less flexible and precise than small-money political donating.

Finally, unlike voting, donating can bridge the "legal distance" experienced by people who are formally disenfranchised because they are (for example) foreign nationals, under 18, or have felony convictions. Small-money political donating can also help overcome the legal distance experienced by people who are *de facto* disenfranchised by laws that make it more difficult to vote, gerrymandered House districts, and political institutions that entrench inequality (e.g., the U.S. Senate). For example, critics might object to the crowdfunding campaign for the challenger to Senator Collins on the grounds that only residents of Maine should be able to influence Collins. But because Maine voters have more per-person political power in the Senate than residents of more populous states, residents of more populous states influencing Collins *via* small-money donations is not necessarily a shift away from political equality, especially given that Collins' vote on Kavanaugh was so consequential at a national level.²³ More generally, small-money political donating is a way for ordinary people to express support for, empower, and hold accountable political actors who—while they might not willingly adopt the role of "surrogate representative"—nonetheless wield significant power over, or make decisions that are highly consequential for, people they do not formally represent (Mansbridge 2003).

As noted earlier, small-money political donating isn't entirely accessible: people with *no* money can't make even small donations. Small-money political donating also doesn't instantiate political equality, because wealthy people can make many more small donations than poor people.²⁴ This latter issue is mitigated somewhat by the fact that as long as donors rather than donations are counted, multiple donations to the same recipient don't help—and can even undermine—the recipient's perceived democratic legitimacy. More generally, the idea that small-money political

donations are only successful if they overcome all economically based forms of exclusion is a hangover from a narrow focus on size and the problem of big money in politics. If we focus instead on medium, we can consider the degree to which, because they are monetary, small-money political donations can compensate for (what are, at least in the first instance) non-monetary forms of exclusion.

How money's divisibility helps make small-money political donating accessible. One democratic benefit of money's divisibility is that it makes small-money political donating potentially expressive, as in the \$20.20 donations to the crowdfunding campaign for Collins' challenger. Here I want to elucidate another democratic strength of money's divisibility: it helps make small-money political donating a relatively accessible form of small-scale political action, compared to non-monetary forms. Because the divisibility of money relates to donation size, this point might at first look like the standard "vertical" argument for small-money political donating made by critics of big money in politics. But my argument here isn't about the difference between big and small monetary donations. Rather, it is that because money is divisible, the minimum amount of *money* necessary to engage in meaningful political action by donating is often more accessible than the minimum amount of *time* necessary to engage in meaningful non-monetary forms of political action, such as speaking at a meeting or even voting.

For the harried parent without childcare or the young adult juggling school and two jobs, donating \$10 or \$20 on their phone via ActBlue or WinRed can be easier than spending two hours canvassing (cf. Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 25-6).²⁵ While direct comparisons are difficult, money is typically more divisible than many other common forms of small-scale political action, such as voting, protesting, and attending public meetings. While time itself is even more divisible than money, the minimum amount of time needed to attend a protest or public meeting, or vote, is often larger and less flexible than the (roughly) corresponding amount of money that can be donated to those same causes. For example, while door-to-door canvassing usually requires at least two hours, the smallest allowable donation to the campaign for Collins' challenger was, as noted earlier, \$1.00.

The example of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee helps illustrate the democratic potential of money's divisibility (and, though to a lesser extent, its mobility, fungibility and commensurability). Like other similar committees in Northern U.S. cities in the decades leading up to the Civil War, the Philadelphia Committee provided transportation, lodging, food, legal counsel, and other assistance to men, women, and children fleeing slavery (Boromé 1968; Bearse 1880; Olsavky 2018; Stewart 2014). After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, Vigilant Committees sought to "resist, defy, baffle, and

nullify the law” by physically confronting, blocking, and shaming slave catchers, and posting bail for local residents who helped formerly enslaved people avoid recapture (Bearse 1880). Because they often reimbursed their members for expenses incurred in assisting people who escaped from slavery, Vigilant Committees emphasized fundraising and responsible fiscal oversight. Members of the Philadelphia Committee paid \$.25 to join and \$.75 in yearly dues; they organized fundraisers (in conjunction with their women’s auxiliary) and appointed a treasurer and finance committee to solicit donations from non-members (Boromé 1968, 323-5).

One entry in the Philadelphia Committee’s ledger lists fifty-five donations received between September 11, 1839, and January 13, 1840, the largest of which was \$5.00 (Boromé 1968, 341). In addition to donations from numerous named individuals, it also includes several donations ranging from \$.50 to \$3.00 labelled “Cash from a friend,” a \$4.00 donation labelled “Cash from a young woman,” a donation of \$5.00 from (curiously) “one not anti-slavery,” and several donations simply labelled “Cash.” The smallest donation on the list is 12½ cents (equivalent to about \$3.40 today), listed as “Cash.” Given what we know about the Vigilant Committees, it is entirely possible that 12½ cents was all this donor could afford, and that due to their race, age, gender, or citizenship status, donating 12½ cents to the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee was the only tactic available to them to fight slavery.

Of course, a small-money political donation made 180 years ago does not offer direct evidence about how the monetariness of small-money political donating functions in the context of U.S. politics today. However, it directs attention to a tradition of underground activist networks and counter-publics, funded partially or entirely by small-money political donations, that runs from the Vigilant Committees of the mid-1800s through the 1960s-era Abortion Counseling Service of Women’s Liberation (also known as Jane) (Leach 2020) to the Minnesota Freedom Fund (which fights unjust incarceration) today. We should not romanticize small-money political donating, any more than we should romanticize street protests, voting, or other forms of political action. But nor should we discount the dignity and political efficacy of a 12½ cent donation to the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee and other similar instances of small-money political donating, merely because they are monetary.

How Monetariness Makes Small-Money Political Donating Non-Intrusive

As the foregoing discussion of accessibility demonstrates, one way that small-money political donating can be democratic is by enabling people who are marginalized or excluded from other forms of political action, but who

should have a say on democratic grounds, to exercise voice or influence. However, in contexts where donors should *not* have a say on democratic grounds,²⁶ small-money political donating can be democratic for a roughly opposite reason: because it enables donors to empower recipients while *minimizing* donors’ own influence.

In other words, small-money political donating can be democratic because it can be—not entirely but relatively—non-intrusive. Critics of big money in politics emphasize that, because they are offering lots of money, big donors often have a direct, inside line to recipients, who in turn have an incentive to follow big donors’ dictates (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 27, 46; Kalla and Broockman 2015). In contrast, small-money political donations are non-intrusive because they are small. But in addition to this, as I will now argue, small-money political donations are non-intrusive in another way, not (only) because they are small, but also because they are monetary.²⁷ More specifically, while small-money political donations avoid the intrusive influence of big-money political donations because they are small, they also avoid the meddlesome, domineering interference that sometimes plagues in-person forms of political action (e.g., volunteering, partnerships) because they are monetary. To be clear, small donors still exercise power, individually and collectively, by deciding where, when, how, and how much to donate. But once their donation is made, they can support recipients without calling the shots.

This is possible primarily because of money’s commensurability—the fact that it can be used to buy many different things—and secondarily because of money’s mobility, which enables action at a distance.²⁸ For example, as noted earlier, some anti-racist activists and organizers argue that donating money is an especially apt way for white people to fight white supremacy because it is more concretely empowering than, e.g., a Facebook repost, but less overbearing than leading chants at a rally or directing strategy for a Black-led anti-racist organization (Phillips 2020; Hajela and Italie 2020; Women of Color for Progress n.d.). In other words, small-money political donating is roughly analogous to what Jane Mansbridge calls the “selection model” of representation: donors exert power primarily via their initial decision about whether, when, how, to whom (etc.) to donate; the commensurability of money enables them to cede power at the moment the donation is made.²⁹ Unlike the “naked Athena” protester in Portland, Oregon, who practiced yoga, naked, between protesters and the police during the George Floyd demonstrations, small-money political donors can remain on the right side of “the line . . . between amplifying a voice and becoming the voice, between ardent allyship and white saviorship” (Jackson 2020).³⁰

In sum, when people who *should* have a say on democratic grounds are instead *excluded* from non-monetary

forms of political action, the democratic value of small-money political donating lies primarily in its accessibility. More specifically, money's mobility and divisibility make small-money political donating potentially accessible by enabling donors to overcome geographic, social, and legal distance. Conversely, when people who should *not* have a say on democratic grounds seek to empower those who should, the democratic value of small-money political donating arises primarily from non-intrusiveness. More specifically, money's commensurability and (secondarily) mobility enables donors to donate and then get out of the way.

How Monetariness Makes Small-Money Political Donating Collective

While collective action is not always democratic, in modern mass democracies organized groups regularly engage in collective action to get issues on the agenda, advocate for policies, and resist excessive consolidations of political power. A third objection to big-money political donating—in addition to it being inaccessible and intrusive—is that it is *atomistic*: rather than having to deliberate, argue, organize, and compromise collectively with others, big-money political donors can push their agendas independently, or in partnership with a few other wealthy donors.

Proponents of small-money political donating argue that small donors avoid this objection because, due to the fact that their donations are small, they can't accomplish anything unless many other small donors share their aims (MacKenzie 2020). Critics of small-money political donating counter that, while this may be true, compared to non-monetary forms of small-scale political action such as protesting, small-money political donating is also atomistic because it is monetary: individuals donate alone, from their phones or computers. More generally, as a review article on anthropological approaches to money puts it, "money and the violence of its abstractions erode the sociability subtending human existence, and the very idea of society itself. Money's baaaaaaad" (Maurer 2006; see also Zelizer 2005, 25-6).

In contrast to this view, I want to suggest that, because small-money political donations are monetary, and money is fungible, small-money political donating can be a type of jointly efficacious action. Even if it is not collective in the full sense of that term—even if it does not involve a group of people working closely together over time to achieve a shared political goal—it is also not entirely atomistic, or even merely aggregative. More specifically, not only do donors to a given cause or candidate share the same goal (roughly speaking), but also because money is fungible, donations to the same "pot" flow together. Like drops of water in a bucket, once combined, they cannot be extricated. If Sara Gideon (Susan Collins' eventual challenger in the Maine Senate race) spends \$5,000 of the money

from the crowdfunding campaign on television advertisements, it is impossible to say, *even in principle*, which donors funded those advertisements; the most we can say is that donors funded them, together.

Because money is fungible, small-money political donating is *more* collective than some non-monetary forms of small-scale political action, such as individually writing a letter to one's representative. Also because money is fungible, small-money political donating is *differently* collective than some non-monetary forms of political action. For example, just as it's impossible to say which small donors paid for a particular campaign expense, it's also impossible to say which voters caused a candidate to win. While both of these processes can be read as weakly collective forms of political action, the fact that money is both fungible and commensurable means that, compared to voters, donors can collectively "do" a wider range of things, or make possible a wider range of outcomes, than voters can. In particular, for ordinary people without specialized training, sometimes the best (or even only) way to support scientific, artistic, and legal forms of political action, especially on emergent issues, is to send money. Small-money political donations can be agglomerated together and translated directly into support for testing water quality in Flint, projecting artwork on Confederate monuments, and (for better or worse) challenging election results in court (Heard 1960; Overton 2012; cf. Smith 1997, 90-91).

Of course, at a subjective, psychological level, small-money political donating often doesn't *feel* collective (cf. Overton 2012, who disagrees). But donors' perceptions of the collective dimensions of donating are not decisive, and can be influenced by aspects of the act of donating itself. These aspects include whether or not they made their donation in response to a personal request (which is how many donations are made; Overton 2012 and Culberson, McDonald, and Robbins 2019), whether their donation is framed as a "membership," and whether recipients seek to cultivate donors' sense of connection to each other. Also important are portrayals of small-money political donating by journalists and other third parties: just as aerial photographs help shape how participants understand the collective dimension of in-person forms of political action such as protesting, news reports (e.g., about the outpouring of donations to progressive causes in the hours after Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg's death) shape how participants understand the collective dimensions of donating (Slodysko 2020).

Limitations of Small-Money Political Donating

I have argued that small-money political donating has more democratic potential than is often recognized, because this potential derives not only from its smallness, but also from its monetariness. I have also emphasized the

importance of a horizontal perspective, comparing small-money political donating not only to big-money political donating, but also to non-monetary forms of small-scale political action. This horizontal perspective is helpful for analyzing not only the strengths of small-money political donating, but also its limitations. Some of these limitations derive from its monetariness; some don't. Some undermine its democratic potential; some are detrimental in other ways. I turn next to a brief discussion of these limitations. Rather than offer a comprehensive overview, my aim is to show that, while some of these limitations are significant, they don't give us reason to reject small-money political donating out of hand.

First, though, I want to briefly address an objection to small-money political donating that is often mentioned, but seems to lack any empirical basis, at least in the contemporary United States. This is the claim, articulated by civic republicans and participatory democrats, that small-money political donating *displaces* more democratically educative forms of in-person political action (Rousseau 1997, 113, see also Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 25). While this would be a significant downside of small-money political donating if it occurred, research suggests that in the contemporary United States, “giving and doing are reciprocal activities: volunteering stimulates giving, while giving small amounts seems to heighten non-financial forms of participation by people who feel more invested in the process” (Corrado et al. 2010; Overton 2012).

Turning now to objections to small-money political donating that have a stronger empirical basis, I begin with the worry that small-money political donating is economizing: that it functions according to a neoliberal, economic logic, rather than a political one (Brown 2015). Some small-money political donating *is* economizing, as the quotation about “political retail therapy” cited earlier suggests. Some, however, is not. For example, individuals who made \$20.20 donations to support Collins' future challenger were not thereby further interpolating themselves as market subjects; they were using money creatively, to act politically. The same goes for donors to Vigilant Committees who sought to “resist, defy, and baffle” a political order that legalized and supported markets for human beings. Other examples of non-economizing small-money political donating include donations to the satiric fundraising website for “victims” of the (non-existent) “Bowling Green Massacre” discussed by Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway (the donations were redirected to the ACLU; Contorno 2017), and the 82,000 donations to Planned Parenthood made in honor of the avidly anti-abortion Mike Pence in the five weeks after he was elected vice president in 2016 (Ryan 2016). These sly, subversive, funny, and sometimes insurgent acts are not examples of a neoliberal, economizing logic creeping into the democratic political domain. To the contrary, they represent an

expansion of the political: these donors used economic transactions to join with others to send political messages, shame political actors, and support political organizations. The constitutive features of money—its commensurability, mobility, fungibility, and divisibility—helped make these forms of political action possible. While more research is needed into what, exactly, distinguishes economizing from non-economizing forms of small-money political donating (and on whether the instrumental, maximizing logic of *homo economicus* is always out of place in democratic politics), these examples demonstrate that some small-money political donating is not economizing.

While Brown's target is economization rather than monetization, some social theorists are critical of money itself, in particular the way that its commensurability flattens specificity and difference, yielding instead an “abstract universality” in which everything can be commensurated with everything else (Walzer 1983, 96-7; see also Arendt 1958, 57, Maurer 2006). Extended to small-money political donating, this allegation would suggest not that it is caught up in a logic of neoliberalism, but rather that it is flat, bland, and boring. While it's not clear how much purchase this allegation has as a specifically *political* criticism, the foregoing examples also demonstrate that the commensurability of money does not render small-money political donating drably uniform or tedious. To the contrary, money's commensurability is part of what makes small-money political donating potentially creative and funny.

While social and critical theorists worry about the depoliticizing effects of money, some political scientists highlight the opposite concern: not too little politicization, but rather too much—in particular, too much political polarization. The idea here is that because small-money donors' donations are too small to buy personal access to a candidate, they tend to be more “purposive” in their donating, supporting their “team,” or “particular issue agendas” (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Culbertson, McDonald, and Robbins 2019).³¹ While big donors have reason to favor mainstream candidates who are more likely to win (and who support the status quo that enabled them to accumulate money), small donors have reason to favor more extreme candidates with bold ideas who promise to “shake things up.” As a result—this thinking goes—small-money political donating exacerbates polarization.

Scholars disagree about whether small-money political donating is polarizing and (if it is polarizing) what exactly this polarization consists of, and why it occurs (Culbertson, McDonald, and Robbins 2019; Keena and Knight-Finley 2019, Harden and Kirkland 2016). It is also not clear whether small-money political donating is more polarizing than non-monetary forms of political action such as protesting, whether small-money political donating outside of electoral politics contributes to polarization, and

whether the anti-democratic effects of big-money donations are normatively worse than the polarizing effects of small money donations. While these and other questions require additional research, polarization could well be a significant downside of small-money political donating.

While political polarization is troubling, it is not, at least in any direct way, undemocratic. In contrast, another aspect of small-money political donating—that small donors tend to be more privileged than the people who (on democratic grounds) should have a say—is undemocratic. As I noted earlier, small-money political donating can be too accessible to people who, on democratic grounds, should not have a say. For example, in 2012 the U.S.-based NGO Invisible Children released a video, *Kony 2012*, about the Ugandan war criminal Joseph Kony. The video raised \$30 million in mostly small donations from people in the United States to help find and prosecute Kony. Not only was the video factually inaccurate and condescending toward Africans; it also promoted the broader redirection of resources toward a goal that many ordinary Ugandans did not view as a priority (Vida, McCarthy, and Curtis 2012).

More generally, small-money political donating in the United States is currently unrepresentative in the sense that donors to candidates, parties, and organizations that support candidates skew wealthier, older, and have more formal education than non-donors (Hughes 2017; Overton 2012). To make matters worse, small-money political donors to these causes might be even *less* representative than participants in non-monetary forms of small-scale political action, such as voting (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 26). That said, as I have emphasized, donations to candidates for elected office do not exhaust the limits of small-money political donating. There is some evidence that donors to social movements and civic organizations, especially those working on racial justice, police reform, and climate change are less skewed in these respects than donors to candidates for elected office (Goldmacher 2020; Mier 2020). More research is also needed on whether extremely small donations—those that express support and build democratic legitimacy, even if they don't transfer significant purchasing power—are less skewed than slightly larger (but still small) donations.³²

Moreover, in some contexts there are justice-based reasons to think that donations *should* come from donors who skew more privileged. As we have seen, small-money political donating can be a form of voice or influence, but it can also be a form of (relatively) non-intrusive support. One could argue, for example, that privileged white people *should* shoulder the cost of protecting and expanding voting rights for African-Americans in Georgia (even if they should not be the ones deciding how this ought to be done). While there are complicated questions here about ownership, self-determination, and the extent to which truly non-intrusive donating is possible, it is crucial to

acknowledge the two sides of donating: that it is both a form of voice and influence, as well as a mode of empowering others.

That said, most instances of unrepresentative small-money political donating do not take the form of privileged people non-intrusively aiding or compensating the less privileged. Rather, the fact that small-money political donors tend to be more privileged than non-donors (even if their preferences align more with those of non-donors than the preferences of big donors align with those of non-donors) is a significant drawback on democratic grounds, and suggests that the democratic potential of small-money political donating—like the democratic potential of voting and other forms of small-scale political action—is not yet fully realized. More research is needed regarding whether the best strategies for achieving this potential involve reducing small-money political donating or expanding it.

In sum, like non-monetary forms of small-scale political action, small-money political donating has limitations. But these limitations don't justify dismissing it or ignoring its democratic potential—whether that potential arises from its smallness, its monetariness, or both.

Implications

If monetariness enhances the democratic potential of small-money political donating, does it do the same for other money-centered and money-adjacent political activities, such as big-money political donating and voucher programs?

With regard to big-money political donating, the answer is no. This is because for the most part, the features of money discussed earlier function differently in the context of small donations than they do in the context of big ones. While money's mobility helps make small-money political donating accessible to people who are excluded from non-monetary forms of political action, it enables big-money donors to exercise their already-disproportionate influence even further afield. While money's divisibility helps make small-money political donating more accessible and expressive, divisibility is largely irrelevant to big-money political donors, both because they donate large amounts and because they usually don't seek to express themselves by donating a precise amount. Finally, while money's fungibility enables both small- and big-money political donors to engage in collective action, big donors have less incentive to do so. Moreover, due to their disproportionate influence big donors' involvement in such collective efforts is not democratic.

The situation with money's commensurability is more complicated. One benefit of money's commensurability in the context of small donations—that it enables donors to be non-intrusive—also applies *to some degree* in the context of big-money political donations. For example, billionaire philanthropist MacKenzie Scott has been giving donations with no conditions, with the aim of “amplifying gifts by

yielding control”—something that is possible, in large part, because of money’s commensurability (Scott 2021). But to avoid creating a situation where potential recipients seek to cater to her preferences, those donations must also be “unsolicited and unexpected” (Scott 2020). Thus, commensurability isn’t enough to make larger donations non-intrusive.

Another benefit of money’s commensurability in the context of small donations—that it enables donors to support a wide range of causes and initiatives—also applies in the context of big donations. For example, in his qualified defense of philanthropic foundations, Reich emphasizes that they can discover novel ways of addressing large-scale social problems (Reich 2018, ch. 4). This is possible not only because foundations have a lot of money, but also because money is commensurable. However, even if Reich is correct about this and other democratic strengths of foundations, these strengths do not necessarily counterbalance other serious objections to big money in politics based in concerns about political inequality, corruption, and the detrimental epistemic effects of giving only a few people political voice (Pevnick 2016; MacKenzie 2020; McGoeys 2015).

Do the foregoing arguments about the democratic potential—and limits—of small-money political donating extend to voucher programs? Voucher programs have been proposed as mechanisms to fund election campaigns, as in Seattle’s Democracy Voucher Program (DVP, discussed further later) and 501(c)3-registered civil society organizations, as in Reich’s argument for a “civil society stakeholding grant” (Reich 2018, 133; see also Pevnick 2013). While the specific goals of voucher programs vary, one common aim is to reduce political inequality and enhance participation by overcoming economic hurdles to participation. A salient question, then, is whether voucher programs serve this function (and other democratic aims) better than approaches that utilize money itself, such as cash transfers (I here leave aside other alternatives, such as full public funding of election campaigns). While I can’t fully address this question here, I want to briefly indicate how the foregoing analysis helps address it, by providing benchmarks to which voucher programs can be compared.

As an example, consider the city of Seattle’s DVP, which enables residents of Seattle who are 18 and over—not only citizens, but also U.S. nationals and lawful permanent residents—to donate four \$25 vouchers to candidates for the Seattle City council and a few other city offices.³³ The program has been utilized in two elections thus far (2017 and 2019). In both elections the rate of voucher use was low, but it did increase significantly, from 4% in 2017 to 8% in 2019. Participation was also skewed, with older, whiter, and wealthier residents using the vouchers at higher rates. However, the DVP might have contributed to higher voter turnout by facilitating more competitive elections (Ramsey et al. 2020).

Like money, the DVP vouchers could be used from home, didn’t require public-speaking skills, and were accessible to some non-citizens. However, because they excluded people under 18 and non-residents of Seattle (who were nonetheless affected by decisions made by the Seattle government), and because using the vouchers required adding one’s name to a special government database (which many people with unsettled immigration status did not want to do), they were less accessible than donating conventional money (Ramsey et al. 2020; Heerwig and McCabe 2019).

The DVP replicated money’s fungibility, enabling Seattle residents to act collectively to support their preferred candidates. However, it did not replicate money’s divisibility: four \$25 vouchers provide less flexibility than ten \$10 vouchers, and less potential for creative self-expression than \$100 of conventional money. Because it limited donations to candidates for only a few positions, rather than all city offices—and, crucially, civil society organizations—the DVP also did not replicate money’s commensurability (cf. Pevnick 2013). While the exclusion of civil-society organizations meant that vouchers didn’t enable people with views outside the mainstream or with specific priorities to express and promote their preferences, the fact that the vouchers were just that—vouchers, rather than regular money—gave them a different status, and might have encouraged different sorts of considerations in how they should be spent, than regular money (Zelizer 2005). In sum, in evaluating the democratic potential of vouchers, it is useful to ask to what degree vouchers replicate money’s mobility, divisibility, fungibility, and commensurability, and consider the resulting implications for accessibility, non-intrusiveness, and collective action.

Conclusion

While critics of big money in politics celebrate small-money political donations because they are small, and proponents of small-scale political action often denigrate or ignore them because they are monetary, I have argued that the monetariness of small-money political donations is an important source of their distinctive democratic potential. In particular, the mobility, divisibility, commensurability, and fungibility of money help to make small-money political donating potentially accessible, non-intrusive, and collective.

My fundamental aim in making this argument is to encourage a different way of thinking about small-money political donating. Rather than celebrate it or eye it with suspicion, we should treat small-money political donating as one more form of potentially democratic small-scale political action—one that has distinctive strengths and weaknesses, can be deployed to do many different things (not just fight big money in politics), and can complement non-monetary forms of small-scale political action (which have their own strengths and weaknesses). This

“horizontal” perspective on small-money political donating is especially salient for people on the Left, who tend to be more worried about money’s anti-democratic effects, and who are therefore more prone to dismissing political activities that are money related.

The foregoing argument also opens up several additional lines of inquiry for normative, critical, and empirical scholarship. One such line of inquiry is about the political ethics of small-money political donating, for donors and recipients. What are donors’ duties of due diligence in selecting and monitoring recipients? How, if at all, do donors’ responsibilities change based on their relationship to the issue in question: when ought they seek to exercise, and when minimize, their voice and influence? If the latter, should they conceive of themselves as “surrogate accountability-holders” for those most directly affected (Rubenstein 2007)? Does being an ethical donor require not sending money willy-nilly to many disparate causes, but instead embarking on more sustained relationships with a smaller number of recipients?

Likewise, what are the ethical responsibilities of recipients of small-money political donations? Beyond obvious questions about unscrupulous or misleading fundraising techniques, we might also consider how recipients of small-money political donations could make the practice of small-money political donating more consistent with relevant democratic norms, for example, by (perhaps counterintuitively) soliciting small donations from those most affected by the issue at hand, reducing the power of more privileged small donors (not just individually but collectively), and making the collective aspects of donating more vivid to donors?

A second line of inquiry involves the role of larger-scale organizations and institutions in shaping small-money political donating. In particular, what should be the role of media and watchdog organizations in supporting ethical action by donors and recipients? How might political parties and fundraising platforms such as ActBlue and WinRed address issues of non-representativeness and political polarization? What donation statistics should be viewed as relevant to recipients’ claims of democratic legitimacy, e.g., number of donations, average donation size, average amount donated per donor over an election cycle?

Finally, if small-money political donating is currently skewed toward the more privileged, what laws and institutional reforms could make it more representative? Can voucher programs be designed to retain the strengths and avoid the limitations of small-money political donating? If not (and even if so) how might the democratic potential of small-money political donating strengthen democratic (as opposed to welfare-based) arguments for a universal basic income?

Critics of big money in politics are right to reject big-money political donations because they are big, but wrong to embrace small-money political donations only because they are small. It is not just smallness, but also

monetariness—and in particular money’s mobility, divisibility, fungibility, and commensurability—that give small-money political donating its distinctive democratic potential, enabling, for example, \$20.20 contributions to the crowdfunding campaign for Collins’ challenger and 12½ cent donations to the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. Money is the coin of the economic realm, but it can also be a currency of democratic politics.

Acknowledgement

For extremely helpful comments on previous versions of this paper, the author thanks Libby Anker, Lawrie Balfour, Ira Bashkow, Suzanne Dovi, Lisa Ellis, Clarissa Hayward, Murad Idris, Justin Kirkland, Jennifer Petersen, Allison Pugh, Denise Walsh, participants at the 2018 Association for Political Theory conference, and four anonymous reviewers for this journal. She also thanks Hayley Elszasz for excellent comments and research assistance.

Notes

- 1 Accurate statistics about small-money political donating as I conceptualize it in this article are difficult to find, because reporting requirements for campaign donations below \$200 are limited, and my conception of “political” extends far beyond elections. The best recent statistics for the number and size of small (below \$200) money donations within electoral politics come from ActBlue (<https://blog.actblue.com/2021/04/19/q1-2021-biggest-start-of-any-election-cycle/>) and WinRed (<https://winred.com/blog/1b/>), but these are limited to candidates and organizations that use these platforms. Open Secrets (<https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/large-vs-small-donations>) documents the proportion of candidates’ funding that comes from small donors. With regard to the percentage of the population that makes small-money political donations, a 2016 survey found that 15% of U.S. adults have contributed to a candidate, party, or organization that supported a particular candidate. Of those surveyed, 55% said they donated less than \$100, while 32% said they donated between \$100 and \$250 (Hughes 2017). This figure does not include donations to entities that are political but don’t support particular candidates or parties. In 2018, 69% percent of the U.S. population donated to “charity,” a category that includes some entities, e.g., politically-oriented 501c(3) organizations, that I characterize as “political,” as well as many entities that I do not characterize as political (<https://nonprofitsource.com/online-giving-statistics/#Charitable>).
- 2 Money held as wealth by candidates for elected office creates different issues than big-money donations. During his 2016 campaign, Trump argued that he

- “couldn’t be bought” because he could fund his own campaign; Strauss 2015.
- 3 While the cited passage contrasts individuals and organizations, part of the point is that it’s better to write a letter or engage in protest than to pay someone else to do these things.
 - 4 Over dinner at a conference several years ago, a prominent political theorist asked each person at the table about their research. When asked, I said “how money in politics can be good for democracy.” The theorist immediately exclaimed, “money in politics can never be good for democracy!” and went on to the next person. This article continues that conversation.
 - 5 I use the qualifier “potential” because even if a small-money political donation is democratic with respect to how its monetariness functions, it can also be undemocratic for other reasons, e.g., because the recipient is an exclusionary organization or candidate. (The same holds for other forms of political action, e.g., voting is widely seen as paradigmatically democratic, but voting for a candidate who seeks to undermine democracy is not straightforwardly democratic.)
 - 6 See <https://www.crowdpac.com/campaigns/387413/either-sen-collins-votes-no-on-kavanaugh-or-we-fund-her-future-opponent>. Retrieved May 1, 2021.
 - 7 This conceptual opening is echoed in Michael Walzer’s work on separate spheres. Like Brown, Walzer objects to big money in politics and to the buying and selling—at any price—of things that shouldn’t be for sale, such as political office; Walzer 1983, 100, 120. Also like Brown, Walzer’s fundamental objection is not to money *per se*, but rather to “the dominance of money outside its sphere”; Walzer 1983, 120. This distinction leaves conceptual space for the possibility of money that does *not* dominate, that is used in ways that are consistent with political equality and other distributive principles appropriate for the political sphere (Walzer 1983, 96; cf. Zelizer 2005, discussed in the next note, who has a slightly different reading of Walzer).
 - 8 While the subject matter is further afield, my argument is structurally most parallel to Viviana Zelizer’s argument about the relationship between money and intimate social relationships; Zelizer 2005. Against critics who argue that money has corrosive effects on social relationships (see Maurer 2006 for a review) and proponents of “separate spheres” such as Michael Walzer, Zelizer argues that “money cohabits regularly with intimacy, and even sustains it”; Zelizer 2005, 28; Walzer 1983. I make a roughly analogous claim that money—*small* money—“cohabits” with democratic politics, and can help sustain it. Yet while Zelizer suggests that money cohabits with intimate relationships *in spite of* money’s fungibility and commensurability, because people create specific types of currency for different relationships, I argue that monetary donations can enact democratic politics in part *because* of these (and other) features of money. In other words, while Zelizer emphasizes distinctions among types of money, I emphasize distinctions between money and other currencies of small-scale political action, such as voting and speech.
 - 9 An example of how the line between a purchase and a donation can be fuzzy is that is buying a subscription to the *New York Times* after Trump called it “the enemy” had a similar expressive function as making a donation to an organization seeking to protect press freedom.
 - 10 One could narrow the definition slightly—e.g., by limiting “political” donations to those that shape public opinion or the allocation of power or resources—without substantively altering the rest of the analysis.
 - 11 Organizations with 501(c)3 status are supposed to devote only 10%-20% of their activities and resources to direct and grassroots lobbying. See <https://www.501c3.org/what-is-a-501c3/>.
 - 12 In 2017, U.S. individuals and households donated \$309.66 billion to charitable causes and gave an additional \$43.21 billion in bequests; Giving USA 2020, 18. This figure includes some donations that are too big or apolitical to count as small-money political donations; it excludes some donations that are small-money political donations, but are too political (e.g., donations to candidates) or informal (e.g., crowd-funding) to be included in Giving USA’s statistics.
 - 13 Both the inaccessibility and intrusiveness objections appeal to the value of political equality and the importance, for good decision-making, of input from diverse voices; Pevnick 2016. The difference between them is that a wealthy donor who remains anonymous and never contacts the recipient could perhaps dodge the intrusiveness objection, but not the inaccessibility objection.
 - 14 Extant views include that individuals should be granted a say on democratic grounds because they are (sufficiently) affected by the issue at hand, subject to the coercive rule under consideration, or a member of the relevant political community; MacKenzie 2020, Bauböck 2018.
 - 15 There is an increasing trend of individuals making many—sometimes even hundreds—of very small donations to the same candidate over the course of a campaign; Mayersohn 2017, Bykowicz and Day 2019. These donors are able to express themselves and empower recipients more than people who only make one or a few small donations. Some of them might therefore be, like big donors, vulnerable to what I call the inaccessibility objection. However, these donors

also typically lack a direct, personal, line of communication to candidates. In this respect they differ from big donors because they avoid what I call the intrusiveness objection. That said, by donating in direct response to things that candidates say and do, these donors are possibly able to communicate their views more nimbly than people who make a smaller number of bigger donations and eschew personal contact with recipients.

- 16 I here leave aside cryptocurrencies.
- 17 While big donors can put conditions on how recipients spend their donation (Saunders-Hastings 2017), small donors generally lack the leverage to do this. If recipients cannot buy what they want or need with funds from small donors, it's usually not those donors stopping them. However, the empowerment dimension of money transfers from small donors can be affected by other factors, such as, on the one hand, high transaction costs, and on the other hand, donations being "matched" by other donors (though such matches are often more marketing ploy than reality).
- 18 Just because small-money political donating is expressive doesn't mean that it should be treated as protected speech or expression under the First Amendment. Expressiveness is necessary but not sufficient for First Amendment protection. Many illegal activities—such as murdering one's political opponent and painting a slogan on a public building—are also expressive. Thus, in saying that small-money political donations are expressive, I am not lending support to the view that big-money political donations are equally or more expressive than small donations and thus also deserve First Amendment protection.
- 19 The perceived value of this sort of support can also create odd incentives. For example, if donors divide up a larger donation into numerous smaller donations they increase transaction costs but enable the recipient to claim a larger number of donations and a smaller average donation size in their public statements and reports; Bykowics and Day 2019.
- 20 During the 2018 election cycle, 0.47% of the U.S. population made contributions of over \$200 to federal-level candidates, parties, and PACS; these contributions comprised 71% of the donated money these entities received (<https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/donordemographics.php>).
- 21 See <https://www.istandwithpp.org/> accessed 8/15/20.
- 22 Thanks to an anonymous referee for help with this point.
- 23 Discussing Collins' claim that the crowdfunding campaign for her opponent was "bribery," Green and Hellman 2018 argue that "the crowdfunding model is closer than the plutocrat model to the one-person-one-vote principle on which our democracy is based." They take this to be "cold comfort," however, because

"something is wrong with a system that makes political giving and spending a form of political participation." In contrast, I argue that there is nothing *inherently* undemocratic about money as a medium of political participation.

- 24 Indeed, money can be transformed into more extreme forms of political equality than time, because even the wealthiest person has only twenty-four hours in a day; Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018, 25. See also [note 13](#) here.
- 25 Money's fungibility plays a role here as well: it is because money can be agglomerated together seamlessly and relatively cheaply that recipients are willing to accept very small donations.
- 26 I here leave open what these grounds are, as this is an ongoing debate within democratic theory; see [note 14](#) here.
- 27 "Non-intrusiveness" is broader than non-paternalism: someone who is non-paternalistic does not intrude because their own well-being isn't at stake; someone who is non-intrusive does not intrude for a wider range of reasons, e.g., they lack relevant knowledge, experience, or standing; Dworkin 2020.
- 28 The more familiar story about money's commensurability is that it enables self-dealing and corruption. An important further question, then, is how donors can minimize their intrusiveness while exercising due diligence to ensure that recipients are not defrauding them or causing harm. Possible strategies include ensuring that donors' and recipients' goals are aligned (e.g., both want the recipient to win election) and enabling donors to hear directly from the people who a recipient claims to speak for or assist.
- 29 While individual small donors' power to influence recipients through their donating decisions is minimal, they clearly exercise influence as an aggregate—as can be seen by the fact that would-be recipients cater to their preferences; Simmel 2004, 298.
- 30 Like small donors, big donors also can't entirely cede their power. This is especially the case when it comes to initial decisions about when, where, how, etc. to donate. Even if a big donor consults with affected groups or uses a random procedure to choose recipients, *she* decides to do these things (cf. Mackenzie 2020; Scott 2021, 2020).
- 31 This is also why small donors, unlike big donors, rarely donate to two or more candidates running against each other.
- 32 A small, non-peer-reviewed study from 2013 found that "the smallest donors, giving amounts such as \$10, are more representative of New York City as a whole along indicators of wealth, race and ethnicity, and in some cases small donors are more diverse than the city overall. However, this diversity drops very rapidly as donation levels rise"; Public Campaign 2013.

33 See <https://www.seattle.gov/democracypoucher/about-the-program>.

References

- Ackerman, Bruce, and Ian Ayres. 2004. *Voting with Dollars: A New Paradigm for Campaign Finance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- ActBlue. 2020. "August 20 Re-Cap." Retrieved September 17, 2020 (<https://blog.actblue.com/2020/09/10/august-20-recap/>).
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder. 2003. "Why Is There So Little Money in U.S. Politics?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17(1): 105–30.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Associated Press. 2016. "Trump Effect: Civil Liberties Groups See Surge in Donations." *Fortune*. Retrieved October 1, 2018 (<http://fortune.com/2016/11/15/donald-trump-civil-liberties-groups-donations/>).
- Attkisson, Sharyl. 2010. "Tea Party Candidates Boosted by Small Donors." *CBS News*, October 18. Retrieved February 22, 2019 (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tea-party-candidates-boosted-by-small-donors/>).
- Bauböck, Rainer, ed. 2018. *Democratic Inclusion: Rainer Bauböck in Dialogue*. *Democratic Inclusion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bearse, Austin. 1880. *Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Law Days in Boston*. Boston: W. Richardson.
- Boromé, Joseph. 1968. "The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92:320–51.
- Bröckerhoff, Aurélie, and Mufid Qassoum. 2019. "Consumer Boycott amid Conflict: The Situated Agency of Political Consumers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." *Journal of Consumer Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540519882483>
- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Cambridge: Zone Books.
- Bykowitz, Julie, and Chad Day. 2019. "Small Donors Get Creative to Give Over and Over to 2020 Candidates; The Trend Is Fueled by the Increasing Ease of Giving Money Online." *Wall Street Journal Online*. October 25, 2019 (<http://global.factiva.com/redirect/default.aspx?P=sa&can=WSJO000020191025efap0015q&cat=a&ep=ASE>).
- Campaign Finance Institute. 2017. "President Trump, with RNC Help, Raised More Small Donor Money than President Obama; As Much As Clinton and Sanders Combined." Retrieved October 1, 2021. Online at http://www.cfnst.org/Press/PReleases/17-02-21/President_Trump_with_RNC_Help_Raised_More_Small_Donor_Money_than_President_Obama_As_Much_As_Clinton_and_Sanders_Combined.aspx.
- Cline, Nathaniel. 2019. "Loudoun County again Tops in the Nation in Median Household Income." *LoudounTimes.com*. Retrieved August 18, 2020 (https://www.loudountimes.com/business/loudoun-county-again-tops-in-the-nation-in-median-household-income/article_04019b78-e90d-11e9-b29f-afd4cca3c2e8.html).
- Cmar, Thomas. 2005. "Toward a Small Donor Democracy: The Past and Future of Incentive Programs for Small Political Contributions." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 32(443): 101–160.
- Cohen, Joshua. 2002. *Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy*. Abingdon: Routledge. (<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203986820-28>)
- Cohen, Rick. 2014. "GoFundMe for Ferguson: Pro-Wilson Donations Top Mike Brown's by 3 to 2" *Non-Profit Quarterly* (<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/gofundme-for-ferguson-pro-wilson-donations-top-mike-brown-s-by-3-to-2/>).
- Contorno, Steve, and Louis Jacobson. 2017. "Fact-checking KellyAnne Conway on the 'Bowling Green Massacre'" *PolitiFact* (<https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/feb/03/kellyanne-conway/fact-checking-kellyanne-conways-bowling-green-mass/>).
- Corrado, Anthony J., Michael J. Malbin, Thomas E. Mann, and Norman J. Ornstein. 2010. *Reform in an Age of Networked Campaigns: How to Foster Citizen Participation through Small Donors and Volunteers*. Washington, DC: Campaign Finance Institute.
- Culbertson, Tyler, Michael P. McDonald, and Suzanne M. Robbins. 2019. "Small Donors in Congressional Elections." *American Politics Research* 47(5): 970–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18763918>
- Dawood, Yasmin. 2015. "Campaign Finance and American Democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 329–48.
- Delmas, Candice. 2018. *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should Be Uncivil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dworkin, Gerald. 2020 "Paternalism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/>).
- Eich, Stefan. 2019. "Between Justice and Accumulation: Aristotle on Currency and Reciprocity." *Political Theory* 47(3): 363–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591718802634>
- Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Mitchell L. Stevens. 1998. "Commensuration as a Social Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1): 313–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.313>
- Fricke, Miranda. 2019. "Testimonial Injustice." In *Contemporary Epistemology*, ed. Jeremy Fantl, Matthew McGrath, and Ernest Sosa, 149–63. Hoboken, NJ:

- John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119420828.ch10>
- Gidda, Mirren. 2017. "Stop Trump Movement Gives Millions to ACLU, Planned Parenthood and Other Charities to Fight His White House." *Newsweek*, April 25. Retrieved February 22, 2019 (<https://www.newsweek.com/us-charity-donations-donald-trump-aclu-planned-parenthood-southern-poverty-law-589485>).
- Giving USA. 2020. *Giiving USA Key Findings 2020*. Chicago: Giving USA. (<https://store.givingusa.org/collections/older-versions/products/giving-usa-2020-the-annual-report-on-philanthropy-for-the-year-2019?variant=39334141165647>)
- Goldmacher, Shane. 2020. "Racial Justice Groups Flooded with Millions in Donations in Wake of Floyd Death." *New York Times*, June 14 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/us/politics/black-lives-matter-racism-donations.html>).
- Gourevitch, Alex. 2018. "The Right to Strike: A Radical View." *American Political Science Review* 112(4): 905–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000321>
- Green, Stuart, and Deborah Hellman. 2018. "Bribery, Crowdfunding, and the Strange Case of Senator Susan Collins." *The Atlantic*, September 14 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/09/bribery-crowdfunding-and-the-strange-case-of-senator-susan-collins/570355/>).
- Greenwood, Max. 2018. "Small-Dollar Donations Explode in the Trump Era." *The Hill*. Retrieved February 22, 2019 (<https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/412231-small-dollar-donations-explode-in-the-trump-era>).
- Hajela, Deepti, and Leanne Italie. 2020. "Dear White People: Being an Ally Isn't Always What You Think." *AP News*. Retrieved May 10, 2021 (<https://apnews.com/article/20a39b6e2d86b561012946b0e2118bbb>).
- Harden, Jeffrey J., and Justin H. Kirkland. 2016. "Do Campaign Donors Influence Polarization? Evidence from Public Financing in the American States." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(1): 119–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12108>
- Heard, Alexander. 1960. *The Costs of Democracy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Heerwig, Jennifer, and Brian McCabe. 2019. "Building a More Diverse Donor Coalition: An Analysis of the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in the 2019 Election Cycle." Retrieved October 1, 2021 (<https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/r2skgxfnc230ukkb3dfqgm4576phzabd>).
- Hughes, Adam. 2017. "Five Facts about US Political Donations." Pew Research. Retrieved May 10, 2021 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/17/5-facts-about-u-s-political-donations/>).
- Jackson, Mitchell S. 2020. "Opinion | Who Gets to Be a 'Naked Athena?'" *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/25/opinion/sunday/portland-protests-white.html>).
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2015. "Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 545–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12180>
- Keena, Alex, and Misty Knight-Finley. 2019. "Are Small Donors Polarizing? A Longitudinal Study of the Senate." *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 18(2): 132–44. <https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2018.0498>
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. 2000. *Why We Can't Wait*. New York: Penguin.
- Leach, Brittany. 2020. "Death Before Birth: Theorizing Pregnant Embodiment, Reproductive Autonomy, and the Politics of Abortion." PhD dissertation, Department of Politics, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. <http://doi.org/10.18130/v3-p0w3-zt45>
- Livingston, Alexander. 2017. "When Protests Work." (<http://publicseminar.org/2017/01/when-protests-work/#.WJVGVVUj0x>).
- MacKenzie, Michael K. 2020. "Democratic Philanthropy." *Contemporary Political Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-020-00431-3>
- Mansbridge, Jane. 1976. "Conflict in a New England Town Meeting" *The Massachusetts Review* 17(4): 631–63.
- . 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *American Political Science Review* 97(4): 515–28.
- Mathey, Sarah, and Maggie Quick. 2020. "Q3 2020: Millions give \$1.5 billion." *ActBlue* October 15. (<https://blog.actblue.com/2020/10/15/q3-2020-millions-give-1-5-billion/>).
- Maurer, Bill. 2006. "The Anthropology of Money." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35(1): 15–36. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123127>
- Mayersohn, Andrew. 2017. "Those Prized Small Donors? They May Not Be as Small as You Think." *OpenSecrets* (<https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2017/04/small-donors-may-not-be-smol-as-you-think/>).
- McGoey, Linsey. 2015. *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*. New York: Verso.
- Megerian, Chris. 2016. "Bernie Sanders Rode Wave of Small Donations in Democratic Primary." *Los Angeles Times*. (<https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-trailguide-updates-bernie-sanders-rode-wave-of-small-1468337592-htmlstory.html>).
- Mier, Amanda. 2020. "\$5. \$10. College Students May Not Have a Lot of Money but They're Donating Whatever They Can to Make Change Happen." CNBC (<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/07/>

- beyond-protests-college-students-donate-money-to-make-change-happen.html).
- Montemayor, Stacy, Pete Quist, Karl Evers-Hillstrom, and Douglas Weber. 2020. "Joint Report Reveals Record Donations in Federal and State Races." Follow the Money. (<https://www.followthemoney.org/research/institute-reports/joint-report-reveals-record-donations-in-2020-state-and-federal-races>).
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2005. *On the Political*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Muller, Jordan. 2018. "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Boosted by out-of-State Donors after Primary Win." *OpenSecrets* (<https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/07/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-boosted-by-out-of-state-donors-after-primary-win/>).
- OpenSecrets. N.d. "Small Donor Donations as a Percentage of Total Fundraising, Current Candidates Only". Retrieved August 18, 2020 (<https://www.opensecrets.org/2020-presidential-race/small-donors?curr=C&show=P>).
- Olsvasky, Jesse. 2018. "Women, Vigilance Committees, and the Rise of Militant Abolitionism, 1835–1859." *Slavery & Abolition* 39(2): 357–82.
- Overton, Spencer A. 2012. "The Participation Interest." *Georgetown Law Journal* 100: 1259–310.
- Pevnick, Ryan. 2013. "Democratizing the Nonprofit Sector." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21(3): 260–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2011.00414.x>
- . 2016. "The Anatomy of the Debate about Campaign Finance" *Journal of Politics* 78(4): 1184–95.
- Phillips, Holiday. 2020. "Performative Allyship Is Deadly (Here's What to Do Instead)." *Medium* (<https://forge.medium.com/performative-allyship-is-deadly-c900645d9f1f>).
- Pildes, Richard H. 2019. "Small-Donor-Based Campaign-Finance Reform and Political Polarization." *Yale Law Journal Forum*, November 18. Volume 129 (https://www.yalelawjournal.org/pdf/Pildes_SmallDonorBasedCampaignFinanceReformandPoliticalPolarization_1nbug72.pdf).
- Public Campaign. 2013. "Summary of Key Findings." Retrieved May 10, 2021 (<http://everyvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Memo-NYC-Donor-Demographics.pdf>).
- Ramsey, Kevin, Bryce Anderson, Julia Tesch, and Jescelle Major. 2020. "2019 Election Cycle Evaluation." (https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/Final%20DVP%20Evaluation%20Report%20July23_2020.pdf).
- Reich, Rob. 2018. *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997 [1779]. "The Social Contract" and Other Later Political Writings. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubenstein, Jennifer. 2007. "Accountability in an Unequal World." *Journal of Politics* 69(3): 616–32.
- Ryan, Lisa. 2016. "Here's How Many Planned Parenthood Donations Have Been Made in Mike Pence's Name." *The Cut*. Retrieved July 28, 2020 (<https://www.thecut.com/2016/12/how-many-planned-parenthood-donations-came-from-mike-pence.html>).
- Saunders-Hastings, Emma. 2017. "Plutocratic Philanthropy." *Journal of Politics* 80(1): 149–61.
- Scott, Mackenzie. 2020. "384 Ways to Help" *Medium* (<https://mackenzie-scott.medium.com/384-ways-to-help-45d0b9ac6ad8>).
- . 2021. "Seeding by Ceding." *Medium* (<https://mackenzie-scott.medium.com/seeding-by-ceding-ea6de642bf>).
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Siders, David. 2019. "DNC Announces Fundraising, Polling Thresholds for Early Debates." Retrieved March 13, 2019 (<https://www.politico.com/story/2019/02/14/dnc-fundraising-polling-early-debates-1170182>).
- Simmel, Georg. 2004 [1900]. *The Philosophy of Money*, 3rd ed. David Frisby. ed. Trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby. New York: Routledge.
- Slodysko, Brad. 2020. "Ginsberg's Death Draws Big Surge of Donations to Democrats." *AP Online*. Retrieved August 10, 2021 (<https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-ruth-bader-ginsburg-elections-us-supreme-court-courts-36c93e5034e428b0b3a4078c2588bb30>).
- Smith, Bradley A. 1997. "Money Talks: Speech, Corruption, Equality, and Campaign Finance." *Georgetown Law Journal* 86(1): 45–100.
- Stein, Jeff. 2017. "Trump's 2020 Campaign Is Raising Millions from Small Donors and Sending It on Legal Fees." *Vox*. Retrieved February 22, 2019 (<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/17/16487942/trump-2020-legal-fees>).
- Stewart, Emily. 2020. "How to Be a Good White Ally, According to Activists." *Vox* (<https://www.vox.com/2020/6/2/21278123/being-an-ally-racism-george-floyd-protests-white-people>).
- Stewart, Paul. 2014. "Underground Railroad History: Vigilant Committees" *The New York History Blog*. Retrieved October 1, 2018 (<https://newyorkhistoryblog.org/2014/08/25/underground-railroad-history-vigilant-committees/>).
- Stieb, Matt. 2018. "The Smart Bets for Last-minute Democratic Donors" *New York Magazine*, October 29.
- Strauss, Daniel. 2015. "Trump's New Pitch: I'm So Rich I Can't Be Bought." *Politico*. Retrieved September

- 20, 2018 (<https://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/donald-trumps-so-rich-i-cant-be-bought-120743>).
- Tausanovitch, Alex, and James Lagasse. 2018. "The Small Donor Antidote to Big Donor Politics." Retrieved May 10, 2021 (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/06/11/451787/small-donor-antidote-big-donor-politics/>).
- United States Census Bureau. N.d. "Quick Facts: Wilcox County, Alabama." Retrieved July 12, 2021 (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wilcoxcountyalabama>).
- Vidal, John, Tom McCarthy, and Polly Curtis. 2012. "Kony 2012: What's the Real Story?" *The Guardian* (<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-what-s-the-story>).
- Walzer, Michael. 1983. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Women of Color for Progress. N.d. "Guide to Being an Ally." Retrieved July 29, 2020 (<https://www.womenofcolorforprogress.org/allyguide>).
- Young, Iris. 2002. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zelizer, Viviana. 2005. *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.