Partisan Interactions

Evidence from a Field Experiment in the United States

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Introduction

- Most forms of political participation reveal partisan affiliation.
  - Thus, susceptible to social effects.
- Empirical challenges:
  - Direction of causality.
  - Causal mechanisms.
  - Revealed-preference evidence.
- Contribution: evidence from a high-stakes large-scale field experiment.

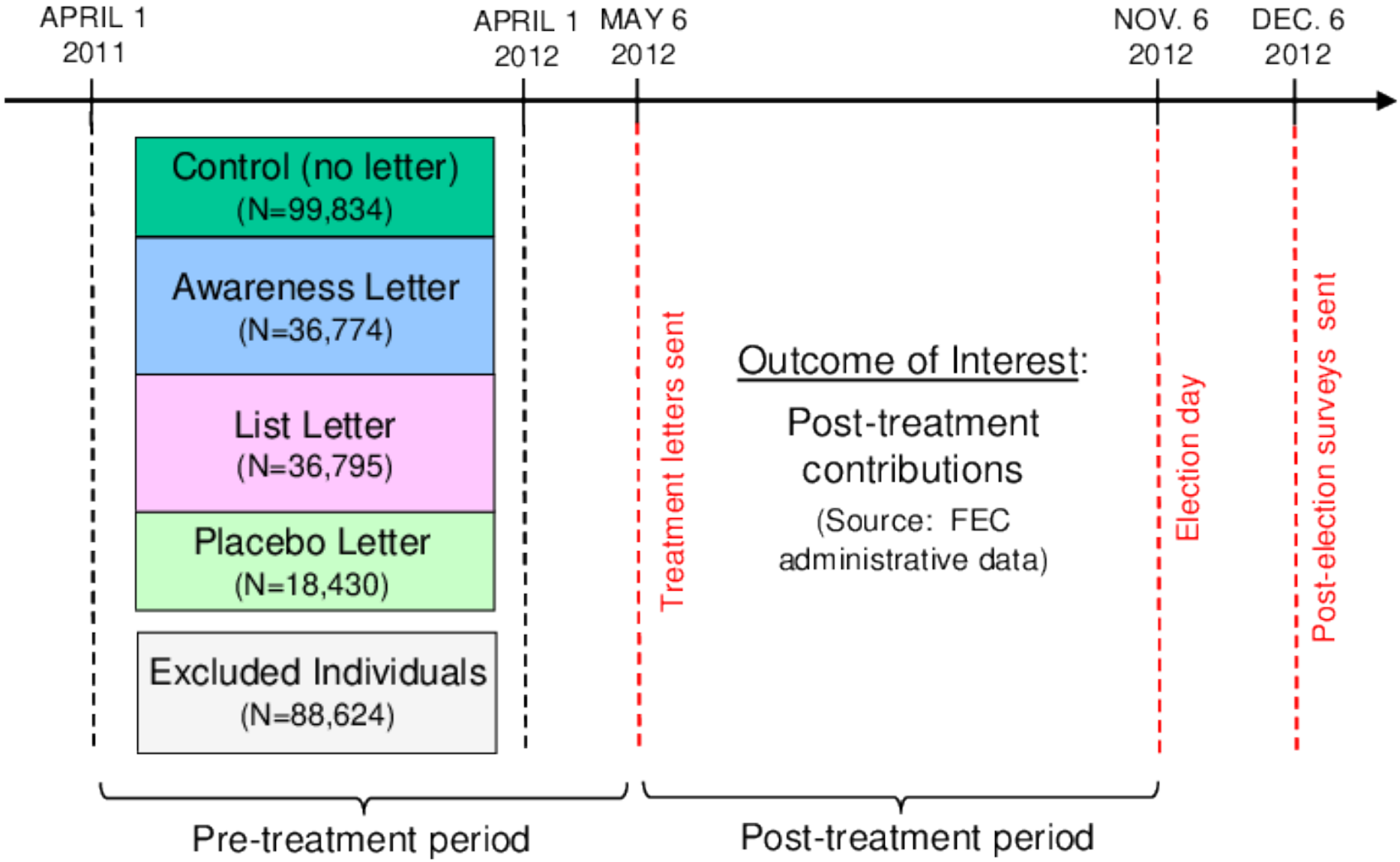
Preview of Results

- Sent letters to 90,000 contributors in the 2012 presidential election.
- Randomized messages within letters.
- Compare post-letter contributions between messages.
- Evidence that:
  - Conformity channel: being observed matters.
  - Comparison channel: observing others matters.

Institutional Context

- Unique disclosure policy for U.S. campaign contributions.
  - Committees report campaign contributions >$200 to Federal Election Comission (FEC).
  - FEC makes records publicly available and easily accessible.
    - "Google" contributors by name, address, etc.
    - Search tool actively used (see Appendix).
  - Contributors can observe others and also be observed.
  - Disentangle between observing others vs. being observed.

Experiment's Timeline



Subject Characteristics

- Subject pool representative of all contributors in FEC records.
- Contribution patterns:
  - 52% Democrat, 48% Republican.
  - Pre-Treatment contribution: average $523.
  - Post-Treatment contribution: 49% contribute at least once more, on average $589.
- Large-stakes experiment: $160 million in contributions in the subjects pool.

Conformity Channel: Hypothesis

- What is the expected effect of visibility (v_i) on contributions (c_i)?
  - Non-partisan interactions: $\frac{\partial c_i}{\partial v_i} > 0$.
    - Signaling civic responsibility, wealth. E.g.: Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008), DellaVigna, List Malmendier and Rao (2014).
  - Partisan interactions: *sign* $\left(\frac{\partial c_i}{\partial v_i}\right)$ depends on share of own-party contacts.

Sample Letter: Website-Self

Boston, April 25th 2012

Dear John,

This letter is part of an effort to disseminate information about political campaign contributions made by individuals from your neighborhood:

Name of contributor	Amount - Party contributed to	Name of contributor	Amount - Party contributed to
S., ANITA LAUTEN	$600 – DEM	H., ROBERT L	$300 – DEM
DOE, JOHN	**$375 – DEM**	L., EDMOND	$2,500 – REP
T., WILLIAM JR	$1,000 – REP	G., LISA	$1,000 – REP

YOUR HOUSEHOLD WAS THE ONLY HOUSEHOLD RANDOMLY CHOSEN FROM YOUR AREA TO RECEIVE A LETTER OF THIS TYPE

The above table contains a list of the total campaign contributions to presidential candidates made by 6 individuals from your neighborhood in the period from April 1, 2011 to April 1, 2012, according to the public records published by the Federal Election Commission.

Your full name, address and details about your campaign contributions are freely available to anyone with Internet access. You can search for individual contributions by first and last name, or by zip code, using the following tool from the website of the Federal Election Commission:

www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/norindsea.shtml

You can use this website to see which candidates or political parties your neighbors, friends, family and co-workers are contributing to. Access to the data is anonymous.

This letter is part of a study of political campaign contributions made by individuals which is being conducted by researchers at Harvard University. We will not send any more letters about past or future contributions to your household or to your neighbors. You can find more information about this project, including contact information, on our website:

Information Dissemination on Campaign Contributions

www.campaign-information.info

Letter Excerpt: Website-Self

YOUR HOUSEHOLD WAS THE ONLY HOUSEHOLD RANDOMLY CHOSEN FROM YOUR AREA TO RECEIVE A LETTER OF THIS TYPE

Your full name, address and details about your campaign contributions are freely available to anyone with Internet access. You can search for individual contributions by first and last name, or by zip code, using the following tool from the website of the Federal Election Commission:

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You can use this website to see which candidates or political parties your neighbors, friends, family and co-workers are contributing to. Access to the data is anonymous.

Letter Excerpt: Website-Neighbors

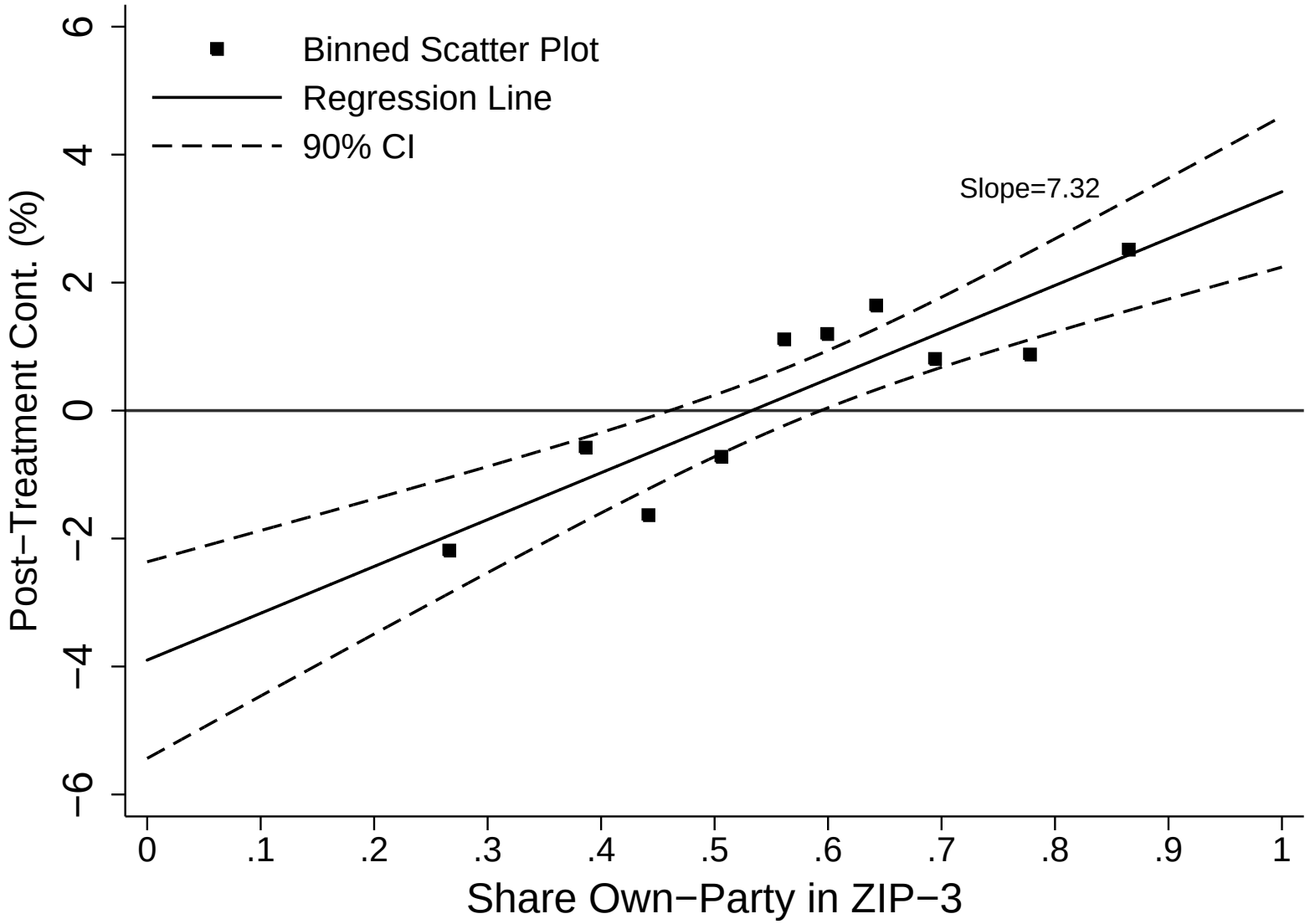
YOUR HOUSEHOLD AND OTHER HOUSEHOLDS IN YOUR AREA WERE RANDOMLY CHOSEN TO RECEIVE A LETTER OF THIS TYPE

Your full name, address and details about your campaign contributions are freely available to anyone with Internet access. You can search for individual contributions by first and last name, or by zip code, using the following tool from the website of the Federal Election Commission:

www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/norindsea.shtml

You can use this website to see which candidates or political parties your neighbors, friends, family and co-workers are contributing to. Access to the data is anonymous.

Effect of Higher Visibility on P(Cont.)



Conformity: Magnitude of the Effects

- ITT effects of visibility intervention:
  - If 75% of neighbors support same party: +$19 (+3.2% of baseline).
  - If 75% of neighbors support opposite party: -$53 (-9% of baseline).
- Effect of *reading* letters (TOT) is multiple of effect of *sending* letters (ITT).
  - Additional results suggests TOT is over 4 times as large.

Conformity: Additional Findings

- Robust effects on intensive vs. extensive margin.
- Effects stronger during first half of the post-treament period.
- No heterogeneity with respect to other characteristics.
  - E.g.: share same-race, share low-income.
- No effects on pre-treatment contributions.

Comparison Channel: Experimental Design

- Besides feeling observed, individuals may observe others.
  - For example:
    - May form norms about the "right" contribution amount.
    - May want to free-ride on the contributions of others.

Letter Excerpt: List

Last name initial and first name of contributor	April 1, 2011 to April 1, 2012	
	Amount contributed	Party contributed to
DOE, JOHN	**$250**	**REP**
M., CHARLES	$1,000	DEM
C., SUSAN	$500	DEM
D., ANN	$500	DEM
B., CAROL	$250	DEM
L., ANNE	$212	DEM
W., CHARLOTTE T.	$200	DEM
W., MELANIE	$2,500	REP
P., JAMES	$2,000	REP
H., PATRICK	$750	REP

Randomization of Information

- Start with list of i's 30 closest neighbors (L_i).
  - Each neighbor j has party D_j and amount A_j.
  - Give j a composite score: $Score_j^i = \theta_i^D \cdot D_j + \theta_i^A \cdot A_j$.
  - Order 30 neighbors according to the composite score.
  - Choose the 9 top neighbors from the list.
- Randomizing $\left\{\theta_i^D, \theta_i^A\right\}$ generates random variation in information.
  - Non-deceptive.
  - Unbiased (on average sense).

Sample Randomization

Baseline

Contributor	Amount	Party
G., R.	**$1,000**	**DEM**
W., D.	**$500**	**DEM**
S., L. Y.	**$500**	**DEM**
W., T. K.	**$500**	**DEM**
A., S.	**$200**	**DEM**
B., R.	**$200**	**DEM**
W., S. B.	**$1,100**	**REP**
B., M. A.	**$400**	**REP**
A., E. A.	**$250**	**REP**

Sample Randomization

Baseline

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G., R.	**$1,000**	**DEM**
W., D.	$500	DEM
S., L. Y.	**$500**	**DEM**
W., T. K.	$500	DEM
A., S.	**$200**	**DEM**
B., R.	**$200**	**DEM**
W., S. B.	**$1,100**	**REP**
B., M. A.	**$400**	**REP**
A., E. A.	**$250**	**REP**

$\Rightarrow$

Fewer DEM ($\theta_i^D < 0$)

Contributor	Amount	Party
G., R.	**$1,000**	**DEM**
S., L. Y.	**$500**	**DEM**
A., S.	**$200**	**DEM**
B., R.	**$200**	**DEM**
W., S. B.	**$1,100**	**REP**
O., T. F.	$800	REP
B., M. A.	**$400**	**REP**
A., E. A.	**$250**	**REP**
H., V.	$200	REP

Sample Randomization

Baseline

Contributor	Amount	Party
G., R.	**$1,000**	**DEM**
W., D.	**$500**	**DEM**
S., L. Y.	**$500**	**DEM**
W., T. K.	**$500**	**DEM**
A., S.	$200	DEM
B., R.	$200	DEM
W., S. B.	**$1,100**	**REP**
B., M. A.	**$400**	**REP**
A., E. A.	$250	REP

$\Rightarrow$

Higher Amounts ($\theta_i^A > 0$)

Contributor	Amount	Party
G., R.	**$1,000**	**DEM**
H., J. B.	$1,000	DEM
P., R.	$700	DEM
W., D.	**$500**	**DEM**
S., L. Y.	**$500**	**DEM**
W., T. K.	**$500**	**DEM**
W., S. B.	**$1,100**	**REP**
O., T. F.	$800	REP
B., M. A.	**$400**	**REP**

Main Results

	Amount Contributed Post-Treatment			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
$\bar{c}_{\text{own}}$	2.452*	2.757*	4.032***	2.694*
	(1.436)	(1.440)	(1.562)	(1.494)
$\bar{c}_{\text{opp}}$	-0.145	-0.667	-1.450	-0.075
	(0.914)	(0.951)	(1.077)	(0.931)
N_{own}		-6.217**		
		(2.821)		
$\sum c_{\text{own}} - \sum c_{\text{opp}}$			-0.408**	
			(0.171)	
$\left\lvert \sum c_{\text{own}} - \sum c_{\text{opp}} \right\rvert$				-0.091
				(0.177)
Observations	155,059	155,059	155,059	155,059
Regression	Interval	Interval	Interval	Interval

Conclusions

- What did we learn from this?
  - DEM/REP participation shaped by social interactions.
  - Partisan interactions can contribute to geographic polarization.
  - Disclosure policies have unintended effects.
    - See also: Perez-Truglia (2015) on unintended effects of income transparency.