

# Redistricting encourages more out-of-district contributions to Congressional candidates from individuals

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/06/28/redistricting-encourages-more-out-of-district-contributions-to-congressional-candidates-from](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/06/28/redistricting-encourages-more-out-of-district-contributions-to-congressional-candidates-from)

*Recent years have seen growing concern over the amount of money in US politics, especially from outside groups and political action committees. In new research, [Michael H. Crespin](#) and [Barry Edwards](#) focus on the group that actually provides the majority of donations to Congressional candidates: individual donors. They find that those on the highest incomes give the most, and that much of these donations come from out-of-district sources. They also find that redistricting leads to more donations coming from outside the district, while those districts that have stable boundaries experience rising levels of in-district donations.*



Although the media often focus on “[special interests](#)” and [political action committees](#) as key players in elections, individual donors frequently provide the majority of contributions in congressional elections. In new [research](#), Barry Edwards and I examine the relationship between members of Congress and this group. Thankfully US election law requires campaigns to report all donations over \$200 to the [Federal Election Commission](#). This means there is a rich [database](#) of information to learn about where election money comes from and which candidates receive it. Since republican government in the United States is geographic in nature and is based on the notion that members of the House will represent constituents residing in their districts, the geographic patterns of campaign contributions can tell us something about democratic accountability.

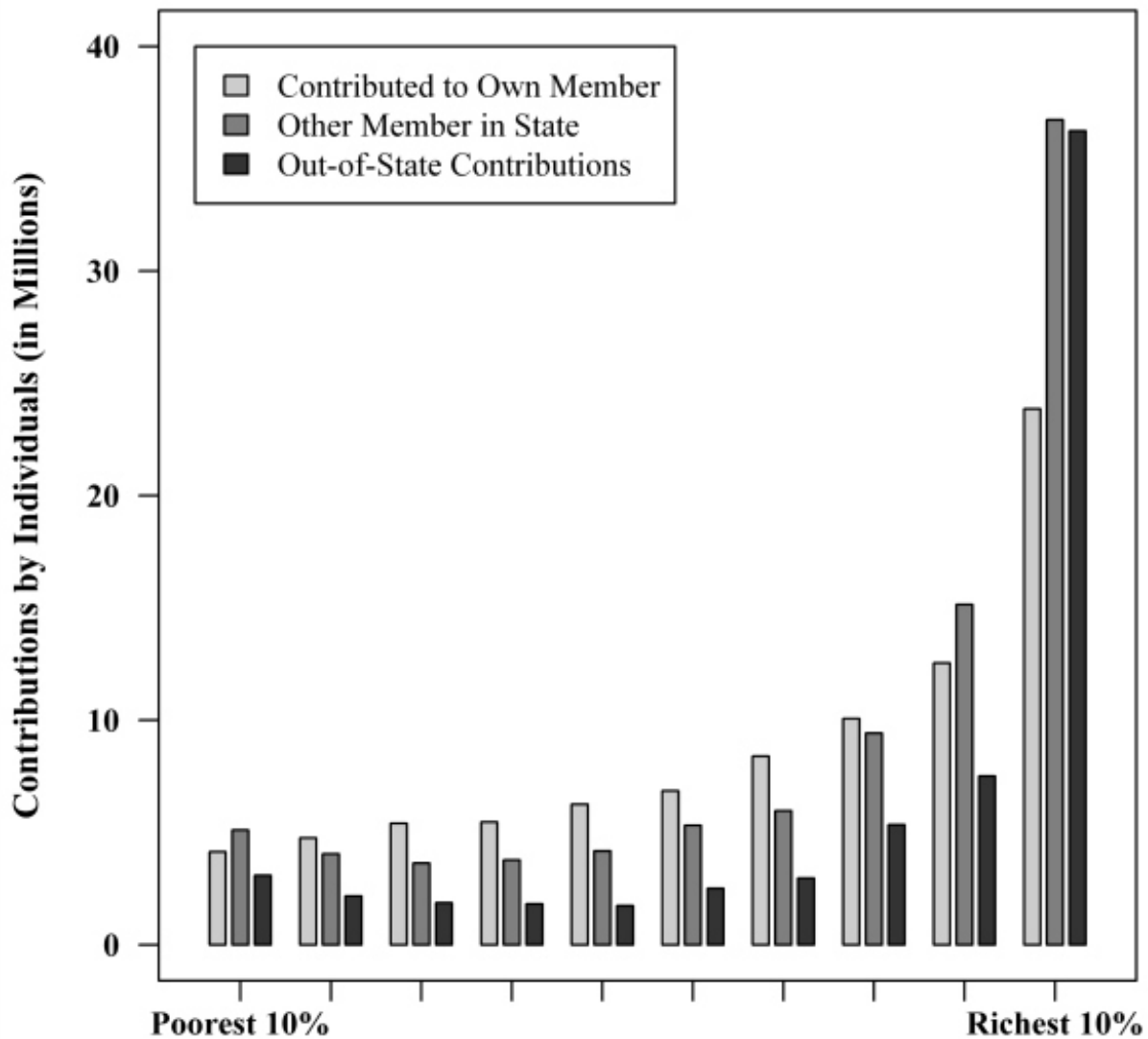


## Who makes contributions?

We compare three groups of contributors, those that give to their own representative, donors who give to other members in their state, and donors who give across state lines. As we might expect, people who make campaign contributions are relatively affluent, but our data show that outside donors stand out, even in this rich crowd.

Figure 1 below provides a breakdown of individual contribution amounts by income category at the zip code level. In each category, we show how much money was contributed from our three groups, in-district, rest-of-state, and out-of-state contributors. As expected, relatively little money comes from the lower income levels and a great deal comes from the richest 10 percent of zip codes. Across the first eight levels, there are no vast differences between the three groups although fewer dollars come from less wealthy out of state donors. Once we get to the highest income category we find substantially more contributions from out-of-district donors. In some ways this is not surprising since donors are limited on how much they can give to one member and individuals who want to make several contributions will have to send money outside their district to do so.

## Figure 1 – Individual campaign contributions by zip code income

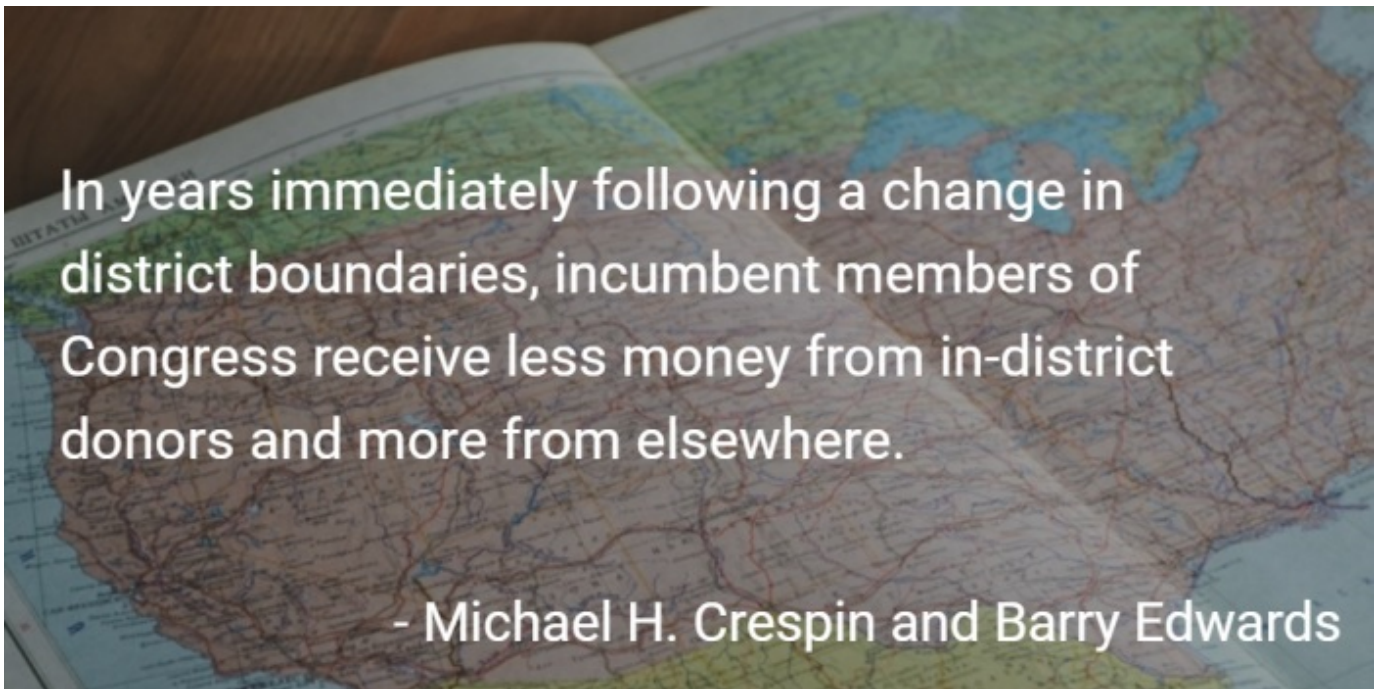


**Income of Zip Code (Median Family, in 1999)**

We also find a significant amount of money comes from outside a member’s district, and these checks tend to be larger. Looking at elections from 1992-2010, the average donation from a member’s district was \$674 while the out of state contributions were much larger at just over \$1,000. Put together, these findings show that larger checks from individuals living in wealthy zip codes, with potential demands attached, are flowing from outside a representatives “geographic constituency”. These results are especially compelling in light of [research](#) showing elites had a greater influence on policy compared to citizens in lower income groups.

**What happens when districts change?**

Every ten years, states must redraw congressional boundaries in response to reapportionment and to equalize the number of constituents in each district. This presents an opportunity to test the bonds of representation between donors and representatives. If social ties are the main basis for contributing we might expect donors to continue to give to their old members even if the donors now live in new districts. If, however, donors give because they expect something in return they might be more likely to stop contributing to the old member and now give to the new representative. We refer to the first type of donors as “intimates” and call the second type “investors”.



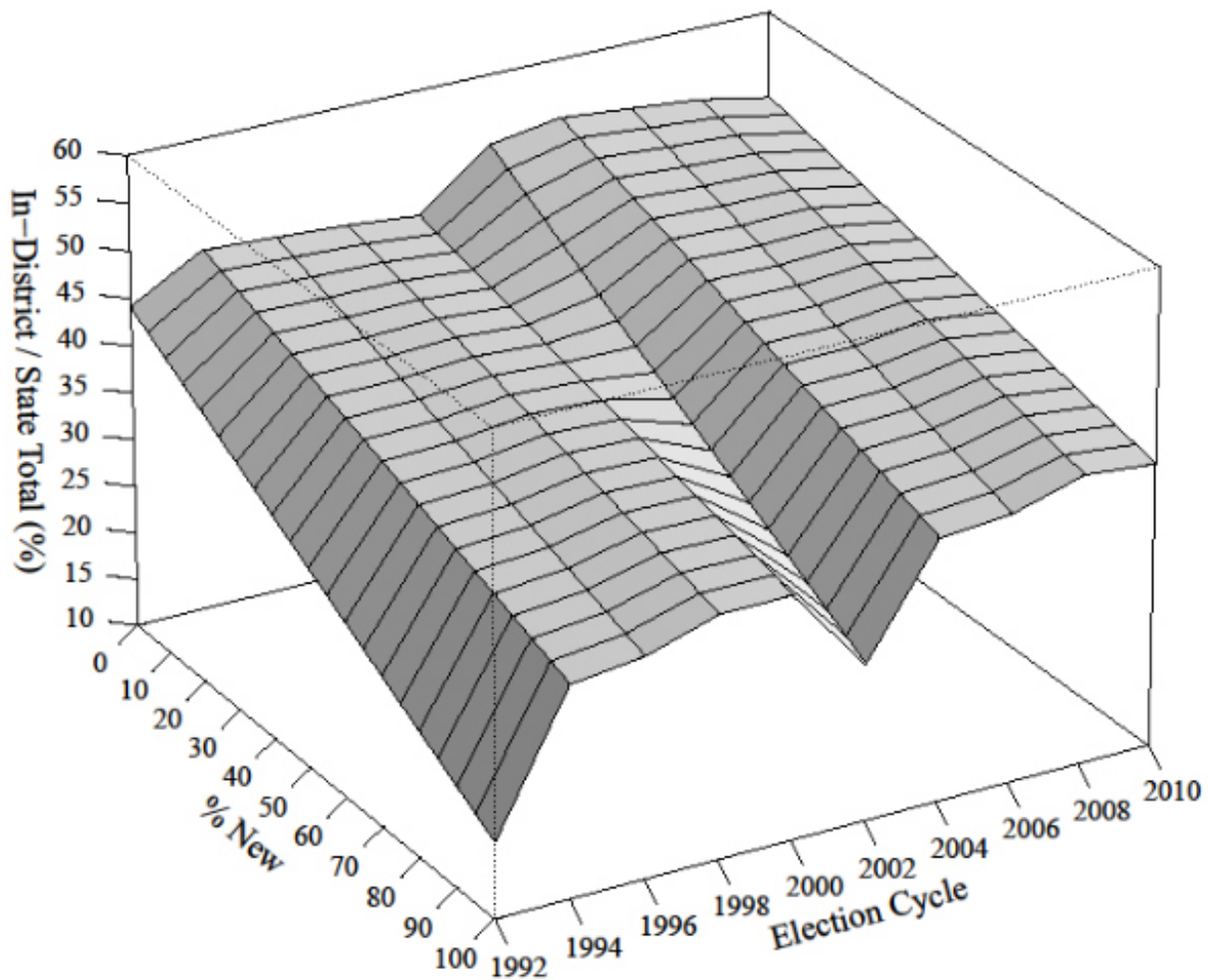
In years immediately following a change in district boundaries, incumbent members of Congress receive less money from in-district donors and more from elsewhere.

- Michael H. Crespin and Barry Edwards

After performing a statistical analysis, we find redistricting exacerbates the importance of out of district contributions. In years immediately following a change in district boundaries, incumbent members of Congress receive less money from in-district donors and more from elsewhere. By the time the next redistricting comes around 10 years later, the percent of in-district contributions never reverts back to the old level.

Since some districts change more than others, Figure 2 shows how much changing districts can influence where campaign money comes from. We see that the financial support a member could expect to receive from his or her district declines the more his or her district changed as the result of redistricting. Members that represent districts with little to no change actually see an increase in the amount of in-district contributions after redistricting relative to districts with a lot of change. The impact of district change on local support is particularly severe immediately following redistricting, producing a cyclical pattern over these election cycles.

**Figure 2 – Source of financial support by change in district and election cycle**



The influence of redistricting is not the same for the two types of donors when they find themselves in new congressional districts. Intimates, who give largely due to social connections, are slower to change behavior. Investors, however, quickly begin to give money to their new representatives and abandon their old members. Interestingly, Democrats tend to attract more intimate types while Republicans collect more from investors.

What does this all mean for representative democracy? For one, it shows that changing districts tends to reduce a member's reliance on her own geographic constituents and increase the member's financial ties to outsiders who may have different political interests. Our results also show that there is a cost to redistricting that has not been fully appreciated as shifting district boundaries may permanently change the relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. Rather than just focus attention on their own districts, members begin cultivate relationships throughout their states.

*This article is based on the paper, 'Redistricting and Individual Contributions to Congressional Candidates' in Political Research Quarterly.*

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