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Presidential Campaign Donations in the Digital Age

10% of 2012 presidential campaign donors have contributed via text message or cell phone app. Democrats are more likely to contribute online or directly from their cell phone, while Republicans are more likely to contribute in person, by phone call, or via regular mail.

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<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Election-2012-Donations.aspx>

Key Findings

In June of this year, the Federal Election Commission for the first time allowed political campaigns to accept campaign contributions via text message, and both of the major presidential candidates now allow supporters to contribute directly to their campaign using a cell phone. In two surveys fielded in late September, we asked a series of questions aimed at determining how this new contribution model is fitting into Americans' political giving habits. Because few (if any) congressional or state-level candidates currently accept mobile donations at this time, we limited our questions on this topic to presidential campaign contributions only.

In total, 13% of all adults have made a contribution to one of the presidential candidates in this year's election, and we presented these donors with a series of follow-up questions asking them how they made their contributions. Their answers indicate that offline methods (such as donating in person or via regular mail) remain the most common way that Americans contribute to political campaigns, but that online contributions represent a significant portion of the total. At the moment, donations directly from cell phones make up only a small component of the political giving universe.

Among the 13% of adults who have donated to one of the presidential candidates in this year's election:

- 67% donated in person, over the telephone, or through the mail
- 50% donated online or via email
- 10% donated by sending a text message from their cell phone or using a cell phone app

Put another way, that works out to just 1% of all American adults who have made a presidential contribution directly from their cell phone this election season. By way of comparison, prior [Pew Internet research](#) has found that roughly one in ten American adults have made a charitable donation of *any kind* using the text messaging feature on their cell phone.

There are no differences related to party affiliation when it comes to making a campaign contribution in general. Some 16% of Democrats and an identical number of Republicans have made a contribution to a presidential candidate this election cycle. But while Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to make a presidential campaign contribution of any kind, Republicans are much more likely to contribute through offline channels, while Democratic donors are much more likely to make a contribution online or directly from their cell phone:

- 87% of Republican campaign donors have contributed in person, by telephone, or via the mail; 57% of Democratic donors have contributed in this way.

On the other hand:

- 57% of Democratic campaign donors have contributed online or via email, compared with 34% of Republican donors.
- 15% of Democratic campaign donors have contributed via text message or cell phone app, compared with 6% of Republican donors.

Methodology

These findings are based on a combined analysis of two nationally representative telephone surveys (details of each are below). The combined data set contained a total of 2,010 respondents, 346 of whom had made a monetary contribution to any of the presidential candidates in the 2012 election. The margin of sampling error for the complete data set is +/-2.6 percentage points, and the margin of sampling error for presidential campaign contributors is +/-6.3 percentage points.

The PSRAI September 2012 Omnibus Week 3 obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (605) and cell phone (400, including 211 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source from September 20 to 23, 2012. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.7 percentage points.

The PSRAI September 2012 Omnibus Week 4 obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (603) and cell phone (402, including 184 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source from September 27 to 30, 2012. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.7 percentage points.
