Conclusion and Discussion

This book attempts to tackle the complex relationship between geography and individual campaign contributions in the early stages of a presidential race, specifically the increasingly important preprimary period. Even more than the decision to cast a ballot, giving money to a political campaign is a rare act of political involvement exercised by a minority of citizens in the United States. This type of support becomes even less common when one considers the relatively small percentage of Americans who participate by contributing during the early days of a presidential campaign when organizations are just beginning to be built by candidates and their staffs. The uncommon individual, the “1 in every 1,500,” who participates during the early stage of fundraising by contributing makes this a significant decision not only for the donor but also for the candidate. This is because the ability to raise money is a crucial, though not necessarily deterministic, indicator of who will win their respective party’s presidential nomination to contend for the White House.

Despite expectations concerning democratic governance, these individuals who make the decision to participate through donations are solicited to contribute. Our findings indicate that timing matters when it comes to electoral fundraising and candidates. Early money is crucial in jumping initial hurdles in any primary competition, as well as sustaining the
campaign through an often long-drawn-out process. We observe that most candidates build their initial base of donors at home, as well as in the most populous states of California, Texas, and New York. We also find that the rest of the country also provides a fair amount of money to the candidates, with broad-based fundraising constituting a relevant portion of the early fundraising process.

Individuals who participate through donations are not randomly distributed across the United States. Cursory geographic analysis of preprimary donors shows isolated pockets of high activity amidst areas with lower levels of monetized participation, with some counties showing no documented fiscal activity. Further investigation reveals that geographic patterns are more complex than simple islands of support amidst a field of nonparticipants, particularly when considering differences between the counties, states, and elections under analysis. Of all distinct variables, we select population density and wealth of income as particularly worthy of analysis.

For example, the discrepancy between 2004 and 2012 may be due to the open nominating contest, which was on the Democratic Party side in 2004 and the Republican side in 2012. In both of these elections, the rates of giving were very similar, while in the completely open contest of 2008 there was an inordinate amount of money raised. In all these competitions, the most populous states gave the bulk of the money. The areas where there were few to no fundraising activities in 2004 correspond well with their 2012 counterparts. Given that the electoral cycle in the former involved a Republican incumbent president and a Democratic Party incumbent, this suggests that donors are geographically located is more heterogeneous areas and that the blue and red islands misrepresent the donor landscape.

The upper Midwest and the rural parts of the South both contain a number of counties that made no contributions. Not only do we see little activity in Appalachia as well, the number