



“Elections and Fundraising”

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 POLS 4620E
 Lecture #28
 University of Georgia

Elections and Fundraising Outline

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Congressional Elections



The Electoral System

Two choices made by the Framers of the Constitution have profoundly affected the electoral politics of Congress: Members of Congress and presidents are elected separately.

- *This is unlike parliamentary systems, where authority resides with the legislature, which chooses the chief executive.*

Members of Congress are elected from states and congressional districts by plurality vote -- that is, whoever gets the most votes wins.

- *Some parliamentary systems use a proportional representation. Under a proportional system a party wins a share of seats in the legislature matching the share of votes it wins on election day.*



Congressional Districts



After the first census in 1790, each state was allotted one House seat for every 33,000 inhabitants for a total of 105 seats.

Total membership was finally fixed at its current ceiling of 435 in 1911 when House leaders concluded that further growth would impede the House's work.

However, the size of each state's delegation may change after each decennial census as state/region populations shift.

Redistricting and the Law

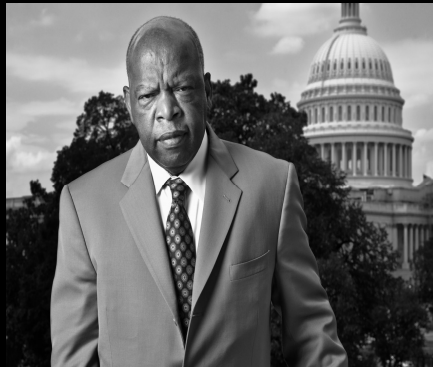
In 1964 the Supreme Court ruled in *Wesberry v. Sanders* that districts must have equal populations.

In *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) the Court ruled that district lines may not dilute minority representation, but neither may they be drawn with race as the predominant consideration

- This raises the issue of majority-minority districts
- Majority-minority districts have some clear benefits

In *Davis v. Bandemer* (1986), the Court held that a gerrymander would be unconstitutional if it were too unfair to one of the parties.

- As yet no districting scheme has run afoul of this vague standard.



Gerrymandering



Gerrymandering – Drawing a district so as to concentrate the opposition party’s voters in a small number of districts that the party wins by large margins, thus “wasting” many of its votes, while creating as many districts as possible where one’s own party has a secure, though not overwhelming, majority.

Gerrymandering

+10	0	+10	+20	+40
+20	-10	-10	+10	+10
	+10	-30	-30	-20
	+40	-10	-10	-10
	+30	0	+20	0
	+40	+10	0	-10
		-20	-20	-30
			-30	-40
				-40

+10	0	+10	+20	+40
+20	-10	-30	+10	+10
	+30	-50	-30	-20
	+40	-10	-10	-10
	+30	0	+20	0
	+40	+30	0	-10
		-20	-20	-30
			-30	-40
				-40

- 40,000 voters. Accordingly, if there are 8 congressional seats in the state, your party should hold 3-4 of them. The redistricting plan drawn on the right gives your party 7 of them. It’s a gerrymander.

Senate Representation



The fifty Senate constituencies – entire states – may not change boundaries with each census, though they vary greatly in size of population.

Senator Harris of California – 39.25 million people.

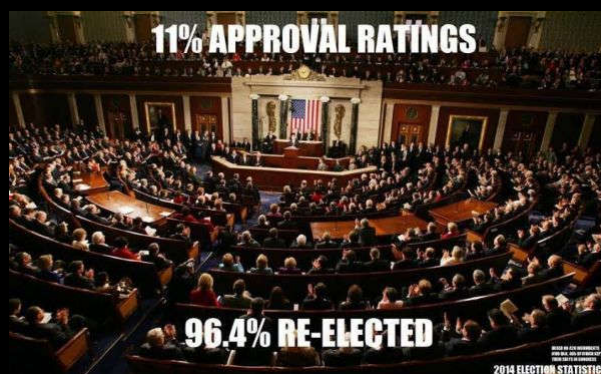
Senator Enzi of Wyoming – 585,501 people.

Average U.S. House member represents nearly 700,000 people.

District of Columbia holds 681,170.

Eight largest states are home to 51 percent of total U.S. population. Leads to unequal representation.

The Electoral Connection



The modern Congress is organized to serve the goals of its members.

Primary goal: keep their jobs! (Or at least their “proximate” goal)

Thus a career in Congress depends on getting elected and reelected again and again.

A “Proximate Goal”

“Former Senator Paul Douglas (D., Ill) tells of how he tried to persuade Senator Frank Graham (D – NC) to tailor his issue positions in order to survive a 1950 primary. Graham, a liberal appointee to the office, refused to listen. He was a “saint,” says Douglas. He lost his primary. There are not many saints...



Fenno assigns three primary goals to congressmen – getting reelected but also achieving influence within Congress and making “good public policy...” [The electoral goal] has to be the proximate goal of everyone, the goal that must be achieved over and over if other ends are to be entertained.” – *David Mayhew, 1974*



Candidate and Party Centered Politics

Party-Centered Electoral Politics:

Nominations: Parties controlled who was nominated.

Political Organization: Parties monopolized political organization through a system of precinct and block captains held together with the rewards of patronage.

Mass Media: And parties controlled the flow of information to the voter through daily and weekly newspapers with clear party affiliation.



Results: The old system was truly party centered. Parties chose the candidates, determined the issues, disseminated the information, organized and ran the campaigns.

Candidate: To be successful a candidate had to bend his will to that of the party -- typically serving a long apprenticeship, working one's way up in the party apparatus.

Candidate and Party Centered Politics

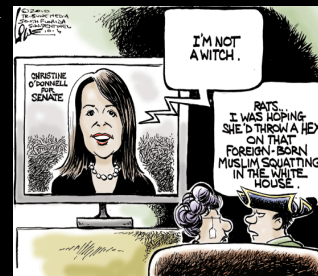
Candidate-Centered Electoral Politics:

An encouragement of electoral politics in which candidates operated largely as independent political entrepreneurs (favored by Democrats throughout the second half of the 20th century).

Nominations: We see a party that has lost its power to control who is nominated to primary election voters.

Political Organization: We see a party whose monopoly of political organization has been destroyed by the rise of countless special interest groups and mass media.

Mass Media: We see a party whose control of the media has vanished under a blizzard of competition. We see voters who get most of their information from the electronic mass media in 8-second sound bites on the network news and in 30-second spot commercials during campaigns.



Candidate and Party Centered Politics



Results: Today parties appear to be at the mercy of candidates rather than candidates being at the mercy of parties. The candidate's views are what counts, and they may change from day to day in response to the perceived needs of the campaign. Modern campaigns are candidate centered, and each candidate must rely on her own resources. It is the candidate who assembles organization. It is the candidate who invents a platform. It is the candidate who produces media and buys broadcast time. It is the candidate who raises the money. It is the candidate who hires the experts who have displaced party functionaries in all these areas. It is the candidate who pays the bills. Money is the first primary. Regardless of party, the voters are allowed to choose only among the candidates who have been approved by the wealthy.

Incumbency Advantage

The incumbent is the existing holder of a political office who normally has a structural advantage over challengers during an election for multiple reasons. A race without an incumbent is known as an open seat because of the lack of incumbency advantage and they are the most contested races in an election.



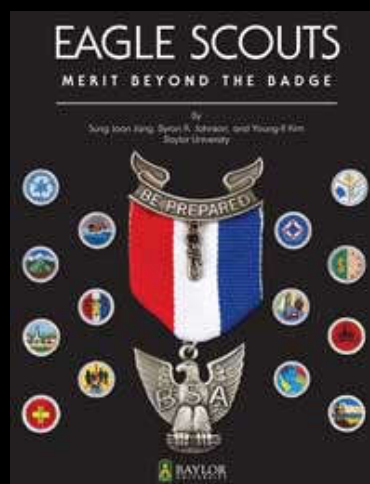
- When they realized their advantage, they sought to increase it by voting to give themselves greater resources for servicing their districts.
- More money for staff, travel, local offices, and communications.
- Constituent services; e.g. mix-up with Veteran's benefits, social security check, eagle scouts, anniversary, etc.
- Resources discourage quality challengers
- Incumbents tend to enjoy much higher levels of name recognition

Incumbency Advantage

Their service orientation has been one of the reasons for their high return rate to office.

But incumbents tend to act as though they are going to lose reelection. Incumbents win reelection because they work so hard at it.

- They work to discourage opponents.
- They are highly responsive to their constituencies. Most members spend time at home, keeping in touch and staying visible.
- They solicit and process casework.
- But also—measurement issues



The Electoral Logic of Members



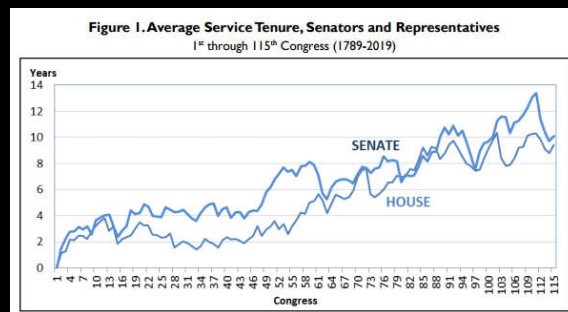
Electoral logic induces members to promote narrowly targeted programs, projects, or tax breaks for constituents without worrying about the impacts of such measures on spending or revenues.

- Pork-barrel legislation.

We see the manifestation of this logic in behavior such as logrolling.

- The legislative practice in which members of Congress agree to reciprocally support each other's vote-gaining projects or tax breaks.
- 1994 revolt by voters against collective irresponsibility.

Who Serves in Congress?



115th Congress:

Average age: 57.8 years (House); 61.8 years (Senate)

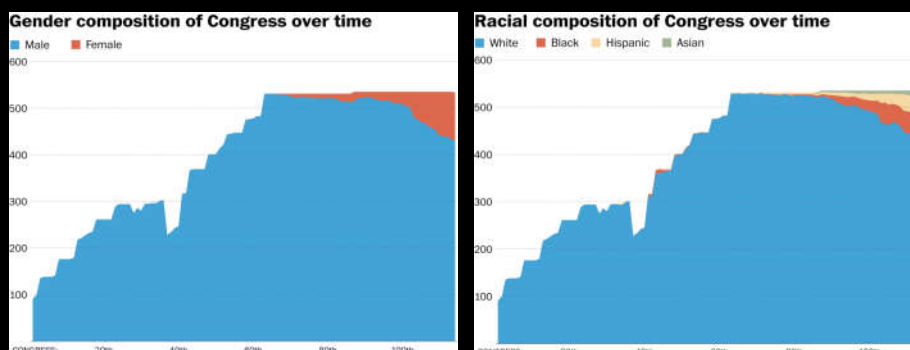
HS Diploma Only: 18 (House); 0 (Senate)

Law Degree: 167, 37.8% (House); 55, 55% (Senate)

Medical: 18 (House), 3 (Senate)

Average Length of Service: 9.4 years (House); 10.1 years (Senate)

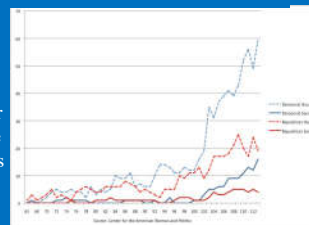
Who Serves in Congress?



The 115th Congress is on nearly 20 percent women and just over 19 percent of which is non-white of the most diverse in American history, comprised of.

Who Serves in Congress?

Michelle Swann -- Dismayed by the gridlock in Congress, some have suggested that electing more women might ease the politics of polarization because women have a more consensus-oriented leadership style. Indeed, when Diane Sawyer interviewed the women of the Senate about a year ago, many of them asserted that if women were in charge they would resolve our fiscal crises because they are more inclined to compromise. But while some individual female legislators may be more prone to compromise, the story is almost exactly the opposite: it is polarization that affects the presence and participation of women in Congress...



My research shows that women do bring a different perspective to legislating. First, based on their life experiences as women and often as mothers, female legislators are more likely to prioritize issues related to women, children, and families. They are more likely to advocate for these interests in committee deliberations and in their floor speeches. For example, women were key players in the Affordable Care Act, with Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) urging President Obama to pass a more comprehensive bill and Democratic women pressing to eliminate discrimination against women in health insurance and to include a comprehensive package of preventive benefits.

Second, women bring a distinctive perspective to policy domains beyond women's issues. In defense policy, for example, Democratic and Republican women in the Senate are more likely to support bills expanding social welfare benefits such as health and education for the troops. And the seven women on the Senate Armed Services committee have led sustained effort to reform how the military deals with sexual assault.

However, the distinctive priorities of women in Congress do not make them less partisan. In the polarized Congress, women pursue these priorities as members of partisan teams who want to enhance their party's reputation with voters and secure the majority in the next election. Many Democratic women legislators in particular hold key positions of leadership within the party, such as minority leader Pelosi and Senate Budget Chair (and former Democratic Senate Campaign Committee chair) Patty Murray (D-Wash.). These women have significant influence over party priorities and electoral strategy, as well as significant responsibilities to promote the party electorally.

Who Serves in Congress?

NEP (2011): For the first time in history, more than half the members of Congress are millionaires, according to a new analysis of financial disclosure reports conducted by the non-partisan Center for Responsive Politics.

Of the 534 current members of the House and Senate, 268 had an average net worth of \$1 million or more in 2012 – up from 257 members in 2011. The median net worth for members of the House and Senate was \$1,008,767.



The wealthiest member of Congress? That's Rep. Darrell Issa, a California Republican, who had a net worth between \$330 and \$598 million.

The reports found that there wasn't much distinction between the two parties – congressional Democrats had a median net worth of \$1.04 million as compared to about \$1 million for Republicans. In both cases, the averages are up from last year, when the numbers were \$990,000 and \$907,000, respectively.

Who Serves in Congress?

Nicholas Carnes: If millionaires in the United States formed their own political party, that party would make up just 3 percent of the country, but it would have a majority in the House of Representatives, a filibuster-proof super-majority in the Senate, a 5 to 4 majority on the Supreme Court and a man in the White House...The economic gulf between ordinary Americans and the people who represent them in the halls of power raises serious questions about our democratic process. Should we care that so many politicians are drawn from the top economic strata and so few come from the working class? Do lawmakers from different classes actually behave differently in office? In my new book, I explore how the virtual absence of an entire class of people from our political institutions affects economic policy.



What I found is squarely at odds with the rosy notion that class doesn't matter in our political institutions. Pollsters have known for decades that Americans from different classes have different views about economic issues, that working-class Americans tend to be more progressive and that the wealthy tend to want government to play a smaller role in economic affairs. *White-Collar Government* shows that politicians are no exception.

When I examined data on roll-call voting in Congress, I found clear differences between legislators from the working class and those from white-collar backgrounds. The graphic below plots the average scores that members of the 106th through 110th Congresses (1999 to 2008) received on the Chamber of Commerce's annual Legislative Report Card. Like ordinary Americans, legislators who worked primarily in white-collar jobs before getting elected to Congress — especially profit-oriented jobs in the private sector — tend to vote with business interests far more often than legislators who worked primarily in blue-collar jobs.

Challenger Entry



- What makes a “quality challenger”
- Why do obvious “losers” run?
- When do good challengers decide to run?
- Whose \$ matters more? The challenger or the incumbent?

Presidential Systems

- Primary difference between presidential and parliamentary systems is that in most parliamentary systems the executive is a member of the legislature. There are positives and negatives with both systems.
- Presidents can accumulate increased power at the expense of the legislative branch keeping checks and balances from working properly.
- Presidential systems frequently result in gridlock, when checks and balances work so well they prevent anyone from doing much of anything.



Parliamentary Systems

- Parliamentary systems are not subject to gridlock.
- The prime minister is a member of parliament and always commands the majority of votes in the legislature.
- The two primary problems in parliamentary systems are policy instability and governmental tenure.
- Policy instability arises from policy change being far easier, and too much change can sometimes be a problem for investors and businesses.
- Because the government can be dissolved at any time by a majority vote, any scandal or any policy failure can lead to an immediate change of government.



Geographic Representation

- There are two major methods for how seats are divided in a legislature: geographic representation and proportional representation.
- With geographic representation, the legislature is divided according to districts with each legislator representing a particular region.
- People can specifically identify their representative and they know who to contact with their opinions.
- Only the candidate who garners a plurality can win in the most frequently used first-past-the-post system.
- This system favors moderate political parties that can create coalitions to gain sizeable amounts of voters. The result is usually a two-party system.



Proportional Representation

- Under proportional representation (PR), people do not vote for a person.
- They vote for the political party with which they most agree. A party will get roughly the same proportion of seats in parliament as the proportion of the votes it received in the election.
- Proportional representation promotes ideological representation.
- Because people have diverse ideas, proportional representation tends to produce multi-party systems.
- However, this can lead to coalition and/or minority governments.



GA General Assembly



Bicameral Legislature with a House and a Senate.

56 State Senators elected for two-year terms.

180 State House members elected for two-year terms.

Meets the second Monday in January for a maximum of 40 legislative days.

The Logic of Elections

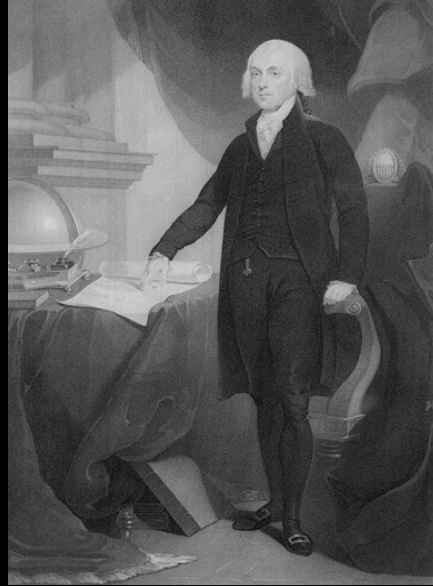
American democracy is representative democracy.

Madison emphasized the main differences between a democracy and a republic:

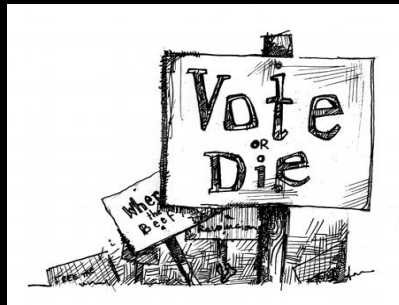
- *“The two great points of difference...are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of the country, over which the latter may be extended.”*

Delegation of authority raises the possibility of agency loss:

- one solution is to hold regular, free, competitive elections



The Logic of Elections



Elections work to ameliorate this problem:

- they give ordinary citizens a say in who represents them
- the prospect of future elections gives officeholders who want to keep or improve their jobs a motive to be responsive agents
- elections provide powerful incentives for the small set of citizens who want to replace the current officeholders to keep a close eye on representatives and to provide critical evaluations of them to the public at large

Electoral Strategies

Common features found throughout competitive campaigns:

- Candidate
- Message (i.e. “It’s the economy, stupid!”)

When they can, campaigns will test out their message by conducting numerous focus group sessions in which a small number of citizens are observed as they talk with each other about candidates, issues and events.

A candidate’s public image is important. They (especially presidential candidates) need to maintain it in the face of heavy scrutinizing by the media.

Televised debates present challenges—and front-runners will often try to minimize them as the risk of damaging missteps typically outweighs the potential gains.



Going Negative...



Campaign messages emphasizing one candidate’s personal suitability for the job invite rebuttals from the other side.

Negative campaigning, pointed personal criticism of the other candidate, is thus a normal, if sometimes ugly, component of the electoral process. Why do candidates “go negative?” Because it works. They exploit uncertainty about a given candidate.

Ground Game

Going door to door has become a less popular source of mobilizing voters than television advertising, but is still frequently employed.

Most campaigns take advantage of microtargeting to identify sympathetic voters.

This involves massive data collection efforts and often purchasing expensive datasets.



How is Campaign Money Spent?

Only a small portion of funds is spent on traditional campaigning (direct candidate-voter interaction). Today's campaigns are made-for-television productions.

Often as large as one quarter of a campaign's money goes to overhead costs: staff salaries, office and furniture rental, computers, telephones, travel, legal, etc.

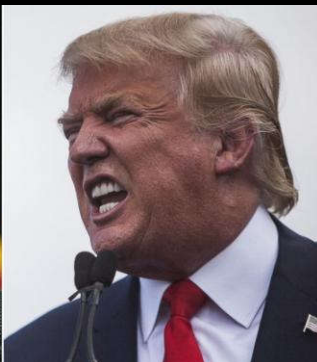


Incumbents and non-incumbents have somewhat different spending patterns.

- weak opposition leaves incumbents free to spend relatively less on reaching voters or not to spend any money at all
- Challengers spent about two-thirds of their funds on activities designed to reach voters directly.

What factors make for a quality challenger? Name recognition, previous electoral experience, money, personal characteristics.

How is Campaign Money Spent in Presidential Elections?



Presidential candidates spend money based on their Electoral College strategy.

Since one needs to piece together enough state victories to win at least 270 electoral voters, the strategy is as follows:

1. Concentrate on states that polls indicate could go either way and that are populous enough to be worth winning (Ohio in 2004, for example).
2. Ignore states that are locked up by either side.

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

A good candidate and a good message are not enough. Without money, the voters do not see the candidate or hear the message.

In contemporary, candidate-centered campaigns, candidates (as opposed to the party organizations) must assemble their own campaign teams, raise their own money, hire consultants and specialists, and design and execute their own campaign strategies.



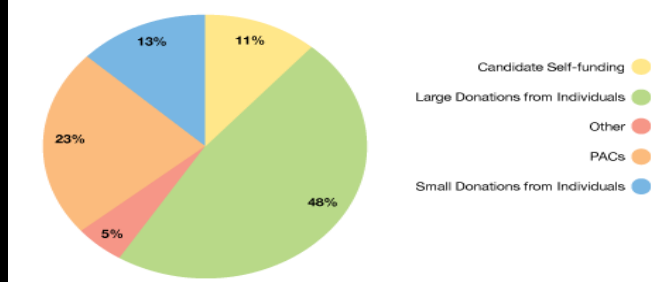
Taxpayers partially finance presidential campaigns, but most of the money spent on congressional elections comes from private sources.

Privately financed elections inevitably raise two related problems for American democracy:

- Democracy demands political equality. But money is distributed very unequally, thus its role in electoral politics threatens democratic equality.
- Privately financed elections raise the suspicion that elected officials will serve as the agents of their contributors rather than their constituents.

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

Source of Funds to 2010 Congressional Candidates



Congressional candidates raise money from four sources:

- Individual contributors
- Political action committees
- Party committees
- Themselves and their families

Also independent expenditures from groups like Super PAC's, 527s, etc...

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

Pursuit of money can subvert the very purpose of elections. Before the 1970s campaign money was effectively unregulated.

As campaigns became more candidate-centered and broadcast campaigning became the standard, costs increased the demand for money, but many began to fear that winners would favor contributors over constituents.



Congress responded to this situation with the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, extensively amended in 1974.

- Law provided partial public funding for presidential campaigns and required full public reporting of, and strict limits on, all contributions and expenditures in federal elections
- established the Federal Election Commission to enforce the law and to collect and publish detailed information on campaign contributions and expenditures

Campaign Money and Its Regulation



Keating Five: Occurs during the savings and loan scandal

Keating is being investigated by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board

He had given a ton of money to these five senators (and probably more)

Asks them to intervene on his behalf

They have a couple meetings with FHLBB, ask them to either charge Keating or back off.



Campaign Money and Its Regulation



Buckley v. Valeo (1976)

Question(s): Does the FEC Act's spending restrictions violate the First Amendment's freedom of speech and association clauses?

Holding (per curiam) -> (1) restrictions on contributions do not violate the First Amendment. (2) restrictions on expenditures do, however.



Dissent (Burger) -> This is idiotic. There is no difference between contributions and expenditures. Void the entire law.

Dissent (White) -> This is idiotic. There is no difference between contributions and expenditures. Uphold the entire law.

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

Concerned that spending limits were choking off traditional local party activity in federal elections, Congress liberalized FECA in 1979.

- this amendment to the act allowed unrestricted contributions and spending for state and local party-building and get-out-the-vote activities (soft money)
- monies regulated through the law by the Federal Election Commission are known as hard money
- 1996 Court decision gave party organizations the right to unfettered independent spending as well.



In March of 2002 Congress passed a law prohibiting parties from raising and spending soft money for federal candidates:

- the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act

Campaign Money and Its Regulation



Outcome of this law:

- Former soft money donors rerouted money into so-called 537 committees and 501(c) committees (“charitable” groups under the tax code who can finance campaigns if they maintain the fiction that they are merely informing voters, not advocating the election or defeat of particular candidates).

The Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act – Much of the Act was upheld in *McConnell v. the FEC* (2004), however, BCRA’s attempt to limit independent campaigning by 527 groups was struck down by the Supreme Court in *FEC v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.* (2007)

In 2010 (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*) the Court overturned precedent to invalidate any restriction on independent campaign spending by any organizations, including corporations and labor unions, based on First Amendment rights.

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

“Justices, 5-4, Reject Corporate Spending Limit.” Adam Liptak, [The New York Times](#), 1/21/2010

Overruling two important precedents about the First Amendment rights of corporations, a bitterly divided Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that the government may not ban political spending by corporations in candidate elections.

The 5-to-4 decision was a vindication, the majority said, of the First Amendment’s most basic free speech principle — that the government has no business regulating political speech. The dissenters said that allowing corporate money to flood the political marketplace would corrupt democracy.

The ruling represented a sharp doctrinal shift, and it will have major political and practical consequences. Specialists in campaign finance law said they expected the decision to reshape the way elections were conducted. Though the decision does not directly address them, its logic also applies to the labor unions that are often at political odds with big business.

President Obama called it “a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.”



Campaign Money and Its Regulation

“Do Unlimited Campaign Contributions Help Republicans?” Lee Drutman, [The Monkey Cage](#), 1/25/10

Will the Citizens United decision help Republicans more, since they’ve traditionally raised more money from corporations, who can now spend unlimited amounts?

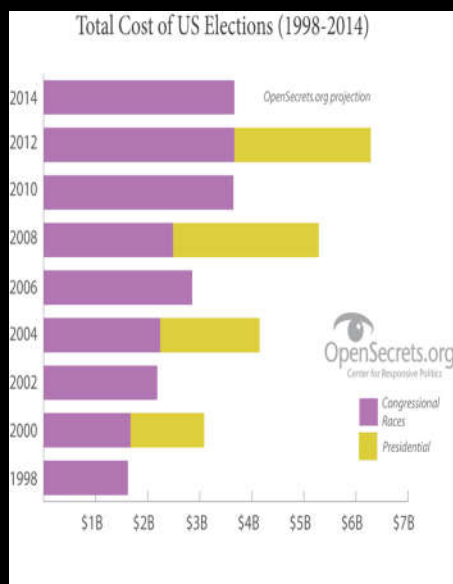


As the New York Times notes, 24 states ban or restrict corporate contributions, and 26 allow unlimited contributions. So do Republicans do better in those states with unlimited contributions? One way to assess this is to run some very simple regressions. We would expect that the Democrats’ share of seats in state legislatures in 2009 would be strongly predicted by Obama’s vote share in 2008. It is.

But what if we added a dummy variable for whether a state bans or restricts campaign contributions into this regression? In state houses, having a ban or restriction improves the Democrat share of seats by three percentage points on average, but the result is not statistically significant ($b=.03$; $se=.03$). In state senates, it has no effect ($b=.01$; $se=.04$).

This provides a cautionary note to fears that unlimited contributions will inevitably create a partisan bias in election outcomes. But Lee notes: On the other hand, there may be an effect on the policy positions of different parties, particularly the Democrats. This will definitely be worth watching.

Campaign Money and Its Regulation



The flow of campaign money has continued to outpace inflation.

- total funding from all sources for the general election campaigns for president rose from \$453 million in 1996 to \$676 million in 2000, and to \$1.262 billion in 2004. Over 2 billion in 2008 and 2012.

Spending in House and Senate campaigns also has continued to grow, rising by an average of about 9 percent in the House and 12 percent in the Senate from one election year to the next:

- average winning House campaign in 2012: \$1.7 million; average winning Senate campaign in 2012: \$10.5 million

Campaign Money and Its Regulation

Contributors tend to favor winners:

- thus incumbents generally are favored and **challengers** have a more difficult time

Candidates for open seats are usually in a much better position to raise funds:

- contributors correctly see open contests as their best opportunity for taking a seat from the other party.



Money is not likely to win a presidential election for someone, but it does help the candidates get their message out. The more uncertain the election (the less information available about the candidates), the more likely money can matter.

In House and Senate races, money (primarily the lack of it) is frequently the deciding factor.

A Side Note: Endogeneity



Variables are said to be **endogenous** when they are predicted by other variables in the model.

What does this mean?

Think about elections. If I was to run a simple model predicting a congressional candidate's vote share using the amount of money spent, what would that model show?

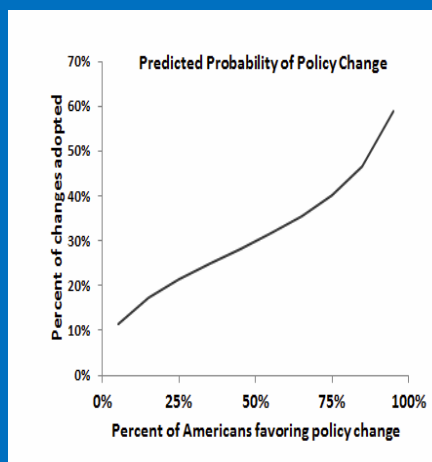
- Jeff Sessions (R-AL) \$3,906,680 – 63% of the vote
- Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) \$18,045,811 – 50% of the vote

Economic Inequality and Political Power

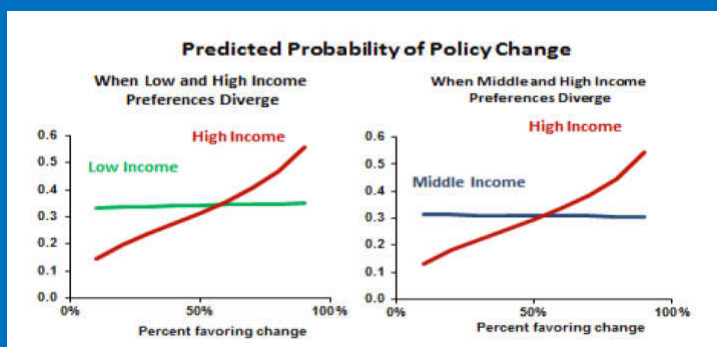
“Economic Inequality and Political Power (Part 1 of 3),
Martin Gilens, [The Atlantic](#), 8/3/2012

In a democracy, all citizens—the rich, middle-class, poor alike—must have some ability to influence what their government does. Few people would expect that influence to be identical: those with higher incomes and better connections will always be more influential. But if influence becomes so unequal that the wishes of most citizens are ignored most of the time, a country's claim to be a democracy is cast in doubt. And that is exactly what I found in my analyses of the link between public preferences and government policy in the U.S.

In my recent book, *Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*, I examined thousands of proposed policy changes over the past four decades. I compared the strength of support (or opposition) of survey respondents at different income levels with actual policy outcomes in the years following the survey. As expected, greater public support increased the likelihood of a proposed policy change being adopted, as shown in the first chart below.



Economic Inequality and Political Power



In many areas of government policy, the preferences of lower and higher income Americans are similar, and in these cases, the strength of the policy/preference link is necessarily similar as well. I found little difference by income level for about half the proposed policy changes in my dataset, including most aspects of defense, environmental policy, the war on drugs, family leave, and even antipoverty policy (where, for example, the affluent and the poor alike support strengthening work requirements, job training, and child care for welfare recipients).

When preferences across income groups do diverge, however, I found that the association with policy outcomes persisted for the affluent but disappeared for the middle class and the poor, as the second chart shows. (I used the 90th, 50th and 10th income percentiles to represent these three groups.)

Elections Clips

[Martin Attacks Chambliss](#)
[Chambliss Attacks Martin](#)
[Clinton – Its 3 am](#)
[SNL – 3 am](#)
[Clint Webb for Senate](#)
[SNL—Undecided Voters](#)
[Daily Show—McConnelling](#)
[Lying Ted](#)



[Daisy Girl](#)
[Daily Show—Not Coordinating with Colbert](#)
[Dale Peterson – We are better than that!](#)
[Thomas Jefferson Attack Ad](#)
[McCain Approves](#)
[Daily Show: Our New Election Economy](#)
[Demon Sheep](#)

Who Uses the Right to Vote?

Most of us agree that the right to vote is the very essence of democracy.

Yet millions of Americans do not vote. Is this irrational? Paradoxical?

- not when you consider that the benefits of elections are collective benefits
- people enjoy the payoffs even if they have not helped to produce them by voting
- a single vote is not likely to make much of a difference. And voting is costly!
- makes sense to demand the right to vote. But rational not to use it



Who Uses the Right to Vote?

Amazing outcome is that so many people actually do turn out to vote!

- Freerider problems are overcome.

Same logic applies to gathering information about the competing candidates and parties if a person chooses to vote.

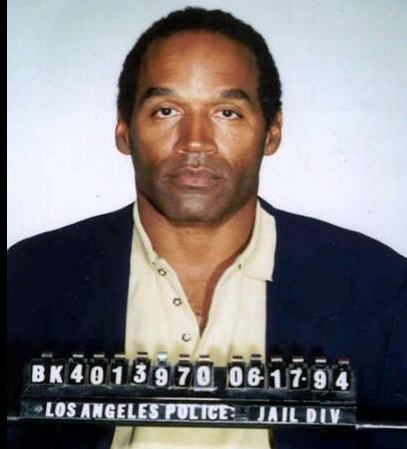


The share of eligible voters who go to the polls has varied widely over American history.

The most important contemporary change was the sharp decline in voter turnout between 1960 and 1972:

- since then, an average of only about 58 percent of the eligible electorate has bothered to register and vote in presidential elections
- even the hotly contested 2008 race inspired a turnout of only about 61 percent

Who Uses the Right to Vote?



A word of caution: the measure matters!

What's wrong with simply calculating voter turnout by dividing the total number of votes cast by the total number voting age residents? What affect would this have?

Who Uses the Right to Vote?

Age and education have the strongest influence on voting.

African Americans and Hispanics are less likely to vote (taking other factors into account), as are people who live in southern states or those that border southern states.

People with deeper roots in their community vote more often as do those with internal and external efficacy.

Turnout is higher in areas where there are fewer barriers to registration.



Who Uses the Right to Vote?



Turnout is higher among people with stronger partisan views and electoral preferences.

If one lives in an area with more active parties and more competitive elections, there is also an increased probability of voting.

In terms of gender, men and women are equally likely to turn out and vote.

The cynical and distrustful are as likely to vote as anyone else

- contradicts a popular explanation for the decline in participation—that it resulted from an increase in public cynicism and mistrust since 1960



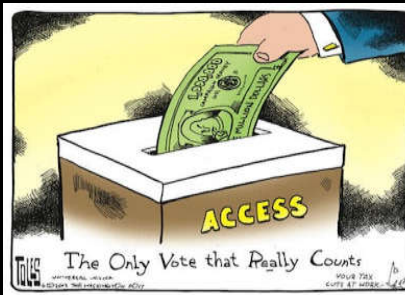
Who Uses the Right to Vote?

Voting and other forms of political participation incur costs but produce benefits.

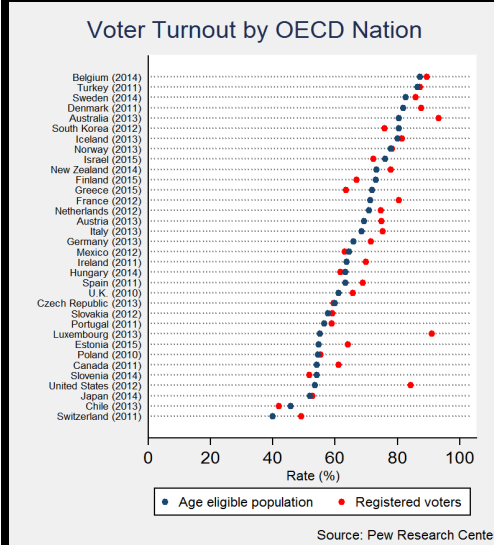
People participate when they can meet the costs and appreciate the benefits.

Those with money, education, experience, free time, and self-confidence find it easier to meet the costs, while those with a greater psychological stake receive greater benefits.

Voting therefore rational for those who derive personal satisfaction from going to the polls. Expressing themselves through voting typically outweighs the modest costs of casting a ballot



Who Uses the Right to Vote?



Differences in participation cannot be explained completely by individual differences in resources and psychological involvement, however.

Institutional contexts (variation in registration laws, for example) affect turnout as well.

Social circumstances also play a crucial part in stimulating turnout:

- social connections help with efficacy levels, information, and contact with activists.
- often people participate because they have been asked to do so.

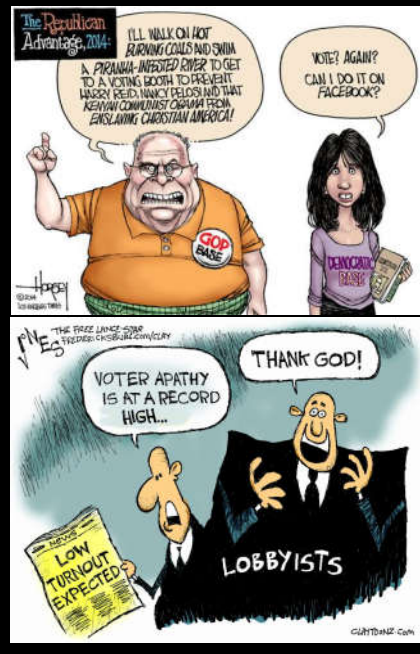
The Non-Representative Electorate

The assorted demographic and institutional influences on voting produce an electorate (the voting public) in which:

- Wealthy, well-educated, older white people are overrepresented.
- Poor, uneducated, young, and nonwhite people are underrepresented.

People like this are more likely to be mobilized by parties, interest groups, and campaigns:

- they are targeted as the cheapest to reach and the easiest to mobilize
- “the pressures that political leaders face to use their own resources most effectively build a class bias into their efforts to mobilize.”—Rosenstone and Hansen



Variation in Turnout over Time

Earlier discussion focused on the factors that explain variations in participation among individuals, but what accounts for variations in turnout over time?

Puzzling: While voter registration laws have eased and educational attainment has increased, why has voter turnout declined over time? These changes should have increased turnout.

While these two trends have had a positive effect on turnout, other factors have had the opposite effect:

- extending the vote to eighteen-to-twenty-year-olds
- lessening of community roots (increased mobility), lessening of political efficacy, lessening of partisan attachment



Variation in Turnout over Time



The major reasons for the decline, however, are institutional. Fewer people are being mobilized by parties, campaigns, and interest groups:

- Most parties and candidates have replaced labor-intensive door-to-door campaigns with money-intensive television and direct-mail campaigns.
- focus scarce resources on tightest races
- diminishment of Civil Rights movement to mobilize black voters
- diminishment of labor union movement and their efforts to union workers and their families

Turnout is directly affected by the activities of political entrepreneurs pursuing offices or policies.

When their goals and tactics change, so does the level of electoral participation.

Voter ID Laws

“Do Voter ID Laws Depress Turnout?” John Sides, [Brennan Center for Justice](#), 10/3/2011

A new Brennan Center study—which is getting front-page news coverage—attempts to count the number of citizens that could be adversely affected by new laws requiring voters to have photo identification. But do these laws actually reduce voter turnout?

In my 2007 post on this subject, I noted two studies. One determined that immigrants and ethnic minorities would be less likely to have these forms of identification. A second—available here at the Brennan Center’s website—found that citizens in states that required photo identification reported turning out at a rate 2 points lower than citizens in other states.

But other studies do not find any negative effect of identification laws on turnout. Here is a one. And here is another, by Robert Erikson and Lorraine Minnite. I’ll quote from their conclusions:

The moral is simple. We should be wary of claims—from all sides of the controversy—regarding turnout effects from voter ID laws... The effects may be there. By all tests there is nothing to suggest otherwise. But the data are not up to the task of making a compelling statistical argument.

The Brennan Center has a list of studies here.

None of this is to say that voter identification laws are unproblematic. It is just difficult to prove that they are associated with lower turnout.



“Voter ID, which is gonna allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania, done.” —*Pennsylvania House Majority Leader Mike Turzai (R)*

How Do Voters Decide?



Acquire information to reduce uncertainty.
Cues and shortcuts through:

- Past performance
- Opinion leaders
- Personal characteristics of the candidate
- Party label

Free information through the press, social media and friends.

How Do Voters Decide?



Assessing past performance.

- Evaluating incumbents. “Are you better off now than you were four years ago?”
- Role of the economy.
- Utilize direct experience/experience of others via the media

How Do Voters Decide?



2008 Election—Family’s financial situation?



Total	Obama (D)	McCain (R)
Better (37%)	37%	60%
Worse (42%)	71%	28%
Same (34%)	45%	53%

How Do Voters Decide?

Comparing future policy options.

- Focus on issues: Guns, abortion, tax cuts, civil rights, etc.

Depends (single-issue voters versus those who make decisions based on bundles of issues).

Voters may take cues from opinion leaders.

Voters also make predictions based on the candidates' personal characteristics:

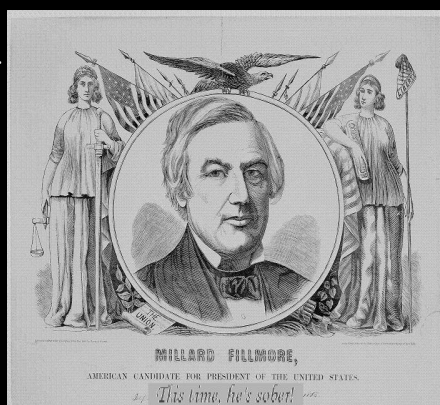
- one set of personal considerations includes qualities such as competence, experience, honesty, knowledge, and leadership skills



How Do Voters Decide?

The most important information shortcut voters use to make predictions is party label.

The party label provides useful information for both: performance voting (voting for the party in control, or “in-party” when one thinks the government is performing well; voting for the outs when one thinks the government is performing poorly) and issue voting (the typical positions of Republicans and Democrats; the parties differ in predictable ways on many issues).



Most voters simplify their electoral evaluations and decisions by developing a consistent bias in favor of the candidates of one of the major parties, making the party label the most influential “endorsement” of all.

How Do Voters Decide?

2008 Election—By party affiliation

Total	Obama (D)	McCain (R)
Democrat (39%)	89%	10%
Republican (32%)	9%	90%
Independent (29%)	52%	44%



Elections Revisited

Does money contributed to elections provide benefits to those who give?

- Access: yes.
- Policy favoritism: no indisputable evidence, but plenty of suggestive evidence.

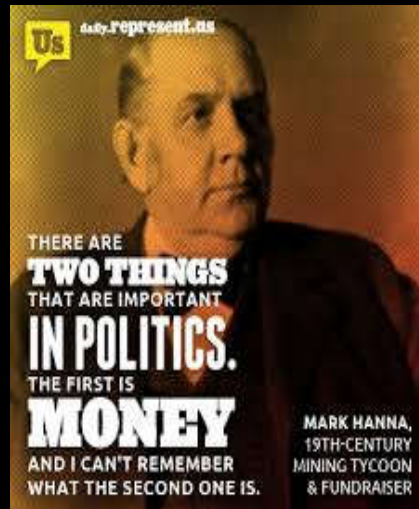
Suggested reforms:

- Spending ceilings.
- Limiting donations and eliminating PACs.
- Public funding.

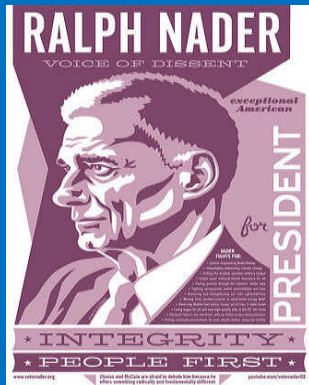
These all have their own problems, trade-offs. And there is no consensus on what would be best reform.

- Ultimate barrier: First Amendment.

Politicians HATE raising money.



Third Parties and Partisan Realignment



What drives the ideological movement of parties?

What effects do third parties have in American elections?

Miller and Schofield (2003, 245): “Politics may appear to be characterized by a single cleavage, but this is because the two parties [led by ideological activists] themselves ‘organize’ politics along the dimension that separates them. Party disagreement on one dimension of politics makes that dimension more salient, while the other dimension is obscured by tacit party agreement.”

Third Parties and Partisan Realignment

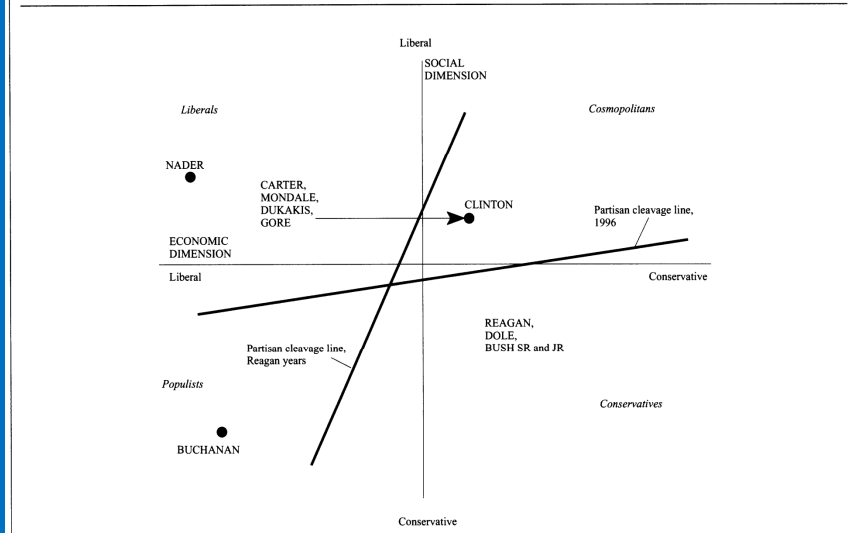
TABLE 1. Reversal of Partisan Presidential Coalitions, 1896 to 2000

	Democratic 1896	Republican 1896
Democratic 2000	<i>Washington</i>	Connecticut Delaware Illinois Maryland Massachusetts Michigan Minnesota New Jersey New York Pennsylvania Rhode Island
Republican 2000	<i>Colorado</i> <i>Florida</i> <i>Idaho</i> <i>Kansas</i> <i>Kentucky</i> <i>Montana</i> <i>Nebraska</i> <i>S. Dakota</i> <i>Tennessee</i> <i>Utah</i> <i>Virginia</i> <i>Wyoming</i>	W. Virginia <i>Indiana</i> <i>New Hampshire</i> <i>N. Dakota</i> <i>Ohio</i>
	23	22

Note: Italicized states are those that were Republican in 1960. Boldfaced states are those that were Democratic in 1960. $\chi^2 = 24.91$ with 3 df ($p < .005$); $r^2 = .55$.
^a Although Kennedy outpolled Nixon in Mississippi (31% to 25%), a plurality voted for electors who cast their electoral votes for segregationist Harry Byrd.

Third Parties and Partisan Realignment

FIGURE 3. Possible Candidate Positions, 1976–2000



Third Parties and Partisan Realignment

To maximize their vote share relative to their opponents, parties engage in “flanking” maneuvers.

For the modern Republican party, this would mean picking up economic liberals/social moderates.

Third parties – two types:

Dragging (like Ralph Nader) – encourage the party to move back to an old position.

Leading (like George Wallace) – encourage the party to adopt a new position.



“There’s not a dime’s worth of difference between the Democrat and Republican parties.” – Former Governor and Presidential Candidate George Wallace (D-AL)

Conclusion



Questions? Comments? Angry rants? Inspirational thoughts?

Have a great weekend!