

Arizona PIRG

Education Fund

Big Money Dominates in Congressional Primaries

In the wake of the Supreme Court's decisions undermining campaign finance rules, most notably *Citizens United*, our elections have become increasingly dominated by large donors, at the expense of ordinary Americans.

Primary elections suffer from the same disparity between big money and small money: even leaving aside Super-PAC-dominated outside spending, which is even more tilted towards the biggest players, candidates relying on small contributions from ordinary citizens are often at a disadvantage compared to those relying on large, often out-of-district donors, or able to self-finance.

Our analysis of fund-raising data from 2014's congressional primaries examines the way these dynamics are playing out state by state across the country. We looked at two key factors: first, the proportion of all candidate contributions coming from donations of \$1,000 or larger; and second, the number of large donors whose contributions matched all donations by small donors (those giving less than \$200), combined.

While some states show markedly more inequity than others, the picture painted by the data is of a primary money race where large donors carry more weight than ordinary Americans. Nationwide, just under two-thirds of all candidate contributions came from the largest donors (those giving over \$1,000). And fewer than 5,500 large donors matched the primary contributions coming from at least 440,000 donors nationwide.

For our elections to truly reflect the principle of one person, one vote, without deep-pocketed spenders able to drown out the voices of ordinary Americans, we must adopt common-sense reforms to set reasonable limits on big money, and amplify the impact of small donors. Fortunately, there is a strong and growing movement to overturn the *Citizens United* decision and reverse the wrong-headed ruling that money is speech and corporations are people. Already 16 states and over 550 communities have gone on the record calling for a constitutional amendment to do exactly that.

There are also successful models already in place to empower small donors to allow their voices to play a more central role in our democracy, such as providing tax credits and public matching

funds for small donations. For example, in New York City's 2013 City Council campaigns, small donors were responsible for 61% of participating candidates' contributions, when funds from a matching program are included. In 2009, all but two of the 51 winning candidates in the City Council elections participated in the small donor program, proving that candidates are able to raise the money they need to win without relying on large-dollar contributions. Just a few weeks ago, Montgomery County, Maryland, became the latest community to adopt one of these programs.

If primaries simply select the candidate with the most appeal to big donors, our democracy will suffer. Reforms are needed to make sure all of our voices count.

Methodology

This analysis was performed in partnership with Demos. Our analysis is based on federal campaign contribution data from the Center for Responsive Politics, which are in turn based on data from the Federal Election Commission. We define "small donor" as those giving less than \$200, and "large donor" as those giving more than \$1,000. Because Louisiana holds its primary on Election Day, it is not included in this analysis. The data are complete as of this writing, but because of the ongoing nature of campaign finance reporting, the final numbers may change slightly once the election concludes and all candidate reporting is complete.

Table 1: Percent of Primary Contributions From Donors Giving \$1,000 or More

State	Percent coming from \$1k+ donors	Place		State	Percent coming from \$1k+ donors	Place
TX	80%	1		OH	65%	26
MO	78%	2		CO	64%	27
TN	77%	3		NE	64%	28
AL	77%	4		IL	64%	29
NY	76%	5		KS	64%	30
WY	74%	6		KY	63%	31
AR	74%	7		MT	63%	32
SC	73%	8		MD	63%	33
MS	73%	9		WI	62%	34
RI	72%	10		ME	62%	35
GA	72%	11		NM	62%	36
MI	72%	12		ND	62%	37
VT	72%	13		ID	62%	38
VA	72%	14		IA	61%	39
IN	71%	15		FL	57%	40
CT	71%	16		WA	57%	41
PA	69%	17		AZ	56%	42
HI	69%	18		DE	54%	43
AK	68%	19		NC	52%	44
OK	68%	20		NH	49%	45
NV	67%	21		SD	46%	46
CA	67%	22		OR	45%	47
MA	66%	23		MN	39%	48
WV	66%	24		UT	33%	49
NJ	66%	25		US	65%	N/A

States are ranked by the share of primary contributions coming from large (\$1,000 or more) donors.

Table 2: Number of Large Donors Required to Match All Small (\$200 or Less) Contributions

State	Number of Large Donors Required to Match all Small Donors	Place	State	Number of Large Donors Required to Match all Small Donors	Place
TX	1	1	WA	259	26
MI	2	2	CT	106	27
GA	47	3	WY	8	28
OK	32	4	NM	302	29
NY	103	5	FL	1,217	30
AL	31	6	MD	122	31
PA	129	7	WI	251	32
TN	78	8	MT	294	33
MO	23	9	NJ	383	34
CA	864	10	ID	136	35
IN	63	11	OH	1,052	36
IA	303	12	ME	255	37
IL	426	13	NE	436	38
CO	457	14	NC	1,567	39
HI	71	15	KY	1,660	40
AR	197	16	AK	271	41
MA	230	17	NH	1,512	42
NV	54	18	ND	54	43
VA	513	19	OR	1,058	44
SC	187	20	DE	9	45
WV	230	21	SD	942	46
KS	210	22	VT	1	47
RI	29	23	MN	8,062	48
MS	143	24	UT	1,700	49
AZ	446	25	US	5,485	N/A

States are ranked according to the ratio of the number of large donors matching all small donor contributions, to the minimum number of small donors responsible for those contributions.