

Small Donors A Small Factor In Chicago Mayoral Race

As we approach ten years since *Citizens United v. FEC*, the growing dominance of a small group of big donors in Illinois elections is undeniable. From City Council to Governor, political campaigns are increasingly fueled by a small number of donors who make contributions far larger than average voters can afford. Increasingly, to run a competitive race, a candidate cannot rely primarily on small donors, but instead needs to draw on the small number of large donors who can afford to make big contributions, from their personal wealth, or from the war chests of established political players.

As the presence of big money in politics grows, the voices of small donors are increasingly stifled. Large donors not only drown out small donors through the sheer size of their contributions, their amplified influence is felt in other aspects of the political process as well.¹ As a result, ordinary Americans may feel their contributions are unlikely to make a difference. Fewer than 10 percent of Americans have ever given to political candidates at any level.²

This dynamic permeates elections at all levels in Illinois. In the 2018 Illinois gubernatorial election, two self-funding candidates broke previous campaign finance records -- set just four years earlier -- but big money played an outsized role in races for other statewide offices and for seats in the General Assembly. We have previously documented this in the [race for Governor, Attorney General](#), and state legislative races ([part I](#), [part II](#)) and [recent analysis](#) by Reform for Illinois came to similar findings.

With Rahm Emanuel not seeking reelection, a crowded field of fourteen candidates is on the ballot for Chicago Mayor. A wider field of candidates has not, however, led to a broader, more diverse pool of campaign donors. Nor has the emergence of online small donor fundraising seen at the national level occurred in the Mayoral race.

This report analyzes campaign contributions made to the campaign committees of the fourteen Chicago mayoral candidates. We analyzed quarterly and itemized reports campaign committees made to the Illinois State Board of Elections between January 1, 2018 to February 19, 2019 -- one week before the municipal election.

The picture is clear. Current campaign finance laws force candidates to raise the majority of their resources from a small pool of large donors, whether individual and corporate donors, campaign committees affiliated with party leaders, or labor unions, simply to compete. Small donors have little to no voice in the process.

¹ Page, Benjamin I, Scholars Strategy Network, "How Money Corrupts American Democracy," Contribution, Retrieved on [February 21, 2019 from https://scholars.org/how-money-corrupts-american-politics](https://scholars.org/how-money-corrupts-american-politics).

² Center for Responsive Politics, "The Top Ten Things Every Voter Should Know About Money-in-Politics," OpenSecrets, archived on 22 January 2018 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20180123011055/http://www.opensecrets.org/resources/dollarocracy/04.php>.

Accounting for all candidates combined, our analysis found:

- 97 percent of the money contributed came from contributions of \$1,000 or more.
- Less than 1 percent of the money contributed came from contributions of \$150 or less.
- The top unique individual donor gave nine times as much as all 1,000-plus small donors combined.³
- More than one-third of all money contributed came from outside of Chicago (37.5 percent)

We analyze this data in aggregate, combining all campaigns, because doing so demonstrates the systemic nature of big money dominance. We also analyzed contributions by candidate and found big money donors provided the largest source of campaign funding for all but one of the fourteen candidates.

Beyond analyzing the size of contributions, we also broke out some contributions by source, separating contributions from labor unions and other political campaign committees. It is important to note that although the contributions of unions are typically large, these contributions can be viewed as “small donor,” as those funds come from pooling small contributions from members.

Candidate	Total for Contributions at less than \$150	% of Contributions at less than \$150	Total for Contributions at least \$150 but less than \$1000	% of Contributions at least \$150 but less than \$1000	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Gery Chico	\$17,127.00	0.64%	\$103,770.00	3.87%	\$2,560,408.00	95.49%
Bill Daley	\$4,864.00	0.06%	\$43,051.00	0.57%	\$7,512,966.00	99.37%
Amara Enyia	\$13,700.11	2.13%	\$7,310.71	1.14%	\$622,000.00	96.73%
Bob Fioretti	\$0.00	0.00%	\$1,550.00	0.26%	\$603,650.00	99.74%
La Shawn Ford	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	0.00%
Jerry Joyce	\$11,907.32	0.47%	\$9,960.00	0.40%	\$2,498,450.00	99.13%
John Kozlar	\$15.00	1.48%	\$999.00	98.52%	\$0.00	0.00%
Lori Lightfoot	\$45,748.00	3.00%	\$200,056.50	13.11%	\$1,280,478.69	83.90%
Garry McCarthy	\$33,869.00	2.65%	\$123,922.00	9.69%	\$1,120,928.00	87.66%
Susana Mendoza	\$1,421.00	0.06%	\$6,250.00	0.25%	\$2,507,250.00	99.69%
Toni Preckwinkle	\$13,616.00	0.36%	\$69,872.00	1.86%	\$3,674,866.67	97.78%
Neal Sales-Griffin	\$667.19	0.74%	\$4,027.96	4.49%	\$85,087.48	94.77%
Paul Vallas	\$14,189.00	1.33%	\$49,806.00	4.66%	\$1,005,250.00	94.01%
Willie Wilson	\$6,407.00	0.45%	\$8,975.00	0.63%	\$1,403,706.16	98.92%

Of course, candidates who raise and spend the most money do not always win, but increasingly candidates must raise significant amounts of large contributions in order to remain competitive.

³ It has been reported that Ken Griffin, CEO of Citadel, contributed an additional \$1 million to Bill Daley’s campaign. This new donation has not yet been reflected in campaign filings (campaigns have one week to file A-1’s). Once this additional \$1 million has been added, Griffin will be the new top individual donor. With current contribution values, once the new top, large donor, Griffin will have spent 12 times as much as all small donors combined.

The withdrawal of 23 year-old mayoral candidate Ja'Mal Green presents perhaps the clearest example of this. Green withdrew from the race in December after Willie Wilson challenged Green's candidate petition signatures. Facing these challenges, Green cited a lack of funding and resources as the primary motivation behind his decision to withdraw.⁴

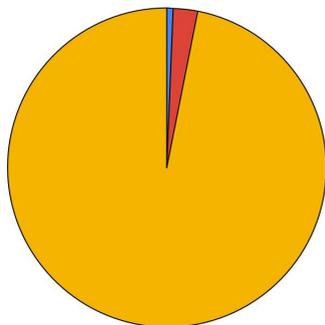
The emphasis on large contributions means candidates are sorted and filtered not by their support from voters, but by their connections to big money--whether through political connections or their ability to raise contributions in large sums from a small, elite pool of donors. This "money primary" leaves candidates who lack this political access, or whose platform does not appeal to the small pool of large donors, unable to compete.

Aggregate Analysis

In the 2019 Chicago Mayoral Race, big money accounts for 97 percent of campaign contributions given across all candidates in this race, while contributions from small donors accounts for less than 1 percent.

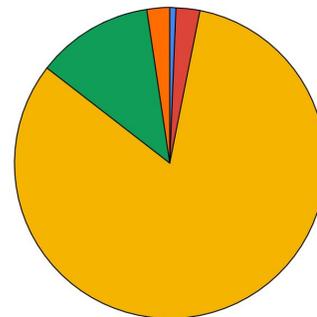
Money Contributions by Size

- Less than \$150 (0.65%)
- \$150 to < \$1000 (2.6%)
- \$1000+ (96.75%)



Money Contributed by Size & Source

- Less than \$150 (.65%)
- \$150 to < \$1000 (2.6%)
- \$1000+ from Individuals (84.32%)
- \$1000+ from Labor (10.76%)
- \$1000+ from Party/Candidate PACs (2.1%)



Breaking down big money contributions across all candidates by source shows:

- 82% - large contributions from individual large donors
- 12% - large contributions from labor unions
- 2% - large contributions from political committees affiliated with parties or elected officials

Only three candidates received large contributions from labor unions, whereas five candidates benefited from large contributions from political committees affiliated with a party or other elected official.

⁴ Blakely, Derek, 2018 Dec 31, CBS Chicago, "Ja'Mal Green Blames Funding, Ballot Access Requirements For Dropping Out

Of Race For Chicago Mayor," Retrieved on February 21, 2019 at

<https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2018/12/31/jamal-green-blames-funding-ballot-access-requirements-for-droppin-g-out-of-race-for-chicago-mayor/>

ABC7 Chicago, 2018 Dec 31, "Candidate Ja'Mal Green backs out of mayoral race," Retrieved on February 21, 2019 at

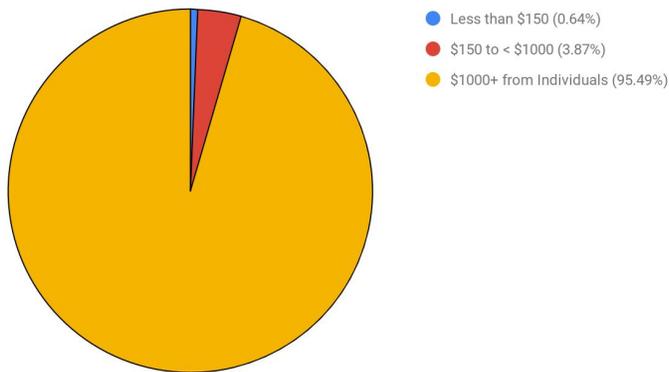
<https://abc7chicago.com/politics/-candidate-jamal-green-backs-out-of-mayoral-race/4995411/>

Every single candidate who reported funds for this race raised large contributions from individual donors, with the exception of Kozlar who was just a dollar short at \$999 raised from a single large donor. LaShawn Ford’s mayoral campaign committee did not report any campaign contributions.

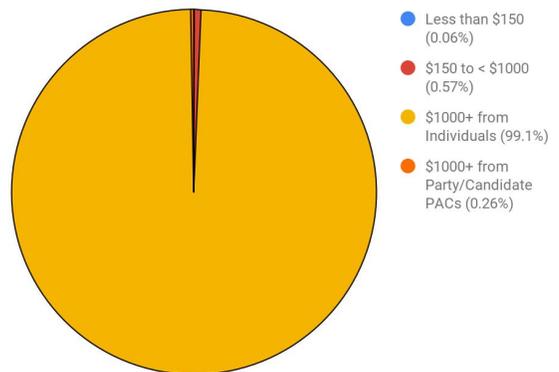
Candidate Analysis

All candidates relied on big money for the majority of their campaign contributions, with 97 percent of contributions across all candidates coming in amounts of \$1000 or more.

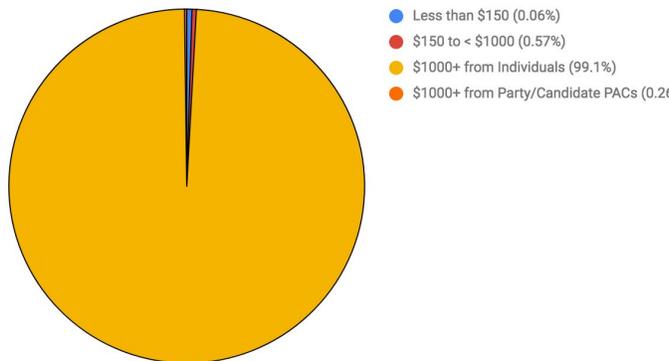
GERY CHICO - Contributions by Size & Source



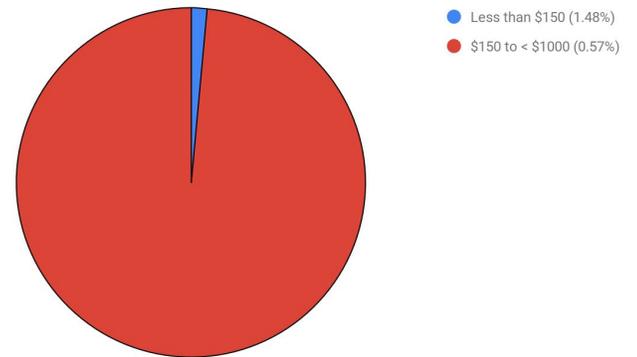
Bill Daley - Contributions by Size & Source



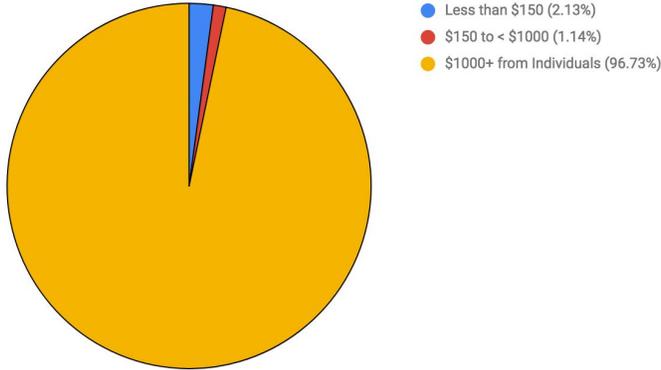
JERRY JOYCE - Contributions by Size & Source



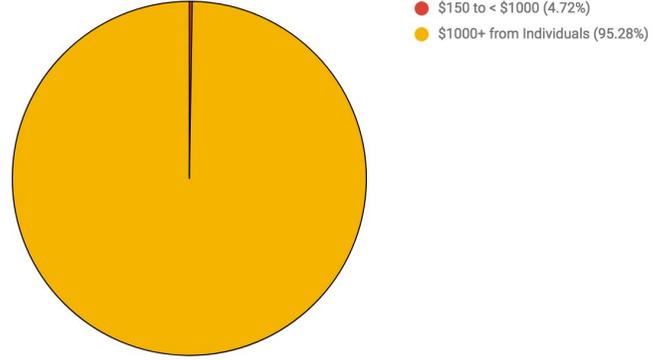
JOHN KOZLAR - Contributions by Size & Source



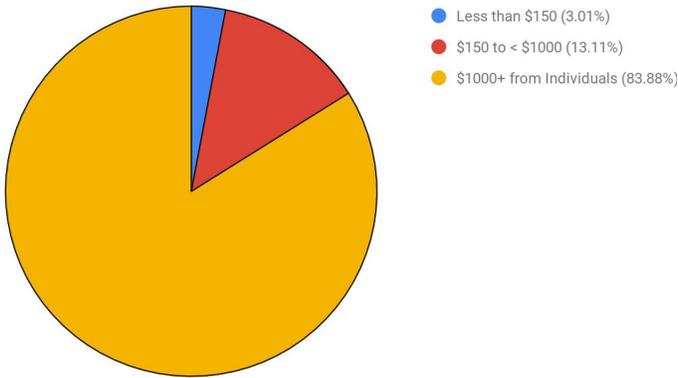
AMARA ENYIA - Contributions by Size & Source



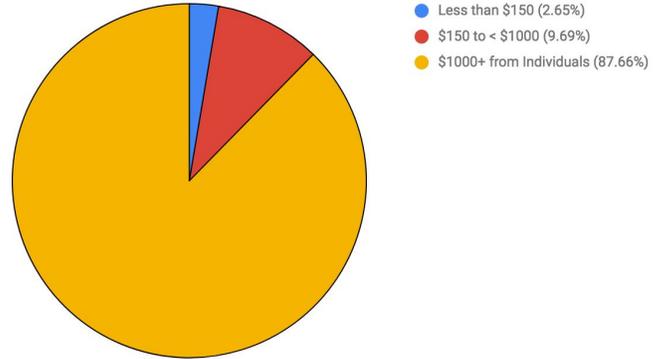
BOB FIORETTI - Contributions by Size & Source



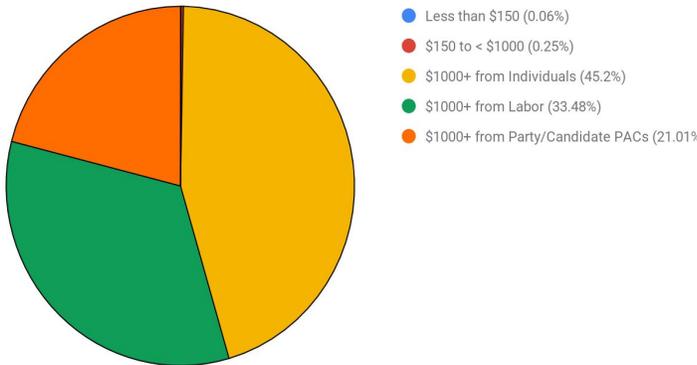
LORI LIGHTFOOT - Contributions by Size & Source



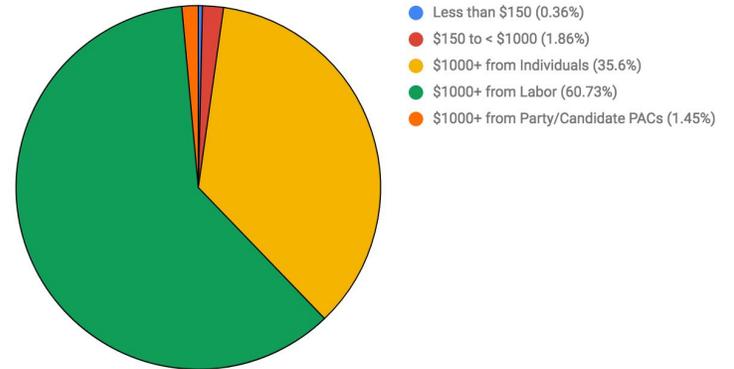
GARY MCCARTHY - Contributions by Size & Source



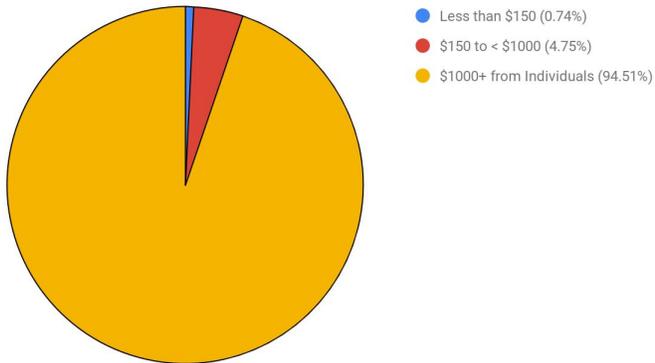
SUSANA MENDOZA - Contributions by Size & Source



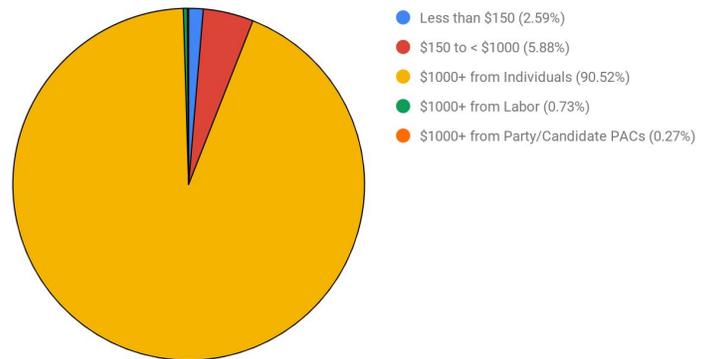
TONI PRECKWINKLE - Contributions by Size & Source



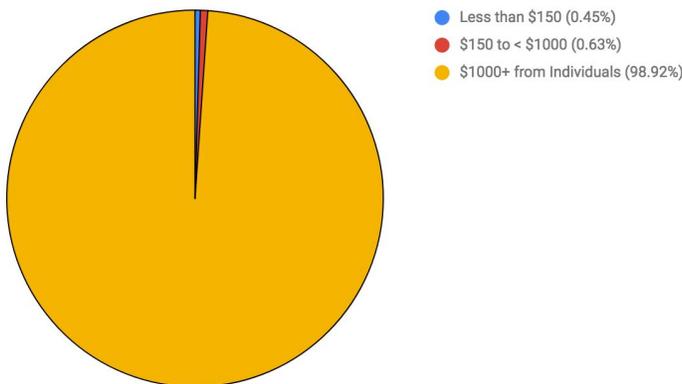
NEAL SALES-GRIFFIN - Contributions by Size & Source



PAUL VALLAS - Contributions in Size & Source



WILLIE WILSON - Contributions by Size & Source



Lori Lightfoot raised the largest amount, and the largest percentage of contributions from small donors, at 3 percent, still a minor source of her campaign funding. Bill Daley and Susana Mendoza tied for the least percentage of contributions from small donors, both at .06 percent. Once the second million dollar contribution from Ken Griffin is reported, Bill Daley will be the candidate with the smallest percentage of contributions coming from small donors.

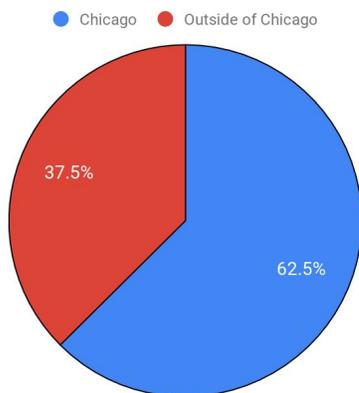
Although they were not the only two candidates to receive money from labor organizations, Toni Preckwinkle and Susana Mendoza were the only candidates who received significant portions of their campaign contributions from labor organizations. Preckwinkle is the only candidate for whom contributions from labor provide the largest source of funding for her campaign, accounting for over 60 percent of her campaign contributions coming from that source.

As a late entrant to the race, big money contributions from labor unions and political committees--including her own state committee--allowed Susana Mendoza to quickly become one of the top five fundraisers in this race, despite having less time to fundraise.

Chicago v. Outside Chicago

While most campaign contributions are coming from within Chicago, a significant amount, 38 percent of all contributions, are from outside of Chicago.

ALL CANDIDATES - Chicago v. Outside Chicago



Although most money is coming from donors within city boundaries, there is a large variation between candidates.

Due to late big money contributions from musicians Kanye West and Chance the Rapper, Amara Enyia raised the greatest proportion of her campaign funds from outside of Chicago at almost 97 percent.⁵ However, seven candidates--or half of those participating in this race--received more money from outside of Chicago than the 38 percent aggregate rate for all candidates.

Candidate breakdowns are presented in Appendix A.

We have proven solutions to elevate the role of small donors

For our elections to truly reflect the principle of one person, one vote, without large donors 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 are successful models already in place to empower small donors to allow their voices to play a more central role in our democracy, such as public matching funds for small donations, in practice in several cities, including New York and Los Angeles, and vouchers for all voters, in practice in Seattle.

Small Donor Matching

A small donor match program refers to a voluntary program which candidates can opt in to, to have small contributions from qualified donors matched by public money. If a multiple match ratio is used in the program, it amplifies the impact of a single small donation, further encouraging individual donors giving at smaller amounts by increasing the value of their contribution to a candidate.

For candidates, it provides them with a viable alternative to relying heavily on big money donors, if they choose. The overall diversity of candidates and competitiveness of elections also improves, as

⁵ Kanye West contributed a total of \$200,000. Chance the Rapper (given name "Chancelor Bennett") contributed a total of \$400,000. Together, they provided 93 percent of Enyia's \$643,010.82 currently reported total.

more first-time candidates without ties to traditional sources of money are able to run competitive campaigns.

This is seen time and again in the election cycles of cities that already employ a small donor match program. During the 2017 election cycle, eighty-two percent of New York City Council candidates participated in the matching funds program.⁶ During the 2013 cycle, small donors were responsible for sixty-one percent of participating candidates' contributions when funds from a matching program were included. All but two of the winning candidates participated in the program, showing that candidates can raise the money they needed to win without looking for large-dollar contributions.

Support is growing in Illinois for small donor reforms. In 2015, when an advisory question appeared on the Chicago municipal ballot, seventy-nine percent of voters supported enacting a small donor matching program. Last May, the Illinois Senate passed a Small Donor Matching Bill (SB 1424) with bipartisan support. In the week before the municipal election, Congressman Chuy Garcia [announced](#) a city council reform agenda which included small donor campaign finance reform.

Vouchers

A newer option for reform is a voucher system. In a voucher system, each eligible voter receives vouchers they can use to direct public funds to the candidate of their choice. Since every voter can now participate, the system gives candidates incentive to reach out to a far wider pool of voters and donors.

Seattle is the first place in the U.S. to employ a voucher system. The city's "Democracy Voucher" program gives each voter four \$25 vouchers.

In 2017, Seattle started using the "Democracy Voucher" system in a handful of city wide races. While the sample size is still small, the initial results indicate that a voucher system can significantly increase small donor participation. In the races that used the vouchers, 19,414 Seattle residents and organizations made donations to candidates, with over 15,100 of those contributions coming in the form of vouchers. In comparison, in the 2015 city election--before vouchers--only about 3,100 Seattle individuals and organizations gave financial contributions to candidates for either of the two at-large council seats.⁷ The "Democracy Voucher" will be used in all municipal elections starting in 2021.

If elections remain a contest of which candidates can appeal most to a narrow set of big donors, our democracy will continue to suffer. We need to improve the system now to make sure millions of voices are not buried by the millions of dollars spent by an elite few.

⁶ Brennan Center for Justice, 2018 May, Money in Politics Toolkit, Retrieved on February 21, 2019, Archived at https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/stock/2018_10_MiPToolkit_PublicFinancingLaw.pdf.

⁷ Morales, Margaret, Honest Elections Seattle Series, 2017 November 28, "Seattle's Democracy Vouchers Are Changing the Campaign Trail for Candidates and City Residents," Sightline Institute, Retrieved on February 21, 2019 at <https://www.sightline.org/2017/11/28/seattles-democracy-vouchers-are-changing-the-campaign-trail-for-candidates-and-city-residents/>.

Methodology

We define “small donor” as those giving less than \$150, “large donor” as those giving \$1,000 or more, and “medium donor” as those giving \$150 up to \$1,000; the amounts of contributions in each of the previous categories are referred to as “small money,” “big money,” and “other money,” respectively.

We obtained all campaign finance data from the Illinois State Board of Elections website, downloading quarterly and itemized reports by candidates’ Chicago Mayoral campaign committee numbers. We analyzed all quarterly and itemized reports campaign committees made to the Illinois State Board of Elections between January 1, 2018 to February 19, 2019 -- exactly one week before the municipal election.

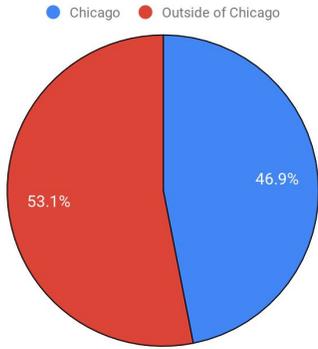
The data for all candidates’ total campaign contributions is complete as of 12/31/18, the end of the reporting period for the most recent quarterly report. It is important to note that since the last quarterly report was filed, a significant amount of money has been contributed since then. For a more up to date look at campaign contributions, we included all reported contributions between 1/1/19 and 2/19/19--one week before election day; reporting is only required for contributions \$1,000 and above. We will update this report with final numbers after campaign reporting is completed.

Contributions include individual contributions, loans, and transfers in from other campaign committees, but do not include in-kind or other contributions. We counted transfers or contributions from union campaign committees separately, because while large contributions themselves, they represent the pooling of many small donors, union members.

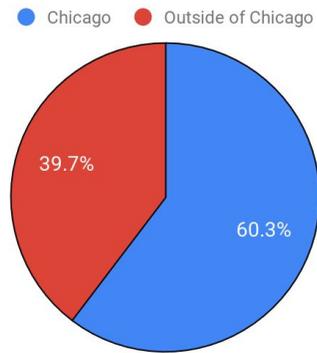
Campaigns do not itemize contributions from donors who give less than \$150. In order to estimate the number of donors giving under \$150, we divide the total amount given by \$150. This also affects our calculation of where contributions come from, as we have no location information for non-itemized contributions. We treated all non-itemized contributions as coming from Chicago.

Appendix - Per Candidate - Chicago v. Outside Chicago Contributions

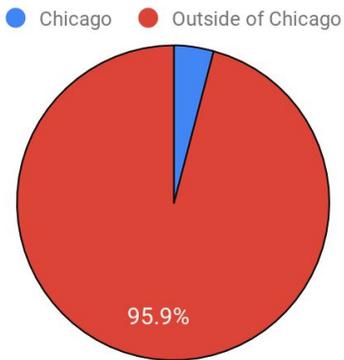
GERY CHICO



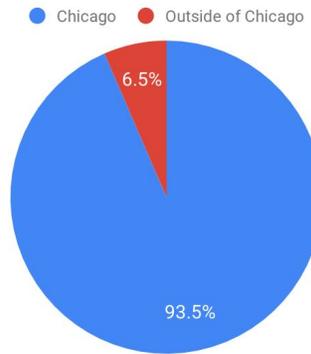
BILL DALEY



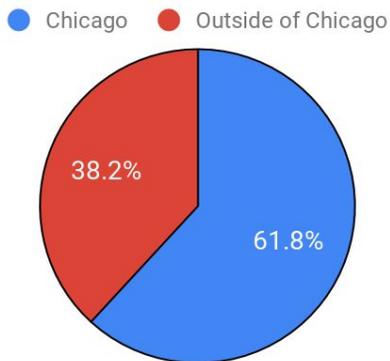
AMARA ENYIA



BOB FIORETTI



JERRY JOYCE

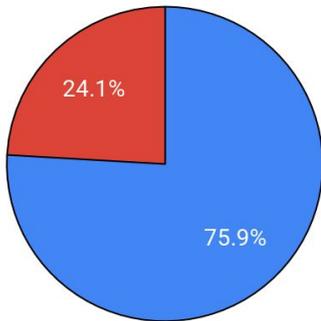


John Kozlar



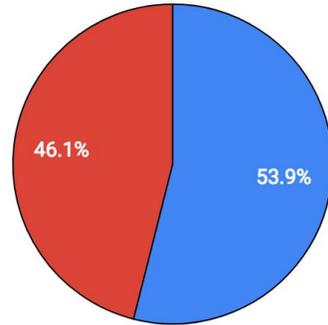
LORI LIGHTFOOT

Chicago Outside of Chicago



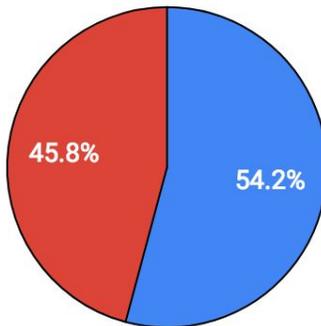
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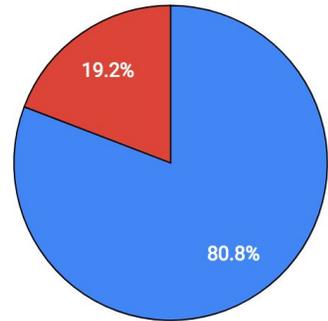
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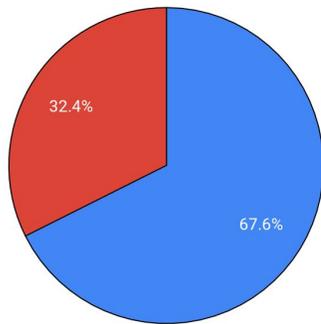
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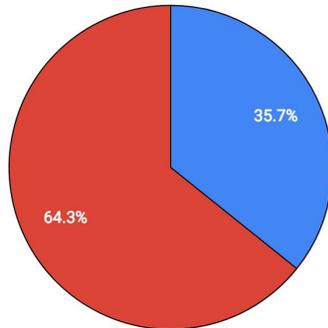
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