



Follow the Money Blast

The Center for Responsive Politics and the Sunlight Foundation have teamed up to report on disclosed donations made in the 2014 elections. One lesson they learned is that in the 2014 election cycle more money came from fewer donors.

32,000 People Donated \$1 Billion

Twenty eight percent of the disclosed political contributions came from just 32,000 people, in a nation of 313.85 million. These donors represent 0.0001% (1% of the 1%) of Americans, an elite class that increasingly serves as gate keepers to public office in the United States. They accounted for just over \$1 billion in disclosed donations. This is up from \$732.7 million in the previous 2010 midterm elections.

Even within the top 0.0001 percent there is an elite set of donors pulling away from the pack.

<i>2014 Donations Disclosed to the FEC</i>		
10,400 donors gave	\$911.1 million	86.5% of the \$1 billion disclosed
134 donors gave	\$500,000 or more	
63 donors gave	\$1 million or more	
3 donors gave	\$10 million or more	

The vast majority of donors in this demographic gave overwhelmingly, if not entirely, to one side or the other. In 2014, 42.7 % of donations from these elite donors went to liberals while 46.8% went to conservatives.

Wall Street Wielded the Checkbook

Wall Street maintained its position as the most influential sector of the 0.0001%, both in the number of donors that made the list and the money given. Individuals who listed a job in securities spent about \$175 million in 2014, of which \$107.5 million went to committees supporting Republicans.

The donors at the very top of the money pyramid provided the financial fuel for many of the attack ads and other messages from independent organizations that filled the air waves last year. The top 100 donors accounted for 39% of the \$696 million raised by Super PACs in the 2014 elections.

Lobbyists Spread Their Influence

There are approximately 9,500 federally registered lobbyists in the US, yet only 894 influencers gave enough to break into the political 1% of the 1%. These lobbyists combine their financial assistance with their revolving door access and personal relationships with Members of Congress and staff to influence the outcome of legislative battles, and even determine the issues that get addressed in the first place. Compared to other big campaign donors, lobbyists spread their money around. And because they seek access to law makers to push for their clients' interests, they give more of their money directly to candidates as opposed to party committees and Super PACs.

The direction of the Supreme Court in *Citizens United* and other cases suggests that efforts to limit contributions will not be successful. The report concludes that disclosure of contributions, expenditures and contacts by everyone who is paid to influence government will be the most immediate and effective method to dilute lobbyists power and level the playing field. Currently, the Lobbying Disclosure Act has gaping omissions, leaving the public mostly in the dark about lobbyists' activities and what the most generous lobbyists may be receiving in exchange for their largesse.

The vast amount of money in our elections is not needed for voters to learn about candidates' positions on issues. Voters can go to LWV's Vote411 website (www.vote411.org) and to Project Vote Smart's website (www.votesmart.org) for candidates' responses to a common set of questions.

For more information: www.lwvbc.org

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