

Subject: Civics and Government

Grade Level: 9–12

Standards:

Indiana DOE

Academic (5)

S.7.3 Social Institutions

Discuss the concept of political power and factors that influence political power.

S.8.3 Social Change

Describe how collective behavior can influence and change society.

USG.3.21 Purposes, Principles and Institutions of Government in the United States

Describe the influence of the media and technology on public opinion and public policy.

USH.9.3 United States History 1877 to the Present

Assess the decisions of the John Roberts court, especially those which addressed the contests among individual citizens, workers, and corporations.

USH.9.4

Reflect on the role of media and social media in the democratic process.

Nationwide

National Standards for Civics and Government (4)

III.E.4 How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the roles of political parties, campaigns, and elections in American politics.

III.E.4.5

LESSON PLAN – HOW DOES CAMPAIGN FINANCE WORK?

To achieve this standard, students should be able to describe the role of political parties in channeling public opinion, allowing people to act jointly, nominating candidates, conducting campaigns, and training future leaders.

III.E.4.9

To achieve this standard, students should be able to evaluate current criticisms of campaigns and proposals for their reform.

III.E.5.1 Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the contemporary roles of associations and groups in American politics.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to identify and explain the historical role of various associations and groups active in American politics, e.g., political organizations, political action committees (PACs), interest groups, voluntary and civic associations, professional organizations, unions, religious groups

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

A computer or laptop or a way to show video in class

Students may need headphones

Access to PBS Learning Media

Access to the internet

Learning Objectives:

- Examine the rise in political campaign costs over the past 40 years
- Consider various ways that donors can support their favorite candidates
- Discuss ideas for reforming the campaign finance process

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Dr. Jett explains that a political campaign is an expensive proposition that grows more costly as the years go by. The Supreme Court has ruled that some types of political donations are limited while others are not, and this has given rise to hundreds of specialized fund-raising groups that citizens can use to funnel money to their favorite candidates. While many organizations want to reform campaign finance laws, wealthy individuals and corporations don't want to lose the political leverage their money gives them.

Body of Lesson:

1. Contributions to political campaigns have risen dramatically over the past 40 years, much faster than the cost of health care or private college tuition. The presidential election cost \$225 million in 1980 and \$5.7 billion in 2020. Spending on congressional elections skyrocketed from \$372.5 million in 1980 to \$8.7 billion in 2020.¹
 - a. Learning Activity:
 - i. Foreign governments are among the most active lobbyists in the halls of Congress. “Just about any country you can think of has interests in the United States, ranging from policy concerns to tourism and trade promotion.”² These countries try to buy influence by giving money to the campaigns of certain members of Congress.
 - ii. The most generous foreign lobbyists in 2021 were:
 1. China \$79.9 million
 2. Qatar \$45.2 million
 3. Japan \$43.5 million
 4. Russia \$35.2 million
 5. United Arab Emirates \$30.9 million
 - iii. Ask students, “What do you think each of these countries could gain by supporting the election of members of Congress?”
2. In the video, Dr. Jett explains the difference between “hard money and “soft money” political contributions. When a donor remains anonymous, observers call their support “dark money.”
 - a. Learning Activity:
 - i. After viewing the video, refer students to “Follow the Shadow of Dark Money” (<https://www.opensecrets.org/dark-money/shadow-infographic>).
 - ii. Have each student write a one-page paper (about 250 words) with these instructions:
 1. Describe the difference between hard money, soft money, and dark money.
 2. Explain what type of donor is likely to contribute hard money, soft money, or dark money to a political campaign.
3. At the end of the video, Dr. Jett asks how we might reform the campaign finance process. Several attempts have been made, for example:
 - a. A person filing a Federal income tax return can designate \$3 of the tax due (\$6 if filing jointly with a spouse) to the Presidential Election Campaign Fund.

¹Source for 1980 costs: Zachary Albert, “Trends in Campaign Financing, 1980-2016” (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice, 2017). Source for 2020 costs: Karl Evers-Hillstrom, “Most Expensive Ever: 2020 Election Cost \$14.4 Billion” (Washington, D.C.: Open Secrets, 2021).

² “Foreign Lobby Watch,” <https://www.opensecrets.org/fara>, accessed April 13, 2022.

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- i. Candidates for President who raise at least \$5,000 in each of 20 states can opt to receive a share of this fund. The Federal Election Commission then matches the amount of money that the candidate has received from other donors, up to a preset limit.
 - ii. That limit was \$52 million for the 2020 election, so a candidate could receive and spend up to \$104 million.
 - iii. No candidate opted to receive money from the fund in 2020 because the cost of a Presidential campaign is much higher. (NOTE: Senator John McCain received \$42 million from the fund in 2008, which limited his total spending to \$84 million. His rival Barack Obama declined to take money from the fund, and was able to raise \$764 million instead.)
- b. Learning Activity:
- i. Have students discuss how this plan might be altered to encourage more citizens and candidates to participate.
 - ii. The Supreme Court has ruled that a corporation's support of a political campaign is a form of free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.³ Ask, If we made the Presidential Campaign Fund the only way to finance Presidential campaigns, would anyone lose the right of free speech?
- c. After years of corruption in political campaigns, New York City passed its Campaign Finance Act in 1988 to encourage small donations from individuals for mayoral and other local elections.⁴
- i. The law initially made a one-to-one match of donations up to \$1,000. This formula has been adjusted across the years, so that the city now makes a six-to-one match of donations up to \$175. In other words, if a citizen donates \$175 to the fund, the city adds \$1,050 for a total of \$1,225.
 - ii. The law also caps the total amount that a candidate can spend in an election and matches up to 55% of that amount. Currently, a candidate can receive up to \$88,500 in matching funds for a primary election and another \$88,500 for a general election.
- d. Learning Activity:
- i. Have each student write a two-page paper (about 500 words) listing the pro's and con's of New York City's reform plan and sharing the student's ideas about how this model might be used for state and national elections.
 - ii. Lead your entire group in a discussion of other ideas for campaign finance reform. How could Americans reduce the cost of political

³ Jeffrey Toobin, "Money Unlimited: How Chief Justice John Roberts Orchestrated the Citizens United Decision," <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/21/money-unlimited>, accessed April 15, 2022.

⁴ Frederick A.O. Schwarz, Jr., Angela Wigaly, and Susan M. Liss, "Small Donor Matching Funds: The NYC Election Experience," <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/small-donor-matching-funds-nyc-election-experience>, accessed April 13, 2022.

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campaigns and encourage more citizens of modest means to run for office?

Summary/Closure

Campaign finance is a way that every citizen can participate in the political process beyond casting a vote; however, it enables the rich and powerful to exert a greater influence than average citizens can. For that reason, campaign finance can be fraught with corruption. Conscientious citizens are working for reform in this arena in an effort to restore the integrity of government.

Extension Activities

What factors are driving the rapid increase of political campaign costs? Let students research this question and recommend some ways to control the most volatile factors. Here are a few websites to recommend for their study:

- “Money in Politics 101” (<http://alturl.com/eb6rr>)
- “The Incredible Rise in Campaign Spending” (<http://alturl.com/44ncj>)
- “Most Expensive Ever: 2020 Election Cost \$14.4 Billion” (<http://alturl.com/nxq9r>)

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