

Chapter Two: Money in Politics

Faith traditions the world-over warn us against the corrupting influence of wealth—it's been a timeless feature in humanity's struggles. The unchecked influence of money in our democracy is one way we see this struggle manifesting today. This is not a struggle unique to 21st Century United States of America, but it is especially pronounced and worrisome in 2020. The most powerful nation in the globalized world is experiencing deep political turmoil and is counting down to a most historic election. So much is at stake and our democracy is more and more driven by big donors and special interests. It is growing increasingly difficult to solve the big problems facing our world, our country, our communities, and our congregations.

Balancing Money and Power

Our nation's founders would be astounded by the current state of American politics. The white men who were delegates to the Continental Congress could not have fathomed the incredible economic, racial, and gender diversity of today's electorate in light of their political reality where women, people of color, and whole swathes of society had no representation. And given the founders' wariness over the role of money in politics, they would likely be deeply dismayed by the domination of moneyed interests over our elections and lawmakers.

In the last chapter we saw how voices were stifled through various means of voter suppression, particularly for people of color. Those voices continue to be drowned out and sidelined by allowing money to influence—or to translate into—power and policy. For people of faith—and for our Founding Fathers—democratic representation is a matter of principles: equity and self-determination. As with voting rights, money in politics perpetuates systemic racism.

There has been an ongoing tension in U.S. history between legislative efforts to limit the influence of money over political power and judicial rulings curbing Congress' power to do so. Particularly in the past 50 years, legislative efforts and Supreme Court rulings have made pivotal changes to the role that money plays in our democracy. Efforts to restrict the influence of money have been rolled back largely based on the misguided narrative that money is equivalent to speech under the First Amendment.

Wealth vs. Greed

Wealth is amoral. It can be corrupting based on how it is gained, how it is held, and how it is wielded.

- ✓ The Quran warns to be on guard against greed. Prophet Muhammad says that when a person attains wealth with greed it will never satisfy or bring about good.
- ✓ Core to Christian faith is the idea that “The Love of money is the root of all evil.” (1 Timothy 6:10).
- ✓ Hebrew Scriptures characterize wealth as good, but warn the rich not to use their position to harm those with less. The wealthy are obligated to alleviate the sufferings of the poor.
- ✓ Hindu teaches that wealth becomes an evil power when greed drives people to amass more, particularly when it is not needed.

Founding Principles

The Declaration of Independence asserts that governments derive their power from the “consent of the governed,” thus justifying the Founding Fathers’ call for revolution against the British monarchy. The fledgling democracy, struggling under the Articles of Confederation, required reinforcement in the form of a new Constitution that guaranteed that the “dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government.”¹



The commitment to the voice of the voters was an essential thread tying together our founding documents. Even while the vote was narrowly restricted to white men (see Chapter 1: A Narrowly Defined “we the people,” representation in elections was sacrosanct for democratic self-determination. In fact, political candidates of the time were more likely to give away gifts to voters than to solicit donations from them. George Washington won his first election to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1757 after supplying voters with food and

alcohol, a tactic that was soon after banned by the state.² The first candidate to run a recognizably modern campaign was Andrew Jackson in 1828. He won by hiring campaign staff, distributing pamphlets, selling memorabilia and merchandise, and appealing to the public in a way no candidate had done before.³ In the mid-1800s Congress began to pass some laws to curb and to preempt unfair campaign finance practices.

“In the Islamic faith tradition, the principles of democracy: freedom, equality, pluralism and social justice are encouraged. Ten years ago, the Citizens United ruling stripped away some of those key principles. As we approach the 2020 elections, we hope to restore trust and faith in our democracy.” - Wardah Khalid, Founder & President, Poligon Education Fund

Reflection Questions:

- *How does your faith distinguish between the proper and improper use of wealth?*
- *Why might it be corrosive to a democracy to equate campaign contributions with political speech?*

Reforms and Roll-backs

As the nation's GDP grew steadily throughout the end of the 19th century during the so-called Gilded Age, so did campaign contributions to U.S. politicians. The 1896 election—when William McKinley received more than \$16 million dollars from businessmen and bankers to defeat William Jennings Bryan—remains the single most expensive election in American history in terms of presidential campaign spending as a share of GDP.⁴ McKinley's successor, Theodore Roosevelt had a more complex relationship with the ultra-wealthy after McKinley's assassination in 1901. He secured \$2 million in donations for his 1904 campaign from magnates like J.P. Morgan and Henry C. Frick⁵. After being elected President, Roosevelt soon asserted his commitment to campaign finance reform, asking Congress to outlaw "contributions by corporations to any political committee or for any political purpose."⁶ It wasn't long before the Tillman Act was passed into law, explicitly banning monetary contribution to national political campaigns by corporations.⁷ The Tillman Act is technically still in effect, but has been undermined by weak enforcement provisions and subsequent Supreme Court rulings.⁸

The Federal Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), enacted in 1910 and amended in 1911 required congressional candidates to disclose campaign spending and the sources of all contributions and limited spending by candidates.⁹ In what would become a historic trend, the Supreme Court undercut the effectiveness of the FCPA in *Newberry v. U.S.* (1921), ruling that Congressional authority to regulate elections did not extend to party primaries or nominations.¹⁰

With the rise of the labor movement, lawmakers became concerned about the growing influence and participation of labor unions in political activity. Congress passed the Smith-Connally Act in 1943 over President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's veto, thus extending the Tillman Act's ban on banks and corporations to prohibit labor unions from contributing to federal election campaigns.¹¹ These campaign finance reforms led to the creation of the political action committee (PAC) in 1944 as a way to circumvent the rules. PAC donations were deemed acceptable because the money came from voluntary individual contributions (from union members) rather than from union treasuries.¹²



As the economy and financial systems grew more complex, the 1970s brought a host of new efforts to reform campaign finance. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (FECA) mandated key reporting requirements on political contributions and spending which are still in place today. FECA required disclosure of political committee contributions and spending, limited spending on media advertisements, and created

more stringent requirements for creating PACs.¹³ Notably, FECA also created the system of public funding of presidential elections that was subsequently used by presidential candidates from Carter through and

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Clinton.¹⁴ In the year after FECA's passage, the Watergate scandal revealed the extensive grip of wealthy interest groups within the political system.¹⁵

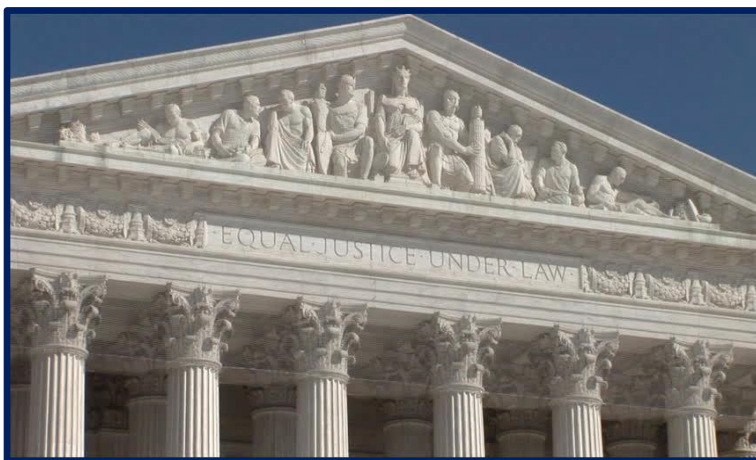
Outrage over Watergate enabled Congress to pass the 1974 amendments to FECA, many of which still form the basis of our campaign finance regulations. These amendments established limits for contributions by individuals, political parties, and PACs, and created the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to enforce the law's restrictions.¹⁶ However, some of FECA's most significant restrictions were then overturned by the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). The Court struck down limits on candidate spending, on contributions by candidates and families to their own campaigns, and limits on election spending that is not coordinated with candidates. These restrictions were deemed violations of the First Amendment's protections on free speech.¹⁷ Notably, the Court upheld disclosure requirements, limits on individual contributions, and voluntary public financing.

The public financing worked well for six electoral cycles until the system couldn't sustain the dramatic increases in presidential campaign costs and Congress failed to modernize it. Contribution limits lost effectiveness as federal officeholders and candidates began incorporating "soft money" to raise contributions for the political parties, instead.

Congress responded in 2002 with the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), also known as the *McCain-Feingold Act*, enacted with strong bipartisan support. The law regulated advertisements directly before elections ("electioneering communication") and prohibited corporations and labor unions from funding issue-specific advertisements.¹⁸ While the core of the reforms were upheld in 2003 when challenged in *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission*, a subsequent ruling followed just 7 years later which was a crushing blow to the McCain-Feingold Act. The Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* continued the loosening restrictions on money in politics and dramatically altered the state of American democracy.¹⁹

A New Era of Citizens United

The *Citizens United* ruling effectively freed labor unions, corporations, and non-profit associations from restrictions on electioneering and allowed advocacy for the election or defeat of candidates. The Court ruled that political action groups (Super PACs) can receive unlimited donations and make unlimited election expenditures so long as they do not directly coordinate with candidates' campaigns. Once again, the Court ruled



that money is the equivalent of speech; limiting independent political spending from corporations and other groups violates the First Amendment right to free speech. The *Citizens United* ruling rested on two assumptions that have since proven false. The majority reasoned that independent spending cannot be corrupting and that it would be transparent.

A Democracy Held Hostage

The Court's narrow interpretation of corruption was limited to *quid pro quo*—assuming a direct connection between donations and political favors. But the corrupting influence of money on policy decisions and political priorities is much more nuanced. This corrupting influence is no less real and has changed the character of American politics. Over the past decade, these special interests have spent unlimited—and often undisclosed—amounts of money to advance their agendas at the expense of the American people. They've blocked action on everything from climate change to gun safety, while buying tax breaks and sweetheart deals for the biggest corporations and wealthiest individuals. In some ways, it has proven more insidious to our democracy. Impacts could be seen just five years after the ruling. In 2015, analysts found clear evidence that a very small group of Americans—"an elite club of wealthy, largely white mega-donors"—were wielding increasing influence in politics while the rest seemed to be disengaging.²⁰ By 2018, a Pew poll found that 76% of Americans believe government was "run by a few big interests looking out for themselves."²¹

"Deuteronomy tells us 'you shall not judge unfairly: you shall know no partiality; you shall not take gifts, for gifts blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just.' We mourn what has become of American democracy and pray for a political system reflecting the interests of all Americans, not just those who can afford to participate. Only then will we truly be able to answer the plea of the just." – Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

The Supreme Court also reasoned that unlimited spending would not distort the political process because the public would be informed about funding for political activity. The reality is that voters often cannot know who is actually behind campaign spending. Political players exploit the growing complexity and lack of transparency in political financing and spending. So while super PACs are required to disclose their donors, those donors can include dark money groups that obscure the original source of their contributions. Since dark money nonprofits do not need to disclose their donors, they provide a back-channel to inundate our politics with money from secret sources. They also increase the vulnerability of U.S. elections to international interference. This is how a Ukrainian operative recently bought access to the presidential circle of influence with a six-figure check to a closely associated super PAC.²²

Reflection Questions:

- *What current political issue are you passionate about? How might money create barriers to finding solutions?*
- *How would limits on campaign costs and spending change the political landscape and voter engagement?*



Finally, while super PACs and dark money groups are technically prohibited from coordinating directly with candidates, weak rules and enforcement leave ample room for coordination through winks and nods. The FEC remains the oversight and enforcement agency in theory, but partisan gridlock and years of severe understaffing and underfunding have crippled the FEC. As a result, unlimited contributions and undisclosed sources of political spending are distorting our democratic systems, shaping the political narratives and

dramatically shifting the nature of our elections. Being the primary recipients of these funds, the presence of white men drastically overshadows women and people of color in political races. Keeping big money in politics is another barrier to keep people of color and poor people from entering political races.

- ❖ *Watch this 8-minute video from the [Story of Stuff](#) that illustrates the harmful influence of money on political activity and on policies after the Citizens United ruling.*²³

A Decade of Data Paints the Picture

Now, armed with 10 years of data, we have a compelling picture of this disturbing trend: a massive influx of big money in politics. Just 25 ultra-rich individual political donors have poured nearly \$1.4 billion into super PACs in the past decade. These political donations accounted for close to half of the total individual donations to super PACs from 2010-2020. The top five largest individual super PAC contributors of the decade are white men or white couples who, combined, they accounted for 28 percent of all donations.²⁴

“For ten years we have lived with the idolatry of corporations with the right of free speech. Enough! Our creator endows persons with rights, and with these rights, we can ensure a just society. Let's end this idolatry of corporate personhood and restore our democracy.”

***—Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Director of Partnership Relations,
Alliance of Baptists***

The issue of money in politics is a bipartisan problem. In the early years of the post-*Citizens United* era, the amount of money donated to outside spending groups was heavily tilted in favor of Republicans. But Democrats have become increasingly reliant on super PAC funding from hedge fund managers, bankers and other financial executives. In the 2017-2018 cycle of contributions from top individual donors, 45 percent of donations went to outside spending groups aligned with the Republican Party and 52 percent went to spending groups benefiting Democrats.²⁵

- ❖ *This [fact sheet](#) from End Citizen United Action Fund highlights the top 10 harms done to our democracy in the past 10 years.*²⁶

Reversing Course on Racial Justice

Donors are overwhelmingly white—various studies have demonstrated the extreme disparity in representation of people of color among donors to political campaigns.²⁷ Even before the rise of Super PACs and unlimited donations, low-income districts predominately with communities of color were under-represented among campaign contributions. One 2016 study found that, among donors to presidential campaigns that year, 91 percent were white and nearly half were white men. Whites made 94 percent of donors giving more than \$5,000 in the 2014 election cycle. Further, an analysis of political donations from 16,752 zip codes between 2010 through 2018 revealed stark disparities between majority-white zip codes and those in communities of color. Political donors from white zip codes gave \$117 per household, on average to political campaigns and super PACs. In contrast, donors in communities of color gave \$36 per household to political campaigns and super PACs.²⁸ These disparities reflect and result from the underlying reality of racial, income and wealth inequality across the nation. They also reflect and influence who can afford to run for office.

While the country becomes more diverse, the gap in political influence based on race and socioeconomic status is widening. In 2016, Hillary Clinton raised 42 percent of her money from millionaires while Trump raised 27 percent from millionaires.²⁹ Millionaires represent about 3 percent of the adult population in the U.S. In 2017, 1 in 7 white families were millionaires while only 1 in 50 black families were millionaires.³⁰



A decade of data demonstrate how the donor class is in fact profoundly unrepresentative of the American population as a whole, and particularly of low-income people and people of color. The result is a government that is less responsive to the needs and concerns of ordinary Americans, and more responsive to the needs and concerns of economic elites. Our nation's history is arguably a long, slow, arduous and unfinished drive toward giving every American a truly equal voice in making the collective decisions that govern our lives. The exaggerated role of big money in politics, however, is both a symptom and source of inequality in America — and a key barrier to achieving this goal.

Reflection Questions:

- *How can you see the influence of money shaping the current election cycle?*
- *How could a common understanding of the dominance of money in politics help repair civic discourse and improve compassion among Americans?*

❖ *Search Forbes Magazine's [database](#) of the richest people in the U.S. Scroll through photos of the top American billionaires and if you see a person of color, he will not be black.*³¹

Reclaiming Our Democracy

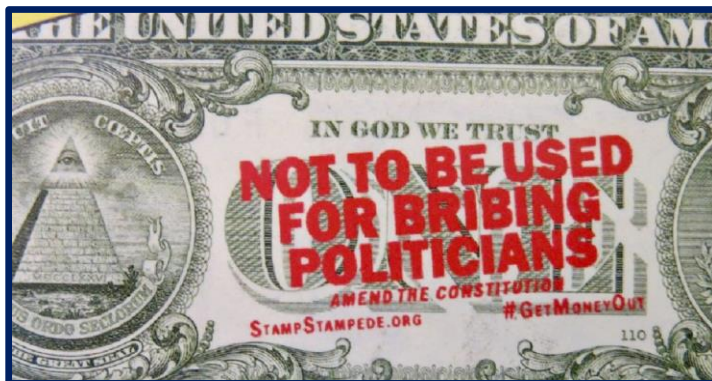
While the issue of money in politics is complex and entrenched, there are solutions to grapple with it, and many states and localities across the nation are mustering the political will to pass them. Solutions generally rely on two different approaches to curbing its influence. One approach would change the Constitution to explicitly allow federal and state governments to restrict political donations and spending. The other tactics accept the legal rulings and attempt to diminish or counterbalance the influence of outsized and dark-money donors. Common counter-measures aimed at evening-the-playing-field are transparency requirements and alternative public financing systems. These legislative solutions are not mutually exclusive. Momentum around a multi-pronged legislative approach to democracy reforms has been building among Democrats in Congress and gaining popularity among voters.

“Scripture speaks continually about the call to seek justice – especially for those on the margins of society, those with little voice or power in the public sphere. The prophets decry those who “sell the righteous for silver and push the afflicted out of the way” (Amos 2:6). As people of faith, we recognize the responsibility of government to seek justice for all people and to build the common good. ” –Sandy Sorenson, Director of Washington Office, United Church of Christ

The For the People Act (H.R. 1/ S.949), introduced in early 2019 is a bold, comprehensive democracy reform package that includes major reforms to curb the influence of money in our political systems. The bill includes a variety of approaches to reform how political activity is financed and to diminish the unbalanced influence of big money in politics. Introduced by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), the For the People Act has gained historic support with the co-sponsorship of every Democrat in the House and Senate. H.R. 1 passed the House on March 8, 2019, but is stalled in the Senate where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has refused to allow debate on the bill.

Limit or Get Money Out

To change the Supreme Court paradigm equating money with speech would require a constitutional amendment to directly address the assertions that corporations are people with rights enshrined in the Constitution and that the First Amendment guarantees a right to unlimited spending in our elections. A constitutional amendment is an extensive and challenging political process (the Equal Rights Amendment has spent 48 years in the process). However,



successfully amending the Constitution would ensure that American elections are permanently protected from the undue influence of special interests that was unleashed by *Citizens United*.

Since 2013, resolutions to amend the Constitution have been introduced in the House and Senate. The passage of these resolutions would begin the amendment process and would then require ratification from 38 of the 50 states. Currently, H.R. Res. 2/S.J. Res. 51, introduced by Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL) and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), await consideration by the 116th Congress. This amendment would give both the federal and state governments broad authority to limit the corrupting influence of money in politics. The For the People Act also explicitly calls for a constitutional amendment to undo the effects of *Citizens United*.

Curb Money's Influence

Though the most direct way to restore contribution limits is to reverse the *Citizens United* ruling, there are legislative options that can reduce the negative effects of unlimited contributions. Many of these are part of the For the People Act.

Transparency and Disclosure Measures

The Supreme Court rightly stated that transparency is key to ensuring that private interests do not gain undue influence over the political process. Accordingly, many democracy reform advocates seek robust disclosure laws that require transparency around donations and spending at multiple levels. Shining light on the system could make significant progress in restoring voters' confidence and sense of empowerment in U.S. politics. Transparency through disclosure requirements helps people understand the values of candidates running for office and improves the ability of government agencies to monitor for corruption and intervene when and where it occurs. Examples of transparency reforms include:

- ✓ Corporations are currently able make donations without the knowledge or approval of corporate shareholders, but could be required to disclose their donations or even get shareholders' approval prior to contributing to political activities.
- ✓ Groups spending on political activities could be required to disclose donors so that the public can better understand the motivations and values of their contributors.
- ✓ Stricter transparency rules applied to social and traditional media outlets that sell political advertising could significantly improve public awareness around who is trying to sell them what.
- ✓ Modernizing, fully funding and fully staffing the FEC would help ensure that funding and spending on political activities conform to federal laws. Robust enforcement leads to accountability.

***"In 2020, we are witnessing the moral consequences of this chokehold of money on our politics. Wealthy donors and special interests are controlling the political conversation and freezing out low wage workers, families in poverty and struggling communities of color. My faith is clear: corporations are not people and money is not speech. Pope Francis calls us to create a 'Politics that must not be subject to the economy.'" – Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Exec. Dir.
Of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice***

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The For the People Act includes the DISCLOSE (“Democracy Is Strengthened by Casting Light On Spending in Elections”) Act, sponsored by Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI). DISCLOSE provisions require Super PACs, “dark money” political organizations and 501(c)(4) nonprofits to disclose the identities of donors who give more than \$10,000. It also requires organizations who pay for political advertising to publicly identify themselves in their ads.



The For the People Act also includes the Honest Ads Act, championed by Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Mark Warner D-(VA) and introduced by Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) in the House. These provisions would require Facebook and Twitter to disclose the source of money for political ads on their platforms and share how much money was spent. The For the People Act would also require government contractors to disclose any political spending, would slow the flow of foreign money into the elections by targeting shell company contributors, and would reform the FEC to better monitor and enforce political activity regulations.

Public Financing Measures

Special interests have an outsized influence in our democracy largely because candidates have little choice but to aggressively fundraise under the current campaign finance system. In 2016, candidates for U.S. Senate needed to raise \$3,300 every single day for six years to keep up with the average winner³². This pressure has only increased—and it draws attention away from the voices of average people towards those able to pay. It also prevents many people from running for office at all.

Many candidates would prefer another way, a financing system that enables them to be accountable to their constituents. Since elected leaders and lawmakers are public servants, it is entirely reasonable that there would be a system of public financing for elections to provide another, viable option to fund their campaigns. States and localities are leading the way in such campaign finance reforms. New York, Seattle, Connecticut, Florida, and others have instituted public finance programs for state and local elections. These programs improve the integrity of elections while amplifying the small contributions afforded by lower-income donors and donors of color. Analysis of the impacts of Connecticut’s public financing law showed a marked increase in the number and diversity of candidates seeking public office.³³ Public financing of elections can be a key part of restoring fairness and integrity to American elections. It amplifies the voices—from non-affluent communities and communities of color—that are currently drowned out of the process by the loud “speech” coming from big, dark or special interest money.

Reflection Questions:

- *Why might public funds be a better financing source for candidates running for public office?*
Would we want our fire fighters and police officers to be funded by private interests? Why or why not?

The For the People Act (H.R. 1/ S.949) includes a publicly financed matching program that would increase the influence of small donations. The federal government would provide a voluntary 6-1 match for presidential and congressional candidates; for every dollar a candidate raises from small donations, the federal government would match it six times over. The maximum small donation match would be capped at \$200. Another example of campaign finance reform is the Clean Money Act (H.R. 3834), proposed by Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA). This bill would establish a voucher program through which campaigns would receive publicly funded vouchers to pay for political advertising if they agreed not to accept donations above \$200. Either of these programs, or other public financing systems, could help to elevate the voices of average Americans in our elections. Including provisions that require candidates to choose between publicly financed or “traditionally” financed campaigns can also have transparency benefits for voters to better discern between candidate priorities and accountability. The For the People Act funds this matching program through a 2.75 percent fee on criminal and civil fines, fees, penalties or settlements with banks and corporations that commit corporate malfeasance (think Wells Fargo). Such a fee would allow for publicly funded financing paid for by the same corporations that consistently try to circumvent the rules, not by taxpayers.

How Can You Take Action?

- ✓ Ask your parish, house of worship, or faith group to [sign on as endorsers](#) of the *Faithful Democracy Voters Covenant*.³⁴
- ✓ Organize a discussion group to study the *Unheard Voices* toolkit. Reflect on the *Voters Covenant* as you move through the chapters.
- ✓ Call your Senator and urge passage of the For the People Act (H.R.1) into law. Call your Representative to express support for measures like the DISCLOSE Act, Honest Ads Act and fixing the FEC. Your legislators need to hear that you support bold democracy reforms that root out the control of money in politics.
- ✓ [Host](#) a screening of the 2018 Sundance Festival documentary *Dark Money*. The movie is also available via most major streaming platforms (YouTube, Hulu, etc.).
- ✓ Organize a discussion group about the film: this [discussion guide](#) accompanies a [collection of clips](#) available as prompts for advocates and educators.

Joining and Building Movements

The upcoming year is an opportunity to engage in movement building, there is so much at stake. See how to engage with the following initiatives, which are mobilizing around money in politics in 2020.

Center for Responsive Politics – OpenSecrets.org

Nonpartisan, independent and nonprofit, the Center for Responsive Politics is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. The Center pursues their mission largely through the award-winning website, [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org), which is the most comprehensive resource for federal campaign contributions, lobbying data and analysis available anywhere.

Request a [training](#) on how to work with their data. Use this invaluable tool to shine light on how money is distorting politics in YOUR community.³⁵

Reclaim the American Dream

Reclaim is an informational gateway aimed at helping people who are upset about America today to get engaged in fixing our democracy and making our economy fairer at the local level. Unlike many other sites, Reclaim does not push one pet issue or one particular strategy but introduces multiple issues, multiple strategies, and multiple organizations that can help you start a reform movement in your own community or join forces with others. Visit them at <http://reclaimtheamericandream.org/>.

The [Democracy Rebellion](#) is a one-hour documentary and a how-to that highlights what YOU can do!³⁶ See how people are calling for a democracy that lives up to ideals of fair, equitable representation. This is their story, first aired on PBS stations in January 2020. PBS and Reclaim the American Dream documented grassroots reform movements across the nation that have come up with solutions for a broken democratic system and are winning reforms in states and localities. Learn how citizen activists pressed for gerrymander reform, voting rights for former felons, exposing dark money, and how they won surprising victories to give voters more voice and make elections fairer.

The Poor People's Campaign

The [Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#) focuses on giving voice to people who have been left out of the process, including the electoral process.³⁷ Drawing on our deepest constitutional, religious and moral values, PPC challenges both political parties to address an economy and a democracy that are not working for people. Clergy and people of faith across the country have joined the PPC to endorse their message and amplify their demands, one of which is to root-out the harmful influence of money in our politics. PPC launched [We Must Do M.O.R.E.](#) (Mobilizing, Organizing, Registering, and Educating) in 2019, a national tour to engage systematically disenfranchised voters.³⁸ Sign up to receive [social media](#) resources from PPC and see how you can help amplify the movement.³⁹

Pray

People of faith know how important prayer is to all of our individual and collective efforts. Prayer and action go hand in hand. Let these words guide your efforts to make a more just democracy. Gather in awareness that you are, now and always, in the presence of God.

Prayer for a Faithful Democracy

Almighty God, most merciful and providential, as people of faith, we come to you today in a spirit of humility and hope. During these challenging times help us to restore the sacred responsibility of our leaders to the common good, to equality and inclusion, and to protect the disempowered. We know that every human being is a person of dignity and worth. In this powerful and troubled nation, guide our efforts to shape a more just democracy that values this truth. Root out the corrosive power of money and restore the common good as the purpose of our politics.

Dear God, we ask that you deliver this nation from cynicism and from the erosion of trust that divides us. Help us to remain ever hopeful and to hold firm to our faith in the spirit of self-governance and the dignity of democratic representation. Empower us with free and honest elections reflecting the collective wisdom and the will of the people. Watch over us in this moment of our nation's history and grant us the insight to know the right way forward and the perseverance to create a truly faithful democracy.

You may choose to close with these petitions:

- ✓ ***God of humanity, open our eyes to the rightful priority of people over money and power in our politics.***
- ✓ ***God of abundance, let the wisdom of our democracy be guided by the richness and diversity of the American people.***
- ✓ ***God of light, open up our democratic systems so they are rooted in truth and transparency.***
- ✓ ***God of liberation, free our democracy and our elected officials from the stranglehold of money and special interests.***
- ✓ ***God of conversion, soften the hearts of our lawmakers and open them to needed reforms in our democratic institutions.***
- ✓ ***God of justice, empower those servant leaders and lawmakers who feel accountable to their constituents and to the common good.***
- ✓ ***God of unity, energize people of goodwill across the nation to join movements for positive change.***
- ✓ ***God of sanctity, root out the corrupting influence of powerful self-serving interests from our democratic systems.***
- ✓ ***God of righteousness, help us create a democracy that addresses the needs of the silenced and the marginalized.***
- ✓ ***God of truth, restore the faith of the American people in the promise and the spirit of our democracy.***
- ✓ ***God of reconciliation, help us shape a shared national identity rooted in kindness and healthy civil discourse.***

Amen.

- ¹ https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp
- ² <https://www.commoncause.org/democracy-wire/george-washington-to-citizens-united-a-history-of-campaign-finance-reform/>
- ³ <https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1828>
- ⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/11/the-most-expensive-election-ever-1896/264649/>
- ⁵ <https://millercenter.org/president/roosevelt/campaigns-and-elections>
- ⁶ <https://www.commoncause.org/democracy-wire/george-washington-to-citizens-united-a-history-of-campaign-finance-reform/>
- ⁷ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/basic-documents-in-federal-campaign-finance-law/tillman-act-34-stat-864-1907/B544B28C42F38C6850E2C9EAA7A0E465>
- ⁸ <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1051/tillman-act-of-1907>
- ⁹ <https://www.history.com/news/election-101-a-brief-history-of-american-campaign-finance-reform-in-7-acts>
- ¹⁰ [https://ballotpedia.org/Newberry v. United States](https://ballotpedia.org/Newberry_v._United_States)
- ¹¹ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/basic-documents-in-federal-campaign-finance-law/smithconnally-act-57-stat-163-1943/7E03B46B32739E5AD42EAD7D6C5E1AD7>
- ¹² <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacfaq.php>
- ¹³ <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/a-modern-history-of-campaign-finance-from-watergate-to-citizens-united/>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/understanding-ways-support-federal-candidates/presidential-elections/public-funding-presidential-elections/>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2012/01/23/opinion/zelizer-campaign-finance-reform/index.html>
- ¹⁶ <http://www.cfinst.org/law/federal.aspx>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.followthemoney.org/assets/press/Reports/200206257.pdf>
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