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INFLUENCING THE STATE: U.S. CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

ABSTRACT: Among the principal targets of criticism in recent American politics has been the alleged corruption, inequity, overall cost, and regulatory complexity of the U.S. campaign-finance system. Scholarship has not borne out any of these criticisms, and, if anything, empirical investigation suggests that the current system does a fair job in addressing—as much as this is possible under modern conditions—the problem of public ignorance in mass democracies.

According to non-pluralist versions of democratic theory, society—the people as a whole, not "special interests"—should determine the policies implemented by the state. State actors (legislators, bureaucrats, and judges) should not be so autonomous from society that they can pursue their own agendas, or those of unrepresentative factions of the people. The state therefore requires a steady supply of disinterested, competent, and representative public officials. How, then, to finance the elaborate system of recruiting candidates, mounting campaigns (including providing the detail on policy positions that is, at least in principle, necessary to a sovereign populace's informed choices), and mobilizing voters to turn out? In most advanced democracies, that same national state foots the bill, or most of it, through such means as direct payments to candidates or political parties, free access to television

and radio, income-tax credits for individual contributions, and reimbursement of election expenses (Katz 1997, 266–73; Pierre, Svasand, and Widfeldt 2000; Alexander 1989).

In contrast to heavily state-subsidized elections in, for example, Germany, Japan, Finland, and Spain, in the United States, the vast majority of national election expenditures[1] are funded by members of civil society through donations. Privately financed elections are a venerable American political practice, as it happens. During George Washington's race for the Virginia assembly in 1757, his supporters purchased "twenty-eight gallons of rum, fifty gallons of spiked punch, forty-six gallons of beer, thirty-four gallons of wine, and a couple of gallons of hard cider to help shore up his political base" (Herrnson 2000, 150). In the first seriously contested presidential race, that of 1800, Jeffersonian Republicans "revolutionized electioneering" by sponsoring "endless 'dinings,' 'drinkings,' and celebrations; handbills 'industriously posted along every road'; [and] convoys of vehicles which brought voters to the polls by the carload" (Fischer 1965, 93). For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, political parties handled most American campaign financing, raising money from individual party members and corporate supporters. Even after extensive reforms over the past quarter century, including the initial provision of public monies for national elections, current American elections remain almost entirely paid for by private sources. Of the nearly $3 billion spent on House, Senate, and presidential races in 2000, only some $238 million—or less than eight percent—came from public funds (Makinson 2001; Marcus 2000).

Individuals and interest groups, both corporate and public-interest, voluntarily donate most of the money spent on campaigns for national office in the United States. These contributions are transparent, in that the dollar amounts and identities of donors are reported and accessible to journalists and, thanks especially to the Internet, everyone else. Most contributions are also subject to

well-policed limits. (The "soft money" exceptions to these restrictions are discussed below.) Regulations also govern candidate and party spending of this privately raised money, whether hard or soft. And proportionate to the gross national product, total spending on U.S. federal elections is little more than it was in 1960 or even 1900.

Yet the U.S. system of financing elections is routinely referred to as undemocratic, scandalous, and the like; polls on campaign finance consistently report widespread public concern with the present system (Gierzynski 2000, 49–52). "Simply put," states one representative formulation, "there is too much private money in our political system. . . . This point is no longer a topic of serious debate" (Donnelly, Fine, and Miller 1997, 3). In a nation otherwise content to handle a vast range of transactions through the private sector, or through public/private partnership, why such a grim view of campaign finance?

A Century of Criticism

Critics of U.S. election financing have long targeted private—especially corporate—contributions. The first significant wave of such criticism arose after Theodore Roosevelt's successful 1904 presidential race, in which "it was unmistakably shown [by journalists and congressional investigators] that large corporations or their executives" contributed most of the then-unprecedented $2 million that the Republican party spent on behalf of Roosevelt and its congressional candidates (Mowry 1958, 179). Three years later, Congress passed the Tillman Act, forbidding corporate contributions to national campaigns. This law was easily circumvented, however, as were a succession of later congressional attempts to reform campaign financing. During the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, private funds "flowed through [corporate and party] channels which were recognized as legal avoid-

ance of existing acts" (Alexander and Haggerty 1981, 15; see also Sorauf 1988, esp. 17–34).

A series of reforms in the 1970s, most notably a sweeping set of 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA; originally passed in 1971), increased the national government's role in U.S. election financing. Congress set strict limits on campaign contributions and required their disclosure, and it provided for partial public subsidies of presidential elections. But this enhanced regulatory authority proved to be ineffective at best. The first federal election that followed the enactment of FECA, in 1972, was marred by secret "slush funds" and other financial irregularities brought to light in the Watergate scandal, resulting in the more draconian reforms of 1974. Yet in the wake of that historic legislation, 1976 election spending drew so much criticism that President Carter made campaign-finance reform his top legislative priority upon entering office—without success. A cycle of public discontent, reform proposals, and sporadic legislative action has continued ever since. Most recently, a push for reform culminated in March 2002, when President Bush signed a law imposing major restrictions on "soft money" contributions and other aspects of campaign finance.

American elites' and masses' periodic expressions of outrage at national election financing practices take four distinct forms.[2] To some, the campaign finance system is thoroughly (or at least significantly) corrupt. Illegal contributions and spending practices are portrayed as far outstripping the meager oversight efforts of executive and legislative regulators.

Second, even if campaign fundraising and spending largely conform to the letter of the law, many reformers view the system and its results as fundamentally unjust or inequitable. Electoral outcomes, and subsequent policy making, are seen as being unduly influenced by private contributions, whose donors are thought to be rewarded by legislative favors from grateful recipients. Moreover, this argument goes, the current financing system unfairly

favors wealthy donors, in both the corporate and individual realms, who can afford the funds necessary to win policy favors.

Third, the rising cost of national elections is a frequent target of criticism. This applies both to total spending—the record $2.8 billion lavished on federal campaigns in the 2000 cycle was widely bemoaned (see, e.g., Marcus 2000)—and to the escalating price tag of individual races. The successful House candidate in 2000 spent an unprecedented average of $840,000, a figure again surpassed in 2002 ($895,000). Along with these landmarks, other spending records set in 2000 included the most expensive Senate (New York) and House (California's 27th district) races, and the most money raised at a single event: $26.7 million, at a May 2000 Democratic gala in Washington, D.C. The high cost of campaigns raises the fear that potential challengers are deterred from seeking office by the sheer cost of running, or by the fundraising advantages enjoyed by incumbents. A pair of related concerns is that the government's efficacy is impaired because the pool of possible officeholders is constrained by rising campaign costs; and that democratic representation suffers if only the wealthy, and others with access to plentiful funds, are able to mount a viable campaign for the presidency or for a congressional seat.

Fourth and finally, after nearly 30 years of repeated amendments and numerous court-ordered revisions to FECA, both outside observers and those involved in campaigns find the present financing system to be overly complex, even incomprehensible. The rules governing contributions can be difficult to decipher. "Soft money" donations to political parties are subject to much looser regulation—no spending limits, for example—than are contributions to candidates for office. Inconsistent penalties for misconduct, such as exceeding contribution limits, also disturb critics. Election-law violations in the aftermath of the 1970s reform laws have been penalized severely in some cases and barely at all in others, de-

pending on seemingly arbitrary accidents of time, place, and presiding judge.

These concerns about the present election-financing system animate critics ranging from small-town newspaper editors to national public-interest organizations to social scientists. Prominent among the latter is Darrell M. West, who has written widely on U.S. elections and interest groups, and whose book-length critique of campaign finance is provocatively entitled Checkbook Democracy: How Money Corrupts Political Campaigns (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000). West touches on all four types of criticism catalogued above; by examining each of them through the prism of his book, as well as through other relevant studies, we may gain greater perspective on the potent issue of financing American national elections.

Corruption in Campaign Finance

Regarding corruption, West devotes an entire chapter to foreign nationals' contributions to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) during the 1996 campaign (84–106), resulting in "an embarrassing Democratic scandal in which illegal sources were tapped for millions of dollars" (13). Another chapter details an illicit swap of campaign contributions coordinated by the Teamsters union and the DNC, again during the 1996 contest (107–24). As they constitute two of six extended case studies in West's book, he presumably finds the corruption these examples reveal to be endemic in the U.S. system.

It is difficult to discern from such examples, however, just how corrupt the U.S. campaign-financing system actually is. Were the foreign-nationals and Teamsters cases typical of 1996 funding practices, within either or both major parties? Did these mark widespread excesses of a sick system, or rare breaches of legality that were duly exposed and brought to justice? Definitive answers are difficult to come by; none of West's fellow academic crit-

ics of campaign finance has published a detailed analysis of the available evidence.[3] But cross-national studies of corruption in politics generally accord the U.S. government, at least in its post-Gilded Age incarnation, relatively high marks compared to other industrial democracies (e.g., Rose-Ackerman 1999; Ades and Di Tella 1997; Eigen 2000; Johnston 2002; on corruption and campaign finance, Strauss 1994).

Though the United States scores well on comparative measures of political (including election finance) corruption, elite critics are joined by large majorities of the American public in viewing illegalities in campaign financing as a major problem, according to a range of national polls.[4] This could reflect a general recognition that scattered revelations of fraud represent pervasive problems (as West and others imply). Or it could be that the perception of corruption outweighs the apparently limited reality of it. If so, then the sources of that perception—media and even scholarly accounts—conceivably share some blame with the handful of actual malefactors whose activities are reported as if they are representative.

One further point concerning corruption in election finance. If the United States were, in response to real or perceived fraud, to undertake a major restructuring of campaign financing, most critics would want to see it move towards more public funding. West summarizes a variety of potential reforms along such lines, concluding that "these proposals show real promise if implemented" (180). Possibly so, although it is difficult to draw a strong conclusion based on the available evidence. The only significant attempt to establish public funding of U.S. elections came, again, in 1974, when presidential campaigns were first subsidized by the national government. While subsequent presidential contests have not been riddled with corruption charges, neither have they been demonstrably "cleaner" than their predecessors in the 1960s or before.

Witness the 1996 campaign, featuring extensive coverage of Lincoln Bedroom and Buddhist temple misdeeds

(e.g., Gierzynski 2000, 2–4). This could owe to the limited extent of public financing; private funds may indeed be the root of the system's evils, as reformers often insist. But looking beyond the United States, many industrial democracies that finance their campaigns primarily or exclusively through public sources have recently experienced fundraising scandals that dwarf anything seen in the 1996 American contest, or even in Watergate. Germany, for example, continues to reel in the wake of a series of revelations following their federal elections of 2000: these exposés resulted in, inter alia, the near-collapse of Germany's dominant postwar party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU); the resignation and public humiliation of the CDU's longtime leader (and Germany's most prominent politician of the past half-century), Helmut Kohl, along with numerous other top CDU leaders; and the suicide of the main CDU fundraising official. Similar troubles have beset France, Japan, and Italy, among other nations that at least formally rely on public financing of federal campaigns (Pujas and Rhodes 1999). If initiated in tandem with the U.S.'s relatively strict disclosure rules, public funding might be an American panacea, provided that First Amendment concerns could be alleviated (Sabato and Simpson 1996, 328–29). But the record elsewhere suggests little grounds for optimism.

Are Private Campaign Donations Unfair?

If not illegal or otherwise obviously corrupt, private contributions may nonetheless be viewed as unfairly influencing electoral—and, ultimately, policy—outcomes. The concern, in brief, is that disparities in wealth may translate into disparities in political power. West describes a representative case at length, involving "Big Tobacco" donations to Republican leaders in Congress during and after the 1996 campaign (125–45). These tobacco-company contributions, along with a public-relations campaign on behalf of the industry, helped to derail punitive legislation in 1998. In West's words, not only

did tobacco "industry executives . . . have their voices heard in the [relevant policy] debate, at least with the dominant party in Congress" (134), but the bill's defeat represented "a remarkable demonstration of the power of money to dictate the policy agenda of Congress" (143).

As with the examples of corruption cited above, West's study is limited to a particularly egregious case of unjust influence. Such stories certainly stir the blood, but again the real issue is whether anecdotes like these represent ordinary campaign-finance practices, or are uncommon instances of inequitable abuse. (As with the Teamsters and foreign- nationals cases, the tobacco companies' activities were widely exposed and criticized.)[5]

Assessing the influence of campaign spending on electoral or policy outcomes is highly problematic, which helps explain the preponderance of anecdotal exposés among critiques of the present system. Whatever the hard evidence, such analysts as West and the general public alike unequivocally identify political-action committee (PAC) contributions as the cause, for example, of incumbents' repeat victories. Yet claims that PAC-fuelled campaign war chests have fuelled spiralling incumbency rates are belied by historical evidence. In the three national elections before 1974, when PACs were made legally possible, the total number of House incumbents who lost their seats was 25, or an average of 1.9 percent per election year. Two decades later, in the elections between 1994 and 98—with PAC spending reaching new heights each time—a total of 61 incumbent House members lost, or 4.7 percent on average each year.[6] Granted, both of these numbers are small; the proportion of incumbents defeated has rarely been large in post-World War II American history. But it is difficult to conclude that "PAC power" has meaningfully increased the ongoing electoral advantage of sitting members of Congress.

As for the larger question of whether, as West (167) claims, "more than 90 percent of the men and women who have sought re-election have won" because "it's much easier for incumbents to raise campaign money than it is

for challengers," a wealth of research has failed to establish such a conclusion. Yes, incumbents raise more money than their opponents do, and largely as a consequence, they are able to greatly outspend their challengers (Herrnson 2000, 151–79). But do well-financed incumbents therefore defeat their challengers? Linking patterns of contributions and candidate spending directly to election outcomes has thus far eluded scholarly research, however intuitively obvious the point may appear (see the thorough review of the literature in Squire 1995; compare Erikson and Palfry 2000). This may merely reflect insufficiently refined analytic instruments, to be sure. But recent studies suggest that incumbents' electoral success owes less to fundraising prowess than to a variety of other factors, such as simple name-identification and résumé advantages (Levitt and Wolfram 1997). Even anecdotally, for every tale of a big-spending winner one may cite a number of big-spending losers, such as Michael Huffington (who squandered a then-record $29 million in his losing 1994 bid for a U.S. Senate seat in California), or—on the incumbent side—the average of $2.5 million spent by the six House members who lost their general-election campaigns in 2000.

Let us assume, even absent scholars' consensus on the point, that levels of spending do directly translate into electoral success. The natural response, favored by many reformers, is to severely restrict campaign expenditures. But such a change could well reduce, rather than boost, electoral competition: "In practical terms, limits on campaign spending constitute an incumbent's protective device, since challengers almost always have a greater burden of making their names known" (Polsby and Wildavsky 1996, 81; cf. Smith 2001, 66–70). A candidate who gains a major party's nomination for Congress or president can tap into extensive fundraising networks, regardless of how personally wealthy he or she is. FEC Commissioner and campaign-finance reform critic Bradley Smith (2001, 81) argues along these lines that "many candidates who begin with relatively

little cash are able to use their other political talents to raise the money necessary to take their message to the voters."

The claim that contributors unfairly gain enhanced influence among members of Congress (MCs) or executive-branch officials after the election is another intuitively plausible notion that has yet to be confirmed by empirical analysis. In a particularly realistic recent experiment, three political scientists engaged 69 congressional staffers in a test of whether PAC contributors enjoyed heightened access to MCs, in contrast to constituents and interest groups that had not contributed to the MCs' campaigns. They concluded that "conventional wisdom notwithstanding, we find evidence that members give priority to constituent requests over PACs." And as to "whether initial access to members is biased towards PACs," their findings "suggest that it is not" (Chin, Bond, and Geva 2000, 545). Numerous other examinations of contributor influence on policy outcomes have reached similarly qualified conclusions (e.g., Box-Steffensmeier and Grant 1999; Milyo et al. 2000; Bailey 2001).

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, most of the concern about inequity in campaign financing targeted PAC contributions. But two newer practices have drawn increasing fire since the 1996 campaign, culminating in the recently enacted McCain-Feingold legislation: so-called "soft money" contributions to political parties; and independent campaign expenditures, most notoriously "issue advocacy" advertisements, that are paid for by interest groups operating (at least ostensibly) apart from either candidates or parties. In West's assessment, "large, soft-money donations [and] independent expenditures allow wealthy interests to funnel money into politics" (65). Yet the effects of soft money and issue ads on electoral and policy outcomes have yet to be reliably determined, and our experience with other plausible-sounding theories about the power of political donors does not bode well for the latest intuitions about the reliance of state personnel on special interests.

How Much Is Too Much?

West minimizes the issue of escalating campaign costs, concluding that "the problem in American politics is not too much money; it is the availability and use of secret, undisclosed financial resources" (179). Other observers disagree, finding the sheer amount of spending (nearly $3 billion in 2000) to be disturbing. Victoria Farrar-Myers and Diana Dwyre list "the rising cost of campaigns" as one of two "issues [at] the forefront for those who stud[y] the campaign finance issue" (1999, 10). Robert Putnam (2000, 39–40), in his massive study of the decline of social capital in post-1950s America, notes that while "citizen involvement was slumping [between 1960–1996] by more than half, spending on presidential nomination and election campaigns exploded. . . . The bottom line in the political industry is this: Financial capital—the wherewithal for mass marketing—has steadily replaced social capital—that is, grassroots citizen networks—as the coin of the realm."

However, the "explosion" of spending in recent years appears much less dramatic when measured in constant dollars. By this standard, spending declined in (for example) 1992 as compared to 1988. The average nominal (unadjusted) cost of winning either a House or Senate campaign nearly doubled between 1986 and 1998, a fact widely advertised among critics of U.S. election finance. Yet in constant dollars, Senate winners spent less than 4 percent more in 1998 than in 1986. The 1998 House inflation-adjusted figure did increase when compared to 1986—by 28 percent—but fell when compared to 1996. Thus, the overall trend is mixed, rather than tracing the upward trajectory that nominal figures imply.

More pertinent is a question rarely voiced in analyses of election financing: How much should campaigns cost? Americans spend more on politics than do the citizens of other advanced nations, as critics often note—yet because of the large U.S. population, the cost per voter is actually less than in most democracies (Penniman 1984, 52–53).

For example, George W. Bush's record $185.9 million campaign in 2000 translated into $3.68 per vote (Laris 2002, 21). Also inflating the sum total of American campaign costs, relative to counterparts like England, Japan, and Germany, are two unique aspects of the U.S. system: far more frequent federal elections, and an unusually powerful national legislature. Those decrying the overall cost of American national elections, either in terms of sheer dollars spent or in comparison to representative democracies around the globe, may be relying on misleading standards.

Others draw comparisons of a different sort. Americans spend over twice as much annually on yogurt as on electing candidates to Congress and the White House (Congressional Record 1995, S16722; cf. Maraniss and Weisskopf 1996, 126–27). Similarly, U.S. spending on the Railroad Retirement Board in 1999, approximately $4.9 billion, was nearly two-thirds again as much as the entire amount spent on the 2000 American national elections. For the same year, the federal government budgeted over 1.5 times as much for promoting international tourism to the United States ($374 million) as for public financing of the general-election phase of the 2000 presidential campaign.[7] Compared to the other purchases of the American public, such as the $4.7 billion spent on laundry soap, the nearly $3 billion it spends on federal races may appear less than egregious.

A concern that is separate from the prima-facie unseemliness of the cost of campaigns is that elected officials are forced to allocate increasing time to fundraising while in office, rather than to governing. West notes that during the 1996 Clinton re-election campaign, "to accommodate such a frenetic money-raising schedule, White House staffers were forced to cancel official presidential meetings. . . . Campaign advisors worried about fatigue and its effect on the president's judgment" (97). Similar portraits have been drawn of members of Congress (e.g., Hall and Wayman 1990). But while such worries certainly have force, it is not immediately evident that reducing the

need for fundraising activities would enable policy makers to devote more time to substantive policy matters. Re-election, however financed, is a perennial concern for most officeholders; a congressional or presidential candidate might well undertake other forms of electioneering in place of "dialing for dollars." Perhaps this is a desirable outcome, but the easy assumption that the private financing of campaigns is what keeps officials from their duties is dubious.

A Boomin', Buzzin' Confusion

In the present U.S. electoral-financing system, West writes, "a reasonably clear set of rules for the game now has given way to a bewildering variety of tangled laws, confusing regulations, blatant loopholes, and selective enforcement of what guidelines remain" (165). Even if private funds are not irrefutably the source of corruption or injustice, the maze governing their regulation may be. Victoria Farrar-Myers and Diane Dwyre (1999, 12) are among those who link legal complexity with the problem of unequal spending by lamenting "a process that is so noisy and consumed with what money can buy that democracy itself is drowned out in the process."

Once more, however, there is an "and yet." The current financing laws date largely to the reforms of the 1970s, when a series of well-meaning changes—intended, in part, to reduce the thicket surrounding campaign finance rules by means of greater transparency in both contributions and spending—yielded a raft of unintended consequences, such as the creation of PACs and, later, soft money, issue advocacy, and so forth (the hot new problem: "527" organizations). Any attempt to simplify the current system may well result in more loopholes and innovative fundraising vehicles, and a net gain rather than reduction in complexity. If a principal intention of reform is to reduce confusion, the results of the past 30-plus years should raise red flags.

My purpose is not to praise the current system. As

West and others show, the potential for abuse is there, even if empirical analysis cannot (yet?) demonstrate that corruption or injustice are a prominent feature of contemporary American campaign financing. But the status quo is not yet ready to be buried, either, based on present evidence.

On paper, the 2000 election would appear to be a compelling object of criticism, thanks to new spending records galore; three largely self-financed multimillionaires newly elected to the Senate; campaign-finance reform crusaders defeated in each party's presidential primary; and so forth.

Yet the 2000 election was marked by an extraordinary level of competition. The two general-election candidates ran within a few percentage points of one another throughout the fall campaign. Partisan control of both houses of Congress was genuinely up for grabs, right up to the eve of the election. Setting aside the bizarre post-election struggle, the 2000 race was also a model campaign in other important respects, such as the propensity of presidential (and many high-profile Senate and House) candidates to favor discussion of policy issues rather than mudslinging ("White House 2000," 1). The new multimillionaire Senators, Jon Corzine of New Jersey, Mark Dayton of Minnesota, and Maria Cantwell of Washington, are unlikely to prove mouthpieces for wealth and privilege, corporate or otherwise: all occupy the left wing of the Democratic party, joining there such wealthy Senators as Jay Rockefeller (W. Va.) and Ted Kennedy (Mass.)—each of whom was originally elected long before the era of soft money and massive PAC spending.[8] In short, a national election held amidst sustained criticism of unprecedented campaign spending will likely be judged among the more salutary national contests of recent decades, even in deliberative-democratic terms.

A Counterintuitive View of Campaign Finance

If political scientists have yet to prove would-be reform-

ers' allegations right, it could indicate a problem with the researchers or the data as much as with the allegations. West endorses such a view, criticizing the bulk of academic work on campaign finance as erroneously "suggesting money doesn't matter all that much in voting in the United States" (167). Yet some studies suggest that current financing practices may have positive effects on democratic participation.

Such an argument has recently been investigated by John Coleman and Paul Manna. Rather than the typical scholarly attempt to ascertain the effects of campaign spending on election or policy outcomes, Coleman and Manna address an intermediary matter: how does campaign spending influence voters?

Specifically, they examine such issues as "trust and efficacy, involvement and attention, and electorally relevant knowledge and affect in the public, all key components of a vibrant political community" (2000, 758). While campaign spending has little apparent effect (positive or negative) on such variables as public trust and citizen involvement, elsewhere it—perhaps astonishingly—appears to "produce generally beneficial effects. Campaign spending contributes importantly to key aspects of democracy and political community such as knowledge and affect" (759). Coleman and Manna show that spending is directly correlated with the amount of reliable, accurate information about candidates and issues available to voters, and with citizens' ability to recall that information. Electoral competitiveness, rather than being diminished, appears to increase in rough proportion with campaign spending, as, one might infer, the bombardment of ads penetrates the fog of voters' customary inattention, leading them to question their assumptions about incumbents and view challengers more favorably. Moreover, spending that is intended to mislead voters (i.e., as to an incumbent's ideology) seems not to succeed in doing so (777). All in all, money may matter in U.S. elections at least partly in a positive way.

Coleman and Manna suggest that current spending prac-

tices may help to enhance voter awareness and involvement. But if West and other critics are unable to show persuasively that the present system corrupts political campaigns and governance, there is a less dramatic way in which the "checkbook democracy" of his title might corrosively affect American democratic practice. Involvement can take the form of "donating" time as well as money. And it seems clear that in recent years, the number of people making monetary contributions have far outstripped those dedicated to volunteering time—for canvassing, mobilizing fellow voters, and the like. One landmark study concludes that the "role of the citizen" is increasingly that of "a writer of checks," and that "if money were to replace time as the primary medium of citizen input, the consequences for politics would be substantial" (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 67; cf. ibid., 191–96). Putnam concurs that "participation in politics is increasingly based on the checkbook. . . . If we think of politics as an industry, we might delight in its new 'labor-saving efficiency,' but if we think of politics as democratic deliberation, to leave people out is to miss the whole point of the exercise" (2000, 40).

On the other hand, the information provided by campaigns, as described by Coleman and Manna, is just about the only means by which, at least at the national level, members of "society" obtain any of the information necessary even to approach being able to control "the state." Were less money spent on campaigns, or were the money to flow from the state itself, even this low level of information might be jeopardized.

NOTES

1. This study focuses on national elections; for research into campaign financing in state and local elections, see the essays in Thompson and Moncrief 1998; or in Giezyrnski 2000, 48–50 and 100–01.
2. Along with West 2000, the following points are drawn from several academic sources, including Ferguson 1995; Smith

2001; Strauss 1994; Farrar-Myers and Dwyre 1999; Katz 1997; Gais 1996; Bartels et al. 1998; and Giezyrnski 2000.

3. Another sustained study, bluntly titled Dirty Little Secrets: The Persistence of Corruption in American Politics, compiles a longer roster of examples—including a handful from the campaign-finance area—revealing "the stubborn persistence of corruption" in U.S. politics; "taken together," the authors conclude, "it is indisputable that corruption is polluting our Republic" (Sabato and Simpson 1996, 4, 326). While these authors (like West) offer no empirical defense of this sweeping claim, both books hint at a "tip-of-the-iceberg" approach—one meriting serious consideration. If corrupt practices in election finance and elsewhere are usually successfully concealed by politicians, the few cases that surface may sustain the inference that many more exist. More sophisticated research instruments are necessary to address this issue, but the possibility deserves mention.
4. National polls on campaign finance from 2000 include those conducted by *Newsweek*, released August 21; Gallup, April 17; ABC News/Washington Post, April 14 (by 66–28 percent, respondents supported "stricter campaign finance laws"); Mellman Group, April 3 (by 68–19 percent, respondents favored eliminating private contributions in favor of full public financing, and 56 percent said campaign contributions affected MCs' votes "a lot"); CBS News, March 27 (85 percent favored either "fundamental changes" or "completely rebuilding" the campaign-finance system); NBC/Wall Street Journal, January 28; *Newsweek*, January 9.
5. Indeed, one might further observe that "Big Tobacco" failed to achieve its desired outcome in Congress—the passage of a settlement that had been elaborately worked up by industry officials, legislators, and state attorneys general. Instead, a bill was introduced by John McCain (a Republican who was, presumably, insufficiently financed by tobacco contributions) that was far more punitive than the settlement agreement. Tobacco money may then have "stopped" the McCain legislation from passage, but it was ineffective in promoting the companies' original objective in Congress. See LaFrance 2000, 199–200; my thanks go to Gary McKissick for pointing out this development.
6. The details: 5 House members lost their seats in 1968 (5 Democrats, no Republicans), 11 lost in 1970 (2 D, 9 R), and 9 lost in 1972 (6 D, 3 R). House losers numbered 34 in 1994 (all D), 21 in 1996 (18 R, 3 D), and 6 in 1998 (1 D, 5 R). In 2000, 8 House members (including two who lost their party's pri-

mary) and 6 Senators were unseated—the most incumbent Senate losers since 1986.

7. Figures are 1999 spending totals derived from the FY 2000 U.S. budget.
8. Far less often noted than these multimillionaire Senate winners is that 12 House candidates devoted over $1 million of their personal fortunes to their 2000 campaigns, and that 11 of the 12 lost.

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