Introduction

With low voter turnout, recent talks about contested conventions and archaic delegate rules, many voters have lost trust in the U.S. electoral process.

There needs to be more transparency about the electoral process and which interests are furthering whose campaigns. Increasingly, there has been an increasing rift not only between social classes, but also a deep partisanship that has increased tensions among the groups and led to stagnation of progress.

History of Campaign Finance

- **1907 Tillman Act**: Prohibited corporations from contributing to federal elections.
- **1947 Taft-Hartley Act**: Prohibited labor unions from contributing to federal elections.
- **1971 FECA**: Created the Federal Election Commission.
- **1974 Amendments to FECA**: Imposed limits on PAC contributions to candidates and parties.
- **2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA)**: Banned the practice of ‘soft money’ from political parties.
- **2010 Citizens United v. FEC**: Lifted ban on independent expenditures & financing electioneering communications by corporations and labor unions.

Research Methods

- I will be using data collected by the Center for Responsive Politics (CPR), through the website opensecrets.org.
- I will be looking at outside spending figures for election cycles dating back to 1996, 20 years back, noting that midterm election years do tend to have lower expenditure rates than presidential election years.
- In determining whether one party has benefited another, I will be looking at the spending from liberal groups as well as conservative groups, also going back to 1996 and looking for any significant changes after 2010.
- Does more money equal more votes? I will be tackling this question by comparing the amount of money spent by the primary candidates of both the 2012 and the current 2016 presidential elections to determine whether there is a pattern of candidates with the most money, both in their campaigns and their superPACs, winning primaries.
- With the 2016 presidential election now underway, there is a new opportunity to further analyze the effects of the Citizens United case.
- We may also begin to catch a glimpse of the bigger picture as a trend starts to emerge as we add another election cycle into the record.
- If there has indeed been a spending increase, I can expect to see a dramatic increase in independent expenditures after 2010, following the ruling.
- If more money equals more votes, then we can expect to see a pattern of candidates with the most money winning elections.

Expected Results

Research Question

- Have independent expenditures by non-party groups increased significantly?
- Has one party benefitted over the other from the ruling?
- And finally, does more money in elections mean more influence?

References


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