A majority cast their votes for John Adams as vice president. After 1800, states began allowing voters to choose electors. When you vote for president in the next election, you will actually be voting for electors who have promised to support your candidate.

The number of electors from each state equals the number of that state's representatives in Congress. For example, Virginia has 2 senators and 11 House members, giving it a total of 13 electoral votes. Washington, D.C., has 3 electoral votes. There are 538 electors in all, which means that a candidate must win at least 270 electoral votes to become president. If no candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the House of Representatives selects the president, with each state casting one vote.

Not surprisingly, the Electoral College system has provoked controversy over the years. The chief criticism is that it is undemocratic. Critics point to three elections in U.S. history—in 1876, 1888, and 2000—in which the candidate who won the popular vote failed to win in the Electoral College. The most recent example was Al Gore's loss to George W. Bush in 2000.

For years, critics have called for a reform of the Electoral College. Most advocate electing the president by direct popular vote. This change would require a constitutional amendment. However, many states, especially smaller ones, are likely to oppose such a change, fearing that it would reduce their influence in presidential elections.

Another option is the congressional district method, which is an alternative to the winner-take-all system. Under this method, now used in Maine and Nebraska, the candidate who wins the popular vote in each congressional district gets that district's electoral vote. The overall winner in the state receives the two additional electoral votes that represent the state's senators.

A third option is called the national popular vote. Under this plan, states would agree to cast their electoral votes for the winner of the national popular vote, rather than for the victor in their own state. This change can be implemented by state legislatures, thereby avoiding the need for a constitutional amendment. In 2007, Maryland became the first state to adopt this Electoral College reform. The reform will not go into effect, however, unless approved by enough states to constitute a majority of the Electoral College vote.




Many Americans find the Electoral College system confusing at best—and at worst, undemocratic. Some would like to replace it with a system based on the popular vote. However, because the Electoral College is written into the Constitution, getting rid of it would require a constitutional amendment.

## 10.5 Financing Election Campaigns

In the United States today, elections are centered more on candidates than on political parties. This was not always the case. At one time, candidates relied heavily on their parties to help them win elections. Today, however, candidates behave more like independent political actors than party representatives. They depend mainly on their own political skills and the efforts of their campaign organizations to get elected.

### The High Cost of Running for Office

Money has played a large part in this shift from party-centered to candidate-centered elections. As campaigns have grown more expensive, candidates have come to rely increasingly on their own fundraising abilities or personal fortunes to win public office. In 2000, for example, more than $3 billion was spent on election campaigns in the United States. On average, winning candidates for a seat in the House of Representatives spent $500,000 each. Winners of each Senate seat spent an average of $4.5 million. Today, the cost is even higher.

American election campaigns center on candidates rather than on parties. Note the absence of party names on these campaign posters. In many other countries, the party affiliations of candidates play a much larger role in campaigns.


The high cost of running for office is a concern for various reasons. Candidates with limited resources may find it hard to compete with those who are well funded. This lack of a level playing field inevitably excludes some people from running for office. In addition, officeholders must spend considerable time and energy building up their war chests for the next race, rather than focusing on the work of governing.

The main issue, however, is whether campaign contributions corrupt elected officials. When candidates win public office, do they use their positions to benefit big campaign donors? In other words, do politicians always "dance with the ones who brung them," as the old saying goes? Lawmakers generally say no, but the public is not so sure.

### Two Strategies Guide Campaign Donations

Political scientists have observed that individuals and groups donating to campaigns choose from two basic strategies. The first is the electoral strategy. Donors that follow this strategy use their money to help elect candidates who support their views and to defeat those who do not. The goal is to increase the likelihood that Congress, their state legislature, or their city council will vote as the donor wishes it would vote.

The second is the access strategy. Donors following this approach give money to the most likely winner in a race, regardless of party. If the race looks close, the donor might even contribute to both campaigns. The goal is to gain access to whichever party wins the election. Donors using this strategy expect to be able to meet with the official they supported and present their views on issues of interest to them.

Political scientist Michael Smith points out that neither strategy involves trading money for a promise to vote a certain way on a piece of legislation. Indeed, offering money for votes is considered bribery and is clearly illegal. Donors found guilty of offering bribes—and lawmakers found guilty of accepting them—face prison sentences, not to mention ruined careers.

There have been well-publicized examples of such corruption. Nonetheless, political scientists find that most elected officials act according to their political principles, no matter who donates to their campaigns. Donors who make large contributions to campaigns might enjoy greater access to officeholders. But that access may or may not translate into influence over the actions of those officials.

### Where Campaign Money Comes From

Almost all of the money used to fund election campaigns comes from private sources. A few wealthy candidates have been able to fund some or all of their campaigns from their own assets. In 2000, for example, John Corzine of New Jersey spent $60 millio of his own money on a successful bid for a seat in the U.S. Senate. The great majority of candidates, however, must reach out to their supporters for funding.

Most campaign funds come from individual citizens. These donations are often raised through direct-mail or Internet fundraising campaigns. And they are typically fairly small, in the $25 to $100 range. Candidates also host fundraisers to raise money from large donors. In 2007–2008, the amount of money an individual could donate to a single candidate was limited by law to $2,300 for the primary campaign and another $2,300 for the general election. These figures are periodically adjusted for inflation.

In recent years, political action committees have become an important source of campaign funds. PACs are organizations formed by corporations, labor unions, or interest groups to channel funds into political campaigns. Similar to individual donations, PAC contributions to a single candidate are limited to $5,000 for the primary campaign and another $5,000 for the general election.

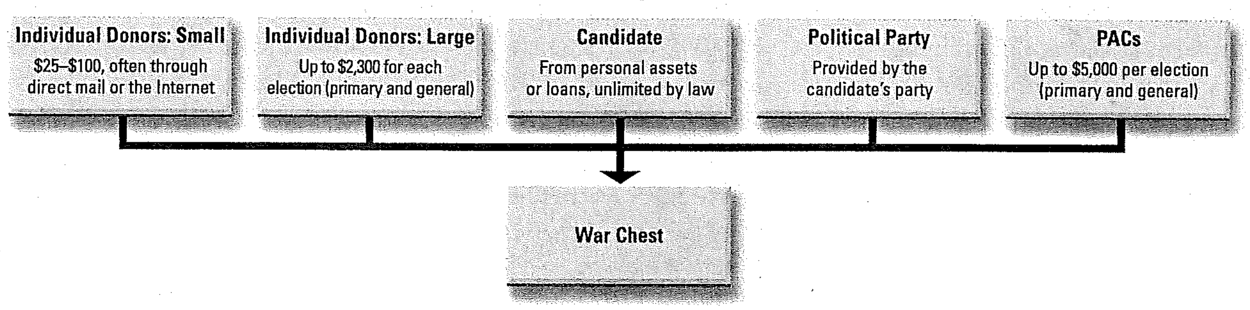
### Public Funding of Campaigns

Another source of money for some candidates is public funds. A few states, such as Arizona and New Hampshire, use public money to finance campaigns

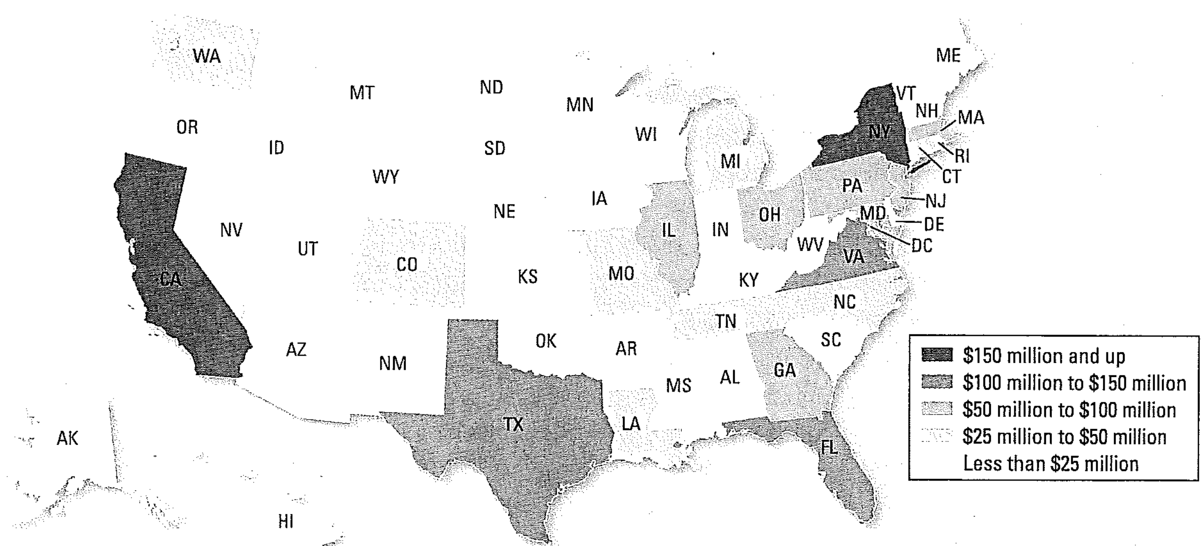
## Where Campaign Money Comes From

Candidates running for federal office raise funds in various ways. Donors in some parts of the country contribute far more to campaigns than do others. In 2004, California topped the nation in terms of total contributions, with New York and the District of Columbia in second and third place, respectively.

**Sources of Campaign Funds**




**Campaign Contributions by State, 2004**




Source: Federal Election Commission.

for governor and state lawmakers. At the federal level, only presidential candidates receive public funding. This money comes from taxpayers who check a $3 donation box on their income tax forms. The money accumulates between elections and is made available for both primary and general election campaigns.

To qualify for public funds, a candidate must raise at least $5,000 in each of 20 states in small contributions of $250 or less. Once qualified, candidates can receive federal matching funds of up to $250 for each additional contribution they receive. The purpose of these provisions is to encourage candidates to rely mainly on small contributions from average voters.

Public funds come with a catch. Candidates who receive public money must agree to limit their campaign spending. In 2004, the limit for primary campaigns was about $37 million. Rather than accept that limit, three candidates—George W. Bush, Howard Dean, and John Kerry—chose to forgo public funding. Instead, they raised and spent far larger sums on their own. Once nominated, however, both Bush and Kerry did agree to accept public funds. This limited their spending in the general election campaign to about $75 million.

The future of public funding for presidential elections looks uncertain for two reasons. One is a drop-off in taxpayer donations for this purpose. The other is a growing reluctance among presidential hopefuls to accept public funds and to limit their campaign spending.

### Reining in Soft Money and Issue Ads

In 1974, Congress created the Federal Election Commission to enforce laws that limit campaign contributions. The FEC requires candidates to keep accurate records of donations to their campaigns and to make those records available to the public. This public disclosure allows voters to see who is supporting which candidates for federal offices.

Despite FEC oversight, campaign spending spiraled upward during the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the money came from interest groups who had found loopholes in existing campaign finance laws. Calls for reform led to the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002, also known as the McCain-Feingold Act.

The new law attempted to solve two main problems. The first was the growing use of **soft money** to fund election campaigns. Soft money is unregulated money donated to a political party for such purposes as voter education. In theory, soft money was not to be used to support individual campaigns. For this reason, it was not limited by campaign funding laws. In practice, however, parties used soft money to help candidates fund their election bids, thus boosting campaign spending.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act bans the use of soft money in individual election campaigns. It also limits how much soft money an individual can contribute to a party. Furthermore, parties can use soft money only to encourage voter registration and voter turnout.

The second problem was the use of **issue ads** in campaigns. Issue ads are political ads that are funded and produced by interest groups rather than by election campaigns. In theory, these ads focus on issues rather than on candidates. Thus, like soft money, they were not regulated by campaign finance laws. In practice, however, many issue ads were barely disguised campaign ads. For example, such an ad might discuss a pollution problem and then suggest that "Bill Jones," a lawmaker up for reelection, is "a friend of polluters." Even though the ad did not say, "Vote against Bill Jones," its intention would be to influence how voters viewed the lawmaker.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act bans the broadcast of such thinly disguised campaign ads in the 60 days leading up to an election. This part of the law has been challenged in court, however, by groups that see the ban as an unconstitutional limit on their First Amendment right to free speech. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled in *Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life* that such ads could be banned "only if the ad is susceptible of no reasonable interpretation other than as an appeal to vote for or against a specific candidate."

Finally, the act contains a "stand by your ad" rule that requires candidates to take responsibility for their campaign commercials. Beginning in the 2004 elections, candidates were required to appear in their own ads and explicitly endorse the content.

One side effect of the reform act has been the growth of groups known as **527 committees**. These organizations are formed under Section 527 of the tax code. Because they are not tied to a political party or candidate, they are allowed to raise and spend


Morin, The Miami Herald, Miami, USA/Cartoon International Arts www.cartoonweb.com

Many people believe that major donors to campaigns have too much influence in U.S. politics. Campaign finance laws have had some success in limiting special-interest donations to candidates. In addition, Americans can still vote leaders out of office if the leaders do a poor job.

unlimited amounts to support or oppose candidates. In effect, 527 committees and their donors have found a loophole that allows the continued use of unregulated soft money in political campaigns. As Senator John McCain, one of the sponsors of the 2002 reform law, pointed out, "Money, like water, will look for ways to leak back into the system."

## 10.6 Voter Behavior

Elections are important in a democracy. They allow citizens to participate in government. They also serve to check the power of elected officials. When voters go to the polls, they hold officials accountable for their actions. In *The Federalist Papers,* James Madison observed that elections compel leaders

> *to anticipate the moment when their power is to cease, when their exercise of it is to be reviewed, and when they must descend to the level from which they were raised; there forever to remain unless a faithful discharge of their trust shall have established their title to a renewal of it.*
>
> —James Madison,
> *The Federalist* No. 57, 1788

Elections are one of the things that distinguish a democracy from a dictatorship. Nevertheless, many Americans do not vote.

### Who Does and Does Not Vote

In any given election, as many as two-thirds of all Americans who could vote do not do so. When asked, nonvoters offer a number of reasons for not going to the polls. Many say they are just too busy. Others cite illness or lack of interest. Political scientists who study voting point to three differences between voters and nonvoters: age, education, and income.

*Age.* The percentage of people voting varies among different age groups. Most voters are over the age of 30, and voting tends to increase with age. Once voters reach 75, however, turnout begins to decline, mostly due to ill health. The younger a person is, the less likely he or she is to vote. In the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000, fewer than one-third of all those in the 18–24 age group went to the polls. That figure rose in 2004. Whether that upward trend will continue depends on future voters like you.

*Education.* Voting also varies by level of education. Americans with college educations vote in much higher numbers than do high school dropouts. Nearly three-fourths of all eligible voters with college