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MONEY AND POLITICS

THE GRADUAL DISTORTION OF AMERICAN POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON POVERTY – WHAT DOES THE CHURCH HAVE TO SAY?

The current political climate of the USA is a system that fails to properly advocate for the needs of all citizens especially those living in poverty. The process of undervaluing the voice of people without wealth has been gradual, misunderstood or under-acknowledged. In this reference we will look at some of the root causes of this division, implications for the average citizen, terms to know and tangible ways to bring about change.

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Mt. 25:40



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Money and Politics: a pairing that is as popular as a hangnail, but as perfect as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Government leaders have always debated over how much to regulate contributions to candidates and parties. And the degree to which money has played a role in our political system has changed over the years, but has it changed for the better? A common refrain we hear is, “There’s too much money in politics.” In this guide we will look at decisions our U.S. and state representatives have made to facilitate outside forces to influence politics and whether they threaten the democratic process. We are concerned about how the current system moves away from addressing poverty and protecting people who live on the edges of poverty, and how this has served to exaggerate an unequal society that also impacts the middle class.

LOPPW organized this guide to build awareness about how lobbying works and which factors are in play in modern society. When looking at why we should care and take action, we will draw on the Bible, Lutheran teachings, and our values as people of faith in the 21st century.

Many Thanks

Thank you to LOPPW Intern Kyle Kretschmann, graduate in Economics from the University of Wisconsin Madison, for being the primary writer of this guide!

IDEAS OF INTEREST

How Did We Get Here? The players involved and the roles they play

The Role of Special Interests and Political Action Committees in Modern Politics

What does the Bible say about hunger and advocacy?

What steps can I take to help balance the scales in American politics?

How Did We Get Here?

In this section we will define commonly used terms when discussing money in politics and their respective histories.

Lobbying

As long as we have had democracy people have expected to have a voice. In fact, citizens being able to publicly express their opinions and influence their communities and

What is lobbying?

The process of influencing public and government policy at all levels: federal, state, and local

country are touted as the true strengths of democracy in its purest form. Lobbying is older than the United States of America. The term lobbyist comes from the 17th century in the English House of Commons where citizens would gather in the lobby to wait to talk to Parliament. By 1832 the term had caught on in the US to describe citizens looking for legislative favors. However, the modern lobbyist not only is active directly with legislators, but also uses coalitions and campaigns to connect on a grassroots level. The goal remains to win support for their point of view but the methods have changed.

In the 19th century lobbyists were seen as ethically dubious, and citizens were concerned that they abused their connections through bribes. Beginning in 1907, Congress passed the Tillman Act, limiting how banks and corporations could make contributions to political candidates. The next big step did not occur until 1946 with the passage of the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act which was subsequently challenged in Court in 1954 through the United States v. Harriss. The ruling upheld the act but restricted the direct communication paid lobbyists had with

members of Congress. To get around this, lobbyists met with staff members and lobbied on issues that did not involve the passage or failure of legislation. Additionally, only individuals who spent more than half their time lobbying were impacted by the laws.

Modern ways to get around US v Harriss include something as simple as just walking out of the capitol to talk with a lobbyist unofficially and use alternate email accounts.

Lobbying in Practice

By advocating on an issue, groups can influence the decisions of leaders. Those influencing can be individuals, interest groups, or governments. In the US this is protected by the 1st amendment.

Lobbying offers the following:

- A way to resolve conflicts by providing information and analysis to lawmakers of bills potential impacts.
- Access to lawmakers and Rule makers
- The opportunity to sway opinion

Lobbyists are information brokers for Congress that present evidence to lawmakers who can then choose to interpret it as they will.

At the Federal Level

The law requires that lobbyists disclose their name, address, clients, payment, contributors, accounts, publications, and legislators they support or oppose. They must register with both the Senate and the House before they start and they must update their paperwork quarterly or face up to 12 months in jail or a three-year probation.

The law has critics because as of 1991 the General Accounting Office found that 10,000 of 13,500 lobbyist listed were not registered under the act. To close this loophole, the

Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 was passed in which anyone who received at least \$5,000 from a client must report it as long as the organization spends at least \$20,000 in a six-month period. The largest complaint about this legislation is that it kept large loopholes by allowing large contributions to campaign committees and PACs. This has changed the dynamic. Candidates now turn to lobbyists for money, distorting lobbyists' influence.

In Wisconsin

Beyond Federal regulations each state is allowed to make its own laws as long as they follow the Constitution. As a case study the history of Wisconsin Lobbying Laws:

- 1858: First law enacted which required interests to state their true intent before attempting to sway legislature members
- 1899: Creation of a lobbying registry which includes name, company and expenses
- 1905: Bans lobbyists from legislature floor sessions
- 1945: Weekly expense reports required including the bills of interest
- 1947: Introduction of the Lobbying License, monthly expense reports
- 1957: Bans lobbyists from buying things for legislators
- 1978: Expands definition of lobbying to include rulemaking, reduces oversight and restrictions
- 1989: Creates the Ethics Board, increases record keeping required by lobbyists
- 2008: Transfers lobbying enforcement to the Government Accountability Board
- 2013: Removes limits on when a lobbyist may give a campaign contribution to a legislator
- 2015: GAB dismantled and campaign finance laws loosen to allow more coordination

After over a century of progress, Wisconsin has taken a bit of a step back in recent years. The lobbying disclosure standards remain high but lobbyist influence is still strong. The common practice of campaign and legislative staff overlapping makes it even harder to navigate what contact is legal by blurring the line. Understanding who the influencers are is the next piece of the puzzle.

Want to know more about groups lobbying in Wisconsin?

Visit www.gab.wi.gov and look under the Lobbying tab at the top of the page. See a full list of registered groups and what they have weighed in on through the Eye on Lobbying page.

Special Interest Groups

What is a Special Interest Group?

An association of individuals or organizations with shared concerns that attempts to influence public policy.

Special interest groups lobby the government in order to get bills that benefit members of their group passed into law. Most groups have a membership requirement and their power is often derived from how large their membership is.

The definition of interest groups has changed over time. They used to only include private associations with a distinct, formal organization were considered special interest groups. They did not include important non-private entities such as government agencies and institutions like the military in addition to informal groups such as the political elite. Groups that consist of individuals start on the local level with people. Fruit growers,

for example could under the new definition be an interest group. The larger lobbying groups are made up of organizations or businesses and are called peak associations. A further type of interest is a less-formal group of political constituencies, who have, for example, agricultural interests, that make up a broad focus. An interest can also refer to governmental entities that work to influence other governments.

Many groups have frameworks set up at the national and state levels. Groups like Common Cause have a national umbrella that holds all the state chapters together. Some interest groups are national companies like Google or local ones like Madison Gas and Electric. This pattern holds true across states and at the state level political pressure gets stronger local news coverage.

Types of Interest Groups

Economic Interest Groups - Include business groups, labor groups, farm groups, and professional groups. They are found everywhere and include prominent groups like the US Chamber of Commerce and AFL-CIO.

Cause Interest Groups - Represent a segment of society that promotes a particular cause or value. They include religious organizations, veterans' groups, and groups devoted to the rights of people with disabilities. Some of these groups are single-issue but most have a broad list of causes. Examples include the NRA, MADD and NARAL.

Public Interest Groups – Focus on general public concerns, such as the environment or human rights, rather than on a narrow constituency (group of citizens and voters). Some public interest groups operate in a single country while others operate internationally. Examples include the NAACP and National Organization for Women.

Public and Private Institutional Interests – Made up of businesses or government departments. They include think tanks, private universities, media, and most prominently the government. Agencies lobby for funding and on issues at international, regional and local levels. Groups include the National League of Cities and National Governors Association. They hope to secure federal grants. Governmental institutions hold more sway in authoritarian regimes.

Non-associational Groups and Interests – These groups emerge spontaneously without formal structures or permanency, and can include protest movements. They create an impact by instigating public awareness of a perceived injustice. They work at a grassroots level.

Common Characteristics

Most groups are not formed to support political candidates. They form to promote programs and provide information. Once they decide to try to secure government funding or help get legislation passed their interests turn political. Once political, they strive to create positive public policy outcomes for their organization. They aggregate and represent the ideas of groups of individuals in a more powerful way by providing more complete information to political leaders. Groups also are involved in elections by providing candidates or providing financial support to favorable candidates.

In the U.S., the development of PACs helped streamline the process of providing money while in Europe trade unions supported candidates. In the U.S. unions have played their own role in advocating for workers' rights. At times in history like the sit-down strikes in Michigan against General Motors they served as a collective voice in the New Deal Era. They now have become a target of more restrictive state legislation. That said some still operate PACs of their own.

Beyond financial resources, members can provide grassroots campaigning by canvassing, operating phone-banks and organizing voting efforts. Potentially, their greatest impact can come from their stance as experts in their policy areas. This allows them to present information to legislators and has at times led to their being accused of writing bills for legislators.

Influence of PACs in states

This all can play out at the local level too. In fact at the state and city level the spending can be even more important in policy outcomes. That is because local rivals rarely have the same financial resources to compete. Some PACs drawing on the idea that “all politics is local,” have started spending on municipal races for city council seats and school board positions. This is because their money goes a long way at the local level. It is a small investment for a large return.

Using New Jersey as an example; in 2014 PAC spending topped \$40 million with Super PACs spending 3 times as much on state races as political parties. An even bigger issue with this is that the majority of the money is coming from out of state. Loose federal and state disclosure laws and inconsistent definitions of coordination with candidates had an impact. This situation demonstrates a disconnect with local issues and anonymity for spenders.

Factors Influencing Interest Groups around the World

The level of socioeconomic development is often a direct reflection on the development of interest groups. The richer a country is the greater the involvement and frequency of interest groups. In democracies interest groups are relatively free to operate as they choose. This does not mean that they are not considered detrimental to a county at times; they can be seen as impeding the

THEORIES ON THE IMPACT OF INTEREST GROUPS

Pluralism - The most realistic description of politics is as a marketplace with perfect competition. In the marketplace perspectives compete to be heard by the government in order to have their favored policies enacted. In this model no single interest is likely to consistently win over others. Theoretically, this means that many voices can be heard and this improves the practice of democracy by encouraging compromise. The US is the country closest to this model.

In practice this is often a less than ideal system for achieving policy changes. Different groups have different resources, some are better financed, better organized, better connected. These groups are slightly favored to have their preferred policies enacted. Additionally, governments are rarely neutral in their positions on issues. Some groups are favored, which has led to a slightly modified theory. Put forth by Theodore Lowi, certain well-connected groups are considered prime movers that hold an advantage and ability to be heard above the crowd of hyperpluralism.

Neo-Corporatism (State Corporatism) - State corporatism arose in the late 19th century. It **frames** as a corporation that is united and hierarchical **and** in which the government dominates **and** all sectors work for the public interest as stated by the government. This **system** is coercive in nature. The modern version of neo-corporatism is a voluntary agreement undertaken between the government and interest groups. The goal is to keep costs and inflation in check so the country can compete internationally while keeping a high standard of domestic living. To occur, peak associations must be in place to enforce agreements. Critics argue it is another form of pluralism with a select few groups inside the system.

government from functioning. In authoritarian regimes an unsavory interest group can be outright banned.

Interest groups analyze the structure of a government and where they can find political power in a system. This determines where the access points are and how groups should attempt to influence. In more authoritarian regimes since the power is focused in select few officials they are the target of lobbying. In parliamentary systems where the executive is chosen from the legislature lobbying is focused on the executive where there is the most power. In the US with separation of powers lobbying is split between branches. Also worth considering is which party controls the government as that impacts which groups hold the most interest.

Lobbying Tactics

The goal of lobbying is to bring pressure on policymakers to gain favorable outcomes. Important factors to consider are regime type, policy process and political culture. The US is one of a few countries in which legislative lobbying is a major strategy in addition to litigation strategies if laws are taken before the Supreme Court. Other factors include the nature of a group and its resources, which side of a legislative proposal a group is on, and the political climate. In the US there is an “advantage of the defense” in that there are multiple opportunities along the way to stop a bill from a committee chair opposing it to the president vetoing a bill. In this case it is easier to kill a bill than to push one through Congress and the White House. Despite this the common tactic is to build close personal contacts between a group’s representatives and public officials in order to foster trust and credibility so when a bill of interest comes up they will be taken seriously. In the US many lobbying firms are found on K Street and they are known for wearing expensive clothing to

the point the Capitol has been nicknamed “Gucci gulch”.

This can hold true at the state level as well. Lobbying for or against a bill while it is still in committee may influence enough representatives or state senators on the committee to reconsider parts of a bill. This can also galvanize public opinion which serves as an important signal to politicians. In the Wisconsin State Legislature over 1,500 bills were considered in the last 2 years. It can be really hard to follow that many, which is where interest groups can step in to influence opinion. LOPPW has both been the major faith voice and has joined in coalition with other faith leaders and secular groups to impact legislation.

A secondary route of influence that potentially holds even more power is in their ability to provide information directly to government agencies in the hope of impacting regulatory requirements and administrative rules. Frankly, it takes a lot of time and effort to thoroughly investigate issues, especially if an agency is short on staff. Interest groups step in as a valuable source of information to many agencies and candidates even if they are pushing their own agenda.

Influence

Influence is more than just the money on hand; it is the political skills of its leaders, the size of its membership and the timing of its lobbying. An important link is related to how much government officials need the group. The more officials who rely on a group, the more sway they hold the more their ideas can be promoted. The more diversified their contributions among officials, the easier it is to get concerns noted. Additionally, by forming “iron triangles” and “policy niches” groups and committee members work hand-in-hand to push policy forward. This is an area where insiders are at a distinct advantage. It is

worth noting that the more enemies a group has the harder it is to move their policies forward.

Some worry that the influence is not equally representative of all people in the US. Those with wealth have more money to spend on politics than those living in poverty or who are middle class. The number of PACs has grown a lot since the 1960s with the number of corporate groups outnumbering those representing the issues of interest to the less wealthy (See *Affluence and Influence* by Gilens). Congress is more likely to create and pass legislation that addresses the interests of those with wealth than those without wealth.

Iron Triangle

The name for the interactions between interest groups, Congress, and bureaucracies is Iron Triangle. Bureaucracies can be government agencies or any other type of non-elected public official. The iron triangle includes contributions and support that groups give to candidates, and the actual bills they provide info on. This writing of bills by interest groups is more prominent at the local and state levels as the representatives have fewer staff to develop bills with. Groups help out bureaucracies, which is seen often a source of research and info, by doing research that would be too time-consuming and costly to an agency. A sad fact is that money is required to complete research and sadly many agencies lack the funding to do it all on their own. In certain industries regulations are actually more important than laws so being able to influence them is a potentially more efficient use of resources. This can include rules on environmental protections, tax code, housing, entitlement programs and more.

International Interest Groups

With an increase in Globalization the importance of lobbying on international affairs has grown since the 1960s. The creation of international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union and the improved awareness of global issues have prompted four categories of interest groups to emerge.

- Foreign governments and international organizations including embassies and military bases work to lobby on the benefits of foreign aid and military support in a way that improves global perceptions.
- Multinational corporations and trade associations look to ensure favorable labor codes, tax structure, trade policy, and regulation of products.
- Special interest and cause groups have mixed success lobbying on human rights, poverty, customs and repatriation.
- International public interest groups (NGOs) work on human rights, child welfare, women's rights and more though they occupy a strange space in that they rarely donate to candidates and often receive little publicity.

Regulation

Many citizens worry that interest groups will undermine democracy by pushing agendas that are not in the public interest. Lobbyists' right to lobby is protected by the constitution but their practices are monitored and they are required to register their income, expenditures and goals. The US has some of the strictest regulations in place globally. The US also extensively tracks Political Action Committees which bring all the players into the arena. A problem is that coordination with candidates currently is loosely defined. Additionally, while interest groups are diligent in reporting how they

spend their money they are not always as transparent about where it comes from.

Political Action Committees (PACs)

What is a Political Action Committee?

Known as PAC, this is a political committee created for the purpose of raising and spending money to elect or defeat candidates

The contribution limits of a PAC during an election cycle are \$5,000 to a candidate committee, \$5,000 to other PACs, and \$15,000 to a national party committee. To be created they must be registered with the Federal Elections Committee within 10 days of its creation. PACs that are linked are treated as one donor with regard to limits.

PACs are not a new. They have been around since 1944 starting with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The money came voluntarily from union members; this did not violate the Smith Connally Act which barred direct contributions from unions to candidates. Current politicians can create Leadership PACs to donate to other candidates' campaigns. As a result of the wider range of PACs existing, the number grew from about 1,300 in 1977 to around 3,900 in 1998. While PACs are often a "bogeyman" when it comes to politics, they only contribute a small part of all campaign contributions. The much bigger contributor in recent elections has been the newly created Super PACs.

The Rise of Super PACs

Created in the wake of Citizens United and Speechnow.org v. FEC in 2010, this is a new kind of PAC that does not make contributions to candidates or parties. They instead spend on races to run ads, send mail or other ways in order to spread a message that advocates for the election or defeat of dark money. They have no limits on the amount or source of funding. It is the Super Pacs' ability to accept unlimited political donations that most

scares their critics. This means that individuals, unions and corporations all have the ability to insert as much money into ads as they would like to. The only limits currently are related to coordination between Super PACs and candidates, though laws vary from state to state. With the passage of recent bills related to campaign finance, Wisconsin now has some of the loosest regulations in the nation. This all stems from the idea that money is a form of speech that cannot be legally restricted. There are currently about 1,850 Super PACs in operation, with over \$320,000,000 raised for the coming 2016 elections. A worrying aspect of this is that only some of the money can be traced back to specific donors, the rest is referred to as dark money.

What is Citizens United?

A case decided in 2010 by the Supreme Court which opened the door for uncapped spending in elections as long as there was no direct coordination with a candidate. The story begins in 2004 when the nonprofit group Citizens United filed a complaint against ads for Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" which was critical of President Bush. They contended to the FEC that these ads were harming Bush's re-election campaign but their complaint was rejected. In response they created their own movie entitled "Hillary: The Movie" in 2007, which was critical of the candidate. They were however blocked by both a judge and the FEC. Eventually the case reached the Supreme Court and they uncapped the amount a person could give. This was followed by Speechnow.org v. FEC which is the case that formally allowed for the creation of Super PACs as long as they were used for independent expenditure. This suit is often overlooked in blaming outside spending but it is just as important for understanding our current political system.

Dark Money

Undisclosed cash that is given to Super PACs without saying who the donor is dark money. This allows money from a wide range of sources, including foreign, to be involved in American elections. This occurs as a result of a law that permits PACs to claim they are social welfare agencies which are tax exempt so they are exempt from disclosure. This allows groups and donors to contribute at high rates but to avoid public awareness of their actions. This reduced transparency is a point of controversy in the American Election process.

Redistricting and Gerrymandering

An additional factor at play in shifting votes

What is Redistricting?

The process of drawing new electoral district boundaries in order to make districts have the same population

and creating a means of securing votes is not a group, but a process. That process occurs every decade following the census and it is meant to ensure the constitutional right of every vote having an equal say. Unfortunately, over the years the redistricting process has been warped. An important disclaimer to get out of the way; all gerrymandering is a form of redistricting but not all redistricting falls victim to gerrymandering. In this section we will look at all types of electoral bias that distort the value of votes in different districts. This is made possible by the fact many states allow the one party to take control of the redistricting process.

TERMS TO KNOW TO TALK ABOUT UNFAIR REDISTRICTING

Gerrymandering – The drawing of constituency boundaries in a way that a certain party will win more seats than its opponent.

Electoral Bias – The difference between the percentage of votes received and the percentage of seats won for a party at the state or national level.

Malapportionment – The biasing of elections by creating districts with different populations.

Packing – When the opposing party wins a small number of seats by a large majority. This concentration means that the party has less chance of winning seats elsewhere.

Cracking – When the controlling party creates as many seats as possible where they have a majority of voters for each seat.

Reactive Malapportionment – when voter turnout percentage favors one party over another in a district.

Surplus – Votes cast for a party that are more than the amount needed to win 50% of the vote.

Clustering – Likeminded voters live in the same areas which decreases the relative value of their vote instead of Gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering was named for Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts in 1812. This is the drawing of constituency boundaries in a way that a certain party will win more seats than

Unfortunately, according to studies of political districts, mainly by the University of Chicago, Wisconsin is the most gerrymandered state in the country. A trial is currently taking place in Federal Court over whether the districts drawn in 2010 stretch the limits of legality.

its opponent. The resulting district looks like a salamander hence Gerrymander. The two main tools are cracking and packing. A less common type of gerrymandering is reactive malapportionment. Combined cracking, packing, and reactive malapportionment account for $\frac{3}{4}$ of electoral bias.

Malapportionment

The biasing of elections by creating districts with different populations is gerrymandering. In districts with less people a party has to win fewer votes for the same level of voting power in office. This can be deliberate if one party is in charge of redistricting by creating large constituencies of opposition strength. Conversely this can occur naturally through creeping malapportionment where over time small seats gravitate to a single party. This accounts for about $\frac{1}{4}$ of electoral bias.

This practice was reigned in partially by the Supreme Court case Reynolds v Sims in 1964. At this time some districts in states had populations 1,000 times greater than others but still had the same number of representatives. In agreeing with the idea of "one person, one vote" they ruled that districts should have similar populations which helped to reduce variations in district size. This prompted changes in districts around the country. However, as recently as

1991 states were found to still have district population ratios as high as 50:1.

Packing occurs when the opposing party wins a small number of seats by a large majority. This concentration means that the party has little chance of winning seats elsewhere. This is most commonly done using large cities.

Cracking occurs when the controlling party creates as many seats as possible where they have a majority of voters for each seat. This has a potential to go wrong if the majorities are not substantial enough. Both methods serve the party that is redrawing the districts and are used to consolidate power at the state level.

Reactive Malapportionment happens when voter turnout and the rate of abstentions in certain districts benefit one party over the other. So if, for example, 50% of eligible voters in party A vote but only 10% of eligible voters in party B come out to vote in a district, party A benefits from reactive malapportionment.

Effective, Surplus, and Wasted and Votes

Effective votes are the exact number of votes needed to win a seat. Wasted votes are any votes that do not help a candidate to win. For the winning candidate wasted votes are the amount of votes pulled in above the effective votes. For the losing candidate wasted votes are all of the votes he/she received. For example, if a district has 50,000 voters, A wins 30,000 and B wins the remaining 20,000. All of the votes for B are wasted since they did not result in a victory. Of A's votes 20,001 are effective votes as that was the amount required to win while 9,999 votes are wasted. This shows how when redistricting it is the goal of the controlling party to minimize surplus and wasted votes.

Clustering

An important counterargument to claims of gerrymandering is that likeminded voters naturally live in the same areas. This is especially true of Democrats who are more likely to cluster in cities. This results in many wasted votes in congressional elections. In the end, however, it has been shown that the fairest redistricting occurs when a court or commission is tasked with drawing districts.

The Impact of Money in Politics

Next we're going to look at some hard data on whether all this spending actually influences politics. The long and short of it is that money helps get politicians elected and they often advocate for issues related to their contributors. Deciding if this is cause and effect is a little trickier. What follows are a set of case studies and anecdotes into how resources given to candidates influence the political process.

Supreme Court elections

The election of Judges is very American. Data on elections from 1990 to 2000 revealed that while all spending increased, partisan races had a higher price tag. Also as spending increases competitiveness in judicial races has fallen. This means that incumbents are holding onto seats at higher rates and judicial candidates are becoming more partisan. This also underlines a worrying trend of incumbents being at a decided advantage compared to their challengers.

This analysis continues in a pair of studies looking into who gets the most out of campaign spending. The 1972 and 1974 congressional elections show that spending by challengers has a much greater effect than spending by incumbents. Spending in elections increases voter recall of candidates and provides stronger evaluative statements

that personally address the candidate. This tool is especially effective for challengers who may be relative unknowns entering a race. Using California state elections, it was found that challenger's spending on campaigns has a significant impact on their chance of victory while incumbent spending does not. Either way in the end 91% of the time the better financed candidate wins.

These practices apply to many European countries as well. Great Britain from 1983-1992 data shows that the most spending occurs on competitive races and spending is correlated with increased voting, increased support for the spending party, and decreased support for rivals. It was also shown that local spending has greater value to challengers. Sadly, these studies point to how the only way to be heard is to spend, which is exactly what we would like to avoid.

National elections

Even studies that dispute the effect of spending sadly advocate the only way to overcome an advantage is to spend more. When the variables that influence spending are accounted for, the results of equal spending are roughly the same for challenger and incumbent. This contradicts research that shows challengers have a greater marginal spending effect. As an example, for Senate elections an incumbent's spending advantage results in a 6% vote share increase so if both spent the same amount there more incumbents might lose and caps on spending may benefit the challenger.

Policy Voting

When people spend on politicians their true goal is to get policies enacted that would help them. This makes voting on policy an even more important indicator of the power of money in politics. Private money as campaign finance contributions can influence public policy outcomes with regard to

regulatory outcomes. This can be a rapid event as contributions to candidates is highly correlated with the regulatory outcome of the same period. This gives some value to a “give early give often” approach as there is often a short term return. This means interest groups generally contribute more to legislators with a high capacity to develop policies. Over the long term contributions give the incentive to improve policymaking. Legislators with better policy making record receive more contributions and are able to give a stronger analytical presence at hearings. Common sense might suggest that contributions and voting may only be loosely linked because groups give to like-minded candidates. Meta-analysis however reveals that one-third of roll call votes are directly influenced by contributions. Exact numbers are 25.3% - 35.9%. This shows that you can buy policy some of the time but the Iron Triangle can produce even greater effects.

“This is a faith issue. This is a values issue. The Biblical prophets railed against economic wealth and political power that resulted in injustice. Modern day prophets and saints raise similar concerns about the co-opting of the democratic system. This is not a partisan issue. This is a justice issue. This is an issue for all citizens. And it is an issue for people of faith.”

-Jessica Crist, Bishop of the Montana Synod of the ELCA

Relevance to me as a Lutheran

We will start to explore why faith and political money are incompatible. It is not enough as Lutherans to stand on the side. We are called by Christ to look out for all of God’s Children.

Money in Politics and Faith Leaders

Free Speech for People in conjunction with Auburn Seminary leads an effort to increase awareness and involvement in working against the expanded role of money in politics for those of faith. Important supporters in this effort included multiple ELCA Bishops. In the process they came up with four ways that money and politics goes against the theological underpinnings of people of faith:

1. **Waste** - The money spent on elections, which numbers in the billions, could be put to better use serving the least in our communities.
2. **Divisive Advertising** - The Bible calls on us to love our neighbors and to the current political climate has moved against that.
3. **Bribes** - Contributions are bribes under another name and the Bible states that “a wicked man (person) accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice.”
4. **Corporate Power and Poverty** - Jesus calls on us to look out for the dignity of all people and unfortunately, as said by Jim Wallis, a Washington theologian and Director of Sojourners, there is “no Super PAC for the poor.”

Biblical quotes on Inequality

“I, the Lord, command you to do what is just and right. Protect the person who is being cheated from the one who is cheating him.”
Proverbs 22:3

“Learn to do right. See that justice is done -- help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.” Isaiah 1:17

“None of you should be looking out for your own interests, but for the interests of others.”
1 Corinthians 10:24

“Don’t take advantage of the poor just because you can; don’t take advantage of those who stand helpless in court. The Lord will argue their case for them and threaten the life of anyone who threatens theirs.” Proverbs 22:22-23

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Proverbs 31:8-9

“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.” Isaiah 10:1-3

First Steps

We cannot despair about the current situation in politics, instead we should take action. What follows are a few suggestions for how you as a citizen can make a difference in politics. The biggest difference between you and a special interest is that

“You are not only responsible for what you say, but also for what you do not say.”

-Martin Luther

they are always paying attention to policy while you only pay attention for part of the time. Policy isn’t all that exciting and it can be really hard to understand. The sad truth is that a lot of people just don’t know that much about government and they aren’t engaged. By reading this guide, you’ve taken the hugely important step of taking an interest. What follows are ways to keep our concern about money in politics on the forefront of policy.

1. Amend the Constitution

To overturn a judgement like Citizens United one would need to amend the Constitution and to do that you would need wide public support. Creating petitions and then following up with these to your representative is a strong way to draw attention to the need for change.

2. Support the American Anti-Corruption Act
A law that would place limits on lobbying and donations and is billed as anti-corruption.

3. Grassroots and Public Financing
Getting involved in modern elections requires a lot of resources and money, a way around that would be to allow for public financing so less affluent voices could run.

4. SEC Regulation
This agency holds the power to force companies to disclose their political spending but at the moment they need more motivation to take action.

5. FEC Regulation
A commission frequently stuck in gridlock, they are in charge of elections and if they could find a way to overcome infighting regulation could change rules dramatically.

6. Corporate Pledge
If progress fails to occur at the federal level, turning to private enterprises could be a way to increase buy-in and expedite change.

LOPPW Advocacy

The Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (LOPPW) is an advocacy ministry supported by ELCA World Hunger and the six synods with congregations in Wisconsin. In faithful response to God’s love, we engage people of faith in the ministry of advocacy for policies that support peace, justice, and care for all of God’s creation. We focus on injustice through the lens of how people in poverty

are impacted and how vulnerable others are to becoming impoverished.

ELCA World Hunger's outreach is vast, and its concerns include creating systemic change. LOPPW's advocacy efforts and this particular project comprise a part of our larger effort impact systemic change that would alleviate hunger and poverty.

More on Money & Politics and the Church ELCA Social Policy Resolution

CA95.07.67 U.S. Election Campaign Finance Reform Adopted by the 1995 Churchwide Assembly

WHEREAS, successful election campaigns in our society are almost totally dependent upon the expenditure of large sums of money for various forms of political advertising and other campaign expenses; and

WHEREAS, the vast majority of our citizens do not have access to the large sums of money required to conduct a successful election campaign; and

WHEREAS, in most instances, less wealthy citizens are not able to be elected to public office, or even to elect candidates who will be responsive to their needs for dignity and justice; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states that, the Church shall "serve in response to God's love to meet human needs,... advocating dignity and justice for all people,... and standing with the poor and the powerless, and committing itself to their needs (4.02.c.); and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs [ELCA Advocacy Washington, D.C. office] provides direct advocacy on public policy issues that may

affect the members of our church; therefore, be it,

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America call upon its members and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs [ELCA Advocacy Washington, D.C. office] to advocate for the enactment of campaign finance reform legislation at the local, state, and national levels, so that an equal opportunity may be provided for all candidates for elected office, regardless of their personal wealth or the wealth of their supporters.

What do you think?

Campaign manager Mark Hanna once said, "There are two things that matter in politics. The first is money. I can't remember the second."

- How can we have a voice?
- Is income inequality distorting the democratic process?
- Is money a form of free speech?
- Is it our responsibility as Lutherans to act?
- How did we get here? What can we do to change the course of the future?
- How does the Bible shape our views on our attitudes about people experiencing poverty and justice? on attitudes about people experiencing poverty and justice?

Learn More:

- ♦ [ELCA social statement "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All"](#)
- ♦ [ELCA social policy resolution on campaign finance](#)
- ♦ [Money in Politics: Striving for a just democratic system from ELCA Advocacy Office](#)
- ♦ [Sunlight Foundation: A nonprofit dedicated to increasing transparency and sharing](#)
- ♦ [A Florida-Bahamas Synod resolution sample for your synod](#)