### Structured Academic Controversy: *Should limits or regulations be placed on how candidates raise funds, and/or spend them, during political campaigns?*

All information adapted from http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate:\_Campaign\_Finance\_Reform

**Background and Context of Debate:**

The notion that money influences the political process is not, nor could it ever be, exclusively associated with contemporary politics. It has long been asserted that money drives politics and that graft is often a by-product of holding political office. Different nations have different traditions with regard to campaign finance - some regulating contributions and spending practices, others allowing candidates to collect and use money as they see fit. While the potential to debate the various nuances of campaign finance law exists in every country, such a broad discussion cannot be completed in these few paragraphs. Instead, because changes in campaign finance laws have been salient in elections for well over two decades in the United States, this summary will focus on the debate over those changes. It should be noted, however, that many of the ideological principles that drive the debate in the United States would be common to a debate over campaign finance reform in another country aiming to uphold similar political values. Generally speaking, elections are expensive. This is particularly true in countries, such as the United States, with long campaigns. Money is needed to pay staff, buy advertising on radio, television and other media, and even to raise more money. Presidential campaigns often cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Senate and congressional campaigns can cost several million. In parliamentary democracies, with smaller districts and shorter election cycles (or more random election cycles) the costs can be different and less significant. Campaign finance reform began in earnest in the post-Watergate era in the United States with the passage of the Federal Election Campaign Act which created the Federal Election Commission, implemented disclosure requirements, donation limits, and federal financing of Presidential elections.

**Choose a side**

**Yes we should limit/regulate how candidates raise and spend campaign contributions in order to prevent corruption.**

**No we should not limit/regulate how candidates raise or spend campaign contributions because it limits the rights of the people involved.**

**Yes, we should limit/regulate how candidates raise and spend campaign contributions in order to prevent corruption.**

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| **Text** | **Summary** |
| Would campaign finance help "level" the playing field among politicians?Yes **Campaign finance reform would "level" the playing field for candidates.** Candidates of enormous leadership potential but small wallets have failed due to the lack of resources. Under a reformed campaign finance system it will be more difficult for well-financed candidates to win purely because of the money they have. Incumbent candidates have a unique advantage over challengers in the present system because of their direct connections to important sources of money. **Campaign finance reform will make elections more competitive, thus resulting in more turnover or "fresh blood" in politics.** This is valuable in challenging old orthodoxies and bringing in new ideas. It will also make it easier for members of ethnic minorities and the working class to seek office - such groups are disproportionately deterred from candidacy by the current need to raise huge sums of money. |  |
| Does campaign finance reform aid free speech and help advance the marketplace of ideas?Yes **Campaign finance reform advances the objectives of a broader marketplace of ideas and of free speech, assembly, and thought.** Under the present system, minor-party candidate’s voices are trampled by the booming voice of large, well-funded campaign operations. The heavy cost of campaigning discourages many potential candidates from entering contests. |  |
| Does campaign finance reform better level the ability of donors to voice themselves, and is this a good thing?Yes **Campaign finance reform gives the individual donor a voice more comparable to other interest groups:** At present, the enormous amount of money channeled into campaigns by large corporations, unions, and special interest groups (Political Action Committees) overwhelm the smaller, limited contributions of individual donors. Under many campaign finance proposals, limits are suggested for these large group donations. Such limits increase the significance of donations by individual voters, likely increasing the responsiveness of candidates to voters/donors and accountability. Additionally, the increased significance of individual contributions encourages voter participation and activism. |  |
| Will campaign finance reform reduce corruption in the government?Yes **Campaign finance reform will reduce corruption in government by discouraging candidates from "selling themselves" to special interests bidding for their votes:** Candidates will be less beholden to special interests, and thus, more amenable to listening to good reasons when making decisions about public policy. |  |

**No we should not limit/regulate how candidates raise or spend campaign contributions because it limits the rights of the people involved.**

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| **Text** | **Summary** |
| Would campaign finance help "level" the playing field among politicians? No Even under the most radical proposals for reform, loopholes exist that enable candidates to spend more or reach their audiences through alternative means. This was precisely the kind of development that led reformers to want to close the soft-money loophole. As with the tax system, the more elaborate the regulation, the more obscure and distorting the ways that are adopted to get around it. There is actually more turnover in public office than some critics of the present campaign finance systems would like to admit. Retirements, scandals, and careful allocation of party resources make turnover possible under a variety of scenarios. Turnover also has significant negative effects, as critics of term limits have pointed-out. The more often new officeholders begin their jobs the steeper the "learning curve" for a new Congress, or other legislative body becomes. |  |
| Does campaign finance reform aid free speech and help advance the marketplace of ideas? No Most campaign finance reform proposals actually have the effect of limiting speech. By limiting the amount of money a candidate can spend, what they can spend it on, and the time and nature of the message they can send, candidates’ speech is limited. This is particularly true if the money being spent is the candidate’s own. Attempts to limit the ability of political parties and special interest groups to run so-called "issue ads" during certain segments of campaigns have a similar effect. While one effect of reform might be to increase the number of viable candidates, tangible limits are placed on the speech of all candidates. |  |
| Does campaign finance reform better level the ability of donors to voice themselves, and is this a good thing? No Even the most radical campaign finance reform proposals have yet to eliminate corporate or union contributions: Short of such bans, the potential for large organizations to swamp the donations of individual voters still exists. Additionally, limitations on the voice of unions, businesses and special interest groups are another potential infringement on the rights of free speech and assembly. Who is to say that a union member’s contribution to their organization’s political action committee isn’t significant speech comparable to the individual gesture they make when they donate to a candidate themselves? It is reasonable that union members or shareholders choose to trust their leaders to use their money in order to best advance their interests. |  |
| Will campaign finance reform end corruption in the government? No Even after the complete elimination of contributions by groups, the temptation to bow to the wishes of special interests may remain. Additionally, pressure from within one’s own party, personal ideological commitments, and a candidate’s sense of the majority’s opinion in their district will still hold enormous influence on their voting record – regardless of whether the politician feels they should vote differently. The desire of many candidates to move on to higher and higher office also potentially exerts pressure on voting choices. |  |

**Teacher Instructions**

A structured academic controversy is a form of deliberation that allows students to develop their own opinions and provides resources for the student to use to help strengthen their opinion on the issue. The format itself helps to model positive debate behavior in a structured environment. The instructions to carry out the structured academic controversy over campaign finance (day 8) are as follows. The slide numbers listed correspond to the Powerpoint titled “Campaign Finance” which can be found in the day 8 folder.

1. (Slides 10 & 11) Have all students read the handout titled “Structured Academic Controversy Background and Context of Debate”, then choose a side they believe most fits with their opinion. (5 minutes)
2. (Slides 12 & 13) After students have chosen a side, divide the room into two large groups; those who chose YES, and those who said NO. All students should then be given the reading and graphic organizer which corresponds to the side they have chosen. Students should then individually read the handout and complete the summary of each section in the “summary” column of the table (10 minutes)
3. (Slides 14 & 15) Next, have students get back in their large groups and discuss the arguments they discovered in the reading. Secondly, the group should decide on the 3 strongest arguments that they will present during the structured academic controversy. (5 minutes)
4. (Slides 16 & 17) Students should then choose a partner that is on the same side of the room as they are. Partners can also be chosen by the teacher based on ability, or at random. (30 seconds)
5. (Slides 18 & 19) Next, each group will choose a group from the opposing viewpoint and move into a group of 4 with opposing groups facing each other. (1 minute)
6. (Slides 20 & 21) The YES group now has 2 minutes to present their arguments to the NO group. During this time the NO group should be silently listening. Optional: students in the NO group can take notes over the major points given by the YES group
7. (Slides 22 & 23) The NO group now has 1 minute to respond to the arguments of the YES group. However, the NO group should not begin presenting their 3 prepared arguments, just rebutting the YES group’s arguments. During this time the YES group should remain silent and listen.
8. (Slides 24 & 25) The NO group now has 2 minutes to present their arguments to the YES group. During this time the YES group should be silently listening. Optional: students in the YES group can take notes over the major points given by the YES group
9. (Slides 26 & 27) The YES group now has 1 minute to respond to the arguments of the NO group. During this time the NO group should remain silent and listen.
10. (Slides 28 & 29) Lastly, the groups will have 3 minutes to work together to come to a compromise between both of the group’s ideas and write them down to present to the class. During this time all students should be encouraged to voice their opinion and share in creating a bipartisan solution.
11. If time allows, have students write their ideas for compromise on the board and debrief the ideas as a class.