

The Role of Campaign Fund- raising Since 1980

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The Role of Campaign Fund-raising in the General Election Since 1980

Using Federal Elections Commission information online, students will work in groups to research campaign contribution levels from the party conventions to the general election and create a graphic representation of the correlation between money raised and winning the election. The teacher should provide students with **Handout 1**, a brief overview of the Federal Election Commission; **Handout 2**, a table showing U.S. presidential winners, their party affiliation, and their competitors since 1981; and **Handout 3**, a table showing federal campaign spending by party from 1977 to 2000. Students will analyze the documents and then draw conclusions to be shared with the class.

1 Federal Election Commission, Overview

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is responsible for interpreting and enforcing federal election laws. Originally created under the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, the FEC consisted of six members: two appointed by the president, two by the Senate, and two by the House of Representatives. The Supreme Court declared the commission unconstitutional because the congressional appointments infringed on executive powers. In 1976, the FEC was reconstituted as a six-member bipartisan panel of presidential appointees who serve six-year terms, with two seats subject to appointment every two years. The 1976 amendments also weakened the FEC's enforcement authority.

FEC powers include audits, investigations, subpoena of witnesses and information, injunctions, and referral of cases to the Justice Department for criminal prosecution. The commission establishes rules and regulations that may be reviewed or vetoed by Congress within 30 days.

The FEC also publishes expenditure reports by candidates and political action committees. Both must file itemizations of expenditures over \$200 and reports of total campaign expenditures in accordance with campaign laws. This information (such as which congressional candidates spent the most money or which political action committees contributed the largest sums to campaigns) is available for public scrutiny.

2 U.S. Presidents (1981–Present), Table

| Number | President | Years in Office | Political Party | Vice President |
|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 40th | Ronald Reagan | 1981–1989 | Republican | George Bush |
| 41st | George Bush | 1989–1993 | Republican | Dan Quayle |
| 42nd | Bill Clinton | 1993–2001 | Democrat | Al Gore |
| 43rd | George W. Bush | 2001– | Republican | Dick Cheney |

Source: White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

3 Federal Campaign Spending by Party (1977–2000), Table

Democrats Spending in Millions of Dollars

| Election Cycle | Raised | Spent | Contributions ¹ | Coordinated Expenditures ² | Independent Expenditures ³ |
|----------------|---------|---------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1977–1978 | \$26.4 | \$26.9 | \$1.8 | \$0.4 | — |
| 1979–1980 | \$37.2 | \$35.0 | \$1.7 | \$4.9 | — |
| 1981–1982 | \$39.3 | \$40.1 | \$1.7 | \$3.3 | — |
| 1983–1984 | \$98.5 | \$97.4 | \$2.6 | \$9.0 | — |
| 1985–1986 | \$64.8 | \$65.9 | \$1.7 | \$9.0 | — |
| 1987–1988 | \$127.9 | \$121.9 | \$1.7 | \$17.9 | — |
| 1989–1990 | \$85.7 | \$90.9 | \$1.5 | \$8.7 | — |
| 1991–1992 | \$177.7 | \$171.9 | \$1.9 | \$28.0 | — |
| 1993–1994 | \$139.1 | \$137.8 | \$2.2 | \$21.1 | — |
| 1995–1996 | \$221.6 | \$214.3 | \$2.2 | \$22.6 | \$1.5 |
| 1997–1998 | \$160.0 | \$155.3 | \$1.2 | \$18.6 | \$1.5 |
| 1999–2000 | \$275.2 | \$265.8 | \$3.9 | \$21.4 | \$2.3 |

3 Federal Campaign Spending by Party (1977–2000), Continued

Republicans Spending in Millions of Dollars

| Election Cycle | Raised | Spent | Contributions ¹ | Coordinated Expenditures ² | Independent Expenditures ³ |
|----------------|---------|---------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1977–1978 | \$84.5 | \$85.9 | \$4.5 | \$4.3 | — |
| 1979–1980 | \$169.5 | \$161.8 | \$4.5 | \$12.4 | — |
| 1981–1982 | \$215.0 | \$214.0 | \$5.6 | \$14.3 | — |
| 1983–1984 | \$297.9 | \$300.8 | \$4.9 | \$20.1 | — |
| 1985–1986 | \$255.2 | \$258.9 | \$3.4 | \$14.3 | — |
| 1987–1988 | \$263.3 | \$257.0 | \$3.4 | \$22.7 | — |
| 1989–1990 | \$205.3 | \$213.5 | \$2.9 | \$10.7 | — |
| 1991–1992 | \$267.3 | \$256.1 | \$3.0 | \$33.8 | — |
| 1993–1994 | \$245.6 | \$234.7 | \$2.8 | \$20.4 | — |
| 1995–1996 | \$416.5 | \$408.5 | \$3.7 | \$31.0 | — |
| 1997–1998 | \$285.0 | \$275.9 | \$2.6 | \$15.7 | — |
| 1999–2000 | \$465.8 | \$427.0 | \$2.8 | \$29.9 | — |

Source: Federal Election Commission, <http://www.fec.gov>.

¹Contributions to candidates.

²Coordinated expenditures are monies spent by national and state party committees on general election nominees and are in addition to contributions. They are limited in amount.

³Independent expenditures are for ads that expressly advocate the election or defeat of specific candidates and are aimed at the electorate as a whole. Under federal rules, these expenditures must be made completely independently of the candidates.