



SSN Forum on Money in Politics

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Running for office and advancing policy agendas are very expensive endeavors. Has raising money become too central to American politics – giving the wealthy outsized leverage, especially now that unlimited contributions can be made in secret? What reforms could improve democratic balance? SSN scholars Ben Page, Martin Gilens, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Nick Carnes weigh in – taking off from different views recently offered by Senator Chris Murphy and journalist Ezra Klein.

Recently, the Yale Institution on Social and Policy Studies sponsored a conference on "Purchasing Power: Money, Politics, and Inequality." In [opening remarks](#), Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy explained how the never-ending quest to raise contributions for the next election campaign distorts legislators' priorities and taints the experience of being a public policymaker. But another participant, Ezra Klein, [cited the 2012 election](#) as evidence that victories do not always go to those who raise the most money. Maybe our worries about money are overblown.

Four SSN scholars weigh in with provocative research findings on the various ways money matters, and offer suggestions for reforms to ensure good governance for all. To read all four SSN Scholars' contributions on a single page, [click here](#).

The Cash Ceiling

Nicholas Carnes, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

"Running for office is too expensive — and therefore off-limits— for the vast majority of Americans. The space on our ballots is becoming the exclusive turf of the wealthy and the well-connected."

America's Politicians are Listening to the Rich

Martin Gilens, Princeton University

"If the rich are having such a hard time turning dollars into votes, do we really need to worry about money distorting American politics? Yes we do."

How Money Corrupts American Politics

Benjamin I. Page, Northwestern University

"The need to raise money acts as a *filter*, tending to eliminate public officials who hold certain points of view — even points of view that are popular with most Americans."

The Other Kind of Political Money

Kay Lehman Schlozman, Boston College

"When individual citizens seek to make their voices heard..., the well-educated have many advantages. However, when politically active organizations seek influence, the critical resource is money."