



BIG MONEY OUT VA
"DEMOCRACY LOSES WHEN BIG MONEY WINS"

Getting Big Money Out of Politics

What do we know about Virginia?

Over the last 60 years, public trust in government has fallen dramatically. According to research conducted by the independent [Pew Research Center](#), in 1959 roughly 70% of Americans had trust in government to do the right thing. **Today, that has fallen to only 2 out of 10 Americans.** [Eighty percent of Americans](#) now believe that the government isn't working for the benefit of all its citizens. Without the trust of its citizens, our democracy is in peril.

Why are we in this predicament? Nationally, the cost of elections is skyrocketing, influenced by the 40 years of **Supreme Court's rulings which have redefined "Money as speech" and weakened restrictions on political spending.** The 2010 *Citizens United* ruling opened the door to unlimited contributions from corporate and wealthy special interests—local, regional, national, and even global. The ruling also led to the rise of "Super PACs" in our elections and unlimited spending from wealthy individuals and special interests. This has allowed state elections to become more nationalized to the detriment of the voices of average citizens.

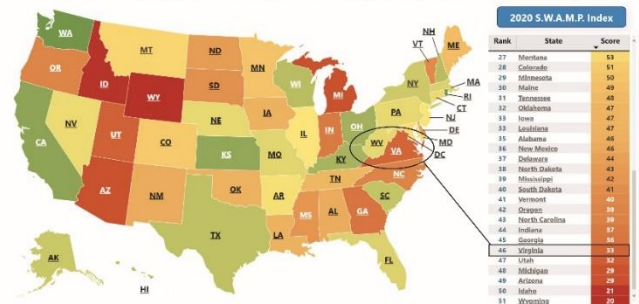
Virginia has one of the weakest campaign finance legal structures in the country

Our Commonwealth ranks poorly on laws and regulations governing ethics and transparency in the executive and legislative branches. The non-partisan [Coalition for Integrity](#) S.W.A.M.P Index ranked **Virginia 46th of 51 jurisdictions** for measures of transparency and accountability to voters.

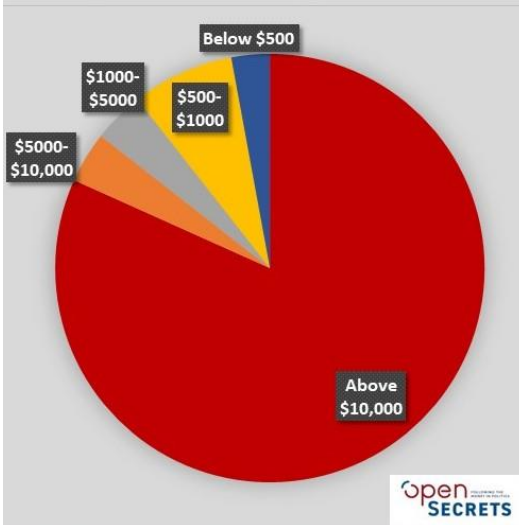
- **NO** dollar limits on any type of campaign donations, including corporations and public utilities.
- **NO** restrictions on politicians' personal use of campaign donations.
- **Inadequate** disclosure of donors
- **Insufficient** regulatory oversight.

Virginia ranks **46** out of **50** states in the S.W.A.M.P. Index,

a cross-state comparative analysis of transparency and accountability.



Money in Virginia's 2023 Legislative Races \$188 million through Nov 2023



Eighty-five percent of all contributions above \$10,000

As a result of the Commonwealth's unusually lax campaign finance laws, off-year elections, and a competitive "purple" political status, **the amount of money raised for Virginia political campaigns is among the highest in the nation, only following Illinois.** The per capita cost estimated at almost \$22/capita—the highest in the nation, four times higher than those California and Texas.

Spending on elections in 2023 reached record levels, with millions of dollars coming from out-of-state billionaires. Through the month of November 2023, total contributions jumped to \$188 million, exceeding the cost of elections in 2019 of \$116 million.

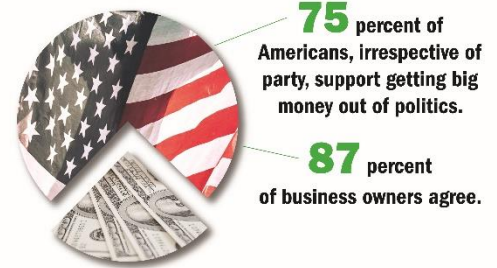
Because of the lack of limits, the influence of large donors has marginalized the voices of average citizens. In Virginia, large donations, those exceeding \$10,000, account for an estimated eighty-five percent of all contributions. **Those contributing \$500 or less to candidates account for only 3% of total contributions.**

Why should voters care?

- **Citizens voices in choosing and influencing their representatives are marginalized.** Once elected, lawmakers are beholden to their most important donors so that they can be re-elected, and these special interests have increased access to policy makers.
- Candidates for political office, who make the laws governing our economy and society, **increasingly rely on private contributions from wealthy individuals and corporate special interests to win their positions.**
- **Money does indeed influence votes.** [Two major research reviews](#) show that campaign contributions and industry lobbyists have influenced politicians to enact tax breaks benefiting narrow business interests and to pass legislation which benefits corporations but disadvantages citizens.
- **Money negatively impacts the representation of average citizens.** Candidates and elected officials spend more time—30-70%— raising money than talking to constituents or crafting legislation. According to [OpenSecrets](#), incumbents have a 5-1 advantage in fundraising., reduces competitiveness in elections, leads to political gridlock, and eventually reduces political innovation.
- **Foreign money can be channeled into our elections.** Although it is illegal for foreigners to contribute directly to federal legislative campaigns, American companies are owned by, borrow money from, and do business with foreign countries. This money can be funneled directly to candidates in certain states or routed through entities involved in funding issue ads through independent expenditures. This is a national security risk.
- **Large donors and Super PACs shape policies that affect our everyday lives,** from health care to education. One example is Big Pharma campaign contributions to and lobbying of our elected officials, often leading our elected officials from regulating to benefit citizens, while favoring the industry. The agenda of the largest corporations and those who control them is not the agenda of the American family or Virginia communities.

Virginians, like all Americans, want reform.

A [Pew Research poll in 2023](#) reveals that American voters rank reducing the influence of money in politics among their top four concerns. A 2021 Wason poll shows that **4 out of 5 Virginians, irrespective of party**, think that large donors have too much influence on our elections. Meanwhile, [87 percent of business owners](#) believe our campaign finance system is broken and needs to be reformed.



Key elements of campaign finance reform in Virginia, many of which will be introduced in the 2024 General Assembly, include:

- **A ban on personal use** of campaign funds (like those most other states and the federal government).
- **Limits on the campaign contributions** (like 45 states and the federal government).
- **Increased disclosure**, including forcing disclosure of independent expenditures, including “dark money” spending. **Increased investments in information technology** such that the data base of the Department of Elections is more easily accessible, searchable, and sortable by the public.
- **Increased regulatory oversight**, supported by sufficient legal authority and budget, to provide clarity for candidates and to monitor campaign finance filings for accuracy and completeness, including consistency of data from various sources.
- **Public-financing of elections as successfully implemented in many other jurisdictions across the country.**
- Resolutions and other expressions of support for **an amendment to the US Constitution.** The amendment will restore the rights of Congress and the states to regulate election spending.

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