

A VISION FOR BLACK LIVES:

POLICY DEMANDS FOR BLACK POWER, FREEDOM, & JUSTICE

Public Financing of Elections and the End of Money Controlling Politics Through Ending Super PACs and Unchecked Corporate Donations.

What is the problem?

- Our country's legacy of racism and persistently racialized politics depresses the political power of Black people, and creates opportunities for exploitation and targeting — exemplified by the subprime lending crisis, mass incarceration, and voter suppression laws. The dominance of big money in our politics makes it far harder for poor and working-class Black people to exert political power and effectively advocate for their interests as both wealth and power are consolidated by a small, very white, share of the population.
- Elections funded primarily by wealthy, white donors mean that candidates as a whole are less likely to prioritize the needs of poor and working class Black people; and that Black candidates are less likely to run for elected office, raise less money when they do, and are less likely to win. Ultimately, Black people are not adequately represented by elected officials.
- Today, an elite and tiny donor class — comprised of an extremely wealthy, 90 percent white, and overwhelmingly male subsection of the population — determines who runs for office, who wins elections, and what policies make it onto the agendas in Washington, D.C. and state legislatures across the country.
- Because donor and corporate interests often diverge significantly from those of working families on economic policies such as minimum wage and paid sick leave, Black people are disproportionately harmed because a larger percentage are poor or working class.
- The dominance of white donors disadvantages Black people in two key ways. First, candidates running for office (in all races) are less likely to prioritize issues of concern to Black Americans because they are forced to spend a significant majority of their time dialing for dollars to wealthy (usually white) donors. Second, Black communities are underrepresented in elected office, as Black candidates without access to networks of wealthy (usually white) donors find it more difficult to compete in the “wealth primary” necessary to run competitive campaigns.
- A recent study of Black candidate success concluded that “the underrepresentation of Black people is driven by constraints on their entry onto the ballot” and that the level of resources in Black communities is “an important factor for shaping the size of the Black candidate pool.”
- Although people of color are 37 percent of the U.S. population, 90 percent of our elected leaders are white. White men are just 31 percent of the population but 65 percent of elected officials. At the other end of the spectrum, women of color hold just 4 percent of elected positions in spite of being 19 percent of the population.

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- Candidates of color raised 47 percent less money than white candidates in 2006 state legislative races, and 64 percent less in the South.
- In 2009, just 9 percent of all state legislators were Black.
- In a 2011 study, researchers found that white state legislators of both major political parties were less likely to reply to letters received from assumed constituents with apparently Black names (like “DeShawn Jackson”).
- The policy outcomes resulting from this big-money campaign finance system fail to address the needs of Black people, and in some cases, actively restrict progress on racial equity in America.

What’s the solution?

- Implement public financing of elections at the local, state and federal levels to encourage candidates for public office to listen to constituents and help Black people —particularly those that are poor and working class —have their voices heard in the political process.
 - Public financing of elections are campaign finance reforms that provide some type of public funding for election campaigns with the purpose of curbing the influence of political donors and special interests in our electoral process. Designed and implemented effectively, these programs can bring more racial and socio-economic diversity to the candidate pool, and improve policy responsiveness and accountability with voters.
 - How a system is designed and implemented — which includes the composition of the members and organizations who are driving the design and implementation — will have determining impacts on whether or not the system can be 1) considered a racial and economic justice reform, and 2) be used to build independent political power.
 - Because programs vary widely, it is critical that a particular system be well matched with local demographics and conditions for it to optimally serve as a racial and economic justice reform and be used to build independent political power (which usually requires effective participation by stakeholder groups in policy design). There are three types of public financing programs: a) “clean money” programs provide an equal, lump-sum grant to candidates who demonstrate sufficient public support and prohibit further fundraising; b) small donor matching programs match each small contribution to a qualifying candidate with public funds according to a specified ratio, which have been as high as six-to-one; and c) voucher, refund, or tax credit programs, which allocate public funding through contributors themselves.
- Overturn the Supreme Court’s Citizens United



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- Over four decades, the Supreme Court has turned the First Amendment into a tool for use by wealthy interests to dominate the political process. Time and again, the Court has stepped in to dismantle democratically-enacted policies intended to prevent wealthy interests from translating economic might directly into political power — from 1976’s *Buckley v. Valeo*, which struck campaign spending limits and equated money with speech;¹²⁸ to 2010’s *Citizens United*, which gave corporations the same speech rights as individuals and opened the door to billionaire-funded Super PACs and unlimited, undisclosed “secret” to *McCutcheon v. FEC* in 2014, which eliminated caps on the total amount that one wealthy donor is permitted to contribute to federal candidates, parties and PACs.
- Ensure that newly appointed justices share the public’s common-sense understanding of the role that money should play in our electoral system.
- Develop and promote robust interpretive frameworks that go beyond fighting corruption as compelling values that our Constitution protects.
- Fight back in the courts to establish an enduring interpretation of the Constitution that empowers the people.
- Pass sensible limits on the use of big money in elections

Federal Action:

- Public Financing of Elections:
 - Pass the Government By the People Act (H.R.20) and the Fair Elections Now Act (S.2023), which are leading proposals to bring a small donor matching system to the federal level.

Local & State Action:

- Support legislation or ballot measures that would implement public financing of elections. Localities with current opportunities include:
 - Miami-Dade County, Florida
 - Washington, D.C.
 - Chicago, Illinois

How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- Public financing of elections increases political equality for Black poor and working class people.
- Makes governing bodies more representative and reflective of our communities by electing more low-and moderate-income people, more women, and more people of color, particularly Black working class people.



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- Providing on-ramps to building independent political power by lowering the barriers to entry for candidates who wish to challenge the status quo, and creating systems that mass-based membership organizations can use to advance a political platform.
- Making local communities, instead of large donors and corporations, the primary constituents of elected officials.

Model Legislation

- [Minnesota Secretary of State: Campaign Finance Filings](#)
- [Minnesota's Campaign Finance Law](#)
- Local legislation:
 - [Hennepin County Campaign Finance](#)
 - [San Francisco Ethic Commission](#)

Resources:

- [Tip of the Iceberg: How Minnesota's Campaign Finance Laws Limit Transparency](#)
- [Stacked Deck: How the Racial Bias in our Big Money Political System Undermines Our Democracy and our Economy.](#)
- [Designing Public Financing Systems to Advance Equity and Independent Political Power.](#)
- [Miami-Dade's Donor Class: Black Political Participation in Miami-Dade](#)
- [D.C.'s White Donor Class: Outsized Influence in A Diverse City](#)

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