



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 28, 2020

10 Years Later: Gloomy Predictions Following Citizens United Decision Didn't Happen

Predictions that the decision by the Supreme Court 10 years ago in *Citizens United v. FEC* (Federal Election Commission) would allow “dark money” to invade and take over the political process in the United States have failed to materialize. Instead, the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech has been strengthened in the political arena, to the benefit of the Republic.



Some Democrats still haven’t gotten the memo. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.) declared just last week that “Ten years after *Citizens United* our democracy has reached a crisis point. Just look at the ever-increasing amount of secret money flooding [into] our elections.” The *New York Times* whined at the time of the ruling that the decision “paved the way for corporations to use their vast treasuries to overwhelm elections ... thrust[ing] politics back to the robber-baron era of the 19th century.”

Udall didn’t bother to check his facts, and the *Times* is silent over the failure of its gloomy prediction. The flood of money from corporations never materialized, as they feared public backlash from their customers. According to David Harsanyi, senior writer at *National Review*, corporations are only responsible for a tiny fraction of all political spending — around one percent or less since 2010.

David Bossie, the head of *Citizens United* (the conservative advocacy group that brought the issue to the Supreme Court), told the *Washington Times* that so-called dark or secret money coming from unnamed donors through PACs (political action committees that sprang up following the ruling) amounts “to perhaps 4% of total political spending.”

The Republic has benefitted enormously from the decision. The high court ruled that laws restricting unions, corporations, and other organizations from spending money to influence elections violated the First Amendment’s guarantee of the right to free speech. The ruling freed those unions and corporations to spend money on political ads advocating for the election or defeat of political candidates right up to the time of the election.

Harsanyi called it “one of the greatest free speech decisions in American history.” Bossie said, “I’ve always been a believer that more options are better than fewer. I find it to be liberating for the American people to be able to choose where they want their money to go, and for what purpose.... If people want to band together to spend money to influence an election, it’s their First Amendment right to do so. The Left’s dire predictions about corporate money taking over our elections never transpired.”



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Since the decision in 2010, voters have become more knowledgeable of both candidates and issues, says Bradley Smith, the former chairman of the Federal Elections Commission: “None of the catastrophic predictions [from the Left] have come true. There’s more competition than ever. We’ve had five elections since *Citizens United*. In four of them, either the presidency has changed hands or one of the houses of Congress has.”

Smith added that incumbents are now less likely to win reelection because of that healthy competition. One chamber flipped in 2010, 2014, and 2018, and the White House changed party affiliation in 2016. Voter turnout has also increased in the last two national elections.

Another benefit is the loss of power for the political parties themselves. Their spending has remained steady at between \$200 and \$250 million for each election over the last decade, while Super PACs spent four times as much in 2016 alone. The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) says “the balance of political power shifted from political parties to outside groups.”

John Samples, vice president of the Cato Institute, said, “Ten years ago the U.S. Supreme Court vindicated the free speech rights of individuals and associations spending independently on elections. Disaster was predicted. It was said [that] businesses and the wealthy would dominate politics and policy. But corporations have stayed out of politics, and liberals have shown and are showing that they can remain competitive or even raise more funds than their opponents.”

The current slate of Democrats seeking their party’s nomination has largely declared they won’t accept “big” money from PACs, with the exception of Joe Biden. Biden is more than happy to accept all the help he can get from a Super PAC as the race is heading down to the wire. And underreported is the fact that the other Democrats are equally happy to accept financial aid from labor unions and other groups seeking to support them and influence the election.

And money alone doesn’t guarantee anything in politics. Consider that Hillary Clinton outspent Donald Trump by three-to-one. Or consider that in spite of spending hundreds of millions on his own campaign, Michael Bloomberg remains in the low single digits in recent political polling.

Scott Blackburn, research director at the Institute for Free Speech, summed up the benefits the Republic is enjoying following the *Citizens United* decision 10 years ago: “While *Citizens United* hasn’t resulted in a flood of corporate cash ‘drowning out’ ordinary voices, it has allowed new, often very important, voices to be heard. The decision not only protects the right to speak, it protects the right of Americans to hear those voices.”

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