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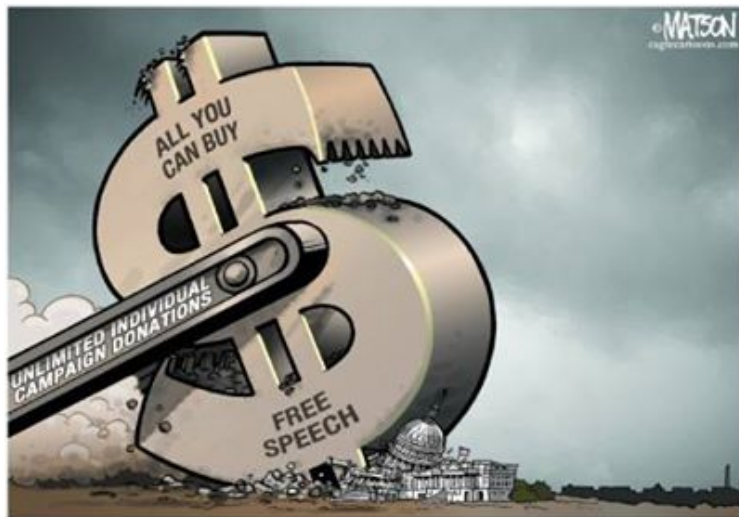
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Visualizing the Data – NJ 2018 Election Campaign Contributions



Ron Rivers April 20, 2018 US Senate

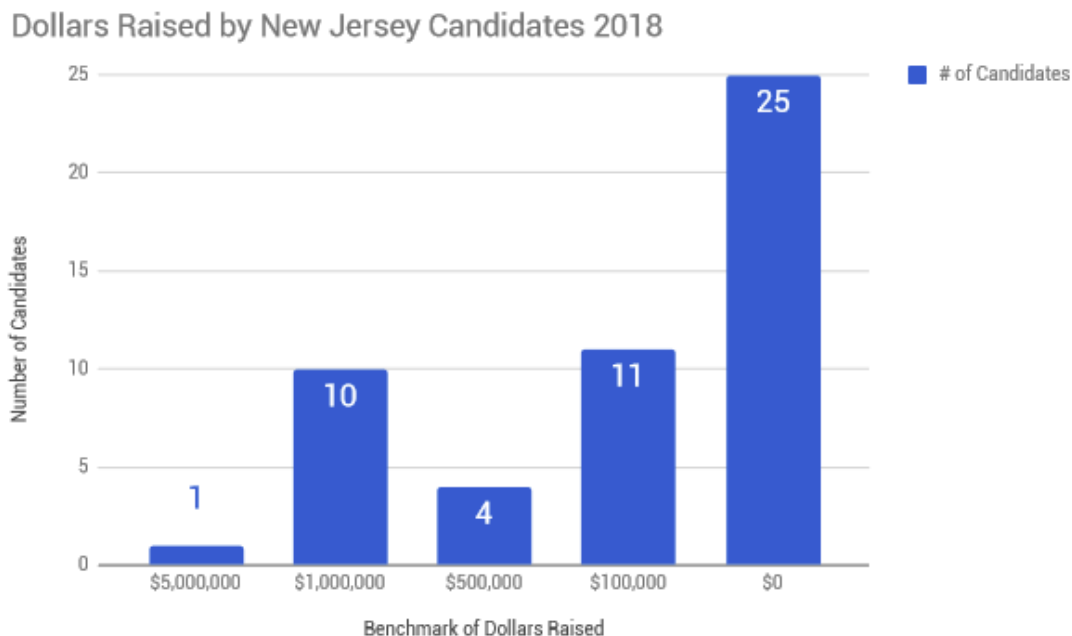
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New Jersey politics has a money problem and it's time we talked about it. Specifically, how concentrated the money is and who holds it. By better understanding the state of our elections currently we can begin to take steps to

reimagine the process of how we allow elections to be conducted here in our state, opening up more opportunities for alternative perspectives aside from those deeply entrenched in the New Jersey political machines.

As of 3/31/2018 the total amount of dollars raised for New Jersey’s 2018 Congressional Race is \$24,368,689.00 [1]. There are 51 candidates registered as of now with the State of New Jersey for this Congressional election so if we averaged this total dollar amount per candidate we would discover that it equates to \$477,817 in spending on average per candidate. Unfortunately, the disparity in funding among the candidates shows us that the average candidate has raised nowhere near that relative average; the data demonstrate that the funding is highly concentrated among a few individuals.



This chart provides a visual representation of the dollar milestones raised in relation to the number of candidates who have achieved them. The dollar amounts represent a floor, so they could read as “raised \$X.XX or more” until the next milestone floor is summed.

Immediately we can observe that a single candidate has raised over \$7,000,000 for his race – our current Senator Bob Menendez. In his re-election campaign, Bob raised *eighty-eight times* the amount of money as his closest competitor – the majority coming from for-profit firms or special interest groups.

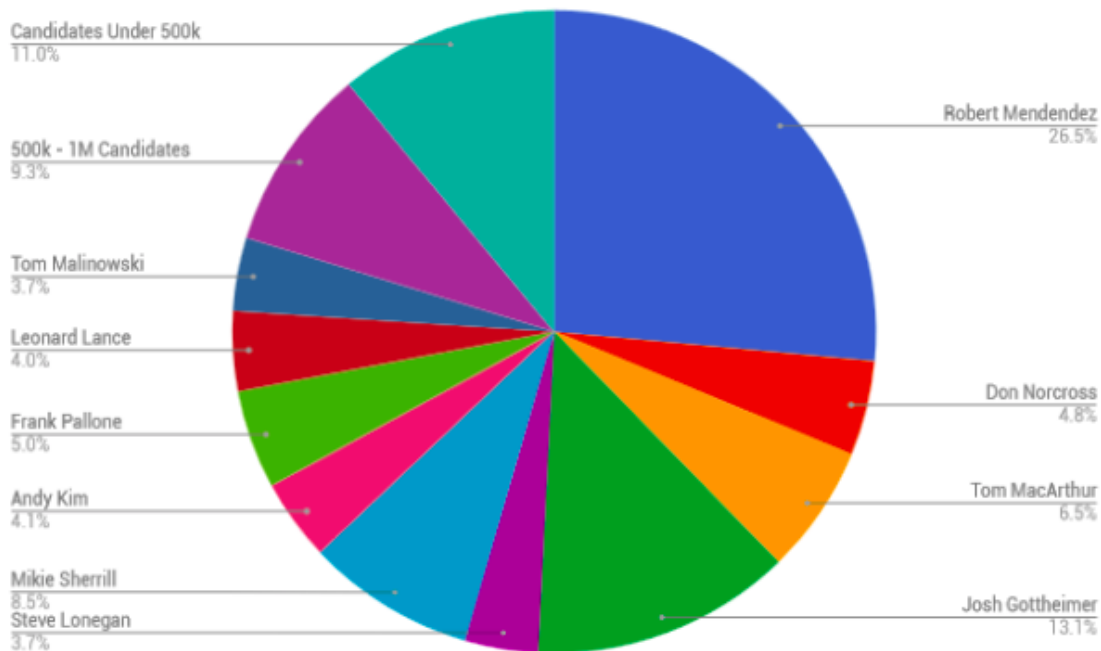
The next milestone of \$1,000,000 has been achieved by ten other candidates, all running for a Congressional seat in their district. Again, we can observe that the majority of funding for each of these candidates comes from for-profit firms or special interest groups. If we include the four candidates have achieved the \$500,000 milestone of fundraising we begin to see just how deep the concentration of funding is among our political options.

Robert Mendendez	\$7,243,108.00	26.45%
Josh Gottheimer	\$3,583,143.00	13.09%

All Candidates Under 500k (36)	\$3,012,196.00	11.00%
500k - 1M Candidates (4)	\$2,540,622.00	9.28%
Mikie Sherrill	\$2,318,374.00	8.47%
Tom MacArthur	\$1,771,323.00	6.47%
Frank Pallone	\$1,358,869.00	4.96%
Don Norcross	\$1,313,307.00	4.80%
Andy Kim	\$1,126,703.00	4.11%
Leonard Lance	\$1,103,661.00	4.03%
Tom Malinowski	\$1,005,333.00	3.67%
Steve Lonigan	\$1,004,246.00	3.67%

Note that two individuals hold more cash than the 40 lowest candidates combined! The remaining eight come reasonably close to matching these combined totals.

Using the actual dollar amounts referenced above, we can visualize this concentration of money as follows:



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Viewing the data visually the concentration of fundraising becomes more apparent. 20% of the candidates are in control of 80% of the total monies raised. If we add the monetary totals of the four candidates, who raised over

\$500,000 but under \$1,000,000 we see that 27% of the total candidates control 89% of the monies raised.

So why does this matter? I'll argue that this hyper-concentration of campaign funds inherently limits our available options for alternative solutions to the issues we face.

"In 93 percent of House of Representatives races and 94 percent of Senate races that had been decided by mid-day Nov. 5, the candidate who spent the most money ended up winning, according to a post-election analysis by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics." [2]

New Jersey suffers from some of the most entrenched political institutions in the nation creating a system that mutes the policies, plans, and visions of the future from candidates who do not toe the line with the status quo. This type of political culture and conduct creates an uneven playing field that suppresses innovative and experimental candidates who might have new ideas about how to govern and build communities in our era of ever-changing technological innovation. Specifically, candidates with such a dominant financial war chest can outspend their competitors in advertisements to the such a degree that it creates the illusion of no alternatives for the average New Jersey resident, a scenario that negatively impacts all of us.

So what can we do? For starters, we can demand campaign finance reform here in New Jersey. In 2017 twenty-three states amended their campaign finance laws[3], New Jersey was not one of them. If our legislators lack proper data of successful examples they need look no further than other advanced democracies such as Germany, France, Hungary, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, South Korea, and Poland, for inspiration of better methods on how to handle the funding our elections. These countries have strict spending limits on campaigns including limits to advertisements, and the way money can be contributed and spent. While we're at it, we can insist that our Congressional Representatives fight to repeal the Citizens United Ruling[4]; removing the ability for corporations and special interest groups to invest unlimited capital into our elections.

The issue of campaign finance reform is not one of means, but rather political willpower. So long as we continue to accept that the candidates who can raise the most capital will inevitably become the winners of our elections, we will be forever indebted to their corporate and special-interest sponsors who will benefit directly from legislation passed in their favor. As the world continues to change it is our collective responsibility as citizens to empower individuals with new and innovative ideas to the forefront of leadership in the United States. To abstain from this responsibility is self-imposed oppression that will continue to favor monied interests in New Jersey.

About the Author: Ron Rivers is the Founder of the 501c3 non-profit [OurSociety Experiment](http://oursociety.org) - @oursocietyorg. He can be reached via Twitter [@ronrivers](https://twitter.com/ronrivers)

[1] Center for Responsive Politics <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/election?id=NJ>

[2] Center for Responsive Politics <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2008/11/money-wins-white-house-and/>

[3] National Conference of State Legislators: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/2017-campaign-finance-enactments.aspx>

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens_United_v._Federal_Election_Commission

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