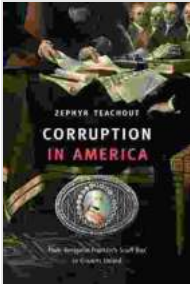


From Benjamin Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United: A History of Corporate Influence in American Elections



Corruption in America: From Benjamin Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United by Zephyr Teachout

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 1423 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 385 pages
Screen Reader	: Supported
X-Ray	: Enabled



Corporations have been influencing American elections for centuries. In the early days of the republic, wealthy merchants and landowners used their money to support candidates who would protect their interests. As the economy grew and corporations became more powerful, their influence over elections also increased.

One of the most famous examples of corporate influence in early American history is the case of Benjamin Franklin's snuff box. In 1789, Franklin was serving as the American ambassador to France. While in Paris, he was approached by a group of French merchants who wanted to influence the outcome of the upcoming presidential election. The merchants offered Franklin a large sum of money to support their preferred candidate, John

Adams. Franklin refused the bribe, but the incident raised concerns about the potential for foreign influence in American elections.

In the 19th century, corporations began to play a more direct role in elections. They donated money to candidates, hired lobbyists to influence legislation, and even ran their own newspapers to promote their favored candidates. In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act, which was intended to prevent corporations from engaging in anti-competitive practices. However, the law did not prevent corporations from spending money on elections.

In the 20th century, corporate influence in elections continued to grow. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* that corporations have the same First Amendment rights as individuals. This decision allowed corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections. In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. FEC* that corporations can spend money on independent political expenditures. This decision has made it even easier for corporations to influence elections.

Today, corporate influence in American elections is a major concern. Critics argue that corporations have too much power over our political system and that they use their money to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens. Supporters of corporate influence argue that corporations are simply exercising their First Amendment rights and that they have a right to participate in the political process.

The debate over corporate influence in elections is likely to continue for many years to come. As the economy continues to grow and corporations

become even more powerful, it is important to consider the potential consequences of their influence on our democracy.

Impact of Corporate Influence on Elections

Corporate influence in elections can have a number of negative consequences. These include:

- **Increased polarization:** Corporations often donate money to candidates who share their ideological views. This can lead to a more polarized political climate, as candidates are more likely to take extreme positions in order to appeal to their corporate donors.
- **Reduced accountability:** When corporations donate money to candidates, they expect something in return. This can lead to candidates being more responsive to the interests of corporations than to the interests of their constituents.
- **Increased corruption:** Corporate influence can lead to corruption, as candidates may be more likely to make decisions that benefit their corporate donors, even if those decisions are harmful to the public interest.

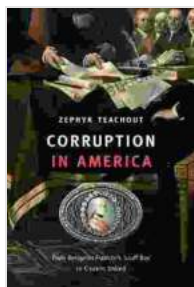
Reforming Corporate Influence in Elections

There are a number of ways to reform corporate influence in elections. These include:

- **Public financing of elections:** One way to reduce corporate influence in elections is to provide public financing for candidates. This would level the playing field and make it less likely that candidates would be beholden to corporate donors.

- Disclosure of corporate spending: Another way to reduce corporate influence in elections is to require corporations to disclose their spending on elections. This would make it easier for voters to see how much money corporations are spending on elections and to hold them accountable for their spending.
- Limits on corporate spending: Another way to reduce corporate influence in elections is to limit the amount of money that corporations can spend on elections. This would make it more difficult for corporations to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens.

Reforming corporate influence in elections is a complex challenge, but it is one that is essential to protecting our democracy. By taking steps to reduce corporate influence, we can make our elections more fair and more representative of the interests of all Americans.



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