

Contribution Limits Increase in 15 States and Federally after *Citizens United*

Five years after the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, which struck down a federal law on First Amendment grounds banning corporations and labor unions from spending money independently of campaigns to urge voters to support or oppose the candidates of their choice, and the subsequent *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* decision, which created Super PACs, fifteen states and Congress have continued the trend of liberalizing political giving laws by raising or eliminating various contribution limits. The rising importance of independent expenditures in election campaigns appears to have spurred lawmakers across the country to raise limits on donations to candidates, political parties, and political committees (PACs), providing those entities a stronger voice with which to communicate with voters. In many cases, legislators explicitly referenced the *Citizens United* decision to explain their rationale for raising limits.

State	Year	Summary of Contribution Limit Changes
Alabama	2013	✓ Eliminated \$500 per election limit on direct corporate contributions to candidates
Arizona	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$488 per election cycle to \$2,500 per election for legislative candidates - From \$1,010 per election cycle to \$2,500 per election for statewide candidates ✓ Increased limits on contribution from PACs to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$2,000 per election cycle to \$5,000 per election for legislative and statewide candidates ✓ Eliminated aggregate limit on individual and PAC contributions to candidates
Connecticut	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to political parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$5,000 per year to \$10,000 per year for state parties - From \$1,000 per year to \$2,000 per year for local parties ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to PACs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$750 per year to \$1,000 per year for PACs
Florida	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$500 per election to \$1,000 per election for legislative candidates - From \$500 per election to \$3,000 per election for statewide candidates ✓ Eliminated limit on contributions from individuals to PACs
Illinois	2012	✓ When Super PACs spend \$250,000 in a race for statewide office or \$100,000 in a race for legislative office, contribution limits on giving to candidates in that race no longer apply
Maryland	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$4,000 per four-year election cycle to \$6,000 per four-year election cycle for candidates, parties, and PACs
Massachusetts	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$500 per year to \$1,000 per year for legislative and statewide candidates ✓ Eliminated aggregate limit on individual giving to legislative and statewide candidates
Michigan	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$500 per election cycle to \$1,000 per election cycle for State House candidates - From \$1,000 per election cycle to \$2,000 per election cycle for State Senate candidates - From \$3,400 per election cycle to \$6,800 per election cycle for statewide candidates ✓ Increased limits on contributions from Independent PACs to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$5,000 per election cycle to \$10,000 per election cycle for state house candidates - From \$10,000 per election cycle to \$20,000 per election cycle for state senate candidates - From \$34,000 per election cycle to \$68,000 per election cycle for statewide candidates
Minnesota	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$500 to \$1,000 for legislative candidates in election years - From \$2,000 to \$4,000 for gubernatorial candidates in election years
Nebraska	2011	✓ The Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission announced in a September 2011 order that it would no longer enforce the state's aggregate limits on giving to candidates, effectively rendering the state without any contribution limits on any source
North Carolina	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates and PACs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$4,000 per election to \$5,000 per election for legislative and statewide candidates - From \$4,000 per election to \$5,000 per election for PACs
Oklahoma	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$5,000 per family to \$2,600 per individual per election for legislative and statewide candidates ✓ Amended limits on contributions from political parties to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$50,000 per campaign to \$25,000 per year for statewide candidates

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$25,000 per campaign to \$10,000 per year for legislative candidates ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to political parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$10,000 per family per year to \$10,000 per individual per year ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to PACs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$5,000 per family per year to \$5,000 per individual per year
Tennessee	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eliminated prohibition and imposed limits on contributions from corporations to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From prohibited to \$7,400 per election for State Representative candidates - From prohibited to \$11,200 per election for State Senate candidates - From prohibited to \$11,200 per election for statewide candidates
Vermont	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Amended limits on contributions from individuals, corporations, and unions to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$1,000 per election to \$1,000 per election cycle for State Representative candidates - From \$1,000 per election to \$1,500 per election cycle for State Senate candidates - From \$1,000 per election to \$4,000 per election cycle for statewide candidates ✓ Amended limits on contributions from PACs to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$3,000 per election to \$1,000 per election cycle for State Representative candidates - From \$3,000 per election to \$1,500 per election cycle for State Senate candidates - From \$3,000 per election to \$4,000 per election cycle for statewide candidates ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals, corporations, unions, and PACs to political parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$2,000 per election cycle to \$10,000 per election cycle ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals, corporations, unions, and political parties to PACs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$2,000 per election cycle to \$4,000 per election cycle
Wyoming	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased limits on contributions from individuals to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From \$1,000 per election to \$1,500 per election for legislative candidates - From \$1,000 per election to \$2,500 per election for statewide candidates ✓ Created limits on contributions from PACs to candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To \$3,000 per election for legislative candidates - To \$7,500 per election for statewide candidates
U.S.	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased ability of individuals to give to political parties through creation of seven new party accounts for financing presidential nominating conventions, maintaining party buildings, and paying legal/recount fees

Contributions to candidate campaigns or political parties are intended to further those campaigns' and those parties' efforts to speak to and persuade the public. Supporters who max out their contributions to candidates and parties and wish to spend more often turn to independent groups, such as Super PACs. By raising contribution limits, states allow donors a more direct way of supporting their preferred candidates and parties, while bolstering the voices of candidates and parties to compete with groups that can raise and spend unlimited amounts.

However, even relatively high contribution limits (in comparison to other states) leave candidates and parties at a distinct and unnecessary disadvantage when compared to independent groups. Although contribution limits are touted as a panacea for diminishing corruption¹ and promoting "good" government,² there is no evidence they provide any such benefits, and plenty of evidence that these laws protect incumbents and make political participation complicated for citizens who want to run for office or support upstart candidates and unpopular or new causes.

Most states allow (and allowed prior to *Citizens United*) unlimited contributions in some form. Twenty-nine states allow unlimited contributions from individuals to political parties, and 28 allow unlimited contributions from PACs to parties. Similarly, 27 states permit unlimited contributions from individuals to PACs that give to candidates. Contributions from individuals to statewide and legislative candidates are unlimited in 12 states, contributions from PACs to candidates are unlimited in 13 states, and contributions from parties to candidates are unlimited in 22 states. Six states have no limits at all on the size or source of contributions. These are not small samples or homogenous states either. Among the 12 states to allow unlimited contributions from individuals to candidates are big states (Texas), small states (Indiana), states with higher population (Missouri), states with lower population (North Dakota), Northern states (Pennsylvania), Southern states (Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia), Midwestern states (Iowa, Nebraska), and Western states (Oregon, Utah).

As elected officials in many states are realizing, raising or eliminating contribution limits improves the vitality of campaigns and bolsters the First Amendment freedoms of those residing within their borders. Given this reality, it's not surprising that so many states are choosing to improve their residents' ability to speak.

¹ Adriana Cordis and Jeff Milyo, "Working Paper No. 13-09: Do State Campaign Finance Reforms Reduce Public Corruption?," Mercatus Center at George Mason University. Retrieved on January 19, 2015. Available at: mercatus.org/sites/default/files/Milyo_CampaignFinanceReforms_v2.pdf (April 2013); Matt Nese and Luke Wachob, "Do Lower Contribution Limits Decrease Public Corruption?," Center for Competitive Politics' Issue Analysis No. 5. Retrieved on January 19, 2015. Available at: http://www.campaignfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-08-01_Issue-Analysis-5_Do-Lower-Contribution-Limits-Decrease-Public-Corruption1.pdf (August 2013).

² Matt Nese and Luke Wachob, "Do Lower Contribution Limits Produce 'Good' Government?," Center for Competitive Politics' Issue Analysis No. 6. Retrieved on January 19, 2015. Available at: http://www.campaignfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2013-10-08_Issue-Analysis-6_Do-Lower-Contribution-Limits-Produce-Good-Government1.pdf (October 2013); Matt Nese, "Do Limits on Corporate and Union Giving to Candidates Lead to 'Good' Government?," Center for Competitive Politics' Issue Analysis No. 7. Retrieved on January 19, 2015. Available at: http://www.campaignfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013-11-20_Issue-Analysis-7_Do-Limits-On-Corporate-And-Union-Giving-To-Candidates-Lead-To-Good-Government.pdf (November 2013).