

How Citizens United changed politics, in 7 charts

By **Chris Cillizza** January 22, 2014

Four years ago today, the Supreme Court issued the Citizens United ruling, a case that has drastically re-shaped the political landscape in its relatively short life span. President Obama condemned it in his 2010 state of the union address, Democrats tried, unsuccessfully, to make the 2010 midterms about it, and it played no small part in making the 2012 presidential election by far the most expensive in American history.

So, what hath Citizens United -- which, in short, allowed corporations and labor unions to spend unlimited funds on direct advocacy for or against candidates - actually wrought? Here are six charts -- many thanks to WaPo's Matea Gold for her help -- that tell the story. Got a favorite chart that details the impact of Citizens United? Send it my way at chris.cillizza@washpost.com and I will add it to the post.

1. This chart details all spending by outside groups from 1990-2014. The surge in 2012 is obvious but compare outside spending in the 2006 midterms (pre Citizens United) vs outside spending in the 2010 midterms (post Citizens United). Big difference.
2. Here's a look at all outside group spending through Jan. 21 (aka today) of an election year. Spending at this point in the 2014 cycle is already almost three times as much as it was at this time in the 2010 election. And it's 25 times more than at this point in the 2006 election.
3. Conservatives have a far better organized and financed outside operation than do liberals. It's also worth noting that Republicans had a contested presidential primary in 2012 with vast sums spent by a handful of individuals to elect their preferred candidate, skewing the numbers below a bit.

4. That GOP organization/fundraising advantage translates into more TV ads when it matters. The chart below -- courtesy of CMAG/Kantar Media -- tracks the raw number of ads run by candidates, party committees and outside groups beginning 130 days before the 2010 and 2006 elections. It's no mistake that the red (Republican) line soared between 2006 and 2010 while the blue (Democratic) one stayed largely steady.

5. While the soaring spending on elections -- by unions, corporations and individuals -- is well known by this point, what is less well understood is how Citizens United drove massive amounts of cash into the non-profit political world, a world where disclosure is not required. This chart details the over \$300 million spent by outside groups with no disclosure of donors.

6. And this one shows the rapid drop in the amount of donor disclosure by outside groups.

7. This chart, courtesy of [Brendan Doherty](#), a political scientist at the U.S. Naval Academy, shows the rapid increase in first term fundraisers by presidents. Writes Doherty: "The combination of rising campaign costs and contribution limits that were low relative to those costs for decades led presidents to spend increasing amounts of their scarcest resource, their time, raising campaign funds. *Citizens United* accelerated these dynamics, as the prospect of outside groups receiving contributions in the millions provided an even greater incentive for President Obama to spend a great deal of time raising money in the increments in the low thousands required by campaign finance law."

Chris Cillizza writes "The Fix," a politics blog for The Washington Post, and hosts the Ciquizza podcast, a weekly news quiz [Subscribe on iTunes. [🐦 Follow @thefix](#)
