

# Money in Politics, Racial Equity, and the U.S. Supreme Court

---

BY ADAM LIOZ

*Big-money politics is a key barrier to people of color achieving equal representation. Building a democracy where the strength of our voices doesn't depend upon the size of our wallets, and where people of all incomes and backgrounds can effectively run for office and lobby our elected representatives, requires keeping Judge Neil Gorsuch off the United States Supreme Court.*

## The Supreme Court Created Our Racially Biased Big-Money System

- Over four decades, the Supreme Court [has gutted many of our strongest protections](#) against big money dominating our democracy, such as:
  - Limits on how much billionaire candidates can spend trying to buy elected office;
  - Bans on direct corporate spending on elections, in the famous *Citizens United* case;
  - Caps on the amount a single wealthy donor can give to all candidates, parties, and political committees (PACs) combined.
- Despite the fact that our democracy is based on equal citizenship and the principle of one person, one vote, [the Supreme Court says](#) the people and our elected representatives *are not allowed* to limit big money in order to give us all an equal voice over the decisions and policies that affect our lives.
- This is part of the Supreme Court's broader "color-blind" ideology that [gutted the Voting Rights Act](#) and sees no problem [with discriminatory voter ID requirements](#).

## The Court is at a Crossroads on Money in Politics

- The Roberts Court's worst money-in-politics rulings were 5-to-4 decisions.
- The Supreme Court is now split 4-to-4 on this and many other issues.
- With an open-minded ninth justice, we could end Super PACs, get corporate money back out of our elections, and prevent billionaires from trying to buy elected office.
- But with a justice more concerned with protecting the privileges of the donor class than the rights of voters, we'll see attacks on the few remaining protections we have left, like contribution limits and the ban on corporations giving directly to candidates.

## Trump's Nominee Will Likely Side With Big Money

- Judge Neil Gorsuch's [record on money in politics](#) suggests that he'll side with big money over ordinary voters.
- Instead of helping to build a fairer democracy, Judge Gorsuch will move us backwards and threaten the few remaining protections against big money.

## Big-Money Elections Sustain Racial Bias

- Centuries of racist policies have created a staggering [racial wealth gap](#)—and big-money politics translates this gap in economic power into a similar gap in political voice.
- Nearly 95 percent of federal election donors who give \$5,000+ [are white](#), whereas small donors are [not necessarily skewed](#) by race.
- Large donors, on the whole, [have different priorities](#) than do people of color and the public at large, and are less progressive on key economic issues such as creating jobs and ensuring affordable college.
- [Ninety percent of elected officials are white](#), even though people of color make up nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population. Fewer candidates of color run due to the fundraising barrier, and those who do [raise substantially less money](#) than their white counterparts (47 percent less in one study).
- Elected officials who are disproportionately white and [more responsive to the white donor class](#) than to ordinary voters produce public policies and practices that are skewed against people of color [on issues](#) from housing policy to mass incarceration to fair wages.



Demos is a public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy.

**Media Contact**

*SKD Knickerbocker*

DEMOS@SKDKNICK.COM

**[demos.org](https://demos.org)**

80 Broad Street, 4th Fl.

New York, NY 10004