



Citizens United Is Breaking Up Corporate Dominance of Elections

With the 2012 political season heating up, many people are calling for a ban on the SuperPacs created in the wake of the 2010 Supreme Court *Citizens United* decision. A few on the left have even called for a constitutional amendment to ban corporations from making political advertisements, for fear that corporations have come to dominate elections in the United States.



In one sense, they are right. But it's not the SuperPacs. The corporations that have been dominating the public debate for decades are the media empires. Right now, six corporations control most of the television, radio, and print publishing networks that Americans see on a daily basis. They drive the debate, and the social issues behind the debate.

- **ABC/Disney** runs ABC News, as well as a large number of local and cable television stations, theme parks, and movie studios.
- **Time-Warner** owns CNN, TNT, and a whole slew of cable television stations, Warner Brothers movie studios, plus a large number of magazines, including *Time*, *People*, and *Sports Illustrated*.
- **NewsCorp** runs Fox News, a radio news network, 20th Century Fox movie studios, and dozens of newspapers and book publishers.
- **NBCUniversal** is jointly owned by Comcast and General Electric, one of the largest corporations in America. It runs the NBC network, MSNBC, a large selection of cable channels, Universal theme parks, and digital media.
- **Viacom** owns a variety of cable television channels and Paramount Pictures movie studios.
- **CBS Corporation** owns CBS television network, Showtime, a number of cable television stations, and a radio news network.

Even [the Left admits](#) that a few corporations control the message most Americans see.

What they don't talk about is that these few corporations are associated with each other in the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, and that they have a tight relationship with government and establishment corporate leadership across the country. The Council on Foreign Relations has only 4,500 members, out of a national population of some 300 million. But they boast some of the most powerful media personalities and media corporate leaders in the country.

[Corporate Members](#) of the CFR include NewsCorp, Google, Time-Warner, Verizon, Microsoft, McGraw-Hill (publishing), General Electric (49 percent of NBC), and Thomson-Reuters (publishing/news network). And many of the personalities that Americans see every day on television are CFR members. For [example](#):

NBC/MSNBC: Brian Williams (NBC anchor), Mika Brzezinski (MSNBC anchor), Maria Bartiromo (CNBC anchor), Tom Brokaw (former anchor), and Jonathan Alter (NBC News/*Newsweek* magazine)



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CBS: Bob Schieffer (anchor) and Dan Rather (former anchor)

CNN: Fareed Zakaria (CNN anchor), Erin Burnett (CNN anchor), and commentators David Gergen, Jonathan Karl, and Jeffrey Toobin

ABC/Disney: George Stephanopoulos (anchor), Diane Sawyer (anchor), Katie Couric (former anchor), and commentators Peggy Noonan and George Will

Fox/NewsCorp: Rupert Murdoch (CEO of NewsCorp) and commentators Morton Kondracke and Charles Krauthammer

Even movie stars are CFR members, such as Angelina Jolie (pictured above), Warren Beatty, and George Clooney.

But it's not just full-time journalists and Hollywood bigshots from the CFR that get network airtime. The CFR member/anchors call CFR member/"experts" to affirm their positions. CFR President Richard Haass [boasted](#) in the CFR's 2011 Annual Report that the "CFR has been active on the full range of U.S. foreign policy concerns. Experts published five hundred and seventy op-eds and articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *Atlantic*, among others, and made nearly five hundred media appearances on major U.S. and international news networks. CFR experts also testified before Congress fourteen times and briefed U.S. and foreign government officials over four hundred times."

So go ahead: Change the channel and pretend you can get a different perspective. In reality, it doesn't matter what channel you flip to; the CFR limits on acceptable debate are evident on every national channel, something that many freedom-lovers witnessed with the media ignoring or — later — demeaning Ron Paul in the presidential race. There's no national debate on eliminating all foreign aid, even though some [three-fourths of Americans want to do it](#). Why not? Because it's not on the CFR talking points. There's no debate about bringing Americans home from hundreds of military bases abroad, even though a clear majority of Americans want it. Why not? Because it's not on the CFR talking points.

Imagine if such a concentration of top media personalities were found to be members of the National Rifle Association or the Teamsters Union, both of which have a membership nearly 1,000 times that of the Council on Foreign Relations. Wouldn't there be an outcry about bias or corruption?

We also saw the mainstream media coalesce around the idea that we had to bail out the banks in 2008 and 2009. Why was that? The CFR and its members led the people to bail out companies that were headed by their fellow CFR members. CFR corporate membership includes major banks such as Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Citibank, Bank of America — and did include AIG — until it went bankrupt despite the bailouts.

And it's not surprising that they got the bailouts either, since the CFR was [holding policy discussions](#) with Treasury Department officials throughout the conference. They [still are](#).

Of course, it's easy to get a [phone-in from the Treasury Secretary](#) before he heads out to the G-20 conference if he's already a member. Indeed, it's not just Timothy Geithner who's a member, but just about all the past Treasury secretaries have been members of the Council on Foreign Relations for 50 years — from Bush's Hank Paulson to Clinton's Lawrence Summers and Robert Rubin (the latter a former CEO of Goldman Sachs).

This is true across the spectrum of government. Obama's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is a



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member, just as Condi Rice and Colin Powell were under the Bush administration, and Madeleine Albright and Warren Christopher were under the Clinton administration.

The point of all this discussion is not to beat up on the Council on Foreign Relations, though its members probably deserve it. It's to point out that our media and our elections are already tightly controlled by a handful of well-connected multi-billion-dollar media corporations. And they were controlled that way long before the *Citizens United* decision. That's how they've been able to get the bailout deals done at the expense of the middle-class taxpayers — despite protests by the Tea Party and the Occupy movement. In this battle, it's a fight not just between the 99 percent and the one percent, but between the 99.999 percent and the 0.001 percent, who are practiced and very good at robbing the 99.999 percent through the agency of government authority.

But the stranglehold of these five corporations is breaking. The Internet started the breakup, but *Citizens United* tore that media oligopoly wide open. Under *Citizens United*, people have only to find one millionaire to fund their views and they can get around the mainstream media with grass-roots campaigning, Internet ads, or even conventional television advertisements. This happened with Liberty For All SuperPac, which helped guide Ron Paul fan Thomas Massie to a Republican primary win in an open Kentucky congressional district. And FreedomWorks SuperPac has shaken up Utah politics with its "Retire Hatch" campaign to stop TARP bailout Republican Orrin Hatch. A six-term senator, Hatch would never have had to have been in a run-off election against Dan Liljenquist without FreedomWorks SuperPac's help.

The Left implores the nation to repeal *Citizens United* in order to "take money out of politics." But the only way to do this is to ban freedom of the press. The *New York Times* [condemned](#) the *Citizens United* decision when it came out in 2009, complaining that corporations should not be involved in politics. This was just days after the *Times'* corporate subsidiary, the *Boston Globe*, had [endorsed](#) the Democrat in the Massachusetts U.S. Senate race to replace the late Ted Kennedy.

No corporations involved in politics?

... except themselves.

As James Madison noted in [Federalist #10](#), political disagreements can be decided by either government censorship or allowing everyone to broadcast their views and trusting the people to make the right decisions at the ballot box. He chose the latter, stating:

There are two methods of curing the mischiefs of faction: the one, by removing its causes; the other, by controlling its effects.

There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests.

It could never be more truly said than of the first remedy, that it was worse than the disease. Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment [element] without which it instantly expires. But it could not be less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency.

Destroying essential liberty is precisely what the critics of *Citizens United* want to do. The attitude of the repeal-*Citizens-United* crowd can be summed up accurately as "totalitarian paternalism." They don't



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trust the people to come to the right conclusions. The people must be safely shepherded by the guardians of acceptable opinion, as represented by the five or six giant corporations that run the establishment media. Or perhaps they remain blissfully unaware that repealing *Citizens United* would put the same old establishment back in charge.

In the end it is an attitude of censorship worthy of Joseph Stalin. More importantly, it is flatly contradictory to the [First and Tenth Amendments](#) to the U.S. Constitution.

The cry on the Left is that corporations are not people. That's true; corporations and SuperPacs are associations of people. And this too was part of the First Amendment, which protected the right of the people to assemble and associate.

During congressional debate on the Bill of Rights in 1789, Connecticut Congressman Theodore Sedgwick [opposed](#) the First Amendment because he thought adding freedom of assembly to freedom of speech and press was redundant. According to the Annals of Congress, Sedgwick "feared it would tend to make them appear trifling in the eyes of their constituents; what, said he, shall we secure the freedom of speech, and think it necessary, at the same time, to allow the right of assembling? If people freely converse together, they must assemble for that purpose; it is a self-evident, unalienable right which the people possess; it is certainly a thing that never would be called in question; it is derogatory to the dignity of the House to descend to such minutiae...."

The right to band together for a political cause and spend money was well-entrenched in the American constitutional system by the 1830s, when Alexis de Tocqueville noted in his [Democracy in America](#) that:

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals.... An association consists simply in the public assent which a number of individuals give to certain doctrines and in the engagement which they contract to promote in a certain manner the spread of those doctrines. The right of associating in this fashion almost merges with freedom of the press, but societies thus formed possess more authority than the press.

While the Left demonizes the label "corporations," it's nothing more than a label, a bogeyman. Call them associations of Americans exercising their rights to freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and the bogeyman is banished. The *Citizens United* decision allows more speech, not less. And for that reason, the Founding Fathers were probably smiling down from heaven when the decision was released.

Photo at top: Actress Angelina Jolie speaks during a symposium on international law and justice at the Council on Foreign Relations, Oct. 17, 2008 in New York: AP Images



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