

Mega-wealthy Elites to Determine Outcome of US 2016 Election

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2016 fundraising shows power tilting to groups backed by wealthy elite

A small cadre of super-wealthy Americans is dominating the fundraising for the 2016 Republican presidential nominating contest, doling out huge sums to independent groups that overwhelm total contributions to the candidates. Nearly \$4 out of every \$5 raised so far on behalf of GOP White House contenders has gone to independent groups rather than the official campaigns.

Outside groups have already amassed more than \$235 million — more than three times the \$67 million raised collectively by the Republican field through June 30, according to reports filed Wednesday with the Federal Election Commission.

So far, the dynamic is different on the Democratic side, with 80 percent of the more than \$80 million raised so far to support Hillary Rodham Clinton and her competitors flowing to their campaigns.

Clinton boasted the biggest campaign haul of any candidate, \$47 million, driven by a largely female donor base. Contributions less than \$200 made up nearly 17 percent of her total. That was in sharp contrast with Republican Jeb Bush: Just 3 percent of the \$11.4 million he raised came from such low-dollar donations.

The lopsided war chests on the right underscore how the financing of political campaigns has been fundamentally rewired in the five years since federal courts loosened restrictions on political spending by corporations and rich individuals. Those decisions triggered a rush of big donations and political operatives to independent groups that can accept unlimited donations, a trend that has dramatically accelerated this year. This election cycle has already seen bolder collaboration between super PACs and campaigns than previous races, as well as a proliferation of nonprofit groups aligned with individual candidates.

The 2016 elections are now poised to mark a tipping point: the first time outside groups outstrip the clout and resources of many campaigns.

“It’s pretty clear that the super PACs are playing an unprecedented role,” said Michael Malbin, executive director of the nonpartisan Campaign Finance Institute, which tracks political contributions.

“This whole development to me is staggering,” he said. “You’re in a fundamentally different system than 12 years ago or eight years ago.”

The huge pack of well-funded independent groups flanking the Republican candidates has fueled anxiety among party elders that the GOP is in for a drawn-out primary fight — one that could possibly roll into the nominating convention in July 2016.

“It could end up with the Republican vote split up in a lot of different ways,” said Ron Weiser, a former finance chairman of the Republican National Committee, who is neutral in the 2016 race.

“No one is going to go away if they have a lot of money in their super PAC.”

“There are people who are concerned that this could end up a long and very extensive primary that could allow the opponent to gain substantial advantage,” Weiser added.

Bush is far ahead of his rivals in the money race with \$119.4 million raised by various entities supporting his bid. In second place, Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.) is being bolstered by \$51.2 million raised by his campaign and aligned super PACs, while supporters of Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.) have donated \$45 million between his campaign, a super PAC and a nonprofit.

Strip away their outside allies and the top contenders are more evenly matched. Cruz, who jumped in the race first in late March, has raised \$14.3 million for his campaign. Rubio pulled in \$12.2 million, while Bush collected \$11.4 million in just two weeks as a declared candidate. Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson is not far behind, with \$10.6 million.

Bush donated \$388,720 to his own campaign for “testing the waters” activities, covering travel, legal fees, polls and consulting done before he declared his bid in early June. Advocates for stricter campaign finance rules have argued that the former governor skirted reporting requirements by spending months traveling and raising money for his allied super PAC, all while maintaining that he had not decided yet whether to run.

Bush aides said Wednesday that his donation to the campaign showed that he was following the rules.

“Jeb 2016’s first report affirms what we have publicly stated over the past few months — that if Governor Bush engaged in any testing-the-waters activities that they would be paid for appropriately, and that if Governor Bush decided to run for office that any testing-the-waters expenses would be reported at the required time,” spokeswoman Kristy Campbell said in a statement.

All the expenditures are dated June 5, which was 10 days before he announced he was running.

Bush officials also announced Wednesday that he will release the names of the fundraisers bundling donations for his campaign by the next filing deadline in October.

For now, the campaign disclosed only the names of lobbyists acting as bundlers, as required by law, showing that eight raised a collective \$228,400 for Bush during the second quarter of 2015.

The top bundlers were William P. Killmer of the Mortgage Banking Association, who raised \$36,200; Dirk Van Dongen of the National Association of Wholesalers, who raised \$33,900; and Ignacio Sanchez, co-chair of the lobbying practice at DLA Piper, who raised \$32,400.

Bush’s rivals for the GOP nomination — even long-shot candidates lagging in the polls — were also able to tout big fundraising hauls, thanks to their outside allies. Former Texas governor Rick Perry raised just \$1 million for his campaign but has generated more than \$16 million in super PAC money, largely from three wealthy backers. The biggest sum came from his campaign finance chair, oil pipeline executive Kelcy Warren, who donated \$6 million.

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, who pulled less than \$600,000 during his first official week as a candidate, will benefit from three different groups — a super PAC and two nonprofits — that have collected more than \$8 million so far.

Brad Todd, the GOP strategist running the pro-Jindal Believe Again super PAC, said an expanding universe of donors has helped fuel the big takes.

“It used to be that once you went through the Bush ambassador list, you were at the end of the rainbow,” he said. “But there are people who are very engaged in this presidential contest who were never a Ranger or a Pioneer,” the titles given top bundlers for former president George W. Bush.

Clinton, who raised the largest sums of any official campaign, was quick to start spending the money. Her committee raced through nearly \$19 million in less than three months, even before beginning expensive TV buys. Millions went to hire hundreds of staffers, a sign of how rapidly it has sought to ramp up a national infrastructure.

Her \$47 million haul was boosted by a predominantly female donor base: Of the more than 250,000 contributors who donated to her campaign, 61 percent are women. That puts her on track to outstrip the presidential high-water mark set by President Obama in 2012, when 47 percent of donors who gave him more than \$200 were women, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Clinton’s small-donor base is larger than it was in her first quarter of fundraising in the 2008 race, when just 9 percent of her money came from contributions under \$200, according to data analyzed by the Campaign Finance Institute. But it is smaller than that of then-candidate Barack Obama, who raised 22 percent of his money that same quarter from small donors. It is also dwarfed by that of primary season rival Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.). Nearly 76 percent of the \$13.5 million in individual donations he received were under \$200.

Other contenders on the left lagged behind. Former Maryland governor Martin O’Malley announced he pulled in \$2 million, while former Rhode Island senator and governor Lincoln Chafee reported that he had raised just \$30,000 from donors, in addition to lending his campaign \$364,000.

Several contenders — including Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie — declared their runs after the close of the last quarter, so they will not file their finance reports until mid-October.

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[To conclude; if elite money determines political outcomes in the U.S. then democracy is dead, unless of course the democratic MAJORITY decide it's time to end elitist rule and RESTORE a Peoples' Democracy to the USA -- fat chance!]

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Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1739.html>