

# Comprehensive Study Guide: Supreme Court Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

The Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* was a landmark ruling that significantly reshaped campaign finance law in the United States. The case centered on the constitutionality of restrictions on corporate and union spending in federal elections, and its outcome had far-reaching implications for the role of money in American politics.



## Study Guide for U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

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This comprehensive study guide provides an in-depth analysis of the *Citizens United* case, examining its legal basis, political context, societal impact, and ongoing debates.

## **Legal Basis**

### **First Amendment Protections**

At the heart of *Citizens United* was the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects the freedom of speech and expression. The Court ruled that the restrictions on corporate and union spending in federal elections violated this right by limiting the ability of these entities to communicate with voters.

The Court argued that corporations and unions have the same right to free speech as individuals, and that limiting their political spending would have a chilling effect on their ability to participate in the political process.

### **Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA)**

The challenged restrictions were contained in the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002. BCRA aimed to reduce the influence of money in politics by limiting the amount of money that corporations and unions could contribute directly to candidates and political parties.

The Court found that while BCRA had a legitimate goal of preventing corruption, the restrictions on corporate and union spending were not narrowly tailored to achieve that goal. The Court argued that the government could not censor political speech simply because it came from corporations or unions.

## **Political Context**

### **Rise of Super PACs**

One of the most significant consequences of *Citizens United* was the rise of super PACs. Super PACs are independent political action committees that

can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money on independent expenditures, which are campaign ads that do not directly advocate for or against a specific candidate.

Since *Citizens United*, super PACs have become major players in federal elections, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to influence the outcome of races. Critics argue that super PACs have exacerbated the problem of money in politics and that they allow wealthy donors to have undue influence on elections.

## **Impact on Political Discourse**

*Citizens United* has also had a significant impact on the political discourse in the United States. The ruling has made it easier for corporations and unions to spend money on political ads, and this has led to an increase in the volume and negativity of political messages.

Critics argue that *Citizens United* has made it harder for candidates to run campaigns based on their ideas and that it has increased the power of special interests in American politics.

## **Societal Impact**

### **Erosion of Public Trust**

One of the most concerning societal impacts of *Citizens United* has been the erosion of public trust in the electoral process. Many Americans believe that the ruling has given too much power to wealthy donors and that it has made elections less fair and representative.

This loss of trust in the electoral system has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of government and to make it harder to address pressing social

and economic issues.

## **Increase in Voter Apathy**

Another societal impact of *Citizens United* has been an increase in voter apathy. When voters believe that their voices are not being heard and that elections are being decided by wealthy donors, they are less likely to participate in the political process.

Low voter turnout is a serious threat to democracy, and *Citizens United* has contributed to this problem by making voters feel like their participation does not matter.

## **Ongoing Debates**

### **Campaign Finance Reform**

*Citizens United* has sparked ongoing debates about the need for campaign finance reform. Critics of the ruling argue that it has opened the floodgates to corporate money in politics and that it has made elections less fair and competitive.

Proponents of campaign finance reform advocate for a variety of measures, including limiting campaign spending, increasing disclosure requirements, and reducing the influence of super PACs.

### **Constitutional Amendments**

Some critics of *Citizens United* have argued that the only way to fully address the problems created by the ruling is to amend the Constitution. Proposed amendments would overturn *Citizens United* and give Congress the authority to regulate campaign spending.

However, amending the Constitution is a difficult and time-consuming process, and it is unclear whether there is enough support for such an amendment.

*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* was a landmark Supreme Court decision that has had a profound impact on American politics. The ruling has raised fundamental questions about the role of money in elections, the First Amendment rights of corporations and unions, and the future of democracy in the United States.

The ongoing debates about campaign finance reform and constitutional amendments show that the issues raised by *Citizens United* are far from settled. The future of money in American politics remains uncertain, and it is up to the American people to decide how they want to address this critical issue.

"*Citizens United* was a disaster for American democracy, and its effects have been profoundly corrosive. It has flooded our elections with corporate money, drowned out the voices of ordinary citizens, and made our political system more corrupt and less responsive to the needs of the people."

- Elizabeth Warren, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts

"*Citizens United* is a landmark decision that has restored the First Amendment rights of corporations and unions. It is a victory for free speech and a defeat for those who want to silence dissenting voices."

- Ted Cruz, U.S. Senator from Texas

## **References**

- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 558 U.S. 310 (2010)
- Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002

- Center for Responsive Politics: <https://www.opensecrets.org/>
- Brennan Center for Justice: <https://www.brennancenter.org/>
- Campaign Legal Center: <https://www.campaignlegalcenter.org/>



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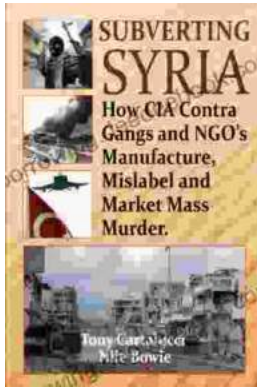
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