

It's not Russia that's damaging American democracy – it's money

Danielle Ryan, RT, 5 November 2018

It is estimated that over \$5.2 billion will be spent on the US midterm elections and it's no secret that hundreds of millions of those dollars are supplied by billionaire donors. This system is incompatible with real democracy.

In a piece for The Guardian last week, Chuck Collins [wrote](#) that the three wealthiest families in the US — the Waltons of Walmart, the Mars candy family and the Koch brothers — own a combined fortune of \$348.7 billion — a sum which is 4 million times the median wealth of a normal American family.

A [recent study](#) conducted by researchers at Northwestern University found that despite the popular narrative of the so-called 'philanthropic' liberal billionaire in the style of Bill Gates, most of these super rich mega-donors are "*extremely conservative*" in their political views. They believe in cutting taxes for the rich and abolishing the estate tax. They are opposed to banking and environmental regulation — and they aren't overly enthusiastic about social programs upon which millions of Americans rely.

Instead of being loud and proud about these views, however, they practice what the study authors called "*stealth politics*" — in other words, they rarely speak publicly on politics, but spend massive amounts of money lobbying politicians on the quiet.

This is not to imply that conservative billionaire donors are bad and liberal billionaires donors are good, which is what mainstream liberal media would seemingly like us to believe when they promote the likes of George Soros as a paragon of goodness while lamenting the influence of the Koch brothers. It is, however, a simple fact that America's wealthiest billionaires are [overwhelmingly conservative](#) — and very rarely are they interested in creating a society that is fairer and better serves the average working American.

But, regardless of the politics of those doling out the dosh, this is a rotten and corrupt system of legalized bribery and one that is completely incompatible with true democracy. How could it be? Politicians are beholden not to the people, but to wealthy donors and special interests. Don't just take it from me. Former congressman Mick Mulvaney, who is now the White House budget director, was [remarkably candid](#) about all this during a speech back in April.

"We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress. If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you."

Rich donors and lobbyists shovel obscene amounts of money into political campaigns knowing that politicians will serve their interests in Congress. Conservative billionaire Sheldon Adelson, for example, has funneled more than \$100 million into the 2018 midterms. If you're wondering why people like Adelson, who have billions in hoarded wealth, would even bother with elections the answer is simple: abject greed. As Collins wrote in the Guardian, they

are “*spending millions to save themselves billions*” down the road. Meanwhile, normal Americans, despite how politically active they may be, have a [near-zero impact](#) on public policy.

Yet, getting money out of politics and taking back control of their democracy does not seem to be as big a focus as it should be for most Americans. Instead, super-rich elites, aided by the mainstream media, have been massively successful in distracting the population with conveniently constructed narratives.

For the Democrats, so-called Russian ‘collusion’ and ‘interference’ has acted as a successful [distraction tactic](#) since Donald Trump was elected. For Republicans and Trump himself, over-the-top fear-mongering about immigration while ignoring its root causes (often destabilizing US foreign policy) has been a wonderful distraction tactic.

When Americans are talking non-stop about Russians and migrants coming to get them, they’re not focused on the fact that the political system in which they are operating is corrupt to the core and serves only a tiny minority of mega-rich citizens who reside in ivory towers. Actress Marsha Warfield summed it up perfectly in a tweet last week:

“Why the hell are you mad at immigrants seeking a better life and not the tiny percentage of greedy f*cks hoarding the world's resources while we fight amongst ourselves for crumbs?”

In 2016, about \$6.5 billion was spent on presidential and congressional campaigns. That’s about enough to give every teacher a [\\$2,000 pay rise](#). Aside from the many ways such money could clearly be put to better use, there’s also the fact that money is a huge barrier to entry for any American trying to get into politics. If you can’t raise the money, you can’t run a campaign — and if you do manage to raise the money (thanks to wealthy donors), you are beholden to them later. Only very rarely does a candidate manage to build a successful grassroots campaign without accepting big donor and corporate money. Democrats often pay lip-service to the idea of getting money out of politics, but in reality, they’re just as happy as Republicans to take money from anyone who wants to throw it at them.

More than [\\$1 billion](#) has been spent by outside groups (independent of and not coordinated with campaigns) to influence the midterm elections. Nearly \$128 million has been spent by “dark money” groups which do not disclose who their donors are. And, consider this: Only [0.42 percent](#) of Americans have given \$200 or more to elections this year. Yet, miniscule as that number is, those people [account for](#) more than 66 percent of all campaign donations.

This is not democracy in action. Until Americans realize that choosing between corporate Democrats and Republicans is like choosing between a slap in the face or a punch in the nose, nothing will be any different. When the ballots are counted on November 6, whether it’s a victory for the Democrats or Republicans, it will still be a tiny minority of elites who hold all the power.