

## **Media Literacy and Democracy**

Pierrette Dagg

2.29.20

From public awareness of a candidate to media buying power, the spread of misinformation, and media literacy education, campaign spending can be an indicator of an election's outcome. However, there is a mixed opinion in scholarly articles which examine whether or not a candidate's likelihood of winning an election can be linked to the amount of money spent during an electoral competition. According to Bonneau (2007), in State Supreme Court elections, an incumbent's campaign spend does not influence an election's outcome; however, a challenger's spending can impact the results (p. 497). Other scholars, such as Nice (1987), have posited that campaign spending is more effective for certain political parties than others. More research is needed on the links between campaign financing and electoral outcomes.

An additional area of inquiry must include the ways in which mass media advertising impacts public awareness of political contenders. Capitalistic systems do not promote a democratic society. Media and advertisements are dominated by those with the largest buying power, which could influence voters' political awareness and positions. Links between awareness and financing are not the only issue when examining the connections between money and mass media. DeMarrais et. Al. (2019) wrote, "In short, the rise of news and fake news across social media and the ability to spread false information across many platforms demand that we understand how the platforms are used and how they ought to be used" (p. 317). The spread of misinformation by the most affluent candidate or party can be just as impactful as standard campaign advertising.

Research regarding media literacy for adults, educators and students will also be conducted. DeMarrais, et. Al. (2019) said, "Because the majority of Americans get their information from local television news, what becomes important is consideration of who owns the majority of that news medium" (p. 317). I believe that a public understanding of the implications of media ownership on society has lain fallow and is fertile ground for work by activist scholars.

Questions that need to be addressed include: Does the amount of money a candidate spends impact the outcome of an election overall? How does media spending influence a race? Can media literacy and an understanding of who owns the media impact these outcomes? What are the implications of these questions on a democratic society? One potential framework to provide a lens for discourse on the topic could include Beane and Apple's (2007) "values and principles of democracy," which include the "open flow of ideas" and "critical reflection and analysis." Without an understanding of financing and media influence on election results, these democratic principles will be unachievable. I urge Toledo City Council to support efforts to support public awareness of media ownership and its impact on democracy, as well as supporting media literacy within the general citizenship.

**Sources:**

Apple, M. and Beane, J. (2007). "The Case for Democratic Schools." In Apple, Michael W. and James A. Beane. 2007. *Democratic Schools: Lessons in Powerful Education* (pp.5-8, 14-19). Heinemann

Bonneau, C. (2007). The Effects of Campaign Spending in State Supreme Court Elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 60(3), pp. 489-499.

deMarrais, K., Brewer, T. J., Herron, B., Atkinson, J. (2019). *Philanthropy, Hidden Strategy, and Collective Resistance* (p. 317). Myers Education Press. Kindle Edition.

Nice, D. (1987). Campaign Spending & Presidential Election Results. *Polity*, 19(3), pp. 464-476. The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Northeastern Political Science Association.