

Flash!

ISSUE 16 / SPRING 2013

A NEWSLETTER FROM **MapLight**

MAPLIGHT REACHES 99 MILLION!

MapLight reached an audience of 99 million people in 2012—almost double our reach in 2011.

California can shine a light on national 'dark money' in campaigns

Originally published in several California newspapers, January 2013
By Daniel G. Newman

The disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision three years ago unleashed a flood of political money unprecedented in U.S. history. Organizations can now raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections, without disclosing where that money came from. These "dark money" groups spent hundreds of millions of dollars nationally to influence November's elections.

In California, this dark money poured into campaigns for California's congressional representatives, and for state ballot measures. Most notably, a group called Americans for Responsible Leadership spent \$11 million to influence Propositions 30 and 32—

without disclosing its donors. Chairwoman Ann Ravel led California's Fair Political Practices Commission in a lawsuit against the group to pry free the basic civic information of who was funding their efforts to influence California elections.

The state's suit was successful, but only up to a point. Americans for Responsible Leadership was forced to reveal that it received the \$11 million from a second group, the Center to Protect Patient Rights, which in turn received



Photo credit: Brian Goodman/Shutterstock.com

it from a third group, Americans for Job Security.

The donors to this third group are still secret today—and the current law allows them to remain that way.
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Mapping the money in the gun debate

State of Influence: Contributions To & From NRA & Brady Campaign

- Campaign Contributions:
- To NRA PAC
 - NRA PAC to Members of Congress by State
 - To Brady Campaign
 - Brady Campaign to Members of Congress by State

Hover over gun icons to reveal contribution totals and state rank.



Amidst a high-profile national debate on federal gun policy, MapLight has highlighted the money on either side.

Our latest interactive visualization, created with Tableau Software, maps campaign contributions from the political action committees of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and the National Rifle Association. Key findings include that, since January 1, 2009, the Brady Campaign has contributed \$5,868 to members of the 113th Congress, while the NRA has contributed \$1,453,637. Members of Congress from Texas received more NRA PAC contributions than members from any other state, with Ohio and Pennsylvania respectively in second and third place.

The "viz" can also be customized to chart the geographic origins of contributions to these PACs, down to the city level. MapLight analysis has revealed that Texas, California, and Florida are the top contributing states to the NRA PAC; Houston, Texas is the top contributing city.

To conduct your own investigations, visit <http://maplt.org/YRGO3g>.

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New Staff Member Spotlight

Rosie Cima, Political Writer, covers California and national politics for MapLight. Rosie received an M.A. in Journalism and a B.S. in Symbolic Systems with a concentration in Human Computer Interaction from Stanford University.

Michael Ruvinsky, Database Manager, keeps MapLight's data organized, useful, accurate, and up-to-date. He has fifteen years' experience working with relational databases and analyzing data. Michael has a B.A. from Yale University.

Donny Shaw, Political Writer, tracks the U.S. Congress and explores campaign contribution data to help reveal how money from outside groups influences legislation and votes. He has previously worked with the Participatory Politics Foundation as their lead blogger covering Congress.

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California can shine a light on national 'dark money' in campaigns

Voters now know the nondescript names of three secret groups that funneled money—but are still in the dark about who really influenced California's ballot measures.

Citizens United also freed corporations to spend unlimited amounts to influence elections. The public doesn't know the extent of corporate spending on elections, because the law currently allows corporations to keep their spending secret. Consumer-facing corporations, sensitive to public perceptions of political influence, are able to hide their political spending by financing trade associations, like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, that do not have to disclose their donors.

And we certainly can't rely on corporations to voluntarily self-disclose. In a public statement to its shareholders, the insurance giant Aetna promised to be transparent about its political spending. Then, it accidentally revealed in a year-end regulatory filing that it contributed \$4.5 million to the Chamber of Commerce to influence elections—a mistaken disclosure that it promptly deleted from its public filing.

Congress will not be acting to reveal this secret money anytime soon. Republicans in Congress will continue to block the DISCLOSE Act and similar sunshine attempts, because the dark money overwhelmingly benefits them.

In November's elections, 85 percent of dark money supported Republicans, according to research from the non-partisan Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

In California, we can ourselves take major steps that will unmask some of this secret money nationally, leveraging our position as the nation's most populous and most influential state. These three California proposals, if implemented at the state level, would reveal dark money across the nation:

First, the state could make use of its tremendous purchasing power to require that companies contracting with the state disclose all their

political contributions—national, state, and local. It's bad enough that government contractors contribute to politicians who can help them win contracts. We citizens should at least know what these contributions are.

Second, California could require that all companies doing business in the state disclose all their political contributions—national, state, and local. As the eighth largest economy in the world, California can use our economic size to leverage the political transparency that is critical for our democracy.

Third, California could require disclosure of every entity making major contributions to the type of "pass-through" dark money groups implicated in the \$11 million political money-laundering case. California could require the disclosure not just of the generic name of an organization, but of all the organization's major donors, if the organization's money was spent on California elections. This change would mean that, in the case of the laundered \$11 million, all three dark money groups that touched the funds would have to disclose all their major donors, opening up a window into these groups' funding sources nationally.

Reforms such as these are well within our grasp. In both chambers of the California Legislature, there have been proposals for legislation, such as the California Disclose Act (SB 52) in the current session, which would bring greater accountability to our elections. What we need now, though, is to move beyond mere proposals.

The California public is disgusted with our broken system of money-dominated politics. Any or all of these three changes made by Sacramento lawmakers would shine a bright light on dark money nationally, while endearing their legislative champions to the California public.



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U.S. Congress contributions data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org) and legislative data provided by GovTrack.us. California contributions data provided by the National Institute on Money in State Politics (FollowTheMoney.org). Wisconsin contributions data provided by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign (WisDC.org).

PROFILE PAMELA BEHR SIN



How did you become involved with MapLight?

In my twenties I worked as a radio reporter. My first beat was the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. The much darker side of politics, the campaign finance game, seemed so commonplace. For example, I was having a conversation at an event with a friend, who was an elected official, when a real estate developer approached us and asked my friend, “So, you gonna vote for this? It’s worth \$10,000 to you.” I asked, “Are you actually attempting to buy a vote here?” That moment had a lasting impact on me.

Fast forward through my years in the corporate world, to consulting for non-profits, I answered an ad for MapLight. When I interviewed with Daniel Newman at MapLight’s headquarters, a couple blocks from the stretch of road that sparked free speech, civil rights, and the revolutionary thinking of the ‘60s, I knew something was right! Inspired by Daniel’s passion for consumer rights, social justice, and driven by his desire to build an interest group for the public interest, I said yes.

As our Vice President of Communications, what does your typical day look like?

A somewhat normal day in the life starts with checking my home office computer around 7 AM for east coast media inquiries, checking in with our east coast reporter, reviewing editorial. I then digest my morning media

breakfast, which includes emails from key congressional committees, CQ, The Hill, TPM, NPR, and mainstream broadcast on the right and left for potential “news cycle” stories. I then see what the word on the street is on Twitter. At that point, I grab coffee and breakfast, read the New York Times in paper form—habit—then jump on my bike and head to the office. Often times I’ll submit research queries to the data team, run an analysis, pitch data to reporters, and tweet MapLight data points to trending stories on Twitter.

On the other hand, if it’s a day that we release a report to the media, all bets are off. Daniel and I are usually texting back and forth in the morning arranging interviews, Jay’s standing by to handle spillover interviews, Zach’s preparing briefing sheets, executing research, or writing quotes for media.

What are the biggest challenges MapLight faces in the realm of communications?

I guess this is a good problem to have, but at times the volume of media requests we get maxes out our data team’s capacity. Often times when we dig into the data, we’ll reveal something beyond the request and flag it for a reporter; the reporter will then ask for further data but keep the same deadline. Trying to anticipate when we’ll hit a “killer fact” and allow the time for the story to shift accordingly is a challenge, especially when juggling several reporter deadlines at once.

What do you wish other people knew about the organization?

Our razor focus on rooting out corruption and exposing money’s influence on our democracy; our rigorous fact-checking process to ensure data integrity; and our mission driven staff who have chosen altruism over the pursuit of wealth.

What has been your greatest accomplishment at MapLight?

MapLight’s positioning in the larger media landscape. Early on Daniel and I worked to identify journalists’ pain points resulting from massive cuts to investigative newsroom budgets over the past decade. Our role became clear: to support the sustainability of this much-needed institution, our fourth branch of government, so they can keep our government in check. We

staked our flag in the ground and started pulling campaign finance data, legislative voting data, and interest group bill support and opposition from our databases and distributed our findings to reporters, saving them hours, if not days of work. Early on our data was highly scrutinized. I remember going through each piece of support and opposition evidence with Fawn Johnson, who was writing a story about a mental health bill for Congress Daily.

How can other people best support MapLight’s work?

Forty percent of the people in this country don’t vote. The first and the easiest thing you can do is participate in your democracy and vote. Then, sign up 10 people not currently registered to vote. Corporations may have corporate personhood and an outsized role in our democracy, but they can’t vote. My mother was an immigrant and she would always tell me it’s a privilege to vote, so vote—it’s your right.

The other thing I’d say is: Find a like-minded group of people wanting to create positive change, or in our case, election reform, and help them make it happen. Small groups will merge with like-minded larger groups to create movements for lasting change.

People in this country are more alike than different. Don’t believe the mainstream media narrative. Once all of us get together in a civic framework, common ground will be found. Of course there will be a minority of ideologues, but Americans as a whole are problem solvers. And though Congress has its hyper partisanship and reelection-focused mentality—getting elected is more important than passing laws—we can move beyond this. It’s our country. Our democracy. Democracy in its truest form works when it’s in the hands of its rightful owner, we the people. We can do this! Our country is resilient. We will ride out this current democratic shift.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

In 2010, I volunteer-managed the UC Berkeley women’s basketball team, and that year the team won the Women’s NIT tournament. I climbed a ladder and cut down part of the net in front of a crowd of 10,000 people at Haas Pavilion.

Pamela Behrsin is Vice President of Communications at MapLight.

INSIDE

"Dark money" in campaigns
Money in the gun debate
Profile: Pamela Behrsin
99 million people reached

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REMOTE CONTROL

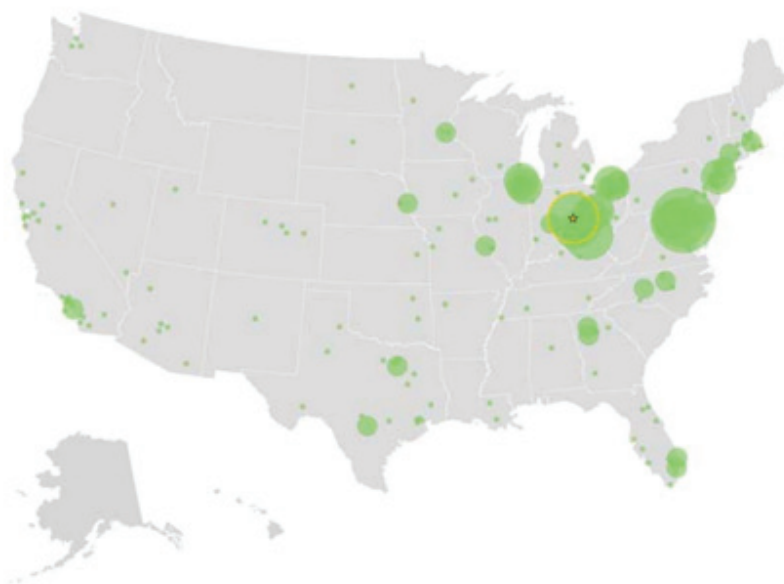
U.S. Senate candidates raise most of their money out-of-state

MapLight released our latest Remote Control report examining the geographic origins of contributions to Senate candidates for the 2012 election. Key findings:

Over the past six years,

- 51% of all contributions to 180 senatorial campaigns came from out of state.
- Only 22% of candidates raised at least two-thirds of their funds in-state (39 out of 180).
- 60% of all Senate candidates raised half or more of their campaign funds outside their home state (108 out of 180 candidates).
- 30% of candidates raised two-thirds or more of their campaign funds from outside their state (54 out of 180).

Our report was highlighted by Politico, National Journal, and more.



DID YOU KNOW? MapLight now has over 30 million data elements in our database going all the way back to 1980!