

# COMPETITIVE DISTRICTS: CAMPAIGN FINANCE TRENDS IN THE 2014 RACE FOR THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE

A photograph of the California State Capitol building in Sacramento, California, featuring its prominent dome and classical architecture. The building is set against a clear blue sky with some greenery visible in the foreground and sides.

\$132,948,597

TOTAL AMOUNT SPENT BY OR FOR CALIFORNIA STATE  
LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES WHOSE CAMPAIGNS  
MADE IT TO THE GENERAL ELECTION

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## INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes campaign finance trends in California state legislative races for the 2014 election cycle. It explores campaign expenditures and independent expenditures across the 80 Assembly races and 20 Senate races, while also focusing on the highest spending districts. The report focuses mostly on the General Election, but includes spending primary spending data for the candidates who advanced to the General Election. Each section provides an overview of the spending and analyzes patterns. The study also addresses the question whether spending for a given candidate correlated to winning. The report finds that:

- Over \$132 million was spent on 80 Assembly and 20 State Senate races,
- Campaign expenditures make up 72% of spending compared to 28% in the form of independent expenditures,
- Democrat vs Democrat races cost more on average with significantly higher independent expenditures in these races,
- Democrats on average spent more per candidate than Republicans did
- Over 60% of spending occurs after the primaries,
- For campaign spending categories the top items are literature and consultants, not media buys,
- Independent expenditures are very concentrated with actors making IEs in only a few races with the majority of IEs made in the weeks immediately preceding the primary and general elections,
- Independent expenditure actors spent more to support candidates than to oppose them,
- The most expensive districts tended to be in urban areas, have higher than average voter turnout, and were Republican versus Democrat races,
- The candidate with highest combined spending won 87% of the time.

## METHODOLOGY

Our paper uses the California Secretary of State's Cal-Access database for all data on campaign expenditures and independent expenditures.<sup>1</sup> Due to the relatively well-organized nature of this database, most reported expenditures included information about its purpose, date,<sup>2</sup> and amount. The research team assessed the data in Excel using pivot tables: this enabled analysis of topics such as spending over time, expenses by purpose, and more.

The team used information about voter turnout in the general election to calculate metrics such as cost per vote, margin of victory, and to determine the size of different electorates. The Rose Institute obtained this information from the California Secretary of State's complete Statement of Vote for the 2014 general election. The Statement of Vote enabled us to confirm full names and third party registration of certain candidates for whom there was an error in the Cal-Access database.

In all, we analyzed 51,702 individual expenditures, both from campaigns and independent expenditure actors, in this study. While this study does consider both primary and general election spending, it is important to note that we omitted primary spending for candidates who did not advance to the General Election from analysis. Independent expenditure data included candidate name, district, party affiliation, date, position, amount, and description. Campaign expenditure data included candidate name, district, party, date, payee, expenditure code, description, and amount.

This study is subject to limitations due to certain shortcomings in the state's campaign finance reporting system. Campaign finance filings are not perfect and are subject to human error. Many filings did not include critical information such as the date filed or the reason for filing; others were mislabeled. The self-reported nature of these filings also raises the possibility that expenditures are missing or duplicated. For example, some campaigns filed a disclosure report that conflated expenditure code and expenditure description. As a result, since

the team's analysis of spending categories was based off reported expenditure codes rather than descriptions, we excluded such expenditures from that analysis. However, these errors represented a relatively small number of filings and thus did not substantially compromise the overall data set.

Independent expenditures in California can

be made by various actors, such as corporations, unions, labor or trade groups, offshoots of national Super PACs, or even individuals. For this reason, this study refers to independent expenditure spenders primarily as "independent expenditure actors." This name more accurately reflects the heterogeneity of independent expenditure sources than the words "group" or "organization."



*Photo Credit: Zheng Zeng | Flickr*

## SECTION I: ANALYSIS OF CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES

### A. OVERVIEW OF SPENDING

According to official filings, in the 2014 races for the California state legislature, \$95,595,371 was spent by candidate campaigns. This amount constituted 72% of the total documented spending for the election cycle. Assembly races accounted for \$68,674,270, or 72%, of the expenditures, with the remaining \$26,921,101, or 28%, spent on state senate races. The following analysis breaks down the spending data by legislative races, rather than by individual candidates.

Looking first at the Assembly, spending varied widely. In the most expensive race, Orange County's AD65, campaign expenditures totaled \$4,663,240. By contrast, in the least expensive race, AD67 in the Inland Empire, campaign expenditures totaled only \$117,907. This amounts to a range of \$4,545,333.

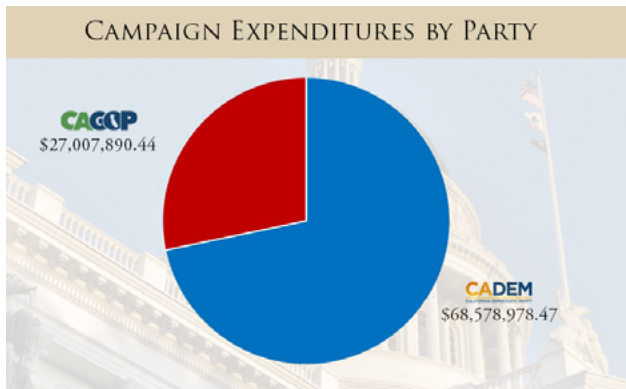
Spending in Assembly races across the state averaged \$903,605 per district, with a median

of \$634,462. However, the average changes when considering Democrat vs. Democrat races, as opposed to races between a Democrat and a Republican. For Democrat vs. Democrat races there was an average of \$1,021,464 spent per race, whereas for Democrat vs. Republican races there was an average of \$879,286 spent per race. Therefore, while only 16% of the Assembly races were Democrat vs. Democrat, on average these races were costlier.

Reviewing campaign expenditures for the California Senate races shows a similar range of spending. In the most expensive race, SD34 in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, campaign expenditures totaled \$4,873,064. In contrast, in the least expensive race, SD30 in Los Angeles County, campaign expenditures totaled only \$298,826. This amounts to a \$4,574,238 range in campaign expenditures for California Senate races.

The average amount spent for each Senate race

was \$1,346,055, with a median of \$830,583. As in the Assembly analysis, this average can be broken down to compare Democrat vs. Democrat races with Democrat vs. Republican races. For Democrat vs. Democrat races there was an average of \$1,319,630 spent per race, whereas for Democrat vs. Republican races there was an average of \$1,357,380 spent per race. Thirty percent of the California Senate races in 2014 were Democrat vs. Democrat.



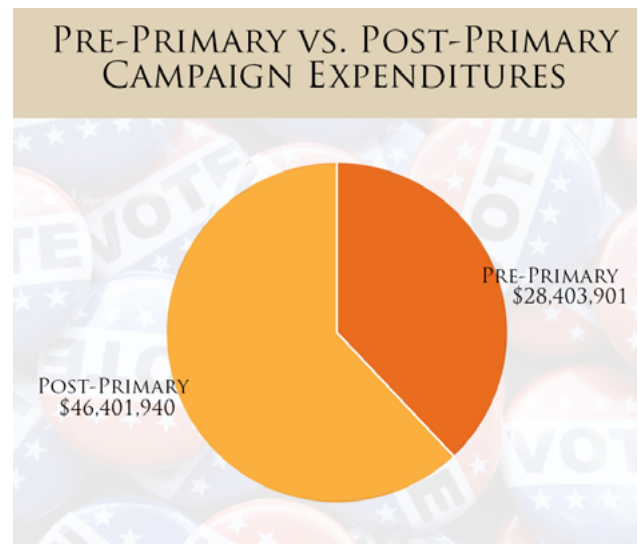
**Figure 1: Campaign Expenditures by Party (2014)**

Analyzing legislative campaign expenditures reveals several findings. First, breaking down campaign expenditures by party shows that Democrats spent \$68,578,978, making up 71% of all campaign expenditures. By contrast, Republicans spent \$27,007,890, making up just 29% of all campaign expenditures, as evidenced in **figure 1**.

Such a large discrepancy is due in part to the fact that more Democrats than Republicans ran for seats in the California legislature in 2014. However, even after accounting for this difference, there is still a large gap in campaign expenditures by party. Specifically, Democrats spent an average of \$763,692 per candidate, with a median of \$635,427, far exceeding the Republican average of \$412,356 per candidate, and a median of \$299,369.

Reviewing the timeline of campaign expenditures reveals more about spending patterns in the 2014 election cycle. Campaign expenditures can be clustered naturally into pre-

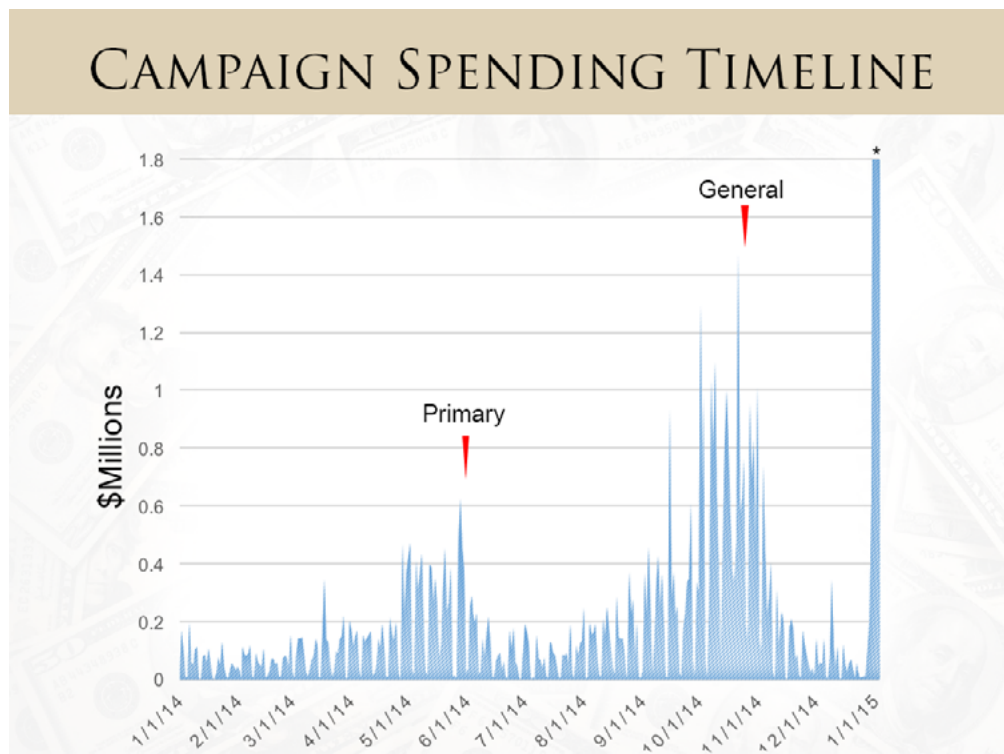
and post-primary spending. As noted above, not all expenditure filings included a date (\$20,789,530 in expenditures could not be included in this analysis



**Figure 2: Pre-Primary and Post-Primary Campaign Expenditures (2014)**

of spending in the two phases of the campaign). However, given that these omitted expenditures had data for every other category of analysis, this is the only category they are not being considered for. According to the filings that included a date, approximately 38% of spending was made before the primary election and 62% afterward, with campaigns reported spending \$28,403,901 pre-primary and \$46,401,940 post-primary. This breakdown can be seen in **figure 2**. As seen in Figure 3, spending increased in the month leading up to the primary election, as well as in the month leading up to the general election. Looking specifically at the post-primary phase, there are two notable spikes in the campaign expenditure timeline.

The first spike in campaign expenditures comes immediately following the general election. It may seem odd that there would be a spike in spending after the election is over; however, the data show that several campaigns made large staff payouts right after Election Day, primarily to field staff receiving lump-sum payments for their work during the cycle. These payments in aggregate



**Figure 3: Timeline of Campaign Expenditures (2014)**

form the large spending spike seen in the graph.

The second spike in campaign expenditures is at the end of the graph, on December 31, 2014. This spike would seem to suggest that campaigns spent \$3,091,392 on this day, constituting 4% of all post-primary spending. However, this is misleading as this money was not “spending” per se, but rather transfers (which are logged as expenditures in the database). It is common practice for campaigns to transfer any remaining money in the original campaign account either to a campaign account for the next election cycle, or to support other candidates, parties, or measures. For example, if a candidate won an Assembly race, the candidate would then transfer any money left in the 2014 election account to a 2016 election account. These transfers of campaign funds comprise the overwhelming majority of the expenditures seen in the final spike.

Campaign expenditure data can also be broken down by spending category.<sup>3</sup> By far the largest spending category was campaign literature

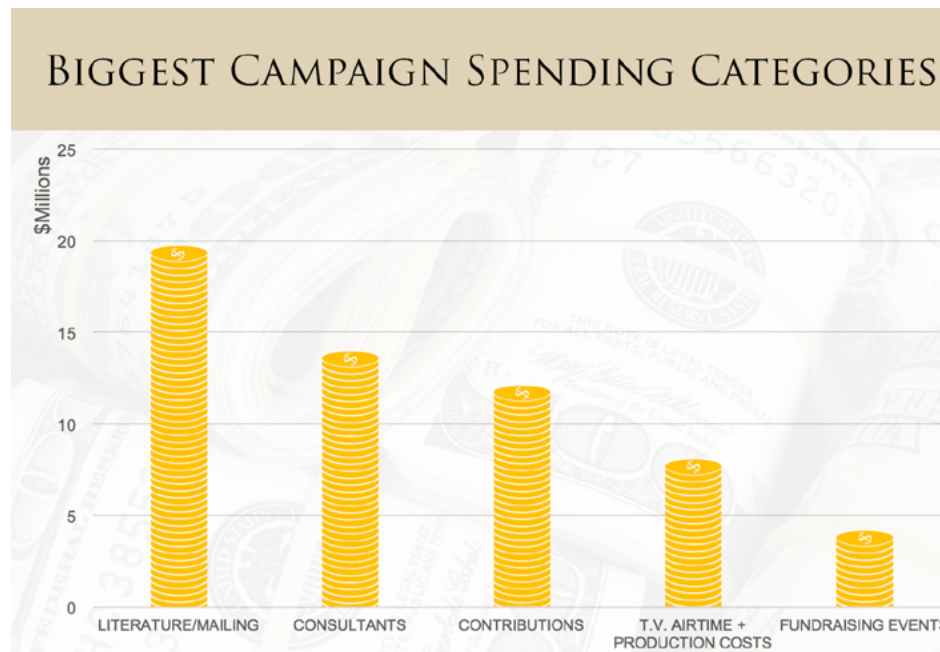
and mailings (including postage, delivery, and messenger services). Campaign literature consists of brochures, palm cards, issue briefs, and newsletters among others. Most candidates invested in these items, with total campaign expenditures reaching \$19,707,624 on literature and mailings for the 2014 election cycle. One hundred and thirteen Assembly candidates and 31 Senate candidates used campaign funds for literature, averaging \$136,859 per candidate.

The next largest spending category was for campaign consultants with total expenditures reaching \$13,939,659. One hundred and six Assembly candidates and 26 Senate candidates hired campaign consultants, with candidates spending an average of \$105,603 for these services. The third largest spending category was contributions, where campaign expenditures totaled \$12,084,730. Most these contributions were transfers made to party committees, political action committees, or to other campaigns.

Despite public perception that cable and

television advertising purchases make up most campaign expenditures, at the state level, T.V. airtime is only the fourth largest spending category at \$8,010,210. However, when radio advertising and newspaper advertising are included in this category, the total grows to \$11,719,35—still below the third largest spending category, contributions to other candidates. In the 2014 election cycle, just 83 Assembly candidates and 25 Senate candidates paid for media buys, spending an average of \$108,513 per candidate. As one would expect, in all four spending categories, the average campaign expenditures was higher for Senate candidates than for Assembly candidates.

Finally, we consider the effect of campaign expenditures on election outcome. One of the study's major questions was whether higher spending correlated to winning. An analysis of the data shows that in a large proportion of the races the candidate with the highest campaign expenditures did in fact win. In the Assembly races, the candidate who outspent his or her opponent in the General Election won 90% of the time. This number was a bit lower for the Senate races, where the candidate who spent the most won 85% of the time. The aggregate probability of winning for candidates who outspent their opponent in both houses of the legislature in 2014 was 89%.



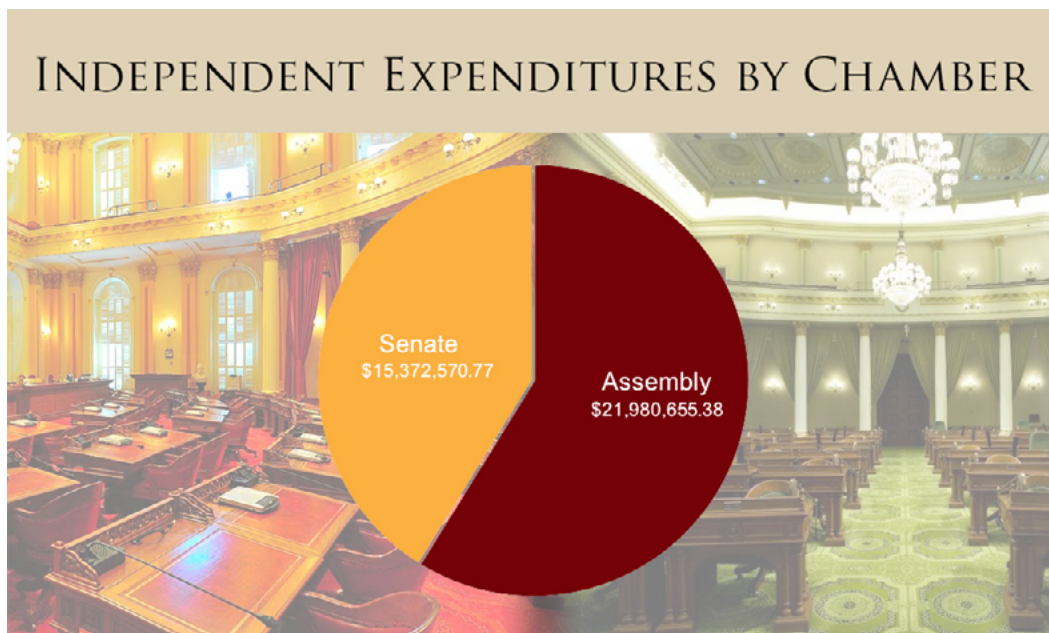
**Figure 4: Campaign Spending by Category (2014)**

## SECTION II: ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES

### A. OVERVIEW OF SPENDING

In the 2014 races for California state legislature, independent expenditures totaled \$37,353,226. This constitutes 28% of the total documented spending for the election cycle. Over half, \$21,980,655 or 59% of this money,

went to Assembly races, with the remaining \$15,372,571, or 41%, spent on Senate races (see figure 5). It is important to note that independent expenditures often target specific, competitive districts, and in several less-contested races in both chambers no independent expenditures were



**Figure 5: Independent Expenditure Totals in the Senate vs. the Assembly (2014)**

made. Specifically, independent expenditures were reported in only 42 of the 80 Assembly races and 14 of the 20 Senate races. As with campaign expenditures, the following analysis looks at spending data for individual races, rather than spending data for or against a specific candidate.

Forty-two Assembly races attracted independent expenditures, with an average of \$523,349 per race, and a median of \$143,494. As with campaign expenditures, this average is different for Democrat vs. Democrat races compared to Democrat vs. Republican races. In the nine Democrat vs. Democrat Assembly races with reported independent expenditures, the average per race was \$756,356. By contrast, in the 33 Democrat vs. Republican Assembly races, the average spending per race was \$459,802. Therefore, while only 16% of the Assembly races were Democrat vs. Democrat, on average these races attracted more independent expenditures. However, the race for AD16 in the East Bay, between Democrat Tim Sbranti and Republican Catharine Baker generated the most independent spending at a total of \$4,704,204. Most spending in AD16 was done by the group Californians for Economic Prosperity to Support Tim Sbranti For Assembly Sponsored by the California Teachers Association

and California State Council of Service Employees.

In the 14 Senate races that attracted independent expenditures, spending averaged \$1,098,041 per race, with a median of \$273,037. As in the Assembly, the average was higher for Democrat vs. Democrat races than Democrat vs. Republican races. In the four Democrat vs. Democrat races with independent expenditures, an average of \$2,013,732 was spent per race, whereas in the 10 Democrat vs. Republican races the average was \$731,764 per race. Thus, while only 30% of Senate races were Democrat vs. Democrat, on average these races generated dramatically more spending by independent expenditure actors. A notable exception to the pattern of higher spending in Democrat vs. Democrat races was the Senate race that drew the most independent spending. In this race between Democrat Jose Solorio and Republican Janet Nguyen for SD34 located in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, independent expenditures totaled \$4,875,205.

### B. OVERALL PATTERNS

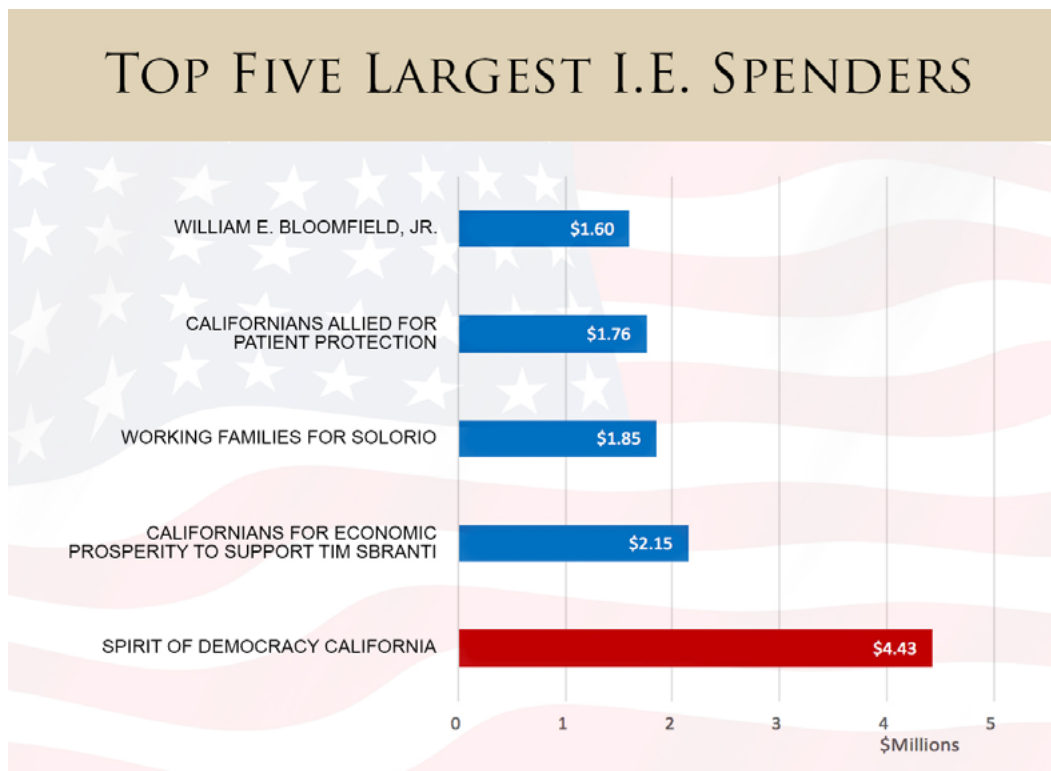
When analyzing independent expenditures it is useful to know who exactly is doing the spending. Independent expenditures can be made by corporations, unions, a conglomeration

of various organizations, or even by a single individual. The 2014 races for the California state legislature saw spending by each of these types of independent expenditure actors. Examining a few of the high spending independent expenditure actors illustrates how this process works.

For example, the top-spending independent expenditure actor was Spirit of Democracy California,<sup>4</sup> which spent a total of \$4,431,694. This group made independent expenditures in several different races to support Republican candidates and drew its funding from various donors. Under current campaign finance law, independent-expenditure-only groups must

disclose the identity of their donors and the amount donated. However, many of these groups receive funds from 501(c)(4) organizations that are not required to disclose the identity of individual donors. As a result, when looking at spending by these types of groups, it is often not entirely clear who the money is coming from. The largest known donor to Spirit of Democracy California was Charles Munger Jr., a physicist and son of Berkshire Hathaway billionaire Charles Munger.

Another high spending independent expenditure actor in this cycle was Working Families for Solorio Senate 2014 Sponsored by Labor and Public Safety Organizations, which



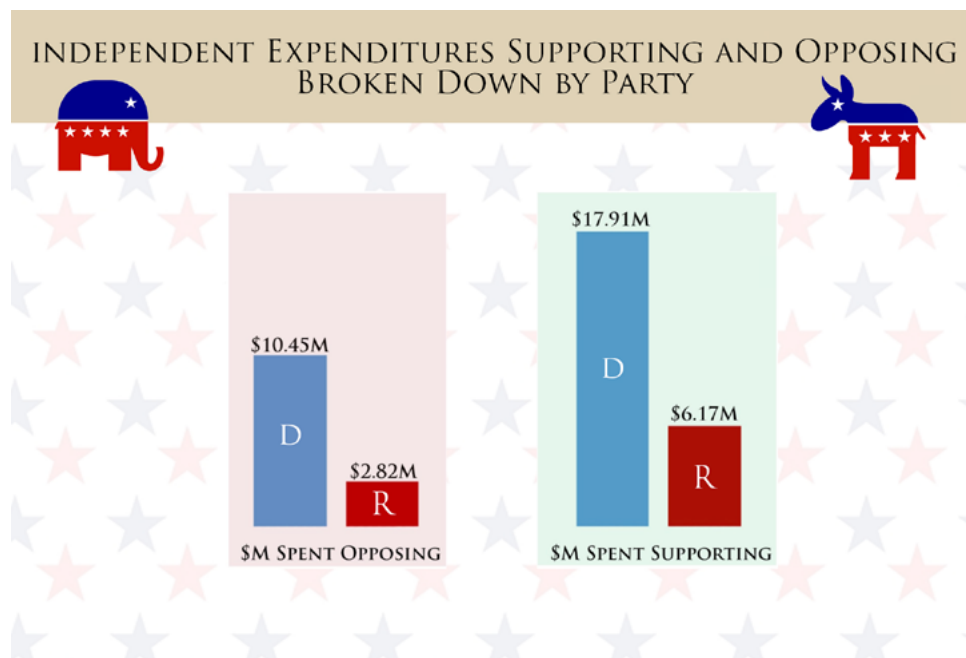
**Figure 6: Five Largest Independent Expenditure Actors (2014)<sup>5</sup>**

spent a total of \$1,851,449. There are a variety of independent expenditure groups akin to this one, all of which are comprised of a mix of unions, labor organizations, and corporations. They often focus exclusively on one race, advocating for a single candidate. While these groups tend to be more transparent, disclosing the corporations or

unions that fund them, the identity of individual contributors or groups can still be obscured.

Lastly, any individual can create his or her own independent expenditure account. This is typically done only by very wealthy individuals. Such individuals either concentrate all their





**Figure 7: Independent Expenditures by Position and Party (2014)**

spending on a single race, or, as in the case of William E. Bloomfield Jr., who spent \$1,600,717 in independent expenditures, direct their money to several different races. These cases tend to be the most transparent regarding the sources of funding. An overview of the top groups and individuals making independent expenditures can be seen in **Figure 6**.

In general, more independent expenditures are made to support candidates than to oppose them. In the 2014 election cycle, independent expenditure actors spent \$17,910,333 to support Democratic candidates and \$6,169,569 to support Republican candidates. By contrast, independent expenditure actors spent \$10,454,880 to oppose Democrats and \$2,818,444 to oppose Republicans. This breakdown is illustrated in **Figure 7**.

The timeline of independent expenditures approximately parallels the campaign expenditures timeline, with some notable differences. Just over one quarter, \$10,083,614 (27%), of the spending was in the pre-primary stage and \$27,269,612 (73%) after the primary. A cluster of spending occurred around the primary date, with an uptick in the weeks immediately preceding the primary, and continued in the weeks immediately

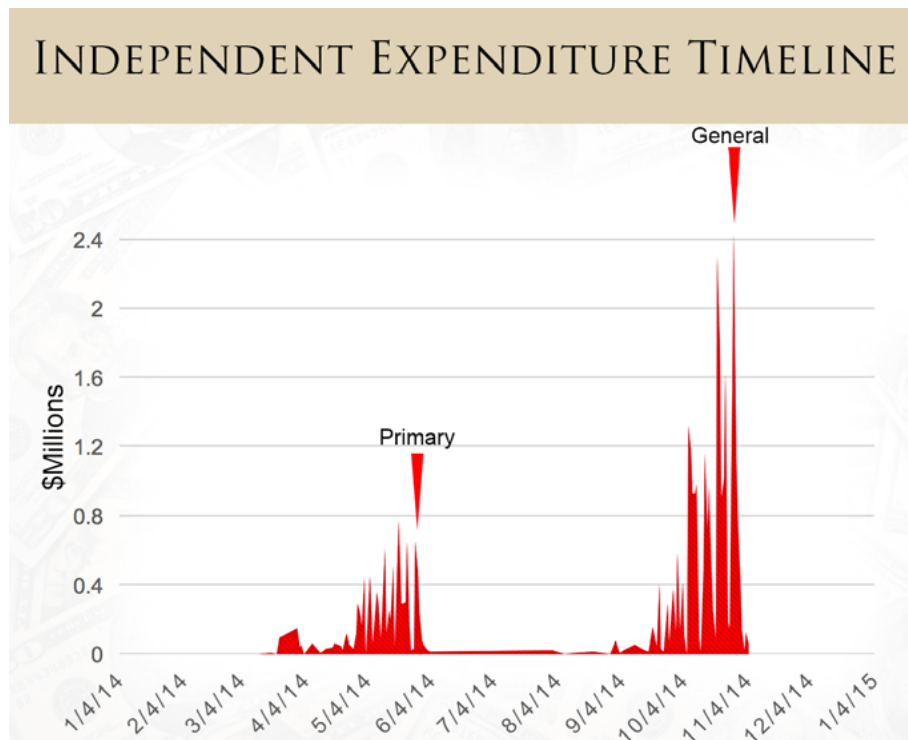
thereafter. After the first spending cluster, however, independent expenditures dropped off for several weeks, only jumping up again a month before the general election. This illustrates that independent expenditures are concentrated in a few weeks, and only in a handful of races, that are perceived to be critical. This is well illustrated by the fact that independent expenditures for the top five races account for \$18,275,806, or 49%, of all independent expenditures. These findings are easy to see in **Figure 8**.

Independent expenditure actors differed from campaigns in what they spent money on.<sup>6</sup> Most independent expenditures paid for campaign literature and mailings (including postage, delivery, and messenger services). In total, independent expenditure actors spent approximately \$17,920,518 on literature and mailings for the 2014 election cycle, constituting 48% of all independent expenditures. The second largest spending category was media buys (radio, print, T.V. ads.), for which independent expenditure actors spent approximately \$5,011,573. While media buys ranked only fourth on the campaign expenditure side, in total, campaigns still spent more on media buys than did independent expenditure actors.

The third largest use of independent expenditures was to subsidize field operations including canvassing, phone banking, and get-out-the-vote drives. This category constituted approximately \$2,598,447 of independent expenditures.

Finally, this section considers the effect of independent expenditures on election outcome. As with campaign expenditures, this study analyzed whether higher independent expenditures for a candidate correlated to winning. In the Assembly

elections, candidates with higher independent expenditures made on their behalf won 74% of the time. This number was lower for the Senate races that attracted independent expenditures, where the candidates who attracted higher independent expenditures won 57% of the time. Looking at the legislature as a whole, the candidates with the higher independent expenditures made on their behalf won 70% of the time.



**Figure 8: Timeline of Independent Expenditures**

**SECTION III: DISTRICTS WITH THE HIGHEST COMBINED SPENDING**

**A. TOP 5 TOTAL SPENDING**

In the 2014 election cycle, the five state legislative races with the highest combined campaign expenditure and independent expenditure totals were SD 6, SD 34, AD 16, AD 65, and AD 66. When analyzing these races, a few common trends emerge. Most of these races were Democrat vs. Republican races, where the Republican won. One of the five races was a Democrat vs. Democrat race,

where the higher spender won. Three of the races were for open seats, and in both races where an incumbent was running, the incumbent lost. Four of the five districts are located in urban areas, and four out of the five races had higher than average voter turnout rates. Independent expenditure groups made up the largest portion of spending in two of the races, campaign expenditures made up the largest portion of spending in two other races,

District	Location	Candidates	Voter Turnout	Total Spending	Biggest Spender <sup>7</sup>	Outcome
S34	Los Angeles & Orange Counties	Janet Nguyen (R) vs. Jose Solorio (D)	165,012	\$9,748,269	Jose Solorio	Janet Nguyen
S6	Sacramento County	Richard Pan (D) vs. Roger Dickinson (D)	179,626	\$6,126,933	Richard Pan	Richard Pan
A66	Los Angeles County	David Hadley (R) vs. Al Muratsuchi (D)	77,580	\$5,686,604	David Hadley	David Hadley
A65	Orange County	Young Kim (R) vs. Sharon Quirk-Silva (D)	108,096	\$5,660,699	Sharon Quirk-Silva	Young Kim
A16	East Bay	Catharine Baker (R) vs. Tim Sbranti (D)	138,604	\$5,445,166	Catharine Baker	Catharine Baker

**Table 1: Total Spending – Top 5 Districts**

and in the fifth race it was a nearly equal split. The margin by which the winning candidate won varied across all five districts, suggesting no correlation to amount spent. Finally, in three of the races the candidate with the highest combined spending won, while in the other two races the candidate with the highest combined spending lost.

**B. TOP 5 COST PER VOTE**

Cost per vote is calculated by dividing total combined spending by the number of votes

that candidate garnered. The five races with the highest combined cost per vote totals were SD 34, AD 16, AD 64, AD 65, and AD 66. Four of these races were Democrat vs. Republican races, with the Republican candidates winning in three of the races. The fifth race was a Democrat vs. Democrat race, where the candidate with the higher spending per vote lost. In three of the races there was an incumbent, with the incumbent winning in only one of the races. Four of the five districts are in the greater Los Angeles area. Campaign expenditures

District	Location	Candidates	Voter Turnout	Cost Per Vote	Biggest Spender <sup>8</sup>	Outcome
A66	Los Angeles County	David Hadley (R) vs. Al Muratsuchi	77,580	\$73.30	David Hadley	David Hadley
A64	Los Angeles County	Mike Gipson (D) vs. Prophet La’Omar Walker (D)	47,258	\$67.30	Prophet La’Omar Walker	Mike Gipson
S34	Los Angeles & Orange Counties	Janet Nguyen (R) vs. Jose Solorio (D)	165,012	\$59.08	Jose Solorio	Janet Nguyen
A65	Orange County	Young Kim (R) vs. Sharon Quirk-Silva (D)	108,096	\$52.37	Sharon Quirk-Silva	Young Kim
A16	East Bay	Catharine Baker (R) vs. Tim Sbranti (D)	138,604	\$39.29	Catharine Baker	Catharine Baker

**Table 2: Cost Per Vote – Top 5 Districts**

made up the largest portion of spending per vote in three of the races, with a nearly equal split between campaign expenditures and independent expenditures for the remaining two races. The margin by which the winning candidate won varied across all five districts, suggesting no correlation

to amount spent per vote. There were no clear similarities regarding turnout numbers across the districts. Finally, in three of the races, the candidate with the highest combined spending per vote lost, while in the other two races the candidate with the highest combined spending per vote won.

## CONCLUSION

This study identifies a few expenditure patterns in the 2014 races for the California state legislature. First, campaign expenditures exceeded independent expenditures in nearly every category. This includes total spending for Assembly and Senate races, as well as the average spending per candidate in those races. There are two exceptions to this finding. One exception is the higher maximum for independent expenditures compared to the maximum for campaign expenditures in both chambers. The other exception is the average in Democrat vs. Democrat races in the Senate, where independent expenditure figures were significantly larger than campaign expenditures. However, for all other categories, campaign expenditure averages were higher than independent expenditure averages.

While only a small proportion of the races were Democrat vs. Democrat races, these races attracted a higher proportion of spending than typical races. This is true of both campaign expenditures and expenditures by independent expenditure actors.

This analysis further shows that independent expenditure actors concentrate nearly all their spending into just a few weeks around the election, while campaigns tend to spend more consistently, over a longer time span.

Democrats overwhelmingly spent more, on average, than Republican candidates on the

campaign expenditure side, and also attracted more independent expenditures on their behalf. Regardless of political affiliation, most campaign and independent expenditures are spent on campaign literature and mailings.

Lastly, in the 2014 election cycle, there was generally a correlation between the candidates who spent the most and the candidates who won. The correlation was higher on the campaign expenditure side than the independent expenditure side, but was evident for both. Overall, in Assembly races, the candidates with the highest combined campaign expenditures and independent expenditures won 89% of the time. In Senate races, the candidates with the highest combined campaign expenditures and independent expenditures won 80% of the time. Taking the legislature as a whole, the candidates with the highest combined campaign expenditures and independent expenditures won 87% of the time. However, in the top five races where spending was extremely high, the correlation between spending and winning was nearly nonexistent. The highest spending races tended to be Democrat vs. Republican races where the Republican won. Most were open-seat elections with no incumbent running. When incumbents were running in the highest-spending races, they tended to lose. ■

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/Candidates/>

<sup>2</sup> Not all expenditures recorded a date. See page 5 below for further explanation.

<sup>3</sup> There may be a small margin of error for the figures reported in this section due to incorrect classification codes in some candidates' filing reports.

<sup>4</sup> This group is an offshoot of the national Super PAC Spirit of Democracy America.

<sup>5</sup> The colors in the graph signify which parties the inde-

pendent expenditure actors aligned with.

<sup>6</sup> There may be a small margin of error for the figures reported in this section due to varied classification codes in some independent expenditure filing reports.

<sup>7</sup> This is calculated as the candidate with the highest combined campaign expenditures and independent expenditures on their behalf.

<sup>8</sup> This is calculated as the candidate with the highest combined campaign expenditures and independent expenditures on their behalf divided by total number of votes cast.



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